

117
✓

MINUTE BY THE HON'BLE THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF BENGAL.

1. It is now generally known that the Indigo Commission have made their report, and an indication of the course which Government intends to adopt thereon, is anxiously expected. The Report and the Evidence, with the most essential part of the Appendix, are now in the hands of the Governor General and of the Council; but I have not yet been able to submit the Report officially, as the whole of the Appendix is not yet printed. Nevertheless, it appears to me extremely desirable that His Excellency in Council should take the earliest possible opportunity of issuing such a Notification as will calm the minds of the masses, now wound up to a state of intense excitement on this subject.

2. The position of the question is this:—When in April last the Legislative Council, as an occasional and temporary measure, passed the Indigo Enforcement Act No. XI of 1860, it promised an inquiry into the system of Indigo planting, of which the ryots were bitterly complaining; and that promise was equivalent to a public assurance to the complaining ryots, against whom the temporary Act was directed, that proved grievances should be remedied for future seasons. Under this assurance, whilst the owners of Indigo Factories have been enabled generally, in consequence of the Act, to recover with expected profits the season's advances, which had been made and were in jeopardy when the Act was passed, the ryots have been kept tranquil, awaiting the result of the promised inquiry. The Commission of Inquiry have now completed their work, and delivered their verdict [which is unanimous, as I understand it, so far as all really material facts are concerned], and this verdict is against the system of which the ryots complained. Nevertheless, the next sowing season in respect to some Indigo lands, and the season of annual advances being now near at hand, the ryots are in fear, not without reasonable grounds, that attempts will be made, by such means as have been heretofore usual, to oblige them to cultivate as usual. In this position of the question, it is but a natural inference that any such attempts will be violently resisted; and in fact, from the observed temper of the people, I think it certain that any such attempts will be violently resisted.

3. Under the circumstances stated, the ryots must naturally expect some measure of relief. But the majority of the Commission are of opinion that no changes of the law, and no changes (organic changes I understand to be here meant) in the system of administration are requisite, or desirable. The only remedy they recommend, which it is in the power of Government to apply, is a good and effective execution of the law as it stands. That is what I understand by a multiplication of Sub-divisions, with a better Police, and Civil Courts of prompt and effective procedure. Whether the majority are right in their view of the sufficiency of this remedy, or not, its propriety, so far as it goes, is unquestionable. And I believe that if the ryots are practically secured from all illegal violence and coercion; and if they are immediately assured that Government is firmly resolved so to secure them, and has the power to do so, there will be little danger of disturbances in the Indigo Districts.

4. It is right that I should report, for the information of His Excellency in Council, my belief that the feeling of the ryots against Indigo is so strong in the Bengal Districts South of the Ganges, that, generally speaking, it is vain to expect Indigo to be sown in them as usual this next season; whatever course the Government may take, and how far this feeling may have spread, it is not possible to say. The Commissioners of Nuddea and Rajshahye have lately sent in reports to this effect. The Magistrate of Pubna is of the same opinion as to his own District. I had a long conversation with a very intelligent Native Deputy Magistrate at Pubna, who has been employed in Indigo cases ever since the first excitement in March; and his opinion was expressed confidently, that such was the determined aversion of the ryots to Indigo planting at this moment, that none would sow the

plant this season, even though they should be offered twenty Rupees a beegah for so doing; though he thought it probable that in two or three years, if a remunerative price were offered, under a fair system, this aversion might be overcome. I have reason to know that three Members of the Indigo Commission, who have been listening to all parties for three months past, are of opinion that the ryots will take no fresh advances, and will not sow in the approaching season, and I believe that the same opinion is general amongst Native Gentlemen and public Officers.

5. I have myself just returned from an excursion to Serajunge, on the Jumoonah River, where I went by water for objects connected with the line of the Dacca Railway, and wholly unconnected with Indigo matters. I had intended to go up the Matabangah and down the Ganges; but finding, on arriving at the Koomar, that the shorter passage was open, I proceeded along the Koomar and Kalligunga, which Rivers run in Nuddea and Jessore, and through that part of the Pubna District which lies South of the Ganges. Numerous crowds of ryots appeared at various places, whose whole prayer was for an order of Government that they should not cultivate Indigo. On my return a few days afterwards along the same two rivers, from dawn to dusk, as I steamed along these two rivers, for some sixty or seventy miles, both banks were literally lined with crowds of villagers claiming justice in this matter. Even the women of the villages on the banks were collected in groups by themselves; the males, who stood at and between the river side villages in little crowds, must have collected from all the villages at a great distance on either side. I do not know that it ever fell to the lot of any Indian Officer to steam for fourteen hours through a continued double street of suppliants for justice. All were most respectful and orderly; but all were plainly in earnest. It would be folly to suppose that such a display on the part of tens of thousands of people, men, women, and children, has no deep meaning. The organization and capacity for combined and simultaneous action, in the cause, which this remarkable demonstration over so large an extent of country proved, are subjects worthy of much consideration.

6. In their examinations before the Indigo Commission, the ryots expressed their feelings and their determination in language not to be mistaken. Panjee Mulla, when asked whether

* Answer No. 3214.

Mundul says—"Let there be profit, or let there be loss, I will die sooner than cultivate Indigo."† Kulin Mundul, when asked at what price he would sow

† Answer No. 1165.

Indigo, if asked to do so by a person in whom he had confidence, answers—"I would sow Indigo for nobody, not even for my father and mother."

* *Revd. Mr. F. Schurr, (Answer 808).*—"The ryots are now looking for the action of Government, and confidently expect that they will obtain redress of their grievances, but they declare that if they are disappointed, the consequences will be terrible. This is not my imagination; I only state what I have heard. This feeling does not exist in Kapasdanga, but I have heard of its existence from persons from all parts of the district."

Revd. Mr. J. G. Lincke, (Answer 918).—"Since the time the Queen took the Government, the ryots have been hoping for release, and as there is such a unity amongst them as has never occurred before, they think it is from God, and that the time of relief is at hand, and they also look to this Commission with great hope; but if they should be disappointed, none can tell what will be the consequences."

Revd. Mr. C. Bomwetsch.—"Since the Indigo Act, most of the ryots have almost lost faith in Government, and their feeling is very sorrowful, and in some instances very bitter."

Revd. Mr. C. H. Blumhardt, (Answer 1351).—"Indeed the Law could not be permanently enforced. The ryots would rather die in Jail than sow Indigo."

These are fair samples of many such answers; and I am told that those only who witnessed the delivery of this evidence, can fully appreciate its effect. The Reverend Missionaries who were examined, than whom no class exists better acquainted with the feelings of the rural population, unanimously expressed a deep conviction of the strength of the feeling of the ryots on this question; I cite some of their answers in the margin.* After what I have just seen with my own eyes, I cannot doubt that the convictions of

these Gentlemen, solemnly delivered three months ago, are but the reflexion of the true state of the mind of the Bengal Ryot.

7. A perusal of the evidence taken before the Indigo Commission, and a consideration of the findings of that body as to matters of fact, in respect to the ruinously unprofitable and compulsory character of the cultivation, will sufficiently explain why the state of the ryots' feeling should be as above described. But the question which Government must now immediately deal with, is not the cause of this feeling, but the feeling itself.

8. With the report of the Commission before me, and bearing in mind the remarks of the Right Hon'ble the Secretary of State on the temporary Act just about to expire, I think I may safely assume that any exceptional law in favor of the system of Indigo planting as heretofore practised, is out of the question;—and it seems to me that under any good system that may hereafter be established, no exceptional law will be requisite.

9. I fully agree with the majority of the Indigo Commission in their opinion that an exceptional law, especially one involving Magisterial action, would have the worst possible effect even upon the interests of the planters themselves. And it is right that I should express my belief that were such a law to be passed, there would, at once, be agrarian risings, of which no man could foresee the consequences.

10. If the Governor General in Council resolves against any special or exceptional legislation, I earnestly recommend the immediate announcement of that resolution.

11. That the conduct of Government, whatever it does, or whatever it does not do, will not be made matter of complaint, by some party or other, is not to be looked for. But if both the substantive law, and the law of procedure under which unexpired contracts were made, be allowed to continue as they were when those contracts were made, no party can have any just or reasonable cause of complaint.

12. To calm the minds of the Ryots, and to secure the tranquillity of the country, it appears to me essential that such a proclamation shall be immediately issued as will make the Ryots feel secure against coercion.

(Signed) J. P. GRANT.

The 17th September, 1860.

(True Copy)

W. S. SETON-KARR,
Offg. Secy. to the Govt. of Bengal.