

T. Harry Williams Center of Oral History

Tape 890 Finding Aid

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Keith Roy

COLLECTION: 4700.0609 Tape 890 (Tape 2 of 2)

IDENTIFICATION: Britons in Pre-Independence India

INTERVIEWERS: Frank de Caro, Rosan Jordan

SERIES: British Voices from South Asia

INTERVIEW DATE: 8/11/78

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 32 minutes

OTHER MATERIALS: None

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Tape 890, Side A

Roy (Part 1 of 3)

001 Fort Worth, Texas

003 at the height of British control in India, there were 11,100 ICS officers in a population of 520 million; were called the "Steel Framers"

013 district commissioners were all ICS, not necessarily English ICS though

017 by 1947, that number came down to 900 because it was known there would be a handing-over of power; there was no further recruitment to ICS in 1943/1944

025 of the 900 still there in 1947, 300 were Muslims that went automatically to Pakistan; between 250 and 350 British members of ICS; Indian members of ICS stayed on out of patriotism

042 Vallabhbhai Patel guaranteed to the European members of the ICS, that decided to stay on, all their rights and privileges they had when they were in the British Civil Service; never tried to undermine the desires of people to stay on

062 the Muslim ICS members that went to Pakistan were greeted by the Pakistani government abolishing the title "ICS"; to them, the name "ICS" and being associated with it meant so much; they were no longer able to put "ICS" behind their name; became Pakistan Civil

Service
 071 in India, they remained ICS
 075 major difference in psychology between the two approaches; he believes this may be a
 factor in the way the two countries have developed since then
 080 there was no administrative breakdown in India: general developments at a slow pace, but
 not chaos; on Pakistan's side, it has "gone completely down the drain"; much of it is due to
 the attitudes of the two governments towards independence
 090 Civil Service has expanded since independence, but not the Indian Civil Service because
 once the original members of the ICS died, the new civil service they created was called the
 Administrative Civil Service; significance is the bringing out the retired Indian members of
 the ICS and placing them in key administrative positions
 114 Administrative Civil Service is larger than the ICS
 117 no British stayed on in the civil service by choice; there were twelve of them; many stayed
 on in Pakistan
 125 in the 1950s, there were more British in India than ever before
 135 didn't choose ICS as career; father was an Indian from a famous family in Calcutta;
 member of Roy family was leader of religious movement in 1850s and broke away from
 the orthodox Hindu because it was too formal
 149 his father is a doctor; he wanted to join the British government services in the East Bengal
 railways, but there was no recognition between the English and Indian university degrees
 156 British railways in India were owned by stock raised in England; because of this, board of
 directors insisted that any doctor who wanted to join the railway medical service had to
 have a degree
 160 in 1877, his father went to England to get his degree; he never went back to India; he got
 into good area around Leicester, England and started a large practice; that's how his father
 met his mother
 172 his mother's father was one of the founders of the East India Company
 183 he was born in Leicester; he is the only one of his siblings that has been to India
 186 had intended to have a career in law, then his father was killed in a motorcar crash; because
 they were short on money and his brothers were in school, he decided (as a joke) to take the
 Civil Service Exam; ended up getting called up to London
 224 decided wanted to go into the British Civil Service; could have gotten into the home civil
 service in the department of wildlife and fisheries, but he didn't want that
 233 because he was so high on the list (being number six), they told him walk straight into the
 Indian Civil Service; didn't really want it, but it was a secure job with good pay for that
 time and he needed to begin earning a living immediately
 250 he went to India when he was twenty-two; he was recruited in 1934; there were six
 Britishers that year
 258 they went out not thinking about making a large sum of money, but because they could
 render a service
 263 it was a good life, but they knew of the limitations; couldn't foresee World War II; looked
 forward to a full twenty-five year career there, knowing at the end that some would become
 the governor of a province or gain a knighthood, get their pension and then return back to
 England and retire
 282 is not singling out the ICS, but including the other groups of Britishers: police, railway
 workers, forestry, Indian Medical Service
 292 had been involved in British missionaries there; even though he didn't agree with the

- missionary concept, couldn't help but admire them for going out there, knowing they had nothing in front of them and poor living conditions
- 299 whatever your reason or mission was for going to India, you did not go anticipating to make a large amount of money
- 304 plums was different thing in commercial world
- 310 in 1934, Calcutta was still the commercial capital of India; wealthy lived extremely well
- 321 there's a social distinction in India that is difficult to pin-point; commercial people called the "box wallers"
- 336 younger clerk without a college degree would work for a large commercial business and would make three or four times as much as a college-educated member of the ICS
- 351 the boys, however, could not get into the clubs, they had their own clubs; Roy, however, could get into almost any club he wanted
- 371 other service members also had more status than the business men
- 383 when posted in Rajshahi, one of the largest districts in Bengal, the deputy commissioner (chief magistrate) was an English ICS officer in charge of everything, from law and order to finances; around the corner was one of the largest British commercial operations in the area; the business man was earning anywhere from four to six times more money than the magistrate; could not talk to each other
- 443 Mrs. Larkin, the wife of the deputy commissioner Larry Larkin, was automatically on every committee that was established; was expected to be in everything, but didn't have the money
- 471 the wives knew, as much as the husbands knew, they were not going to India to make money
- 478 rules of corruptibility were very intense; never was any corruption of any kind in ICS
- 514 Penderel Moon was secretary to the governor of the Punjab when Partition was coming on. He was told by the governor not to mix with the Muslim Indians. He said to leave him alone because it was his life, and he would live it his way. The governor then dismissed him from the service.
- 587 Roy can recall only one time when an ICS officer has been dismissed from the service, and it was back in the 1800s; isn't exactly sure
- 573 he was the private secretary to the Finance Minister, Sir Jeremy Raisin; Sir Jeremy was the vice president of the council
- 586 ICS officer was an officer of the secretary of state of India of the British Government; he could only be removed with the permission of the secretary of state in Britain; recommendation would come from government of India to the secretary of state, then he would take action
- 599 these things were handled by the vice president; papers went to Sir Jeremy, then through Roy
- 605 end of tape

Tape 890, Side B

Roy (Part 3 of 3)

[this side of tape indexed from digital audio file]

- 45:46 access to ports, trade relations and treaties between Tibet, Sikkim, and British India; resident political officer in Sikkim; Roy was assistant commissioner in Darjeeling; when present Dalai Lama was six years old, British sent political officer from Sikkim, [Basil Gould?] and Roy to meet him;

- 48:05 took twelve to fourteen days to get there, sometimes on horseback, once on a yak; on the Siberian Plateau about 15,000 feet, windy; a tough journey; then the Dalai Lama sent his emissaries in return for the British sending their own to him; according to diplomatic protocol, officers had to receive the gifts but couldn't keep them;
- 49:42 he thinks America has the same protocol, ambassadors can receive gifts but the gifts are not personal, they're a gift to the state; British officers could buy such gifts back at a set price from the Indian government; many of the items in his home now are items the Dalai Lama sent to the British government and Roy bought back from the Indian government; that's how it worked in the British government;
- 51:35 Dalai Lama has taken political refuge in India now; [tape starts to crackle and continues] discussion about defining bribery, illegal contributions by corporations; he doesn't believe much of that should be viewed as illegal; it was common that companies would pay what they called [bapshish?];
- 53:12 This goes back to the Moghul Empire; to see the emperor, you would have to go through multiple people of increasing importance and you had to give each one a little something; he sees that as part of the system, same as with business people; when the British crown took over, the concept of corruption was hammered into them; reaction against "this way of doing things"; argues it depends on what is considered corruption;
- 55:30 previously asked if people tried to corrupt the ICS; they had a little red book that said what they could and could not do; at Christmastime, local business owners, etc. would bring baskets of food, fruit, alcohol; first year he was there he got a small basket because his rank was low; he consulted the book which said you could accept gifts like that but nothing more; once his basket has money at the bottom, he knew he couldn't keep that, had to explain why he was giving it back to the giver;
- 57:18 they don't give such gifts because they want anything from you, perhaps you could help them in court in the future, it's just how they do things and he doesn't think that's bribing; if someone did try to bribe him, he just sent things back through his deputy; he thinks it's hard to say if anyone really tried to bribe the ICS; when he left the ICS and would go to Delhi to get a license or permit, you couldn't get anywhere if you didn't follow this system; if one shoe started on the slippery slope, you couldn't stop;
- 59:01 A comparison between "compensation payments" and bribery which he doesn't agree with; if the custom of the country says to operate that way, you go with the customs; he does not think Indians tried to corrupt the ICS, the ICS was incorruptible; it was a reaction against total corruption under the East India Company; the name for a Muslim golden coin;
- 1:01:42 de Caro ask about his feelings going out to India; by the time he went to India, his father's oldest brother had become prime minister of Bengal; Roy was a representative of the British government and he was in a difficult position; [low voices, tape crackle make portion inaudible] his reaction was, he didn't have any reaction;
- 1:03:55 he went to India by necessity, not choice; he was struck by the utter poverty in Calcutta; he went out then came back and was undersecretary, about a year or so in Bengal where he was a part of the Raj administration; utter poverty and the inability to do anything about it; nothing strikes you like the poverty in Calcutta; the [World Bank?] has looked into options for getting Calcutta on its feet again; the only thing to do is erase Calcutta, it's no good throwing money into it; forget about it and start from scratch;
- 1:06:47 a combination of factors make Calcutta undesirable, the climate, it's geographic location on a river that is silting up and isn't a great port; during Independence a line

- was drawn through the middle of Bengal, one part became East Pakistan, the other part West Bengal; political situation, all jute grown in East Pakistan where there is no mill, all the mills were in West Bengal; politicians drew the boundaries and ruined the economy, sent Calcutta down the drain;
- 1:08:30 they had a very nice, well-educated boy come by who was going to go to Calcutta; warned him he would be shocked by poverty; gave him a book to read about it; when he came back, he returned the book and recalled how awful [low voices, tape crackle make portion inaudible] he was appalled; beggars, people sleeping on the streets;
- 1:10:35 When Independence came in 1947, a total chapter of social history in India was closed, relationships between the British and India; ICS looked upon it as a career, going to India for over twenty years; shortly after Partition was the largest number of Britishers ever in India; they were short-term technicians on a two or three year contract; tragically, that long connection between India and England began to die out;
- 1:12:02 Today, you don't find as many people who were born in India; he thinks of the many families whose fathers and grandfathers were in India [woman speaking, too quiet to understand, something about people with long family histories in India, and those with no connections to India; about her daughter];
- 1:15:10 He'd summarize it by saying that the essence of the British connection with India is so different than other colonial connections; the British always vowed to get out and that helped people to give the best that they could give to the country not hoping for any return; this distinguishes British colonialism from other countries like Japan or Germany; it was a different philosophy, the social connections were different; this is why there is still a basic administrative structure there;
- 1:18:05 In every country that faces independence, within the first few years there's a swing of the pendulum, being anti-everything that was before and this happened in India; wanting to reconstruct capital structure of companies, giving jobs to Indians, change with trademarks and patents; this was from 1947-1950; then the pendulum swings back, he feels this is bound to happen in Africa or else they won't get anywhere; in the 1960s India's developing economy; Indian government doesn't want patents for Coca-Cola in India; "Coca Cola is not a critical area" in a developing country;
- 1:21:05 No country can learn from another country's history and never will; woman speaking says she's dying to get back to India; discussion of countries in African facing independence; [discussion continues off-mic, dog barking, woman speaking but inaudible];
- 1:25:13 He had to learn the language; before going to India you go to a year of studies in London, you learn the language of your province, you learn Hindi; you're placed in an impossible position, he was twenty-two, had never been out of England; within six weeks of arriving in India he made magistrate; hard to pick up the language even though he learned some in school; he had to write judgments in the native language [more discussion off-mic] 240 dialects in India; he had seven servants; his mother was in India with him;
- 1:28:36 Tells a story that he says seems unbelievable; when he got into service in 1934 they had to pay their respects to the "big white chief" Lord Zetland; he describes the opulent India Office in Whitehall; recalls going into a small dark room with a Scrooge-like man who asked him to sign his contract; then passed into another Room with a Mr. Smith who said he was now a member of the ICS and would be given his little red book; book was written in 1857 and had never been revised; tape cuts off [1:31:35]