CHAPTER 3

Just Governance and Colonial Violence

Colonial accounts of South Asia often stress British gallantry. A description of the Battle of Miani by Sir Charles Napier underscores the drama of this gallantry:

There was no time to be lost and I sent orders to the cavalry to force the right of the enemy’s line. This order was very gallantly executed by the 9th Bengal Cavalry and the Scinde Horse. In this charge, the 9th Cavalry took a standard and several pieces of artillery and the Scinde Horse took the enemy’s camp, from which a vast body of their cavalry slowly retired fighting. Lieutenant [Robert] Fitzgerald gallantly pursued them for two miles and I understand slew three of the enemy in single combat.¹

In contrast to this description by Napier, Robert Fitzgerald’s account of the Battle of Miani highlighted its violence rather than gallantry. One day after the battle, he wrote his family that,

I call[ed] on the men and took the enemy’s camp and the Ameers’ tents, in which there were sixty thousand pounds sterling. [I] took a standard and put everybody in the tents to the sword. I then continued the pursuit about a mile beyond but, my men being all scattered, was obliged to retreat before a large body of cavalry.²

Disturbed by such violence, Fitzgerald’s father demanded that his son justify its viciousness. Fitzgerald replied to his father that he killed the combatants in the Ameers’ tents because they would not surrender. He additionally justified these killings as politically practical: “People of the East generally join the power that proves itself the strongest.”³

In a letter to his family, Fitzgerald’s commanding officer, Major John Jacob, also described the Battle of Miani as very violent: “Dead men were lying literally around in heaps [Jacob’s underline].”⁴ He detailed how he and Fitzgerald

¹ BL/OIOC/MssEur/F208/90/10; also see MSA/BR/P/1843/81-1503/M177-M189.
² BL/OIOC/MssEur/D1171/12/February 19, 1843; BL/OIOC/MssEur/D1171/1 (February 19, 1843).
³ BL/OIOC/MssEur/D1171/12/3.
⁴ BL/OIOC/MssEur/F208/108/B/222.
charged through the Ameers’ camp “killing nearly every man in it.”5 Jacob also stated that, “Fitzgerald, not hearing my trumpets, continued the pursuit and killed many more of the enemy.”6 In contrast to Fitzgerald’s description to his family, Jacob detailed how enemy combatants, rather than fight, attempted to flee. In this different historical light, Fitzgerald’s “gallant” pursuit of the enemy at the Battle of Miani was, as his father viewed it, a vicious killing spree.

This chapter connects British violence in Sindh to the concept of just governance. It illustrates how this concept, through coded law, veiled violence and promoted the idea that colonial rule “improved” South Asia. To unmask this violence, I employ case studies, all of which involve John Jacob, to demonstrate contradictions between just governance and the actions of East India Company. By means of these cases studies, I argue that physical force was a key factor in colonial relationships and that neither military-fiscalism nor the concepts of direct and indirect rule adequately explained its viciousness in Sindh. To demonstrate this argument, the chapter examines the Company’s plunder of Hyderabad. The plundering of this city ran counter to British assumptions about the colonial state and its relationship to the territory that it controlled. I conclude that Charles Napier’s control of Sindh through a form of non-centralized despotism put British assumptions and distinctions about colonial expansion at risk.

**Just Governance and the Colonial Improvement**

In his forward to A Thousand Plateaus by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Brian Massumi writes that, “Force is not to be confused with power.”7 Physical force destroys things. In contrast, power is constructive: It builds “walls” to make socio-cultural distinctions.8 To build such walls, the British in South Asia, and elsewhere, employed a variety of concepts.9 One such concept was

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5 BL/OIOC/MssEur/F208/108/B/210.  
6 BL/OIOC/MssEur/F208/108/B/222.  
8 Ibid.  
9 For example, the "doctrine of identity" viewed the colonizer and colonized as opposites on an evolutionary timeline (Mahmood Mamdani, Citizen and Subject: Decentralized Despotism and the Legacy of Late Colonialism [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997], 7). Nonetheless, this doctrine maintained that the colonized could transform themselves into the colonizer’s facsimiles by becoming “civilized.” In contrast, the “doctrine of