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The Idea to Transit German East Africa into Indian Colony: A Colonial British Policy towards the Indians in Africa

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Abstract: *The Europeans were attracted to the African continent in the beginning of the modern period and started exploiting its resources for their benefit. The Europeans settled in the suitable environment. European imperialism caused a scramble of Africa and settled European minorities became ruling authority. The several reservations for Europeans placed disabilities on aborigines of Africa and other settlers. In East Africa, European economic interest clashed with the Indians, who had economic relations with it from ancient times. The demand for reservation of German East Africa as Indian Colony after World War I, resented Europeans as it was a challenge to their imperialistic nature and racial superiority.*

Key words: *East Africa, Indians, Indentured labourers, Colony, World War I, Protectorate.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Tanzania, the name given to the union of Tanganyika and the Island of Zanzibar in 1964 is an East African country. After World War I, the largest part of the German East African colony came to be known as Tanganyika, excluding Ruanda and Urundi and placed under Britain. This paper is an attempt to give emphasis on a rejected idea by which the demand was made to reserve Tanganyika, former German East Africa, exclusive for Indian colonization

2. German East Africa and World War I:

The East African coast was dominated by Arabs with a brief interval of Portuguese dominion in the 16th century. The Sultan of Oman, Seyyid who shifted his capital to Zanzibar Island in 1840, was sovereign over the East African coast. In the later half of the 19th century the Germans developed interest in East Africa and clashed with the British, who already had an alliance with the Sultan of Zanzibar. In 1884, Dr. Karl Peter for his Society of German Colonization made treaties with East African chiefs of the mainland. In February 1885 the German Government granted a Charter to the Society to administer the territory. Though the Sultan of Zanzibar resisted and wanted help from Britain, the German treaties were consented by the latter. In November 1886 Britain and Germany agreed on the Sultan's claim over Zanzibar and over the East African coast to ten miles depth. The British and German sphere of influence was recognised over the territory between river Ruvuma and Tana i.e. modern boundary between Kenya and Tanganyika (Tanzania). The German interest in north –west of Lake Tanganyika, alarmed Britain. The political situation in Europe made Germany curtail her ambitions and to conclude a treaty with Britain in July 1890 by which Germany recognised the British Protectorate over Zanzibar. Britain recognised German interest over territory to the south of river Tana, westward to Lake Victoria up to Congo Free States. This formed German East Africa.

After an Arab revolt in 1889 the German Government took over administration from Peter’s Company and German Protectorate was proclaimed in January 1891. There were several rebellions against German rule but the Maji Maji rebellion of 1905 was noteworthy. The African tribes united themselves with German hatred. The rebellion was ruthlessly crushed by the Germans in 1907. The suppression of revolt devastated the south of German East Africa. About 1,20,000 people died due to war and famine.

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During 1907 to 1914 there were several economic and administrative reforms. German East Africa was divided into 21 districts under direct German rule and Ruanda, Urundi; Bukoda remained under tribal rule under supervision of German Resident. But the system could not prove satisfactory. The Germans concentrated on developing European plantations as about 3115 sq. miles fertile land was alienated to Europeans. The main economic crops were sisal and rubber. The railway system especially Central railway and Usambara railway developed to help the planters.[6]

After the outbreak of World War I, the clashes occurred between Germans and British. After a setback in 1914, the British forces containing British, South African, Rhodesian and Indians led by Gen. Smuts defeated German forces in East Africa. The British occupied Dar es Salaam in September 1916. In January 1917, the British set up provisional civil administration under Horace Byatt in conquered territory of Germany in East Africa. The British advance continued and German forces surrendered on 25th November, 1918.

World War I turned German East Africa into a wasteland. Thousands of Africans died from diseases and famine. Thirty thousand died of famine alone. In 1918-1919 the influenza epidemic caused thousands of lives. By Treaty of Versailles, Germany renounced her claim over East African territory. German East Africa was to be administered under supervision of the League of Nations. This territory was placed under 'B' class Mandate. In January 1920 the mandate for Ruanda and Urundi allocated to Belgium and Britain received remaining German East Africa i.e. Tanganyika.

3. Indian Diaspora in German East Africa:

It is interesting to note that Indians arrived on the East coast of Africa about more than thousands of years ago than Europeans. The latter who came with a superiority complex of their race, suppressed the cause of Indian Colonisation in the 20th century.

The Indians had trading contacts with East Africa from ancient times. It was probably an Indian settlement that started in the 8th century A.D. in Arab dominion. The Arab colonies in East Africa profited by exporting ivory and slaves to Arabia, Persia and India. Indian trade got a setback during Portuguese dominion. The East African mainland and Zanzibar Island were rich in agricultural as well as mineral resources. In the 19th century the Indians managed a good amount of trade. But the local Indians were at the mercy of Arab governors. The reign of Zanzibar Sultan Seyyid proved prosperous and his pro Indian policies attracted Indians to migrate to East Africa. During 1840 to 1890 those Indians migrated to East Africa chief among Hindus were Banias and Khoja, Bohra, Memons among the Muslims. In 1870's increasing importance of Indians in East Africa was noticed by British Officials and Bombay government was suggested to control the immigration.

After 1890 the fortunes for Indians were opened in the British Protectorate in East Africa as construction of railways started. The indentured labourers brought from India. In all, nearly 32000 Indian indentured labourers employed in railway construction and after completion of contract they remained there in railway services. Other than indentured labourers, Indian traders, merchants, agriculturist, money lenders were spread in the interior of British Protectorate. One remark shows that the entire country had grown up on Indian traders. Like Indians, European traders and settlers came to British East Africa and rivalry began between these two as British East African highlands was kept reserved for the European settlement. In 1905, the British East Africa Protectorate was transferred to the British Colonial Office. The Colonist Association in BEA demanded restrictions on Indian emigration to East Africa. In spite of European opposition there were 1752 Indians compared to 350 Europeans at Nairobi in 1906.

Europeans had developed an anti-Indian attitude due to the prosperity of the Indians in East Africa which was supported by Imperial administrators. For instance, in the first decade of the 20th century the Zanzibar government passed laws such as prohibiting Indian immigration, depriving the right of trial by jury and right to appeal in Bombay High Court. In 1909 the suggestion made by Sanderson Committee for Indian colonisation in British East Africa was ignored.

During 1909 to 1917, the pro-European policies had established European privileges. After the expiry of the term of A.M.Jeevanjee, only Indian legislator in BEA, no Indian was appointed. The Indians in British East Africa were restricted to have several rights and amenities. The Indians were denied access to first class facilities. They were required to use separate hospitals, education institutions and never appointed to higher posts in civil, police and military services. Professional degrees from Indian universities were not recognised. In 1910 there was concerted attempt to exclude Indians from Nairobi market place.

The Indians in German East Africa were the largest foreign community and had assurance about their status and rights. But in practice it was not seen. The German settlers considered Indians as aliens due to their British ties. The Indians

were compelled to pay heavy taxes. In 1907, the German Colonisation Society passed several anti-Indian resolutions. In 1908, Indian immigration to European settlement was restricted. The Indians were classified as 'natives' in German laws.

Under British and German Protectorate in East Africa, the Indians suffered heavily due to disabilities imposed on them by Europeans. Indians urged for a separate colony which would ensure the protection of Indian interests.

4. Evolution of Idea of Indian Colony:

As World War I broke out in Europe, the Indian government supported the cause to save the British Empire with men, ammunition and money. Many Indian princes like Bikaner, Kishengarh, Jodhpur, Rampur gave active service and twenty-seven states provided their Imperial Service Troops. The total strength of Indians sent to East Africa was 46906 men, which consisted largely of British troops. Indians got appreciation from Col. Kitchner, Lt. Gen. Smuts.

The already emerged idea of Indian Colony in conquered German East Africa got momentum due to Indian contribution in war. The German territories in East Africa were placed under the 'B' class mandate of the League of Nations which stated equal opportunities for the trade and commerce of other members of the League. India was an original member of the League. It was clear that Britain might have got authority over German territories in East Africa. The British Colonial Office might have used a sympathetic attitude about Indian demand. Even the Conservative leader like Winston Churchill was sympathetic about Indians in East Africa.

During the War time the demand for Indian Colony was put forward by its supporters. In November 1914, A.M. Jeevanjee, an Indian leader in British Protectorate (Kenya) remarked about a great future for Indians in German East Africa. The Secretary of States for Colonies, Lewes Harcourt, had the opinion that the German East Africa was reserved for Indians as it already had large settled Indians.

The chief advocates of the demand for an Indian colony in GEA were Aga Khan and Theodore Morrison. Aga Khan made constant demands for Indian colonisation during the war period. In August 1917 Aga Khan published a wish of Indian nationalist leader Gopal Krishna Gokhale, who died in 1915, in *Times* London. According to that, Gokhale demanded that Britain should reserve the GEA for Indians and the administration should give it to the Government of India. Further Aga Khan demanded the administration of British Protectorate also should give to India.

Theodore Morrison, the then Lt. Col. in the war office, supported Indian demand for Colony in GEA in an interview to Reuters. In September 1918 he elaborated the idea in the article '*A colony for India*'. He had not only pressed for Indian administration but also for Indian supervision over the civil and military department.

The Indian Association in Nairobi, in her meeting requested SOS for Colonies on 28th September, 1918 for reservation of GEA as Indian Colony. The Khoja Community of Zanzibar also requested the SOS for Colonies not to return the conquered territory to Germany. In December 1918, Horace Byatt, the administrator of the conquered territory informed the Colonial Office about gathering support from Indian community of Daar es Salaam and Tanga for the Indian Colony cause led by Indian Association, Nairobi. The Indian Association of Dar es Salaam made an appeal to the All-India Congress Committee and Gandhiji for support. The London branch of Muslim League in January 1919 made an appeal to the Colonial Office on the basis of a supportive telegram received from Muslim League for reservation of GEA for Indians. It demanded that the Indians should have the same privileges as European settlers had in other parts of the British Empire.

In November1919, the East Africa Indian National Congress resolved for an Indian Colony in GEA. In June 1920, A.M. Jeevanjee, headed a deputation to London, remarked that Indians were responsible for the development of German territories in East Africa. Another Indian deputation demanded that not only GEA but whole British East Africa should be placed under the Indian government.

In India there was some enthusiasm over the idea of Indian Colony in East Africa. The Maharaja of Bikaner urged the Viceroy of India to reward land grants in GEA and Mesopotamia to Indian Princesses for their contribution in war. Morrison's suggestion of Indian Colony got attention in the Indian Legislature also. The several associations in India including T. B. Sapru's U.P. Liberal Association and Imperial Indian Citizenship Association supported Indian colonisation. The latter which looking after safeguarding interest of overseas Indians, sponsored a public meeting at Bombay in which Morrison and Aga Khan were chief speakers.

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During the World War I period the Government of India took interest in this issue when the India Office asked her views on disposal of conquered territories. In September 1916 Lord Chelmsford expressed Indian interest in GEA. The Indian representatives expressed favourable views in support of Indians on disposal of territories. After the war no official decision was possible as the future of GEA was entrusted to the Paris Peace Conference.

5. Futile Efforts for Transition:

There were more opponents than supporters of the idea of an Indian colony in German East Africa. The opposition not only came from Britain and European settlers in East Africa but also from India on different grounds. When the discussions were going on over German East Africa as a future Indian colony, the League of Nations did not exist. The GEA mandate was not clear for Britain. It was assumed that if Britain had conquered the said territory, she could get a mandate for GEA. Though the GEA mandate was allocated to Britain in May 1919, it had to get confirmation from the League.

The demand for Indian colony was vehemently opposed by British imperialist authorities as well as Europeans in East Africa who did not want to share the power with Indians whom they considered as inferior race. The imperialistic view put forward the idea that they had to protect the 'native interest' i.e. Africans. They pressed if Indians could get reward from the GEA, there might have been injustice to Africans. The concept was put forward that the Western rule was necessary for protection and progress of the native Africans. Horace Byatt, the British administrator of GEA, raised the question of the future of indigenous Africans. A meeting of Tanga natives requested Byatt that the British government should not place them under Indian administration.

The European settlers in the British East Africa Protectorate opposed the idea of an Indian colony under leadership of Lord Delmare. A resolution was passed by the East Africa Legislative Council in December 1918, stating as 'in Africa, the task of the Empire was gradual uplifting of native inhabitants by contact with civilization of the West and not the imposition of the civilization of East.' The discussion on the resolution also criticised the administration in India before the arrival of the British. In January 1919 the Acting Governor of British Protectorate in his telegram to Colonial Office, supported the view of the Legislature. At the same time the Bishop of Zanzibar requested the British government to refuse the mandate to India.

The British SoS for Colonies, Lord Milner and Under Secretary L.S. Amery instead of taking the idea of exclusive Indian colonisation, they put the proposal for an Indian settlement of desirable class preferably agriculturist and ex-servicemen. The correspondence shows that Lord Milner was entirely against the idea of an Indian colony.

Until August 1919, it was clear that the idea of a colony failed. Now SOS for India, Lord Montague invited opinion on future Indian settlement in GEA. The cost of the passage was to be borne from Indian revenue. There was a proposal to send a deputation to study the scheme of settlement. Lord Montague also questioned whether there any advantage in GEA to induce ex-sepoys to leave fertile region of Punjab.

In December 1919, Department of Commerce and Industry of India who were concerned with Indian settlement, requested opinion from Provincial Governments about the proposed settlement. In response the Provincial Govt. were unfavourable. In its report the Bombay Government asked that the assurance of equal rights to the League members depended much on governing power in GEA. It also objected whether the Indians were wanted as settlers in areas which considered as unsuitable for others.

Meanwhile, the idea of Indian colony could not achieve nationwide support in India as it was opposed by Gandhiji, C.F.Andrews and others. In1919 the nationalist struggle against imperialism was in full swing in India. Gandhiji wanted the Indians to concentrate on the national movement. He thought that the demand for colonies would have engaged Indians in imperialism. In the Amritsar session of 1919, Indian National Congress only demanded 'rights of free and unrestricted emigration for Indians with full civic and political rights.' C.F. Andrews also insisted on right to equal treatment than Indian colony in East Africa.

The hopes for Indian colonies were diminished as the mandate for GEA was awarded to Britain in January, 1920. In the same month East Africa Indian National Congress withdrew her resolution of Indian colonisation. British East Africa Indian Assoc. had taken her stand only for equal treatment.

The reports about conditions in GEA for Indian agriculturist settlement were unfavourable. Sir Robertson who visited Tanganyika reported about the unhealthy climate of unoccupied areas and described the local Indian fear that

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reservations for Indians might have restricted their free activities in other parts of East Africa. So, he advised to drop the idea of colony.

Meanwhile, the Government of India got assurance from the Colonial Office about equal treatment to Indians in former German territory. So, the Indian Govt. remained on stand for equality than organised settlement or Indian Colony.

6. Conclusion:

From the beginning, the idea of Indian Colony in East Africa or reservations in German East Africa for Indians was never a strong possibility. The supporters of this idea were not so ardent; it could not receive overwhelming support. The leaders who supported this cause were moderate and their attitude was rather social and political than economic as their counterparts were economic minded imperialistic people. Indians in East Africa who swirled around this idea for some time basically wanted equal status with Europeans. The Indians in East Africa were economically competent but dominated by Europeans due to their political power. It was assumed that the Indian problem would have been solved by carving a separate colony. When Indians got assurance about equality the idea lost her ground.

The idea of Indian Colony in GEA could not achieve support from nationalist leaders in India as they were fighting against imperialism. The demand of the Indian colony was imperialist in nature. The Indian leaders were not interested in policy which could have shaken their basic foundation. There was strong opposition from European settlers with their racial superiority complex in East Africa, never wanting to remain under Indian domination. Indian army men had contributed in East Africa during World War I, it was a British conquest. It was a low possibility to accept the concept of sharing the Empire with Indians. The suggestion of Indian agricultural settlement was accepted because it was an economic need of the Empire. It was not possible for the European imperialist mind to digest the concept of 'colony of a colony.'

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