

Letter 67  
Calcutta  
Sept. 1768

Before I take my leave of India, you will naturally expect me to say something of the English, who are now so numerous in the country.

As the hindoos were heretofore under the Mahomedan government, both Mahomedans and Hindoos, in the provinces of Bengal, Bahar, and Orixia, are now under the government of the English.

Calcutta is the presidency; the governor, assisted by the council, has the direction of all the company's affairs; which is not merely the superintending of their commerce, but the governing of three rich and extensive provinces; the direction of a powerful army; making alliances with the princes of other provinces, or declaring war against them, as they judge most conducive to the advantage of the company, under whole direction they act; but, on account of the distance from the mother country, much must always be left to their own direction.

The council are twelve in number; the other civil servants of the company are senior and junior merchants, factors, and writers, who rise in progression according to their standing in the service.

The merchants who have leave to settle in India, without any employment under the company, are called free merchants.

It is unnecessary to make any observations on the manners of English people; therefore I shall only mention such customs as, from the heat of the climate, and other causes, are peculiar to this country.

As the morning and evening is cooler than the day, it is usual to rise early, and sit up rather late; for after the morning the heat is so intense, that it is difficult to take any amusement. Ladies mostly retire to their own apartments, where the slightest covering is scarcely supportable. The most active disposition must be indolent in this climate.

After dinner everyone retires to sleep; it is a second night; every servant is gone to his own habitation; all is silence: and this custom is so universal, that it would be as unreasonable to call on any person at three or four o'clock in the afternoon, as at the same time in the morning.

This custom of sleeping away the hottest hours in the day is necessary, even to the strongest constitution. After this repose people dress for the evening, and enjoy the air about sunset in their carriages, &c. The rest of the evening is for society.

Living is very expensive, on account of the great rents of houses, the number of servants, the excessive price of all European clothes, &c. The perspiration requires perpetual changes of clothes and linen; not to mention the expenses of palenqueens, carriages, and horses.

Many of these things, which perhaps appear luxuries, are, in this climate, real necessaries of life.

It is remarkable that those Europeans who have health enjoy a greater flow of spirits than in cooler climates.

Except when parties are violent, which is sometimes the case, the society and hospitality is general; and there is no other part of the world where people part with their money to assist each other so freely as the English in India.