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## **Keeping corruption at bay: A study of the VOC's administrative encounter with the Mughals in seventeenth-century Bengal**

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## Chapter 5

### Behind the Scenes: The Making of the Van Reede Committee in the Dutch Republic

We have bound ourselves to the Company by an oath, by which we call upon the God Almighty to not only be a witness to our sincere intentions but also we are, as it were, taunting and provoking God's punishing powers to be provoked if we do anything other than what we have promised; as we are God-fearing Christians, we should remain faithful, do well and induce ourselves to love our lords and masters because they have received not only the power of the state from our fatherland to punish miscreants but have also themselves given us ample opportunities to prosper, to flourish, and to add to our honour and respect by which we have had come to obtain a kind of temporal happiness, that we could not find in our fatherland.<sup>1</sup>

This was what Hendrik Adriaan van Reede wrote from Hooghly in his position as the commissioner-general in 1687 for the future VOC directors and the council working in Bengal. He was doing what he had been sent to do in India – namely to remind the Company servants in the factories there about their duty to remain ‘faithful’ to their ‘lords and masters’ in the Republic. If they failed in this duty, they could be punished as miscreants by virtue of the ‘power of the state’ sanctioned by the *Heeren XVII* and by the ‘fatherland’. This entire process, as has been alleged in the previous chapters, was necessitated against the background of intense discussions on overseas corruption. In their effort to prove to the Dutch citizens and the VOC investors that remedies were being adopted, the *Heeren XVII* strengthened the Company's monopoly and persistently drafted new rules and regulations. In chapter 2, we mentioned that this opened up

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<sup>1</sup> ‘...denijle wij onszelven door een eed daar aan hebben verbonden; in zig vervattende wij God almagtigh niet alleen tot getuijge aan roepen van onse sincere intentie, maar dat wij boven dien Gods straffende magt als versoeken en over ons uijtlocken zoo wij anders komen te doen als het geen wij beloven; zulcx zoo wij Christenen zijn en God vreesen moeten wij getrouw wesen, wel doen en onse beeren en meesters bewegen ons te beminnen want deselve hebben niet alleen van den staat onser vaderlands verkregen de magt van quaad doenders te straffen maar sij hebben ook bij haar zelven zoo veel gelegentheid ons te begunstigen, groot te maken, en in haer dienst toe te voegen eere en aanzien waar door wij een tijdelijk geluk bekomen, diergelijk wij in ons vaderland niet en zoude kunnen vinden.’

NA, HR, inv. nr. 241, Instructions and Regulations made by Van Reede as commissioner, c. 1687: folios not numbered.

the possibility of factional alignment between the political institutions in the Dutch Republic – the VOC in the Republic – and the VOC in Asia (as the governor-general in Batavia had direct ties with the dominant faction in the *Heeren XVII*). In order to see if this was true or not, it is necessary to examine a case study involving one such investigation committee. This committee was different from the usual committees because it was sent to India in 1684 with a commissioner appointed by the *Heeren XVII*, unlike other commissioners that were sent by the *Hoge Regering*.

This was the committee constituted in December 1684, and Van Reede was put in charge as the commissioner-general with instructions to inspect all the Company's factories in the western quarters – those along the coasts of Coromandel and Malabar, and in Ceylon, Surat, Agra and especially in Bengal (fig 13).<sup>2</sup> Van Reede was to be on board the ship, *Bantam* that would sail from the Republic along the Cape where he was to change over to the yacht, *De Purmer* that would be accompanied by another fluyt (*fluyjt*), *Adrichem* sailing together towards Ceylon.<sup>3</sup> After the loading and unloading of commodities, *De Purmer* full with *arrecq* (areca nuts), *chiancoes* (big horns) and other goods from Ceylon was to carry Van Reede to Bengal while the fluyt, *Adrichem* was to leave for Coromandel.<sup>4</sup> On reaching the factory of Chinsurah-Hooghly in Bengal, he was supposed to read out the letter from the *Heeren XVII* so that the officials serving there were made aware of his authority and obeyed him.<sup>5</sup> Van Reede was allowed to enter the lodges of the Company and was to be allocated his own desk for working, the cost of which had

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<sup>2</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions of the *Heeren XVII* for Hendrik Adriaan van Reede appointed as the commissioner of the committee to be sent to Bengal, Coromandel, Ceylon etc. in Amsterdam, 1684: f. 1v-2v.

<sup>3</sup> NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, Copy-Resolutions of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 27 February, 1681- 8 October, 1685, 23 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>4</sup> Anonymous, *VOC Glossarium* (Den Haag: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2000): 13, 30; NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede, December, 1684: f. 1v.

<sup>5</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede, December, 1684: f. 2v.



Fig 13: The Western Quarters that were granted to the VOC by the charter of the States-General were included in the stretch between the Cape of Good Hope and Japan in the Indian Ocean. NA, Kaarten  
 Leupe, access number 4. VEL, inv. nr. 312.

to be covered from the Company's accounts.<sup>6</sup> His position and power was designated as being above those of all the governors and directors of the places he was supposed to visit. He even had permission to preside over any meeting that was convened during his stay on behalf of the *Heeren XVII*.<sup>7</sup>

The explicit orders however were to report all cases of malpractice, fraud and abuse against anyone to the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia so that it was the *Raad van Justitie* that had the final say in the trial and punishment of the accused.<sup>8</sup> From Bengal he was to later move on to Coromandel, Ceylon and thereafter to Malabar. From there, the orders were to let him go further to Surat before returning back to Ceylon again. In Ceylon, he could embark on any of the returning ships and return back to the Republic. Van Reede was to be assisted in this mission by two other men, the second and next in rank being Isaac Soolmans who had earlier written to the directors complaining about the chaotic state of affairs of the Company in Bengal.<sup>9</sup> Soolmans was instructed to take over the position of Van Reede in case of his sudden death or under any other unpredictable circumstances.<sup>10</sup> The third person, Johannes Bacherus who had been the former *opperkoopman* in Surat was appointed as the final member of this committee for assisting both Van Reede and Soolmans in their investigation duties.<sup>11</sup> It thus seemed to be a fully-equipped and a sound attempt by the *Heeren XVII* to try to combat corruption among the Company's servants in India. But why was there the need to send this committee at this hour in the first place? How did the plan to send this committee reflect the anxiety about corruption and especially that of corruption in Mughal Bengal, towards the end of the seventeenth century, among the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic? It is in order to find the answers to these questions that

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<sup>6</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 2v.

<sup>7</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 19 October, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>8</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 3r.

<sup>9</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 28 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>10</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 26 October, 1684 and 28 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>11</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 25 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

this chapter focuses on the above-mentioned committee and the story behind its formation in the VOC.

### **Why this committee?**

This committee led by Van Reede was neither the first, nor the last in the series of reforms adopted by the factions in the VOC administration to create checks and balances in its overseas wing. And yet it was significant on account of the fact that the Van Reede Committee came at a crucial point of the Republic's expansionist ventures *vis-à-vis* its other European competitors and was designed to target particular VOC bases. Furthermore, it was one of its kind, equipped with extraordinarily special powers. Besides that, the extreme care and year-long deliberations that went behind planning and organising it and the tremendous expectations from this committee made it look like a seriously high-profile investigation.

To begin with the time of this committee's inception and dispatch, one needs to situate the VOC in its contemporary political and social background. As early as 1626, complaints of corruption against the Company in the Republic could be heard through the popular pamphlet culture. Two pamphlets published in 1635 and 1638 blamed the VOC for its barbarous and villainous conduct in the East Indies in order to maximise the Company's profits in the Republic.<sup>12</sup> By 1663, a pamphlet called *Het Oost-Indisch-Praetjen* gave an explicit insight into the lives of the Company servants as perceived by the people in the Republic. In a conversational style (*praetje*) typical of such pamphlets, the author showed a *stuyrman* (a helmsman), a *koopman* (a merchant), a *krijghs-officier* (an officer of the militia) and a *kerancke-bezoeker* (a religious visitor for comforting sick patients) engaged in dialogues with each other about their lives in Asia. The *koopman* was shown to begin with remarks on their drinking habits that reflected the common image of a Company servant living abroad –

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<sup>12</sup> Cited in Virginia West Lunsford, *Piracy and Privateering in the Golden Age Netherlands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 209.

*Koopman:* Well, friends, you have all gathered here together, and yet it is so dry? There is only tobacco, and no drinks such as wine, German beer, arrack, gin or at least some nice ale (*smul-biertjen*) that could have been of use now. We have certainly been doing quite badly.

Half-way through the conversation, more on this conspicuous lifestyle was revealed when the *krijghsofficier* made his remarks on the illegal means of earning by the Company officials –

*Krijghsofficier:* ...Well, I still maintain what I have said; that the merchants (indicating Company servants) play with the pennies and show them to us. Although we know very well that such (pennies) comes with their position and service for which they enjoy a pay and salary; yet we see, that they already make so much for their own that they not only live in an extravagant state and indulge in prodigal consumption when they come here from other places, but also do the same in our fatherland...

To this, the *stuurman* had replied –

*Stuurman:* ‘Yes, yes mate; having is having but acquiring is an art. You don’t have to explain to a farmer how a nobleman earns his money...’.

As the conversation continued, the names of many high officials were mentioned casually in relation to illegal trading in Asia. Finally, the *stuurman* confessed that –

*Stuurman:* ‘It appears to be that the whole of the Dutch-Indies is infested with theft and private trade, and is entirely dependent on these, with nobody as an exception, and why should then the men who arrive here new, not maintain the lifestyle of their masters, or even follow them, because the belief here in India is that it does not go all too well even among the directors themselves. On the contrary, it is they who try to plague the Company servants with new rules and laws, so that the Company servants are compelled to steal as much as they can before they return to the homeland, and free themselves of their slavery (to the Company), and what more is that one learns here that those who return home with the largest amount of goods are the most respected, even getting married to the daughters of the directors...’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Koopman:* Wel vrienden bent ghy hier t’samen soo vergadert, en dat soo drooghjes, alleen met een Tabackjen, sonder een dronckjen Wijn, Mom, Arackjen, Towackjen, of ten minsten een smul-biertjen te nuttigen, dat loopt seecker al vry slecht af... *Krijghs-officier:* Wel ick houdt noch staende, ’t geen ick geseyt hebbe, dat de koop-luyden vast met de penningen speelen, en laten’t ons ansien: En hoewel ny wel weten, dat sulcx haer ampt en bedieningh mede brengh, daer voor sy haer gagie en tractement

Such pamphlets reflected a part of the corruption discussions that were going on in the Republic about the Company, especially at a time before 1665 when the VOC charter had to be renewed by the States-General.

After the turmoil of 1672, such discussions still haunted the Republic and the call for reformation or redress were heard even more loudly than ever. Deliberations began by the board of directors on launching reforms by installing a committee to send abroad. From 1676 onwards, such discussions began to materialise but the directors remained inconclusive about finding the right person to be appointed as the commissioner-general. By August of the same year, concern grew that details about trading practices in India should be examined; in other parts of Asia too commerce had grown considerably and with it the need to find ways of improving profits.<sup>14</sup> It did not take long before the resolution of 24<sup>th</sup> September allowed for the appointment of a committee of three members comprising Nicolaas Verburg, Cornelis van der Lijn and Mattheus van der Broecke.<sup>15</sup> They were to produce a detailed report on the ways of cutting down costs and making the Company's trade more profitable in Mughal India. Accordingly in October, a set of regulations were passed against illegal trade by the 'ministers of the Company' and the punishments detailed that were to be meted out as per the *placcaten*, with instructions to the Company's men to control expenses overseas by living less extravagantly there.<sup>16</sup> These points were well developed by the next year when the directors met again and further decisions were

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*genieten, soo sien wy echter, dat sy voor haer eygen, soo veel mede brengen, datse niet alleen wanneerse van andere plaetsen hier komen, groote Staet voeren, en prodigale consumptie doen, maer selfs in ons Vaderlandt ... Stuyrman: Jae, jae maet, hebben is hebben, maer krijgen is konst, 't is een boer niet wijs te maecken, hoe een edelman aen gelt komt ... Stuyrman: 't schijnt dat India van dievery en particulieren handel te plegen, gheheel aen malkander hangt, sonder dat men by na yemandt mach uytsonderen, en waerom souden de aenkomelingen de stijl van haer meesters niet mogen onderhouden, ofte achter-volgen, want het gheloof is in India toch dat het selfs niet al te pluys onder de bevindhebberen toe-gaet, van onnakomelijcke wetten, so te plagen, dat de selve wel genoodsaeckt zijn, haer handen te moeten reppen, om weder nae't patria te keeren, en haer uyt de slaverny te ontslaen, te meer men hier hoort, dat die maer met 't meeste goedt t'huys komen, 't beste gesien zijn, jae noch wel bevindhebbers dochters ten huwelijck toe bedingen..?'*

Anonymus, *Oost-Indisch-praetje*, A1r.-C4v.

<sup>14</sup> NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, Copy-*Resoluties* of the *Heeren XVII* in Amsterdam, 27 August, 1676: folios not numbered.

<sup>15</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 26 September, 1676: folios not numbered.

<sup>16</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 16 October, 1676: folios not numbered.



taken on checking the treasuries in all the factories in Asia.<sup>17</sup> The following year of 1678 produced the plan to send someone to inspect these factories again. Rijkloff van Goens Junior happened to be the *Heeren XVII*'s choice.<sup>18</sup> But owing to his refusal, the post remained unfilled.<sup>19</sup> That the search of the *Heeren XVII* was still on was evident increasingly in the next two years as the *besoignes* came to be repeatedly entrusted with the duty of looking into the accounts, documents and records of every chamber.<sup>20</sup>

By June 1681, there were detailed discussions carried out about appointing a person of experience and knowledge who could occupy the position of the commissioner as was reflected from the resolutions of the *Heeren XVII*.<sup>21</sup> He was to undertake the task of inspecting the factories and finding solutions for doing away with the problems of the desertion of workers and fraud in the prices of commodities. The idea of 'redress' became one of the prominent ideals of the *Heeren XVII* in 1683, and a *besoigne* was formed to draw up ideas for economising with regard to salaries, the excess in the number of Company officials and fraud in the Company's inland trade.<sup>22</sup> As a follow-up ten days later, a list of points of redress was drawn up that would bring about the desired changes in the 'faults, abuses and disorders' of the VOC factories overseas.<sup>23</sup> On 19<sup>th</sup> October, 1684, the plan to dispatch a committee under one suitable official in order to investigate the factories in Bengal and Coromandel for 'fraud, misuse, tampering, [and] malpractices' was ultimately finalised. The initial idea was to invest this official with so much power and authority that he would be able to remove anyone found guilty or even suspected of it by communicating directly with the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic.<sup>24</sup> But in the final instructions,

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<sup>17</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 4, 8 and 17 September, 1677: folios not numbered.

<sup>18</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 25 October, 1678: folios not numbered.

<sup>19</sup> Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 126.

<sup>20</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 22 November, 1679/ 17 June, 1680: folios not numbered.

<sup>21</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 3 and 4 June, 1681: folios not numbered.

<sup>22</sup> NL-HaNA, VOC, inv. nr. 241, Minuut- and net-*resoluties* of the *ordinaris* and *extraordinaris* meetings of the chamber of Amsterdam, 5 April, 1683: folios not numbered.

<sup>23</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 241, *Resoluties* of the chamber of Amsterdam, 15 April, 1683: folios not numbered.

<sup>24</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 19 October, 1684: folios not numbered.

the *Hoge Regeering* was given the last say with the person accused having the chance to undergo a trial in the *Raad van Justitie*.

In the afternoon session of the next day the directors had already agreed on their choice of the official to be put in charge of this committee and it was none other than Hendrik Adriaan van Reede. He was to visit the Company's bases in Bengal, the Coromandel Coast, Malabar, Ceylon and other places as the *Heeren XVII* had instructed. The days after this in October and November were spent in drawing up the privileges that were to be given to him, the details of changes that needed to be addressed and included in the instructions that were to be handed down to him and in finding the second and third members of this committee who were supposed to assist him.<sup>25</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> November, 1684, Van Reede took his last oath in the service of the Company.<sup>26</sup> He had to swear his allegiance to the 'States-General of the United Provinces and the sovereign authority of his Highness, Willem Hendrik (referring to the *stadhouder*, Willem III of Holland, Zeeland and Utrecht), and by the grace of God the Prince of Orange and Nassau, as Governor Captain and Admiral-General', while fulfilling his duties as the 'commissioner-general in India on behalf of the *Heeren XVII*.'<sup>27</sup>

The fact that almost eight years in the Company's board meetings were spent in creating this committee and finding the right person as the commissioner makes it no ordinary initiative. The post of the commissioner-general that Van Reede occupied had been conceived long since the Company's initial years in 1626.<sup>28</sup> The idea was to have two persons appointed as commissioners by the governor-general and the *Raad van Indië* in Batavia with the approval of the *Heeren XVII* to investigate the factories in Asia. The commissioners were supposed to execute their duties according to the instructions of the *Hoge Regeering* and the *Heeren XVII* and report

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<sup>25</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 20, 24, 25, 26 October, 1684 and 11, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>26</sup> Van Reede died in 1691 on his way to Surat, without being able to complete his mission as a commissioner-general.

<sup>27</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 30 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>28</sup> Chijs, *Nederlandsch-Indisch Plakkaatboek*, 1:188.

back with their findings, recommendations and conclusions. Considering that the territorial possessions of the VOC in Asia were vast, it was suggested that the two commissioners should split their task between the eastern and the western quarters. Thus, while in the first year, one of the commissioners was to investigate the factories and the VOC officials working in Amboina, Banda, Moluccas, Taiwan, Japan, Siam, Patani and so on; the other went looking into the factories located on the coast of Coromandel, Surat, Malabar, Mocha, Persia and Sumatra. It was then decided that these commissioners would alternate with each other for the two quarters of the following year.

Since Bengal was not yet a part of the VOC bases in Asia, it was left unmentioned in the documents of 1626. Later in the century, however, it was added to the domain of the Western Quarters. These commissioners were endowed with the power to check almost all the rules that were drafted as contents of the statutes of Batavia. This covered the area of arms and ammunitions, the condition of the factories, forts and other relevant buildings, the bookkeeping accounts, the warehouses, the shipping logs, the orders issued by local directors or governors, and the networks of illegal private trade, if any, conducted by the Company officials. It was precisely these powers that Van Reede too had in 1684 as the commissioner-general of his committee. But instead of being appointed by the governor-general and *Raad van Indië* in Batavia as was the case with Nicolaas Bauckes, Willem Volger or Isaac Solomans who were sent to Bengal for inspection, Van Reede was directly installed by the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic. This definitely made this committee special and worth looking into.

Copies of the extracts from other relevant letters written by Company officials such as the memoirs sent by the governor-general and the members of the *Raad van Indië* to Commissioner Nicolaas Bauckes in 1681, the report of the *schipper* (captain) Willem Hagendooren and so on were attached to the instructions for Van Reede as the *Heeren XVII*

thought that their contents might be useful for his investigations.<sup>29</sup> The instructions also mentioned about the Company's experiences with Bauckes and Jacob Jorisz. Pits who had been sent earlier to inspect the factory offices in Bengal and along the coast of Coromandel in 1681 and 1682 respectively.<sup>30</sup> There were also the reports of Abraham Lense and Isaac Soolmans who too had written back to the VOC directors in 1683 protesting against the fraud and misdeeds of the local authorities in Bengal.<sup>31</sup> It was quite clear that the Company had not just passed on random instructions in haste but had lodged a well thought-out, long discussed and carefully put together plan that reflected their resolution of implementing reforms.

Apart from that, there was another interesting aspect that distinguished this committee from the rest. In the list of instructions that were sent to Van Reede enumerating his duties and responsibilities, he was asked to investigate the factories in all the places in the western quarter, but with special emphasis on Bengal in Mughal India. The *Heeren XVII* was clear about the fact that 'for several years it had been noticed and found that everywhere in the Indies' and 'especially in Bengal (with a bold underline in the sources), there were ample faults and misuses of different types that had crept into' the Company's offices 'from time to time'.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, while Van Reede was instructed to announce the purpose of his visit on his arrival at the different factories that he was to investigate, the *Heeren XVII* mentioned that it was necessary 'especially, in Bengal (where) after his arrival, he had to restore order through communications and the advice of the director and his council (also underlined in the sources for extra emphasis).'<sup>33</sup> Considering that this was a ripe time for Bengal's prominence in the European

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<sup>29</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4rv.

<sup>30</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4v.

<sup>31</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4r.

<sup>32</sup> 'Alsoo wij van veele jaren aff hebben gesien en ondervonden, dat allomme in Indien en voornamentelyck oock in de gewesten in't hooft deser genomineert en vel bijsonderlyck in Bengale veel en verscheijde foute en mesuses van tijt tot tijt sijn ingekropen...'

NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f.1v.

<sup>33</sup> 'Soo haeft syn Ed. op Ceylon en in Bengale, mitsgaders de vordere gewesten hier nae nijtgedruckt sal wesen g'arriveert sal sijn Ed sijn commissie den volcke en bedrevende aldaer doen voorlesen, ons te weten, hoedanigh en waervoor deselve syn Ed sullen hebben aen te sien, te erkennen, en te gehoorsaemen, mitsgaders voort daerop te treden tot het verrighden van't geene syn Ed by

overseas network, and that a similar investigation committee led by Streynhem Master had been sent by the EIC in Bengal around 1676, the Van Reede committee seems to have been all the more relevant.<sup>34</sup> Bengal had witnessed the arrival of such commissioners from the time of Joan Verpoorten in 1653 under the initiative of the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia. In 1670, another commissioner called Willem Volger was sent to Bengal and to the other Indian factories for investigation.<sup>35</sup> This was followed by the despatch of Nicolaas Baukes in 1681 who was to act in the dual capacity of the commissioner and the director at the factory of Hooghly, under the instructions of the Company's government in Batavia.<sup>36</sup> In 1683, Abraham Lense was deputed on a fact-finding mission in Bengal where he drew up lengthy reports of his observations.<sup>37</sup> The *Heeren XVII* at this point again wrote to Batavia to appoint Isaac Soolmans as the special commissioner for Bengal, Surat and Persia and any other factory that required attention in the western quarters.<sup>38</sup> Soolmans ended up being included in the Van Reede committee as a second member and the information in his reports was used largely by Van Reede in writing his missives to the *Heeren XVII*. The extensive care taken in forming this committee and selecting a suitable person as the commissioner-general leads one to wonder why there was so much time and attention devoted to this endeavour. To answer this question, the motives in sending this committee need to be uncovered.

To start with the motives, the obvious question would be – ‘Why was this committee formed in the first place?’ And the most obvious answer would be – ‘It was so because of the 1626 regulations that provided for the appointment of commissioners for checking into the VOC factories in Asia from time to time’. But new dimensions are added to the story when the

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*desen wort aanbevolen, en voor al, in Bengale aengekomen synde, met communicatie en advijs van den directeur en den raedt ordre te stellen...?*

NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f.1v.

<sup>34</sup> Fawcett, *The English Factories in India*, IV:188; 211–14.

<sup>35</sup> Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company and the Economy of Bengal*, 83.

<sup>36</sup> Prakash, 86.

<sup>37</sup> Prakash, 87.

<sup>38</sup> Prakash, 87.

sense of urgency in creating it, the tremendous effort invested in finding the right person and the high expectations and propaganda of reform surrounding it are taken into consideration. There was definitely more than one obvious reason for this. As I would argue here, a combination of different factors that had already been present in the Republic for a long time, became functional in creating this committee. Although differing from each other, they were not independent of each other's effects. The call for frantic reforms had to do partly with the financial situation of the Company arising out of the political mess of the time. This was accelerated further by the factional politics of the people behind the committee and their ideological strife.

### **The Financial Angle**

It is important to start with the financial crisis, which was the most widely used, explicit reason provided for the citizens of the Republic, about initiating reforms within the VOC administration. When the political disaster of 1672 hit the United Provinces, the economy was devastated to an extent that was considerably larger than conventional war-time damages. Even though the Company managed to bring in decent profits in these years from the cargo of its returning fleets, many debts were still waiting to be repaid. The debt trap which had already crippled the Republic earlier was intensified by the urgent need for cash, which led to increased amounts of forced loans.<sup>39</sup> Immediately after the political crisis of 1672 in the Republic, considerable panic among the VOC investors had led to a heightened demand for a quick return of their dividends. Failure to be able to do this would have had led to the Company's loss of face and trust in the Republic, as Gaastra argued, risking its dissolution.<sup>40</sup> The directors in the Company's administration (in the Republic) at that time were eager to regulate their own finances and see to it that the dividends of the shareholders were returned, since they were accountable to all the Company's investors. Consequently, all the attention came to be directed towards the overseas possessions which did have the ability to pump in extra resources for

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<sup>39</sup> Gelderblom and Jonker, "Public Finance and Economic Growth."

<sup>40</sup> Gaastra, "Succesvol ondernemerschap, falend bestuur?" 59.

saving the situation in the Republic. To maximise profits from overseas trade therefore, the *Heeren XVII* regarded it as important to show that corruption was being curtailed there, and that the economy was not being deprived of its potential prosperity. The call for redress in reorganising the Company's administration in India and Ceylon thus was perfectly timed to blend in with these concerns.<sup>41</sup>

From 1676 onwards, the *Heeren XVII* had recovered partially and it was to make important decisions on the dividends. The chamber of Amsterdam wanted to hold on to the payment of dividends till 1678 until the pressure became higher, but this proposal was not supported by the other chambers of the Company. Factional rivalries and chamber politics led to a flood of allegations of fraud in the bookkeeping records of the chamber of Zeeland in the same year, which in turn highlighted the agenda of corruption and reforms.<sup>42</sup> The involvement of some officials from the Amsterdam chamber in this alleged fraud was also exposed. It led to a few older officials being removed from their positions within these chambers, while new men were appointed in their places. Eventually, in 1679, 1680, 1681 and 1682, dividend returns were made to the shareholders at a 3.5% reduction on the normal rates.<sup>43</sup> But even though the Company managed to pull itself out temporarily from the immediate damage, there was the need to save the VOC's image and credibility in order to prevent it from collapsing. The leading directors in the *Heeren XVII* like Johannes Hudde and Coenraad van Beuningen (both from the prominent chamber of Amsterdam) began, therefore, planning frantically in 1683 ways of embarking on projects of redress, especially at a time that Van Beuningen had made larger investments.

The plans for redress included consequently many economic measures for the Dutch East India Company. This was manifested in the instructions handed over by the *Heeren XVII* to Van Reede, which contained strong assertions of the Company's need for financial reforms. At

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<sup>41</sup> Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Gaastra, 65–66.

<sup>43</sup> Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 27.

the beginning of the instructions, the *Heeren XVII* stressed the fact that in all places in India where there were VOC factories, and especially in Bengal, several ‘faults and abuses had crept in over the years, which had resulted in a lot of corruption, defrauding and other malpractices’.<sup>44</sup> The *Heeren XVII* lamented the fact that despite the best efforts of the Company up till then, illegal private trade and other unnecessary expenditure had made the economic losses deeper and the situation worse overall. The points of redress therefore were highly focused on bringing about financial changes, which conveyed the idea of the directors trying to build a stricter corporate image of the officials abroad. From 1676 onwards, the growing unpopularity of the policies of the Governor-General Van Goens owing to his expenditure and plans in Asia, put the directors in the Republic under pressure to produce a different approach.<sup>45</sup> From 1683, the redress committee led by Van Beuningen, Hudde and the others was focused on prioritising the Company’s role in overseas trade as opposed to its military engagements, in order to boost the image of the Company servant as a merchant official.<sup>46</sup>

While the administrative functions of the VOC official had not changed in any way, the rhetoric that came to be crafted was that of a ‘frugal’ merchant, who sought to live within his means and obey the orders of his employers in the best interests of the ‘fatherland’.<sup>47</sup> All the thirteen points laid out by the *Heeren XVII*, that were set as the goals for the Van Reede committee, were directed towards this mercantile image-building. Among other things, it included reforms through cutting down expenses by reducing the number of Company personnel, by avoiding unnecessary gift-giving and payments, by maintaining sober households suitable for the lifestyle of merchants and by keeping a check on the arms and ammunitions that were stocked in all of the Company warehouses in India.<sup>48</sup> Regulations on currency value, proper weighing and investigation of the cargo in the ships and such other measures were also part of

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<sup>44</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 1v.

<sup>45</sup> Vink, *Encounters*, 126.

<sup>46</sup> Knaap, “De ‘Core Business’ van de VOC,” 15.

<sup>47</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 5r.

<sup>48</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 4v-5v.



these reforms.<sup>49</sup> All of this makes it clear then that, among other factors, financial concerns were one of the incentives for creating a corporate outlook for the Company, which was the message that the committee sought to impress upon its overseas officials.

### **The Political Backdrop**

However, although the economic reasons were serious enough to push the Company administrators to act, there were deeper political and factional reasons that stirred up the measures against corruption even further. By 1672, Willem III had gained the office of the *stadhouder* by garnering support from Valckenier and his faction in the States of Holland against the De Witt-ian regents. He seemed to have managed to convince the citizens of his capability and legitimacy as a descendant of the House of Orange. The virulent pamphlet fever that was stirred up in these years by the anti-Orangist and the pro-Orangist camps, showed the strength of the ‘public’ presence in the political forum.<sup>50</sup> The political murder of the De Witt brothers in 1672 made it even more visible and important than in previous years. It forced the leading figures in the Dutch administration, to try hard to stick together despite their differences, in order to preserve stability and unity in the seven provinces. Administrative corruption had loomed large on the agenda in the Republican campaign of the De Witt brothers, as referred to in Chapter 1. It was at this time that strict rules were made to install reforms against corrupt actions because of citizens who started identifying corruption as a major nuisance within the political administration.

Even after the fall of the Republicans and the De Witt faction, the basis for judging the administrators remained the same – that is the capability to govern in a fair way without indulging in bribery and corruption. As has been alleged in the earlier chapters, corruption among the officeholders was an important political agenda. Naturally the political power-holders after 1672 had to show the Dutch citizens that they were better administrators capable of

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<sup>49</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 38, Instructions for Van Reede: f. 5r-5v.

<sup>50</sup> Reinders, “Burghers, Orangists,” 315–46; Bruijn, “Political Pamphleteering,” 63–96.

steering the Republic and its populace in the right direction. The need to show a greater drive and urgency for correcting all faults and defects, was reflected in the Company's administration as well. *Burgemeesters* and other regents in Amsterdam (and other cities in Holland) who were also Company directors in the chamber of Amsterdam and sometimes part of the *Heeren XVII*, realised that the overseas administration of the VOC was as much their responsibility as the need to protect the image of the Company in the Republic. In the aftermath of the political scars inflicted by England and France on the Republic, the VOC had also to prove itself against the English and the French East India Companies.<sup>51</sup> The new administrators in the States of Holland and in the Amsterdam chamber of the Company, therefore, were eager to experiment and implement new measures in a spirit of reform. This zeal was manifested in the formation of a committee of redress in the VOC and the appointing of a suitable person in the position of the commissioner. A group of directors were allied and dedicated to this purpose of implementing changes, which they claimed could improve the Company's commercial performance. In 1676 and 77, this group consisted of men as Valckenier, Joan Munter, Nicolaas Rochusz. van Capelle, Bernard Hulft and so on in the Amsterdam chamber and partly in the *Heeren XVII*. But by 1680 and 1681, new members came in after the demise of Valckenier and his faction. They consisted of the likes of Salomon de Blocquerie, Gerrit Hooft, Hudde and Coenrad van Beuningen. They began revising the areas that needed reform and amending the codes in the Statutes of Batavia, for curbing corruption among its officials abroad. A committee of redress was especially drafted in 1683 for this purpose with men as Munter, Van Beuningen, Van Capelle, Hudde, Adriaan Temminck, De Blocquerie and others as Huydecoper, Pieter de Graef, Hendrick Becker, Jan de Vries and Hendrik Decker along with Pieter van Dam and Gerbrand Elias.<sup>52</sup> But these measures bring us to the crucial question of whether this zeal to implement reforms was more than just

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<sup>51</sup> Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> Gaastra, 148.

the need to conform to the factional politics of corruption allegations and the implementation of reforms.

### **Ideology or Political Factionalism?**

The seventeenth century in the history of the Dutch Republic was known for its constant tension among the officeholders due to their political differences and factionalism.<sup>53</sup> All the administrative factions consequently shared not just material possessions and honour as their common bond of friendship, but they also harboured similar ideological beliefs. And these ideologies were often vocally expressed during discussions among groups of friends and families. With the advent of new philosophies at that time, it was the political families with university training who were exposed to these ideas.<sup>54</sup> It was they who were acquainted with these debates and their implications in politics and society. This was because most of the students who could afford university education in the seventeenth century hailed often from these political families, who had the necessary money and resources for giving their children such a training, essential in building an administrative career. It was quite logical therefore that they brought along with them these ideas into the political arena, as they filled the different administrative positions within the Company and the political institutions. Most of them did have various ideological stances and those who allied together in a faction were assumed to be more or less in a consensual state over these affairs. Factions in the seventeenth century, therefore, represented a conglomeration of somewhat similar political, economic and ideological affiliations.

It was in this atmosphere that the ideas of reforms and redress were put forward by the leading administrators in the Republic, who formed part of the *Heeren XVII*. They incorporated these ideas into the policy-making decisions of the Company. These men were tied together by a shared ideology, as can be discerned from a sentence extracted from the *apologia* of Nicolaas

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<sup>53</sup> Judith Pollmann, “Met grootvaders bloed bezegeld: Over religie en herinneringscultuur in de zeventiende eeuwse Nederlanden,” *De Zeventiende Eeuw: Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief* 9, no. 2 (Dec. 2013): 154–75; Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 748–66; Prak, “The Politics of Intolerance.”

<sup>54</sup> For examples see, Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 37.

Schagen. Schagen was the former director of Bengal, who (along with his wife) was accused of illegal private trade by Van Reede. On the basis of the evidence produced, he had to undergo a trial in the *Raad van Justitie* in Batavia. After Van Reede's death, Schagen produced his *apologia* in 1691 where he complained about the unsuitability of Van Reede as a commissioner-general. According to him, the Company's men who decided to bring trade and commerce under the forte of the 'Cartesian philosophy' (*Cartesiaansche Philosophie*) and whose principal was 'to doubt and question' everything chose Van Reede to examine the Company's activities in India.<sup>55</sup> But in Schagen's opinion, the *Heeren XVII* did not realise that Van Reede's measures destroyed the entire system as they were implemented without him understanding the way the Company operated in areas such as Bengal and Coromandel. These directors of the VOC were political allies of Van Reede, which Schagen pointed out as belonging to a certain ideological clique, and were responsible for appointing Van Reede to the position of the commissioner-general. An examination of the personal letters written and received by Huydecoper, one of the most prominent director-*burgemeesters* on the board of the *Heeren XVII*, revealed his cordial relationship with Van Reede and his support for him.<sup>56</sup> Huydecoper had no qualms about proclaiming the political favours he had granted to Van Reede, stating openly in a letter to Commander Simon van der Stel in October 1685, 'I had contributed a lot to the advancement of the lord of Mijdrecht.'<sup>57</sup> If Schagen was to be believed, Huydecoper was then one of those men supporting Van Reede who belonged to the group of Dutch administrators experimenting with new political theories in the VOC that was current at their time.

Interest in natural science, including human anatomy and medicine, that formed an essential part of the new political theories was appreciated and shared by these group of

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<sup>55</sup> NA, HR, inv. nr. 241A, Consideration of Nicolas Schagen on the instructions of Van Reede: folios not numbered.

<sup>56</sup> It is to be noted that Huydecoper studied in the University of Utrecht where Van Reede came from. Kooijmans, *Vriendschap*, 117.

<sup>57</sup> '*Dewyl ick veel heb gecontributeert tot het advancement van den heer van Mijdrecht.*'

UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to Van der Stel in the Cape by Huydecoper van Maarsseveen from Amsterdam, 7 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

administrators. It boosted the habit of collecting ‘exotic’ plant specimens and other naturalia by these men in the Republic.<sup>58</sup> In the numerous letters despatched by Huydecoper to his nephews, Joan Bax and Simon van der Stel (both of whom were stationed at the Cape in succession), there was repeated mention of exchanges of natural curiosities as gifts.<sup>59</sup> These included horns of rhinoceros, several seeds, bulbs, dried flowers and even water-colour illustrations of African plants sent by them to Huydecoper in the Republic.<sup>60</sup> Huydecoper explicitly provided his support for research on the flora and fauna of the Cape, thus demonstrating his interest in natural sciences. Whether such interest was connected to the idea of ‘Cartesian philosophy’ is, as mentioned earlier, a matter of inspection best left for further research in another project. What is nevertheless important to note here is that, Hudde had close contact with Descartes, and was allied with Huydecoper to form the dominant political faction in these years which indicated their common political and ideological connections.<sup>61</sup> Known for his concealed contacts and correspondences with the likes of Descartes, Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz, Hudde managed to remain a stable link to the circle of new philosophers of his time.<sup>62</sup> He became immensely active in the VOC and in the political space of the Republic, in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Simultaneously, his reputation for his knowledge of medicine as well as for being an excellent mathematician also roused his interests in the Company’s ‘exotic’ collections.<sup>63</sup> Van Beuningen was also one of those men who had appointed Van Reede along with Huydecoper and Hudde. He, too, was known for his lofty career on the political stage of the Republic, especially throughout the high years of the De Witt regime. He continued working in political positions even after 1672, before moving on to join the VOC administration. Born of parents

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<sup>58</sup> Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 304.

<sup>59</sup> Cook, 307.

<sup>60</sup> Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 71.

<sup>61</sup> P.C. Molhuysen and P.J. Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff’s Uitgevers-Maatschappij, 1911), 1171.

<sup>62</sup> Kraan, “The Dutch East India Company, Christiaan Huygens and the Marine Clock, 1682-95,” 281; Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 224, 1099, 1172–76, 1482.

<sup>63</sup> Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 1171.

harbouring Remonstrant sympathies, Van Beuningen went on to study law and held numerous administrative positions at different points in time in the Republic (ranging from that of a *burgemeester*, to a foreign diplomat, to being the *pensionaris* of Amsterdam and eventually a VOC director).<sup>64</sup> It led him to invest heavily in the Company's overseas affairs (possibly in order to stimulate the study of Asian flora and fauna) until he lost a lot of money and ended up being under legal restraint in his last years for reasons of eccentricity.<sup>65</sup> The spirit of Van Beuningen was subsequently shared by his friends and family in his faction, who too were under the spell of his energy and ideas. The personal journal of Huydecoper gives ample information about the informal social gatherings of this group who met regularly at Huydecoper's residence. There were evening-drinks (*borrel*) where discussions about new philosophies and natural science were conducted with full vigour.<sup>66</sup> Jan Commelin, one of the cousins of Huydecoper and a *burgemeester* of Amsterdam was known for his passion for having private collections of different botanical specimens for the purpose of study.<sup>67</sup> His presence in these discussions at Huydecoper's residence brought him into contact with Van Reede who had also been a regular visitor to these gatherings, before commencing his second term as the commissioner-general in Mughal India.

Van Reede himself was born in a noble family in Utrecht. His father, brother and uncle were all known for holding important military and political positions, and Van Reede's father even occupied a position on the board of directors of the chartered Companies, though this was the West India Company (WIC) and not the VOC.<sup>68</sup> However, as Van Reede himself claimed in his botanical work *Hortus Malabaricus*, he ran away from his home to join the Company as a

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<sup>64</sup> Molhuysen and Blok, 118. For a biography on Van Beuningen's life see, M.A.M. Franken, *Coenraad van Beuningen's politieke en diplomatieke activiteiten in de jaren 1667-1684* (Groningen: Wolters, 1966); Cornelia W. Roldanus, *Coenraad van Beuningen: staatsman en libertijn* ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1931).

<sup>65</sup> Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 119–20.

<sup>66</sup> See the entries at the end of Huydecoper's journal for the years 1683-85. UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Journal of 1684, 1684 and 1685: folios not numbered.

<sup>67</sup> Cook, *Matters of Exchange*, 320.

<sup>68</sup> Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 4–5.



Fig 14: Portrait of Coenraad van Beuningen, Jacob Houbraken, attributed to Jacob van Loo and Hendrik Pothoven, 1749-59. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-OB-48.829.



Fig 15: Portrait of Johannes Hudde, 1749-80, attributed to Jacob Houbraken, Hendrik Pothoven, 1796. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-OB-48.654.



Fig 16: Portrait of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein by Pieter van Gunst, 1659-1731. Courtesy Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-1895-A-18865.



Fig 17: Portrait of Joan Huydecooper van Maarsveen, Pieter Holsteyn, 1651. Courtesy, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (online collection), object nr. RP-P-OB-55.274.



fourteen-year-old boy. This claim of his, as Heniger pointed out, could not be verified from the Company's records and it was not until 1656, that his name appeared in the VOC records as a *cadet* (an official in probation) recruited by the Company.<sup>69</sup> Gradually, through patronage from higher officials (with mainly Van Geons as his patron), he managed to climb up the bureaucratic ladder and made his mark in the Company's overseas administration. It was during his tenure as the commander of Malabar in India between 1670 and 1677 that he produced his famous volumes of the *Hortus Malabaricus*.<sup>70</sup> These volumes, elaborating on the multiple specimens of Indian herbs and plants and their medicinal benefit, exposed his passion for the study of nature and brought him closer to the men in Huydecoper's and Van Beuningen's circle. Moreover, Van Reede had started his career by sailing on the same ship to the Cape as two important men – Joan Bax van Herentals and Isaac de l'Ostal de Saint Martin, both of whom remained part of his circle of close friends through his lifetime. They were important because Bax was one of Huydecoper's nephews and therefore a vital link between Van Reede and Huydecoper. In this connection, Saint Martin also formed part of this group and remained in Huydecoper's and the *Heeren XVII's* proximity after his return to the Republic in 1683.

All these men who had undergone administrative training and shared common interests, naturally tended to form a tight faction in the Company and the Republic around the 1680s. It could be true that their new-found philosophy imbued them with an unmatched vigour, that genuinely moved them to bring about reforms and changes. But it can also be contended that their ideological drive compelled these men to try to secure dominant positions within the VOC administration in order to be able to exercise their ideas. They were, as such, not free from the ongoing power struggles but their ideological motivations were connected to some extent to their factional politics which formed the very core of the Company's administrative structure. In

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<sup>69</sup> Heniger, 7.

<sup>70</sup> See for an English version, K.S. Manilal, *Van Rheedee's Hortus Malabaricus (Malabar Garden): With Annotations and Modern Botanical Nomenclature* (Kerela: University of Kerela, 2003). For a general introduction see, Marian Fournier, "Hortus Malabaricus of Hendrik Adriaan van Reede tot Drakenstein," in *Botany and History of Hortus Malabaricus*, ed. K.S. Manilal (Rotterdam: Balkema, 1980), 6–23.

the second half of the seventeenth century, much of the intellectual domain had more or less passed under the influence of ‘Cartesian philosophy’ in the Republic, irrespective of all factional rivalries.<sup>71</sup> For no matter how fiery Huydecoper had been with his new world views, he would not let his curious son join the VOC and sail to India. In fact, he expressed his outright anger when he heard of his son’s desires to join Van Reede by saying how he had spent much money on his son’s education, and his son, was now willing to give up his promising career in the Republic for the sake of travelling to India.<sup>72</sup> Hudde extended his support to the *pro-stadhouder* faction in the States of Holland against the De Witt governments’ Republican ideals, despite being a friend of Descartes’ and sharing the common sentiment of his friendly faction of regent-administrators (to whom De Witt and the other Republicans also belonged). This case of Hudde showed how political theories and ideologies were not unanimous with or restricted to any specific faction. The case of Valckenier was similar; he started out in the States of Holland under the De Witt regime, but changed over to provide support to the *stadhouder* challenging the Republican ideology of the De Witt brothers. Ideological motivations, thus, did not always override political factionalism. Factional allegiances were supple and fluid, and it was not uncommon for family members or friends to change their political affiliations, if circumstances necessitated it.

Despite the fact that members were in the same political faction, personal differences of opinion could snap ties of common ideology and factional alliance. Van Beuningen, for example, continued to work in Amsterdam for some time after 1672, though relations between him and the *stadhouder*, Willem III soon soured over political differences.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, despite differences in ideology, it was possible for all administrators to work together. Van Beuningen was known for his differences with Johan de Witt on the Republic’s manoeuvres against France,

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<sup>71</sup> Weststeijn, *Commercial Republicanism*, 82–83.

<sup>72</sup> UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Letter from Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen in Amsterdam to his son, Jan Elias on 6 November, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>73</sup> Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 119–20.

but the two continued to be on cordial terms.<sup>74</sup> Similar ideological beliefs did not always mean open endorsement of friendships and factions. Johan de Witt, despite having allegedly amicable relations with Spinoza, did not dare entertain his ideas publicly in the political space.<sup>75</sup> He also withdrew his support for Pieter de la Court when De la Court's ideas sparked controversy and came to be censored in the Republic. Ideological motivations were sometimes suppressed by the force of political factionalism to form a stable entity in the public political space. In this regard, it is essential to look into the factional interplay behind the formation of the committee to see how ideologies and reforms blended in with the political power struggles.

### **Factionalism in the Making of the Committee**

Around 1676, Gillis Valckenier (1623-80) and his allies comprising Johannes Hudde, Joan Munter, Nicolas Pancras, Cornelis Backer, Pieter van Loon and others happened to be the strongest factional front controlling both the States of Holland and the Company (from the Amsterdam chamber) in the Republic. They also comprised a significant part of the *Heeren XVII* and attempted to align their factions with the composition of the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia. Since this was the time that the plans for the redress committee was being brought up, it is crucial to explore the factional links between Batavia and the Republic. The new governor-general of the VOC in Batavia at this time, was Rijkloff van Goens, who came to be appointed after the previous Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker was called back to the Republic.<sup>76</sup> Van Goens tried to take control of the Company's administration overseas, in alliance with Valckenier in the Republic, until they met with resistance from some of the Company personnel (as explained later Van Reede and Ranst were some of them). In 1680 however, Valckenier died and with his demise, Van Goens' power too began declining. His tenure as the governor-general ended in 1681 when he came back to the Republic and lived there until his death in 1682. The factional

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<sup>74</sup> Mirte Postma, *Johan de Witt en Coenraad van Beuningen: Correspondentie tijdens de Noordse Oorlog (1655-1660)* (Deventer: Scriptio, 2007).

<sup>75</sup> Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 1482–83.

<sup>76</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 16 October, 1676: folios not numbered.

link between Van Goens and Valckenier was not explicitly mentioned anywhere, but their family relations and the secret letters dispatched betrayed their alliance.

One of Van Goens' letters despatched to the *Heeren XVII* contained details of the names of certain Company servants that he suspected of corruption. It was however addressed to an anonymous person mentioned as 'my lord' who Van Goens later again described as 'my patron'.<sup>77</sup> Further, it was accompanied with the request at the end of the letter to keep the information revealed in it secret, stating that – 'My duty and love for serving the Company, and my conscience for its welfare... has compelled me to send this (letter) to you secretly...I would not dare disclose this information to anyone else, therefore my request is to ensure that this letter gets burnt'.<sup>78</sup> According to Gaastra, this highly regarded person of Van Goens, who was entitled to receive such high-level confidential information about the Company's activities in Asia could not possibly have been anyone else other than Valckenier at that time.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, Valckenier who was close to Hudde passed it on to him and with or without the knowledge of Van Goens the copy of his letter written to his patron survived through Hudde's collection. This letter with names of certain Company officials shows that there were attempts of factional coordination between Van Goens as the governor-general and Valckenier as one of the leading men in the VOC and the political space of the Republic. It also showed that Van Goens had the power to try to remove men who were his opponents by bringing them to the notice of the *Heeren XVII* through corruption accusations. The anonymity showed how this was craftily done under the formal façade of the Company.

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<sup>77</sup> NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens to an anonymous patron, 8 February, 1676: folios not numbered.

<sup>78</sup> *'Mijn pligt en liefde tot 's Comps dienst, ende mijn conscientie tot betragtingh van hare weharen, ...hebben mij gedwongen desen secretelijck U ed toe te senden, ...ende huijten wien ick niemand anders soo open kennisse soude durven doen, versoeckende deselve...magh verbrant werden...'*

NA, Collectie Hudde, inv. nr. 5, Letter from Van Goens to an anonymous patron, 8 February, 1676: folios not numbered.

<sup>79</sup> Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 12.

It was also Van Goens who happened to be the patron of a young Van Reede when the latter had set sail from the waters of Texel in 1657 to reach the Cape and sail further into the Indian Ocean. In 1662, when Van Goens had launched his conquests over the spice-producing areas of Cochin in order to establish the Company's monopoly there, Van Reede accompanied his patron in the military feats. Van Reede's timely intervention with the local king saved the situation which impressed Van Goens very much. He wrote to the *Heeren XVII* reporting that, 'he (Van Reede) is a constantly sober and seasoned soldier, and what he may still lack in style of trading, will no doubt be made good within a short time by his ability.'<sup>80</sup> However, this amicability snapped when the two argued over their differences on Ceylon, which was a possible choice for the establishment of a VOC base with colonial plantations, as suggested by Van Goens.<sup>81</sup> This rivalry made such a deep chasm in the relationship between these two men, that it became one of the most bitter examples of factional strife in the history of the Company. An agitated Van Goens wrote to the *Hoge Regering* complaining openly about the personal character of Van Reede, breaking many of the rules of the policy of neutrality for colleagues in the official reports of the Company.<sup>82</sup>

In 1676, Van Goens managed to remove Van Reede from his post of commander of Malabar through the influence of his power and position in the Company. In October of the

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<sup>80</sup> Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 22.

<sup>81</sup> Van Reede wrote a report on the prospects of the Company in Ceylon at the request of the *Raad van Indië* in 1677. This was at a time, Van Goens was already chosen as the next governor-general (1678-1681) in Batavia, though Joan Maetsuyker was still officially carrying out his duties in this position. In his report, Van Reede opposed Van Goens' idea of establishing a colony in Ceylon and this was forwarded to the *Heeren XVII*. This infuriated Van Goens, as he later came to know of it, and wrote back an angry letter to the *Heeren XVII* condemning Van Reede's actions as 'hypocrisy'. For the letter of Van Reede see, NL-HaNA, Aanwinsten 1e afdeling, inv. nr. 1001, Aanmerking en verklaring over verscheyde zaken, betreffende der staet en ommeslag van de P'Comp op het eijland Ceijlon, en het gene daer aen hoort te samen gestelt uijt last en bevel van den Ed heer gouverneur-generael, en d' Ed heeren raden van India, door Hendrick Adriaan van Rheede, voor zijn advijs, in d'vergadering der Hoge Regeringe van India gedaen [Observations and declarations concerning different affairs, regarding the state and consequences of the Company in Ceylon, and those who belong there put together by Hendrick Adriaan van Reede, under the order of the governor-general and the Council of the Indies in Batavia, as his advice for the High Government], dated 23 November, 1677: f. 1-98. For the letter of Van Goens sent to the *Heeren XVII* see, Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 52.

<sup>82</sup> NL-HaNA, Familie Van Goens, inv. nr. 18, Letter from Rijkloff van Goens to the *Raad van Indië* about Ceylon, 1675: folios not numbered.

same year, Van Reede came to be appointed as an *extraordinaire Raad van Indië* (extraordinary councillor of the Indies) in Batavia where his colleagues were among others, Cornelis Speelman and Willem Volger.<sup>83</sup> But relations between him and Van Goens had already reached an impasse and his open letter to the *Heeren XVII* questioning the ideas of Van Goens brought matters to a deadlock.<sup>84</sup> Thereafter, a resignation was filed in his name and Van Reede went back to the Republic. On board with him, was also Constantijn Ranst who too had resigned from his position in the *Raad van Indië*.<sup>85</sup> Ranst was a brother-in-law of Valckenier (as the latter was married to Jacoba Ranst, the sister of Constantijn) and therefore both Ranst and Van Goens should have had been on good terms with each other.<sup>86</sup> But the two clashed with each other as a result of their differences in opinion and soon Ranst too resigned and accompanied Van Reede to the Republic.<sup>87</sup>

In the meantime, ideas for ‘redress’ of the VOC regulations were being drawn up in the directorial board of the Company and Nicolaas Verburg was invited to be one of the committee members in 1676.<sup>88</sup> Verburg’s active involvement with the Company’s affairs was understandable on the grounds of his belonging to the faction of Hooft (another faction besides Valckenier’s in the States and the VOC at that time), who was connected to Verburg by family relations.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, Van Goens’ writing highly of Nicolaas Verburg can be understood with reference to the past incidents, involving Ranst and Verburg. The two had a disagreement over Nicolaas Verburg’s brother, Jacob Verburg who was charged with corruption by Volger during the

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<sup>83</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 16 October, 1676: folios not numbered.

<sup>84</sup> Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 54.

<sup>85</sup> Heniger, 55.

<sup>86</sup> Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 542–43, 479.

<sup>87</sup> Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 124; Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 55; Chijs, *Dagh-Register, anno 1677*, 395, 399.

<sup>88</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 108, *Resoluties*, 26 September, 1676: folios not numbered.

<sup>89</sup> The Hoofts were related to the Verburgs in two ways – first through Anna van Hoorn who had previously been married to Cornelis van Vlooswijck before being married to Arnhout Hellemans Hooft and the Van Vlooswijck family was related to the Verburgs through Neeltgen Jansdr. Verburg. And secondly, Willem Hooft married as his second wife, Adriana Verburg. Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 142, 483; W. Wijnaendts van Resandt, *De gezaghebbers der Oost-Indische Compagnie: Op hare buiten-comptoiren in Azië* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Liebaert, 1944), 130.

directorship of Ranst in Bengal.<sup>90</sup> Van Goens' conflict with Ranst might have then incited him to show his approval for Nicolaas Verburg (who was the opponent of Ranst). Moreover, Nicolaas Verburgh also showed his disapproval against Maetsuyker's wife and brother-in-law, Andries Bogaart during the revelation of their illegal trade in Surat.<sup>91</sup> Nicolaas Verburg was thus not opposed to Van Goens and his faction, both in the *Hoge Regering* and in the Republic. On the basis of this committee's reports, and the letter received from Van Goens himself, further *besoignes* were formed in the Amsterdam chamber. In 1677, a committee of redress was constituted in Amsterdam led by Valckenier that was also copied at the level of the *Heeren XVII*. By 1678, Van Goens used his influence and the attention of the directors came to be focussed on none other than Van Goens' son, Rijkloff van Goens Jr. in considering him for the commissioner's position. But Van Goens Jr. then refused and the fall of Van Goens himself began soon after, as his decisions and actions came to be increasingly questioned by the *Heeren XVII*. In 1680, he was instructed to repatriate back to the Republic and his power base immediately collapsed. Following both Hooft's and Valckenier's deaths, the political grip on the States of Holland and the Company was transferred to the new leaders such as Huydecoper van Maarsseveen and other allies from Hudde's faction.

Huydecoper had always expressed his dislike for Van Goens in his letters.<sup>92</sup> Naturally, Van Reede in the Republic, sought his alliance in Huydecoper and found patronage under him and his faction. Van Reede consequently stepped back into active politics of the VOC again and came to be involved in the plans for the 'redress committee'. In 1683, when the idea of checking for corruption and implementing reforms had begun slowly materialising, Huydecoper and Hudde turned out to be the most prominent director-politicians within the VOC administration. They were also related through family with the other directors and the members of the *besoignes*

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<sup>90</sup> Gaastra, "Constantijn Ranst," 126–36; Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 119, 124.

<sup>91</sup> Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 120.

<sup>92</sup> UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 58, Letter written by Joan Huydecoper van Maarsseveen to Joan Bax, 19 November, 1678: folios not numbered. Also see, Gaastra, *Bewind en beleid*, 125.

who supported the plan of redress consisting of Munter, Van Beuningen, Van Capelle, De Blocquerij, Temminck and others.<sup>93</sup> While Munter was related to the Valckeniers and the Trips, and was thereby related to Hudde as well, the others like Temminck and Van Beuningen were related to the Huydecoper-Coymans and the Tulp families.<sup>94</sup> Van Capelle had been related through the Hochepieds to Valckenier.<sup>95</sup> The De Blocquerij family was connected to the family De Haze through marital alliances who were in turn connected to the families of Hudde and the Coymans.<sup>96</sup>

The *Heeren XVII's* sessions in October 1684 which decided on the final instructions and oath for Van Reede was also presided over more or less by these same men – De Blocquerij, Cornelis van Vlooswijck, Munter, Huydecoper, Van Beuningen, Decker, Temminck and others belonging to an allied group.<sup>97</sup> In the years before he left for India, Van Reede's frequent visits to the Huydecoper residence along with his friend Saint Martin were known from Huydecoper's *journaal*.<sup>98</sup> They often had long conversations and drinks with Commelin, Gerard Bors van Waveren, De Blocquerie, Munter, Hudde and Huydecoper, with the wife of Huydecoper, Constantia sometimes joining in.<sup>99</sup> It seemed quite clear then that this was a dominant factional group in the Republic at that time to which Van Reede was attached. His appointment as the commissioner was therefore a consequence of his direct links to this faction that controlled the administration of the VOC. On the other hand, the old friends and sympathisers of Van Goens

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<sup>93</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 241, *Resoluties*, 5 April, 1683: folios not numbered.

<sup>94</sup> Elias, *De vroedschap van Amsterdam*, 626. A relation of Valckenier was married to one of the daughters of Joan Munter, Agatha Munter. One of the sons of Huydecoper van Maarsseveen was married to Maria Temminck from the Temminck. In the Huydecoper-Coymans family, there were marriages with the Bartolotti family which was in turn connected to the Van Beuningen family. Jacoba Victoria Bartolotti van den Heuvel was married to Coenraad van Beuningen who was the daughter of Guiliellmo Bartolotti who married Jacoba Sophia Huydecoper from the Huydecoper-Coymans family.

<sup>95</sup> Elias, 620.

<sup>96</sup> Elias, 721.

<sup>97</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 31 October, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>98</sup> UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Journal of 1684, entry of 21 May, 26 June, 7 and 8 July, 9 and 30 August, 21 and 25 October, 13 and 14 November, 11 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>99</sup> UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Journal of 1684, entries made on 27 January, 19 February, 10 April, 25 October, 12 November, 1684: folios not numbered.



remained Van Reede's political opponents and this could be clearly discerned from their bitterness towards him in their writings. While Van Dam who was in the pro-Van Reede faction praised him for his fervour in rooting out corruption from the Company, Nicolaus de Graaff who had been close to Van Goens regretted Van Goens' death and questioned Van Reede's intentions as a commissioner-general in charge of the committee.<sup>100</sup>

On the other side, the political atmosphere in the Republic had to correspond with the *Heeren XVII* and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia, in terms of aligning factional networks. After Van Goens' death, Cornelis Speelman took over the office of the governor-general of the *Hoge Regering*. The fact that the alignment of the factions was gradually taking place in Batavia in accordance with the shuffling of power positions in the *Heeren XVII* was evident from the appointment of Speelman who was on good terms with Huydecoper. In one of his letters to his nephew, Joan Bax, written in 1683, Huydecoper mentioned that he was obliged to Speelman for the favour done to his cousin Van Heusen and Joan Bax's brother Jacobus.<sup>101</sup> In 1684 when Speelman died in Batavia, Johannes Camphuys was chosen as his successor.<sup>102</sup> Huydecoper described him as 'one of the most capable officials of the esteemed Company' which left little doubt about Camphuys being in favour of Huydecoper's faction in the Republic.<sup>103</sup>

Finally, when Van Reede was on board the ship *Bantam*, Huydecoper wrote to his cousin, Bax who as mentioned before was also close to Van Reede, wishing that 'God may give his (Van Reede's) committee the desired success'.<sup>104</sup> His letters show that he was in constant touch with

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<sup>100</sup> Graaff, *Oost-Indise spiegel*, 100–101. The fact that Pieter van Dam was in the pro-Van Reede faction can be asserted from Van Reede's dedication to Van Dam, along with others in his faction, in one of the volumes of the *Hortus Malabaricus*. See Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 101.

<sup>101</sup> NA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter from Joan Huydecoper to Joan Bax from Amsterdam, 29 November, 1683: folios not numbered.

<sup>102</sup> NA, VOC, inv. nr. 109, *Resoluties*, 1 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>103</sup> UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to Bax by Huydecoper van Maarsseveen from Amsterdam, 10 October, 1685: folios not numbered.

<sup>104</sup> UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to cousin Joan Bax, 5 April, 1685: folios not numbered. The fact that Van Reede and Bax were good friends can be deduced from the fact that they sailed together when they started off for the first time to the Cape and Van Reede spoke dearly of him. Heniger, *Hendrik Adriaan van Reede*, 9.

Van Reede himself, and knew exactly when Van Reede had reached the Cape on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1685. Thereafter he recommended his cousin Hinlopen and some other of his acquaintances in Asia, to Van Reede.<sup>105</sup> From his letters, it is also evident that Huydecoper had an alliance with Bacherus (the second member of the committee), whom he had recommended to his cousin Faucommer.<sup>106</sup> Factionalism thus seemed to have been in full force in the making of this committee and the choosing of its commissioner throughout these years. The factional link between the political institutions in the Republic – the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic – and the *Hoge Regering* in Batavia became thereby evident from the way corruption allegations and the promise of reforms were used by their officials.

The *Heeren XVII* eventually took the recommendations of Van Reede and his committee seriously and implemented most of them as administrative reforms in the Company.<sup>107</sup> But what was further unfortunate, was the abrupt culmination of this committee's investigations when Van Reede succumbed to sudden illness and died, during the course of his journey from Malabar to Surat. Even though there are sources that refer to his illness plaguing him for months already, certain conspiracy theories alleging his being poisoned by his political opponents also could not be ignored.<sup>108</sup> It makes one curious about the manoeuvrings of the committee since the time of its landing in Bengal in 1685. It also compels the researcher to look beyond the official reports in order to uncover Van Reede's personal intentions in his pursuit against corruption. It

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<sup>105</sup> UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter written to the Lord of Zuilen, 8 August, 1685: folios not numbered; UA, Family Huydecoper, inv. nr. 60, Letter to Jacobus Hinlopen, 11 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>106</sup> UA, Huydecoper Family, inv. nr. 60, Letter to cousin Faucommer, 10 December, 1684: folios not numbered.

<sup>107</sup> The office of an independent fiscaal, for instance, was created to specially regulate the illegal trading practices on the basis of the Van Reede Committee's reports. See, Gaastra, "The Independent Fiscaals."

<sup>108</sup> Molhuysen and Blok, *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek*, 1012. It is important in this connection to note that the factional politics in the Company were quite serious and could at times have had serious consequences for the VOC officials. There were also often rumours about the bookkeeper, Paulus de Roo being poisoned while on duty, that were known to have been circulated within the Company's administrative circle. References for Roo in the editor's note by Dam, *Pieter van Dam's Beschryvinge*, Book II, Part II, 386. Also see, R.J. Barendse, *The Arabian Seas: The Indian Ocean World of the Seventeenth Century* (M.E. Sharp Inc., 2002), 409; Peters, *In steen geschreven*, 117.

simultaneously opens up a glaring lack of control on the part of the *Heeren XVII* in the Republic, to comprehend the dynamics of the Company's Asiatic world. The next chapter deals with the Committee in Bengal and tries to explore all these perspectives, in light of Bengal's notoriety for corruption.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, it is shown why the committee under Hendrik Adriaan van Reede as its commissioner was different from its predecessors. The time, attention and long deliberations invested in its formation, was the outcome of the ongoing developments in the Republic in the seventeenth century. There was already a focus on corruption and its reforms as a political agenda in seventeenth-century Dutch society. The years after 1672 saw a more pressing need to use corruption allegations and reforms in politics, following the instability of the times. Reforms and changes to combat corruption became the necessary political tools for the new administrators (both in the political space and in the Company) to establish their credibility for the Dutch citizens and the VOC investors. Financial tensions regarding timely return of dividends also made the situation more serious. At this time, the dominant faction representing Amsterdam in the Company belonged to a group of men who were known for their specific world views and new ideas. As botanists, anatomists, mathematician and scientists, men like Hudde, Huydecoper and Van Beuningen provided an intellectual stimulus to the Company's activities abroad. This was represented by the choice of Van Reede as the commissioner who was also known for his interest in botany that led to the compilation of the *Hortus Malabaricus*. But to be able to implement policies along the lines of these new ideas, there was a need to establish their administrative stronghold within the VOC, both in the Republic and in the overseas posts. Factional politics appeared to be the way this could be done, and as has been shown in this chapter, it was in substantial use. The instructions for Van Reede from the *Heeren XVII* also left open the chance to remove men that Van Reede deemed guilty of corruption by

sending them for trial to Batavia. This possibly opened up chances of realigning factions between the Company in the Republic and the Company in Asia and the Cape. Lastly, the committee's focus on Bengal as a problem region also marked the growing importance of the region for the VOC in the final decades of the seventeenth century. The following chapter will emphasise this aspect further, along with the factional interplay, in order to shed light on Mughal Bengal through the lived encounter on the one hand and the discourse of the committee on the other.