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British India and the Origins of the Great Game 1757-1805

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**'The Greatest Benefit they ever received from Us':
British India and the Origins of the Great Game
1757-1805**

MARK JAMES STEWART

**Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the origins of the Great Game, a geopolitical conflict between the British and Russian Empires in Central Asia to the intellectual and constitutional construction of 'British India' after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Using a diverse range of ideas and facets of British and Indian society it will examine how the East India Company, the Mughal Empire and the domestic British state all contributed to the development of the Great Game in the middle of the nineteenth century. By examining how British politicians and scholars interpreted the nature of British sovereignty and government in Bengal, it will demonstrate that once the East India Company had secured territorial domain in India, its employees set about interpreting many of the political, legal and religious ideas and traditions of Indian society in a way that made them more governable for Britons. This exercise in intellectual imperialism, in turn, had many unforeseen consequences, one of which was a propensity to expand the British Indian state into the rest of the subcontinent. This paper uses a variety of primary sources and the rich historiography of British India from recent decades to examine and evaluate this interesting and important episode.

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This work is dedicated to the memory of Lloyd Arthur Stewart (1920-2005) and Mary Eleanor (nee Jones) Stewart (1922-2004). Both Grandpa and Grandma never got to read this thesis but were looking forward to doing so.

This thesis would not have been possible without the help of many people. My studies at the University of Ottawa have been wonderful and this is largely due to the first-class academic supervising and mentoring of Dr. Richard Connors. In my undergraduate years, Dr. Andrew Mackillop of the University of Aberdeen was instrumental in introducing me to the East India Company and its Scottish dimensions. Finally, none of this would have come to fruition without the emotional and financial support of my wonderful parents Owen and Louise, and my three siblings Daniel, Sean and Johanna. They helped every inch along the way, all the while putting up with incessant talk of Mughal India and the fiscal-military state for almost two years. Thank-you.

Introduction

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the tempestuous relationship between East and West has once again brought the regions of the Middle East and Central Asia into the global spotlight. They have also powerfully and painfully reminded us that Rudyard Kipling's oft cited observation: 'East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,'¹ was not an ironic phrase. He well knew that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they did meet and these encounters left an indelible mark on both peoples. Aspects of these eighteenth century encounters are the subject of this thesis.

Moreover, as Kipling also knew, interest in Central Asia can very rarely be called new. Time and time again, it has resurfaced in world history and become an important consideration in the strategic affairs of the great empires and nation states. Central Asia was crossed by Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, powerful Turkic tribes, the British and Russian empires, and the Soviet Union. Currently, a coalition of nations led by the United States is fighting a war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Central Asia was also once an important highway for the spread of culture, religion, and material riches.² For over a thousand years, the famous Silk Road, a network of caravan trails, bazaars, and entrepôts, carried the cultural and religious ideas of western and southern Asia to the east and the riches of the east to the Mediterranean and Europe. Volatility; both political and cultural is and remains the norm for Central Asia.

It is against this imposing historical backdrop that this thesis will explore the

¹ Rudyard Kipling. *Departmental Ditties, Barrack-room Ballads and other verses* (New York: U.S. Book Company, 1890): 45.

² Richard C. Foltz. *Religions of the Silk Road* (New York: St. Martin's Giffin, 1999): 24.

nature of the interaction between the British and Mughal Indian empires in the mid to late eighteenth century, and contribute to the understanding of events of what have been referred to by historians as the nineteenth century 'Great Game' between the British and Russian empires for political dominance in the centre of the world's largest continent. While many have argued that the emergence of the Great Game in Asia was driven by tension between British and Russian interests in nineteenth century Central Asia, this dissertation suggests that events in East India, specifically in Bengal during the decades after the Battle of Plassey (1757), did much to shape British attitudes towards the subcontinent and subsequently the politics of northern India (Hindustan) and Central Asia beyond the Hindu Kush.

As such, this thesis seeks to contribute to the understanding of the Great Game by providing a much needed prologue to the contest that emerged between two great imperial powers between 1828 and 1900.³ It also seeks to explain why large numbers of East India Company and British Indian explorers, soldiers, and adventurers moved across the subcontinent into distant lands and mountainous regions, gathering information and currying the favour of the resident Maharajas, Rajas, Khans and Caliphs. What distinguishes this thesis from other histories of the Great Game is that it concentrates upon eighteenth century events and sources, showing how these helped contribute to the origins of imperial expansion in India and influenced nineteenth century geopolitical intrigue in the rest of the subcontinent. It considers religious tracts, constitutional

³ Edward Ingram. *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979): 5. 1815 is also considered important to the history of the Great Game because it saw the collapse of the Napoleonic threat to India and the beginning of a Russian one. 1828 is the year in which a forward Central Asian policy was adopted for British forces by Edward Law, the second Lord Ellenborough, then President of the Board of Control.

documents, and correspondence collections and argues that these sources were as important to the genesis of the Great Game as any map of the province of Kabul or diplomatic dispatch to London or from Moscow. The reason for this is clear: information that the British East India Company collected after 1757 was constantly used to gauge the power of its rivals in Asia, be they Indian or European and contributed to the ultimate goal of gaining the upper hand in India and protecting British and East Indian Company interests in that region.⁴

This thesis will contribute to our understanding of the contemporary attitudes and conceptions of the Great Game and examine some of the questions Britons had about the constitutional, economic, religious, and social structures of India and place them within precise historical contexts. By examining Indians and their interaction with the East India Company, it will consider how the Company's Indian possessions contributed to, and fit into a British imperial world-view.⁵ Furthermore, by examining the ideas, realities and images British authorities had about the Indian subcontinent, it contributes to our understanding of how British strengths and insecurities manifested themselves during discussions and actions regarding India. From this research, one can conclude that the British Indian empire was not only forged by rifles and trade, but also by early modern British constitutional and legal thought and by the expectations of the British fiscal-military state.

The organization of this thesis will be as follows. The first chapter examines the historiography of the British Empire and British India from the late eighteenth century

⁴ C. A. Bayly. *Empire and Information: Intelligence gathering and social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 65-66.

⁵ Philip Lawson. *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman Group, 1987): 19.

until the present. It concentrates upon the major schools of thought within British imperial historiography since India first emerged on the intellectual horizon in the early modern period. It demonstrates that there has been a strong connection between the different historiographical schools of thought and the different political philosophies of empire during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The second chapter focuses on the domestic British state and underlines the connection and importance that the creation of Great Britain (1707) and the financial revolution of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries had upon the emergence of the British Empire abroad. It will examine important ideas such as John Brewer's 'fiscal-military state' thesis as well as how the development of a cohesive legal and constitutional framework turned England into a unified, stable, and arguably most powerful state in Europe.⁶ It will argue that economic and legal forces within England itself had a direct impact not only on the formation of a 'British' Empire, but also on the formation of the important social, economic and political links, which after the 1757 Battle of Plassey, manifested themselves in Bengal, and encouraged the expansion of the East India Company once it became a surrogate government for the Mughal Empire in eastern India.

The third chapter considers the political dynamics of the Indian subcontinent in the years leading to the pivotal Battle of Plassey. This section will explain how the political and economic structures of the Mughal Empire unconsciously offered a fertile environment for the East India Company to root itself in eastern India and then expand

⁶ John Brewer. *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989): 4.

across the subcontinent. Central to this chapter is the obvious point that Mughal India and its successor-states were complex and dynamic structures, and it would be erroneous to believe that the Company's officials simply became an Anglo-Mughal ruling elite. Company officials, Hindu bankers, landlords, nobles, religious leaders, warriors and peasant farmers all had important roles to play in the Indian economy, social networks and political structures both before and after 1757. It will be shown here that it was not the East India Company that imposed its system of governance on Bengal, as much as it was the Company who seized an opportunity to insinuate itself into Mughal power structures and subtly alter them from within.

The final chapter examines the practical origins of the Great Game. It explores the multitude of questions and debates that surfaced in Britain and Bengal after Plassey, and explores some of the major ideas and concepts that were contested regarding how to better govern and control India. Between 1757 and 1797, the British Empire underwent a period of tumultuous change on a global scale, and India nineteenth century affairs must be put into, and seen in light of, this context. Of particular importance in this chapter are coinciding constitutional changes throughout the empire. It also considers the motivations and ideas of the individuals who were responsible for the concerted push of British expansion into central and northern India in the eighteenth century.

The earliest stage of the East India Company's activity in India involved, in part, action that was motivated with the goal of understanding and comprehending eastern Indian society, a place it had just militarily conquered. Amongst other motivations such as immense commercial profit, Britons sought an understanding of the Indian people; their lands, cultures and ideas. This is an overarching theme and represents an important

dimension in this thesis. As such, the East India Company's involvement in India after 1757, and the construction of a British Indian domain were closely tied to the scholarly research and intellectual debate of those Britons there, and laid the groundwork for the Company's expansive Indian Empire in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, it was during this crucial transitional phase (between 1757 and 1805) that India came forcefully to the attention of British powerbrokers in London and was reconfigured into something more than just a place for a British merchant company to do business. India's eventual status as the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire began here, and its subsequent impact on British society, culture, history and politics should be traced to this period.

The British East India Company rose from a position of merchant trader, to suzerain, to eventually ruler of all of the Indian subcontinent within a century. In the process, the Company and then the Raj, exposed itself to the double edged sword of a foreign society. The title of this thesis is drawn from an account of the many challenges Britons faced when governing Bengal. In a letter to Lady Spencer from the Hanoverian Orientalist scholar Sir William Jones, after describing his recently finished work the *Digest of Indian Law*, Jones noted that: 'If my Digest of Indian Law should give stability to their property, real and personal, and security to their persons, it will be the greatest benefit they ever received from us.'⁷ It was men like Jones who brought this very English idea of Common Law and personal property to Asia and in the process turned Mughal India into British India, all the while beginning a trek - both physical and intellectual - up the River Ganges.

⁷ Sir William Jones to Lady Spencer, Crishna-nagar, 24 October 1791, in *The Letters of Sir William Jones Volume II*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970): 903.

Chapter I: The Five Schools of Thought in the Historiography of British India

Before any examination of the British East India Company's activity on the Indian subcontinent or the subsequent geopolitical struggles of southern and central Asia in the nineteenth century is undertaken, an analysis of what has been written on this broad topic is essential. The historiography of the British Empire in India is enormous. Vast amounts of material have been written on the colonial enterprise on the Indian subcontinent, far too much to mention in one historiographical chapter. However the historiography of the British Indian experience can be reduced to five schools of thought which have emerged to dominate the field. The five schools of thought also reveal that British Indian historiography has been integral to understanding the political nature of the empire itself. Imperial historiography changed as the empire changed, and in many ways there was a symbiotic relation between the two. Perhaps, it is not at all ironic that the writer who noted that: 'Who controls the past controls the present, who controls the present controls the future,' was British Indian born.⁸ Control was very much in the mindset of the imperial historians throughout the political, economic and intellectual configuration of the Empire. The writers of British imperial history often sought to influence the workings of the empire by controlling its past.⁹ At times this was done more subtly than others, but in most cases conscious or unconscious motivations were embedded in the historian's craft and used as running commentaries on and critiques of, not just the British Empire,

⁸ Eric Arthur Blair, better known by his pseudonym, George Orwell, wrote a fictional account about a totalitarian government and its need to control history. This book was *Nineteen Eighty-Four* written in 1949.

⁹ Bernard S. Cohn. *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 3.

but also of the societies and regions encountered by Britons.

The first school of thought that emerged in the writing of empire is perhaps best described as British Orientalist. The Orientalist scholars proved most dominant during the early modern contact between India and Great Britain. They were dominant in this intellectual realm from the late sixteenth century until the early 1800s. By virtue of the fact that Orientalists were the first scholars to record early interactions between Europe and Asia, they were very important to these two fields of history and established many of the early terms of reference between the two cultural groups. The term British Orientalist is actually an umbrella term that needs to be used with caution. There have always been Orientalists of a sort in Europe because individuals and groups have studied distant peoples and lands since the Greeks and Romans. Indeed, some contemporary scholars have argued that Orientalism is so embedded in how western civilisation looks at eastern cultures that much of what is thought about the East is untrue and is actually an insidious way of creating the false dichotomy of 'us' (representing civilization and progress) versus 'them' (representing colonized peoples).¹⁰

Europeans have long sought to know what was beyond their horizon. From Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, to Marco Polo, Christopher Columbus, John Cabot and beyond, there have always been explorers and conquerors who wanted to master and understand the 'riches' and 'mysteries' of the East. From this desire emerged the first Orientalists in the western intellectual tradition, but until the earliest period of global exploration, this was difficult. The earliest students of extra-European societies

¹⁰ Edward W. Said. *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993): 22. See also Edward Said. 'Orientalism reconsidered' *Race and Class* 27, no. 2 (1985): 6.

were uninformed and possessed a limited amount of material to work with; much of which was tainted by years of biased reportage and mythical stories which were the result of imagining distant societies from great distances.

In the British context, England began its national expansion in the early seventeenth century, driven by some important domestic political events. In 1603, upon the death of Queen Elizabeth I, James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England, moved to London and became the first bi-nationally accepted monarch in the history of Scotland and England. The Union of Crowns, as we shall see in the next chapter, would have a significant impact on European imperial expansion because not only did it inaugurate the first 'British' colonial enterprise, the plantation of Ulster in northern Ireland, but out of this 'Union' came an emerging British imperial ideology that would influence and inform the way British Orientalists viewed the world. With this first template of a British colonial enterprise, very soon the English kingdom moved to settle in the Americas, founding Jamestown in Virginia in 1607 and the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1634. King James I and VI was a colonial theorist and spoke of his colonial ventures in the stark and unequivocal language about bringing civility to the barbarous corners of the world. The Union of Crowns, the plantation of Ireland, and the colonies in North America were all early steps in a process that would be sustained by British subjects for centuries. Throughout this process, new identities were created, boundaries were crossed, and ideas shaped.¹¹

¹¹ David Armitage. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 45. Armitage also addressed the process by which the Empire influenced English literature by promoting Classical learning in England. See David Armitage, 'Literature and Empire' *Oxford History of the British Empire Volume I: Origins of Empire*, edited by Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University

Despite expanding in multiple directions, none of the Europeans forgot their original goals of Eastern wealth and it was to the East that the English too sought riches and wealth once more. Spices, an increasingly important component to the English diet and to food storage techniques, were needed. When overland attempts through Russia by the Muscovy and Levant Company failed, the only means to acquire these much needed commodities was by sea borne routes. To facilitate this eastern trade, on 31 December 1600 a charter creating the Governor and Company of Merchants of London, Trading into the East-Indies was established.¹² Within this mercantile climate there emerged an increasingly greater demand for verifiable knowledge of the world.

Early English students of the east were tainted by the same biases and misinformation as their European contemporaries. But soon empirical experience became more plentiful as contact with the non-European world became more common. Historical misconceptions of the Americas and Asia lessened as knowledge of these places grew. As more people experienced these lands, their knowledge and understanding of these regions became more accurate, and the result was new ideological and historical ideas. In the case of India, the first Orientalists to encounter Indian civilization were very rarely interested students of the region and most often were simply trading company employees, mercenary traders or soldiers using the East India Company as a vehicle to make a quick fortune.¹³ It is important to note that these observers were not professionally trained historians, but usually individual explorers there with the intention of making money.

Press, 1997): 106-108.

¹² Lawson, *East India Company*, 17.

¹³ D.R. Woolf ed. *A Global Encyclopaedia of Historical Writing, Volume I: A-J*. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1998): 458. They are referred to here as 'scholar-officials.'

Once there, new lands facilitated an interest in indigenous Indian affairs and accounts of these encounters were put to paper.

In the eighteenth century Oriental scholars existed within the world of the prominent but increasingly challenged Christian intellectual hegemony. Those beginning to challenge a literal interpretation of *The Bible* - the Deists - were the result of the Enlightenment's concepts of empirical reasoning, and as such, philosophical and scientific intellectuals were increasingly dividing into two camps: the purveyors of the Judeo-Christian orthodoxy and the Deists themselves. The years between the founding of the East Indian Company in 1600 and the globe spanning Seven Years War of 1756 to 1763 was a period of massive political and intellectual upheaval in Europe. New ideas were challenging older ones, many of which were rooted in information brought back from the colonies around the world.¹⁴ Furthermore, European colonies were also becoming integrated into imperial economies based upon mercantile capitalism, itself quickly becoming the driving force for all imperial activity. In Britain, political sovereignty and stability were being entrenched in law with the English Civil War securing increased rights for Parliament by the middle seventeenth century, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 leading to the permanent entrenchment of a powerful aristocracy. The 1701 Act of Settlement guaranteed a Protestant succession to the thrones of the two Protestant British kingdoms and the 1707 Act of Union unified their Parliaments. Ultimately, the defeat of Charles Edward Stuart at the Battle of Culloden ended the 1745 Rebellion and eliminated the threat of a Catholic Stuart King from

¹⁴ For a survey on the broad intellectual achievements of the early modern period, especially in the pivotal sixteenth century see Richard Mackenney. *Sixteenth Century Europe: Expansion and Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993): 58.

coming back to Britain, ending the dynastic pretensions of the Stuarts for good.

Meanwhile in East India, during the Seven Years War, the Company achieved a bridgehead on the Asian subcontinent and had its status irrevocably changed from a trading to ruling power, altering the history of India, the British Empire and its historiography.¹⁵ By fighting and winning the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and defeating the *Nawab* of Bengal thereby acquiring the right to collect revenues and dispense justice (the *Diwani*) on behalf of the Mughal Emperor in Delhi, new demands for British Orientalist scholarship were created. With a new and invigorated British political presence in Bengal under the guise of the Company, debate soon raged over how to govern the region and this gave rise to a new demand for Orientalists. Orientalist knowledge had been given a new forum in which it could flourish and become an epistemological means of exploring India.

In order to explain the influence that British Orientalists had on the historiography of the British Empire, the lives and work of two British Orientalists, both men who wrote on India and its history and society, require further discussion here. Alexander Dow and Sir William Jones were two scholars who represent the aforementioned schools of European thought, the Judeo-Christian and the Deists. Both were not trained historians, but employees of the Company. Of the two men, Sir William Jones was without question the more widely recognized and influential. Jones's work in the field of linguistics and Indian culture provided some of the most influential British Orientalist scholarship of the late eighteenth century. He was also responsible for a plethora of written work, much of

¹⁵ P.J. Marshall. *Bengal: The British Bridgehead* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 91.

which he wrote himself, that was published in the journal of the *Asiatick Society*, an early scholarly and philosophical society he founded. This institution created a forum for the philosophical and intellectual discovery of India and caused a virtual flood of opinion on subjects ranging from discourses on local law, music, literature, botany, and perhaps most importantly, the geography and languages of India.¹⁶ This early British Indian institution was of vital importance to the popularisation and study of ancient and contemporary Indian society in both Britain and Europe and it was largely through Jones's resolve that the society survived its difficult early years.¹⁷

Both of these British Orientalists demonstrate how early historians constructed arguments and histories in the early British Indian experience. Despite their ideological differences, both used a wide array of intellectual techniques, ranging from myth explanation to epistemological deconstruction to examine Indian society. Upon reading their work it becomes apparent that although each Orientalist had a different goal and viewed Indian society through different scholarly lenses, both simultaneously sought the common goal of upholding an overarching Euro-centric world-view that placed the myths, ideas, culture and social mores of India's population into a European epistemological framework. By explaining the commonalties and differences between Europe and Asia, this process turned the subcontinent of India into a more comprehensible place to the European reader. In this manner, the early British Orientalists were not quite soldiers in the same vein as Robert Clive, nor were they explorers in the

¹⁶ Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, 5.

¹⁷ Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Stanley Lee eds. *Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 1900, Volume X* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917): 1063.

same sense as William Moorcroft, the first Briton to see parts of Tibet and Central Asia.¹⁸ But the British Orientalist's goals were in many respects quite similar to those of a soldier or explorer. By interpreting and absorbing the intellectual ideas and traditions of the subcontinent, these scholars wrote India into an epistemological, racial and ideological space in relation to Europe. India was pigeonholed, and in the process began to become a comprehensible space for the British.¹⁹ It was also transformed, in the British mind, to an ancient realm worthy of respect. But simultaneously it was also a society that was demonstrably inferior to European and British civilisation. Sociologist and historian Bernard Cohn describes this form of cultural interpretation and the creation of categories of understanding in general, as 'modalities of knowledge.'²⁰ These modalities were the tools of categorization used by Britons to process India within an imperial mindset and place Indians into various categories of colonial inferiority, itself a mental process that would not end until Indian independence in 1947. Orientalists built this world-view by way of the pen. These imperial mentalities were reinforced by further physical expansion into the Indian subcontinent for it was this imagined India - 'British India' - that required protection by soldiers, officials and spies.²¹ This mindset further precipitated its own demand for forward thinking political officials and an increasingly interventionist and expansionary stance in both Calcutta and London.

Unfortunately for historians, Alexander Dow is a man about whom very little has

¹⁸ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (New York: Kodansha International, 1990): 92.

¹⁹ C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* (London: Longman Group, 1989): 148-149.

²⁰ Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 5.

²¹ Richard Inden and Maureen L. Paterson. *Introduction to the Civilization of India: An Introductory Bibliography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962): 23.

been written.²² He was born in Scotland in 1735 or 1736 and was educated for a merchant career.²³ He joined the East India Company as a young man, likely having run away from an apprenticeship, and by 1760 had made the rank of Ensign in the East India Company's Bengal Army. By his death in 1779, he had achieved the rank of Colonel. He was talented and erudite, being at different times an accomplished playwright, soldier, and translator, but it is for his work as a British Orientalist that he is best remembered. Although he did not have a strong reputation as a writer, his accomplishments in scholarship were impressive enough to garner him respect throughout Europe for his work on India and he did have a following in the continental European intelligentsia.²⁴

Dow's writings usually focussed upon Hinduism and other religious topics. Dow was a Deist and in the mid-eighteenth century there was a burgeoning interest in the challenges that Hinduism and other Eastern religious traditions posed to the established religious norms of Europe. Orientalist writings on Asia offered anthropological, cultural and historical ammunition against Europe's Christian thinkers.

Dow's work, *A Dissertation concerning the Customs Manners, Language, Religion, and Philosophy of the Hindoos* is an unabashed example of a Deist argument and gives the reader insights into the ways one British Orientalist observed Indian culture, religious tradition, and connected these back to the British conquest of Bengal. In this work, epistemological ties are made to classical Europe, and to an earlier age when

²² N.B. Dirks, 'Colonial Histories and Nation Informants: Biography of an Archive' in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia* edited by Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993): 281.

²³ Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Stanley Lee eds. *Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 1900, Volume V* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917): 1288.

²⁴ P. J. Marshall. *The British Discovery of Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 8.

Europeans often subdued other 'barbarian' peoples living on their periphery.²⁵ The work began with a criticism of the scholars of antiquity for their lack of foresight into the study of ancient history as well as a plea to Dow's contemporaries to avoid the mistakes the Greeks and Romans made with their peripheral and 'oriental' possessions. He writes:

Posterity will perhaps, in the same manner, find fault with the British for not investigating the learning and religious opinions, which prevail in those countries in Asia, into which either their commerce or their arms have penetrated. The Brahmins of the East possessed in antient (sic) times, some reputation for knowledge, but we have never had the curiosity to examine whether there was any truth in the reports of antiquity upon that head.²⁶

Dow continues the *Dissertation* by explaining how knowledge of Hinduism and India was categorized and organized by the Hindus themselves. The Hindu canon was composed of:

...books which contain the religion and philosophy of the Hindoos (sic), are distinguished by the name *Bedas* (sic). They are four in number, and like the sacred writings of other nations, are said to have been penned by the divinity. Beda in the Sanskrit, literally signifies Science: for these books not only treat of religious and moral duties, but of every branch of philosophical knowledge.²⁷

Dow's work is imbued with an ecumenical spirit that obviously had much to do with the purpose of his description and enquiry into Hinduism. By reading this passage, one is also given the impression that there was much less hostility towards this distant culture, as foreign and different as it may appear, than one would expect in what was generally an intolerant and sectarian period. Indeed, there were numerous instances where Dow paid compliments to India's indigenous religious rulers and applauded Indian society before things were irrevocably changed when Emperor Awrengzeb sought to convert India to

²⁵ Anthony Pagden. *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 17.

²⁶ Alexander Dow, 'A Dissertation concerning the Customs, Manners, Language, Religion and Philosophy of the Hindoos,' edited by P.J. Marshall. *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 107.

²⁷ Dow, *A Dissertation concerning Hindoos*, 109.

Islam.²⁸ According to Dow, the Hindus demonstrated in their religious and traditional culture that they were devoid of the dogmatic religious beliefs that people, especially those in Europe, were susceptible. For example, in his later writings he lauds an indigenous Moslem ruler, before Awrengazeb, by explaining that: 'Muhammad Akbar, being a prince of elevated and extensive ideas, was totally divested of those prejudices for his own religion which men of inferior parts not only imbibe with their mother's milk, but retain throughout their lives.'²⁹ To Dow, Hindu society was worthy of respect because Indian culture was one which had not clouded faith and culture with the rigid dogma and belief structures that were so prevalent in European society. India's early appreciation of religious cohabitation and toleration exhibited the ideals that Dow hoped would one day become prominent in European society.

Later in the text, Dow makes further observations on the daily lives and tradition of India's people. In order to make these observations explicitly clear to the English reader, he includes large parenthetical insertions of the original *Vedas* throughout the work. This material was obviously included with the purpose of allowing the reader to better understand Hinduism, and throughout there is no question as to where Dow's opinion on the matter of Indian ecumenism versus European orthodoxy lay. These insertions of the Hindu *Vedas* are intended to point out to his audience that the Hindu faith was ancient, tolerant, and founded upon many of the same principles of those of Deist philosophy.³⁰ Important ideas such as the creation of the world, stellar cosmology, and God are included in their Hindu fashion and juxtaposed against the ideas of Dow's

²⁸ John F. Richards. *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 290.

²⁹ Dow, *A Dissertation concerning Hindoos*, 109.

³⁰ Dow, *A Dissertation concerning Hindoos*, 108.

traditionally oriented contemporaries. Deists, and by Dow's extension Hindu Indians, had a real sense of the world; one that was not tied down by dogmatic belief structures and archaic mythology. Dow's belief in God, similar to the 'educated Brahmins', was based upon the ultimate truth of the Creator's role in the world and the absolute falsehood of dogma.³¹ He writes:

Upon the whole, the opinions of the author of the *Bedang* upon the subject of religion, are not unphilosophical...He maintains that the world was created out of nothing by God, and that it will be again annihilated. The unity, infinity and omnipotence of the supreme divinity are inculcated by him. For those he presents us with a long list of inferior beings, it is plain they are merely allegorical.³²

From this, an attack on the dogmatically orthodox religious ideas of Europe is carried on, 'and neither he nor the sensible part of his followers believe in their actual existence. The more ignorant Hindoos, it cannot be denied, think that these subaltern divinities do exist, in the same manner, that Christians believe in angels.'³³

To the thinkers of both Deists and Brahminic traditions, there was no firmly entrenched religious dogma; only a single god who had made the world and then left it alone. Furthermore, only allegorical stories kept the majority of India and Europe captive to archaic understandings of the universe and this was made evident *The Dissertation*.

Contrasting Dow are the works of perhaps the most famous eighteenth century British Orientalist, Sir William Jones. As the *de facto* leader of the *Asiatick Society* of Bengal from its inception in the late 1780s until his death on 27 April 1794, Jones nearly single headedly kept this fledgling organization afloat as both Secretary and principle

³¹ Dow, *A Dissertation concerning Hindoos*, 109.

³² Dow, *A Dissertation concerning Hindoos*, 125.

³³ Dow, *A Dissertation concerning Hindoos*, 125.

contributor to its periodical *Asiatick Researches*.³⁴ Moreover, his prolific scholarship has left us a plethora of material to investigate the historiography of the early British interest in India and an exploration of how Britons first sought to understand their new colonial possessions. As an Orientalist, Jones was respected by all the Governors-General he served and had a reputation as an impressive jurist and linguist as well. The difference between him and Alexander Dow was that he was an Anglican and his leanings were towards a Judeo-Christian and traditionally Protestant understanding of scripture and Indian history.

William Jones was born on 28 September 1746 to a respectable middle-class family. His father was an intellectual from Anglesey and his mother the daughter of a respected and sought after carpenter-tradesman. His father's friends included men such as Sir Isaac Newton and Samuel Johnson, but died while Jones was very young. Jones and his siblings were raised by their fiercely independent mother. His mother was pedagogically progressive for the mid-eighteenth century, and from the onset of Jones's career took responsibility for educating him in a method that did not involve the thrashing of knuckles or other forms of corporal punishment. Mary Jones's method of instruction was based around encouraging her children; especially the precocious William 'insensibly to knowledge and exertion, by exciting his curiosity, and directing it to useful objects.'³⁵ By age four young William was reading English and reciting Shakespeare. Three years later, he was admitted to the prestigious Harrow School and began his long path of

³⁴ Garland Cannon. *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sir William Jones, the Father of Modern Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 255-256.

³⁵ Soumyenda Nath Mukherjee. *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968): 24.

institutionalised schooling.³⁶

Once he was finished at Harrow he went to the University of Oxford where his reputation and career as a British Orientalist began. At Oxford, Jones started working with Asian languages and by 1764 had been elected to a philosophical club called the Foundation of Sir Simon Bennett. This was an impressive feat given his young age, and was something of which he would always be proud. Jones studied Asian languages prolifically and soon garnered a linguistic competency and scholastic reputation that would follow him in perpetuity, and evolve to eventually shape British Orientalism and contribute to the historiography of the British Empire.

After joining the Foundation of Sir Simon Bennett, Jones devoted his linguistic studies almost exclusively to study of Arabic, but this posed a logistical problem. Arabic, like other eastern languages and customs was characterized by very little firsthand knowledge of the subject. Jones' knowledge of Arabic, like that of his contemporaries in Britain was, in general, largely confined to inadequate secondary sources. This changed, quite serendipitously, however, while Jones was on vacation in London in 1763. There he met, Mirza, a noted scholar, who, being a native of Aleppo, could both speak and write basic Arabic. Jones soon persuaded Mirza to stay as his guest at Oxford and the result was a partnership from which Jones acquired a working knowledge of Arabic in a very short time. With this knowledge, he soon started to study the linguistic relationships between Arabic and Persian.³⁷

After his time at Oxford, Jones was offered a tutoring post for the son of Lord

³⁶ Cannon, *Oriental Jones*, 8.

³⁷ Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones*, 45.

Althorp, the Earl Spencer and he moved to Wimbledon. This presented him with a new opportunity to use the metropolitan resources that a young scholar needed, but could not find up the Thames in Oxford. Jones's career flourished and while in London he translated a text by the French legal scholar Dortescue titled *In Praise of the Laws of England*. This exposed him to law as both an academic and professional pursuit for the first time; something he would eventually build into a career and soon garner a reputation as a skilled jurist as well. In London, he acquired memberships at some of the more prestigious clubs which included Johnson's Literary Club which he joined in 1773, and the Royal Society of London which he joined soon after that.³⁸ Becoming a member of an eighteenth century British club was important and very prestigious because these associations were 'forces for cultural and political integration' and 'assumed near governmental roles' at times.³⁹ It was also at this time Jones took up a career in law and was called to the bar in 1774.

As a jurist, his goal was not just to make money, but also to emulate the great classical philosopher-statesman Cicero. Cicero influenced Jones in many ways, one of the most profound being the way Cicero thought about the writing and study of history. According to Cicero, there were a number of qualities that had to work in harmony in order to write a perfect history. These included the qualities of gravity, judiciousness, boldness, impartiality and polished elegance. Cicero claimed that it was very rare to find a historian who was able to combine all these qualities into a single work. This was Jones's goal when writing his histories about Britain and India.

³⁸ Stephen and Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography, Volume X*, 1063.

³⁹ Peter Clark. *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800: The Origins of an Associational World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 471.

Along with the Ciceronian standards to which Jones held himself, he was also very much a product of his age and its scholarly development. The body of knowledge he used by secondary sources and the works he himself wrote, contained many of the common eighteenth-century modes of historicism that were characteristic of other works in the period. They placed a clear emphasis on style and seeking the truth. That being said, the truth was a very difficult thing to find for the earliest historians of the East. These works were often riddled with the mistakes and parochialisms that often were not based on what actually happened in those distant regions, but rather based on quips and jabs aimed at rival intellectual trends.

One of the first significant contributions Jones made was as a translator of Asian languages. His work on *Tarikh-I-Nadiri* or *The History of the Life of Nader Shah*, done at the behest of the Danish king, was received as a masterpiece of translation.⁴⁰ His work on Nader Shah made it obvious that he saw very little difference between the Oriental and European despot. This was a perception that most other British Orientalists did not share. Furthermore, Jones believed that men such as Nadir Shah were important individuals and that Asian history had a number of things to teach Europeans. The two global regions were separate but they were also interconnected in ways that required study. Although Jones did not completely depart from the standard eighteenth century sense of superiority, he did in many ways represent a more accommodating Christian European view which shaped subsequent British writings and ideas on India.

Soon after becoming a lawyer Jones found success in his new profession. In 1781,

⁴⁰ Stephen and Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography, Volume X*, 1062.

he published his second and most famous legal work titled *An Essay on the Law of Bailments*.⁴¹ This was a pioneering study in comparative law and was very useful to his professional peers.⁴² In the text, Jones innovatively treated the law as analytically true while trying to trace every 'part of it up to the first principles of natural reason.'⁴³ Despite his success in law, however, by the mid 1770s, he realised the legal profession was not going to provide him the material rewards needed to maintain his independent lifestyle. Law, Jones would write, was a 'tree that bears fruit only in twenty years' and if he was to going to acquire financial independence he would have to find an occupation that rewarded him quicker than the bench. He soon sought a post that could alleviate his money woes and after an unsuccessful bid for an Oxford seat in Parliament, a contest in which he was beaten handily by a candidate who outspent him, Jones accepted a judgeship with the East India Company. This appointment was offered by his friend Lord Bathurst. He immediately planned his voyage to the East, and by 1778 was headed to the place which had occupied his mind for much of his life. His goal, like many other fortune seekers, was to get rich in India and then come home and live free of financial worry.

By April 1783, and armed with a knighthood for his legal work, Jones was onboard the ship *Crocodile*, sailing for the conquered territories of India. On the first day at sea he charted an ambitious task for himself which he set out as 'Objects of Enquiry.' These included studies into 'the laws of the Hindus and Mohammedans, modern politics

⁴¹ Cannon, *Oriental Jones*, 151.

⁴² Julian Martin. *Francis Bacon, the State, and Reform of Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992):87-104. This provides an excellent background in the development of early modern common law and the importance which comparative uses of precedent and judicial decisions had for England.

⁴³ Mukerjee, *Sir William Jones*, 33.

and geography of Hindustan, the Best mode of governing Bengal; Medicine, Chemistry, Surgery, and Anatomy of the Indians; Poetry, Rhetoric, and Morality of Asia, The best accounts of Tibet and Cashmir.⁴⁴ These were ambitious tasks but also very telling in themselves of the mentalité of an eighteenth century British Orientalist. Jones took his talents to India and from the onset of his voyage set lofty goals that would require all of his scholarly skills. His expertise in translation would allow him to translate the laws and customs of Hindustan. His legal background gave him insights into the legal and religious traditions of Hindus and Muslims alike. His knowledge of Persian gave him the ability to study Indian political affairs. He was ideally suited as an early observer of the East Indian Company's new domains. Before an imperial power can control another region geographically or politically, the empire first must control it epistemologically.⁴⁵ This is what the Orientalists did, and explains why Sir William Jones was so prominent among their ranks. He could study many facets of Indian society.

In the early 1780s India provided abundant opportunity for material gain by talented Britons. After twenty years of political control, the Indian territories were increasingly becoming an important consideration for British policy makers when deciding upon international policy. By force of military conquest during the Seven Years War, Robert Clive secured the Bengali *Diwani*, resulting in Bengal's economic networks being placed under control of the East Indian Company and by extension, this mercurial Briton.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Sir William Jones. *Memoirs of the Life, Writing and Correspondence of Sir William Jones Volume II*, edited by Lord Teignmouth (London: John Hatchard, 1806): 4.

⁴⁵ Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, 6-10.

⁴⁶ Stephen and Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography: Volume V*, 564.

But from this military conquest also emerged an increasing demand for the British to know and understand India and it was from this situation that Orientalist scholars like Dow and Jones became prominent. Knowing India was a momentous task, and it fell upon British personnel to build this body of knowledge. In areas of culture, politics, military affairs and religion as well as so many other facets of Indian society, the first Orientalists had an important job and without them there could not have been a successful transfer of power from Mughals to Britons, or even the creation of a British India by the East India Company. Their labours provided the intellectual underpinnings for an intellectual colonization and by considering these works on Hinduism, we have noted European stances and biases in much of what they wrote.

But what of the early works of Sir William Jones? His history provides a juxtaposition to Alexander Dow, but also serve as an example of the Orientalist school of historiography and the early methods by which the British Orientalists sought to control India. One of Jones's works, titled *On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India*, like Dow's went to great lengths to reconcile the Hindu faith with the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions of Europe. In this text, Jones attempts to explain to the British intelligentsia and political elite that Indians were not an inferior people, but rather an ancient society that, 'we may infer a general union or affinity between the most distinguished inhabitants of the primitive world, at the time when they deviated, as they did too early deviate, from the rational adoration of the only true God.'⁴⁷ By studying India, Jones was studying a menagerie of earlier pre-monotheistic religious traditions and

⁴⁷ Sir William Jones. 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy, and India' edited by P.J. Marshall, *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 196.

societies. By doing this, and using the comparative methodologies of a legal scholar, not only did he seek to better understand Indian culture, but also acquire a better understanding of how to govern the people now under British rule.

On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India, first published in 1784, is an extraordinary work. It is as creative as it is imaginative. Unlike Dow's history, it is not an attempt to paint a rosy picture of a world where there is one God interpreted in many different places, and by many different people. Jones begins his work with a stark statement, 'The first eleven chapters of Genesis, all due allowances being made for a figurative Eastern style are true, or else the whole facrick (sic) of our national religion is false; a conclusion which one of us, I trust will wish to be drawn.'⁴⁸ The dichotomy was clear: either the Deists or the Christians were correct, but both could not be. Jones continues: 'I cannot stop believing in the Messiah', making his stand; from which he continues to examine the pantheons of the Greco-Roman, Egyptian and the Hindu religious cultures and by doing so finds the equivalent for gods and goddesses between them.

The work is not merely a simple comparison of spiritual cultures but it also draws upon the connections between two polytheistic traditions. There is also a search here for interconnectivity and an attempt to relate the exotic with the familiar. Through his attempt to reconcile the story of the Hebrew biblical chronology to the story of the Hindu pantheon, he forges connections between the eastern and western religious narratives, while making a subtle attempt to place the more familiar and European story in the

⁴⁸ Jones, *On the Gods*, 200.

forefront. Naturally, because of the pivotal role the story of Noah has to all *Bible* history, he pays a great deal of attention to the story of the Great Deluge. Jones writes:

This epitome of the first Indian History, that is now extant, appears to me very curious and very important; for the story, though whimsically dressed up in the form of an allegory, seems to prove a primeval tradition in this country of the universal deluge described by Moses, and fixes consequently the time, when the genuine Hindu Chronology actually begins.⁴⁹

In connecting the Indian tradition to the Genesis story of the flood and then post-dating the Hindu pantheon, Jones links the two cultures, (of course, his Deist contemporaries like Alexander Dow would have argued this did not exist), but he acknowledges the Hebrew story as truth and places the Judeo-Christian tradition on higher ground. But by also writing that, 'Water was the primitive lament and first world of the Creative power and is the uniform opinion of the Indian philosopher',⁵⁰ this British Orientalist also draws an important connection between Europe and Asia through water. Toward the end of the work Jones describes his methodology and intent:

I have attempted to trace, imperfectly at present for want of ampler materials, but with a confidence continually increasing as I advance, a parallel between the gods adored in their very different nations Greece, Italy, and India; but, which was the original system and which the copy, I will not presume to decide; nor are we likely, I believe, to be soon furnished with sufficient grounds for a decision...though after all, whatever colonies may have come from the Nile to the Ganges, we shall, perhaps agree at last with Bryant, that Egyptian, Indians, Greeks, and Italians proceeded originally from one central place, and that the same people carried religion and sciences into China and Japan: and may we not add, even Mexico and Peru?⁵¹

Herein lies the crux of the British Orientalist study of early India and a British Orientalist interpretation of Indian history. Although both Dow and Jones were separated by an intellectual gulf emblematic of a greater division that separated many thinkers throughout Europe, these ideological points of view share a common element when put into an Orientalist context, characteristic of British Orientalism on the whole. To put it

⁴⁹ Jones, *On the Gods*, 207.

⁵⁰ Jones, *On the Gods*, 216.

⁵¹ Jones, *On the Gods*, 239.

succinctly, there was a desire to understand the Indian mind on a level that went beyond simple geography or military tactics. By creating a new mental map of India, one that made this land comprehensible for those Britons at home, and thus easier to govern.

This was the key purpose of British Orientalist thinking. It was to further assert British superiority and sovereignty over a new colonial possession, and, in turn, conquer and invent a mental colony as well as a physical one, while creating a mental picture of India that was comprehensible to Europeans. India may have been a physically distant place but from the onset of the interaction between Britons and Indians, the intellectual gulf that separated the two cultures and political entities was much, much wider. The earliest British Orientalists men such as Alexander Dow and Sir William Jones were of vital importance to the conquest of India because these men were, in many ways, the first explorers or agents to encounter it. As trailblazers, these Britons and their contemporaries in both Europe and Asia, launched themselves into previously untouched areas of intellectual geography and were the earliest innovators of British Indian thought. The British Orientalists were in many respects responsible for not just forging closer ties between Europe and Asia, but also for the implementation of policies used by the politicians and soldiers in British India. Their intellectual discoveries were not done with purely intellectual goals in mind. Once one scratches beneath the surface much more than descriptive literature on Hinduism, the Mughal Empire or other elements of Indian society are found. Although there was a diversity in European ideological thought between British Orientalists who studied India, there was also a fundamentally similar element to their writings. This was a desire to control a new environment and mould it into an image and form that was comprehensible to a British mind. Both Dow and Jones

created 'modalities of knowledge' for Hinduism and subjected them to direct comparisons with European ideas. Both appropriated these stories and placed them in categories and in terminology they could comprehend. So although, on the surface, they seemed to have very different interpretations of Hinduism, they were actually quite similar in scope because their primary goal was to control the facts contained within them. Both were, in some sense, complementary but dictated the terms of their references. The British Orientalist's primary objective was to control the new and emerging impression of India that was now in their possession. Dow and Jones may have been on different sides of the fence, but they were still on the same property.

Yet, just as Orientalists were coming to terms with India, a completely different school of thought based on utilitarianism philosophy was emerging in the early nineteenth century. This group would rise to prominence very quickly and soon render the British Orientalists and their interpretation of 'British India' obsolete.

Chapter II: Utilitarian and Modernist historians of British India

Utilitarian thought swept through all disciplines in the first half of the nineteenth century and history was no exception. As a result, a new historiographical school of thought grew from the political and philosophical ideas of utilitarianism, which itself grew to prominence in the mid nineteenth century, and was based in the philosophical and scientific enquiries of the British Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, British Orientalists were the dominant scholars of the study of Asia. However, once the East Indian Company established itself in Bengal, the generation influenced by the British Enlightenment soon emerged as the prominent thinkers on India and these were the Utilitarians. Developing at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and acting in many ways as outright opponents to British Orientalists, they would eventually rise to not only dominate the study and historiography of British India, but also shape and dominate the governance and rule of these and other British colonial possessions as well.⁵² The imperial ideas and philosophies of utilitarian thinkers had, at their foundation, the ultimate goal of making the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. This overarching principle guided their thinking, writing, and ideology and put them in opposition with the British Orientalists. The Orientalists were reluctant to interfere with the indigenous societies they studied. Utilitarian knowledge however, was premised upon the assumptions that the discoveries made in the studies of political economy, science, religion and philosophical enquiry had to ultimately result in the final goal of human civilization becoming a liberal Christian state, not ruled by capricious or whimsical

⁵² Thomas Metcalf. *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 28-31. Metcalf refers to them as Liberal Imperialists.

superstitions, but rather liberal Christian values of reason, law, and scientific rationality. English Utilitarians judged other societies such as India as dangerously backwards, despotic and devoid of the knowledge necessary to create a progressive state.⁵³ It was, to say the least, an ideology very confident of itself.

Because the first British administrators in India had a tendency to see themselves as heirs to the Mughal successor-state and its political structures, and because there were so few Britons in India, the first governors of the Indian colonies tended to support and encourage an Orientalist point-of-view and understanding of India. The noted historian Philip Lawson, speaks to this idea as it existed in the mind of the Company's first Governor after the Battle of Plassey:

In Hastings, the Company had appointed someone to high office who showed pride in his knowledge and regard for oriental government, society and culture. He understood, as few of his contemporaries did, that the Mogul empire was not a monolith that could be reduced in one fell swoop to the benefit of the Company. He wished to have the Company servants respect the rule of law in the presidencies and recognize the laws and customs of the territories now under British influence and it was under his auspices Hindu and Moslem laws were translated into English for use by English judges.⁵⁴

There was no attempt in the early years of the Company's political control over parts of India to impose British standards on Indian society. As long as the commodities Britons needed for the home market flowed, the *status quo* was maintained. Indeed, many who arrived in India had only one intention and that was to make their fortunes. These men had no intention of making British India a better place for those who lived there permanently. Until 1813, the Company had a monopoly on all trade moving between the Far East, India, and ports in Britain and this was the most important facet to the Company's existence. This three way trade carried goods and bullion from Europe to

⁵³ Woolf, *A Global Encyclopaedia of Historical Writing*, 459.

⁵⁴ Lawson, *East India Company*, 114.

Asia, and spices and teas from the Far East to Britain while it served British India (Bengal) as both an intermediary and trade entrepôt for goods coming down the Ganges. Revenue extraction from India became very profitable for the Company until its monopoly was broken by free trade campaigns in Britain in the early nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Much of the intellectual ammunition for this debate came from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and other Enlightenment era scholars.⁵⁶

But as the British established a government in India, and began to expand and acquire greater pieces of property and tutelage over Mughal successor-states, there soon broke out a 'battle of ideologies', as the important historian of Utilitarianism, Eric Stokes argued, between the British Orientalists and the English Utilitarians.⁵⁷ The process of more and more Britons going to India initiated the desire for these company servants to improve the subcontinent. As the Mughal Empire was reduced in geographical influence, the Company, in conquering the major spiritual and political cities (Agra and Delhi) of India, filled this vacuum of political power. This ultimately caused these new Liberal Imperialists to become very influential in Indian politics. One of the first English Utilitarians, and an important figure in the historiography of British India was James Mill. Mill was a product of the Scottish Enlightenment and in many ways is the ideal utilitarian historian, because he used history not only in an effort to change British India, but also to catapult his career to prominence within India itself.

⁵⁵ Richard Connors. 'Opium and Imperial Expansion: The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Asia' in *Hanoverian Britain and Empire: Essays in Memory of Philip Lawson* edited by Stephen Taylor, Richard Connors and Clyve Jones (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1998): 262-263.

⁵⁶ Adam Smith. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 309.

⁵⁷ Eric Stokes. *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959): 1-5.

Born amid humble beginnings, on 6 April 1773 James Milne showed great promise from a very early age. Although his father was a shoemaker, his mother came from a distinguished family which had fallen on hard times because of their support for the Stuart side in the second Jacobite uprising of 1745. She was a very strong willed individual and, after persuading her husband to change their family name from 'Milne' to a more distinguished 'Mill,' she cultivated her landlord's favour, and re-adapted the ways of the landed elite.⁵⁸ After accomplishing this, her attention turned to honing the talent of her eldest son, James. James soon attended parish and grammar schools and then went to Montrose Academy. Once there, he bloomed quickly, attracting the attention of other gentry who were interested in sponsoring a boy who would go on and study to become a minister.⁵⁹ With their support, James went on to the University of Edinburgh, in a city which was not only the Scottish capital, but was also at the zenith of a great intellectual renaissance that had turned it into an intellectual focal point of Europe and garnered it a reputation as the Athens of the North.⁶⁰ Mill soon became a preacher on the pulpit of a number of Presbyterian churches and when he was not successful at this, he moved to London to try his hand at journalism. He would write for the *Anti-Jacobite Review* and *the Literary Journal* and soon became an editor of the *St. James Chronicle*. After his marriage to the daughter of a wealthy widow, he tried his hand at a greater work in 1806 which would become an important element of the historiography of British India and

⁵⁸ Bruce Mazlish. *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1975): 48.

⁵⁹ Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*, 56.

⁶⁰ James Buchan. *Capital of the Mind: How Edinburgh changed the World* (Edinburgh: John Murray, 2003): 15.

aply titled *A History of British India*.⁶¹

This work is voluminous. In over one thousand pages Mill examines various facets of both the pre-British Indian and British Indian government as well as its laws, taxes, religious cultures, manners, arts and other aspects of the subcontinent. Mill's detailed analysis of India before its interaction with Europe and the consideration of the origins of the Indian trade network of the East India Company, set the stage for an important and detailed analysis of the political affairs and wars which took the British deeper into India and indeed into the proscription of governance too. In the preface to this work, Mill unapologetically writes that it was to be a 'Critical History', designed not only to be deep in its breadth and detail, but also to cast judgement upon those who had been governing India, regardless if they were Asian or European.⁶² His purpose was to make contemporaries think carefully about India and to this end the work was punctuated with practicality and purpose. One of the most important goals of writing this work was to simply add to a historiography that was full of holes. Mill noted that in the course of researching:

I was met and in some degrees surprised, by extraordinary difficulties when I arrived at that part of my inquiry which related to India. On other subjects, of any magnitudes and importance, I generally found that there was one book, or small number of books, continuing the material part of the requisite information; and in which direction was obtained, by reference, to extend his researches. In regard to India, the case was exceedingly different. The knowledge requisite for attaining an adequate conception of that great scene of British action, was collected nowhere.⁶³

Histories of Great Britain or other European states were available to be read. However, with India, this was simply not the case. In the absence of practical information, the demand for expertise was great. But this also meant that by establishing an expertise in a

⁶¹ Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill*, 117.

⁶² James Mill. *A History of British India, Volume I* (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1972): 2.

⁶³ James Mill. *A History of British India, Volume I*, 2.

particular subject, like Mughal India or Indian law, and thereby by displaying an understanding of India couched in utilitarian terms, Mill quickly emerged as a strong candidate for a position in India and soon landed a job with the Company.⁶⁴ What is interesting, is that Mill never travelled to India in the course of writing *A History of British India*, which also reveals a stark difference between how the British Orientalists and English Utilitarians viewed their study of the topic.

The following passage, from the *History of British India*, illustrates his perspective on Indian society and what direction he felt the Company administration needed to take. When addressing the role of religion in Indian society, Mill takes a very different tone than his British Orientalist predecessors. The Orientalists were generous, accommodating, and indeed anthropologically interested in Hindu religious culture and its interconnectedness with other facets of Indian society. Mill is disparagingly different in his description:

Beside the causes which usually give superstition a powerful sway in ignorant and credulous ages, the order of priests obtained a greater authority in India than in any other region of the globe; and this again they employed with astonishing success in multiplying and corroborating the ideas on which their power and consequence depended. Everything in Hindustan was transacted by the Deity. The laws were promulgated, the people were classified, the government was established by the Devine Being. The astonishing exploits of the Divinity were endless in that sacred land. For every state of life from the cradle to the grave; for every hour of the day; for ever function of nature; for every social transaction, God prescribed a number of religious observances.⁶⁵

In other passages of the text, Mill is equally critical of the subcontinent's society before the arrival of the British. The Indian form of governance was 'contrivance simple and rude'⁶⁶ while the Laws of 'Hindustan' occupied 'comparatively a very moderate space' as

⁶⁴ Martha McLaren. *British India and British Scotland, 1780-1830: Career Building, Empire Building, and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (Akron, OH: University of Akron Press, 2001): 35.

⁶⁵ Mill, *History of British India Volume I*, 160.

⁶⁶ Mill, *History of British India Volume I*, 66.

well as those of religious tradition, domestic life, private morality and 'even [the] domestic economy all form especial parts of the Hindu codes of law and are treated in the same style, and laid down with the same authority, as the rules for the distribution of justice.'⁶⁷

Mill also heaped scorn on the British as well. When examining the affairs of the Company in the early 1790s he questioned the competence and abilities of company officials and wondered aloud if they had a great enough understanding of the situation in India. He writes,

It is, indeed, true, that the people were deplorably ignorant of the history and management of their East India affairs; and it was, on this account, the more easily to make them throw themselves, with blind confidence, upon the assertions of men, whose knowledge was presumed for their situations and pretensions.⁶⁸

Mill's comments make it clear to the reader that to view India as a romanticized lost society or something out of a biblical nursery school was to see India inaccurately.

English Utilitarians had very little admiration or affection for indigenous Indian culture, and were convinced it was very much in need of a good dose of English and Judeo-Christian civilization.

In his important book *Ideologies of the Raj*, Thomas R. Metcalf discusses the character of the English Utilitarians and how they differed from their earlier Orientalists counterparts. In this work, referring to them as liberals, he outlines the political and philosophical ideas these men had towards British colonial possessions in Asia. Metcalf claims that the liberals shared a set of fundamental assumptions that differentiated them sharply from Burke's oligarchic Whigs, (the British Orientalists), and subsequently, from

⁶⁷ Mill, *History of British India Volume I*, 81.

⁶⁸ Mill, *History of British India Volume III*, 435.

Disraeli's Tory conservatives of the latter nineteenth century. The liberals believed that human nature was intrinsically the same everywhere and, 'that the human experience could be illuminated by the uncovering of universal laws governing thought and action.'⁶⁹ Individual liberals differed in opinion over the urgency of reform and the relative importance of particular measures, but invariably they sought to free individuals from 'their age-old bondage to priests, despots, and feudal aristocrats so that they could be autonomous, rational beings, leading a life of conscious deliberation and choice.'⁷⁰

The English Utilitarians made an intellectual contribution to historiography of the British Empire by suggesting that, contrary to the British Orientalists, it was the Company's duty to improve India. Lord Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1827 to 1835 was the first Company vice-roy to be influenced by the English Utilitarianism of James Mill and others.⁷¹ He initiated a policy of reforming the legal system and made English the language of the high courts. He further encouraged western-style education for Indians, and this policy, as well as its accompanying historiography, would be prominent until the middle of the nineteenth century.

Heroic or Great Events School

The third school of thought to be examined in this chapter is the 'Heroic' or 'Great Events School'. This school developed in the nineteenth century and is generally considered whiggish in its ideological method and subject matter. Its historical ideology was based upon the conclusion that the British state and its expansion throughout the

⁶⁹ Sandra M. Den Otter. *British Idealism and Social Explanation: A Study in Late Victorian Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996): 65.

⁷⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 29.

⁷¹ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 34.

globe was a benign or even positive phenomenon for the British people and the rest of the world. With Britain came progress, civilization, and most importantly the political freedom inherent in the sublime British Constitution.⁷² What set this school apart from the Utilitarian approach to historiography was its rationale of study. The Heroic School saw history more as the natural evolution of the progress of British civilization and liberty, and these historians examined events of consequence in this light. Accordingly, it was important for Britons to know the mistakes of history in order to understand the currents of the present and future. In this sense, historians became state priests, interpreting the ebb and flow of time and conveying it to the political and social elites of the day.⁷³

The intellectual harbinger of this school was the nineteenth century Regis professor of history at Cambridge, J.R. Seeley. In a series of lectures published as the *Expansion of England* in 1883, Seeley argued that the British Empire was a gradual and pacific phenomenon which spread commercial and political liberties around the globe. He emphasised the development of concepts such as liberty and democracy and their impact, especially in nations and states where English was the vernacular. One of the key objectives behind the 'Heroic' school was to assist Victorian and Edwardian Britons in their administration of empire by informing them of the actions and mistakes of their predecessors. This school championed the idea that with an historical consciousness applied to politics, the best and brightest of the nineteenth century would understand the colonial environments they had inherited. Other adherents of this school included

⁷² Deborah Wormell. *Sir John Seeley and the uses of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980): 131.

⁷³ J.G. Greenlee, 'A Successions of Seeleys': The 'Old School' Re-examined,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies* 3, no. 4 (1976): 267.

historians such as Sir Charles Prestwood Lucas, Hugh Edward Egerton and Arthur Percival Newton all of whom brought new ideas to the school but still used many of the same methodologies as their mentor.⁷⁴

Seeley wrote that all events were pregnant with consequences and from singular events, grand and sweeping narratives emerged to change the direction of nation-states. As such 'the interest of English history ought therefore to deepen steadily...since the future grows out of the past, the history of the past of England ought to give rise to the prophecy concerning her future.'⁷⁵ The study of history was a means of assuring future progress and the natural changes which society made over time. The English state of the Tudors or Stuarts was different from the British state of Queen Victoria or King Edward VII because this was the result of history in practice and the evolution of the English Constitution, the frame upon which British historical progress was built.⁷⁶

In the *Expansion of England*, Seeley's history concentrated upon the state and the constitution, something that also separated him from the British Orientalists and the English Utilitarians, as they were both more interested in examining other facets of British society. Furthermore, Seeley also addressed the importance of empire to the British state, going as far as to suggest that: 'They [historians] do not perceive that in that century [the seventeenth] is not in England but in America and Asia.'⁷⁷ He was referring to his other important idea, that the British Empire and British State were inseparably

⁷⁴ William A. Green and John P. Deasy Jr. 'Unifying Themes in the History of British India, 1757-1857: An Historiographical Analysis,' *Albion* 17, no 1 (1985): 16.

⁷⁵ J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England: Two Courses in Lectures* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1904): 2.

⁷⁶ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 8-11.

⁷⁷ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 10.

linked and mutually reinforced each other, forming a polity he called 'Greater Britain' (which also encompassed colonies such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Cape Colony as well). In this model, Seeley admonished those who took a narrow view of the subject and encouraged historians to take a broader approach to history, while also demonstrating his desire for a federated empire:

We must cease to think that the history of England is the history of Parliament that sits at Westminster, and that affairs which are not discussed there cannot belong to English history. When we have accustomed ourselves to contemplate the whole Empire together and call it all England, we shall see that here too is a United States. Here to is a great homogeneous people, one in blood language religion (sic) and laws, but dispersed over a boundless space.⁷⁸

One question loomed above all others concerning questions of the British Indian Empire. Despite both participating in the 'great military imperialism to resist the march of Russia in Central Asia', while at the same time filling 'Queensland and Manitoba with free settlers' nineteenth century empire did not puzzle Seeley with its paradoxes. British India and the British Dominions were two very different animals. In India:

All the oldest religious, all the oldest customs, petrified as it were. No form of popular government is yet possible. Everything which Europe, and still more the New World, has outlived still flourishing in full vigour; superstition, fatalism, polygamy, the most primitive priest craft, the most primitive despotism; all threatening the northern frontier the vast Asiatic steppe and its Osbegs and Turcomans. Thus the same nation which reaches one hand towards the future of the globe and assumes the position of mediator between Europe and the New World, stretches the other hand towards the remotest past, becomes as Asiatic conqueror, and usurps the succession of the Great Mogul.⁷⁹

The contradiction of free settlers spreading across the globe and a group of Britons assuming the position of the new Khans in Asia was not as much a contradiction as it was a connection to the politics of the free British state. Seeley wrote:

Yes, and the main reason why I have chosen this subject is that it illustrates better than any other subject my view of the connection between history and politics. The ultimate object of all my teaching here is to establish this fundamental connection, to show that politics and history are only

⁷⁸ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 184 -185.

⁷⁹ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 205.

different aspects of the same study... Politics are vulgar when they are not liberalised by history, and history fades into mere literature when it loses sight of its relations to practical politics.⁸⁰

The Indian acquisition may have been made 'blindly', 'unintentionally' and 'accidentally' but Seeley asked students to, 'dismiss from our minds the idea that India is in any practical sense of the word a possession of England', because this was not the case.⁸¹

India was a piece of the British Empire because of internal revolution and the collapse of the Mughals and this had significant repercussions for British Indian policy and the statesmen of the day. They were now:

...anxiously interested in the East. Every movement in Turkey, every new symptom in Egypt, any stirring in Persia or Transoxana or Burma (sic), or Afghanistan, we are obliged to watch with vigilance. The reason is that we have possession of India. Owing to this we have a leading position in the system of Asiatic Powers, and a leading interest in the affairs of all those countries which lie upon the route to India. This and this only involves us in that permanent rivalry with Russia, which is to England in the nineteenth century the condition with France for the New World was to her in the eighteenth.⁸²

One of the additional innovations made in the 'Heroic' school was the idea of the 'organic growth' of the British Empire. Another was the introduction of racial concepts in British imperial expansion, an idea that became popular with the rise of Social Darwinism and Eugenics in the early twentieth century.⁸³ Many of these new ideas would most likely have been dismissed by Seeley, including the one based on race. Nevertheless, this school of historiography remained important for a multitude of reasons, paramount of which was that it helped facilitate the study of the British Empire as a topic separate from the study of the British State.

This school would survive in varying forms until the Second World War left the

⁸⁰ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 192-193.

⁸¹ Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 212.

⁸² Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 222.

⁸³ J.G. Greenlee. 'A Succession of Seeleys,' 275-279.

British Empire in tatters and many of its colonial possessions quickly became independent states. With its collapse came the rise of new forms of historical analysis such as post-colonialism and subaltern studies, both which examined empires from the perspective of its 'victims' rather than its 'victors'. Furthermore, with the new political reality for Great Britain and a permanently devolved empire with no important colonial subordinates and Cold War subordination to the United States of America, the optimism found in the 'Heroic' school quickly dissipated and from it grew a post war assessment of the British Empire, as well as new historiographical interpretations of imperial history.

The Periphery versus Metropolis and Post-Colonial Schools

In the wake of decolonisation, scholarship became increasingly interested in the colonial rather than the metropolitan account of imperial history. Central to this emerging idea in historiographical interpretation was an examination of the dynamic that existed between the imperial 'periphery' and the metropolitan 'centre'. Since its inception, many of the prevailing ideas of the history of the British Empire have been dominated, both overtly and tacitly by the idea that London, the great capital and centre of empire, dictated the political and economic policies of the British Empire, and thus its trajectory. For example, British Orientalists studied India on the grounds that India and Europe were distantly connected and looked for illustrations that verified this assumption. The English Utilitarian and Heroic schools of thought embraced an ideology that stationed the emergence of empire at the centre or the metropole. The Utilitarians, going as far as imposing metropolitan standards on the peripheral regions of empire. The Heroic school also did this and by labelling the British Empire 'Greater Britain'. These historians made no attempt to hide the fact they saw the origins of progress and civilisation in Britain

itself.⁸⁴

The metropolitan versus periphery thesis emerged as an interpretation and reflected a movement away from top down colonial history. The *avatars* of this new school were Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher and the first major work was a short piece appearing in the *Journal of Economic History* called 'The Imperialism of Free Trade.' It argued for the near exclusivity of economic forces in the formulation of imperial policy. For Robinson and Gallagher, the idea of an empire of free trade was the most important.⁸⁵ They wrote:

Imperialism, perhaps, may be defined as a sufficient political fusion of this process of integrating new regions into the expanding economy; its character is largely decided by the various and changing relationship between the political and economic elements of expansion in any particular region and time.⁸⁶

Robinson and Gallagher further argued that, far from being an era of imperial indifference, the middle years of Queen Victoria's reign was the decisive period in the history of British expansion overseas and this was due to a combination of commercial and political influences that allowed the United Kingdom to command colonial economies which met British needs.⁸⁷ London was not one all powerful force radiating policy to all corners of the world, but rather the currents of empire flowed and changed as regional circumstances warranted.

The second influential text by Robinson and Gallagher, titled *Africa and the*

⁸⁴ In the case of India this was not always true. Because of distance and logistical problems British India had considerable autonomy. See Seely, *Expansion of England*, 223.

⁸⁵ Robinson and Gallagher's ideas involving free trade were descriptive rather than proscriptive. Whereas the English Utilitarians spoke to how things should be the new historians wrote about how they actually happened. The Utilitarian propensity to proscribe directly came from an explosion in the use of the positive sciences in the nineteenth century. See Den Otter, *British Idealism*, 52.

⁸⁶ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade,' *Journal Of Economic History* 1, no. 5 (1953): 4.

⁸⁷ Gallagher and Robison, 'Imperialism of Free Trade,' 11.

Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism, argued that the British perceived themselves as the pinnacle of world power during the Victorian age, and this reflected in its official mind and policies. The Victorians became torch bearers of civilization, the heralds of industry, the initiators of progress, and these Victorian notions of greatness maintained an inertia of empire, further manifesting itself in strong beliefs in free trade, free enterprise and the free thought in imperial activity around the world. Furthermore, it was Britons, the Victorians believed, and their expansionist tendencies, that kept the world rotating on its axes. This ideology of empire quickly turned global progress into the moral obligation of the empire. Their improvement of the world became a duty to the rest of humanity and they saw the world through the lenses of their own progress. Robinson and Gallagher write:

They were not the first, nor were they to be the last people, to project their own image as the universal ideal, nor to mistake fortunate trends of national history for natural laws and bend foreigners to obey them. Palmerston stated their earlier faith when in 1842 he asked why the world should be divided between different races living in contrasting climatic zones - and replied. "Sir, this is the dispensation of Providence... But in the face of it, with arrogant presumptuous folly, the deals is restrictive duties fly, fettering the inborn energies of man, and setting up their miserable legislation instead of the great standing laws of nature."⁸⁸

On its own, the world and Britain's colonial possessions could not advance and it was up to the British Empire (or its ideals) to take the world to the soaring heights, which the herald of progress, Great Britain, had itself created. Robinson and Gallagher's analysis of the British Empire was influential and still resonates nearly fifty years after its publication and many of these ideas have since been adopted and embraced by historians of the British Empire and British India.

⁸⁸ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher. *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: Macmillan, 1961): 2-5.

In the early 1970s the imperial historian D.K. Fieldhouse published *Economics and Empire: 1830-1913*, which was massively influential on the 'Periphery versus Metropolis' historiography. Although his was not an entirely novel thesis, Fieldhouse argued that an empire, and the process of empire building generally, was often a policy of last resort for politicians in the metropolis.⁸⁹ According to Fieldhouse, most policy makers only found it necessary to build formal empires because events on a periphery had spiralled out of control and created a situation where all other options had been exhausted.⁹⁰ Therefore, colonization was not a preference, but a stop gap measure and this distinction was further demarcated by the existence of formal and informal empires. Parts of the formal British empire were Canada, Southern Africa or India, which had overt British rule in the form of a constitutional and political structure. An informal empire was based upon trade and financial connections such as those that developed for much of South America during the nineteenth century.⁹¹ Fieldhouse further cited a number of examples in the expansion of informal empires and went on to suggest that only one European state had ever expanded in an imperial fashion due entirely to domestic factors, this being Bismarck's Germany.⁹² The reason for this was that in nineteenth century Europe, empire building was a matter of national and state pride which

⁸⁹ Fieldhouse did not focus exclusively on the British Empire, but also upon other imperial and expansionary states such as Czarist Russia and the United States of America. See D.K. Fieldhouse. *Economics and Empire: 1830-1914* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973): 11.

⁹⁰ This idea was also borrowed by Robinson and Gallagher. The most significant difference is that D.K. Fieldhouse focussed on other aspects of Empire rather than just its economic factors by examining the role that statesmen, the masses, and the periphery had on the growth of imperialism in European politics. See Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire*, 63-65.

⁹¹ For more on British imperial activity in South America see Alan Knight. 'Britain and Latin America' in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century* edited by Andrew Porter. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 124-126.

⁹² Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire*, 211.

could not be neglected.⁹³

C.A. Bayly contributed to the historiography of the British Empire and India in the early 1980s with his first major work on India titled, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*. This work was a deep and detailed study of the economics of the East India Company from its first experiences in Bengal to the period of expansion on the north-west frontier in the mid nineteenth century. In a Robinson and Gallagherian fashion, Bayly tied everything back to the role of agriculture and economics within the pre-existing Mughal political framework and from this drew his conclusions. Bayly's argument is that there was significant interconnectedness between Indian land productivity and the political and economic stability of the region. The East India Company began to acquire more and more power in the region, with Bengal, and very soon afterwards, other Mughal successor states, acquired a greater influence on the British Indian metropolis of Calcutta. Calcutta, in turn, exerted incredible influence on policy makers in the British metropole - London. Bayly persuasively makes this point by illustrating the points of contact between lower caste farmers or landless workers to the government of the East India Company and the Board of Control in London. He writes:

Successor state India was likely the most powerful where it was the most rich. This had much to do with the agriculturally viability of the lands and peoples that worked them. As mentioned above, the rulers were bound to the land because although they would often partake in aggressive wealth finding activities and the easiest way to find wealth was to grow it from the land.⁹⁴

Until the mid nineteenth century, the East India Company worked under the devolved sovereignty of the Mughal Empire. Because of this, there was no real invention of new

⁹³ Fieldhouse, *Economics and Empire*, 68.

⁹⁴ C.A. Bayly. *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770-1870* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992): 93.

methods of political control in the early years of the Company's ownership of Bengal, only the extension of older Mughal ones. In this way, institutions such as the *Zamindars*, or the individual that controlled agricultural production and distribution, were used by the East India Company after it had acquired its revenue gathering powers. Furthermore, in *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, Bayly places emphasis on the dynamism of the Indian frontier regions and the ever changing nature of British governance.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bayly wrote two additional works that have since brought perspective to the metropolis versus periphery school of thought. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* and *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780-1830* were both influential and in many ways were continuations of the models and ideas found in *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*. They introduced, however, a new analysis in the role that individual office holders had in promoting the political change that was so important to the establishment of the East India Company in India in the late 1770s. For example, in *Indian Society*, Bayly points out that William Pitt's India Act of 1784 and Lord Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement of 1793 soon placed the emphasis of the Company's governance of India on stability.⁹⁵

Bayly points out that British systems of governance in the newly acquired territories were not only founded upon direct administration, but also the creation of information gathering and diplomatic networks with subordinate allies and dependants. The powers of the princes and tribal warriors were to be taken seriously but could also be exploited. This itself was a double edged sword because the Indians 'could still become

⁹⁵ C.A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 109.

magnets of disaffection', and quickly turn on their East India Company allies.⁹⁶ If properly controlled however, their resources could be marshalled against rebels in other territories because the 'embryonic political service and a series of other techniques for neutralizing disaffected Indian states, reinforced the administrative consolidation of British India'.⁹⁷

Imperial Meridian was an attempt to reconcile the peripheral and metropolitan aspects of empire into one system of imperial governance.⁹⁸ Here, Bayly discusses the role of the British Empire in Europe, namely the English state and its peripheral and subordinate kingdoms of Scotland and Ireland and how European empire building brought about a global British Empire. From the early modern political interaction of the English and subordinate British states, arose a dynamism that eventually led to colonial enterprises in North America and consolidated the north-west archipelago into a morally unified and sovereign kingdom.⁹⁹ The British Indian element in *Imperial Meridian* focussed on how the loss of the American colonies in 1783 encouraged a refocusing of the imperial enterprise to the East. Bayly argues this process was encouraged by London, but also by what was happening on the ground in India.

Similarly, P.J. Marshall in *Bengal: The British Bridgehead* focussed exclusively on the role of Bengal in the making of the British Indian Empire. The imperial activities of the East India Company were not only the result of peripheral elements of empire

⁹⁶ Bayly, *Indian Society*, 110.

⁹⁷ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 105-107.

⁹⁸ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 110.

⁹⁹ Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 37. Armitage traces the history of the idea of a British composite monarchy founded by Brutus a refugee from the Trojan war. This legend provided many Englishmen with a Classical foundation upon which to build their historic dominance of the archipelago.

affecting the metropolis, but also how the actors of the periphery, such as Lord Cornwallis, Warren Hastings, and even Sir William Jones, affected the Empire on the whole. Marshall suggests that the responsibility for the East India Company getting sucked into the vortex of the decaying Mughal Empire was the fault of one person in particular, Robert Clive. According to Marshall:

Calculated plotting seemed to have been absent until the last few weeks before Plassey. The Calcutta Council appears to have blundered itself into a crisis with Siraj-ud-Daula which led to the loss of the settlement. When he came to Bengal, Clive's objectives were very circumscribed. The possibility of achieving a "revolution" was only slowly revealed to him and even then he intended it to be a very conservative revolution. Purposeful sub-imperialism may be hard to prove, but the destruction of the *Nawabs* was brought about by the expansion of Calcutta, not by an assault directed from London.¹⁰⁰

The Battle of Plassey, the singular most important event in the making of the British Indian Empire in the eighteenth century, was a catalyst which created political opportunity and propelled these Britons into Mughal imperial territory. Marshall further argues that the economic instability resulting from the conflict between the East India Company and the rest of India, was one of the origins of political action that led to the not-so-gradual assumption of power by the Company in the latter eighteenth century. Bengal was the 'bridgehead' that eventually led to British mastery over the entire subcontinent. Thomas Metcalf followed through on this theme in *Ideologies of the Raj* by touching on the ideological implications of British rule in Bengal and how the foothold in Bengal eventually formed the foundation of the British Indian Empire and subsequently, the liberal thinking towards India in the nineteenth century. Douglas Peers expanded upon military ideas in *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India 1819-1835* and argued that the army of the East India Company, because of the

¹⁰⁰ Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 91.

numerous ambiguities and contradictions in its command structures, as well as sectional, cultural, racial and religious breaking points, gave the British metropolis an Asiatic army that rivalled those of Europe for the cost of nothing. The pitfall to this was that it also created a military complex within the British Empire that itself was very dangerous.¹⁰¹

When one added the Company's European troops, its *Sepoys* and the British regulars who served along side them, then mixed in a command structure that was labyrinthical at the best of times, often the army was responsible for pulling the British 'garrison state' into situations solely to feed an insatiable appetite for war. An example cited by Peers was the British conquest of Burma in 1824. The Burmese were not a threat to the company's eastern marches in the early nineteenth century, but despite this, the British garrison state invaded and the conquest of this Asian kingdom resulted. The periphery was exerting its influence on the Company's Indian Empire.

The Metropolis versus Periphery School of thought has been further influenced by historians who have written on the domestic British state. Of these, Linda Colley ranks as one of the most prominent. Recent works of Colley have much to say on the development of both the British domestic and imperial ethos. For example, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, argues that with the Act of Union in 1707, a political act which united the Scottish and English parliaments at Westminster, creating a British polity, began a number of contributing events that helped create the new identity of Great Britain. By superimposing upon a newly minted 'British' citizenry, values of monarchy, commerce, empire, but above all the religious commonality of Protestantism, a post 1707 'Great

¹⁰¹ Douglas M. Peers. *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the Garrison State in India, 1819-1835* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1995): 114.

Britain' emerged out of the rubble of what had been previously separate and hostile kingdoms.¹⁰² The new, United Kingdom did not arise without manifestations of old animosities arising now and then, but by the 1830s, there was a cohesiveness to being 'British' from the Shetlands to Devonshire.

Britons fit into the Periphery versus Metropolis School by arguing that the key component of Britishness after 1707 was its opposition to the 'Otherness' of Roman Catholic France. After the *Auld Alliance* was permanently smashed in 1707, and a new national identity created, Britishness required something against which to define itself. In pre-revolutionary France, Britons believed the French to be decadent, corrupt and Popish, while the British were enterprising, loyal and God-fearing. In post-revolutionary and Jacobin France the same people became godless, capricious, disorderly and republican, while Britons remained enterprising, loyal and Protestant. When the dust of the Revolution settled and Napoleon emerged to contest British dominance, stalwart symbols of Great Britain like Britannia with the Trident and patriotic anthems such as *Rule Britannia!*¹⁰³ and *God Save the King*, surfaced to dominate the British cultural *milieu*. Images like Red Coats or the Black Watch fighting on the edge of the empire became British images, capturing the public's imagination. The eighteenth century was one in which British ideas were galvanized and without an 'Other' and a well defined boundary such as the English Channel or North Sea, this could not have happened.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 25. Colley is conscious to acknowledge her neglect of the Irish-Catholic population and subsequent objections to *Britons* have often taken this tact.

¹⁰³ Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 173-174.

¹⁰⁴ Colley, *Britons*, 45. See also Kathleen Wilson. *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003): 31-35. Wilson's focus is on the national 'imagined

In *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850*, Colley uses unconventional archival sources such as prison records to demonstrate that in many respects, the British Empire could not always control its periphery. By using examples such as from the failed colonial ventures in north Africa of the 1660s, the American Revolution of 1775-1783, and many instances of imperial set-backs in India, Colley argues that although the British were aggressive, one cannot ignore the messy business of empire and how its negative elements almost always had an effect on the centre.¹⁰⁵

The Periphery versus Metropolis School is multifaceted and dynamic. Over the last three decades it has displayed a remarkable ability to encompass economic, cultural, religious, nationalist, warfare, espionage and a plethora of other ideas and concepts, greatly enriching the historiography of empire. Furthermore, it has become apparent to any scholar of imperial history, that one of the most important and powerful influences on a central imperial state is its hinterlands or borderlands. This central theme will emerge in the following chapters of this thesis, particularly when it addresses the origins of the geopolitical conflict in nineteenth century Central Asia called the Great Game. It will argue, very much in the tradition of Robinson and Gallagher, D.K. Fieldhouse and in concert with more recent researches of C.A. Bayly, D. Peers, P.J. Marshall, L. Colley, and

community' which grew with the assistance of a proliferation of provincial and national newspapers. These publications brought home ideas of Britishness and mercantile expansion and were consumed voraciously. These newspapers articulated a British 'manly, rational love of liberty.' See page 80 for the important contribution that Protestantism made to the development of the 'Island Race' as well.

¹⁰⁵ Linda Colley. *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600-1850* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002): 265. Here Colley demonstrates how the metaphor of the Tiger became synonymous with India in the minds of Britons and became an image through which ideas and apprehensions could be expressed. For a look into English imperial activity in North Africa see Colley, *Captives*, 43.

J. Brewer, amongst others, that imperial expansion in the north-west of India was in many ways a reaction to a host of different events and circumstances (both local and metropolitan) rather than a piece of concerted policy.¹⁰⁶

Before turning to the domestic British state, India, the East India Company and its contemporary actors however, it is useful to consider the broad historiographical interpretation of the period on the eve of the Great Game. Of the historians who have written on the earliest phases of the Great Game in Central Asia, Edward Ingram and M.E. Yapp have made the most lasting contributions. In *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798-1850*, Malcolm Yapp has argued that the frontier of British India had always been a dynamic and troublesome place for the British because of the military activity of the Mughal successor states. The Company's army was built along European lines which gave it an effective infantry and artillery corps, but made it weak in terms of mobility and cavalry, which formed the basis of the turbulent nature of Indian military and political culture and were important parts of Indian entrepreneurs in political power. Because Mughal Indian forces were usually mobile and competent when fighting on horseback, or on terrain that gave tactical superiority to light cavalry, they often caused excessive damage to the surrounding environments in which they fought.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Edward Ingram. 'The Rules of the Great Game: A Commentary on the Defence of British India, 1798-1829.' *Journal of British and Commonwealth History* 3, no. 2 (1975): 257-279. Also see Paul Schroeder, 'Containment Nineteenth-Century Style: How Russia Was Restrained.' *South Atlantic Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (1983): 1-18, and Paul Schroeder, 'Old Wine in Old Bottles: Recent Contributions to British Foreign Policy and European International Politics, 1789-1848.' *Journal of British Studies* 26, no. 1 (1987): 1-25. The work of these historians usually fall into the Periphery versus Metropolis School of historiography. For a geopolitical analysis of British imperial activities after the Seven Year's War see Ronald Hyam. 'The Primacy of Geopolitics: The Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763-1963' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27, no. 2 (1999): 27-49.

¹⁰⁷ M.E. Yapp. *Strategies of British India: Britain, Iran and Afghanistan 1798-1850*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 153.

Because of this, it was quickly realised by the Company's military command that they needed to fight their battles on lands they did not depend upon for revenues. Bengali revenue became very important after 1757 to the profitability of the East India Company, and this soon necessitated that all political and military action between the Company and its Indian rivals take place outside its borders. Yapp's conclusion is that the Great Game must be seen as a wider conflict between imperial Russia and imperial Britain which was itself the result of both empires desire to create buffer states that they wished to control between the centres of their economic and political strength and their peripheries.¹⁰⁸

Yapp sustains his thesis by drawing upon the example of Robert Clive's activism in wake of Plassey. As Governor of Bengal, Clive soon realised that the state of Oudh would provide a needed buffer for Bengal and protect Company interest and trade from bandits and interlopers. Oudh, was not powerful enough to threaten Bengal, but was powerful enough to ensure that it could withstand - with the Company's assistance - any threats to its territorial integrity. This was the first 'subsidiary alliance' of the East India Company and would radically alter Indian military affairs.¹⁰⁹ Like so many other initiatives in British India, Clive's plan for Oudh did not work and his successor as Governor of Bengal (and after 1774 Governor-General of India) Warren Hastings was forced to incorporate Oudh into British India by stationing troops and political advisors there. Hastings differed from his predecessor's approach because he did not see a specific enemy as the threat, but viewed the larger instability of the Indian subcontinent as the

¹⁰⁸ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 24-32.

¹⁰⁹ Marshall, *Bengal Bridgehead*, 138-140. Also see P.J Marshall and Rudrangshu Mukherjee. 'Debate: Early British Imperialism in India,' *Past and Present* 106, no. 3 (1985): 164-173. This article has two distinguished historians of British India debating the initial phases of the Company's empire.

most dangerous problem the Company faced. Hastings was specifically concerned about the Maratha Confederacy of central India; a powerful successor kingdom of Hindus in revolt against the Mughals.¹¹⁰ Hastings soon planned to expand British control of the border states of Bengal and Oudh by attacking rebellious and quasi independent Mughal states such as Rohillakand. This expansionary approach to British Indian security was initiated by Clive and Hastings but would have major consequences for subsequent Governors-General and individual leaders responsible for the protection of British India. In seeking to build a line of provinces that would serve as a buffer between British India and its perceived threats, Hastings and Clive irreversibly altered the doctrine of defence for the British Indian empire. Yapp argues:

Hastings scheme implied the abandonment of what had been a basic assumption of British Indian defence, namely that British security depended upon the existence of a balance of power among the Indian states, and the replacement of that assumption by the presumption that in the long run nothing but patrimony could guarantee British safety.¹¹¹

Throughout the late eighteenth century, another problem for British governance in India became apparent. One of its three principal components, the presidency of Madras was weak and this became a source of constitutional and strategic concern for those governing in both London and Calcutta.¹¹² Madras, located along the south-east coast of India had been part of the British trading network since 1639.¹¹³ The East India Company had built a base there, Fort St. George; and it, like Fort William in Bengal, had become an important factory for the trade in British and Asian goods in the southern portion of the

¹¹⁰ Rajaram Vyankatesh Nadkarni. *The Rise and Fall of the Maratha Empire* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966): 323-325.

¹¹¹ Yapp, *Strategies of British India*, 154.

¹¹² C.S. Srinivasachari 'The Nawabs of the Carnatic' in *The Politics of the British Annexation of India, 1757-1857* edited by Michael Fischer (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993): 98-104.

¹¹³ C.A. Bayly. *Atlas of the British Empire* (London: Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1989): 52.

subcontinent. Madras, however, was very different from the forts in Bombay and the Ganges delta because it was also the source of innovative business practices. One such practice was the insuring of ship borne trade which started in 1687.¹¹⁴ Another was the practice of giving loans to the Indian rulers who were vying for power in this portion of India. This role of banker did not occur in Bengal until much later, and then only on a limited scale.¹¹⁵ The reason for these innovative practices in Madras was principally because the region always needed to find new and innovative ways to survive in face of competition from other states and provinces. It was in a much weaker position than the other factories before 1757, and, after the end of the Seven Years War, had become the Achilles heel of the Company. To its north-west was the powerful Islamic successor-state of Hyderabad while to its south-west was the even more ideologically driven state of Mysore, which was led by the charismatic and aggressive Tipu Sultan. To ensure its survival, Madras had to remain innovative in its business policies and generous with its friendships. The unique problems of Madras were solved by the even more pioneering policies of the second Governor-General of British India, the Marquis Cornwallis. Cornwallis created an alliance with the independent state of Hyderabad in 1790 and then the Marathas soon afterwards; both being used against Tipu Sultan of Mysore. Cornwallis' tactics were successful and the Company defeated the Sultan and in the process made important political gains at the Treaty of Seringapatam (1799). However, even with the concessions made by Tipu Sultan, the Madras Presidency was not completely secured and the Indian successor-states were never completely to be trusted by

¹¹⁴ P.J. Marshall. *East India Fortunes: The British In Bengal in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976): 72.

¹¹⁵ Marshall, *East India Fortunes*, 196.

the British due to the volatile nature of Indian politics. This point was powerfully made when Britain's allies in the Anglo-Mysore war of 1780-1784, Hyderabad and the Maratha Confederacy, came into conflict with each other and Hyderabad was ultimately defeated by the Marthas in 1794. Not until Governor-General Wellesley defeated Tipu Sultan in 1799 would the threat Mysore be completely eliminated.¹¹⁶

Edward Ingram, the noted scholar of numerous works on the Great Game has observed the importance southern India and Tipu Sultan of Mysore had upon British expansion in north-western India. In *Commitment to Empire: Prophecies of the Great Game in Asia 1797-1800* Ingram argues that the guiding principle of British India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was 'the future and the past but never the present.'¹¹⁷ What he meant is that in a similar fashion to Malcolm Yapp's overarching argument of British India, the British were always concerned about borders and territorial security.¹¹⁸ Ingram argues that the most important aspect of British global power during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars was British India and without it there would have been no means for the British to maintain their standing in Europe.¹¹⁹ In fact, Ingram takes this idea even further and modifies the myth of British success in the realm of naval warfare during the French Revolution by painting it as an optical illusion.

Although it galvanised Britons culturally, and created the national myth of Britain ruling

¹¹⁶ H.S. Bhatia. *Military History of India 1606-1947* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1977): 158-159.

¹¹⁷ Edward Ingram. *Commitment to Empire*, 10.

¹¹⁸ For more on the idea of the frontier and how this had an effect on British imperial policies see Colley, *Captives*, 348 and Linda Colley. 'The Significance of the Frontier in British History' in *More Adventures with Britannia: Personalities, Politics and Culture in Britain* edited by Wm. Roger Louis (Austin: University of Texas at Austin Press, 1998): 27.

¹¹⁹ C.A. Bayly. *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914 Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004): 86. This work on the history of the globalisation in modernity addresses the important place that globe spanning empires had to their metropolitan cores.

the waves, Ingram maintains that ‘a study of Great Britain’s role in the war of the Second Coalition must focus on the effects on Napoleon Bonaparte’s invasion of Egypt. It follows from the swing to the east and one of its repercussions was the Great Game of Asia.’¹²⁰

In the various themes of this work, we would do well to accept recent colonial and post-colonial historiography which considers empire building and colonialism as metaphors for the subtle relationship between culture and control and knowledge and resistance.¹²¹ Between 1750 and 1820, the Company, as its Orientalists thinkers recognized, was hardly capable of dictating terms to the subcontinent. What these officials did realise, however, was that they could seize upon Mughal mechanisms of power and authority for their own benefit.¹²² It is also important to acknowledge that the Company expanded in the way it did, in part, because of Mughal expectations and considerable assistance and encouragement from Indian princes. Because of this, once they were established in Bengal, Britons were drafted into the complex web of Indian intrigue and power relationships.¹²³

¹²⁰ Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, 2. Ingram’s ideas about the important role of British India in the larger imperial picture were very similar to the nineteenth century geographer Sir Halford Mackinder and opposed to those of American naval theorist Alfred Mahan. Whereas Mahan focussed on British sea power as the foundation for the long nineteenth century peace that followed the Congress of Vienna, Ingram argues that India played the role as a ‘geographical pivot’ and most important factor for British global power. The British, after winning the important and lucrative possession of Bengal, Ingram argues, further participated in this large scale contest as an extension of their struggle for the European balance of power.

¹²¹ Woolf, *A Global Encyclopaedia of Historical Writing*, 461.

¹²² Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, 55.

¹²³ On the subject of post-colonial and subaltern studies see Ranajit Guha. *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998), Robert J.C. Young. *Postcolonialism, An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001): 34-41, Kathleen Wilson ed. *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, Modernity in Britain and the Empire 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 1-26, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman eds. *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and J. C. Scott. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University

Chapter III: Consolidation of the State and the Origins of Empire

As most students in the English speaking world know, two of the greatest bodies of English literature originated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It was in this period that William Shakespeare, arguably the most gifted English playwright in history, wrote his works. It was also in this period that King James lent his name and organizational skill to the *Authorized Edition of the Holy Bible*, known in many countries today simply as the *King James Bible*. It would be an understatement to say that the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a crucible period in the history of English literature. This chapter concentrates upon the growth and expansion of the English empire and its crucial connection to the process of domestic state building in England between the mid seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One of the many results of this important period, was the formation of a new economic model for England (and its empire), a balanced Constitution, a new partnership between the ruling class of aristocrats and the middling class, and most importantly, an impetus to expand the power and economic system of the English state on an imperial and global level. For as the Bard himself wrote: 'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women are merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, And one man in his time plays many parts, His Acts being seven

Press, 1992). For a discussion of these works and their influence on British imperial historiography see Dane Kennedy. 'Imperial History and Post-Colonial Theory.' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 24, no. 2 (1996): 345-363.

ages.¹²⁴

Until the formative 1600s, England had not only been a minor player in the state of affairs of Europe, but was also surrounded by hostile neighbours. The intellectual processes of the Renaissance, Reformation and Wars of Religion before 1560, had been largely Italian and Germanic events leaving England on the outside looking in. The Iberian kingdoms, had been, and still were, important global powers having divided and conquered the continental landmasses of Central and South America, as well as other parts of the globe including portions of Southern Asia and India.

England, on the other hand, remained on the periphery of Europe. It had embarked on the process of the Reformation, but on its own terms under Henry VIII and Edward VI before eventually adopting under, Elizabeth I, the *via media*. As such it kept an Episcopal structure while incorporating doctrinal elements of reformed Christianity, the most obvious being hierarchical independence from Rome.

This religious settlement was only one factor within a pragmatic political stability that was eventually attained by 1689 and would go on to influence and characterize the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, in the period before 1688, a number of wars, political conflicts, political compromises, and constitutional arrangements took place that would have the ultimate effect of consolidating this previously out-of-the-way archipelago into not just a stable and consolidated state; but also lay the groundwork for a globe spanning empire. By the mid 1600s the principal features of English political stability existed. It would be driven by an elitist and mercantilist mentality, have a strong

¹²⁴ William Shakespeare. *As You like It* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1977) II, vii, 139-143)

legal backbone embodied in the English Constitution and was on its way to unifying with Scotland in 1707 and Ireland in 1801. This chapter will survey this important development.

State Sovereignty and Empire

The concepts of Empire and Sovereignty are very similar and both represent the ultimate power of rule over a kingdom/principality/empire or nation. The word 'Empire', was derived from the Latin word *Imperium*, which in the Classical period simply meant something akin to 'control'. This meaning changed, gradually, to assume the usage it took in the modern period; and how we understand it today. David Armitage examined this concept and its philosophical underpinnings when he explored the ideological origins of sovereignty and empire in Britain. This book, titled *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, examines early modern opinions and conceptions of kingdom, and what early English and Scots believed to be the exclusive domain of their territorial governments *vis-à-vis* other European nations.¹²⁵ 'Empire' was a state of being and reached back to Classical antiquity as a form of magisterial power and jurisdictional control.¹²⁶ The earliest ideas of the British Empire conceived of political independence from all other kingdoms. The noted scholar and intellectual historian Anthony Pagden, in *Lords of all the World*, considers the classical allusions of Empire in early modern European thought and argues that:

It was the example of Rome, above all, an empire which had acquired an imaginative identity, a legal and political persona, which reached far beyond the contingencies of the relationship between

¹²⁵ Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, 3.

¹²⁶ For a further elaboration of the idea of Roman imperial Power its origins see: J.S. Richardson, 'Imperium Romanum: Empire and the Language of Power,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 90, no. 1 (1991): 3-13.

colony and metropolis, which ensured that all future empires would be closely associated with the institution of monarchy. For by the time of the collapse of the Republic, Rome was already the largest state in the Mediterranean world, and its size, as St. Augustine had remarked, was a demonstration of the far-reaching potentiality of the values of the society which had created it.¹²⁷

Thus, *Imperium* in the 1500s and 1600s was very similar to the concept of sovereignty and meant ultimate authority over legal, cultural, and executive power. This became an important idea for the English and Scottish kingdoms of the early modern period and the monarchs who ruled them. Henry VIII and the Reformation Parliament (1527-34) in England articulated ideas of this sort. For example, in an Act of Parliament in 1534 titled *An Act for the Exoneration from exactions paid to the see of Rome*; the dues flowing from the King to the Pope were effectively stopped and this was done using the language of Empire. The bill read:

The Bishop of Rome aforesaid hath not been only to be blamed for his usurpation in the premises but also for his abusing and beguiling your subjects, pretending and persuading to them that he hath full power to dispense with all human laws, uses, and customs of all realms in all causes which be called spiritual, which matter hath been usurped and practiced by him and his predecessors by many years in great derogation of your imperial crown and authority royal, contrary to right and conscience.¹²⁸

Sovereignty and power were established and the concept of Empire was invoked in this parliamentary statute. Neither Parliament nor Crown would submit nor recognize any authority superior to them, save God.

Henry's daughter Queen Elizabeth I would often wear the Imperial Crown with its closed arches after she had galvanized English spiritual independence from the Papacy and Church of Rome. Simultaneously, the kingdom of Scotland had begun to draw upon the Classical language of *Imperium* to assert its independent authority and territorial

¹²⁷ Anthony Pagden. *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain, and France c.1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 17.

¹²⁸ 'An Act for the Exoneration from exactions paid to the see of Rome' *English Historical Documents Volume V*, edited by C.H. Douglas (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967): 774.

sovereignty. The Scottish Reformation of the 1560s went a long way in establishing Scottish religious independence. But even earlier than that, the Scots participated in state activity to consolidate Scotland's power and guarantee its sovereignty. Michael Lynch, renowned historian of Scotland has noted how James IV, grandfather of James VI, engaged in public displays of imperial power and cultivated the persona of a controlling warrior king:

James is rightly celebrated as a builder of palaces and ships rather than of monasteries, for he sought earthly rather than heavenly glory. Yet hard-headed politics were always intertwined with such conspicuous expenditure. He contrived by 1502 to expel from the minds of his subjects the memory of the humiliations of the war of 1480-2 with England. A more aggressive stance was taken in foreign policy, turning English tactics of using collaborators such as the Lord of the Island to destabilise Scottish politics (as they had in 1462) against them [the English].¹²⁹

The Union of Crowns of 1603 brought James VI of Scotland to the throne of England and Ireland and in the process created the first king of Britain. The previous reigns of the Tudors in England and Stewarts in Scotland had been plagued by dynastic rivalry and political intrigue which poured fuel on the fire of the traditional acrimony between England and Scotland and were the cause of a number of internal British conflicts. With the Union of Crowns, however, there was now a new reason for the kingdoms to co-exist amicably. This was not a smooth process, and James and his Stuart descendants became a source of instability for the English constitution, state, and confessional structures during the seventeenth century. However, it was during this period

¹²⁹ Michael Lynch. *Scotland: A New History* (London: Century Limited, 1991): 159. Another example in the use of the Classical language of *Imperium* can be found in the north-east of Scotland. Aberdeen, built a university in 1495 with the patronage of Scottish King James IV. He encouraged the founding of King's College with the goal of training clergymen and doctors for the north-east, all of whom would help, in their way, consolidate his Scottish kingdom. At the pinnacle of the chapel of King's College, lay an imperial crown atop the church steeple. This unabashed public display of power was the first of its kind in the Scottish kingdom and was there with the purpose of proclaiming Scottish imperial rule and sovereign independence from all other empires and kingdoms of Europe. See Leslie J. Macfarlane. *King's College: University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Press, 1992): 12.

of 1603-1714 that the development of the nation-state was assisted by the expansion of an English/British mercantile mentality and network; something essential to the genesis of England, and later Britain's, empire.

Just as Rome and Classical antiquity had introduced the language of power and *Imperium* to early modern Europe, it also introduced the concepts of the 'nation-state' and the 'merchant empire'. The noted scholar of early modern Europe, Thomas Brady, Jr. argues that the nation-state was itself a legacy of the Classical world's dominion over Europe and a direct cause of international empire building. His argument connected Classical Rome, Medieval Europe and the early modern European nation-state with a single thread:

...based on a line running roughly from Cologne to Rome, where the failure of mediaeval imperial tendencies at the centre enabled smaller, more efficient empires to form later at the western, especially north-western, periphery. The heartlands did produce rulers who aimed to unite Christendom into an empire of a classic sort, but they failed. One reason for their failure was that, down to the end of the medieval era, much of the ideological and religious ground on which empire had to be built - and not a little of its material basis - served an institution which made rival imperial claims...the Latin church in general and the Roman papacy in particular.¹³⁰

After the fall of the secular Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church appropriated the functions, ideologies and even the vocabulary of *Imperium* and subsequently used it to further its dominance over European polities. This multifaceted approach of centralized leadership, bureaucratic government, common language, and Latin high culture, as well as the development of universal ecclesiastical law, soon developed so that no one - not even the Pope himself - was above it.¹³¹ As the secular influence of the Papacy plummeted in parts of Europe, including England and Scotland, the economic influence of the

¹³⁰ Thomas A. Brady, Jr. 'The rise of merchant empires, 1400-1700' edited by James Tracy. *The Political Economy of Merchant Empires* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 123.

¹³¹ Brady, 'The Rise of Merchant Empires,' 130.

middling and upper classes grew, leaving a national monarch to protect their rights and coordinate the powers of the kingdom. The surest way to secure the realm (and incur loyalty) was to protect the people and their property. The nation-state quickly became 'at least in some respects the guarantor of their property rights' and the price of this was the strengthening of the 'Prince's law' to the diminishment of all others.¹³² Early modern rulers quickly realised that the state itself was very good at making war and expanding its merchant empire. King James I and VI appreciated this, and encouraged it within his English and Scottish kingdoms.¹³³

During his reign, the subjects of his two kingdoms participated in the first joint venture of an imperial British manner and the first extension of British sovereignty aboard. As David Armitage explains, the beginnings of the British Empire and the:

...very language of British imperial ideology - of 'Great Britain', 'empire' and 'colony' - was not forged originally in Ireland, the Caribbean or the Americas, but sprang instead from Anglo-Scottish relations in the late 1540s. The succession of the infant Queen Mary to the Scottish throne in 1542 and the renewal of the 'Auld Alliance' between France and Scotland raised the possibility for both Henry VIII and the regents of Edward VI that England could be encircled by its historic enemies. In the interests of security and honour, both attempted to defuse the threat from Scotland by means of a dynastic marriage between Mary and Edward, enforced if necessary by military invasion. In order to justify this 'Rough Wooing,' the English argued that dynastic union would restore the ancient submission of the Scots to the suzerainty of the English crown, and recalled that Scotland had been a dependency of England as far back as the period following the death of Brutus, the mythical Trojan conqueror of Britain.¹³⁴

As an ardent theorist of colonialism and advocate of the classical ideas, James I and VI went further than any previous English or Scottish monarch in developing a 'British' polity and 'British' imperial ideology. By creating a colonial enterprise that encouraged both Scots and English to work together, the colonization of Ulster (northern Ireland)

¹³² Brady, 'The Rise of Merchant Empires,' 131.

¹³³ Brady, 'The Rise of Merchant Empires,' 143.

¹³⁴ David Armitage, 'Making the empire British: Scotland in the Atlantic world, 1542-1707,' *Past and Present* 155, no. 1 (1997): 36.

became the first plantation where Scots and English Protestants both owed their king for this opportunity.¹³⁵ James was further consolidating the imperial nature of his crown and the 'invincible monarchy of Great Britain.'¹³⁶

But not all of James I and VI's ideas for the English state and its constitution were welcome by the ascendant English aristocracy. In fact, the Union of Crowns in 1603 began a process of almost one hundred years of political and constitutional upheaval within England and Scotland. James had an affinity for the ideas of continental Europe. One of these was best exemplified in a work he wrote called *The Devine Right of Kings*. This treatise unequivocally asserted that a King was not only the father to his subjects, but also divinely ordained as God's lieutenant on Earth. Moreover, kings were accountable to God alone and as such, were required to be treated that way.¹³⁷ James was declaring his *Imperium* and Sovereignty over the state-of-affairs in his realm and was claiming that there was no rival to match his power. Through force of will and personal character, this assertion lasted his reign with relative stability. However, by the time his son Charles I had become king, Parliament was, once more, asserting its own strength. This, however would only be achieved through violent civil and religious war in the 1620s and 1680s; Charles himself losing his head, the Cromwellian protectorship, and the 'Glorious' Revolution. In the end, Parliament and the elite who controlled it achieved the balanced constitution and stability they desired so much.

The Rise of State Stability

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 was a turning point in not just the history of

¹³⁵ Nicholas Canny. *Making Ireland British 1580-1650* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 167.

¹³⁶ Canny, *Making Ireland British*, 195.

¹³⁷ John Neville Figgis. *The Devine Right of Kings* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965): 169.

English state but also that of the British Empire. The Civil War had affirmed Parliament's power in levying taxes, while the Glorious Revolution secured a 'Bill of Rights' into law. No longer could a King flagrantly dispense with law as James II had. A realignment of sovereignty from the King to Parliament had taken place and the constitutional arrangement referred to by legal scholars as the 'King-in-Parliament',¹³⁸ although not entirely secured, had passed an important juncture. No longer could a King entertain the notion that he did not require Parliament's consent on most domestic issues. It had been a turbulent, difficult, and violent process, but when one reads the *Bill of Rights of 1689*, a parliamentary manoeuvre to ensure that the new William and Mary understood exactly what type of monarchy they were not to assume, a transfer of power from the Crown to Parliament becomes evident. Titled *An Act Declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject and Settling the succession of the Crown*, the Bill of Rights notes what James II did to drive the English elite to a change of monarchs: 'Whereas the late King James the Second, by the assistance of divers evil councillors, judges and ministers employed by him, did endeavour to subvert and extirpate the Protestant religion and the laws and liberties of this kingdom'.¹³⁹ It went on to outline what the new king and queen were forbidden to do. These included things such as: impose excessive fines; use cruel or illegal punishments; keep or raise a standing army without the consent of Parliament, or levy money for the use of the Crown without parliamentary assent.¹⁴⁰

What this explains about the reconfiguration of politics in the late seventeenth

¹³⁸ Jeffery Goldsworthy. *The Sovereignty of Parliament: History and Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999): 9-12.

¹³⁹ 'The Bill of Rights of 1689,' *English Historical Documents Volume IX*, edited by Andrew Browning (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1953): 123-134.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Bill of Rights of 1689,' *English Historical Documents Volume IX*, 123-134.

century is that the English state faced an unprecedented change in the years between the Civil War and the Revolution of 1688. By the 1670s and 1680s Parliament had grown in strength as the result of a number of factors. First, an important constituency to be considered in political decision making. Moreover, the landed classes began to consider the financial community not as rivals, but as partners in a new and fiscally demanding state. Both groups were able to find an outlet in the mechanisms of Parliament and to this end it was a win/win situation for both, the only loser being the executive power of the Crown.¹⁴¹

John Brewer's *Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State 1688-1783* examined in detail the nature of the state building institutions and has shown the role it played in England of the seventeenth century. These included customs and excise, lobbying, country ideology, the rise of parliamentary power, and collectively contributed to what Brewer describes as a 'fiscal-military state'.¹⁴² By the early eighteenth century, the emergence of a fiscal-military state contributed to the domestic stability of England and the foundations of its Empire.¹⁴³

Brewer's thesis also observes that both Parliament and King William and Queen Mary were important to the development and expansion of England after the 1688 Revolution. In the next few years, both used their prerogatives to build a nation that was centralized, legitimate (in the eyes of the Protestant majority), and economically

¹⁴¹ J.H. Plumb. *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (London: Macmillan, 1967): 8.

¹⁴² Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 21-24. The book's introduction offers a great synopsis of his thesis.

¹⁴³ Lawrence Stone, ed. *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London: Routledge, 1994): 9. In this multi-authored volume a number of eminent historians including John Brewer, Kathleen Wilson, Linda Colley, and C.A. Bayly chart the development of English and British fiscal-militarism and imperialism using a wide range of geographical and topical locales.

advanced. The King changed the direction of English foreign policy from one of isolation to one of expansion. By using his most impressive and exclusive prerogative - foreign affairs - the English king turned his state into an important military force in the hyper religious climate of European politics. England became a counterweight to the geopolitical power of Louis XIV of France and kept this massive Roman Catholic kingdom from dominating the continent. Brewer's analysis of the kingship of William III concluded that the momentum of the fiscal-military state further resulted in political and economic developments; many of which left a permanent legacy. For example, the English tax system was more efficient, and collection more acceptable, than in other European states. This was because Parliament approved the taxes, as well as where they were spent, and how these taxes were imposed upon the population. Because of this, England under William III was one of the most heavily taxed nations in Europe. Excise and consumption taxes predominated after 1688, and along with this came a growing and well-oiled civil bureaucracy, customs and excise enforcement agencies, and lobbyists who suggested where these taxes should be spent.¹⁴⁴ Brewer also noted that the English elites had representative government in the House of Commons, a political body that had no rival throughout the land.

Brewer's thesis was in many ways inspired by J.H. Plumb's celebrated work, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725*. In *The Growth of Political Stability* Plumb suggested that it was the harmonization of interests of the Crown and the national government that led to the eighteenth century stability which the English propertied class

¹⁴⁴ Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 131.

wanted. He wrote: ‘After 1689, and even more after 1714, the ebb and flow of political power between Parliament and Court becomes stronger; more of the political establishment of the nation were to be found at Court, and courtiers themselves became steadily more entangled in the routine of Parliamentary government’.¹⁴⁵ High levels of taxation and the development of a fiscal political culture between 1675 and 1725 were complemented by a greater involvement and monitoring of parliamentary elections, the growth of canvassing and targeting certain constituencies of the electorate, and the increased frequency of electoral campaigns.¹⁴⁶ All of this type of activity would eventually become standard features of not just eighteenth century politics but all parliamentary government up to the modern era. The economy too saw gradual urbanization, a growing proportion of non-agricultural employment, and an increase in agricultural efficiency, which although not directly tied to the growth of political stability, was another important economic factor unique to England. The state and its empire was now sovereign and stable, and it was armed with these social, political, economic and expansionary perspectives that Hanoverian Britons soon pursued their imperial ambitions.

The Constitution of a sovereign and stable England

Plumb’s work on the political stability of Augustan England and John Brewer’s arguments for the fiscal and economic foundation of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century strengthening of the English state are both persuasive. The fiscal-military state and the origins of what Plumb refers to as the ‘Venetian Oligarchy’ no longer relied solely on the Court, but also on the ‘domination of Parliament’ through the

¹⁴⁵ Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability*, 113.

¹⁴⁶ Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 224.

ownership and control of property.¹⁴⁷ Like property and political power, state sovereignty and the imperial state was also connected to one aspect of government that was equally important to early modern Britain: the law.¹⁴⁸ The English Constitution was inextricably linked to the course of the English state after 1688, and ultimately played a significant role in England's political expansion in and outside of Europe and the building of a British Empire in India.

Historians still debate the character of the Glorious Revolution and ask whether it, as one historian has written: 'established a new king on the throne, or a new type of monarchy'.¹⁴⁹ However, the important point is that the result the Revolution and the Bill of Rights was not as much innovation in government as the realization of the rights of Parliament, which had been previously accepted by theorists but ignored by the Stuart monarchs. One needs only to refer to the parliamentary activities conducted at the behest of Thomas Cromwell during the Reformation Parliament or the *Petition of Right* given to Charles I to see genesis of these the parliamentary claims. As Brewer and Plumb did point out, the strength of the propertied and political Englishman was that his rights in law and their rights as parliamentarians were tied to the sovereignty of Parliament itself.¹⁵⁰ These rights were balanced against the Crown, but the Glorious Revolution had galvanised the idea that the individual liberties of freeborn Britons and monarchical rule were not

¹⁴⁷ Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability*, 179.

¹⁴⁸ E.P. Thompson. *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1975): 197. Thompson demonstrates through use of the Black Act how political power and law were increasingly tied to property and intrusions on private property during the early eighteenth century. See also Douglas Hay. 'Property, Authority and the Criminal Law' in *Albion's Fatal Tree* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975): 52.

¹⁴⁹ Henry Horwitz, '1689(and All That),' *Parliamentary History* 6, no. 1 (1987): 23.

¹⁵⁰ See Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 52-53. See also Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability*, 179. The interconnectivity of their arguments should not be surprising. Brewer was Plumb's student.

necessarily contradictory. The English legal scholar, Sir William Blackstone, articulated this years later in a series of lectures at the University of Oxford beginning on 25 October 1758.¹⁵¹ These lectures, subsequently published as the *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, addressed the nature of the Common Law in England and arguably became the most influential legal treatise in the history of the Common Law. This title was so influential, in fact, that the *Commentaries* were published in no less than eight editions before Blackstone's death in 1780. The *Commentaries* themselves were not groundbreaking or profound in what they said, rather what made them important was what they came to symbolize in the political and gentry classes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were legal texts, not for jurists, although they were widely used by them as well, but for non-specialists and laymen. In eighteenth century England, the educated, propertied, and political individual had to also be literate in legal matters. He did not necessarily have to be a specialist, but he did need to be learned enough to understand the law as an integral component to the political world around him.

The first volume focussed on the nature of the English state and its laws and in many respects captured the essence of the development of English state sovereignty in the 1600s and early 1700s. It articulated the nature of the 'mixed Constitution' and lauded the British form of government by pointing out that there was a system of checks and balances that keep any powerful group from running amok. Blackstone wrote:

It is highly necessary for preserving the balance of the Constitution, that the Executive Power should be a branch, though not the whole, of the legislature. The total union of them, *as we have seen*, would be productive to tyranny; the total disjoint of them, for the present, would in the end produce the same effects, by causing that union against which it seems to provide. The legislature

¹⁵¹ Sir William Blackstone. *Commentaries on the Laws of England: A Facsimile of the First Edition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979): 153-154.

would soon become tyrannical, by making continual encroachments, and gradually assuming to itself the rights of the executive power.¹⁵²

He continued:

...And herein indeed consists of the true excellence of the English government, that all the parts of it form a mutual check upon each other. In the legislature, the people are a check upon the nobility, the nobility a check upon the people; by the mutual privilege of rejecting what the other has resolved: while the king is a check upon both, which preserves the executive power from encroachments.¹⁵³

The power and the jurisdiction of Parliament was 'sovereign and uncontrollable.'¹⁵⁴ It had the authority to make laws for all facets of society and it was in Parliament that the 'absolute despotic power, which must in all governments reside somewhere.'¹⁵⁵

A few years earlier, the Scottish philosopher and historian David Hume examined the same questions and responded to them in an essay titled *Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic*. Hume's questions revolved around the post-1707 political climate and the Act of Union which had united the parliaments of Scotland and England. After outlining the reasons why people might have opinions on either suggestions he said:

I would frankly declare, that, though liberty be preferable to slavery, in almost every case; yet I should rather wish to see an absolute monarch than a republic in this island. For, let us consider, what kind of republic we have reason to expect. The question is not concerning any fine imaginary republic, of which a man many form a plan in his closet. There is no doubt, but a popular government may be imagined more perfect than absolute monarch, or even than our present constitution. But what reason have we to expect that any such government will ever be established in GREAT BRITAIN, upon the dissolution of our Monarchy? If any single person acquire power enough to take our constitution to pieces, and put it any single person acquire power enough to take our constitution to pieces, and put it up a-new, he is really an absolute monarch; and we have already had an instance of this king, sufficient to convince us, that such a person will never resign his power, or establish any free government...If the House of Commons, in such a case, ever dissolve itself, which is not to be expected, we may look for a civil war every election.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 153-154.

¹⁵³ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 154.

¹⁵⁴ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 154.

¹⁵⁵ Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ David Hume. 'Essay VII: Whether the British Government inclines more to Absolute Monarchy or to a Republic.' *Theory of Politics*, edited by Frederick Watkins, *Essays Moral Political Literary* (Toronto:

Hume's ideas about an absolute monarch with sovereign powers and no Parliament to check it, meant danger for the people. An individual with such power would never resign and establish a free government. In Hume's opinion, Parliament had become the most important body that ensured tyranny did not re-emerge and that the Constitution remained integral to the British state.

Another Scotsman, John Campbell, wrote *The Present State of Europe*, after the Act of Union had united his country with England. Campbell went to great length to explain that the strong economic ties of the new British state, its government, and its Constitution, were inextricably linked to its commercial wealth. Campbell surveyed the political situation throughout Europe, outlining each nation's strengths and weakness and then focussed his arguments on what needed to be done for the interests of Great Britain. The British state and its growing empire needed to be supported and encouraged by legislation and policy similar to the Navigation Acts of 1651 and 1660.¹⁵⁷ These laws were intended to reduce Dutch pre-eminence in trade by giving English ships a virtual monopoly on the transport of goods between Europe and England's colonies. The Navigation Acts, and other economically motivated policies (including the English East India Company) generated wealth and trade for the Empire. Campbell's ideas were emblematic of the effect commerce and empire were beginning to have on Great Britain and its colonial possessions in both Asia and North America. In Campbell's opinion

Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951): 167.

¹⁵⁷ Norman Davies. *The Isles: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000): 715.

economics and the state were:

...so inseparable united, that they may be very well considered as one and the same. For Commerce is that tie, by which the several, and even the most distance Parts of this Empire, are connected and kept together, so as to be rendred [sic] Parts of the same whole, and to receive not only Countenance and Protection, but Warmth and Nourishment from the vital Parts of our Government of which, if I may be indulged so figurative an Expression, our Monarch is the Head and our Liberty the Soul.¹⁵⁸

Campbell further suggested that the commerce of Great Britain needed to be one of the most important priorities for its government and its constitution. The strength and power of the Empire was important and to this end must be principally met by offsetting those powers in Europe which sought to limit the independent action of other states such as France or Russia and 'maintain others in their Rights,' by 'subduing several Countries under one Potentate, naturally and even necessarily.'¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Campbell also favoured a *real politick* approach to making and keeping alliances with other powers and argued that the British needed to,

resent Wrongs done us, vigorously and without delay, more especially where it is in our Power to do it, by employing our maritime Force, since in this case it answers a double End; First, it redresses the Mischief, whatever it is, for the Present and next, it raises our Reputation for the future.¹⁶⁰

Empire had emerged as a principle foreign policy consideration.

The implication upon the Hanoverian state of the aforementioned theories and ideas of the seventeenth century are well illustrated in two political events of the mid eighteenth century. The first was a speech made in the House of Commons by Sir Robert Walpole, considered Britain's first prime minister, given on 21 May 1739. This can best be exemplified as a doctrinaire foreign policy speech; one that outlines the role

¹⁵⁸ John Campbell. *The Present State of Europe* (London: T. Longman and C. Hitch, 1752): 510.

¹⁵⁹ Campbell, *The Present State of Europe*, 511.

¹⁶⁰ Campbell, *The Present State of Europe*, 512.

Parliament has in making treaties with other sovereign powers. In response to a suggestion that the British had been bested in a treaty, Walpole disagreed and noted that British trade was, 'at this instance more flourishing, her ships more numerous, and her navigation better protected, than ever was known in former ages.'¹⁶¹ Walpole went on to ask, 'Have we made any one treaty that so much as seems to take away the smallest advantage we enjoyed by former stipulations?' From there he outlined the nature of war and peace for the eighteenth century British state. A Janus-like stance was one that the British state needed to take at any given time:

I have lived, Sir, long enough in the world to see the effects of war on this nation; I have seen how destructive the effects, even of a successful war, have been; and shall I, who have seen this, when I am admitted to the honour to ear a share in his majesty's councils, advise him to enter upon a war while peace may be had? No, Sir, I am proud to own it, that I have always been, and always shall be, an advocate for peace But, Sir, when it was found that our commerce was no longer to be preserved but by a war, when the Spaniards by a flagrant breach of faith refused to fulfil the stipulations they had entered into, the same considerations, which had hitherto dictated to me, that peace if possible was to be preserved, then determined me in my acquiesce to the advice of a vigorous war.¹⁶²

The second act symbolically and powerfully illustrated the limits of kingship in Hanoverian Britain. When King George III refused to wear the Imperial Crown in 1760, he did so because he felt it best to be 'known in Europe and the world by the appropriated and undisputed style belonging to the British Crown.'¹⁶³ The King, although ruling in many respects an empire, did not want to be seen as an emperor. The ascendancy of Parliament; the Acts of Union and Settlement; and the development of the fiscal-military state had all created a Britain that was imperial and expansionary and it would be this

¹⁶¹ Robert Walpole. 'Review of Whig foreign policy, 1714-1739, in a Speech in the House of Commons, 21 November 1739.' *English Historical Documents Volume. X* edited by D.B. Horn and Mary Ransome (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957): 847.

¹⁶² Walpole, 'Speech in the House of Commons,' 847.

¹⁶³ Lord North, 'Letter to George III,' 123.

new state that soon established itself in India, interacted with the established Mughal Empire, and eventually took its place. The prologue to the British role in the 'Great Game' had begun.

Chapter IV: The Convergence of Empires in India

Just as the relationship between the British state and the British elite of the seventeenth and eighteenth century relied upon a growing political and economic stability and Constitution, imperial fortunes in Asia depended upon a number of relations between Britons and Indians, and between the East India Company and the Mughal Empire and its successor states. Between the mid eighteenth century and the mid nineteenth century, the interaction between the East India Company and the Mughal Empire ultimately led to the growth of British power in India and the expansion of that power throughout the subcontinent. To understand this transitional relationship it is necessary to briefly consider the origins and internal dynamics of the Mughal Empire and its power structures. This chapter will discuss this, and forge the connection between the Mughal Empire and Britain's fiscal-military state.

The Mughal Empire was founded in 1521 when a group of nomadic Afghan warriors invaded India and defeated the last of the Delhi Sultans, eventually securing most of the subcontinent. They would, until the middle of the nineteenth century, either practically or ostensibly, rule vast tracts of the Indian subcontinent from their capital cities of Agra and Delhi. They would also come to dominate both the physical and intellectual landscape of their possessions. This dominance became absolute during the reign of Akbar the Great and would quickly be emulated in its format by lesser nobles in many parts of India.¹⁶⁴ Considering the fact that they ruled over a geographic area with not only an enormous population, but also a diverse religious and economic culture, this was

¹⁶⁴ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*, 123.

an impressive empire by all standards.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, it was the coexistence of ideas from Great Britain and Mughal India that shaped and moulded British governance of the Company's possessions after the important battle of Plassey in 1757. Therefore, an understanding of some political, military and economic ideas of the Mughal Empire are important when looking at the origins of the Company's power in India and the geopolitical events of British India.¹⁶⁶

As surrogates or subalterns to the Mughal Emperor, the British could never completely separate Company rule in India from the Mughals, despite the turbulent character of Successor States and the decentralization of power away from Delhi in the period after the death of the last Mughal Emperor to rule an integrated and centralized empire, Aurangzeb, in 1707. The Mughal Empire, despite the centrifugal forces that were fuelled by intolerance towards Hindus that Aurangzab himself institutionalised, demonstrated the empire was very ideological and non-corporeal, and was not simply a physical political entity. This empire represented a spiritual politics that resonated throughout India until it was eventually replaced by the Viceroyalty of British India in the

¹⁶⁵ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 45-47. The impressive nature of the Mughal Empire was not lost on Akbar and his supporters who attributed it, in part, to divine power. Akbar was believed to direct his energies outward to all mankind and this idea was derived from Persian Neoplatoic philosophy which claimed that only the highest of three grades of men (which included the Mughal Emperor) were true theosophists and masters of the age. At the head of this group was the Archangel Gabriel who represented the Prophet Muhammad.

¹⁶⁶ Bayly, *Indian Society*, 80-81. On this important and voluminous subject see Michael Fisher. *A Clash of Cultures: Awadh, the British and the Mughals* (London: Manohar 1987): 80. Fisher argues that far from being a non-factor in Mughal politics by the late eighteenth century, the Mughal Emperor was in reality a very important one. He demonstrates this by citing how even Awadh, arguably the most powerful successor-state before it was conquered by the East India Company would still never disobey requests from its Mughal sovereign. It would often postpone them until the political situation had changed in its favour but never disobey them. See also Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 138-140.

middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁷

In the years prior to the Battle of Plassey and the rise of the East Indian Company in Bengal in 1757, India was an extraordinarily complex and multi-layered society. From its capital Delhi, the Mughal ruler and his imperial retainers oversaw an imperial revenue generating apparatus which connected it to every village and city of northern and central India. There were also a number of particularities that set this empire apart from its Asiatic and European counterparts. The most obvious of these was that it was composite in structure.¹⁶⁸ Power was divided and portioned out to a number of lesser rulers, governors and lords; all of whom played an indispensable part in its greater governance. Its military structure also exemplified the composite nature of empire too, as there was no single Mughal standing army or force to maintain its security. Rather, it was secured by a number of different military and paramilitary groups and chains of command, many of which did not ultimately end at the emperor's word and served the various aristocrats and revenue gatherers that lived under Mughal tutelage.¹⁶⁹

Mughal economic structures were equally composite and complex. The economic roots of this polity were based upon the agricultural productivity of peasants; those responsible for working the land and sustaining the agriculture commodities that formed the basic trading currency of the Mughal economy and the prosperity of the entire

¹⁶⁷ David Cannadine. *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press 2001): 44.

¹⁶⁸ Farhat Hosan. *State and Locality in Mughal India: Power Relations in Western India, c. 1575-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 17. See Hosan's Introduction, pages 3-16. He makes this point very clear on page 17 when he remarks: 'The group leader [a *Nawab*, *Zamindar*, *Ryot*, etc] linked each hierarchical social unit to the one above it, like many small pyramids stacked on top of one another, forming a gigantic pyramid.'

¹⁶⁹ Hosan, *State and Locality in Mughal India*, 17.

empire.¹⁷⁰ So the Battle of Plassey was an important battle in a greater world war not just because it led to the overt political expansion of the East India Company in Bengal, but also because it allowed British interests to become more intimately involved in the commodities trade that formed the basis of the Mughal economic system.¹⁷¹ It was these economic and political forces which existed within India before the British expanded beyond the walls of their trading forts, including pre-existing economic infrastructure, political autonomy of successor states, and the increased devolution of the Mughal state that went a long way in assisting in creating an infrastructure which was then appropriated by the British after the Battle of Plassey.

The Mughal Political System in the years before Plassey

The Mughal Empire was one of history's largest and most important Islamic political organizations. Existing for over two hundred years, its origins were in the mountainous regions of Afghanistan. From there, a nomadic ruler from the Kabul province, named Babur and his followers invaded the northern marches of the Indian subcontinent in the 1520s, with a desire to find new spoils and riches in the south.¹⁷² This was an enterprise that would be emulated in other parts of Asia by other central Asians during the next two hundred years, but never with the same success of the Mughals. Babur founded an imperial dynasty that did not reach its culmination of imperial status until the fall of the great fortress of Asirgagh in the Khandesh region through the efforts

¹⁷⁰ Jagadish Narayan Sarkar. *Mughal Economy: Organization and Working* (Calcutta: Naya Prokash, 1987): 163-165.

¹⁷¹ Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 89.

¹⁷² Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 6-8.

of his grandson Akbar in 1601.¹⁷³ Even after this conquest however, high suzerainty and not overt sovereignty was the order of rule over the Indian subcontinent by the Mughal emperor.

The Mughal Indian political system was based upon many things comparable to other empires throughout the world. The threat of force and economic supremacy loomed large in the initial years, but the Mughal executive never had a complete grasp of power over the entire subcontinent and the principal reason for this was its diversity. The geographic, religious and ethnic differences of the regions of India made it very difficult to rule without the effective cooperation of a compliant Indian aristocracy.¹⁷⁴ The Mughals would administer a very different empire from their contemporaries in Qing China or Tokugawa Japan, or the European nation-state empires of the Bourbons or Habsburgs.

Between 1601 and the mid eighteenth century, the Mughals held onto the Indian subcontinent through a class of compliant nobles and princes. There would be exceptions, but for the most part it would remain a stalwart political structure. By the mid eighteenth century, however, the ties that had bound the Mughal empire were steadily loosening.¹⁷⁵ This dissolution was further exacerbated by Emperor Aurangzeb's coercive policies against Hindus which went a long way in creating religious strife in a region which had otherwise been religiously tolerant. The Mughal Empire not fraying at its seams, but its

¹⁷³ Irfan Habib. *An Atlas of the Mughal Empire: Political and Economic Maps with Detailed Notes* (Delhi : Oxford University Press, 1982): xvii.

¹⁷⁴ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars*, 198.

¹⁷⁵ Hosan, *State and Locality in Mughal India*, 91-92.

interior lines of communication and political order was slackening.¹⁷⁶ In keeping with Indian tradition, which went back to the ascent of the Mughals themselves, this process of devolution was hastened by rogue factions, raiders and bandits who were beginning to institutionalise their political violence as a legitimate force in Mughal politics. Sometimes this was done at the behest of an aristocratic sponsor but most often it originated outside the power structures of India and sometimes even outside Mughal India itself. These factors, along with the slackening of centralised power, all contributed to the rise of Indian princely kingdoms and a phenomenon that has been described by one eminent historian of India as 'entrepreneurships in political power.'¹⁷⁷ What was taking place was the gradual erosion of power structures within the Mughal empire itself, and the creation of a more fluid and less permanent political existence in both the urban and rural Indian aristocracies. Power was no longer - if it ever had been - something that emanated from the Mughal capital to the periphery and was now something to be grasped by the individual who could reach for it and then best hold onto it. A noble, although under the titular rule of the Mughal emperor in distant Delhi, was ostensibly independent. He was still under pressure to pay whatever tribute or *dagir* was required by the emperor, but now he was also under pressure to resist what rivals might originate from his own circle.¹⁷⁸ The result was twofold. There was increased instability in any given jurisdiction as well as the construction of independent alliances between the successor states. Complicating this already complex structure was the fact that it was never as easy as

¹⁷⁶ Bayly, C.A. 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 27 no. 1 (1993): 10-14.

¹⁷⁷ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 115.

¹⁷⁸ H.V. Bowen. *Revenue and reform: the Indian problem in British politics 1757-1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 55.

applying brute force to a situation to eliminate a threat. Moreover, there were a myriad of other factors that Indian rulers needed to take into account when defending their local positions on domestic policies, imperial affairs, taxes, etc. This was a highly hierarchical society and relationships between an Indian noble, his bloodline, his retainers, local religious patrons, and perhaps most importantly, the subjects needed to be cultivated.¹⁷⁹

Protocol, ceremony, and military prowess were important and necessary activities in any Mughal aristocratic system and centred around the conspicuous display of power called a *Durbar*.¹⁸⁰ The *Durbar* was both an urban centre and a metaphysical idea, it was a town as well as a form of political power supported by a formula of 'patrimonial feudalism and the heritage of the Central Asian Khanate.'¹⁸¹ An entrepreneur in political power, be he a *Nawab*, *Raja*, *Maharaja*, or in some cases even the a *Nizam* (the chief financial officer of a region), would constantly evaluate, adjust and frame the relationships he had between himself and those around him within the context of this Mughal power structure.¹⁸² These activities were based upon goals of building familial ties, maintaining military control through regional conquest, controlling land and revenues through the *Zamindar* and their agents, and other forms of regional revenue extraction, diplomatic manoeuvring and the forging of tribal links. All of this was further weighted against the atmosphere outside the walls of this *Durbar*, namely the multi-ethnic

¹⁷⁹ Richards, *Mughal Empire*, 185. See also John R. McLane. *Land and Local Kingship in eighteenth century Bengal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 69. McLane outlines the routine feature of coercion and force that the collection of revenue and the administration of state justice had in the late Mughal Empire. This was a highly decentralized aspect to Indian politics with the various levels of Indian society given *de facto* power to punish and coerce.

¹⁸⁰ Cannadine, *Ornamentalism*, 114-115.

¹⁸¹ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 115.

¹⁸² Bayly, *Indian Society*, 23.

and multi-religious makeup of the subcontinent. A ruler, whether Hindu or Moslem, not only had to maintain legitimacy in the eyes of the powerful Islamic elites in Delhi, but also the different religious communities and the people who lived within his principality. Religion was such an integral part of Indian society and any opposition the Hindu and Moslem clerics had towards political power would drastically undermine their authority. Patronage, on the other hand, would sustain both the local Moslem intelligentsia as well placate the large numbers of Hindu subjects that demanded support for their faith as well.¹⁸³

Key to understanding Mughal Indian power before the Battle of Plassey is the metaphysical nature of Mughal Indian sovereignty. Because the Mughals themselves were foreign invaders from the north, there was no single attribute other than competence that kept a dynasty in office for good.¹⁸⁴ Successful nobles emerged from a series of complex relationships based upon blood relations, but also the personal favour and martial prowess that surrounded a predecessor's court and harem. Power was something that had to be asserted because it was not transferred solely from generation to generation and this was manifested in the ritual and highly visible spectacle of the *Durbar*.¹⁸⁵ It was this place where the complex relationships of power were carried out, and where an Indian lord maintained his patrimony or consolidated his family when under threat. It was also here that others, sons or sycophants, politicked and lobbied on their own or on behalf of their favourites. Essentially, the *Durbar* was where the lord dominated completely and these dynastic courts were miniature emulations of the imperial capital itself. As C.A. Bayly

¹⁸³ Bowen, *Revenue and reform*, 67-68.

¹⁸⁴ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 58.

¹⁸⁵ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 116.

explains, Delhi for Mughal India, had 'the same dominance that Rome had to the late medieval European mind' and for this reason Delhi retained such symbolic power when its actual political influence started to wane in the decades before the Battle of Plassey.¹⁸⁶

Mughal India's political hierarchy was fluid and this was no where more obvious than on its borders or those of its successor states. Nobility and banditry were closely related and the Rohillas provide an example of the relationships between the two. The Rohillas were Afghan tribal warriors who migrated south in the mid eighteenth century looking for greener pastures, and seized and created their own successor state north-east of Delhi. Like their suzerain lords, the Mughals, they were Afghan Muslims and claimed to be descendants of Abraham the Patriarch and because of this distinguished pedigree believed themselves entitled to their own *Jagir* and principedom within the Mughal Empire. From this sense of entitlement and their successful martial conquest, they established a legitimate regime that would thrive for a generation between 1750s to 1770s before being conquered by the East India Company in the late eighteenth century.¹⁸⁷

The Mughal Indian Economic and Revenue Generation until 1759

The cornerstone of the Mughal system of government lay in the way Mughal officialdom extracted revenues from its subordinate population and thereby paid for its expenses.¹⁸⁸ By the early eighteenth century, however, the empire's grip had slackened considerably, and the economic ties that bound the Mughal Empire were fragmenting the

¹⁸⁶ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 123.

¹⁸⁷ Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 118-121.

¹⁸⁸ In this respect, the Mughal Empire shared many of the same characteristics of the English 'fiscal-military state' described by John Brewer. For more on this see the introduction to *An Imperial State at War* edited by Lawrence Stone (London: Routledge, 1994): 17-19 and Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars*, 35-36, 51.

subcontinent. Bengal, highly prized by the Mughals because of its important role in imperial trade, was one of the first to begin to centrifugally spin away from the centralized empire.¹⁸⁹ By 1690, the English East India Company had established a trading factory in the delta of the Ganges and was becoming an important component to the Bengali economy. Although it was governed by Mughals, this soon changed and by the mid eighteenth century, Bengal had become not just the richest part of India, but also a region where the princes had successfully asserted themselves and their power as successor states. These rulers were left increasingly on their own to defend their region against other successor states or warrior-tribes like the Rohillas or Marathas, as well as extract the revenues they required to make the state function and pay tribute to the Mughal emperor. Political stability was important and Bengal, like other regions of India, derived its strength and the robust versatility of its economy from its rural and agrarian features. Because of this, economic instability and failure had consequences for the south-east Asian political structure and damaged not just the livelihood of everyone around working in it, but also the effectiveness of administrative officials, including the *Nawab* himself. Problems most often manifested themselves in crop scarcity and when merchants were no longer able to make precise predictions on deliverable goods it disrupted the complex Indian futures market.¹⁹⁰ Merchants, Hindu bankers, artisans and others were all

¹⁸⁹ This process was accelerated by Alivardi Khan in 1740. This Governor of Bengal used patronage to secure loyalty to himself rather than the Mughal Emperor and by the end of his reign, Bengal was virtually autonomous. See Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 48.

¹⁹⁰ K.N. Chaudhuri. *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 86. In this masterful and extensive volume on Asian economies before their integration into European mercantilist networks, Chaudhuri explains how up to one fifth of rural production was appropriated by the centralized military-bureaucratic empires of Asia and how the economies of these regions (including India) were governed by active processes of exchange.

subordinate to the economic forces within the Indian subcontinent's economy and very soon the European merchant companies were entrapped by these same economic forces as well.¹⁹¹ What made the European merchant companies increasingly important after they had entrenched themselves along India's coasts, was their technological superiority on the high seas. Superior naval security, navigation and ship size was something these European trading companies very quickly used to their advantage to become vital agents to the subcontinent's maritime trading network.¹⁹²

The local level of the Indian economy in the eighteenth century was quite similar to that of other economies throughout the world.¹⁹³ It was agrarian based, with Indians growing a diversity of crops and commodities. The majority of people had very little material wealth and worked the soil to feed themselves and their dependants. The link in the chain that connected the economy of India was the 'composite intermediary social class'¹⁹⁴ between the farmer, artisan and the *Nawab* called the *Zamindars*. They were the pillar upon which the Indian economic structure was built and they formed one of the key elements of infrastructure that helped lead to the Company's rise in power before and after the Battle of Plassey.

Zamindars were the backbone of the revenue generating system in Bengal and eastern India. The term *Zamindar* or *Zamindari*, was an office that could be sold, inherited, or purchased, and their principal job was to collect revenues in the form of

¹⁹¹ D.K. Fieldhouse. *The Colonial Empires: A Comparative Survey from the Eighteenth Century* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966): 150-152.

¹⁹² Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 239.

¹⁹³ Habib Irfan. 'Systems of Agricultural Production.' *Cambridge Economic History of India Volume I c.1200-c.1750* edited by Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 214.

¹⁹⁴ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 192.

taxes from the *Ryots* (peasants) and hand these over to the *Nawab* after changing a nominal fee. Because of the influence this group had on the revenue generating structure was so great, without the *Zamindars* performing their duty adequately, the entire economic system could be thrown into disorder. Therefore, there were varying degrees of power of *Zamindars* throughout the region, but all were important.¹⁹⁵ At their most powerful, an influential *Zamindar* had a considerable degree of autonomous authority at his disposal, and could, in time of emergency or rebellion, muster military or paramilitary forces to bring wayward peasants or lesser *Zamindari* into line.¹⁹⁶ Technically, the *Zamindar* answered to the Mughal nobility, but when the central power of the Mughal empire broke down after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707, the subsequent crisis of succession allowed groups such as the Sikhs, north of Delhi and the Marathas south of it, to assert their independence and rebel. With this, even in places that did not overtly revolt, the *Zamindar* classes also began to assert their autonomy and accelerate the development of the successor-state regimes. In extreme cases this would lead to minor rebellions, but would also create considerable opportunities for rival Indian factions, including the East India Company.¹⁹⁷

Working as subordinates with the *Zamindars* were the various professionals who had developed an expertise in the management of the wealth moving into (from Europe in the form of bullion), out of (via European trading companies), and within India (via the Mughal trading system). These groups used the management of Indian commerce to

¹⁹⁵ Bayly, *Indian Society*, 28.

¹⁹⁶ Richards, *The Mughal Empire*, 80.

¹⁹⁷ For a more detailed understanding of the power successor-state regimes could have, see J. S. Grewal. *The Sikhs of the Punjab* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 99. The Sikhs were arguably the most powerful of these regimes, withstanding British interloping until the middle nineteenth century.

facilitate the rise of merchant trading and banking clans and bring themselves to a prominence that worried both the Mughals and their partners the European trading companies. This was facilitated by a number of effects, the most prominent being the use of silver and other wealth from Europe. This new currency was used to increase the traffic between Europe's merchant companies, their factories, and the inland trading culture controlled by the *Zamindars* due to their taxing powers. This galvanised the connection between the economy of Europe and that of Mughal India, as well as solidified the power of successor-states as independent revenue generating powers by encouraging diversity in the weight, shape and appearance of coins that were accepted in trade.¹⁹⁸ As this new trading environment took hold, Indian revenue systems firmly attached themselves to a growing demand for European manufactured goods, and Europe and India became deeply integrated into each other's economies.¹⁹⁹

The East India Company in the years before 1757

The success of the East India Company was the result of a number of different factors. As discussed, these included an emerging global consciousness in the British mind, success in ventures of mercantilism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and a need to compete with other European states in the grand quest for global and colonial dominance.²⁰⁰ Upon its inception in 1600, the Company was given a monopoly for trade with Asia through Royal Charter. For much of its early existence, the

¹⁹⁸ Kumkum Chatterjee, 'Collaboration and conflict: Bankers and early colonial rule in India: 1757-1813,' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 30, no 3 (1993): 287.

¹⁹⁹ These goods did not necessarily come from Europe but were carried by European ships from other ports in Asia such as Canton and the Spice Islands of present day Indonesia. See Lawson, *East India Company*, 70-71.

²⁰⁰ Niall Ferguson. *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British Empire and its Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002): 24-26.

Company's charter was accepted as the best way to maintain a steady flow of goods from Asia and keep English stockholders content with their investment. When civil war broke out in England between 1642 and 1649, the Company was forced to choose between siding with the King or Parliament. But perhaps even worse for those associated with the Company, this civil war was very bad for business. Philip Lawson writes:

Civil war was not conducive to ordered commercial development; capital sharing suffered; food supplies to London were precarious; merchant ships were commandeered for the naval war, and most serious of all, the Company's investors and high officials split into factions of Royal and Parliamentary supporters.²⁰¹

The years of the English Civil War were difficult for all involved with the English East India Company. Being a monopoly company with a Royal Charter, it was immediately susceptible to divisions within the Company itself and attacks from outside as well. Soon internal factions developed in the Company, and when the Parliamentarians gained the upper hand in the larger war, so did the parliamentary faction within the Company. But soon what became most alarming for all stockholders, was that after the war, it looked like the Company's monopoly on eastern trade was going to be eliminated. The reason for this was that it had become smart strategy to promise rights of eastern trade in exchange for loyalty and both the parliamentary and royalists factions had done this liberally.²⁰²

But the most important question and controversy the Civil War raised about the East India Company was about the constitutionality legitimacy of the entire organization. As a republican nation no longer with a crown, the East India Company's Crown Charter had lost its legitimacy and in an era when the symbolism of the state and its instruments of power were crucial, the very existence of the Company came into question. By the end

²⁰¹ Lawson, *East India Company*, 38.

²⁰² Lawson, *East India Company*, 38.

of the Civil War and the victory of the Parliamentarians, the legitimacy of the Company was buoyed by the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell himself. Cromwell renewed its 'Royal' Charter because of the dire financial state of the Company and a massive decrease in English trade to the east.²⁰³ This also underlined the growing importance that mercantile organizations like the East India Company were beginning to have on the economic power of the domestic English state. By the mid seventeenth century India was already an important dimension to the European economy and European political ambitions. Imports of commodities such as pepper, for example were being brought to Europe by the Dutch and English. In 1621 the figure was put at 7 million pounds of pepper for the Dutch and 1.4 million for the English. Indian textiles also became very important to the English market after cotton was discovered to have superior qualities compared to heavier English materials like wool.²⁰⁴ In 1664 the English East India Company imported 750,000 pieces of linen and cotton material which accounted for seventy three percent of the entire Indian trade.²⁰⁵ Munitions also became dependent on the Indian trade as well. Saltpetre, used in artillery munitions, was much easier to transport by sea, and as the important economic historian of India, K.N. Chaudhuri has remarked, 'there is no doubt at all that Dutch and English demand for Indian saltpetre was closely connected with national, political and military considerations.'²⁰⁶

With Cromwell onside, and the importance of the Company to England's strategic interests obvious, it was given a *carte blanche* to carry out aggressive policies *vis-à-vis*

²⁰³ Lawson, *East India Company*, 40.

²⁰⁴ K.N. Chaudhuri, 'European Trade with India.' *Cambridge Economic History of India Volume I* edited by Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 403.

²⁰⁵ Chaudhuri, *Cambridge Economic History*, 403.

²⁰⁶ Chaudhuri, *Cambridge Economic History*, 403.

other European merchant companies. After the English experiment with republicanism failed and Charles II was returned to the throne in 1660, fiscal-militarism started to develop within the Company, and by extension, the Indian economy became an integral part of it.²⁰⁷ C.A. Bayly argues this was done principally by two means. The first was the ideological concept of sovereignty which the British brought with them to India, and the second was their ethos of 'administrative accountancy' which they initiated once they had arrived.²⁰⁸

English, and later British, notions of sovereignty as the foundation of political power were very different from those in Mughal India. In Britain power originated from the Crown, but as the seventeenth century revealed more and more, a monarch was only on the throne with the consent of the Lords and Commons. Bayly argues that there were similar events in the Company interactions with the Mughal Empire during the years in which the Company established itself along the Indian coast before it eventually became a political power on the subcontinent. When the English first arrived to trade, they carried with them very clear ideas about where they envisioned themselves on the political and economic landscape of Mughal Indian affairs, namely that they were exempt. This feeling of difference was solidified in 1717 when the East India Company secured a charter from the Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar which granted it rights to trade free of all dues in exchange for an annual payment and rent for additional lands throughout eastern India.²⁰⁹ This was granted by the Mughal Emperor under the same auspices and conditions that he

²⁰⁷ C.A. Bayly, 'The British Military-Fiscal State and Indigenous Resistance: India 1750-1820' in *An Imperial State at War* edited by Lawrence Stone (London: Routledge, 1994): 322.

²⁰⁸ Bayly, *British Military-Fiscal State*, 322.

²⁰⁹ Bayly, *British-Fiscal Military State*, 329.

made with other components of his empire, in the spirit of entrepreneurships in political power or a non-permanent basis. The British, however, interpreted this charter as a binding and long standing agreement in the same way they did in other constitutional documents. This Charter was to have the same permanency in British minds as Magna Carta or the Bill of Rights and became part of an Indian Constitution.²¹⁰ Therefore, they would use the 1717 Mughal Charter to assert the sovereignty of the Company in India and immediately set out doing things that only sovereign powers had the right to do, such as minting coins with non-Mughal images, or pursuing a policy of trade and commerce without consulting Mughal authorities. The British notion of sovereignty was an absolute concept and although this was not consistent with the notion of sovereignty of the Mughal empire, between 1717 and 1757 the British would use their ideas of political permanency to establish themselves on the Indian subcontinent.²¹¹

Administrative accountancy was the fiscal connection that tied the East India Company to the Mughal empire. This was accomplished primarily through an internalised revenue stream in which the Company became more and more important as it involved itself deeper and deeper in the Indian economy, and was used by other European powers to bridge Asia to Europe. Bayly writes:

Viewed from the Accountant General's office in Calcutta, commercial operations, military subsidies and revenue operations were all one. The Company had to pay its troops and also purchase the annual investment in Indian cloth for the home market. Profitable sales would allow the Company to pay the annual dividend fixed by Parliament and so keep the prying eyes of ministers out of its increasingly embarrassed affairs. The complex of official Company activity fronted a machine of private venality, with which it was deeply entangled.²¹²

²¹⁰ Bayly, *British-Fiscal Military State*, 330.

²¹¹ Sushil Chaudhury, 'Merchants, Companies and Rulers: Bengal in the Eighteenth Century,' *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 31, no. 1 (1988): 75-87

²¹² Bayly, *British-Fiscal Military State*, 340.

For the sake of appearances, the Company maintained that the legal sovereignty of Bengal and other British Indian possessions after 1757 were Mughal. But as the governance and political structures of the subcontinent changed, after Plassey, the British became more involved in the internal workings of India. As this happened it became increasingly tempting for aggressive leaders such as Governor-General Richard Wellesley to acquire domains and extend British dominion at the expense of the Mughal Emperor.

Technically, the legal sovereignty of these territories and princely kingdoms was Mughal, but this technicality was observed to obfuscate the indignation of Britain's European rivals. The real benefits of achieving control of India were: its land rents, exclusive privileges, fines and forfeits, and most importantly, the fiscal-military structure of British India were decisively British. The appetite of Anglo-Indian fiscal-militarism took the Company further up the Ganges River and became as important to the construction of British India as an understanding on Indian language, culture, religion, and geography.²¹³

With the overt expansion of the East India Company into Indian political affairs, the governance of these new territories immediately became a priority in India and a subject of concern in Parliament. Prior to this, the General Court of the East India Company was its supreme and ultimate governing body.²¹⁴ In this forum, issues were debated or discussed and proposals were submitted to the government of the day to be acted upon. After the Battle of Plassey, things changed measurably and this manifested itself in investor activity. It has been noted by one historian of Indian revenue that:

Not only did the total number of stockholdings rise from 2160 in 1748 to 2826 in 1773, but the

²¹³ Bowen, *Revenue and reform*, 9

²¹⁴ Lawson, *East India Company*, 18-23. Here Lawson explains how the Company was built and how its governance functioned.

proportion of proprietors owning the minimum voting qualification of 500 pounds sterling stock rose from 31 percent to 48 percent of the total during the same period. That more proprietors were utilizing their stock purchases in order to participate in Company politics is beyond doubt: there was a four-fold increase in the number of voters at the annual election between 1758 and 1773.²¹⁵

After the military victory in Bengal, questions along with a general interest in India affairs started to grow exponentially. Initially, those politicians responsible for East Indian affairs in the 1780s wanted to find a middle ground and hoped to create a new British Indian situation where the Crown had a privileged place in Indian governance and was thereby legally entitled to revenues generated there. This would allow the Company to remain the representative of the Crown and thus leave it on its own. Attempts at this failed due to a number of reasons, but the main point of contention was the issue of rights: those of a chartered company versus the rights of Parliament to make important decisions over Indian policy.²¹⁶ This new debate was able to convince many previously disinterested Members of Parliament to question the nature of the Company's new possessions and bring new scrutiny over Indian revenues, the Indian empire and the influence of these Asiatic possessions were having on the British Parliament itself.²¹⁷

Chapter three examined concepts of state and governance, imperial stability, and imperial structures in Mughal India. From our exploration of these topics, the conclusion can be drawn that the growth of the British Empire in India was fostered by the interactive processes of Mughal states with that of British and East India Company fiscal-

²¹⁵ Bowen, *Revenue and reform*, 42.

²¹⁶ Lawson, *East India Company*, 107.

²¹⁷ Dame Lucy Sutherland argues, that the impact of the Company on domestic parliamentary affairs became swift and sudden starting in 1766. This was largely because most parliamentarians, with the exception of those who had detailed knowledge of affairs in India, thought that the acquisition of the *Diwani* would mean instantaneous wealth. Clive contributed to this when he estimated generous profits (£2,000,000 a year) in his correspondence to Great Britain. See Lucy S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962): 138-140.

militarism. While domestic developments in Britain precipitated a burgeoning of the fiscal-military state, events in India, and specifically Bengal, accelerated the diminution of the moribund Mughal Empire, and the simultaneous rise of the Company. Therefore, British growth in India was fostered by two key processes: one in Britain and another in the political and economic infrastructure of India's Mughal Empire. Mughal Indian systems of revenue generation were very important in the period before the Battle of Plassey, but it was the British acquisition of a Mughal *Diwani* for Bengal that generated ambitions for a British empire in India. Soon after 1757, the Company's role in Indian affairs changed drastically and this change in the economic and political environment encouraged the Company's growth up the Ganges River, until it eventually arrived in Delhi itself. Both British and Mughal Indian societies contained imperial ideologies that manifested themselves in the economic, political and sovereign ideas of their respective geographies. To fully understand the relationship between British and India imperial ideologies, it is necessary to examine the perspectives of certain leaders of British India after the convergence of the British and Indian empires and consider how they incorporated Bengal/India into a global network of interests. By examining these opinions and actions, many of which were at times contentious and contradictory, we will see how British India maintained its power and imperial Indian fiscal military resources and why this process took them into northern India, across the Hindu Kush, and into the Great Game in Central Asia.

Chapter V: British India, Three Crises and Expansion

It did not take the East India Company long to realise that trade and power were intimately connected concepts in India. The Battle of Plassey may have been small in terms of the actual soldiers and armaments involved, but its ramifications on Indian governance and British imperial fortunes made it Britain's most important victory in the Seven Years War.²¹⁸ Plassey was also a turning point for the English East India Company and inadvertently created a Mughal Prince out of the Englishman Robert Clive. Furthermore, this victory necessitated a number of changes in the way the Company did business in Bengal. By acquiring the *Diwani*, the personal tribute from the Nawab of Bengal to the Mughal Emperor, Clive and the Company acquired an important tool of revenue extraction in the region. Moreover, they became true subalterns of the Mughal Emperor and became responsible for the Mughal administration for this portion of India, albeit with a private hope to one day to see all of India 'directly under the British Crown.'²¹⁹ One must qualify this statement, because by this time, the trading system of Bengal was embedded within the Company's trading expertise and infrastructure which allowed the Company to continue to go about its business facilitating trade between Canton, Bengal and Europe regardless of its political status.²²⁰ By the late 1750s, the Company had become one of the most important participants in the East Indian trade and all involved (Indian or European alike) were in some way connected to the Company's

²¹⁸ The Battle of Plassey involved three thousand troops on the British side, only half of whom were actually British. See David Eggenberger. *A Dictionary of Battles* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1967): 336. See also Lawson, *East India Company*, 89-90.

²¹⁹ Lawson, Philip and Lenman, Bruce. 'Robert Clive, The "Black Jagir," and British Politics,' *The Historical Journal*, 26, no 4 (1983): 809.

²²⁰ Bowen, *Revenue and reform*, 17.

networks. This had an enormous effect on the rest of the Indian subcontinent, but especially its rich province of Bengal. With the acquisition of the *Diwani*, the British trading company took one more step into Indian trade and the most lucrative and seductive aspect of it: revenue extraction through taxation. Revenues generated by taxes and other forms of government wealth is one of the most important actions associated with the governance of any country or state and this was no different in the Mughal Empire.²²¹ Wealth generated from these revenues were important because they allowed a very complicated and stratified society to function in an orderly fashion and this important quality was not lost on the Britons who had acquired it.²²² Ironically, it was about this time that the wealth generating capacities of the company itself were diminishing and the Company entered a period of prolonged decline. Control of the *Diwani* came at just the right time for the Company. It altered the Company's existence in India and forced Indians to pay for their own governance by contributing to the expensive costs of maintaining the Company's military in Bengal. Taxes, state-building, and governance increasingly connected the Company's power to British statesmen and Company officials understood from experience at home that fiscal-military state building required the growth of a military force and the internal consolidation of an economic machine.²²³

Between 1757 and 1805 the establishment of British India was made official.

While these processes were taking place, it is arguable that the British were also laying

²²¹ Michael Mann. *The Sources of Social Power: A History of Power Volume I: From the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 363.

²²² Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, 135. Marshall refers to this as 'political safety' and views it as a common element between both Indian and British rulers of Bengal.

²²³ John Brewer, *Sinews of Power*, 173-175.

the intellectual foundation of the Great Game in Central Asia. During these crucial decades, Orientalist understandings of Indian law, society, and religion became inseparable from the political and economic realities of post-Plassey Bengal. These conceptions of 'British India' were necessarily integrated by English politicians, polemicists, and philosophers into the larger constitutional questions and parliamentary debates that were raging in late eighteenth century Hanoverian Britain. To offer further reflection on these imperial and intellectual conceptions of a consolidated British Indian state, it is perhaps best to consider the tenure of Governor-General, the Marquis Wellesley. Wellesley was arguably the man who was not only responsible for the expansion of the British Indian empire to the northern reaches of India, but also the first Governor-General of India with an obvious agenda for further institutionalised political and military control over the subcontinent.

By 1798, India had assumed a prominent place in the political struggle of British imperialism and had transformed itself into a land-based entity which used the Company's force of Sepoys and European troops to offset the impressive might of *Levée en masse* which revolutionary and Napoleonic France had mastered.²²⁴ With the arrival of Wellesley as the Governor General of India in 1798, the defeat of the Tipu Sultan in 1799 and the final loss of independence for the Maratha Confederacy in 1818, Britain turned from being a European state to a truly global imperial power. Ingram writes, 'As soon as Great Britain ceased to be a peripheral state in Europe and turned into a continental state in Asia, she needed an army instead of a navy. She could not be defeated at sea which

²²⁴ Colley, *Britons*, 187.

turned the Indian Army rather than the Royal Navy into the most effective instrument of British power.²²⁵

The challenge of protecting borders and subordinate states was not the only challenge the Company faced in India in the latter eighteenth century. The Battle of Plassey brought about an increased awareness of Indian affairs to the British Parliament and provoked turbulent and acrimonious debate about the Company's status in India.²²⁶ The Anglo-Irish politician, Edmund Burke was one of the most articulate and vocal opposition Members of Parliament who questioned the imperial presence in India and argued for changes in how Indian affairs were run. After Robert Clive became the first 'British Nawab' of Bengal, the entire character of the East Indian Company's role in India changed. This was felt everywhere, including inside the walls of the Palace of Westminster. The Company, an important economic force in the workings of the Bengali economy for over a century, had now become an important piece of the subcontinent's political picture. Plassey further caused a number of petty disputes, which were not great enough to erupt into outright war, but exemplified the Byzantine nature of internal Indian politics. These often did not only pit Indian versus Briton, but were sometimes complicated by Britons siding with Indians against other Britons. One such event occurred in Madras in the early 1770s. There, Muhammad Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic had a great many European supporters at his court and, thus, was a significant power broker in the region.²²⁷ He was, in fact, powerful enough that most Governors of the Madras

²²⁵ Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, 13.

²²⁶ Lawson and Lenman, 'Robert Clive and the "Black Jagir"', 801. See also Bowen, *Revenue and reform*, 119.

²²⁷ The Carnatic was located on south-east side of Madras along the Indian Ocean.

presidency would not resist him, the only two being Lord Pigot in 1776 and Lord McCartney between 1781 and 1785, both who ultimately suffered unfortunate fates.²²⁸

What made the story more convoluted was that in both cases, Warren Hastings, then the Second on the Council of Madras, had supported the *Nawab* against his own countrymen, albeit doing so for what he claimed were the honourable reasons of maintaining the territorial and royal integrity of the Carnatic and its leader.²²⁹ This drew fiery responses from men such as Edmund Burke and his associates in Britain and would also precipitate a debate on Indian affairs that would dominate the Company's place in Parliament for years afterwards. Warren Hastings and the events that surrounded his term in Madras and as Governor-General of India, after 1773 proved a focal point for a fundamental question on British Indian governance, embodied in an attempt to impeach him.

Parliament's attempt to impeach Hastings was long and drawn out and it raised questions that went to the very core of the emerging state of British India and challenged, at a fundamental level, Britain's role in Indian affairs. Since their victory at Plassey, the Company had come under suspicion by many Britons who were beginning to doubt the merchant company's foray into government and see it as a threat to Britain's own constitutional integrity.²³⁰ Allegations of abuse against Robert Clive had first been made

²²⁸ Lord Pigot was overthrown and Lord McCartney narrowly escaped a coup. See P.J. Marshall. *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965): 8.

²²⁹ Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 9.

²³⁰ Edmund Burke remarked about this threat that a 'body of men, united in a close connexion of common guilt...is not forming but actually formed in this country. This faction is at present ranged under Hastings as an Indian leader; and it will have very soon, if it has not already, an English leader of considerable enterprise and no contemptible influence.' See Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 23 and Edmund Burke to Henry Dundas, Beconsfield, 25 March 1787, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke* V ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 314.

in 1760. Once a hero of British militarism in India, Clive soon came under suspicion. The official response to this was the creation of a Select Committee of the House of Commons which met between the 1772 and 1773. Although the committee's resolutions were never accepted by the government, they inadvertently led to first minister Lord North passing the Regulating Act of 1773. George III expressed his support for Lord North's first India Act in a letter dated 11 June 1773 which conveyed what the Crown believed needed to be remedied in British India. The King wrote:

...a foundation for a constant inspection from Parliament into the affairs of the Company, which must require a succession of regulations every year; for new abuses will naturally come to light, which, in the end, Parliament alone can in any degree check; for the Directors, from views of self-interest, must court their servants who made rapid fortunes from the desire of remaining at the head of the Company.²³¹

The Regulating Act went to great lengths in creating a structured system of British government in the Company's domain and legislating the office of Governor-General for all of the Company's Indian possessions. It further created a Supreme (governing) Council which advised the Governor-General and created a Supreme Court that dealt with all Bengali legal matters. By creating these new offices and governing structures, the Company was now better able to enforce other elements of the Act which attempted to curb abuses by Company employees in illegal trading, private money lending and other interference with Indian society.²³² Warren Hastings was the first new Governor of Bengal and, therefore, the first Governor-General of India.²³³

But it was soon realised that the Regulating Act did not redress these grievances in India and could not diminish domestic misgivings about the East India Company.

²³¹ George III to Lord North, Kew, 11 June 1773, in *Correspondence of King George the Third with Lord North from 1768 to 1783*, ed Bodham Donne (London: John Murray, 1867): 141.

²³² Bowen, *Revenue and reform*, 194.

²³³ Lawson, *East India Company*, 113,

Since 1760 there was a growing perception that Indian-Britons or 'Nabobs' were having a negative effect on domestic British politics. Nabob was a title, adapted from the Indian office of *Nawab*, that was pejoratively directed at those who, upon their return to Britain, sought election as Members of Parliament. Their involvement in British politics proliferated after 1763 as did their power, influence, and involvement in public life. The emergence of Nabobs proved divisive in the factious Parliaments of the 1760s and 1770s, because contemporary's perceived that they challenged directly those, who for so long, claimed to protect the English Constitution, namely the aristocracy and propertied elites. As a result, the Nabob was seen as a parasitic interloper who had little appreciation of the Constitution and was there for improving his status in Hanoverian Britain.²³⁴ Because the English Constitution was ambiguous at times, it was not something that could be simply studied and most eighteenth century experts, such as Edmund Burke, agreed it required an understanding that could only be supplied by the collective wisdom of previous generations. Because of this acceptance by the elite - that they would govern because they always had governed - these men became fearful when new wealth continued to buy its way into Parliament.²³⁵ For example, in the General Election of 1754 only two East India Company directors were returned to Parliament. But this number did not remain low. The 1761 General Election saw three directors elected but three Nabobs as well. Because of this Parliament started to examine East Indian affairs with greater frequency. The 1768 election returned to Parliament many more men with a vested interest in the East India

²³⁴ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti.'" Perceptions of Nabobs in Eighteenth Century Britain' *Albion* 16, no 3 (1984): 231-232.

²³⁵ Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke. *A History of Parliament: The House of Commons, Volume I* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964): 152.

Company and the numbers proliferated from that point forward.²³⁶

The feeling of resentment the Nabobs stirred upon their return to Britain and subsequent election to office, came from the more established and powerful parliamentarians. They feared, above all else, the pretensions of these self-made men from India and the influence of their plundered wealth. To them, a seat in Parliament was a form of property and a position of sacred trust to be used in the spirit of a centuries old English Constitution.²³⁷ It was an outward sign of worldly success, but it was also much more than that. Although a seat in the House of Commons offered the trappings, prestige and social standing that British society could afford, the real reason they were there was an obligation to serve the county, borough, burgh, or town and the state.²³⁸ The Nabobs, on the other hand, may have embraced the noble and material side of Parliament but these were not the only reasons they coveted seat. There were also practical motives for becoming a Member of Parliament. With a seat in such an important place, they joined an elite group and were governed by the rules of those who sat with them.²³⁹ No matter that allegations of mismanagement and corruption were levelled against the Company, sitting in the House of Commons was best way to protect oneself from damning allegations and steer the agenda of Parliament away from deeper inquires into the Company or the individuals who profited by it.²⁴⁰

²³⁶ The numbers were as follows: Between 1774-1780 there were twenty-six Nabobs. Between 1780-1784 thirty-one Nabobs and between 1784-1790 there were forty-five Nabobs. This can be found in a graph in: Namier and Brooke, *The History of Parliament, Volume I*, 152.

²³⁷ Colley, *Britons*, 50.

²³⁸ Colley, *Britons*, 50-51. Colley refers to this as the 'Cult of Parliament.'

²³⁹ Namier and Brooke, *The History of Parliament, Volume I*, 153. See also Lucy S. Sutherland, *The East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, 57-58.

²⁴⁰ Namier and Brooke, *The History of Parliament, Volume I*, 150.

By the 1780s, the House of Commons and the British polity were severely tested by three significant crises. The first crisis proved protracted and took two decades to resolve. Warren Hastings had been the Governor-General of British India and Governor of Bengal between 1772 and 1785, and by the end of his term, had come under attack for his perceived preference of 'frantic military exploits' over the 'improvement of the trade and commerce of the Country.'²⁴¹ These political attacks, much more aggressive than ones endured by others Nabobs in Britain, would ultimately lead to his impeachment by the House of Commons but not the House of Lords in the late 1780s. The second crisis was the American revolutionary war and the eventual defeat of British rule in the thirteen North American colonies at the Treaty of Paris in July of 1783. This, and the flurry of post war activity tested the ability of the Shelburne Ministry to maintain the confidence of the House of Commons while creating, a (relatively) lasting peace with the United States of America.²⁴² Later in that same year came the third crisis, a change in government which brought to power the coalition of Lord North and Charles James Fox and nearly forced the Constitution into another destructive power struggle between the King and his Parliament.

The attempted impeachment of Warren Hastings was more than just the indictment of a high ranking civil servant. It was an inquisition into the very nature of the East India Company's governance of India and the political activity of the Nabobs and other Company employees. One of the most vociferous opponents of Nabob power in

²⁴¹ John Cannon. *The Fox-North Coalition: Crisis of the Constitution, 1782-4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969): 11.

²⁴² John Cannon, *The Fox-North Coalition*, 59-64.

Britain was Edmund Burke.²⁴³

Edmund Burke was one of the most articulate, forceful and persistent antagonists of Hastings, and fortunately, he has left volumes of correspondences and writings, many of which prominently feature Nabobs and the governance of India. For Burke, the debate over India was framed around theoretical and practical concerns for British India, the British Constitution and what actual impact the Company was having on Indian society. This debate was hotly contested and focussed on the tension between new wealth and established power, and went to the very nature of government and political power throughout Britain and its empire. Between 1773 and 1780, Burke's brilliant oratory skill combined with his steadfast belief that Hastings had violated both 'the laws of that country, [and] the common laws of Nature' led him to become a leading voice among those seeking to impeach the Governor-General.²⁴⁴ By the 1780s he had convinced many, especially himself, that the Company was also a threat to the British Constitution. Anglo-Indians with their Asian wealth, were upsetting the traditional balance between English and British property and power. These usurpers, Burke believed, were dangerous because they sat as Members of Parliament not for the maintenance and betterment of the British

²⁴³ As the number of Nabobs increased, many in the British gentry class began to see them also as the carriers of the torch of Oriental despotism. What is ironic is that often a Nabob was connected to the gentry class. The *avatar* of this type of Briton, one who used the machine of the East India Company for personal gain, was Robert Clive himself. Clive's father was a small property owner in southern England and was sent away to be a writer for the Company in 1743. Clive returned to Britain not only a national hero, but also with £300,000 to his name; an astronomical sum in that day. See Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754-1790, Volume II* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1964): 225. Hector Monroe was another Nabob who sought a seat in Parliament upon his return from India. In late 1766 Monroe declared his candidacy for a seat from the Inverness Burghs. He remained in office in the burgh for thirty years afterwards. See Namier and Brooke, *The History of Parliament, Volume I*, 508.

²⁴⁴ Frederick G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India: Political Morality and Empire* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996): 152. See also Neil Sen 'Warren Hastings and British Sovereign Authority in Bengal, 1774-80' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 25, no 1 (1997): 66-67.

state, but for their own self aggrandisement and to launder their plundered wealth.

The Hastings impeachment crisis was fuelled by the turbulent situation throughout India and the ambiguous position the British state there, took in larger questions of the political situation of India in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. In the 1770s, Madras and Fort St. George were weak and on the brink of collapse, because of their distance from the Company's stronghold in Bengal.²⁴⁵ The Carnatic, a kingdom adjacent to Madras was in the midst of civil war. A region of its southern portion, the Kingdom of Tanjore, was seeking its independence and to this end was building alliances with other powers it could rely on for assistance. Tanjore was ruled by a Hindu dynasty that wanted full autonomy except for an annual tribute, which had been fixed with the Carnatic in 1762. By 1773, the East India Company and its army had been used in alliance with the Nawab of Carnatic and one of its duties was to help re-annex the rebellious Tanjore to its former master. What made this conflict even more precarious was the fact that responses in both London and Calcutta were mixed.²⁴⁶ In London, those in favour of reinstating the Raja of Tanjore won the day and resulted in Lord Pigot being reappointed Governor of Madras with orders to see this was the outcome. This overtly self-serving political move was not surprisingly met with resistance by the Nawab of Carnatic. In April of 1776 the Raja was restored, but only months later he was disposed by his Council and kept under house arrest until his death by natural causes in May 1777.²⁴⁷

The affair between the Company, the Raja of Tanjore and the Nawab of the Carnatic offers an example of how British Indian affairs were convoluted, but also how

²⁴⁵ Sutherland, *East India Company in Eighteenth Century Politics*, 45.

²⁴⁶ Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 10

²⁴⁷ Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 8.

the Regulating Act of 1773 was failing. When news of this event came to the public's attention in both Britain and the rest of British controlled India, Calcutta reacted swiftly by declaring that the Council was the lawful government of Madras and that they had acted justly towards the Raja. But to Warren Hastings, the Governor-General, the damage had already been done and his name was sullied by the entire affair. His enemies rallied against him and this event came to represent more than a political conflict between the Raja of Tanjore and the Nawab of Carnatic. It further served as an example of the consequences of interference and involvement in the subcontinent's political affairs.

Edmund Burke noted why Warren Hastings and the Company in 1774 had been wrong with the Nawab:

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the East India Company have come to a Resolution of Seizing upon, and delivering over to the discretion of their Servants at Madras, the Revenues of the King of Tanjour an Ally of the Company, and therefore of the Crown and Nation of Great Britain, in direct violation of a solemn treaty by which the Company has engaged that none of their Servants shall intermeddle in the internal Government of that Prince.²⁴⁸

According to Burke, when the Company broke an alliance with an Indian prince, so did the Crown and Great Britain itself. But Hastings thought the best interests for the Company in India was for Tanjore to be part of a friendly Carnatic that could keep the nearby French forces in Pondicherry at bay. To Burke it was a matter of principle and honour; to Hastings a matter of pragmatism.

Later, when the Company went to war against Mysore, ruled by the shrewd Haidar Ali, the Company's force started to lose and scapegoats were needed. One of those offered up was Thomas Rumbold, Governor of Madras, but so too was Warren Hastings.

²⁴⁸ Edmund Burke to Philip Francis, Beconsfield, 24 December 1778, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke IV* ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 32.

Many including Philip Francis, a capable Indian bureaucrat and a member of the Governor-General's council, called for Hastings to be impeached.²⁴⁹

The second imperial and constitutional crises was the American Revolutionary War and the ramifications this had for Britain's Indian Empire. This fratricidal conflict not only tore at the fabric of the British Empire, but also deeply divided Parliament and pitted many of the great political minds of Hanoverian Britain against each other. The catalyst for this division were the major victories of the Seven Years War. Whereas the Battle of Plassey was the defining movement of the war in eastern Asia, the Battle of Québec was the defining moment of the war in North America.²⁵⁰ Its ramifications were many, and although beyond the scope of this work, deserve some mention.²⁵¹ One of these ramifications was the Boston Tea Party, itself a response by the American colonists to the Tea Act, which directly tied the two wings of the British Empire.²⁵² In losing the American colonies and eventually acknowledging the United States of America as an

²⁴⁹ Philip Francis was a good friend of Edmund Burke and the correspondence between the two was extremely important in 'informing' Burke as to the activities of Indian between 1773 and 1784, which, in turn, extremely important to forcing his opinions on how India should be run by the British. Francis would eventually become one of the leaders of those who led the charges against the former Governor-General Hastings but it is perhaps not surprising that Philip Francis' time in the employ of the East India Company was itself riddled with contradiction and profiteering. See T.H. Bowyer, 'India and the Personal Finances of Philip Francis' *English Historical Review* 110, no. 3 (1995): 121-128. The Regulation Acts of 1773 were intended to curb the freedom of movement in the underground Anglo-Indian economy but, on the whole, failed at this. Philip Francis, Bowyer argues, was one of the many Britons in India that continued to make money through illicit Indian trade, manipulation of Indian markets and plain old gambling with his colleagues and fellow Britons in India. Bowyer does this convincingly by using the personal financial records of Francis. What is equally interesting is that when Francis himself returned to England and allied with Burke against Hastings his own reputation was lacking.

²⁵⁰ Fred Anderson. *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in North America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000): 363.

²⁵¹ Philip Lawson. *Imperial Challenge: Quebec and Britain in the Age of the American Revolution* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989): 127.

²⁵² Another more visible example was that the flag of the East India Company and the Continental Colours of the American colonies were identical. See Alfred Znamierowski. *The World Encyclopaedia of Flags* (London: Hermes House, 2001): 113.

independent state, Britain's empire changed irrevocably. It could no longer be a mercantilist one and now had to refocus itself as a trading rather than colonizing empire. The centre of this new empire would be India.²⁵³

The third crisis of the late eighteenth century British Empire was the constitutional dilemma that surrounded the collapse of the Fox-North coalition between 1782 and 1784. The coalition governed intermittently during the period between 1782-1784, but this was briefly interrupted by Lord Shelburne. In order to stay in power again, North forged an unlikely alliance with Charles Fox, North's great adversary and leader of the third largest Whig faction in the House of Commons. Moreover, Fox was someone not liked by King George III. The feeling was mutual, as Fox was inflexible in his Whiggish views on parliamentary reform. The coalition's ministry did not last long, and the ministry came to crisis when George III played a partisan role in encouraging the Opposition, led by William Pitt the Younger, to defeat his Government in Parliament and thereby lose his confidence. The legislation presented for such a show-down was the East India Bill, North and Fox wished to push through Parliament. This bill passed in the Commons but failed to carry in Lords and after a dissolution of Parliament and General Election, Pitt came to power. His famous India Act of 1784, established the political direction of the East India Company in the hands of a Board of Control and its powerful office of President.²⁵⁴

The Orientalist's Ideal in India

²⁵³ Michael Fry. *The Dundas Despotism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992): 128. See also P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America - A Second Empire?' *Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume II: The Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 577 and P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empire: Britain, India and America 1750-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005): 230

²⁵⁴ Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 30-31.

With their Empire seemingly in tatters and with India appearing to be in the midst of scandal, corruption and mismanagement, both the East India Company and the government in Britain immediately set out to remedy this situation. India was far too important by now to let fall into the hands of imperial rivals such as France or Russia. Not only was it a source of important revenue, it also served as an important strategic reserve for the British military. In 1784, the results of Pitt's India Act were largely successful and encouraged an acceptance of India amongst the British political elite. Britons set about learning Indian society and its ways because it, unlike any colonial venture before, was a place which they needed to be controlled by knowledge. This would be a very difficult process as Edmund Burke himself admitted, in a letter dated 3 October 1780 to Lords Hillsborough and Stormont. In it he also made it clear what he blamed for the problematic situation in India:

I therefore hope, that as the Ministers, like myself and most others, seemd (sic) to be strongly impressed with the Idea of the misconduct of the English Subjects in India towards the Natives, and of their disobedience to Lawful authority, we might all proceed with unanimity in vindicating the honour of the Nation, by an Enquiry into the abuses which prevail in that part of the world, and in such Steps as are necessary towards a reformation. This, if any thing in the world can be, is both the duty and the Interest of Government.²⁵⁵

'Lawful authority' and 'honour of the nation' were very strong phrases and represented in Burke's mind something that was not being done in India. Abuse and mistreatment of the Indian population at the hands of a British Company was, and this was characteristic of the Whig ideology of the late eighteenth century, anathematic to the English Constitution.²⁵⁶ Therefore, despotism in a British controlled territory was possible but

²⁵⁵ Edmund Burke to Lord Hillsborough and Lord Stormont, Charles Street, St. James Square, 3 October 1780, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke IV*, ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 308.

²⁵⁶ P.J. Marshall. 'Empire and Authority in the Later Eighteenth Century' *Journal of Imperial and*

represented a severe and unspeakable lapse by those who should not only have known better, but had a moral obligation to act and fix the problem. Burke would make his feelings about the pretensions of subordinate officials *vis-à-vis* the royalty of Europe and India known, in letter to Philip Francis on 2 December of 1780:

When and where, my dear Sir, did you find me the advocate for any tyranny either ancient or modern, either at home or abroad? When did you find me totally unmoved at the distress of hundreds and thousands of my equals, and only touched with the sufferings of guilty greatness? I find this distinction either in my sympathies, nor in my morals; and under favour, in addressing yourself to me, you might have spared that observation... I have heard, that Mr. Hasting's Advocates have endeavoured to palliate the rigour of his government by an attempt to prove, that the Moorish dominion was productive of many more and worse instances of inhumanity and perfidy than the English. I never could prevail on myself to enter with him into this parallel of Crimes. I did not think it any apology for his government, that some of the preceding might have been more wicked. I feel myself much more disposed to sentiments of resentment and indignation against the tyranny of Mr. Hastings and Monsr Barnave, than against that of Aurangzeb, and Lewis the XIV.²⁵⁷

Two tyrannical wrongs were of no comparison when one of these wrongs was committed by an Englishman. India had become a second chance in the life of the British Empire and here they could right the wrongs committed in the Americas using 'Wisdom, diligence and fortitude.'²⁵⁸

Edmund Burke's opinion of Bengal and its British components were also complex. India was an ancient society, he believed, not only deserving of respect, but also deserving of proper government by the East India Company. This, of course, could only happen by learning its systems of governance, Indian religious and secular law, and its various other traditions. The Company could not take measures that would appear

Commonwealth History 15 no. (1987): 113.

²⁵⁷ Edmund Burke to Philip Francis, Beconsfield, 19 November 1790, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke VI*, ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 173. See also Burke's observations in the 'Ninth Report of the Select Committee Appointed to take into consider the state of the Administration of Justice in the Provinces of Bengal, Bihan and Orissa,' London, 25 June 1783 in *Writings and Speeches of Burke VI: India: The Launching of the Hastings Impeachment 1786-1788* ed. P.J. Marshall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991): 270.

²⁵⁸ Edmund Burke to Philip Francis, Beconsfield, 24 December 1778, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke IV*, ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 132.

arbitrary in the eyes of the Indian people and inevitably lead to rebellion or war. Burke's ideas about India were articulated in a letter he wrote to Sir Thomas Rumbold, then Governor of Madras, on 23 March 1781. Here he made it perfectly clear that he was:

unable to regard the acquisition of Territory to the Company as matter of Merit, until I find that in some one instances, the condition of the Inhabitants has been improved by the revolution, or that the affairs of this Kingdom have derived some benefit from it. For unfortunately in proportion to our acquisitions both in Bengal and in the Decan (sic), we find a Country infinitely injured, and the Treasures and revenues both the Company and the subordinate powers wasted and decayed.²⁵⁹

These opinions were straightforward and had at their foundation a feeling of tolerance and honour towards these new subjects of Great Britain. Of course, these ideas were not unique to Edmund Burke but were spurred forth by a number of people most importantly the British Orientalists. These men went to work in the late eighteenth century, institutionalising the ideas of India and recreating the subcontinent in order to better understand India for the East India Company.

Contributing to this effort was the aforementioned Sir William Jones, who was not only a prolific writer on Indian religious culture and Indian society, but he was also an important jurist. It was intellectuals like Jones who left an indelible legacy on India by means of their legal and constitutional understanding of early British Bengal. By exploring the wisdom and legal understanding of Hindu law, the constitutional fabric of the post-Plassey Indian subcontinent was less chaotic and, therefore, easier for the British and the East India Company to control. One example of the work Jones did was found in a letter written on 19 March 1788 to the Marquis of Cornwallis, Governor-General of India. Here Jones makes the case for an important role which Indian law and

²⁵⁹ Edmund Burke to Sir Thomas Rumbold, Charles Street, St. James Square, 23 March 1781, in *Correspondence of Edmund Burke IV*, ed. John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963): 346.

jurisprudence could have in the way the British governed their new possession. Jones

wrote:

Nothing indeed could be more obviously just, than to determine private contest according to those laws which the parties themselves had ever considered as the rules of their conduct and engagements in civil life; not could any thing be wiser than, by a legislative act, to assure the Hindu and Moslem subjects of Great Britain, that the private laws, which they severally hold sacred, and a violation of which they would have though the most rigorous oppression, should not be superseded by a new system, of which they could have no knowledge, and which they must have considered as imposed on them by a spirit of rigour and intolerance.²⁶⁰

Foreign laws could only be seen by Indians as ‘intolerant’ and ‘rigorous,’ and to rule ignorantly was to rule unjustly. In a manoeuvre perhaps appealing to the Governor-General’s ego, Sir William attempted to persuade Cornwallis to create a ‘Justinian code’ for India. In the late eighteenth century, classical learning was widely held to be supreme and by invoking the iconic figure of the eighth century Roman Emperor, Jones knew that the Governor-General would, at least, consider the idea. Jones further believed that a ‘Digest of Hindu and Mohammedan Laws’ would be the principle means by which Britain could best govern Bengal justly and any intellectual venture like it would be of great ‘national honour and utility.’ Jones would finish this digest on Indian Law before his death and feel he had made an enormous contribution to the governance of India upon its competition.²⁶¹ It was a great pleasure for him to send it to the Governor General of India,

...a system of Hindu laws believed to be of divine authority, and, in my opinion, of the greatest importance. Having observed, that every page of the new compilation, by the Pandits employed by government, was filled with texts of Menu,²⁶² I thought it best to translate the whole code of that

²⁶⁰ Sir William Jones to the Marquis Cornwallis, Calcutta, 19 March 1788, in *Letters of Sir William Jones Volume II*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970): 794.

²⁶¹ Jones would offer his ‘humble labour’ to perform this task and ultimately would do the work that was needed to bring it into existence. See *Jones to Cornwallis*, 799.

²⁶² ‘Manu,’ as this name is properly spelt, was an ancient Hindu legal scholar who lived sometime between 600 BCE and 300 CE. He was called the ‘Lawgiver’ and compiled the legal doctrines of Hinduism, creating the first handbook on Hindu jurisprudence and the precursor of all other *dharmastras* or Brahmin legal

ancient legislator; because I knew, that many of his laws, which appeared obscure when detached, would be perfectly clear when connected. Should the government be pleased to give orders for printing the book in Calcutta, I will correct the press with the most vigilant attention; and I much doubt, whether it can be corrected in England. Two more vacations will, I trust, enable me to complete the Digest with an Introductory Discourse.²⁶³

Shortly before his death in April 1794, Jones posted his final letter to Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Control and asked to be relieved of his judgeship in Calcutta if the King 'graciously permitted' it. Although he realised that he was nearing the end of his life, in the letter he told Dundas that his *Institutes on Hindu Law* were complete and a copy was ready to be sent to Great Britain. Jones concluded the letter by reiterating his love of 'King and my Country, and of that recorded Constitution, which is the basis of our national glory and felicity.' In combining his love for the English Constitution, with his service and skills as an Orientalist in India, Sir William Jones, through the medium of British Bengali governance helped contribute to the transformation of a trading company into a government, in the decades after 1757 and assisted in a radical change for both the British Company and Bengal, thereby altering the Indian subcontinent.²⁶⁴

The Marquis Wellesley and the Origins of the Great Game

Legal scholars such as Sir William Jones²⁶⁵ and British politicians such as Edmund Burke or Henry Dundas, were in very different positions than those who did the actual governing of British India. Men such as Hastings or Cornwallis were important

texts. See Benjamin Walker. *The Hindu World, Volume II* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968): 28.

²⁶³ Sir William Jones to Edward Hay, Calcutta, 9 June 1793, in *Letters of Sir William Jones Volume II*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970): 916.

²⁶⁴ Sir William Jones to Henry Dundas, Calcutta, Fort William, 1 March 1794, in *Letters of Sir William Jones Volume II*, ed. Garland Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970): 928.

²⁶⁵ Jones was always careful not to let any of his actions as a judge be seen as political or partisan and this was something he often addressed in his letters to Britain. He once remarked after he was accused of being partisan: 'If I am ignorant, let me be disgraced, if corrupt, let me be hanged: but let me not be menaced by every fiery fool, who may happen to measure my principles and conduct by his own.' See Cannon, *Oriental Jones*, 210.

because they were in extraordinarily more powerful offices than most in British politics or in the administration of the British Empire. As we have seen, often this power and the uses of it, could create powerful enemies and vitriolic controversy. However, if there is one prominent Briton who looms incredibly large in both the history of British India and the history of the earliest phases of the Great Game and British expansion into the northwest, it was the Governor-General between the years 1797 and 1805, Richard, the Marquis Wellesley. Wellesley, the eldest brother of Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, was born into an improvised Irish landowning family in 1760.²⁶⁶ He was elected a Member of Parliament for Devonshire in 1784 and continued a meteoric political rise from this point onward. Made a Lord of the Treasury in 1786, and a Commissioner of the East India Company in 1793, he always concentrated on affairs in India and had a voracious appetite when it came to learning the Company's interaction and domestic business interests and to this end became close friends with Lord Cornwallis, upon the latter's return from the subcontinent.²⁶⁷ By the time he became Governor-General in 1797, with the support of powerful friends like the president of the Board of Control, Henry Dundas and the prime minister, William Pitt, Wellesley had an extraordinary grasp of all facets of British India and was able to use the knowledge of the Orientalists, along with the political apparatus of the Company and its military, to build a constitutionally sanctioned and powerful military and executive office in Calcutta. With this power, Wellesley would bring to fruition not only a protected British Bengal and

²⁶⁶ Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Stanley Lee eds. *Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 1900, Volume XX* (London: Oxford University Press, 1917): 1122.

²⁶⁷ Juliet Gardiner, ed. *Who's Who in British History* (London: Collins and Brown, 2000): 820 and Stephen and Lee, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1123.

later, British India, but eventually the entire subcontinent under the power of the East India Company and the British Crown.²⁶⁸

The Marquis Wellesley's tenure in office was simultaneous with one of the most turbulent decades in the eighteenth century. Napoleon Bonaparte, on his trajectory from revolutionary general to First Counsel to Emperor of France, had become a threat for the British East India Company and the government in London. Edward Ingram has argued that this was largely because of the strategic importance the Middle-East and India had to the balance of power in Europe.²⁶⁹ Throughout, India was the fulcrum which gave Britain a powerful military force that kept the French armies at bay on their southern flank, and everything between the Mediterranean and India kept these two armies apart. This strategic advantage, however, soon became a crutch and any perception of a break in its line produced the fear that Britain would become unable to counter France in terms of military might.²⁷⁰ When one studies the motivations of and action taken by Wellesley, it becomes apparent that the powers of the Governor-General and the strategy he adopted, would become the dominant mode of political and strategic thinking after 1805 and would ultimately result in the Great Game and other exploratory-strategic contests.

Wellesley's ideas towards the safety of British India within India itself was imperially and militarily driven. He saw the Indian states, especially ones that were still beyond the East India Company's reach, as potential threats and in other cases potential allies of Britain's enemies.²⁷¹ Furthermore, Wellesley looked at the preservation of British

²⁶⁸ Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, 33-40.

²⁶⁹ Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, 196-197.

²⁷⁰ Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, 140.

²⁷¹ Such was the case with Tipu Sultan of Mysore. See Ingram, *Commitment to Empire*, 133-145. Ingram

strategic power, rooted in both politics and commerce, as the means to a powerful domestic Great Britain. This was clear in the numerous letters he wrote to the President of the Board of Control. In one discussion, while speaking to the status of the island of Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka) and the Cape possessions, not yet under British control, he wrote:

The Possession of Cylon is universally thought to be indispensable to the preservation both of our power on the continent, or our commerce on the seas of India. I am led by this observation to add a very few words with relation to this place. Before my arrival here I had formed very high ideals of the intrinsic values of the Cape as a colony, but I had not estimable so height its values with reference to defence of our trade to the east, and of our territories in India.²⁷²

This idea of securing Ceylon, the Cape or other Indian territories was an idea that Wellesley firmly believed should become normal policy. But even after the Regulating Act of 1774 created the office of Governor-General and Pitt's India Act had cleaned up the business operations of the Company, there was still centrifugally charged political forces within even the Company's governing structures. Legal authority of the Governor-General still had its limitations, and the person sitting in office only had jurisdiction over the other two presidencies in matters of war and peace.²⁷³ The Regulating Act had further created a Governing Council, in which ultimate decisions did not rest in an individual but in the majority of the group. The result, perhaps unsurprisingly, was often a divided council, indecision, and in some cases personal acrimony that led to crises like the impeachment proceedings against Warren Hastings.²⁷⁴ Modifications to this governing

argues that much of what Wellesley thought about Tipu Sultan was based upon hyperbolic and sometimes fabricated evidence but when it served Wellesley's strategic needs he acted upon this evidence.

²⁷² Richard Wellesley to Henry Dundas, Castle of Good Hope, 28 February 1798, in *Two Views of British India, 1798-1801* ed. Edward Ingram (Bath: Adams and Dart, 1970): 41.

²⁷³ Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 86

²⁷⁴ Iris Butler. *The Eldest Brother: The Marquis Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington's Eldest Brother*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973): 91.

structure were made in the India Act of 1784, but it was only after 1786 that the Governor-General could override the India Act's Governing Council, which had been reduced to three individuals.²⁷⁵ Pitt's India Act was an important reform in the East India Company's governance in India and London and by creating the new state entities of the Board of Control, who were Privy Councillors with specific responsibilities towards India, and their leader, the President of the Board of Control, the Company's political direction in London not had focused leadership and expertise.²⁷⁶

But in India, the Company's governance would change drastically in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, as well. Wellesley, upon assuming office in 1797, became fervently aggressive when it came to securing both political and constitutional power for his position in India. Although the President and the Board of Control had considerable influence, physical distance was far too great for the president to realistically have an important role in the local and tactical elements of British Indian operations. In response to this political and constitutional distance, Wellesley advocated forcefully for a powerful and centralized office of Governor-General. New and centralized powers, he argued, were important to secure the safety of the Company's possessions in India and thereby the wealth that came with them.²⁷⁷ One has only to look at his letters to the Government and the Board of Control to see ambitions for this office. Writing to Henry Dundas on 1 October 1798 he stated:

The governor-general in council ought to be the centre of all authority within the British possessions in India. Every other authority should be subject to him, with such limitation in the exercise of his power as many appear advisable. Without this authority it may become utterly

²⁷⁵ Marshall, *Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, 30.

²⁷⁶ Butler, *The Eldest Brother*, 93.

²⁷⁷ Richard Wellesley. *The Wellesley Papers* (London: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1914): 15.

impossible for him to preserve general order in time of peace, or to carry on either offences and defence war with vigour or effect.²⁷⁸

Wellesley continued to argue for increased power in his office, so that it would become the ultimate British authority in India in time when 'public security' was imperilled and that there would never be problems in the chain of command.²⁷⁹ Wellesley argued the previous acts to reform India had failed to solve problems of this kind because, 'A notion prevails that the King's regiments are subject exclusively to the authority of the commander-in-chief, and that the Company's government has not concern with them.'²⁸⁰ The system as it existed, was one in which the military and political leadership were based in two separate offices and often competed with each other for power and influence.²⁸¹ By combining them, there would be less duplication in command structures but more importantly, all action would be taken at the behest of one man.

By calling for the merging of constitutional power in the office of the Indian Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Indian military, Wellesley was arguing for his position to be given an elevated status which would give him sovereign powers, making the office a *de facto* King of India and thereby institutionalising notions of British sovereignty in the Company's possessions. He argued:

The Governor-General in addition to his commission from the Company, ought to have a concentrating commission from the Crown, vesting him with such powers over his Majesty's naval and military force in India as might be deemed expedient...[and]...It would also be desirable that the commission should be framed as to render the Governor-General the representative of the King in India, with the same rank and privileges (as far as circumstances will admit) which are annexed to the office of Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Richard Wellesley to Henry Dundas, Fort William, 1 October 1798, in *Two Views of British India, 1798-1801* ed. Edward Ingram (Bath: Adams and Dart, 1970): 81.

²⁷⁹ Wellesley to Dundas, 81.

²⁸⁰ Wellesley to Dundas, 81.

²⁸¹ Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon*, 109.

²⁸² Wellesley to Dundas, 83.

The office of Governor-General gradually assumed these powers which Wellesley demanded in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, becoming the most prestigious in the British Empire. The trials and tribulations such as those that beset Warren Hastings, would never again befall a Governor-General of India. Indeed, by the early decades of the next century, the office had evolved into one of the most coveted and sought after in all of the Empire. With an increase in constitutional and military powers, as well as the evolution from an Orientalists focused methodology of Indian governance, to that of a utilitarian one, the Governor-General became more powerful still. In 1828, with the advent of the first overtly liberal imperialist, Lord Bentinck, utilitarian principles of government came to rule India.²⁸³ Also, by this time, Russia's expansion into the western portion of central Asia ensured India remained a cause of concern for those in Britain who feared for the safety of their possessions and interests in the sub-continent. Wellesley instituted a forwardly minded policy and a desire to rid India of French influence. Subsequent wars between the British and the Marathas in the early 1800s, the Afghans in 1832, and the powerful Sikh Empire in 1839 would yield mixed results, but all were scions of Wellesley's initial policy.²⁸⁴ The horrible defeats of the first Afghan War forced the British to acknowledge that conventional invasion was not an option in Central Asia. By this time too, the Central Asian question had evolved into something of a muted and restrained competition; a 'game' being played between British and Russian spies, explorers, cartographers and adventurers throughout the region including the

²⁸³ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 28.

²⁸⁴ H.S. Bhatia. *Military History of British India* (New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 1977): 158. For further elaboration on the Sikh war see Grewal. *The Sikhs of the Punjab*, 99.

northern Himalayas and Tibetan plateau. From Oriental governance to constitutional reform and military expansion, British involvement in the 'Great Game' had its origins in the British government of India itself. We gain some appreciation of this fact when we read Wellesley's rather prophetic observations of 12 November 1798 when he noted:

Our accounts of Zeman Shah are still extremely vague and contradictory. I have, however, thought it prudent to continue our preparations on the north-western frontier, where I trust our defence is perfectly secure. The present cordial intercourse between England and Russia ought to afford you a means of reliving us from that perpetual alarm of an invasion from Kabul. If the emperor of Russia could be induced to continence, even in a slight degree, the power of Baba Khan, the present sovereign of Persia, a cause of apprehensive might be excited on the confines of the shah's dominions, which would effectually check his ambitious designs against the tranquillity of Hindustan.²⁸⁵

This 'cordial' relationship with the Emperor of All the Russias, described in 1798, would not last.

²⁸⁵ Richard Wellesley to Henry Dundas, Fort William, 12 November 1798, in *Two Views of British India, 1798-1801*, ed. Edward Ingram (Bath: Adams and Dart, 1970): 104.

Conclusion

The Great Game in Asia between Britain and Russia may have officially begun in 1828 when Lord Ellenborough sent orders to India for the British administration there to officially adopt a foreign policy aimed at gaining the strategic upper hand in Central Asia.²⁸⁶ This thesis has argued however, that such a diplomatic dispatch was not the beginning, but in fact, the middle chapter to this intriguing episode in the history of the British Empire. By examining the important and interconnected facets of imperial historiography, the early modern English state, the Mughal Empire, and the constitutional changes and advocacy made in late eighteenth century British India, this thesis has argued that the Great Game was a nineteenth century manifestation of the very problems the East India Company faced in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The first chapter considered the historiographical perspectives that Britons and writers of British imperial history have held of their empire from the mid-eighteenth century, until the present. It demonstrated how historiography, embodied in five schools of thought, has played an important role not only in telling the story of the British colonial enterprise in India, but was crucial in the intellectual construction of the British Empire on a global scale. It contributes to the historiographical resurgence of the British Empire in recent decades and provides support for recent scholarly arguments that have demanded that the histories of Britain and its empire be studied as a coherent whole for a greater understanding of the subject.²⁸⁷ This chapter also examined the British Orientalists and noted how the ideas of Sir William Jones and Alexander Dow, may have

²⁸⁶ Ingram, *The Beginning of the Great Game*, 5-7.

²⁸⁷ Philip Lawson, 'The Missing Link: The Imperial Dimension in Understanding Hanoverian', *Historical Journal* 29, (1986): 747-751.

been superficially contradictory, but at a deeper level were very similar in their motivations to comprehend and control Indian society.

The second chapter, crucially sought to explain why the English state was so dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It demonstrated how political and constitutional developments in England after 1688 were instrumental in changing a marginal archipelago into a strong and stable kingdom, capable of an unrivalled global empire. In the years after the Battle of Plassey and the conquest of Bengal, through the medium of the East India Company, the British state began to export its fiscal-militarism to India and this process allowed it to build an Indian empire, something that no other European commercial power did with the same degree of success. What enabled the creation of British India was a combination of fiscal-militarism, constitutional and legal structures, and the rise of domestic stability that developed during these important centuries and allowed Britain to eventually supplant the Mughals as the dominant political force in India. But these British and 'metropolitan' dimensions are only part of the story told in this thesis.

Chapter three examined the Mughal Empire and how it presented the East India Company with fertile ground upon which it could build a hybrid British Indian political structure. Once the Company became the first European power to gain control of taxation and constitutional powers, with the assistance of Indian princes and allies, the East India Company and the British government would use indigenous power structures to unseat the Mughal Emperor by the middle of the nineteenth century and establish their 'Raj.' This chapter argued that the Mughal administrative structures were sophisticated and complex, but that it ultimately served the purposes of the East India Company and its

allies. By being both multi-faceted and decentralised, the Mughals could never really gain enough information to defend themselves against the British fiscal-militarism and imperial commerce that took root in Bengal after 1757. That being said, without Mughal India there would have been a very different British India, or perhaps none at all.

The final chapter examined the roles individual actors and politicians in both London and British India played during one of the most turbulent periods for the British state and British Empire: the late eighteenth century. By considering the actions and attitudes of such men as Sir William Jones, Edmund Burke, and the Marquis Wellesley and by placing them into British Indian contexts, we charted the genesis of late eighteenth century expansionary policies that would manifest themselves as the Great Game over the subsequent six decades. When Wellesley demanded Crown powers similar to those of the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, or when Sir William Jones argued for a Justinian code for British India, they did so with the impression that the tenants of imperial rule in India were similar to the constitutional powers of Britain. India, as a British domain, needed to be defended from all enemies be they foreign or internal, by the same ideas and powers that defended Britons living in England or Scotland. British India needed the same economic, military and above all constitutional conventions and protections that Britons came to recognize and enjoy as their birthright in the post 1688 Hanoverian state.

In many respects, Richard Wellesley embodied these aspirations and the dualistic character of British India during the latter decades of the eighteenth century. The East India Company may have embarked as a trading venture on the subcontinent and been the metaphorical bird eating insects off the back of the giant Mughal elephant. But as decades progressed, it grew larger and more influential, to the point where the Mughal elephant

began to depend on British intermediaries to maintain its economy and to protect its food sources. Gradually there developed a dependency and symbiotic relationship between the Company and the Mughal Empire, with both eventually becoming part of the wars of global conquest in the mid eighteenth century. It was after the Battle of Plassey (1757) that the British East India Company came to experience the awesome power that came with Mughal Indian tax revenue; and it was this power - or more accurately - a fear of losing it, that transformed the Company's Bengal into 'British India' and eventually into the British Indian Empire. Power and paranoia went hand-in-hand and the Great Game was a nineteenth century legacy of eighteenth century war, state formation, and empire building. In an effort to protect its commercial and political interests in India, the Company embarked upon an imperialising process that acquired a nineteenth century empire that would have undoubtedly been beyond the imagination of Jones, Burke, Wellesley, and all those who inhabited the period covered by this thesis. What the East India Company wanted to protect was its heartland. In the process it acquired much more than that. It acquired the Indian sub-continent and a Raj.

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