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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Comparative Literature
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Myth, Language, Empire: The East India Company and the Construction of British India, 1757-1857

(Spine Title: Myth, Language, Empire)
(Thesis format: Monograph)

by

Nida Sajid

Graduate Program in Comparative Literature

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

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Myth, Language, Empire: The East India Company and the Construction of British India, 1757-1857

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Abstract

My PhD dissertation investigates the discursive strategies employed by the East India Company during the early colonial period to legitimize mercantile imperialism as an act of preservation for the fast-disintegrating political order that was the Mughal empire in India. By arguing that the interrelationship of myth, history and archive was essential to networks of trade and the establishment of political domination, my thesis offers a new reading of the representations of both the colonizer and the colonized and of the political debates surrounding the Company's scandals and imperial ambitions in the English public sphere during the late eighteenth century. It further reveals the discursive role of Mughal constitutionality in defining the contours of some key ideas of Enlightenment thought such as universal sovereignty and vigilant citizenry in Britain, while simultaneously legitimizing mechanisms of colonial control in an overseas empire. In order to expose the proximity of early imperialist discourse about Islamic rule in India to the broader representative structures of European modernity, I revisit via literary and historical texts, public records and archival documents, the following canonized moments of British imperial history: the Battle of Plassey, the Black Hole incident, the Company's acquisition of the *Diwani* of Bengal, and the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings. I further examine the interpretations of these events during the nineteenth century in order to trace the genealogical connections between the early representations of colonial encounters and the later writings of high imperialism. Looking simultaneously at these two discursive moments of the British empire in India, I demonstrate how a mythical modality based on the aesthetics of the sublime emerged in the colonial archive and how this mode of representation came to inform history-writing, making the broader representative structures of Enlightenment thought complicit in the construction of a narrative continuity for the British empire. In so doing, I reveal the fallacy of current theoretical positions which inadvertently ignore the role of colonized cultures in the construction of modern democratic concepts like citizenship and civil society in both South Asia and Europe.

Keywords: British Empire, India, East India Company, Mughal Empire, Long Eighteenth Century, Nationalism, Colonialism, Enlightenment, New Imperial History, Postcolonial Theory

For Irene and Sajid, and an imaginary place called home …

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INTRODUCTION

Lady Oldham: You will, Sir Matthew, pardon my weakness; but I would rather see my child with a competence, nay, even reduced to an indigent state, than voluptuously rioting in pleasures that derive their source from the ruin of others.

Mite: Ruin! What, you, I find, adopt the popular prejudice, and conclude that every man that is rich is a villain?

Lady Oldham: I only echo the voice of the public. Besides, I would wish my daughter a more solid establishment: The possessions arising from plunder very rarely are permanent; we every day see what has been treacherously and rapaciously gained, as profusely and full as rapidly squandered.

Mite: I am sorry, madam, to see one of your fashion, concur in the common cry of the times; but such is the gratitude of this country to those who have given it dominion and wealth.

Thomas: I could wish even that fact was well founded, Sir Mathew. Your riches (which perhaps are only too ideal) by introducing a general spirit of dissipation, have extinguished labour and industry, the slow, but sure source of national wealth…

> … *Mite:* You must, Master Oldham, give me leave to laugh at your prophetic effusion. This is not Sparta, nor are these the chaste times of the Roman republic: Now-a-days, riches possess at least one magical power, that, being rightly dispensed, they closely conceal the source from whence they proceeded; That wisdom, I hope never to want.[1]

This exchange of dialogues comes from an eighteenth-century play titled *The Nabob*. Written by English dramatist, Samuel Foote, this play is set in the house of Sir John Oldham, a representative of the landed gentry of the time. The action revolves around the negotiations of a marriage proposal extended by Sir Mathew Mite to Oldham's daughter Sophy. In his analysis of this play, Daniel O'Quinn states, "It is a commonplace of both theatre history and British social history that Samuel Foote's *The Nabob* established the figure of the exemplary nabob and thereby encapsulated the anxieties of an entire nation" (55). The central character of the play, Sir Mathew Mite, was a "composite portrait" of many East India Company officers who had returned from India "fabulously rich and proceeded to destabilize both the domestic economy and the aristocracy's firm grip on fashionable society" (O'Quinn 55). As the above exchange indicates, both Lady Oldham and her brother, Thomas, are opposed to Mite's proposal on the grounds of his dubious wealth collected through perfidious means in India.

---

[1] Samuel Foote, *The nabob; a comedy, in three acts*, 52-55.

Earlier in the play, Lady Oldham characterizes Mite as someone who came from the "Indies" into their lives and, by "profusely scattering the spoils of ruined provinces, corrupted the virtue and alienated the affection of all the old friends to the family" (Foote 11). Once Mite is refused Sophy's hand in marriage, he goes on to demonstrate the villainy suspected of him by the Oldham household. He blackmails the family by reminding them the terms of his proposal in which he had promised to cancel the debts of John Oldham in exchange of his daughter. In a threat amounting to extortion, Mite asks the family to honor their debt without delay, knowing too well that they do not possess the financial means of doing so. It is only towards the end of the play that Thomas, with his ingenuity and resourcefulness, saves the Oldhams from Mite's evil designs and vengeance.

While cultural productions like *The Nabob* capture the mood of a skeptical public regarding the activities of the Company's agents in India, a meticulous record of the trajectory of the eighteenth-century British empire can be found in the East India Company's official archive and in the many narratives of the English exploits in India. Dealing with the same subject, namely that of the Company's expansion of its powers, these multiple depositories of early colonial history sometimes intersect, but they largely chart different discursive routes for the empire. The narrative histories of the early empire mostly celebrate the acquisition of Indian territories as a historic moment of conquest by the British nation. However, even a momentary glance at the eighteenth-century public

records demonstrates that the expansion of Britain's colonial interests in India was a moment of anxiety, rather than a moment of triumph, for the English public. In *The Scandal of Empire*, Nicholas Dirks asserts, "Empire was always a scandal for those who were colonized. It is less well known that empire began as a scandal even for those who were colonizers" (7). While scandal was the "crucible in which both imperial and capitalist expansion was forged" (Dirks 8), critical scholarship creates little awareness of the fact that two simultaneous processes began to shape the English experience of its empire after the Company's accession of territories in India. On the one hand, there was Britain's growing control over a distant land, holding the promise of unlimited wealth and power; and, on the other, there was the disturbing visibility of scandals that came along as unwanted companions of this promise. Within years of acquiring the province of Bengal, reports of scandalous activities in India destroyed the legitimacy of the Company, making its empire-building efforts synonymous with the less-than-honorable modus operandi of private profiteering.

This thesis has two aims: first, to examine the controversial beginnings of the British rule in India; and, second, to unravel the techniques that mask this aspect of colonial rule. I investigate the discursive strategies employed by the East India Company during the early colonial period to legitimize mercantile imperialism as an act of preservation for the fast-disintegrating political order that

was the Mughal empire in India. By arguing that the interrelationship of myth, history and archive was essential to networks of trade and the establishment of political domination, my thesis offers a new reading of the representations of both the colonizer and the colonized and of the political debates surrounding the Company's scandals and imperial ambitions in the English public sphere during the late eighteenth century. It further reveals the discursive role of Mughal constitutionality in defining the contours of some key ideas of Enlightenment thought such as universal sovereignty and vigilant citizenry in Britain, while simultaneously legitimizing mechanisms of colonial control in an overseas empire. In order to expose the proximity of early imperialist discourse about Islamic rule in India to the broader representative structures of European modernity, I revisit via literary and historical texts, public records and archival documents, the following canonized moments of British imperial history: the Battle of Plassey, the Black Hole incident, the Company's acquisition of the *Diwani* of Bengal, and the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings. I further examine the interpretations of these events during the nineteenth century in order to trace the genealogical connections between the early representations of colonial encounters and the later writings of high imperialism. Looking simultaneously at these two discursive moments of the British empire in India, I demonstrate how a mythical modality based on the aesthetics of the sublime emerged in the colonial archive and how this mode of representation came to inform history-writing,

making the broader representative structures of Enlightenment thought complicit in the construction of a narrative continuity for the British empire. In so doing, I reveal the fallacy of current theoretical positions which inadvertently ignore the role of colonized cultures in the construction of modern democratic concepts like citizenship and civil society in both South Asia and Europe.

The India Question in Eighteenth-Century England

> *Lady Oldham:* Is it possible Sir Matthew can have acted from so infernal a motive, to have advanced the money with a view of distressing us deeper?
>
> *Thomas:* Sir Mathew is a profound politician, and will not stick at trifles to carry his point.
>
> *Lady Oldham:* With the wealth of the East, we have too imported the worst of its vices. What a horrid crew!
>
> *Thomas:* Hold, sister! Don't gratify your resentment at the expence of your justice; a general conclusion from a single instance is but indifferent logick.
>
> *Lady Oldham:* Why, is not this Sir Matthew—
>
> *Thomas:* Perhaps as bad a subject as your passion can paint him: But there are men from the Indies, and many too, with whom I have the honour to live, who dispense nobly and with hospitality here, what they have

> acquired with honour and credit elsewhere; and, at the same time they have increased the dominions and wealth, have added virtues too to their country (*Nabob* 13).

Lady Oldham's characterization of Matthew Mite as the embodiment of Eastern "wealth" and "vices" and her brother's defense of "men from the Indies" as both important and honorable in English society captures the divided public opinion over the question of an overseas empire for England. A popular play in its time, *The Nabob* repeatedly returned to the London stage for almost three decades after its first performance in 1772. This play's popularity with the "fashionable" London society is quite understandable since it dealt with a theme all too familiar to the audience. Samuel Foote, through the characters of Mite and Oldham, represented the social tensions between a traditional and slowly disintegrating landed aristocracy and an emergent yet powerful class possessing commercial capital.[2] This conflict was an obvious commentary on the social and economic climate of late eighteenth-century England and its fast-changing dynamics which

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[2] For a detailed discussion on class in eighteenth-century Britain, see Susan E. Brown, "'A Just and Profitable Commerce': Moral Economy and the Middle Classes in Eighteenth-Century London"; Linda Colley, "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830"; Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the Professions in Britain*, 1700-1850; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*; Amanda Goodrich, *Debating England's Aristocracy in the 1790s*; James Raven, *Judging New Wealth*; and Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: the Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840.*

came with the rise of Britain's imperial ambitions in India.[3] Besides encapsulating the collective sentiments of a period in three acts, *The Nabob* also gave voice to an extremely wary public attitude towards the rising mercantile imperialism of trading companies like the East India Company and the possibility of integrating India as a colony into the economy of the British empire. Besides the alarming reports of British losses in America, the English public domain in the year 1772 was dominated by numerous stories of the Company's atrocities in India. The news of a famine in Bengal after the Company's takeover of the province and its indiscriminate taxation on agricultural produce had slowly made its way to England.[4] While reading about such calamitous events in a distant land, the English public saw with its own eyes the immense private wealth of the Company's officers returning from India and changing the cultural landscape within Britain.[5]

---

[3] The cultural impact of imperial trade on the eighteenth-century English society is explored in detail by Tillman W. Nechtman, "A Jewel in the Crown? Indian Wealth in Domestic Britain in the Late Eighteenth Century."

[4] Great Britain. Parliament. House of Commons. *Further report from the Committee of Secrecy appointed by the House of Commons, assembled at Westminster in the sixth session of the thirteenth Parliament of Great Britain, to enquire into the state of the East India Company*, 8.

[5] See Holden Furber, *Private Fortunes and Company Profits in the India Trade in the 18th Century* and P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: the British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century.*

In addition to these developments, the performance of *The Nabob* had another immediate context of reference. From the spring of 1772 onward, the newspapers started reporting two related stories: the accounts of parliamentary debates and committees on the conduct of the East India Company and Lord Clive's defense before Parliament of his actions in India.[6] Though constructed as the "original architect of British India" in the writings of high imperialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century,[7] Clive's claim to this epithet did not come in his lifetime without some serious doubts raised about his conduct in India. The usurpation of the *Diwani* of Bengal by the Company under his directions in the year 1765 (an act later constructed as the foundational moment of British rule in colonial history) created a huge scandal, which was taken up by the House of Commons through the formation of a Select Committee. Nathaniel Smith, the director of the East India Company in London, described Clive's

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[6] Official records of these proceedings can be found in Great Britain, *The Minutes of the Select Committee appointed by the Honourable House of Commons, to enquire into the nature, state, and conditions of the East India Company, and of the British affairs in the East Indies* (1772); Robert Clive, *Lord Clive's Speech in the House of Commons, on the motion made for an inquiry into the nature, state, and condition, of the East India Company, and of the British affairs in the East Indies, in the fifth session of the present Parliament 1772*; and Great Britain, *Report from the Committee of Secrecy Appointed by the House of Commons, assembled at Westminster, in the Sixth Session of the Thirteenth Parliament of Great Britain, to Enquire into the State of the East India Company* (1773).

[7] Some examples of such biographies are Alexander John Arbuthnot, *Lord Clive, the Foundation of British Rule in India*; G. R. Gleig, *The Life of Robert, first Lord Clive*; G. B. Malleson, *Lord Clive and the Establishment of the English in India*; and Charles William Wilson, *Lord Clive*.

initiative to take over the administration of Bengal and to interfere with the traditional structures of power and control in the province in the following terms:

> This most powerful, and indeed the only effectual control, Lord Clive unfortunately removed, when he took the Duannee for the Company; because, by abolishing the authority of the Suba, and substituting no proper check in its, place, he left the government of the country with greater imperfections than he found in it. (4)

The famine that came as the aftermath of the restructuring of the administrative and revenue system in Bengal added fuel to an already inflamed public opinion regarding the moral implications of accumulating wealth through the despair of the other. Clive's supporters did their best to contain the damage done to his image by flooding stories of his military endeavors and administrative acumen in India. John Henry Grose, in his travelogue *A Voyage to the Indies*, described Clive as "a man of undaunted resolution, of a cool temper and a presence of mind, which never left him in the greatest danger." In order to underline the advantages and the accompanying perils of Company's territorial expansion, he presented Clive as a "born soldier" who, without military education of any sort, "led an army like an experienced officer, and brave soldier, with a prudence that warranted success" (Vol. 2, 80).

While such accounts provided the "historically authentic" material for the later imperialist reconstruction of the origins for the British Raj, the eighteenth-

century public was far less charitable towards Clive. For instance, the following excerpt from a poem encapsulates the overall skepticism of Clive's contemporaries regarding his motives for adding Bengal to the expanding empire in the east:

> Of scepter'd princes, treacherously slain,
> His fill of plunder rapidly to gain;
> Whether by his unmerciful command,
> Monopoly o'erspread a wretched land,
> With meager famine stalking by her side
> By whom innumerable millions died:
> Whate'er his crimes, though black as night
> The Bard his crimes without restraint say
> Shall drag them to the blushing face of day
> And all their full deformity display.[8]

There was no dearth of such sentiments towards Clive and other Company officers, especially given the increase in their personal fortunes on return from India.[9] Highlighting the adverse effects of colonial wealth on both India and

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[8] Henry Shepherd, *Delineation, a poem*, n. pag.

[9] The public attitude towards the Company can be gauged through writings such as *The National Mirror. Being a series of essays on the most important concerns: but particularly those of the East-India Company* (1771); Henry Fred Thompson, *The intrigues of a nabob: or, Bengal the fittest soil for the growth of lust, injustice and*

Britain, Horace Walpole wrote in a letter during the House proceedings: "Here was Lord Clive's diamond house…They starved millions in India by monopolies and plunder, and almost raised a famine at home by the luxury occasioned by their opulence, and by that opulence raising the prices of everything, till the poor could not purchase bread."[10] Specifically analyzing the cultural value of diamonds from India, Tillman Nechtman states that the speculative nature of the Company's trade channels made colonial wealth seem "insubstantial, foreign, and uncomfortably novel to domestic Britons, who focused their attention on Indian fortunes as a metonymic symbol of the larger concerns surrounding the growth of British imperialism in India" (72). The luxurious lifestyles of East Indiamen became a contentious and everyday topic, where "Indian diamonds were the most readily visible evidence of the economic, political, and social imbrication of empire and nation in late eighteenth-century Britain" ("Jewel in Crown" 72).

Though Clive was acquitted after the House rejected the resolutions of the Select Committee condemning him in 1773, these proceedings left an indelible mark on Clive's own personal life and on the Company's public image. Clive's attempts at joining politics in England were curtailed by these controversies, leading to his suicide in 1774 at the age of forty nine. Though a premature death

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dishonesty (1780); Joseph Price, *The saddle put on the right horse, or, An enquiry into the reason why certain persons have been denominated nabobs* (1783).

[10] Letter dated 9 April 1772, *Yale Edition of Horace Walpole's Correspondence*, Vol. 23, 400.

exonerated Clive from further disgrace, no such possibility presented itself to the Company for at least the next two decades. The questions raised by the Committee's report defined the tone of Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773, which introduced clauses to control abuses of power by the Company's officers. After a brief hiatus following the passing of this Act, the issue of Company reform was picked up again in the late 1770s with renewed energy, when Edmund Burke began to take a deep interest in India affairs. The Regulating Act had little consequence in India and reports of the Company's aggressive policy of imperial expansion led to the British government's intervention again. Now dominated by Burke, a new Select Committee was formed and its proceedings culminated with the introduction of Fox's East India Bill in 1783. Though defeated, many of its recommendations were included in Pitt's India Act of 1784. Its provision for a joint government of the Company and the Crown in India was hardly a measure for preventing the history of colonization from unfolding itself, but it did open the British Constitution to its own inadequacy in handling the ethical implications of building an empire. With Burke's personal legal triumph in persuading the House to impeach Warren Hastings, the next decade in British history saw the philosophical revisiting of the ancient idea of an empire and its repercussions for the enlightened spirit of modern European nations.

The public and legal debates surrounding the East India Company and its functionaries were frequently characterized as the India question in the eighteenth

century. This thesis is an attempt to understand the implications of this question and how it defined the relationship of Britain with its empire in India for the next two centuries. Was India simply a question mark in the sense of being an exotic and unexplored land slowly made visible through the rising mercantilism and overseas trade? Or was India also a conceptual space that questioned the emergent sovereignty of the British nation itself? One of the primary objectives of this thesis is to understand the discursive mechanisms underlying the formulation of this question in Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century. I intend to fill the lacuna in current postcolonial scholarship created by the misconception that the divided public opinion over the Company's strategies had little or no consequence on the future of the British empire in India. Though the eighteenth-century, in comparison to the period of high imperialism, has received limited critical attention in postcolonial studies, my research aligns itself with recent works which pay close attention to the construction of the early empire in the English public sphere.[11]

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[11] These include Mita Choudhury, *Interculturalism and Resistance in the London Theatre, 1660–1800: Identity, Performance, Empire*; Nicholas Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*; Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire: the Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843*; Michael John Franklin (ed.), *Representing India: Indian Culture and Imperial Control in Eighteenth-century British Orientalist Discourse* (9 vols.); Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (eds.), *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*; Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (eds.), *Travels, Explorations and Empires:Writings from the Era of Imperial Expansion 1770–1835* (8 vols.); Margaret Hunt, "Racism, Imperialism, and the Traveler's Gaze in Eighteenth-Century England"; Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600-1800*; Tara

Scholars argue that little attention has been given to the controversial reception of early colonial rule since “a binary divide between the nation and the empire had been central to the nationalist historiography that emerged in mid-nineteenth-century Britain and survived for much of the twentieth” (Hall and Rose 8). My thesis challenges this divide by showing the interpenetration of discursive spaces identified separately as “Britain” and “India” in colonial history and by investigating the historical overlaps and the complex exchange of ideas between them. Maya Jasanoff quite rightly reminds us that the empire was always “only questionably ‘British,’ since Britain depended heavily on continental Europeans, and increasingly on imperial subjects, for manpower and support” and that investigating such “cracks” and “insecurities” in British power “helps explain why and when the empire took the peculiar forms it did” (8). As I illustrate, given the anxieties of the general public in eighteenth-century England, many of the Company’s actions in India were motivated by the desire to correct the Company’s public image back home. In order to hide these rather embarrassing beginnings of the empire, later historians like Thomas Babington Macaulay went to great lengths to construct a narrative of cultural triumph for the future generations of the English public. I look at the corruption trials of the East India Company and its officers, both illustrious (such as Lord Clive and Warren

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Ghoshal Wallace, *Imperial Characters: Home and Periphery in Eighteenth-century Literature*; and Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785*.

Hastings) and relatively unknown (like the author of the Black Hole incident, Jonathan Holwell), to demonstrate how the founding moment of the empire is not simply a question of territorial or, despite its blatant use, even discursive hegemony; rather, it is a moment of a major revisioning of the relationship between Britain's nationalist self and its overseas empire.

Mercantile Empires and the Nation-State

> The orient sun never laid more glorious expectations before us…You are plunged into Empire in the east. You have formed a great body of power, you must abide by the consequence.[12]

With these ominous words in 1769, Edmund Burke appraised the British thrill at its newfound economic supremacy and the confusion arising from this dominance within the workings and ideology of the nation. Trading companies played a fundamental role in the formation of European nations and in the subsequent rivalries between them for commercial trade monopolies during the eighteenth century. Among them, the English East India Company, marginalizing the Dutch and the French, secured circuits of trade and political control through a combination of military action and economic aggression that proved essential to the consolidation of British imperialism in Asia. By the mid-eighteenth century, the East India Company was using armed trade and diplomatic negotiation to

[12] Edmund Burke, *Commons debate*, 27 February 1769. Qtd. in O'Quinn, 43.

create a corporate empire bounded by coastal settlements in the Indian subcontinent. By the late 1800s, territorial control marked a shift in the Company's priorities in India from trade to administration and a complex power struggle began to unfold in Britain as trade became embroiled in public debates about imperial ambitions, making the British nation-state both censorious of and complicit in the activities of the Company.

Through her analysis of the relationship of European states with the violence perpetrated by non-state institutions across the globe, Janice Thomson concludes that mercantile companies were, ultimately, "state-created institutions that used violence in the pursuit of economic gain and political power." These institutions were crucial for European state formations since they allowed national governments to achieve political, territorial, and economic goals at little cost to themselves and "exploit nonstate coercive capabilities in conquering and colonizing large areas of the globe." As a result of such tacit collusions, "it is impossible to draw distinctions between the economic and political, the domestic and international, or the nonstate and state realms of authority when analyzing these practices" (Thomson 41). In her essay titled "The Politics of Eighteenth-Century British History," Linda Colley also underlines the complex overlaps between competing ideologies and asks a relevant question about the scholarly interest in this period: "How can concerned and contemporary scholars even want to study a nation that-at the height of the Enlightenment-conserved its monarchy

and aristocracy, led the opposition to the American and French Revolutions, and was so ruthlessly obsessed with colonial expansion and commercial gain?" (361). Being one of the most established scholars in the field herself, Colley justifies this interest through a methodology that takes into account the fact that the period lacks an easily perceptible and discrete identity and is both enriched and marred by many Janus-faced developments. Similarly, another prominent scholar of the empire, Ann Laura Stoler, also proposes an approach that underlines the multi-layered imbrications of discourses and understands that the "pursuits of exploitation and enlightenment are not mutually exclusive but deeply entangled projects" (3).

A methodological approach that understands the deep contradictions of British nationhood and its relationship with mercantile imperialism forms the basis of this study. By pointing out that the diversity of eighteenth-century British history was compromised by the linearity of its later historiography, I build upon Maya Jasanoff's injunction in the *Edge of Empire* that the "white man's burden" attitude of the late nineteenth century should not be imposed over the "earlier, denser, more complicated entangling of human experiences" (11) and that the "the broader trajectory of British imperialism in the East was a more complex and uncertain process than traditional narratives suggest" (8). Through a vigorous historiographical debate on this period, I show that the ideological investments in the myth of the "white man's burden" were in fact "a piece of wishful thinking, a

way of justifying and compensating for, with rhetorical and moral purpose, the fundamental vulnerabilities and contradictions embedded in British imperial rule" (Jasanoff 11). In so doing, my research falls in line with recent scholarship which questions the simple diffusion of the fundamental values of modernity from Britain to its colonies.[13] I argue that many institutions of modernity such as civil society and citizenship – recognized as products of European thought and history – did not emanate from a well-defined center; rather, they were an outcome of the adaptations and accommodations British society made when confronted with the social, political, and economic order of territories the East India Company came to dominate in the eighteenth century. Besides implying that Britain, its modern institutions, and its empire were co-constituted, I challenge the canonical Janus-faced model of colonial history that looks at the Company's territorial gains, on one hand, to explain the disintegration of the Mughal empire and, on the other, to understand India's transition from an unstable Islamic state to a colony.[14] Instead,

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[13] I refer here to works like Christopher A. Bayly*, Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830*; Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the world, 1600-1850*; Cooper, Frederick and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*; Kapil Raj, "Colonial Encounters and the Forging of New Knowledge and National Identities: Great Britain and India, 1760-1850"; and Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth century*.

[14] Canonical studies in this regard are T. G. Percival Spear, *Twilight of the Mughuls* and Vincent Arthur Smith, *The Oxford History of India*. The construction of Islamic rule in colonial history is discussed in J. S Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: the Assessment of British Historians*. Some revisionist readings of this transitory period can be found in Seema Alavi (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century in India*; Richard B. Barnett (ed.), *Rethinking*

I look at historical conditions and philosophical debates surrounding such acts to underline the importance of India in making Britain into a modern nation-state, a debt less frequently acknowledged in scholarship.

Even the most casual journey into the late-eighteenth-century English public sphere reveals the conjoined histories of Britain and India. This was the moment not for rejoicing at the East India Company's first territorial conquests on the subcontinent; it was instead one of the most scandalous spectacles to rivet London society. This spectacle was both fueled and abated in a climate that saw the increasing involvement of the nation-state in rising mercantile imperialism by becoming a subject of rigorous philosophical reflection during the eighteenth century. In his canonical study *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, J. G. A. Pocock analyzes the effects of the new economic order on Britain's attempts at defining the contours of its newfound identity as a modern nation. During the eighteenth century, Anglophone political theory was preoccupied with the question of "whether a regime founded on patronage, public debt, and professionalization of the armed forces did not corrupt both governors and governed." In order to counter the adverse effects of commerce, social thought moved decisively "out of

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Early Modern India; Christopher A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion*; Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India*; Sushil Chaudhury, *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth-century Bengal*; P. J. Marshall (ed.), *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?*; John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth-century Bengal*; and Ranjit Sen, *New Elite and New Collaboration: a Study of Social Transformations in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*.

the law-centered paradigm and into the paradigm of virtue and corruption." The prominent public appearance of stockholders and their "monied interest" in mercantile companies, whose relations with government were those of mutual dependence, "was countered by a renewed assertion of the ideal of the citizen, virtuous in his devotion to the public good and his engagement in relations of equality and ruling-and-being-ruled, but virtuous also in his independence of any relation which might render him corrupt" (Pocock 48). However, this ideal of public virtue as free from the corruptions of "paper money," given the entanglements of both the state and the citizen in the credit system perpetuated by trading companies, could not restrain the new forms of commercial exchange in British society and, instead of containing capitalism, the idea of virtue itself was redefined in the social ethos of enlightenment with the aid of a concept of "manners": "The social psychology of the age declared that encounters with things and persons evoked passions and refined them into manners; it was preeminently the function of commerce to refine the passions and polish the manners" (Pocock 49). Therefore, instead of rejecting the imperial tendencies of trading companies, European societies defended rigorously the rising commercialization associated with it using the "weapons of humanism" and "the practice and refinement of manners" (Pocock 50). With its increasing dependence on the products of imperial trade, the society of late eighteenth-century Britain developed an ambivalent structure: the public sphere remained dominated by

cultural productions and political debates condemning imperial trade practices as unethical and corrupt influences on an enlightened nation, while an aesthetic of exoticism seeped into its quotidian and private life through new patterns of consumption.[15]

One of the primary objectives of this thesis is to situate the actions of the East India Company and the reaction of the English public towards them within the social ethos of the age and the discursive construction of British nationalism in political thought. Like Pocock, I also turn to the writings of one of the most prominent philosophical voices of the period, Edmund Burke, on the predicament of reconciling the manners of the British society with the not-so virtuous principles of commercialism. According to Pocock, Burke, like many Whig thinkers, was not "free of the nightmare that multiplying paper credit might end by destroying the value and even the meaning of property, the foundation alike of virtue, manners and the natural relations of society" (196). Therefore, throughout his career, Burke tried to present "religion, chivalry and commerce as trodden down together by the hoofs of a paper-money despotism" (Pocock 200). By

[15] In *Consumption and the Making of Respectability*, Woodruff D. Smith analyses the social value of certain consumer products—tea, spices, sugar—and demonstrates how the pursuit of cultural constructs or the "manners" of the period such as "gentility," "rational masculinity," "domestic femininity," and "respectability" created a concerted demand for these items, and the desire for exotic and luxury products in Europe between 1600 and 1800 propelled imperialist expansion around the world. Similarly, Maya Jasanoff, in *Edge of Empire*, investigates imperial expansion through the lives of collectors and their practice of collecting imperial novelties in the late 18th and early 19th century in order to show how personal encounters between people and things "offer a different perspective on the relationship of culture and imperialism more generally (6).

asserting that commerce is dependant upon manners, and not the other way around, Burke tried to establish the idea that "a civilized society is the prerequisite of exchange relations, and the latter alone cannot create the former" (Pocock 199). Though Pocock's conclusion that Burke considered "aristocratic patronage and established religion" to be necessary links in the "connexion between civilized manners and expanding commerce" (210) is valid, he, nevertheless, fails to engage in the question of what ignited the philosophical interest of thinkers like Burke in the relationship between virtue and commerce in the first place. Like most scholars working on this period, Pocock restricts his analysis to the French Revolution and sees it as the source material for Burke's "ideological defense and moral vindication" of the "Whig ruling order" and its allegiance to landed property (195). As I demonstrate in this study, Burke's deep reflections on the adverse effects of commercial exchange on the manners of British society long preceded his work on the French Revolution and came to light in his writings on the British interest in establishing a global commercial supremacy through the imperial domination of distant lands like India.

It is through such philosophical interventions that the modern conception of the nation as the ultimate authority over bureaucratic administration and organized military power with the moral force to criminalize forms of violence that endangered its sovereignty was born. And the very first institutions to experience the impact of this new idea of the nation-state were trading companies

which used violence to augment their commercial interests. As Janice Thomson concludes in her study *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns*, an unintended consequence of authorizing nonstate violence by European powers in the trade wars of the eighteenth century was the empowerment of individuals to act independently of their home state: "the ties between the state and its subjects were tenuous; given the chance, individuals would express their independence from state goals, interests, and policies…Ultimately, pirates, mercenaries, and mercantile companies challenged the sovereignty of the nascent national state itself" (68). The struggle between the state and the Company concerning ideologies of imperialism ultimately led to the Company's mid-nineteenth-century demise, clearing the way for high imperialism in India.

Not surprisingly, the Company's peculiar infrastructure and ideological claims to self-governance have attracted the attention of literary critics, scholars of imperial expansion, and historians of modern India seeking to understand the onset of colonial rule in the region.[16] Against this background of research, my

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[16] Some important works include H. V. Bowen, Margarette Lincoln, and Nigel Rigby (eds.), *The Worlds of the East India Company*; H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: the East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756-1833*; Kirti N. Chaudhuri, *The Trading World of Asia and the English East India Company*; Betty Joseph, *Reading East India Company, 1720-1840*; Philip Lawson, *The East India Company: a History*; Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company*; Rila Mukherjee, *Merchants and Companies in Bengal: Kasimbazar and Jugdia in the Eighteenth Century*; and Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade: the East India Company and Making of the Colonial Marketplace*.

thesis offers fresh perspectives on eighteenth-century writings preoccupied with the Company's involvement in India and embroiled in the debates about whether the Company's territorial expansion was preordained—a part of Britain's imperial destiny—or whether it marked a break from earlier political systems and laid the foundations of a new nation. By looking at documents and literature that both endorsed and condemned the Company's policy towards Indian political systems and populace, I show how the British empire gained its power and longevity not only through practices of domination but also by delegitimizing institutions it once endorsed, creating a moral force for the nation-state. However, as evidenced by Samuel Foote's play, a skeptical social attitude towards the Company had permeated literature and taken hold of the public imagination even prior to state proceedings, reflecting the social and political anxieties of the early empire. Cultural images were born and none was more powerful than that of the nabob.

The Becomings of the Colonizer and the Colonized

> A nabob, according to the modern acceptation of the word, is a person who in the East-India Company's service has by art, fraud, cruelty, and imposition obtained the fortune of an Asiatic prince and returned to England to display his folly and vanity and ambition.[17]

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[17] "The Memoirs of a Nabob," *The Town and Country Magazine; or, Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment*, 28.

These words from an eighteenth-century magazine will surely come as a surprise to ears accustomed to associating the title of nawab with the Muslim nobility in India. Though this aristocratic class has slowly eroded with time, the term continues to be used in common North-Indian parlance to describe an extravagant, careless, and wasteful individual. These connotations in popular culture are the result of a centuries' long association of nawabi rule with incompetent governance and sumptuous lifestyles in nationalist and colonialist histories of the Indian subcontinent. More often than not, the ineffectual control of the Nawabs over the province of Bengal is seen as the reason for the expansion of British colonialism in that region and beyond.[18] However, as the above-mentioned description of the nabob from 1771 illustrates, this word, though imported from India through the channels of the Company's trade and communication lines, soon shed its original denotation of a Muslim provincial ruler and was used as a derogatory term for the Company officers returning from India during the

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[18] This perception has been challenged in recent times by P. J. Marshall in *The Making and Unmaking of Empires* and *Bengal: the British Bridgehead*. Marshall sets right the imperial historiography that blames India's conquest on the despotism and anarchy of Islamic rule. Differentiating the regional conditions that enabled British military endeavors to succeed in Bengal, Marshall unveils the hidden history of the empire and the debt owed to the Nawabs of Bengal by the Company—a rich, stable, organized, and well-administered province able to finance its conquests elsewhere in India for the next few decades.

eighteenth century.[19] The transference of this title from the traditional Indian aristocracy to the new British administrators in India needs to be situated within a "process of reciprocal perceptions and diversification of the self and the other" (Malik 4) in order to understand the complexity of early colonial encounters. In the context of the cultural reception of the empire, it is, therefore, more appropriate to "speak of 'becoming' rather than 'being', contrary to the reifying and essentialising colonial and also nationalist historiographical stereotypes" (Malik 4).

Most current scholarship on colonial encounters continues to concentrate on the images of the colonized, ignoring the complexity of the nabob figure in discussions of the eighteenth-century expansion of the British empire in India. Studies in cultural imperialism have also chosen to ignore the cultural and political significance of the indianized English nabob, concentrating far more on the colonial construction of the anglicized Indian sahib.[20] To a large extent,

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[19] In eighteenth-century writings, the anglicized spelling of nabob is used for referring to both Indian nawabs and Company officers.

[20] This trend had been broken in the last couple of years with the appearance of some insightful historical investigations into the construction of the nabob figure in the English public sphere. See, for instance, Tillman W. Nechtman, "A Jewel in the Crown? Indian Wealth in Domestic Britain in the Late Eighteenth Century." Nechtman argues that the debates surrounding Indian wealth in the late eighteenth century fused complicated questions regarding political and imperial affairs with concrete questions of daily economy, thus making the politics of British imperialism in South Asia a matter of concern for the broader British public. Some other works on the nabob figure include Michael Edwards, *The Nabobs at Home*; Jyotsna G. Singh, *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: 'Discoveries' of India in the Language of Colonialism*; Christina

colonialist historiography has been responsible for this perception in scholarship. For instance, Thomas Macaulay, in order to show the advantages of anglicizing colonial policies, went to great lengths to cast the orientalist interests of early administrators as a fallacy, dismissing the nabob figure in the process as a "villain" with "an immense fortune, a tawny complexion, a bad liver, and a worse heart" ("Clive" 539). Almost as a corollary of Macaulay's strong condemnation of the English nabob, academic interest in the hybrid figures of colonial encounters has been restricted to the study of the experience of the colonized through the figure of the English-educated Indian. Macaulay's "brown sahib" has also been reinscribed in recent scholarship as the emblematic figure of the ambivalence circumscribing the postcolonial subjectivity. Homi Bhabha, in his influential work on hybridity in colonial discourse, elaborates how the colonial imagination turned away from the lofty ideals of enlightenment and indulged in "low mimetic literary effects," making mimicry "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (122). Despite a strong emphasis on the unstable and ambivalent nature of this mimetic process, one of the major drawbacks of Bhabha's formulation is the unidirectional flow of knowledge from the colonizer to the colonized. Although Bhabha underlines the "slippages" and the "excesses" in colonial imitation, his analysis of colonial hybridity, just like those of most

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Smylitopoulos, "Rewritten and Reused: Imaging the Nabob through 'Upstart Iconography'"; and T. G. Percival Spear, *The Nabobs: A Study of the Social Life of the English in Eighteenth Century India*.

other historians created in the wake of Macaulay's Minute of 1835, remains limited to the class of Indians that emerged out of European-style educational policies in the nineteenth century.

One of the major reasons behind the canonization of the "brown sahib" as the archetype figure of colonial hybridity is the perception that the English nabobs had little or no impact on the colonial policies in India. Dismissed as a problem of the English society by Macaulay, current critiques of British imperialism also tend to minimize the role of this hybrid figure in the epistemic shifts in the colonial discourse. Gauri Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest*, asserts that the British turned to the improvement of its Indian subjects through English education, only after they had failed to check the activities of the Company's nabobs (24). Viswanathan argues that the British administration, frustrated in its efforts to change the attitude of its English employees, took on the task of educating Indians by adapting "the content of English literary education to the administrative and political imperatives of British rule" (3). Her assertion, in part, is based on Macaulay's famous statement in the Minute on the necessity of English:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from

> the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.[21]

Such remarks by Macaulay have been instrumental in generating far greater interest in the academia in the effects of the English language and European-style education on the colonized, rather than the effects of Indian knowledge systems on the colonizer.[22] It has also led to the perception that the development of Orientalist scholarship and its later absorption into India's nationalist discourse was largely a concern of the Indian elite, with little or no connection with the early consolidation of the British empire.[23]

This thesis is an attempt to revert the gaze of postcolonial scholarship back to the circumstances which led to an active interest on the part of the colonizer in Indian history, politics and culture during the eighteenth century, and how this interest situated India on the centre stage of Enlightenment thought. In her article "The Native and the Nabob," Renu Juneja identifies the beginning of the age of

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[21] "Thomas Macaulay: Minute on Indian Education," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 375.

[22] Some canonical studies in this regard can be found in the edited volume by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*. Other works exploring the importance of English in colonized cultures are N. Krishnaswamy and Archana S. Burde, *The Politics of Indians' English: Linguistic Colonialism and the Expanding English Empire*; Priya Joshi, *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel*; Svati Joshi (ed.), *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*; and Alastair Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism.*

[23] For an example of this scholarship, see Veena Naregal, *Language, Politics, Elites and the Public Sphere: Western India under Colonialism.*

Company nabobs with Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and its heyday between 1760 and 1785 (183). During this period, the nabobs became representative figures in the political debates surrounding imperialism in India because "they were hybrid figures who made Britain's empire more real to domestic British observers" (Nechtman, "Nabobs Revisited" 646). As the very embodiment of Indian wealth and cultural influences, they led to the "acceleration and intensification" of "cultural hybridization, which could only be overcome and re-purified through the establishment of a new and definite power-relationship that came about in a most complex procedure in the beginning of the 19th century" (Malik 4).[24] Till then, the Company servants stood at a permeable boundary and exposed the mutual imbrication of the projects of building a nation and an empire: "Nabobs suggested that Britain's *imperial* history had the potential to shape, influence, and change Britain's *national* history – that the empire forged the nation even as the nation forged the empire" (Nechtman, "Nabobs Revisited" 646).

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[24] This process of hybridization took place in both the colony and the metropole. This enmeshing of cultural influences is investigated in many scholarly works including Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*; Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830 – 1867*; Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*; Ogborn, Miles. *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550 – 1800*; and Kathleen Wilson, *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840.*

As I argue in this study, the figure of the English nabob—with all the connotations of immorality, violence, and excessive wealth—was responsible for inaugurating an age of curiosity about the colonized which ultimately converged with the emergent discourses of enlightened modernity and moral authority in British nationalist thought and literature. In *Colonial Power, Colonial Texts*, M. Keith Booker acutely observes that "given the importance of cultural policies as techniques of British colonial domination in India, it should come as no surprise that British literary images of India were intricately interwoven with practices of power both in Britain and in India" (10). Inscribed within the larger discourse of moral improvement and ethics, Indian forms of constitutionality were instrumental in first condemning and then correcting the much-damaged image of the Company's servant in both Britain and India. Controversies and scandals were countered by creating the entwined myths of the Company's nationalist heroism and the despotism of the Indian ruling elite, leading to the larger discursive maneuver of legitimizing colonial technologies of rule.[25] The eighteenth-century conceptualization of Mughal polity on these lines facilitated its later absorption into the colonial administrative system despite the absence of the Mughal empire

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[25] Two important studies in this regard are Christopher Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* and Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: the British in India*.

itself.[26] As I demonstrate, Macaulay's nineteenth-century call for an anglicized India did not constitute an epistemological break from earlier modalities of colonial discourse; rather, it presented the logical culmination of an ideological process which had already instituted English modernity in the Indian episteme by using the nabob figure to perform the interrelated functions of delegitimizing Mughal governance and endorsing British administration in India. Far from being a peripheral figure, the hybrid English nabob figure was central to the discursive technologies of empire.

Enlightenment and the Limits of Postcolonial Theory

> Our Government and our laws are beset by two different Enemies, which are sapping its foundation, Indianism and Jacobinism. In some case they act separately, in some they act in conjunction: but of this I am sure; that the first is worst by far, and the hardest to deal with.[27]

In academia, there is an innate assumption that the history of the colonies cannot be understood without the history of colonialism.[28] Yet, when it comes to

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[26] A detailed discussion of the British administration's dependence on indigenous governance can be found in Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*.

[27] Edmund Burke, *Correspondence*, Vol. 8, 432.

[28] Some canonical examples are David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance; the Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835* and Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*.

the history of Europe, it is assumed that one can talk about a British history without that of the empire. While countless works recollect the flow of modernity from Britain to India via colonial institutions, it is perhaps time to investigate how India became a moral imperative for English constitutionality, having occupied the centre stage of the Enlightenment period for more than half a century. This thesis is an attempt to dispel the myth of an invisible empire in Enlightenment thought—a myth made even more precarious by the excess of public and philosophical preoccupation with ethics, technologies of self and notions of collectivity during this period.[29] I investigate the cultural and political upheavals in the English public sphere on the India question which ultimately led to the highly publicized impeachment trial of Warren Hastings by one of the most prominent philosophers of the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke. This investigation shows how the absence of Burke's reflections on the Company's activities in India often creates a unidirectional flow of ideas in scholarly studies of the intellectual relationship between Europe and its colonies. By constructing Burke primarily as a theorist of aesthetic categories like the beautiful and the

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[29] Some recent works investigating the connections between Enlightenment thought and empire are Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804*; Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa (eds.), *The Postcolonial Enlightenment: Eighteenth-century Colonialism and Postcolonial Theory*; Peter N. Miller, *Defining the Common Good: Empire, Religion and Philosophy in Eighteenth-century Britain*; Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire*; Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France*; and Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (eds.), *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*.

sublime on the one hand and as a thinker engaged with the possible effects of the French revolution on Europe's selfhood on the other, both European intellectual history and postcolonial theory frequently overlook the centrality of India and other imperial conquests in the formation of European discourses of modernity. Looking at Burke's prosecution of Warren Hastings and the public reception of the trial, I illustrate how India did not simply filter into the English consciousness as the other of Britain's modernity in the last quarter of the eighteenth century; rather, it became the very locus for the performance of a modern sensibility for the English public through Burke's construction of sublime terror to articulate the East India Company's violent excesses in India.[30]

Comparing Jacobinism in France with his own neologism for the abuses of the empire in India, Burke wrote the above-mentioned lines in a letter to voice his frustration at the English public and its failure to prevent the Company from becoming a colonial power by the end of the eighteenth century. In spite of such repeated pleas by Burke to recognize the dangers posed by the Company's

[30] When the term "India" was used in the eighteenth century, it is important to remember that the English public did not consider India to be either a colony or a nation, but the dominion of a crumbling Mughal dynasty. Burke's use of the term India, however, presents one of the early instances of imagining India through the emergent idea of nationalism in the eighteenth century. Throughout his writings on the abuses of the Company, Burke evoked India as a singular conceptual category—divided by multiple languages, religions and cultural practices, but still bound together by a history and a civilization extending all the way back to an antiquity older than that of Europe's. For an instance of Burke's construction of India, see "Speech on Fox's East India Bill," *Selected Works*, 272-73.

activities to the spirit of the age, a conspiracy of silence surrounds the India question in the history of ideas which keeps the sphere of Western aesthetics and politics free from the taint of the history of imperialism. The textual interweaving of the Burkean sublime with the French revolution in Western intellectual history is not simply a tacit maneuver of self-definition—a discursive effort to maintain an allegedly "pure" identity through an exclusively European tradition of critical self-reflection. Rather, such an attempt at historicizing ideas has been responsible for creating "the frequent if implicit notion of a 'colonial lag time' whereby a revolution occurs in Europe and then spreads elsewhere" (Agnani 132). Burke's harsh assessment of the Company's rule in India preceded his critique of the Jacobins in France but, in comparison to more than two centuries of rigorous research invested in evaluating the significance of the French revolution in shaping European modernity, a distinct body of scholarship is yet to emerge for assessing the impact of eighteenth-century philosophical engagements with questions of imperial power on the formation of modern institutions like democracy. In an essay titled "Burke as Modern Cicero," Geoffrey Carnall asks a pertinent question: "If Burke's assessment of the revolution in France carried so much authority, why should not his assessment of the East India Company's revolution in Bengal do so too?" (77). Carnall's question should have a special resonance for postcolonial studies since the European silence surrounding Burke's

writings on India also informs many scholarly critiques of imperialism and colonization.

A tendency to read the influence of the European Enlightenment on the intellectual life of the colonies in a unidirectional manner is most apparent in the studies of anticolonial nationalisms. Benedict Anderson, in his influential study on the ideological formation of nation-states, *Imagined Communities*, forwards the argument that the cultural and political developments in Europe and America provided later nationalist movements in the colonies with a set of tangible institutions to "imagine" their own national communities.[31] In *The Nation and its Fragments*, Partha Chatterjee points out the shortcomings of this argument by asking the following question: "If nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain 'modular' forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?" (5). According to Chatterjee, colonized India had declared its freedom to imagine itself as a nation well before the formation of anticolonial institutions

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[31] According to Anderson, recent nationalist movements have a highly modular character since

> They can, and do, draw on more than a century and a half of human experience and three earlier models of nationalism. Nationalist leaders are thus in a position consciously to deploy civil and military educational systems modeled on official nationalism's; elections, party organizations, and cultural celebrations modeled on the popular nationalisms of nineteenth-century Europe; and the citizen-republican idea brought into the world by the Americas. Above all, the very idea of 'nation' is now nestled firmly in virtually all print-languages; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness. (135)

by pronouncing the "inner" domain of culture as its "sovereign territory" and by refusing "to allow the colonial power to intervene in that domain" (*Nation* 6). However, despite declaring the cultural sovereignty of India, Chatterjee also places Indian nationalism in the double bind of Enlightenment rationality and colonialist knowledge. In *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, Chatterjee argues that nationalist thinking in India fails to escape the universality of Reason in it critique of colonialism, largely because it works "within a framework of knowledge whose representational structure corresponds to the very structure of power nationalist thought seeks to repudiate" (38). While colonial nationalisms are ambivalently derivative for Chatterjee, he seems to tacitly agree with Anderson that the constitution of Enlightenment thought is purely European, reaching subsequently to the colony—via institutions of Western modernity like liberal education—to transform its knowledge systems.

Like the studies on colonial nationalisms, some ardent critiques of Eurocentricism assign an exclusively European identity to the Enlightenment. As a result, these studies fall victim to the very same genealogical claims of European modernity which they wish to expose as false constructs of Western discourse. Edward Said, in his canonical work *Orientalism*, asserts that a very large number of European writers, while engaging with non-western cultures, adopted a style of discourse based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between the "orient" and the "occident" (2). Through this discursive

process, "European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). Though the contribution of Said's work to postcolonial studies—in the context of exposing the hegemonic nexus between knowledge and power—is undeniable, there are some inherent assumptions in *Orientalism* which weaken his critique. Said relegates the Orient to a temporal tardiness—to an "age of 'posts'"[32] —in its encounter with the West. Thus, at the very outset of *Orientalism*, European Enlightenment is placed well outside the reach of the colonized cultures. The age of Enlightenment makes an occasional appearance in subsequent pages, but only to affirm its own centrality in defining the contours of European knowledge. In Said's analysis, the West arrives at its encounter with the East as an independent and self-sufficient conceptual category under the aegis of Enlightenment thought, while the East—in the absence of such privileged tutelage—is easily compliant with the European desire to construct its other. By constructing the problematic of discursive encounters as an upshot of colonialism, Said reads European writings as discursive strategies of dominating and controlling colonized spaces. Given the disproportionate distribution of power and knowledge in this relationship, Said asserts that Orientalist discourse, as an ideologically-charged product of Western

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[32] I have borrowed this phrase from Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, 1.

imagination, reduces eastern cultures to a homogenized and inverted image of a modern and enlightened European self. As readily available images of Europe's otherness, Orientalist writings constantly legitimize hegemonic political projects like imperialism. However, as a consequence of Said's own uncritical acceptance of a canonized genealogy of Western thought, the East is also rendered impotent in his analysis, with little or no potential for transforming and restructuring the Western episteme.

Aijaz Ahmad, one of the leading critics of the implicit assumptions in *Orientalism*, comments, "the only voices we encounter in the book are precisely those of the very Western canonicity which, Said complains, has always silenced the Orient" (*In Theory* 172). According to Ahmad, *Orientalism*, despite its attempts to expose the hegemonic structure of the Western canon, is haunted by the "ghost of canonicity" because of Said's own allegiance to the humanist tradition of academic practices emanating from the Enlightenment period. While writing about "orientalist discourse," Ahmad asserts that Said identifies "the Enlightenment as a unified trajectory and master sign of both Orientalism and colonialism" (*In Theory* 164). Sensitive to the multiplicity of the Enlightenment period, Ahmad elaborates the many intellectual trends—empiricism, rationalism, historicism—perpetuated during the eighteenth-century in Europe (*In Theory* 70). In *Lineages of the Present*, he also recognizes the fissures and contradictions within the intellectual spirit of the age, especially on the question of democratic

values such as liberty and equality (203-4). However, despite deep reflections on the political values of the period, Ahmad tends to situate the revolutionary thrust of Western philosophy, following Antonio Gramsci's example, in the combined "effects" of the Enlightenment thought, the French Revolution, and Jacobin politics (*Lineages* 150). Despite repeated emphasis on the "mixed genealogies" of India's past, the flow of ideas remains curiously unidirectional in Ahmad's reading of South-Asian politics and culture in *Lineages of the Present*, with the canonized texts of European thought informing the questions of democracy, secularity and nationalism in the sub-continent. Even for an ardent critic of the metropolitan location of postcolonial criticism like Ahmad, the idea of India intervening in debates surrounding European modernity in the eighteenth century remains too distant a possibility.

I have engaged in this review of current scholarship not in order to minimize its contribution, but to make precisely the following point— the traditional canon of the European history of ideas, with its inherent mechanisms of selection and (occasional) deception, informs even the most sincere criticisms of Western epistemology. Because of their uncritical acceptance of a synthetically constructed genealogy for European modernity, the above-mentioned critics read colonized cultures as the inheritors of a belated modernity, which, despite many attempts at improvisation on the part of the colonized, remains limited and derivative. Though unspoken, these critics seem to share the conviction that the

East somehow missed its initial "tryst with destiny,"[33] arriving a little too warily and a little too tardily at an age of enlightened modernity to be ever truly contemporaneous with Europe. Postcolonial scholarship, in its agenda to question hegemonic representations of the other in colonial discourse, often ignores the centrality of colonies in debates surrounding Enlightenment and the empire. It also tends to create rigid binaries between the European self and its other, using imperialist historiography and Western epistemology as the objects of its critique and also as the depositories of non-European histories and social sciences. For instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty in his influential study *Provincializing Europe*, situates his work within the rubric of a postcolonial scholarship which is committed "to engaging the universals—such as the abstract figure of the human or that of Reason—that were forged in eighteenth-century Europe and that underlie the human sciences" (5). However, almost immediately, he curtails the exploratory potential of this project by stating that the phenomenon of "political modernity" is "impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the

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[33] This phrase is from the opening sentence in Jawaharlal Nehru's speech, delivered by him as the first Prime Minister of India on the eve of India' independence: "Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially" ("Tryst" 3). I use this phrase intentionally to demonstrate how mainstream Indian nationalism also situates India's freedom from colonial rule as the "true" dawn of enlightenment for the Indian nation. Nehru's speech is studded with phrases like "an age ends," "we step out from the old to the new," "India discovers herself again" ("Tryst" 3-4) to underscore both the sovereignty and modernity of India.

intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe" (4). Despite calling upon his fellow researchers to the task of shunning an Eurocentric approach to historicism and embracing the project of "provincializing Europe" as a way to explore how the Western episteme "may be renewed from and for the margins" (16), Chakrabarty fails to do so himself by emphasizing throughout his book that concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights "all bear the burden of European thought and history" (4).

Through my research into a relatively under-explored eighteenth-century archive, I demonstrate the fallacy of these theoretical positions which inadvertently ignore the role of colonized cultures in defining the contours of modern democratic institutions like citizenry and civil society in Europe. My work falls in line with the current "archival turn"[34] in the humanities and converges with the recent theoretical attempts at reconceptualizing and invigorating the postcolonial mission, so that Orientalist discourse can be revisioned as having evolved not "in total isolation but in continuous interaction with and as a part of the growth of social sciences." It should not be seen as "an

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[34] In the human sciences, the "archival turn" of the past two decades is used not to designate a simple return to the archive as a way of grounding historical research, but as a significant recasting of the way we formulate certain questions concerning methodology and epistemology. Some theoretical investigations into the construction of archives are Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown, "The Making of Memory: The Politics of Archives, Libraries and Museums in the Construction of the National Consciousness"; Michael Lynch, "Archives in Formation: Privileged Spaces, Popular Archives and Paper Trails"; and Carolyn Steedman, "The Space of Memory: In an Archive."

extraneous and alien growth on the otherwise splendid corpus of social sciences"; instead, it needs to be studied "as an inextricable part of social scientific discourse" (Balagangadhara and Keppens 55). Though critiquing certain basic assumptions within the field of postcolonial studies and humanities in general, this thesis, nevertheless, remains very much a project of "provincializing" Europe by showing that the voices from the margins actually speak from *within* the Western episteme and, though repeatedly distorted and disembodied, they did manage to restructure the cultural and political project of modernity. In this context, Nicholas Dirks insists that it is "critical to refocus our attention on the history of empire, cutting through the unquestioned assumptions of imperial history whenever it mistakes colonial ideology for a balanced history" (335). Whilst providing deeper insights into the cultural politics of the early empire and the ideological underpinnings of its discursive reconstructions, this thesis avoids the pitfalls of a postcolonial analysis that critiques the disparity between the metropole and the colony only to replace it with a monolithic construction of both spaces.

By using a comparative perspective, my research contributes to an emergent body of scholarship which aims to question the rigid metropole/colony binary while investigating the discursive overlaps and historical intersections

implicit in the formation of empires.[35] The relevance of colonies in structuring English culture, politics, and history has been an object of scholarly study for some time. Though most of the nineteenth-century historians remained preoccupied with separating Britain's domestic history from that of the empire, J. R Seeley commented as early as 1883 that "the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia" (10). More recently, scholars have examined the reciprocal influences of empire and metropolitan culture, and the ways in which non-western cultures shaped British power and knowledge.[36] The objective of these scholarly endeavors is to track particular sites of differentiation and specific networks of association in order to find methods to "treat metropole and colony in a single analytical field" (Cooper and Stoler 4). The empire was not simply something "out-there" as an exotic or menacing other but very much "in here" giving shape to metropolitan Britain, which "could not be insulated from or immune to its infiltration, either imaginatively or materially" (Wilson, *New Imperial History* 13). As Kathleen Wilson succinctly sums it up elsewhere, "In one sense, empire as a unit was a phantasm of the metropole: all empire is local" (*Island Race* 213 n. 74). A valuable contribution of this thesis, then, is to peel

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[35] Some examples include Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*; David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds.), *Colonial Lives across the British Empire*; and Felicity A. Nussbaum, *The Global Eighteenth Century*.

[36] See Maxine Berg, "From Imitation to Invention: Creating Commodities in Eighteenth-Century Britain"; Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination*; and Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose (eds.), *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*.

away the self-legitimizing historiography of the metropole by challenging the essentialist constructions of difference and identity and by unpacking the material conditions which made discrete practices of power possible. Via its alignment with a fast-developing field of study referred to as "new imperial history,"[37] this study also intervenes in the current understandings of eighteenth-century Britain in areas of eighteenth-century studies, critical theory and cultural history which, until recently, have unequivocally accepted the separation and isolation of metropolitan thought and culture from that of the colonies.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This thesis has a broad chronological organization, starting from the year 1757 when the East India Company took its first military action in the province of Bengal and ending with the year 1857 which marked the dissolution of the Company. Though I do not engage with the historical and political events of 1857 such as the Sepoy Mutiny, I expose the discursive hinges that made the high imperialism of the late nineteenth century possible, arguing that it is not the minacity of isolated events but their construction in imperial history that made the British empire a global force by the beginning of the twentieth century. This study is also genealogically structured as it explores the constitution and intersection of

[37] See Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*; Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives*; and Kathleen Wilson (ed.), *New Imperial History*.

knowledges and discourses about nation and empire. My research provides a nuanced understanding of how the images of the colonizer and the colonized have been used in important ways not only within various representations of nationalism in Britain but also within colonial administration in India, and how they inflected a variety of political debates surrounding the legitimacy of mercantile imperialism in the subcontinent. A genealogical study of the India question during the early empire in conjunction with its later manifestations in policy decisions can significantly advance our understanding of the many deployments of Indian culture and politics in the construction of British nationhood, and of the relationship between processes of knowledge formation and the production of power relations in the discourses of colonial domination and nationalism. Furthermore, the historiographic nature of this investigation challenges the premises of both imperialist and nationalist histories which tend to assume an essentialist separation between the colony and the metropole. By bringing together a wide range of historical and literary resources, it locates the multiple crossovers and alignments amongst the colonizers and colonized that ultimately aided in the formation of a unitary discourse regarding the moral authority of the British to rule India.

This study involves a close reading and analysis of historical treatises, archival documents related to the East India Company, correspondences and legal proceedings related to India, periodicals and newspapers, political pamphlets, and

published literary texts. In order to work with these extensive resource materials, I adopt an analytical framework which is interdisciplinary in nature and facilitates a combined study of literary and historical documents. Since I cross into the disciplines of literature, law, and history, I integrate these through critical tools provided by cultural materialism and new historicism.[38] This means I read archival and literary resources as spaces within language that exist "both as a series of historical instances and as a series of rhetorical functions" (Spurr 7). As Kathleen Wilson points out, "The eighteenth-century British empire presents us with interconnected and interdependent sites of historical importance, territorial and imaginative, that can disrupt oppositions between metropole and colony and allow us to rethink the genealogies and historiographies of national belonging and exclusion" (*New Imperial History*, 3). My methodological approach, by using such insights from recent studies on the empire, allows me to explain the historical conditions for the emergence of the India question as a contested site for British self-determination and enables a textured reading of the relationship between philosophical/literary practices and imperial and nationalist ideologies.

In his study of the development and deployment of different forms of writing and print by the East India Company, Miles Ogborn remarks that the

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[38] Canonical texts in this regard are Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*; *The Archeology of Knowledge*; Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse*; *Metahistory*; and Aram H Veeser (ed.), *The New Historicism*.

"Company's world was one made on paper as well as on land and sea" (*Indian Ink* xvii). Unpacking this enigmatic statement in his article "Power, Knowledge and Ritual on the English East India Company's Early Voyages," Ogborn observes that the Company's writings need to be understood as material objects that "gradually entangled the agency of Europeans and Asians in the active making of an intercontinental network that required constant material and symbolic work. It was only through that work that the infrastructures of empire were eventually produced" (157). In *The Rhetoric of Empire*, David Spurr also draws our attention to both the hegemonic mechanisms and the vulnerabilities of colonial discourse which, "despite its rather constant function in serving the forces of order, actually assumes a number of widely divergent rhetorical forms, like a series of fragments made by stress fractures under the burden of colonial authority" (7). Keeping these observations in mind, I have chosen to look at different modes of writing—legal, journalistic, literary, bureaucratic, historical, epistolary, philosophical—differentiated from each other by form, function and use but still held together through the thin yet tenacious filaments of colonial discourse. I consider the study of these divergent forms of writings as an integral part of my project since I aim to unpack the symbolic power of imperialist practices and also their in-built incongruities and contradictions. Furthermore, a transnational reading of different materials from multiple geographical and historical sites can significantly advance our current understanding of the

common historical links and divergent cultural viewpoints which come as inevitable legacies of a long colonial encounter. Since such an approach requires "alertness to the past's inaccessibility, an openness to alternative modes of historical being, and a capacity for humility and uncertainty in our engagements with historical archives and issues" (Wilson, *New Imperial History* 4), a combination of confidence and doubt also circumscribes my self-reflective perambulations into colonial histories and archives.

Both cultural materialism and new historicism represent rigorous and complex conceptual approaches to the use of historical material and to the role of contextualization in analysis. By using these approaches, this thesis also assesses and problematizes the position of archives in research work. As Helen Freshwater acutely observes, the archive presents an undeniable allure to scholars, especially given the recent return to particularity and specificity of a text's location and context in cultural studies. This allure of the archive, however, often "obscures the contingency of its construction, its destructive powers, and the way in which its contents remain vulnerable to interpretative violence" (729). Freshwater's observation cannot be truer when it comes to the question of colonial archives. In the context of the archives of the nineteenth-century Netherlands Indies, Ann Laura Stoler examines the workings of colonial governance as seen through its archival habits and conventions, and in so doing declares, "Transparency is not what archival collections are known for" (8). Instead of being simple accounts of

actions or records of what people thought happened, archival collections happen to be "records of uncertainty and doubt in how people imagined they could and might make the rubrics of rule correspond to a changing imperial world" (Stoler 4). However, the discursive anxieties and epistemic uncertainties which "repeatedly unsettled the imperial conceit that all was in order" tend to get buried under "grids of intelligibility" (Stoler 1). Not infrequently, one finds documents honed to write new histories and "renewed to fortify security measures against what were perceived as new assaults on imperial sovereignty and its moralizing claims" (3). Therefore, it would be a fallacy to consider documents in the colonial archives to be "dead matter" once the moment of their making has passed: "What was 'left' was not 'left behind' or obsolete…these colonial archives were an arsenal of sorts that were reactivated to suit new governing strategies" (Stoler 3).

This "reactivation" of archival material by imperialist historians gave shape to what I term as "archival myths": certain lasting images in the colonial and postcolonial imaginary which originate in the imperial archive but slowly seep into nationalist discourses of identity and gain strength as historical truths—the Black Hole of Calcutta being one such example—with the passing of time.[39]

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[39] In *Myth and Archive*, Roberto Gonzalez Echevvaria explores the intimate connections between literature, myth and history and asserts that the power to endow a text with the capacity to bear the truth lies outside the text in other narratives: "it is an exogenous agent that bestows authority upon a certain kind of document owing to the ideological power structure of the period, not to any inherent quality of the document or even of the outside agent" (8).

Given the power of these myths to infiltrate surreptitiously even the contemporary rhetoric about identity and difference,[40] it is imperative for a critic to search for their source within such dichotomous notions "inherited, in part, from the eighteenth century itself, when the interplay of alterity and similitude propelled by British expansion made possible notions of essentializing 'national' characters and the claims to historical distance" (Wilson, *New Imperial History* 4). These myths and the archival documentation surrounding them play a crucial role in the formation of a national self-consciousness by becoming "the storing and ordering place of the collective memory of that nation" and by enabling the realization of "the textual embodiment of a shared memory exterior to particular minds and performances" (Richard Harvey-Brown and Beth Davis-Brown 17, 18). By reading these archival myths "against their grain" and by focusing on "their blind-spots, silences and anxieties" (Prakash 9), I expose the textual violence perpetrated by imperialist interpretation of events documented during the burgeoning British empire in India. In so doing, my thesis has a postcolonial motive of reinscribing colonialist historiography "by reading its archives differently from its constitution" (Prakash 9).

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[40] As I discuss in the first chapter, the myth of the Black Hole played a crucial role in constructing an aura of "poverty tourism" around the city of Calcutta in postcolonial times. Such representations of the city are further explored in John Hutnyk, *The Rumour of Calcutta: Tourism, Charity and the Poverty of Representation*.

Though the East India Company had started to make its presence felt in many coastal regions of the Indian subcontinent by the mid-eighteenth century, this thesis concentrates on the documentation related to the province of Bengal. I have chosen to study the early colonial history of this province because of the symbolic significance of its acquisition in the history of the empire. In the year 1765, the Company procured the rights to collect the land revenues of Bengal, putting into effect a system of colonization that lasted for almost two centuries in the subcontinent. I have two reasons for studying this period. First, imperialist history canonized this age as the formative phase of the British rule in India by reiterating the adventures of the original English “heroes” like Robert Clive. As this thesis demonstrates, colonialist historiography used this epoch to create a myth of origin for the empire where the “conquest” of India was orchestrated, not by oppressive and controversial acts of aggression, but through the moral superiority of the British nation. The second reason for investigating this period is closely linked to the first one. This period also corresponds to the disintegration of the Company’s reputation in the English public sphere. I examine how, in order to preserve the legitimacy of the Company’s expansionist agenda in the public eye, a new mythical mode of history-writing emerged during this period, constructing the English intervention in Bengal’s political life as an act of protection for the fast-disintegrating Mughal empire in India.

I finally investigate the reasons why and how the controversial aspects of early colonial rule got lost in the later representations of the empire. I have chosen to juxtapose Thomas Macaulay's reconstruction of the origin of the British empire with the eighteenth-century archive for a number of important reasons. First of all, it demonstrates how the totalizing impulses of imperialist history overshadowed the controversial beginnings of the empire. This thesis, however, does not attempt to present a corrective history or an authentic account of the East India Company's activities in India. Any such attempt would amount to attaching a truth-value to the official records of the Company. As I stated above, the historical facts of the early British presence in India are often buried under layers of archival obscurity and deception. The political maneuvering of public opinion by the Company's officers created multiple smokescreens around their dealings in Bengal, rendering the actuality of events almost indecipherable. Rather than engaging in yet another reconstruction based on a questionable archive, this study reveals the mythical modalities of imperial history which cloaked the initial reception of the empire with the ideological constructions of nineteenth-century cultural imperialism. The myth of the Black Hole, the myth of Eastern despotism, the myth of English heroism—the ideological investments in all these myths consolidated the cultural construction of an alleged origin for the moral authority of the empire. Not surprisingly, these constructions also fed into Macaulay's own ambition of revising the Indian polity in the image of Britain. I further argue that

the narratives of imperial conquest in the nineteenth-century—such as those of Macaulay's—have been instrumental in diminishing the role of certain eighteenth-century initiatives of the Company in the later administrative policies of colonial India. I scrutinize how Macaulay, along with offering a strong indictment of Indian culture, did not refrain from denouncing early British administrators for adopting Indian manners in their public and private lives, marginalizing those very colonial institutions which made the empire possible. However, Macaulay also contradicted himself by creating a narrative continuity between the eighteenth-century "conquests" and his own vision of an "anglicized" India because the early British administration was largely a replica of the Indian, specifically Mughal, forms of constitutionality. Well aware of this contradiction, he concentrated on the personality rather than the policies of the early administrators like Robert Clive and, in the process, reduced the history of the period to a biographical portrayal of the original "architects" of British India.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis opens with an analysis of the imperial myth of the Black Hole of Calcutta. Though reiterated even today in a mutated form, this myth emerged out of a mid-eighteenth century letter written by a Company officer, Jonathan Holwell, describing the imprisonment and the subsequent slaughter of more than a hundred English subjects by the Nawab of Bengal. Chapter 1 examines how this

letter, by constructing historical discourse through fictional devices, gave shape to a narrative of English heroism and native aggression in colonialist history. Despite the absence of any appropriate validation of the writer's claims, later imperialist historians canonized this letter as a spontaneous eye-witness account of a tragedy and used it as a justification for Robert Clive's aggressive political move to dethrone the Nawab within a few months of the Black Hole incident. Besides situating the origin of the empire in a sense of collective trauma, this myth also provided a linear continuity to a colonial narrative that insisted that British rule in India began as an act of retribution for the violent abuses of power by the native rulers. By examining additional documents from this period, I demonstrate the ideological gaps between the initial reception of this incident by the English public and its later reconstruction in narrative history. This narrative not only created the myth of despotism that came to be associated with Indian forms of governance; it also helped to disguise the controversies and scandals plaguing the inception of the British empire in India. Based on this archival evidence, I assert that current scholarship frequently elides the difference between imperialist propaganda literature and larger public opinion in the eighteenth century. As a consequence of this elision, existing research on this period largely interprets the narrative of the Black Hole as a discursive strategy employed by the Company to strengthen its control over Bengal, ignoring its primary function as a tool for concealing a major crisis in the Company's legitimacy.

From 1765 onwards, historians—using Holwell's account—began to tie the tragedy of the Black Hole along with the Battle of Plassey into a linear and one-dimensional historical narrative of British India. As the next chapter illustrates, this causal relationship was constructed to protect the Company's reputation in a time of public confrontations and power struggles between its influential employees. In the face of rising public anxiety about the territorial ambitions of the Company and its officers, a new myth of "Eastern despotism" was introduced in the history of the empire through the figure of the Indian "Nabob." This myth, however, did not circulate in the English public sphere in isolation; it was soon combined in the Company's propaganda literature with the emerging nationalist narrative of English heroism and military valor in order to conceal both the oppressive acts of empire-building and the Company's disrepute in the wake of innumerous scandals. By constructing the territorial expansion in India as an act of spreading English values in distant lands with morally dubious regimes, this literature sought to overcome the discursive disjunction between the British nation-state and the commercial empire of a private corporation. In order to counter aspersions and abate public anxiety, historical treatises began to appear in the English press which covered up the controversies of the time with a narrative of English heroism. As I argue in Chapter 2, these narratives brought the military conquests of the East India Company within the rubric of the rising discourse of English nationalism. By collating the conquest of Bengal with

Britain’s other armed skirmishes during the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763), the writers of these narratives gave a new moral authority to the Company—which, till then, was little more than a trading enterprise in the public imagination—by reinventing it as a custodian of the English nationalist values. I further illustrate how this legitimacy was not only secured by recasting the Company’s employees in the heroic mold, but also by constructing the native rulers of Bengal as despotic figures. However, as I expose later in the chapter, the representations of Indian rulers remained particularly unstable during this period, leading to the transference of the term Nawab—anglicized in the early reports from India as “nabob”—to the Company’s employees themselves. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it was not simply the term, but also the negative connotations of arbitrary power and violence associated with it, which got transferred to the Company.

In chapter 3, I specifically look at the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings and analyze Burke’s construction of the atrocities committed by the Company’s officers on the peasants of Bengal during the annual collection of land taxes. The objective of this investigation is to show how a general tendency exists in current scholarship to receive the canon of Enlightenment thought uncritically and to situate certain areas of eighteenth-century intellectual inquiry—such as aesthetic theory—outside the purview of imperialist discourse. By incorporating the aesthetics of the sublime in his description of the Company’s methods, Burke

created terror and violence as essential traits of mercantile imperialist agenda. Congruently, unlike the numerous inscriptions of English military valor and heroism, Burke gave visibility to the plight of Indian peasants under the early colonial administration in order to heighten the sensibility of the English public about the debilitating effects of the British empire in India. While this chapter analyzes the centrality of the India question in the development of his aesthetic and moral philosophy, it also examines how Burke gave a new morally concentrated force to the sporadic and fragmented appearances of reports about the Company's abuses of power in India through his sublime construction of Warren Hastings as the archetypal despotic nabob. As a consequence of Burke's strong condemnation of the Company's crimes, a new myth emerged in colonial history regarding the moral authority of the English to preside over a global empire: the British nation, because of its unwavering belief in the rule of the law and its unconditional benevolence towards the subjugated races, did not flinch from putting its own comforts at risk by castigating its most lucrative enterprise. However, as I go on to demonstrate, rather than instilling sympathy towards the other as an essential trait of a modern civil society, Burke's rhetoric remained limited in its scope since political agency, in his worldview, was restricted to the inhabitants of the British isles alone and did not extend to the subjects in India. I illustrate how the moral concept of "sympathetic revenge," through Burke's obsession with the sublimity of violence, soon turned into a categorical dismissal

of the idea of self-governance for the Indian populace and, thus, laid the quasi-ethical foundations of colonial rule in India for the nineteenth century.

In order to explicate the tacit connections between eighteenth-century events and the colonial policies introduced during the period of high imperialism, I analyze in chapter 4 Thomas Macaulay's reconstruction of the early empire in his mid-nineteenth-century writings. By selectively using the eighteenth-century archive, later imperialist historians like Macaulay transformed the East India Company into a harbinger of enlightenment and modernity with the purpose of justifying the expansion and consolidation of the British Raj in India. These historians constructed British imperial history in such a way that the Company, instead of remaining a commercial enterprise with largely mercantile interests in the colonies, became a bastion of the modern British nation in the popular imagination. This shift in the representational structure of colonial history was made possible through the discursive interventions of nineteenth-century historiography which glorified the early British empire for actively dismantling an archaic and tyrannical Islamic rule in India. Besides highlighting these aspects of colonialist history, I specifically analyze the manner in which Macaulay combined political, aesthetic, and literary insights from the Romantic Movement with a selective reading of the archive and, in the process, created the powerful cultural myth of the conquest of India. However, as I go on to demonstrate, Macaulay's seamless narrative of the rise of the empire was not only meant to

disguise the ambivalent beginnings of colonial rule, but also mask the failure of his own vision to anglicize India in the image of Britain.

CHAPTER 1

Literary Performance and Myth Making: Narrating the Black Hole as Imperial Trauma

> Being myself once again at liberty, it is time I should release you, Sir, also from the unpleasing travel I have led you in this narrative of our distresses, from our entrance into that fatal Black-Hole. And, shall it after all be said, or even thought, that I can possibly have arraigned or commented too severely on a conduct which alone plunged us into these unequalled sufferings? I hope not.[41]

It is not uncommon to find narratives of trauma as faithful companions to imperialist expansion. Constructed as national tragedies, these narratives often obscure the controversial actions of empire-building and replace the history of a period with the pathos of a single event. The Black Hole of Calcutta is one such incident in British imperial history. With the enigmatic remarks above, John Zephaniah Holwell ended his account of the Black Hole, which he wrote to a friend in the form of a private letter during the month of February 1757 while still on board a ship sailing from Bengal to England. The end of Holwell's narrative must have come as a cathartic release for the reader after being held emotionally captive by the intensely tragic description of the slow and torturous deaths of the

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[41] John Zephaniah Holwell, "A Genuine Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths of the English Gentlemen," *India Tracts*, 274. Subsequent citations appear in the body of the text.

many Europeans in the prison of an Indian provincial ruler. An alleged witness and survivor of this tragedy, Holwell described with great pathos the callous handling of the East India Company employees incarcerated by the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula. According to the letter, this incident took place after the Nawab's forces destroyed the English factory at Calcutta's Fort William in June 1756.[42] After ransacking the factory, Daula supposedly confined a hundred and forty-six Europeans—most of them British—in a small unventilated prison-cell for a whole night in the hot summer month of June.[43] Within hours of their imprisonment, a hundred and twenty-three prisoners were suffocated to death amidst unspeakable horrors. While Holwell exhibited some trepidation over the possible effect of his horrifying imagery on the reader, the subsequent inscriptions of this event ensured that the terror produced by his description did not get judged too harshly in the future. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Holwell's account of the Black Hole was canonized as one of the founding documents of the British empire and got reiterated for more than two centuries in imperialist history to exemplify the dangers faced by English pioneers in colonies. As Nicholas

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[42] This skirmish between the Nawab and the English is popularly known as the "Siege of Calcutta" in the history of the British Empire.

[43] It is important to add here that Holwell's letter also reveals the imprisonment of some Indian soldiers of the Company's forces. He does not, however, disclose their presence in his narrative of the atrocities committed in the prison cell. He mentions this fact passingly in the adjoining list of the survivors and the deceased during the night.

Dirks comments in his study of the early colonial expansion in India, "the Black Hole became a legend of and for the atrocities committed by the natives of India against the heroic traders of the East India Company" (1). Almost inseparable from the historical moment of the Company's acquisition of Bengal, the Black Hole transformed the beginning of the British rule in India into an epical English tragedy.

Besides Holwell's initial account, nineteenth-century historiography played no small role in lifting the incident out of the annals of history and transforming it into an imperial myth. In an essay titled "Lord Clive," Thomas Babington Macaulay devoted special attention to this particular event while recounting the British acquisition of the province of Bengal. In this account, the incident is subsumed within the meta-narrative of England's heroic fight against the evils of Oriental despotism. Macaulay's recollection of the Black Hole begins with a liberal dose of biased judgments and racial prejudices to discredit Indian forms of governance and constitutionality. In his view, while the "Oriental despots" were "the worst class of human beings," Siraj-ud-Daula outstood as "one of the worst specimens of his class." Without any rationale, Daula hated the English and wanted to drive them away from his province. He quarreled with the Company on the slightest pretext and razed the English factories at Fort William because of "a very exaggerated notion of the wealth which might be obtained by

plundering them" ("Clive" 504).[44] Daula's "feeble and uncultivated mind" was incapable of perceiving that the riches of the Fort would fail to compensate him for a much greater loss "if the European trade, of which Bengal was the chief seat, should be driven by his violence to some other quarter" ("Clive" 504). Though the English soldiers fought bravely to protect the factory, they were no match for the Nawab's enormous forces. The Fort soon fell, and the "brave soldiers" of the empire were taken prisoner in the infamous prison cell called the Black Hole. The ensuing despair and agony of the Company employees awakened "neither remorse nor pity in the bosom of the savage Nabob" ("Clive" 506). Oblivious to the beneficence of English trade and the good-intentions of its peaceful traders, the Nawab committed the horrendous crime of Black Hole.

[44] Though Macaulay identifies greed as the reason for the siege of the Fort William, Siraj-ud-Daula elaborated his reasons in a letter (dated 1 June 1756) to Khwaja Wajid, appointed to negotiate with the British, in the following manner:

> I have three substantial motives for extirpating the English out of my country: one that they have built strong fortifications and dug a large ditch in the king's dominions contrary to the established laws of the country; the second is that they have abused the privilege of their *dastaks* [trade passes] by granting them to such as were in no ways entitled to them, from which practice the king has suffered greatly in the revenue of his customs; the third motive is that they give protection to such of the king's subjects as have by their behavior in the employs they were entrusted with made themselves liable to be called to an account. (qtd. in Hill III 152)

A detailed discussion of Daula's relationship with the Company can be found in B. K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company*. Gupta argues that the arrogance and the disobedience of the English traders angered the Nawab, and their constant provocations led to his decision to ransack the Fort. Also see Sushil Chaudhary, "Sirajuddaullah, English Company and the Plassey Conspiracy—A Reappraisal."

In Macaulay's version of the early empire, the Black Hole does not remain only an emblematic incident of the failure of the native rulers to recognize the peaceful and benevolent nature of the British trade in their province. The incident also plays an important role in turning, to use Patrick Brantlinger's words, "violence and rapacity into virtues" and "acts of aggression" into "acts of necessity and self-defense" (81). Macaulay constructed the Battle of Plassey—fought a year later between the Nawab and the East India Company—as a direct outcome of the Black Hole. According to Macaulay, Robert Clive used all his military acumen to punish and, ultimately, to vanquish the "evil" and "remorseless" Nawab of Bengal on the battlefield.[45] In Macaulay's view, while the "great crime" of the Black Hole was "memorable for its singular atrocity," equally unforgettable was "the tremendous retribution by which it was followed" in the shape of the Battle of Plassey ("Clive" 505). Macaulay described the

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[45] Many recent works have challenged this lopsided representation of the Battle of Plassey. Michael Edwardes, in *Plassey: The Founding of an Empire*, demonstrates that the conflicts between the Nawab and the Company can be best understood within the larger context of the Anglo-French rivalry in the sub-continent of India. With the defeat of Siraj-ud-Daula and the French East India Company's troops supporting him, the British also extinguished the French colonial interests in Bengal. Edwardes' argument—that this outcome was achieved mainly through the behind-the-scenes conspiracies, rather than the actual battle—is also supported by Sushil Chaudhury's *The Prelude to Empire*. According to Chaudhury, the plans to overthrow Daula began much before the battle since the Nawab, soon after his accession to the throne, instituted strict property and trade policies towards the East India Company. It is important to add here that Siraj-ud-Daula was in power for less than a year before he was overthrown by the British forces.

reaction of the British settlements in South India to the Nawab's actions as follows:

> In August the news of the fall of Calcutta reached Madras, and excited the fiercest and bitterest resentment. The cry of the whole settlement was for vengeance. Within forty-eight hours after the arrival of the intelligence it was determined that an expedition should be sent to the Hoogley, and that Clive should be at the head of the land forces. ("Clive" 506)

Macaulay continued to narrate how, despite his anger at the Nawab's actions, Clive retained his composure on reaching Bengal and embarked on his mission of deposing the "perpetrator of the Black Hole" in a slow and deliberate manner. In Macaulay's opinion, "the odious vices" of Siraj-ud-Daula, "the wrongs" suffered by the English at his hands, "the dangers" posed to the European trade by his whims—all these reasons together justified a battle with the ruler of Bengal.

In a description of otherwise epic proportions, Macaulay tends to get rather defensive about Clive's actions during the Battle of Plassey. According to Macaulay, Clive's reasons for deposing Daula, though amply justified, were largely misinterpreted by his contemporaries and left a "stain on his moral character." The means adopted by Clive to achieve the "noble" end of destroying a "depraved" Nawab also affected his public image in eighteenth-century England. Instead of recognizing the fact that Clive had added Bengal—the "wealthiest kingdom in the East"—to the dominion of Britain with his decision to

overthrow a native ruler, his political rivals decided to accuse him of engaging in wanton violence for the sole purpose of increasing his personal wealth and fortune.[46] Macaulay further asserted that it was the duty of historians like him to correct the image of a "great hero" of the empire which the political rivalries in the eighteenth century had distorted severely. The reading public had to be reminded that Clive had to deal with a powerful adversary who was devoid of any ethical principles. Greatly outnumbered by the Nawab's forces, Clive was forced to participate in the "dishonorable" methods of "Oriental politics." Supporting Clive's decision, Macaulay wrote

> This man [Clive], in the other parts of his life an honourable English gentleman and a soldier, was no sooner matched with an Indian intriguer, than he became himself an Indian intriguer, and descended, without scruple, to falsehood, to hypocritical caresses, to the substitution of documents. ("Clive" 508-509)

In Macaulay's view, instead of condemning Clive for his involvement in the plots for overthrowing Daula's regime, history must remember these negotiations as the commencement of a new chapter in Clive's life. In this new phase, he must be

[46] Macaulay is being disingenuous here by presenting an extremely partial view of the events that took place in the eighteenth-century. Accusations against Clive were not simply a result of political enmity; rather, the English Parliament was forced to inquire into the conduct of the Company's high-ranking officers after multiple reports of corruption and abuses of power from India. I discuss this particular aspect of the early empire later in this chapter and also in the following chapter.

"chiefly regarded as a statesman; and his military movements are to be considered as subordinate to his political designs" ("Clive" 508). From Macaulay's perspective, it was about time that the English public exonerated Clive from all the allegations of the past century because, even if he did not act honorably in every instance, he had, nevertheless, used his political acumen to lay the foundations of the British empire in the East.

As in many other instances in the essay, Macaulay used his rhetorical flourishes to shift the controversial areas of dethroning Siraj-ud-Daula onto the Indian players in this imperial drama. A Bengali merchant named Omichand emerged as the key negotiator between the British and the ruler of Bengal.[47] According to Macaulay, Omichand, driven by a strong hatred of the Nawab, used all his "Hindoo vices" to plot against his own sovereign.[48] Finally, as a result of

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[47] There is very little consensus amongst recent researchers regarding the role of Omichand in the conspiracies to overthrow Daula. In *The Prelude to Empire*, Sushil Chaudhary contends that Omichand was instrumental in putting the British in touch with the disaffected members of the Nawab's durbar (124). On the other hand, Kumkum Chatterjee, in *Merchants, Politics and Society*, argues that Omichand's role has been exaggerated in the colonial archive in the context of the Plassey conspiracy (103). As P. J Marshall has also shown, it was not uncommon to find close bonds between the Company's servants and the Indian merchants during the early years of the empire. Though they performed many financial and diplomatic services, these local merchants were rarely involved in the political decisions of the Company. For a detailed historical perspective on this relationship, see P. J. Marshall, "Masters and Banians in Eighteenth-century Calcutta," *Trade and Conquest*, 191-213.

[48] One of the eighteenth-century documents that collaborates with Macaulay's version of Omichand's role is a biography of Robert Clive titled *The life of Robert Lord Clive, Baron Plassey*. Written by Charles Caraccioli after Robert Clive's suicide in 1774, this biography is largely an attempt to rectify Clive's much damaged public image in the

Clive's "bravery" on the battlefield of Plassey and Omichand's "knavery" in the royal court, Daula was defeated, and Nawab Mir Jafar was placed on the throne of Bengal. By introducing a Hindu merchant as a key figure in the conspiracies to overthrow Daula, Macaulay strengthened the historical stance that a religious schism between Hindus and Muslims existed in Indian society before the advent of British rule.[49] He asserted that the "true" inhabitants of Bengal were Hindus who, because of their long history of servitude to "foreign" Islamic regimes, were eager to get rid of the Nawab and welcomed the British as their saviors from the tyrannical rule of the "Moors." His exaggeration of Omichand's role still informs a commonplace perception that the majority population of Hindus in India was oppressed by their Muslim rulers before the arrival of the British.[50]

Besides creating the historical myth of a divided Indian society, Macaulay's construction of the rigid dichotomies between Western "virtues" and

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wake of the parliamentary inquiries into the Indian affairs of the East India Company in 1772-73.

[49] Macaulay's assertion about a politically disenfranchised Hindu population in the *nawabi* Bengal is contradicted by many historical works from the eighteenth century. In *A History of the Military Transactions*, Robert Orme elaborated how the royal court of Bengal, during the reign of Siraj-ud-Daula's predecessor Alivardi Khan, was almost exclusively comprised of Hindus. According to Orme, the "Gentoos" in Bengal's administration had great influence, and the Nawab rarely took a decision without their participation or knowledge. (Vol. 2, 52-53)

[50] This theory of a divided Indian society on the eve of the British Empire has been presented in relatively recent scholarly investigations into the reasons for the Battle of Plassey. See, for instance, Brijen K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company*, 41. For a rebuttal of this historical stance, see Sushil Chaudhary, *The Prelude to Empire*, 62-86.

Eastern “vices,” embodied by Robert Clive and Siraj-ud-Daula respectively, fed into the larger discursive field of English nationalism in the nineteenth century. The construction of the Black Hole as a national tragedy and the Battle of Plassey as a necessary act of English retribution performed the ideological function of justifying the empire in the eyes of the public. It made the empire-building process a legitimate act of spreading the values of “justice” and “integrity” beyond English shores into a world where they were allegedly unknown before the arrival of the British. Once this legitimacy was secured by Macaulay, all the controversies that plagued the beginning of the British empire in India were easily ironed out by creating a discursive cause-and-effect relationship between trauma and aggression. In this version, Robert Clive is predominantly an English hero who punished the perpetrator of the Black Hole honorably by depriving him the dominion of Bengal.[51] For a writer like Macaulay, it became an almost superfluous duty to account for the authenticity of such a history. To achieve a narrative continuity between the Black Hole and the Battle of Plassey, Macaulay remained highly selective in his reading of the eighteenth-century archive and

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[51] Macaulay’s version can also be found in twentieth-century popular histories of early British rule in India. See, for instance, Noel Barber’s reconstruction of the eighteenth-century events in Bengal in *The Black Hole of Calcutta*, published in 1965.

presented his limited interpretation of eighteenth-century events through an ideologically charged rhetoric of nation and race.[52]

These hegemonic interpretations of eighteenth-century events in the later historiography often obscure the initial reception of the Black Hole incident by the English public. Considering the popular interest in the incident in the nineteenth century, one almost expects the reconstructions of the Black Hole to be based on extensive records in the eighteenth-century archive. However, the attention solicited by this single event in the history of the British empire is highly incongruous with its initial coverage. Very few reports of the incident appeared in the English press between 1757 and 1760. Out of this limited archive, historians like Macaulay focused on one document as the authoritative text on the Black Hole. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, this document was a letter written by John Zephaniah Holwell to a friend in England in 1757.[53] In this letter,

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[52] It is important to add here that race—as a discursive strategy of colonial domination—did not emerge till almost the beginning of the nineteenth century. Though Macaulay opposes the British and the Indian character by using race and nation as synonymous terms in his essay, this ideological overlap did not take place in the eighteenth century. For a further discussion on the emergence of the idea of race in European thought, see Nicholas Hudson's essay, "From "Nation" to "Race": The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought." Hudson argues that racial characterizations were not uncommon in the eighteenth century, but they did not merge with the emergent discourse of nationalism in Europe till almost the end of the century.

[53] This letter was published for public perusal in the form of a pamphlet with the title *A Genuine Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths of the English Gentlemen*. That Holwell's letter did get printed as a pamphlet is attested by the *Catalogue* of all the published books and pamphlets in London between 1750 and 1760. Since there is no exact year of its appearance, the letter could have been made public anytime between late 1757 and early 1758.

Holwell wrote that he was imprisoned, along with the other English officers, in the Black Hole after the plunder of the factories at Fort William by the forces of the Nawab. Despite its suspicious solitariness in the colonial archive, historians like Macaulay never doubted the legitimacy of Holwell's testimonial about the Nawab's orders to confine more than a hundred men for a whole night in a small cell with insufficient supply of water and air.[54] One reason for Holwell's escape from a closer scrutiny by the later imperialist writings was his rather illustrious career in the East India Company. He was initially appointed as an attorney at the Mayors Court at Calcutta, where he handled legal cases between Indian and British plaintiffs.[55] In 1752, he was appointed as a *Zamindar*, a post equivalent to

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[54] It is generally believed that the prisoners in the Black Hole were only men, comprising of traders, soldiers, and Company employees. The letter, however, mentions one woman prisoner called Mrs. Carey. According to Holwell, Mrs. Carey did not perish during the night, but continued to be a prisoner of the Nawab on the account of being "too young and handsome." This slightest hint of rape in Holwell's text, as Betty Joseph suggests, was "sufficient to invoke the public's nascent phantasmic image of oriental despotism as sexual as well as political vice" (71). While Mrs. Carey actual existence is open to debate, she was reintroduced to the nineteenth-century English public through H. E. Busteed's *Echoes from Old Calcutta*, published in 1888.

[55] Holwell's early career as a legal attorney is well documented in the proceedings of a case between Nian Mullick and William Davis. This case is one of the few surviving records of the disagreements between Indian and English traders over the rights of buying and selling cotton in mid-eighteenth century Bengal. For the proceeding of this case, see Nian Mullick, *Between Nian Mullick, ... Appellant. John Zephaniah Holwell, ... attorney for William Davis, Esq; ... Respondent.* For Holwell's defense of Davis, see William Davis, *Edward Holden Cruttenden Esq; and John Zephaniah Holwell Esq; attorneys for, and on behalf of, William Davis Esq; ... Plaintiffs. Nian Mullick, ... Defendant.*

that of a District Magistrate in the early colonial administration of Bengal.[56] When the office of *Zamindar* was abolished in 1758, Holwell continued in the service of the Company as a member of the Governor's council at Fort William in Calcutta. He also held the post of the Governor of Bengal twice for very brief periods: first, during the "Seige of Calcutta" in 1756; and, again in 1760, between the departure of Robert Clive and the arrival of his successor Henry Vansittart. These high official ranks during a long career in India vouched for the authenticity of his narrative and also invested it with an unprecedented authority in the later versions of the event.[57]

While Holwell's position in the Company administration convinced the defenders of the empire about the authenticity of the Black Hole, historians over

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[56] This post entailed the double duty of supervising and collecting the land revenues on the behalf of the Company. The office-holder was also required to be the judge at the Court of "Cutcherry," a tribunal constituted for trying both civil and criminal cases.

[57] Though Holwell's name is canonized in the context of the Black Hole, it is worth noting that he was also one of the first Company officers to acquaint the English public with the practice of Sati. The juxtaposition of his accounts of the Black Hole and the ritual of Sati demonstrates the selective nature of imperialist history, where certain archival records are highlighted according to their ideological alignment with colonial policies. Holwell's name rarely figured in the nineteenth-century discussions of Sati, since, as an eyewitness, he did not paint Sati as an archaic and inhuman practice. In contrast to the later condemnation of this ritual by the British administration, Holwell actually praised the women for their heroism and justified the practice through rational and religious principles. Holwell's description can be found in an essay titled "On the Religious Tenets of the Gentoos," published in his various compilations on India, including *A review of the original principles, religious and moral, of the ancient Bramins* and *Interesting historical events, relative to the provinces of Bengal*. For a discussion of Holwell's views on Sati, see Norbert Schürer, "The Impartial Spectator of Sati, 1757-1784," 23-25.

the years have been far less charitable towards Holwell and have raised serious questions about the accuracy of his account. In fact, the complete lack of documentation supporting this text has led to a suspicion about the very likelihood of the incident ever taking place, especially in the manner described by Holwell.[58] One of the main reasons for historians' skepticism over this account is the complete absence of any other official documents to corroborate Holwell's version of events in Calcutta during the summer of 1756. This anomaly is all the more noticeable since the East India Company officials maintained meticulously detailed reports of their activities in the province of Bengal during this period.[59] The very genre of writing in which Holwell had chosen to report the horror of the incident also raised doubts about its authenticity. Throwing all bureaucratic caution to air, Holwell had inscribed the events leading to the Black Hole in the form of a personal letter. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Karl Marx—writing almost simultaneously with Macaulay—had accused the English of being "hypocrites" for making "so much sham scandal" (81) over an event described in a private letter showing little inclination towards objectivity.

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[58] See, for instance, Sayyid Amin Ahmad, *The Black Hole of Calcutta*, 19-21. Other recent works dismissing the Black Hole as Company propaganda are Iris Macfarlane, *The Black Hole or The Makings of a Legend* and Jan Dalley, *The Black Hole: Money, Myth and Empire*.

[59] The official decorum of reporting important incidents required the concerned Company officer to provide a detailed transcription of the original documents of the transactions leading up to the event in question.

Though the personal and solitary nature of Holwell's account has been a subject of controversy for some time, its authority in the context of shaping the English attitude towards Bengal and Calcutta is undeniable. In her attempt to dissipate the myth of Black Hole, Iris Macfarlane states, "The importance it assumed in history books, in the national imagination, was not related in any way to its truth" (230). Overshadowing the truth-function of an objective history, the value of this narrative resided in its power to construct images of human degradation for the cultural discourse of imperialism. It created a powerful myth about Calcutta, where the story of suffering and dread in the prison cell became synonymous with the living conditions of the city itself.[60] In the context of its popular reception, Macfarlane further observes that the significance of the "non-event" of the Black Hole was "only in the use to which it could be put afterwards" (19). As John Hutnyk has shown, Holwell's letter, to a large extent, helped to create a permanent "tourist" destination for the West to witness Eastern poverty and squalor. The subjective nature of the Black Hole account gave rise to a new mode of imagining Calcutta, where the fictional narratives of "rumor" and "gossip" replaced the discursive structures of "truth" and "fact" (Hutnyk 90). As a result of these unconventional channels of information, the metonymic association

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[60] For instance, Geoffrey Moorhouse, in his travelogue on Calcutta, associates the Black Hole incident with the city to assert that the "very name Calcutta is derived from a symbol of fear and evil" (19).

between the Black Hole and Calcutta, over the span of two centuries, reinvented the city as a space of appalling decay and decrepitude in the Western imagination.

Besides producing images of an impoverished Other, Holwell's letter was also instrumental in creating a sense of shared trauma in the English imagination regarding the origin of British India. Despite lacking all the official norms of authentication, Holwell's intensely personal narration of his experience attained a transcendental "aura" in the colonial archive.[61] As the most accessible account of the event, it became one of the fountainheads of all the later reconstructions of the origin of the British empire in India. In contrast to the voluble archive of the East India Company, Holwell's letter took a far stronger grip on the national imagination in the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons behind its lasting appeal was the unique use of the first-person voice to convey trauma, contrasting drastically from the impersonal tone of the usual official reports coming from India.[62] Rather than a factual representation of an event, Holwell's letter was a

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[61] I am using the term "aura" in the sense proposed by Walter Benjamin in the essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." According to Benjamin, great works of art inspire awe and reverence due to their uniqueness and irreproducibility. This aura, however, does not depend on any inherent quality of the work, but comes from the external attributes of cultural value and authenticity. Benjamin's conception of "aura" has been adapted in the context of the archive by Helen Freshwater in "The Allure of the Archive." Freshwater argues that the allure of the archive, in a large measure, arises from the perceived originality of an archival document rather than its truth-value vis-à-vis the actuality of an event.

[62] As Kate Teltscher argues in her essay "The Fearful Name of the Black Hole," Holwell mixed the genres of sentimental and adventure literature in order to presents himself as a

text that represented “historical trauma through the individualized discourse of sensibility” (Joseph 63). The canonization of Holwell’s letter, as a representative text of imperial trauma, in the English imagination was largely because of the fact that it was an eye-witness account. A detailed look at the structure of Holwell’s narrative is necessary here in order to understand how a private letter created the lasting public myth of the Black Hole.

With his brief letter, Holwell introduced—most likely for the first time—a new mode of history-writing in the Company’s archive, where the trauma of an event was inscribed through the subjective voice of a survivor of a tragedy. Jeffrey Wallen has discussed in detail how the eye-witness narrative, as a mode of recording history, always exists in tension with archival records. In contrast to the institutionalized and bureaucratic voice of the archive, the eye-witness “insists on the importance of individual experience against the crushingly impersonal forces of history” (Wallen 261). Wallen further elaborates the function of the eye-witness account in the inscriptions of an event:

> It insists that *we* remember, and no longer be allowed to forget, what has been lived through and suffered by others. The eyewitness seeks to implant and imprint a living voice: a voice that registers the trauma of what should not have happened, and therefore must not be forgotten.

“hero who combines manly fortitude in the face of extreme horror with a feminized helplessness and sensibility” (322).

> Eyewitness testimony contains an imperative — you too must know, must remember, must bear the marks of the past — even as it states the impossibility of ever truly grasping the violations that the witness has undergone. (262)

As outlined by Wallen here, the eye-witness narrative creates a unique subjective perspective on the history of a period. By personalizing the knowledge of an event, it brings the experience of the writer into greater proximity with the reader. The emotive effect of this affinity is further multiplied when the writer chooses to put into words the experience of a trauma. While archival records reduce the horror of an incident to objective information of a distant atrocity, eye-witnesses bring to life all the horrors of an event by making their first-person narrative voice, along with their bodies, the bearer of all the psychological and physical traces of the trauma.

Holwell also knew how to mold the language of his letter to stand witness to the horror of a tragedy. His letter combined the recollection of the events with the figurative language of literature, creating a highly poignant image of English suffering at the hands of the Nawab of Bengal. Though overlaps between genres of writing were not uncommon in the eighteenth century, Holwell's account leaned markedly towards a literary rather than a factual representation of the

Black Hole.[63] Holwell was quite distinctly inclined towards constructing the emotive effects of a traumatic experience rather than simply conveying the accurate details of an event to his readers. His choice of a narrative voice that expresses the horror of the night in an affective language was not surprising given the centrality of aesthetics in the eighteenth century. As Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla mention in their anthology of English writings on the sublime, this period saw the transformation of aesthetics into an essential modality for articulating the complexities of affective experience, particularly "in the context of an emerging new understanding of the construction of the subject" (1).[64] In effect, aesthetics became the very site for reducing the role of conscious and reflective intellectual activity by giving voice to various desires and passions which could not be accommodated by reasoning faculties. By circumscribing the

[63] For a detailed discussion of the ideas of truth and fiction in the eighteenth century, see Lisa Zunshine's "Eighteenth-Century Print Culture and the "Truth" of Fictional Narrative." Zunshine argues that it was not uncommon to see writers manipulate narrative forms to convey both subjective experience and objective knowledge. These experimental narratives renegotiated the boundaries of genres, collapsing the binary between truth and fiction.

[64] This new conception of aesthetics, to a large extent, emerged in the very same year in which Holwell wrote his letter with the publication of Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke's *Enquiry* made a significant intervention in the philosophical debate amongst eighteenth-century philosophers over the place of aesthetics in the construction of human subjectivity. In this text, Burke reworked the classical concept of sublime by making terror the primary source of aesthetic pleasures and extended this concept to the ethical dimensions of human experience. I undertake a detailed analysis of the Burkean sublime in the context of India in the third chapter.

power of reason, aesthetics in the eighteenth century declared the autonomy of human subjectivity from the limitations of rationalist discourse.

Holwell's letter intersects with the emergent discourse of an aesthetically-determined subject in an interesting manner. By conflating the individuality of eye-witness accounts with the affectivity of terrifying imagery in his narrative, Holwell erased the historicity of the Black Hole incident and projected his own subjective experience onto the event. Right at the beginning of his narrative, he provided a putative explanation for the unconventional choice of an emotionally-charged language in the relating of his experience. He declared that the irreparable damage to his "health of body and peace of mind" was a testimony to the fact that "the annals of the world cannot produce an incident like it in any degree or proportion to all the dismal circumstances attending to it" (*Tracts* 388). By constructing his physical and mental suffering as the "true" evidence of the authenticity of the Black Hole, Howell freed himself from the responsibility of providing any tangible proof of the event. He went on to describe how, despite his resolution to testify accurately about the incident, the very act of remembrance created such a "disturbance" and "affliction" in his mind that it became impossible to find a "language capable of raising an adequate idea of the horrors of the scene." Through similar statements about the detrimental effects of trauma on his psyche at the very outset of his narrative, Holwell divorced his language from all the formal constraints placed on a rationalist historical discourse. He

further emphasized that it was impossible to recollect the great atrocities committed in the prison cell in the impersonal manner of the official reports, written in order to record the Company's commercial transactions. What was at stake in this recollection was not a matter of commerce or profit for the Company, but a quest for a language to capture the physical and mental suffering of its officer. He also justified the heavy use of emotive imagery in his recollections by stating that "however high the colouring of my retentive memory may supply, it will fall short of the horrors accompanying this scene" (*Tracts* 388). By underlining the inimitability of his experience, Holwell made it absolutely clear that it was impossible for him to translate this incident into a language which did not have the power to reproduce the "horrors" of the fateful night for those who chose to read his account. He further emphasized the legitimacy of his chosen mode of expression by stating that the "humane and benevolent imagination" of his readers would supply the necessary images where own memory would fall short. According to Holwell, the reader with this essential empathy would take the pathos of his recollections as the most indisputable proof of the magnitude of the tragedy.

By making the reader an accomplice to his reconstruction of the horror of the Black Hole at the outset, Holwell presented the rest of the narrative as an appeal to the reader's imagination rather than reason. He implored the reader to visualize the condition of the prisoners before they succumbed to their death in

the Black Hole. In order to assist the reader's imagination, he provided an hour-by-hour account of the pathetic attempts made by the prisoners to save their lives. According to Holwell's narrative, the captives from Fort William were pushed into the tiny cell "like one agitated wave impelling another" at around eight in the evening (*Tracts* 391). Without enough standing space, the prisoners were piled on top of one other, with the prison door—the only venue of escape—shutting behind them. Before nine o'clock, the inmates started to loose their mind by getting reduced to a situation "much more wretched than that of so many miserable animals in an exhausted receiver." They began to beg for a swift death to save themselves from a condition where there was "no circulation of fresh air sufficient to continue life, nor yet enough divested of its vivifying particles to put a speedy period to it" (*Tracts* 394, 395). Delirious with thirst in the sweltering heat of June, "WATER, WATER" became the general cry of the prisoners of the cell. These cries brought water to the prison window, but with fatal effects. Since the only source of air was situated on the other end of the cell, prisoners started to rush from one source of life to another with the disastrous result of trampling the weaker inmates to death. By eleven in the night, the guards began to keep up a steady supply of water in order to watch this horrific scene. At this point in the narrative, Holwell asked his readers to contemplate the behavior of the Nawab's guards, who "held up lights to the bars, that they might lose no part of the inhuman diversion" (*Tracts* 397). A greater scene of misery, however, soon put an

end to this morbid entertainment. The already rancid air of the cell turned poisonous with the fumes of rotting bodies by midnight, destroying the remaining strength of the survivors. Holwell admitted to having no memories beyond this point because of the insensible state he was in for the rest of the night. It was only around six in the morning that he regained consciousness, after the guards opened the prison-door on the orders of the Nawab. According to Holwell, no words could ever describe the pain suffered by him at the sight of the dead piled all around him. He concluded the letter in the hope that the narrative of "these unequalled sufferings" would remain with the readers as a reminder of the damage done to his "soul" by "that fatal Black-Hole" (*Tracts* 416).

According to recent scholarship, such a moving literary performance of trauma did not go unnoticed in the history of the British empire. In her analysis of the letter, Betty Joseph claims that "the passions aroused by the Black Hole event did much to justify the subsequent Company-funded 'revolution' in Bengal, which replaced the local potentate with a puppet who furthered the interests of the Company" (65). Holwell's narrative, Betty Joseph argues, made it possible "to believe that British rule in India was born not out of naked English aggression but out of justifiable actions taken to punish the Indian perpetrators of the Black Hole" (65).Though exposing an important ideological bind between the Black Hole and the Company's acquisition of Bengal, Joseph tends to mistake the public

role of Holwell's account in the eighteenth century. Describing the impact of his narrative, she affirms

> The Black Hole captured the public imagination in a way that helped the Company avoid much public and political scrutiny of the crucial shift that had taken place in its role in India. Through this skirmish with the rulers of Bengal and their later defeat at Plassey, the Company moved from being a commercial enterprise trading with the Indies to a territorial power ruling a portion of India. It was the beginning of the conquest of India. (70-71)

With these statements, Joseph makes two fundamental errors in her reading of the early empire. First, she considers Holwell's account to be the Company's justification for deposing the Nawab of Bengal. Second, she suggests that these aggressive actions of the Company in India escaped, as a consequence of the Black Hole, public scrutiny in the eighteenth-century England. As I demonstrate later in the chapter, Holwell's account failed to either protect the Company from public scrutiny or justify its aggression in India. However, before elaborating these points, I think that it is crucial to identify the common source of these erroneous postulations in the current studies of the early empire.

Betty Joseph's scholarship tends to approach the events of the Black Hole and the Battle of Plassey through the ideological lens of the era of high imperialism in the nineteenth century. Such scholarly assertions about eighteenth-

century events largely depend on narrative reconstructions, rather than the archival depositories, of imperial history. But as I have elaborated earlier in this study, there are problems with adopting such a lens because nineteenth-century historians like Macaulay created a fallacious myth of origin, where the British empire is invested with an uninterrupted continuity. In this foundational myth of Britain's moral supremacy, all the acts of imperial aggression are justified through the representations of unsolicited violence on the part of the colonized. In a certain sense, it has become a far more powerful myth than that of the Black Hole because it continues to frame, and thus to debilitate, even the most scathing scholarly oppositions to imperialism. It is useful to turn to Aijaz Ahmad's critique of postcolonial theory to illustrate this point. As Ahmad observes in his reading of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the myth of a continuous "West" undermines most current studies in imperialism. He demonstrates that this myth greatly weakens Said's own denunciation of the imperialistic tendencies in Western discourse, when he projects a vista of a homogenized "western" thought and constructs an uninterrupted continuity from then to now. Despite postulating this continuity "as the ideological corollary of colonialism," Ahmad argues that Said "takes a fantastic, and rather late, fabrication for a real genealogical history, hence disabling himself as regards the history of fabrication *qua* fabrication and settling down, instead, to reading modern history back into Antiquity" (335).

Ahmad's critique of Said applies to the studies of the early British empire as well since they take the later "fabrications" of eighteenth-century events as the actual unfolding of the history of the period. By ignoring the discontinuities in the formation of the early empire, even the most nuanced studies fall victim to the monolithic constructions of historical progress in imperialist historiography. Betty Joseph's reading of Holwell's narrative, for instance, is highly nuanced in itself, for she argues that the construction of the Black Hole as a subjective experience overcame the "profound lack of archival evidence" (69). Holwell shifted the locus of history from the archive to the extraordinarily traumatized body of the narrator, therefore, "positioning the sensible body as the primary receiving surface of impressions, the surface of writing for historical violence" (Joseph 68). Despite offering a powerful critique of the eyewitness accounts in the colonial history, Joseph's analysis returns to the deterministic system of the nineteenth-century historiography: a system of representation where all the events converge with the historian's sanctimonious desire to discipline its disruptive other. By acknowledging that the Company used the Black Hole as the reason for ousting Siraj-ud-Daula from power, Joseph buys into the imperialist propaganda about Britain's territorial expansion in India. This acknowledgement, even when it is accompanied by scathing criticism, lends more power to Macaulay's construction of the "conquest of India" as a justified act of English retribution.

Rather than reiterating the alleged correlation between the Black Hole and the Battle of Plassey, I would argue that it is far more significant to unravel the reasons behind Holwell's attempt to reenact the events in Bengal through fictional devices. For too long, Holwell's letter has been a literary substitute for an event believed to be irretrievably lost to the British imagination. As a trace of a collective trauma, writers like Macaulay often isolated this text from the surrounding archive to give shape to a shared national memory. A return to the eighteenth-century archive, however, helps to mitigate this aura of solitude created around the letter over the period of almost two centuries. Though the account of the Black Hole may well be an archival anomaly, it is not as isolated a text as one is made to believe. It is, after all, surrounded by the fragmented, yet well preserved, records of Holwell's long Company career. The context of his career gives a different complexion to the Black Hole incident in the eighteenth century. As I illustrate in the next section, the controversies surrounding Holwell's role in the acquisition of Bengal almost discredited his story of the Black Hole in the eighteenth century.[65]

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[65] In *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850*, Linda Colley suggests that Holwell's account was largely ineffectual in turning public opinion in favor of Company's activities in the eighteenth century. According to Colley, the British public "had no great desire — and would not until the late 1780s — to read about or identify with" (255) the suffering of the Company's officers, given their immense wealth on returning from India.

The Inconvenient Truths of Imperial Conquest: Disguising Controversy with Tragedy

> It is somewhat rare, to find transactions of an extraordinary nature delivered circumstantially by those who are not only acquainted with, but were also actors in them, whilst the matter is fresh in their minds, and consequently, when they are fittest to give a clear, connected, and impartial account. (*Tracts* 253)

John Zephaniah Holwell wrote these lines in 1764 to reacquaint the public with his inimitable experience of the Black Hole and to underscore both the authenticity and the horror of this incident for his readers. Though his original letter describing the Black Hole had been made public in many texts since 1757,[66] Holwell chose to publish it again in a treatise titled the *India Tracts* in 1764. By the time these tracts were published, Holwell had already lost his credibility with the East India Company. He had been demoted by the Court of Directors in London for his role in promoting "revolutions" in Bengal at the Company's expense and deposing two Nawabs in swift succession.[67] This fact was underlined

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[66] The first excerpts of Holwell's letter appeared in 1759 in the *Annual Register of the year 1758*, 278-287. It was reproduced a year later by John Almon in *A new military dictionary: or, the field of war* under the entry "Calcutta." It appeared again in 1764 in an anonymous historical treatise titled *An impartial history of the late glorious war,* 45-59.

[67] After Siraj-ud-Daula was overthrown, Nawab Mir Jafar was placed by the British on the throne of Bengal in 1757. However, Mir Jafar was also deposed in 1760 and replaced by his son-in-law, Ali Kasim. The Company headquarters in London perceived these

publicly by an anonymous pamphlet in 1764, accusing Holwell of "nabob-changing" tactics for private gains.[68] Within months of the publication of this pamphlet, a pamphlet titled *A vindication of Mr. Holwell's character* was published anonymously by the so-called "friends of Mr. Holwell" to salvage Holwell's reputation after the "aspersions" thrown out by the pamphlet.[69] The "friends" defended Holwell's conduct passionately by illustrating his integrity in the various offices held by him in India.[70] Immediately after the public

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frequent changes in the local administration as detrimental policies of the officers in Bengal which affected the Company's trading profits. A more detailed discussion of the Company's relationship with Mir Jafar and Ali Kasim is taken up in the subsequent chapter.

[68] Titled *Reflections on the present commotions in Bengal*, the pamphlet was published by the supporters of Robert Clive on 6 March, 1764. The writers claimed that Holwell, in his temporary capacity as the Governor of Bengal, had abused his power and used the Company's forces to dethrone Mir Jafar after receiving bribes from his successor, Mir Kasim. The pamphlet stated

> After the departure of Colonel Clive, the delicacy that he had used towards him [Mir Jafar] was entirely thrown aside. His successor [Holwell] in the government, who had been *particularly instrumental in bringing down Sou Raja Dowla* [Siraj-ud-Daula]*, and consequently, in occasioning the first revolution in Bengal*, had arrived at his dignity…entirely through the accident of a number of his seniors going home…Being blessed with a genius, uncommonly fertile in expedients for *raising money*,…he had projected and put in practice several *inferior maneuvers…* (37).

[69] The "Friends of Holwell" called the writers of the pamphlet "the partisans of Mir Jaffer," who were paid by the Nawab to cover up his close association with the Dutch East India Company. According to the "friends," these anonymous writers were disloyal Company officers who were enraged with Holwell for exposing the Nawab's designs for ousting the English—with the help of the Dutch forces—from Bengal. These accusations, however, had little impact on the decision of the Company because there was no evidence to support these claims.

[70] *A vindication of Mr. Holwell's character* by Holwell's friends contains many official documents which show Holwell's efforts to maximize the Company's profits and to

appearance of the pamphlet and its rebuttal, *India Tracts* was published. The compilation consisted of five main sections. The first section contained an address to the proprietors of East-India Stock, outlining the necessity of deposing the Nawabs of Bengal. The second section was a long refutation of a letter which had expressed discontent on the part of some members of the Governor's Council in Bengal with Holwell's conduct. The third section contained some "important facts" regarding the East India Company's affairs from the years 1752 to 1762. Using the Company's documents, Holwell constructed a linear chronology of events in this section to demonstrate the necessity of his actions in Bengal. The fourth section was exclusively devoted to the "Narrative of the Deplorable Deaths of the English Gentlemen who were suffocated in the Black Hole."[71] The final section was devoted to the defense of Henry Vansittart, the Governor of Bengal who had succeeded Robert Clive and who was also instrumental in deposing Mir

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augment its reputation with the Indian population. It also claimed that Holwell was responsible for the abolition of the post of *Zamindar* by exposing the following problems of the post: the embezzlement of the Company revenues, the oppression of the natives, and the corruption in judicial proceedings (36).

[71] The *India Tracts* also includes an illustration of the monument erected by Holwell in memory of the Black Hole. According to Holwell, the monument was constructed in Calcutta at his own expense to commemorate the brave "English souls" who succumbed in the prison cell. As Robert Travers argues in "Death and the Nabob: Imperialism and Commemoration in eighteenth-Century India," this monument became an unshakeable testimony to the "tyrannical violence" of the Muslim rulers in Bengal for the British officials and the Indian populace alike. According to Travers, "monuments to the dead became important tools for projecting British power in India, as Calcutta was transformed from a vulnerable commercial enclave into the capital of a vast British-Indian empire" (195-96).

Jafar. All the texts in these sections—starting with the personal correspondences and ending with the official Company records—were carefully arranged to either attest to the integrity of Holwell's character or to counter the allegations of corruption levied against him by the other officers in Bengal.

In the dedication framing these documents, Holwell affirmed that he had "hastily" thrown these tracts together "in consequence of unprovoked injuries" to his character during the "disputes between Directors, Proprietors, and Candidates for the management of East-India affairs." The "pungency" of the many accusations had deprived him of a "peaceful retirement" after a Company career full of "difficulties, miseries, and heavy misfortunes." He stated that the narrative of "the fatal catastrophe" of the Black Hole was included in this collection to remind the public about his painful career in Calcutta. According to Holwell, though other versions of his letter had appeared earlier, they were ridden with the inaccuracies of the press, leaving the intensity of his writing unintelligible. As a consequence of these "involuntary imperfections" of the press, he had chosen "to review, to reform, and to cast into somewhat a different shape, these little pieces, that were thus exposed." He further added that the narrative had so close a connection with the other documents, "as scarce to require an apology for reprinting it in this edition" (*Tracts* iii-vi).

With these brief statements at the beginning of the collection, Holwell performed a couple of important and interrelated functions. First of all, he

discredited all earlier accounts of the Black Hole incident and framed the version included in the *India Tracts* as the most “genuine” description till date.[72] This elision is extremely significant because this particular reconstruction of the events leading up to the imprisonment of the Company officers—unlike previous reports—highlighted Howell’s role in defending Fort William from the Nawab’s forces. While other accounts did not exceed ten pages, this particular narrative ran into almost thirty pages, describing Holwell’s heroic efforts to protect the Company’s property as the commander of the English troops after they were deserted by their assigned commanding officer. The depiction of the night in the infamous cell was also far more protracted, complemented with an equally long elucidation of Holwell’s own circumstances after surviving the night. In contrast to the other versions that were already public, this letter gave a more detailed account of the atrocities committed by the Nawab’s forces. Furthermore, it did not end with Holwell’s miraculous survival from the Black Hole; it continued to dwell, in great detail, on the physical and emotional torment endured by him

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[72] Holwell also added a preface to his letter in the *India Tracts*, emphasizing again that the language of the letter was enough evidence of its authenticity. With this preface, he further underlined the notion that the letter was written right after his release in the form of a private correspondence and that he had not interfered with its language and its content in the intervening years. He apologized to his readers for reproducing the text of his personal letter verbatim:

> If therefore it appears in some places, a little passionate; in others, somewhat diffuse; and through the whole, tinctured with that disposition under which it was written; the occasion, and the nature of the performance, will sufficiently excuse what might have been considered as imperfections, if it had been intended for the public view. (386)

during the months of detention after his release from the Black Hole. In this version, Siraj-ud-Daula refused to pardon Holwell after his survival, and he remained a prisoner as a punishment for his prominent role during the siege of the Fort William. According to Holwell, the Nawab had a special score to settle with him: "My being treated with this severity, I have reasons to affirm, proceeded from… the Suba's resentment for my defending the fort" (*Tracts* 406).[73] As a punishment for his unwavering loyalty to the Company, Holwell claimed that he was dragged from one place to another for days at end by the marching troops of the Nawab. After a long description of this painful journey, Holwell claimed that his half-dead and diseased body was placed in front of Daula, who finally took pity on him and said, "his sufferings have been great; he shall have his liberty" (*Tracts* 416).

This representation of personal injury and pain, supplemented by an equally passionate recollection of unrehearsed heroism in the armed skirmish with the Nawab prior to the imprisonment in the Black Hole, makes it evident that Holwell's narrative, especially in the year 1764, was no longer a demonstration of the collective trauma of the English prisoners in the prison cell. It was a public revelation of the trials and tribulations of a Company officer who had dared to

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[73] Holwell addresses Siraj-ud-Daula as "Suba" in his narrative. This is an abbreviated form of the title "Subedar," given to a provincial head or chief in the Mughal administration. This title was used interchangeably with the title of the "Nawab" in the early Company records.

protect the Company's property from the enemy and had suffered greatly in the process. However, by the time Thomas Macaulay returned to Holwell's letter in the nineteenth century, this performance of private trauma became one more illustration of the "despotism" of the Indian rulers. Macaulay completely ignored the way Holwell framed this letter as a testimony of his service to the Company rather than as a condemnation of the Indian forms of governance. Seeing its potential for informing his own ideological constructions of precolonial India, Macaulay singled out this particular version of the letter from the *India Tracts* as the most authentic document on the Black Hole. Once juxtaposed with the surrounding archive, however, an entirely different light is thrown on the letter. Almost as an anticlimax, the letter is no longer the bearer of collective trauma, but the personal and desperate attempt of an East India Company officer to save his public reputation.

Unlike Macaulay, the reasons for Holwell's performance of trauma had little to do with the construction of a shared English experience of an empire in India. When he chose to include the letter in the *India Tracts*, Holwell had just one preoccupation—to reinstate himself in a favorable position with the Company.[74] By exposing his personal trauma, Holwell expected the public to

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[74] Holwell underlined this purpose in *Interesting historical events, relative to the provinces of Bengal*, a two-volume treatise compiled between 1765 and 1767. Addressed to the "august assembly, the public," this historical treatise begins with a recollection of the Black Hole. Holwell admits to being called upon to address the public on two previous occasions. According to Holwell, his first public piece on the Black Hole

think that the accusations of bribery against him were false. After all, it was impossible to believe that a survivor of the Black Hole could form any kind of alliance—financial or otherwise—with any Indian ruler. From Holwell's perspective, the more he could convince the public about the authenticity of his traumatic experience in India, the more it would serve to salvage his fast-deteriorating relationship with the Company. After reading his account, Holwell hoped that the public would see the injustice of the Company's actions, especially towards an officer who had suffered so much on their behalf. Also, when the "ruthless" ruler of Bengal could find it in his heart to pardon Holwell's life after witnessing his miserable condition, surely the English public would be even more charitable and support his opposition to the Company's decision to deprive him of his former powers in India. That Holwell failed desperately in this attempt to solicit public support is borne out by the fact that he never regained his previous influence in the affairs related to India. Though Holwell's personal motives were frustrated, his "revised" narrative of the Black Hole, nevertheless, gave a new direction to the inscriptions of the British Empire. Chronicles began to appear in press, authenticating Holwell's account as the original document of the Black

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exhibited the "scene of unparalleled horror and distress, which I judged not unworthy a place in our annals" (1-2). The *India Tracts* came later as a result of "the necessity of the times" which "obliged me to draw my pen in defense of injured worth and character" (2). In addition to providing reasons for Holwell's earlier writing, the *Interesting historical events* also presents one of the earliest attempts at writing the history of India within the framework of Western historiography.

Hole.[75] In this process, other accounts of the incident disappeared from the public view, allowing Holwell's letter to feed the imperial imagination of the nineteenth century in an alleged archival solitude.

While it is crucial to recognize the hegemonic impulses behind the later constructions of trauma around the Black Hole, we must not forget that Holwell's letter was primarily an alibi for his conduct in the service of the Company in Bengal. Rather than reading the letter in a state of severance from the other documents from this period, we need to recognize that it is far more useful to interpret it in conjunction with the records which expose the internal politics of the Company. Such a reading does not only dissolve the myth of a traumatic beginning of the British rule in India, it also provides a more historically-sound understanding of the motivations behind the Company's desire to shroud its activities in Bengal with a founding myth of native aggression. After examining Holwell's account in the broader context of his career, I would argue that it is also important to look at some other, and often ignored, publications on the Black Hole. This is an extremely critical exercise in order to understand the vast ideological distance between the initial reporting of the incident and its later reconstruction in imperial history.

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[75] See, for instance, John Entick, *The general history of the late war*, 367.

Though Holwell affixed 28 February 1757 as the date for the writing his account, there is no public record of its publication in this year.[76] Contrary to popular belief, there were no reports of the incident from India in the year 1756 either.[77] One of the first mentions of the incident appeared in a 1757 report, originating from the British settlements in Canada instead of India. Published anonymously, this document, titled *The Military History of Great Britain*, was penned by an English officer in Canada. This first-person narrative mainly provided the details of the officer's imprisonment at Oswego by the French armies during the Seven Years' War in North America.[78] As defined by the

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[76] A word of caution is necessary here. This unavailability in the archive does not necessary convey to the researcher that the content of Holwell's letter did not reach a wider public. Some passing references to Holwell's account had already started appearing in the English press by 1758 to attest the public familiarity with his letter. For instance, a 1758 treatise titled *A plan, for regulating the marine system of Great Britain* mentions Holwell's name in connection with the Black Hole. Imploring the improvement of the unhygienic conditions of the British naval fleet, the author, a Captain John Blake, adopts a rather sarcastic tone towards Holwell's account. Almost undermining Holwell's construction of the trauma of the Black Hole, Blake emphasized the necessity of immediate steps to protect the soldier's life on board the English ships from

> That destructive and contagious sickness, which is too well known to be the effect of close confinement; whereof what happened lately in the black-hole at Bengal is one shocking instance, though we might find many not unlike it nearer home, could every surviving seamen tell the moving tale of his sufferings as well as Mr. Holwell (49).

[77] The Black Hole tragedy, according to Holwell, took place on 20 June, 1756. The absence of any record of the incident in this year is sometimes interpreted as evidence against the authenticity of Holwell's account. This lacuna in public knowledge, however, needs to be understood within the context of the networks of information in the eighteenth century. In the absence of any specialized channels or technologies of sending news, it was not uncommon for the reports of incidents in India to take six months to a year to reach London.

writer, the purpose of this narrative was to enumerate the reasons why "the French in America are enabled, not only to stand in Defiance of us, but are daily enlarging their Territories, by which they must inevitably ruin us on the Continent" (iii). Outlined on the title-page itself, there were mainly three reasons behind the publication of this document: first, to exhibit "the cruelty and infidelity of the French, and their savage Indians;" second, to show "their superior advantages, and the only means of redress;" and third, to delineate "the present state of our colonies in *America*." As a survivor of the French siege of Oswego in 1756, this anonymous writer stated that his superiors in the colonies had adopted the unfortunate policy of gathering inadequate garrisons and fortifications to protect the English settlements. These disastrous measures required the immediate attention of the authorities in London since they endangered the English people and the wealth of the British nation in the colonies alike. If not corrected in time, the "French tyranny" would soon take over the British territory in North America with the help of the many "Nations of Indians," who are continually employed by

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[78] Also known as the French and Indian War (1756-63) in the context of Canada, the Seven Years' War is the name ascribed to the various skirmishes between the European nations across the globe in their rush for lucrative colonies in the new world during the mid-eighteenth century. During this period, the royal French forces in Canada allied with the Native-American forces to fight the British in a series of intercolonial wars. For a history of French and British conflict in North America, see William Fowler's *Empires at War: The French and Indian War and the struggle for North America, 1754-1763*.

the French "to commit all Sorts of Depredations against our Settlements, as well in Peace as War" (7).[79]

Though this document was largely preoccupied with the construction of the French and native threat to British interests in America, it universalized the writer's argument about the precarious situation of the English in the colonies by citing two examples from outside America. The first example was the siege of St. Philip's in Minorca,[80] and the second was the siege of Fort William in Calcutta. The incident of the Black Hole was mentioned in this context as an illustration of the dangers faced by the English settlements in the absence of proper fortifications against the French. In this initial account of the Black Hole, the incident was little more than an appendage to a larger point made by the writer about the security of the British in the New World. The account was largely framed as yet another instance of French and native complicity in preventing the British from gaining new territories. At this stage, it is important to raise the following question: How did an officer stationed in Canada know about the Black

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[79] With a decisive win of the Seven Years' War, Britain destroyed both the colonial interests of the French and greatly diminished the role of Native Americans in the political and cultural landscape of North America. For a detailed discussion of imperial relationships during this period, see Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*.

[80] Minorca, an island in Mediterranean Sea, was taken over by the French navy after its defeat of the British in May 1756. The "Siege of Minorca" is often represented as the catalyst event for the Seven Years' War between the two colonial powers.

Hole incident?[81] The document provides the answer to this question by reproducing the original text of three personal letters about the siege of Calcutta, allegedly written by a band of officers posted in India.[82]

In comparison to Holwell's lengthy description of the Black Hole event, these letters are very brief and do not exceed more than two pages. The brevity and the tone of these letters indicate that they were not written with the purpose of becoming public.[83] One of these letters was from a Company employee called Alex Champion, while the other two letters were anonymous. Out of the three writers, only Champion claimed to be a survivor of the Black Hole.[84] The other two writers mainly described their experience during the siege of Calcutta and did

[81] Along with raising this question, I should also point out that the text does not give any indication about the location of the writer. Though published in London, the overall tone of this work seems to indicate that it was put together in several batches and in different places in Canada.

[82] Two of these letters were written from Calcutta, while the third was written on board a ship in the Bay of Bengal. It is quite possible that these letters were added later to the main body of the text in London at the time of its publication. Again, the writer provides no clues as to how and where he procured the letters.

[83] In contrast to these letters, the language of Holwell's letter appears to be a far more self-conscious performance of trauma. It is quite possible that his letter was written with the intention of becoming public, rather than remaining limited to a private reading by a personal friend, from the very beginning.

[84] Interestingly, Holwell, in his list of survivors of the Black Hole, does not mention Alex Champion's name. This can either mean that Champion was not imprisoned or that Holwell removed his name intentionally from the list. The latter can be interpreted as an attempt on Holwell's part to discredit Champion as an eyewitness of the night in the cell. However, this remains mere speculation in the absence of supporting documentation of either Champion's or Holwell's letter.

not claim to be the witnesses of the Black Hole. Though largely ignored, these letters provide some significant details that challenge Holwell's account of the Black Hole.[85] Instead of blaming the Nawab for the siege, one of the letters held the Company officers responsible for the destruction of the Fort William. According to the anonymous writer of one letter in *The Military History of Great Britain*: "The cause of our being so ill treated in that opulent Country" arises "entirely from the Misconduct and Knavery" (80) of the Company officers who were unacquainted with the proper customs of conducting trade in India.[86] In the same letter, the writer claimed that the British brought this attack upon themselves by sending out "Crouds of School-Boys every Year, fitter for their Master's Rod ten Years after they appear here, than the Government of a Country" (81). Infatuated with "riches," these young and inexperienced officers acted in complete defiance of the laws and policies of the Nawab. In the writer's view, the Black Hole must serve as a "lesson" and a "warning" for the Company when it came to the recruitment of its employees for India.

After a cursory look at their content, one must proceed rather cautiously with the analysis of these letters. Though they have the potential of weakening

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[85] For instance, Champion mentions the Black Hole in his letter dated on 14 February 1756. This is especially significant because Holwell gives 20 June 1756 as the date of the incident. There is a possibility that Holwell was never imprisoned and used the experience of the other survivors to construct his own narrative.

[86] The names of these Company employees are censored, appearing only in the form of initials.

Holwell's version, these alternate accounts should not be celebrated prematurely. They are, after all, debilitated by a text written in order to illustrate the dangers posed by native "savagery" to the English interests in the colonies. For the anonymous officer in Canada, these letters substantiated the claim that the "natives" were a global rather than a local threat in Oswego.[87] It is also important to remember that, though these letters held the English officers responsible for the Nawab's retaliation, they did not question the legitimacy of the empire itself. Neither did they question the East India Company's use of force and coercion to generate profits. While praising the Company and denigrating its employees, one of the anonymous letters stated, "Search the known World, you'll find no such Masters as the honourable Company; and none so unfaithfully served" (81). For the writers of these letters, the blame for the abuses of power lay entirely on the conduct of the officers rather than on the policies of the Company itself. With such an indictment of individual culprits, these writers reduced the collective acts of aggression to mere anomalies of the empire instead of making them the very symptoms of imperialism.

There is also no reason to believe that these letters were authentic and legitimate accounts of the Black Hole. Like Holwell and the anonymous officer in

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[87] It is worth noting here that the cataloging of news items—particularly of military expeditions—in eighteenth-century English periodicals often created an imaginary textual continuity between India and Canada. This was done either by placing the reports from these regions next to each other or by creating analogies between the incidents occurring in these places.

Canada, the writers may well have had their own reasons—even if they are lost to the archive—for writing a different version of history. It would be unfair on our part to invest any specific truth-value into one particular account in preference over the other. Unsubstantiated by evidence, they are equally subject to our scrutiny in terms of their objectivity vis-à-vis the events in Bengal during the year 1756. However, it is also important to question why these accounts, despite their obvious shortcomings, faded from the public view. It is possible that their disappearance from the public view was a mere accident. After all, a narrative about the English settlements in Canada was not the first place to look for an account of the events in India. This conclusion, however, is rather unsatisfactory since it is based on the assumption that these letters were the only available documents on the events surrounding the Black Hole. As Holwell himself admitted at the beginning of his letter, there were other survivors of the Black Hole who had related their experience to the public. At this juncture, one needs to ask another pertinent question: Why did Holwell's letter overshadow other accounts in the later narratives of the empire, alluring the casual reader and the historian alike with the pathos of its narrative?

As the next chapter demonstrates, documents, where one could at least glimpse an alternate beginning of the empire, were soon marginalized in colonialist history. Alternate accounts were ignored by the subsequent narratives of the empire in order to preserve a company's reputation and a nation's imperial

ambitions. Stray accounts of the events in Bengal were perceived as a threat because they introduced the possibility of tracing diverse genealogical histories of the British empire in India. In fact, different versions of the origin of the empire did emerge in the eighteenth-century archive, challenging the monolithic "conquest of India" popularized in the later imperialist historiography of Thomas Babington Macaulay. In these records, there was no flamboyant display of English heroism and Indian despotism. Instead, the empire emerged in the stark reality of its objective—an unrepentant and ruthless pursuit of wealth and power.[88] This alternate history of the empire, however, was soon silenced by the East India Company in order to legitimize its empire-building efforts in India. What remained behind for the historian to peruse was a tale of English trauma and English retribution to explain the territorial expansion of the Company. The longevity of Holwell's letter in the archive attests to the fact that such fables were far more indispensable than their writers in the theatre of the empire. Soon after the appearance of the letter in *India Tracts*, John Zephaniah Holwell's own career faded away from history, leaving behind the trauma of the Black Hole to justify the empire.

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[88] One of the most popular histories in this regard was abbé Raynal's *A philosophical and political history of the settlements and trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*. Though originally published in French, its English translation went through twelve editions in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER 2

The Many Faces of Despotism: Imperial Conquest and its Defacement after the Battle of Plassey

> A general court is now called, on whose decisions the fate of the company will depend. It is to be hoped every proprietor will reflect on the duty he owes to himself and to his country, and remember if these growing evils are not now checked, impending ruin threatens this valuable branch [Bengal] of our national commerce.[89]

Shortly before a general meeting of the proprietors of the East India Company in 1764, an anonymous pamphlet appeared in the English press urging the company's board of directors to take into account the many "unfortunate" developments in Bengal before deciding the organizational policies for this newly-acquired province. The writer/s of this document—ostensibly working for the Company in Bengal—insisted that the proprietors in London would seriously jeopardize their private fortunes and put at risk the future prospects of their "beloved England" if they disregarded the critical information contained in the pamphlet. Conflating private interest with patriotic duty, the above lines of warning framed a long exposé of the many "evils" brewing in the distant yet indispensable outpost of an extremely profitable commercial venture. The source of these ills, however, was not some troublesome native ruler endangering

[89] *Reflections on the present commotions in Bengal*, 14.

Britain's imperial ambitions; rather, the pamphlet, without any ambiguity, named the company's own illustrious officers as the greatest impediment in the founding of a stable and lucrative government in Bengal.

During the second half of the eighteenth century, the expansion of European empires by corporate enterprises was an unprecedented event in history, and, as an untested form of territorial domination, it brought unforeseen challenges for the English nation and the East India Company alike. Issues of power and control, accompanying the sudden accession of territory in Bengal, soon overshadowed the commercial benefits of overthrowing a native government. Furthermore, increased personal privileges for the high-ranking officers brought along a struggle for power in the Company which determined the future shape of British India. This chapter examines some lesser-known controversies of the early empire and analyzes the debate around the question of private interests in the quest for the territorial and political control of Bengal. In order to illustrate the significance of these internal—almost forgotten—disputes, I look specifically at the altercations between two early administrators of Bengal: Robert Clive and Henry Vansittart. Driven by their desire to gain greater control over the administration of Bengal, these influential employees launched a war of pamphlets in London, damaging each other's reputation in the public eye. While the appearance of serious charges against these individual officers began to rally public opinion against the Company itself, it also simultaneously initiated a new

mode of narrativizing events in colonial historical discourse. This chapter reveals the historical conditions necessitating this new form of historiography and also the controversies that destabilized it. Initiated by the employees of the Company in order to salvage their public reputation or to damage that of others, this ambivalent approach to inscribing events in the colonial archive blurred the discursive boundaries between fact and fiction in the eighteenth century, giving rise to the myth of imperial conquest on the one hand and, simultaneously, interrupting this narrative with reports of private profiteering and exploitation on the other.

I. Pursuing Power: The Ignominies of Conquest for the East India Company

> Since my last [letter], in which I gave you an account of the taking and retaking this place [Calcutta], and of my providential escape from the black hole, our affairs are agreeably altered. Colonel *Clive* with his army…have now placed a man upon the throne named *Meer Jaffer Ally Cawn*, who has sent down considerable sums of money …to repay the losses occasioned by the attack of the former nabob, which we expect to receive the next month…This nabob has given more lands to the company than ever they had before, and granted them great privileges.[90]

Thomas Meadows, a clerk in the service of the East India Company, wrote a letter to his brother in 1757 from Calcutta, claiming to be a survivor of the Black Hole and a witness of the Company's actions in Bengal during 1756-57.[91] This letter—written shortly after the Battle of Plassey—described the military acumen with which Clive had overwhelmed his enemy, regardless of the vast difference in the size of their armies. According to Meadows, Siraj-ud-Daula had endeavored to surround the small English force with his thousands, but in vain. Clive took very little time to diffuse the threat by imprisoning or killing most of his generals. The English were completely safe now, continued the letter, because Siraj-ud-Daula had been beheaded on the command of Clive's new Nawab, Mir Jafar. As an onlooker of the battle, Meadows showered his enthusiastic praise on the Company's decision to send Clive from Madras to reclaim Calcutta from the former ruler of Bengal. As the above extract from the letter indicates, Meadows considered Clive's choice of Mir Jafar to be an extremely profitable decision for the Company. From a historical perspective, Meadows' assessment of the situation in Bengal was fairly accurate. The Company had taken full advantage of its confrontations with Siraj-ud-Daula and his subsequent dethronement in favor

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[90] "Extract of a letter from Mr. Thomas Meadows, a clerk to the East-India company, in Bengall, to his brother in Liverpool. Calcutta, 22 Aug. 1757," *The American magazine and monthly chronicle for the British colonies. ... By a society of gentlemen*, Vol. 1, 356.

[91] It is also worth mentioning here that John Holwell included Meadows' name in the list of the Company employees who had survived the night in the cell and were subsequently freed by Siraj-ud-Daula.

of Mir Jafar. The new Nawab had recently signed a treaty with Clive, offering the Company more than two million pounds in compensation for the losses during the siege of Calcutta. In addition to this, Mir Jafar was forced to grant the Company large portions of land around Calcutta and to pay the Company troops for the future protection of his regime.[92]

In Meadows' view, all these developments were favorable since they held the promise of greater fortunes for both the Company and its employees. In its enumeration of the advantages, however, Meadows' letter lacked the caution exhibited by his fellow employee, John Holwell. Writing a few months before Meadows, Holwell had stayed clear of any mention of the economic reality of the Company in his famed account of the Black Hole. Concentrating on the emotional appeal of trauma and loss, Holwell had seized upon his privileged position as an "eyewitness" of this incident to display the unrelenting valor of the Company's employees. He had also taken great care to avoid any mention of aggression on the part of the English, ascribing all atrocities to the Nawab and his soldiers after the siege of Calcutta. In fact, Holwell had gone to great lengths to present the Company in its most vulnerable aspect, where unknown perils constituted the very landscape of its officers' lives in Bengal. As I discussed in the last chapter,

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[92] According to the treaty signed between Mir Jafar and Clive, the new Nawab had to compensate the Company with ten million rupees for the losses during the Calcutta siege: five million for the loss of property of the English settlers and two million for the loss of trade by the Indian merchants.

Holwell's letter on the Black Hole fulfilled a number of objectives in the public domain back in England after the dethronement of Siraj-ud-Daula. In addition to providing an alibi for the Company's officers against any insinuations about their violent excesses, the letter was very-well positioned to abate public anxieties in the wake of the Company's decision to encroach upon the political administration of Bengal. Since the East India Company was largely perceived as a trading enterprise, rather than as a colonial power in the mid-eighteenth century, the removal of a sovereign was highly incompatible with the Company's public image. Till the Battle of Plassey, the Company had been largely successful in convincing the English public that its interests in India were limited to commerce, and it had equipped itself with a sizeable army for the sole purpose of carrying out a peaceful and profitable trade. The Company's forces were installed in different parts of the subcontinent in order to protect trade routes rather than to engage in any form of armed confrontation with the native governments. From this viewpoint, Holwell's laborious construction of the perilous life of the English subjects in the dominion of an unpredictable ruler provided an additional justification for the Company's decision to depose the ruler of Bengal.

Through a series of concise statements, however, Meadows' letter interrupted this myth of a morally justified aggression before it could take a proper hold on the public imagination. First, despite being a survivor of the Black Hole, Meadows did not construct Clive's intervention in the political structure of

Bengal as an act of moral retribution for the alleged atrocities committed by Siraj-ud-Daula. By voicing his enthusiasm for Daula's dethronement, Meadows could not help revealing that the Company had used the Nawab as an excuse for getting amply compensated by Mir Jafar. Second, he did not portray Clive's military expedition as an act of necessity for the protection of English interests against the threat of native rulers. He showed quite clearly that the privileges extracted from the new ruler far exceeded the losses sustained by the Company during the siege of Calcutta. In the light of Meadows' letter, a very different image of the Company emerges for the reader, in complete contrast with the one constructed by Holwell's letter. In this version, the Company does not remain a mere trading corporation drawn reluctantly into the exigencies of warfare in order to protect its ability to engage in peaceful trade in Bengal. Unlike Holwell's myth of native aggression, Meadows' letter demonstrated that the Company, from the very beginning, had attempted to build an intrusive policy and that the Battle of Plassey entailed much more than the preservation of English subjects and their property. The Company had attempted, largely by force and subversion, to simultaneously dismantle and appropriate the indigenous political infrastructure to increase its control over the province of Bengal.

From a modern perspective, there is very little novelty in Meadows' revelations. With the subsequent history of colonization in front of us, we are well-aware of the Company's policy to supplant the local forms of governance in

order to augment its own political presence in India. From this standpoint, the letter is another piece of evidence in support of a well-recognized thesis in the studies of the early colonial history: the disorganization of the indigenous political structure, resulting from the Company's dismantling of the Mughal polity, helped to prepare the way for the eventual conquest of India.[93] However, our familiarity with this history does not suggest that there is not much to be learnt about the response of the eighteenth-century English public to such disclosures of the Company's quest for power. In this sense, the novelty of Meadows' letter does not lie so much in its revelations, but in the efforts of the later imperialist historiography to conceal the content of such documents from the public view. As I demonstrate below, the suppression of this letter belonged to a discursive maneuver in colonialist history to disguise a disturbing phase in its purported progress towards "civilizing" India in the image of Britain.

While it is impossible to ascertain the individual impact of Meadows' letter, this document, nevertheless, belonged to a larger body of publicly available material that attested to the blatant profitability of the Company's decision to become a political player in Bengal. This body of literature largely emerged out of

[93] For a recent elaboration of this thesis, see Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India*. According to Travers, Clive's procurement of special privileges from Mir Jafar proved too enticing for the English to resist further territorial revenues through other nominal rulers. As a result of this policy of instating allies as rulers, the indigenous governance of Bengal soon collapsed under the weight of the demands made by the British from their Nawabs.

power struggles within the Company. The unprecedented wealth and power following the decision to depose Siraj-ud-Daula started an unanticipated dispute amongst the influential factions in the Company for the highest positions of authority in matters related to Calcutta. Whenever frustrated in their efforts to procure a lucrative share in the Company's profit, employees aired their discontent in public, hoping to solicit support for their private interests. Each new accusation brought a new controversial document to the public eye, turning former heroes into malefactors and conspirators. The more one bloc tried to malign and discredit the other, the more public these internal disputes became, destroying the benevolent façade of the Company in this process.

The East India Company's internal troubles coincided with its decision to use Siraj-ud-Daula's attack on the English settlements in Calcutta as an excuse to monopolize the commerce of Bengal.[94] Besides reaping unparalleled privileges for the Company, Robert Clive also managed to get some "gifts" for his own private fortune from the new Nawab of Bengal, Mir Jafar. In 1759, Clive received, amongst other rewards, a *jaghire* that would generate an annual income

[94] For an exploration of the close connection between the marketplaces and the broader social and political fabric of the eighteenth-century Bengal, see Sudipta Sen, *Empire of Free Trade*. According to Sen, the British failed to comprehend the cultural meanings associated with the trade practices in Bengal, heightening the friction between the *Nawabs* and the Company in their early encounters. For another comprehensive study of the commercial functioning of the East India Company in the wake of the events in Bengal, see B. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire*. According to Bowen, the Company—soon after its territorial acquisitions in Bengal—began to function less like a modern corporation and became more of an agency of imperial government by the end of the eighteenth century.

of approximately thirty thousand pounds from the land revenues in Bengal for the rest of his life.[95] Clive, according to the decree of the Nawab of Bengal, had exclusive rights to the income generated by this *jaghire*, and the decree specifically excluded the East India Company from any claim to the revenues. Other Company officers, who had been close allies of Clive and had played instrumental roles in the Battle of Plassey, also returned to England extremely wealthy men. When Clive left Bengal in 1760, he had accumulated a far greater personal fortune than any other individual in the employment of the Company in India. With personal assets amounting to almost three hundred thousand pounds, Clive had been amply compensated for his role in the removal of Daula from the highest seat of political power in Bengal.[96] On returning to England, Clive hoped to use his fame and wealth to embark on a political career in the English Parliament.[97] This ambition, however, was cut short by some new developments in Bengal.

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[95] For the exact terms of the reward, see "Nabob *Meer Jaffier Ally Khan*'s Perwannah for the Payment of Colonel *Clive*'s Jagire, dated in *July* 1759," *Copy of His Majesty's Advocate, Attorney, and Solicitor Generals report*, 57-58.

[96] For an estimation of the private profits of Clive and his associates, see P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, 235-236.

[97] Though Clive amassed great wealth and influence during his years in India, he failed to transform them into political clout in London because of the controversies surrounding his career in India. For an appraisal of the adverse effect of Clive's personal fortune on his political career in England, see Philip Lawson and B. Lenman, "Robert Clive, the 'Black Jagir,' and British Politics," 801-29.

After Clive's departure, Henry Vansittart was called from Madras to take over as the Governor of Bengal. Within months of his appointment, Vansittart deposed Mir Jafar in a "bloodless revolution" and instated his son-in-law Mir Kasim as the new ruler of Bengal.[98] Mir Kasim, like his predecessor, was obliged to pay the Company for its assistance in his accession to the throne, adding substantial grants of territory to the Company.[99] Personal "gifts" also followed for Vansittart and his supporters in the Governor's council, but not without serious consequences. Mir Kasim's accession in 1760 marked the beginning of a series of altercations between the supporters of Clive and those of Vansittart. Both parties took their grievances to the press, making an internal war visible to the public eye through a series of pamphlets, historical treatises, and compilations of the Company's documents. This dispute between the two parties arose from the fact that Vansittart, a much less-illustrious employee than Clive in the Company's service, was expected to follow the policies of his predecessor and to maintain an administrative status-quo till the Company devised a more permanent strategy for consolidating its new-found trading power in the province. Vansittart's support

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[98] *The Annual Register* of the year 1761—an yearly London publication of important events concerning Britain—reported the ousting of Mir Jafar and used the term "bloodless revolution" (57) to describe the peaceful manner in which the Nawab requited the throne to the Company.

[99] According to the treaty between Mir Kasim and Vansittart, the Company received three additional districts in Bengal: Midnapur, Burdwan, and Chittagong.

for Mir Kasim and for the ousting of Mir Jafar not only undermined Clive's authority on the subject of governing Bengal, it also sent into convulsions the Company's nascent commercial boom after the Battle of Plassey.[100]

Besides being the most tangible evidence of Vansittart's insubordinate behavior, the removal of Mir Jafar was also a source of great personal anxiety for Clive and his supporters. Jafar had assured his English allies—through a series of pacts and treaties—that they would keep on receiving private incomes in exchange for their continued support and protection of his rule. His dethronement meant an abrupt end of these private means for Clive since Mir Kasim, as the new titular head of Bengal's government, owed all allegiances to his benefactors in the Vansittart administration. The opposition to Vansittart's decision to depose Jafar, quite understandably then, came from the members of the Calcutta council who had supported Clive's efforts to appoint Mir Jafar as the successor of Siraj-ud-Daula. Seeing their own fortunes in jeopardy, Clive and his supporters embarked on a public campaign to discredit Vansittart as the Governor of Bengal, casting doubts on his motives for deposing Mir Jafar. In a letter to the committee looking into the India affairs, certain members of the Governor's council at Bengal revealed the "true" reason for the "revolution":

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[100] One of the main grievances of the council at Calcutta was that Vansittart, in a very short period of time, had encircled the general trade in the province under his own direction rather than that of the Company. For a detailed account of Vansittart's personal trading interests, see P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, 115-128.

> We would willingly indeed suppose, that it [instating Mir Kasim] proceeded rather from the want of a true knowledge of the country policy, and from an error of judgment, than from lucrative views, had not Mr. Vansittart, and others of the projectors, made no secret that there was a present promised them by Cossim Aly Chan of twenty lack.[101]

Such accusations of bribery against Vansittart's administration became commonplace in the English press in the early 1760s. According to P. J. Marshall, "The fact that those who supported Mir Kasim's promotion received his bounty, while those who opposed it were ignored, contributed very materially to the bitter factionalism that paralyzed Vansittart's government" (*Private* 170-71). Clive loyalists kept up their onslaught on Vansittart's policies, questioning the legitimacy of every political and administrative decision taken by him during his residency between 1760 and 1764.[102]

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[101] *A letter from certain gentlemen of the Council at Bengal, to the Honourable the Secret Committee for affairs of the Honourable United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East-Indies*, 23. "Cossim Aly Chan" in the quote is the anglicized version of Mir Kasim's full name, Kasim Ali Khan. The "lack" is again the anglicized form of *lakh*, a unit equivalent to a hundred thousand in the Indian numerical system. The evolution of this word is quite interesting in the eighteenth-century English vocabulary. In the wake of the publicity of the Company's scandals and corruptions, many satires began to use "lack" as a pun for the erosion of all moral standards of the Company's officers as soon as they started making money in India.

[102] One of the most damaging documents for Vansittart and his supporters was an anonymous pamphlet titled *Reflections on the present commotions in Bengal*. The writers of this pamphlet claimed that Vansittart—in a couple of months—had reversed all of Clive's policies towards the rulers of Bengal, reducing the Company to a state of penury and anarchy.

In the face of these public allegations, neither Vansittart nor his supporters kept their silence. Each and every aspersion thrown out into the public by the supporters of Clive's administration was countered vigorously by Vansittart's faction in the Company. A number of the Company's documents were made public to attest to the integrity of Vansittart's conduct as the Governor of Bengal.[103] Besides offering a defense of the new administration, these documents began to illustrate the fault lines in Clive's strategy for deposing Siraj-ud-Daula. Because of Clive's vast accumulation of wealth in a relatively short span of time, Vansittart's supporters did not have to dig too deep to find material evidence of Clive's involvement in disreputable dealings during his residency in Bengal. In a letter to the proprietors of East-India Stock, John Dunning—a Vansittart supporter—claimed that the victory at Plassey could not be ascribed to Clive's military valor, but was only attributable to his dishonest conduct.[104] To illustrate this point, Dunning went on to outline the secret pact between Clive and Mir Jafar which led to Sira-ud-Daula's defeat on the battlefield. According to this secret

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[103] See, for instance, *A defence of Mr. Vansittart's conduct, in concluding the treaty of commerce with Mhir Cossim Aly Chawn, at Mongheer*, and *Original papers relative to the disturbances in Bengal*. Both these texts are voluminous compilations of the transactions between the Vansittart's administration and the Nawabs of Bengal. A similar collection was also published by Vansittart in 1766 titled *A narrative of the transactions in Bengal, from the year 1760, to the year 1764, during the government of Mr. Henry Vansittart*.

[104] *A letter to the proprietors of East-India Stock, on the subject of Lord Clive's Jaghire; occasioned by his Lordship's letter on that subject*, 3.

agreement, Mir Jafar had refused his support to the Nawab's troops, handing out a rather easy victory to the Company's forces. Jafar was rewarded for his assistance with the throne of Bengal, while Clive was amply compensated by the new ruler with "gifts" of land and other privileges. Dunning further questioned Clive's claim to the *jaghire* awarded by Mir Jafar and also the "propriety" of his conduct in relation to the land acquired in Bengal. According to him, Clive's award of land revenues was cutting into the Company's profits. Dunning claimed that, in contrast to Clive, none of the supporters of Mir Kasim had received any compensation in form of land revenues. Besides refuting charges of corruption in Vansittart's administration, Dunning brought to the surface the pertinent question of Clive's own motives for getting involved in the governance of Bengal.

Such questions about Clive's role in the political life of Bengal found resonance with the public. Clive was soon forced to defend his position in the face of mounting allegations from the other bloc. In an address to the proprietors of the East India Company, Clive countered some of the more serious accusations published in the *Gazetteer* of April 1763. Amongst many others, there were three particularly damaging charges against him from his years in Bengal. First, that he had withheld the compensation stipulated by the treaty with Mir Jafar to the relatives of the sufferers in the Black Hole. Second, that after deposing Siraj-ud-Daula, he had distributed Bengal's treasury according to his own pleasure, leaving the subsequent Nawab destitute and impoverished. Third, that his *jaghire* was

supported and maintained at the Company's expense because of the diminished resources of Mir Jafar. Clive countered these accusations passionately in the address, calling them a "heap of absurdities," which his "enemies" had thrown into public view. He claimed that the Company had recovered its goods and money in large amounts on the account of his successful military expedition against Daula. The new Nawab, according to his own customs, had made presents to the English who had been instrumental in elevating him to the rank and the "dignity" of a sovereign. Any claim that this act impoverished the Nawab was a false representation of the facts since Clive himself had witnessed the inexhaustible riches of Bengal. In contrast to the insinuations of plunder and coercion made by his adversaries, Clive claimed that it was Mir Jafar's own wish to reward the Company's officers. In defense of the personal wealth accumulated through Mir Jafar's accession, Clive wrote,

> What injunction was I under to refuse a present from him who had the power to make one, as the reward of honourable services? I know of none. I had surely myself a particular claim, by having devoted myself to the Company's military service, and neglected all commercial advantages.[105]

According to Clive, the Company had no reason to question his right to a personal fortune, especially after it had acquired more than two million pounds from the

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[105] *A letter to the proprietors of the East India stock, from Lord Clive*, 17.

success of the forces under his command. In Clive's view, everyone—including the relations of the prisoners of the Black Hole—had profited from his actions in Bengal. In the light of the advantages brought by him to the Company and its officers, any inquiry into his conduct amounted to endangering the rising English empire in the East.

In the first half of the year 1764, the East India Company held a series of meetings and general courts to decide the future of its interests in Bengal.[106] The outcome of these meetings dispelled, at least temporarily, the confusion resulting from the multiple versions of events put forth by the supporters of Clive and Vansittart. In a March 1764 meeting, Clive was nominated to take over the presidency of Bengal for a second term to put the affairs of the Company in order. In May 1764, it was decided by the Company's board of directors to dispatch Clive to India in his new capacity as the governor of the province. This decision indicates that Clive had won the internal war by convincing the proprietors of the East India Company of the merits of his policies and actions in India. Though Clive's success may have come in part from the passionate defense of his motives, a good measure of it is also attributable to certain developments in India.

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[106] For the proceeding of these meetings, see *The Weekly Amusement from Saturday Decemr. 24th, 1763 to Saturday Decemr. 29 1764 or an useful and agreeable miscellany of literary entertainment ... Together with An historical detail of the publick transactions & occurrences of the year 1764*, Vol. 1, 510, 542, 550.

Mir Kasim, who had been elevated to the seat of the Nawab by the Vansittart administration, had combined forces with the ruler of the northern province of Awadh, Shuja-ud-Daula, and the Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II, to free Bengal from the Company's control. By 1764, the English forces had fully diffused their joint offensive, but not before destroying Vansittart's legitimacy in the eyes of the Company's headquarters in London. An address to the participants of the East India Company's general court underlined the fact that they could no longer afford to place the reigns of power in the hands of "inexperienced" officers like Vansittart. It further warned about the dangers of replacing Vansittart with someone equally unacquainted with the political milieu of Bengal. This anxiety over the crisis of leadership can be best understood in the words of the address itself. Outlining the importance of Company's administrative control of Bengal for the future imperial status of Britain, the address stated the following:

> Before the memorable and ever-glorious battle of Plassey, the company's concerns in Bengal were entirely of a commercial nature. Ever since that period the English have been under the necessity of concerning themselves…in the deliberations and resolutions of the Durbar [Bengal's royal court]…and sometimes to interpose their authority, or their influence, for the sake of the company's interest. The acquisitions obtained from Jaffier Ally Khaun, Lord Clive's Nabob, and afterwards the cessions made by Mr. Vansittart's Nabob, Cossim Ally Khaun, are so very

considerable, that Bengal is become the chief support of the company…the proprietors must readily acknowledge that such possessions… are objects of utmost importance, not only to the company, but to the [British] nation in general…There are other considerations…We receive from that presidency annually four or five ships richly laden with the manufactures and produce of that kingdom, the sales of which cargoes in England may be computed on a very reasonable calculation at twelve hundred thousand pounds sterling. We export to that presidency a very large quantity of British manufactures and commodities, such as broad-cloth, lead, copper, and many other articles…There is no doubt that the demand for British manufactures will increase in Bengal as soon as the commotions in that country are at an end, and peace restored; there is likewise great reason to think, that were we at leisure to make experiments, and set on foot discoveries, new markets for the consumption of our home manufactures might be found…Bengal is the granary of Indostan; and our settlements on the two coasts of that peninsula would scarce be able to subsist, were it not for the supplies of rice they annually receive by shipping from Calcutta.[107]

[107] *An address to the proprietors of East-India stock, upon the important points to be discussed among them at the next meeting of the General Court*, 6-7.

These lines are perhaps one of the most succinct accounts of the transformation of a trading company into a colonial force within the span of just five years. From the time Siraj-ud-Daula had been overthrown, Bengal had turned into a prized commodity that could no longer be endangered by any form of conflict with the local rulers. As the above address indicates, the control of Bengal was not only a commercial concern of the Company, but also a matter of Britain's future as the manager of a profitable empire.

After this transformation in Bengal's value, Clive's earlier successes made him an ideal candidate to defend the Company from any future threats posed by the native rulers. Mir Jafar, with his record of peaceful coexistence with the earlier administration, was restored as the Nawab of Bengal. Despite these developments, Clive did not get reunited with his old Nawab. Jafar died just before Clive's arrival in India, leaving his son, Kasim Ali, as the successor of the title. These events, however, became trivial matters for Clive's second administration in Bengal. Shortly after his arrival in India, he had managed to procure a *firman* (royal decree) from the defeated Mughal emperor, Shah Alam II. As an act of concession by the Mughal, this decree granted the *diwani* of Bengal to the East India Company. The grant of the *diwani* meant that the English now had the right to collect the land revenues from the province of Bengal. Effectively

giving the right to rule the province, this *firman* reinvented the Company as a territorial power, putting an end to the *Nawabi* rule of Bengal.[108]

Considering its importance in the founding of the British empire in India, this decree has become one of the most canonized documents in the colonial archive. Its significance in imperial history, however, overshadowed another *firman* extracted by Clive from Shah Alam II on the same day. This other decree, also dated 12 August 1765, confirmed the reversion of Clive's *jaghire* back to the Company, depriving him of the right to collect the revenues from this private "gift" from the late Nawab Mir Jafar.[109] Clive's urgent need to get a document depriving him of a substantial personal fortune on the same day that another document made him—for all practical purposes—the ruler of Bengal requires some serious investigation. An explanation of this double act, for sure, resides in the fact that Clive, as the new *diwan* of Bengal, had gained unprecedented power to expand both his personal and the Company's interests. With almost unlimited access to the resources of the province, the reversion of the *jaghire* was no longer so great a loss for Clive as it had been just a year back, when he had passionately

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[108] The eighteenth-century boundaries of the province include present-day Bangladesh and the Indian states of West Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.

[109] For the text of this decree, see "Firmaun from the King *Shah Aalum*, confirming the Reversion in Perpetuity of Lord *Clive*'s Jaghire to the Company," *Copy of His Majesty's Advocate, Attorney, and Solicitor Generals report*, 59-60.

defended his right to a private fortune.[110] In fact, this gesture, combined with the discredited administration of Henry Vansittart, ensured that all the controversies surrounding Clive's unaccounted wealth were put to rest for sometime.

Besides this explanation, there is also another possibility that can account for Clive's urgency to get the emperor's decree on his *jaghire*. Almost a year back, on 4 May 1764, a general court of the East India Company in London had passed a resolution that Clive would allow the Company to take over the land and the revenues of his *jaghire* for a span of ten years.[111] Within a fortnight, on 20 May 1764, another meeting of the proprietors appointed Clive to take charge of Bengal and passed the following motion:

> That, the Company's Affairs in Bengal requiring immediate Attention, and the Season being very far advanced, Lord Clive be desired to embark forthwith for that Government; and that all the Officers now appointed, be ordered to proceed thither without delay.[112]

If we take into account the timely proximity between Clive's renunciation of his right to the *jaghire* and the Company's decision to dispatch him to oversee its

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[110] A sample of Clive's defense can be found in *A letter to the proprietors of the East India stock, from Lord Clive*, 15-20.

[111] *The Weekly Amusement from Saturday Decemr. 24th, 1763 to Saturday Decemr. 29 1764 or an useful and agreeable miscellany of literary entertainment ... Together with An historical detail of the publick transactions & occurrences of the year 1764*, Vol. 1, 542.

[112] Ibid., 550.

interests in Bengal, it is not difficult to surmise that Clive's own future in the Company was at stake when he met Shah Alam II. To regain his former power in the matters concerning Bengal, Clive required the emperor's seal of authority to confirm the fact that he had given up all his private privileges in the province.

After the public revelations of his malpractices, this decree meant more than a formal document attesting to the integrity of Clive's intentions. Almost forgotten by the annals of the colonial history, the Mughal emperor's *firman* on Clive's *jaghire* locates the decree on the *diwani* of Bengal in an ideological space that interrupts the alleged historical continuity of the English empire in India. Because of the subsequent history of territorial gains by the Company, the *diwani* of Bengal is canonized in imperial history as the first step towards the conquest of India. However, seen in the light of a comparatively insignificant document, it is possible to postulate that the empire was also tethered to the private anxieties of a Company officer over his diminishing public reputation. With the decree on the *jaghire* as the focal point, the *firman* on the *diwani* of Bengal can be seen as Clive's attempt to restore his damaged reputation by creating even greater revenues for the Company. On account of the increased importance of Bengal in the trading enterprise, Clive's effort to augment the Company's position in the province could only be met with appreciation by his peers. To a large extent, Clive did manage to redeem himself in the Company's eyes by cracking down on

the private traders in Bengal and creating a monopoly on the province's trade in only a couple of years.[113]

This interpolation of personal motives in the exchanges between Clive and Shah Alam II, however, is not intended to diminish the role of the *diwani* of Bengal in creating a prototype for the future conquests in India. Any attempt to see only private interest in Clive's extraction of the two royal decrees amounts to ignoring the complex ideological bind between his actions and the embryonic stage of British imperialism in India. No matter what private concerns drove Clive to obtain the *diwani* of Bengal, it is undeniable that his actions restructured the political landscape of the province, making it more conducive to the future forms of empire-building. The discussion of private contexts, nonetheless, is a crucial exercise because it unravels the discursive strategies practiced by imperialist historiography to manage the scandals of the empire. Taking into account Clive's public defamation in the years preceding his second presidency, I would argue that it is almost impossible to explain his ascendancy in the Company without considering the construction of his larger-than-life image in the propagandist histories of the empire. Almost simultaneously with public revelations of Clive's controversial actions, quasi-historical narratives began to appear in the press providing the "true" sequence of events in Bengal in order to combat the

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[113] For a comprehensive overview of the Company's expansionist policies in the wake of Clive's initiatives, see Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India,* 67-99. Also see P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, 129-157.

increasing number of publications which derided Clive's decision to interfere in Bengal's governance. As I illustrate in the next section, these so-called histories began to create a new imperial myth, where English valor—in the person of Lord Clive—was pitted against the Eastern despotism of the Nawabs of Bengal.

II. Displaying Masculinity: The Narrative Construction of English Heroism and Indian Despotism

> Mr. Clive is one of those heroes that are formed from instinct than education…Though he does not stand enrolled among the foremost in the lists of fame, he is very far from deserving a place towards the latter end; the dawn of his military exploits can scarce be called a thirst of fame; it was voluntary zeal that engaged him to wield the sword against the enemies of his country…Mr. Clive deserves to be reckoned among the first who have distinguished themselves in the present war. An impartial recital of his conduct is no other than writing his panegyric.[114]

These words of tribute opened an anonymous historical treatise which appeared in the English press in the year 1761. After eulogizing Clive in this manner, the author began the chronology of Clive's "military transactions" with the statement that it was impossible to appreciate the valor of Clive's expeditions in India without a full understanding of the "enemies" he had to confront during

[114] *A complete history of the war in India, from the year 1749*, 1-2.

his years in India. To elaborate this point, the treatise summarized the contents of John Holwell's letter on the Black Hole. According to the writer, Clive—on hearing about the tragedy—decided to leave Madras in order to restore "the company's affairs, on the Ganges," to recover Calcutta, and to take "vengeance on the cruel nabob of Bengal" (24). The author described the subsequent confrontation between Clive and Siraj-ud-Daula as a "torrent of the English valour" which could not be resisted by "such feeble dams as forts defended by Indians" (26). The Nawab was soon dislodged, in the writer's words, by the "gallant measures" of Clive and his officers who only fought for the "honour of their country" (27).

This tracing of a linear trajectory between the Black Hole and the Battle of Plassey was one of the initial examples of an imperialist mode of history-writing, wherein Clive's actions are presented through the prism of a masculinist national identity. In order to counter the accusations of private profiteering, this treatise constructed Clive's armed intrusion into *nawabi* Bengal as an exhibition of English valor. Avoiding any mention of the increase in the Company's commercial interests or in Clive's personal fortune after the Battle of Plassey, the author focused, almost exclusively, on the triumph of the English soldiers over their adversaries. As a result, a completely different subtext emerges out of this narration of events. A ruthless Indian ruler had shed English blood without any provocation, and such acts could not be ignored by the valiant British soldiers in

India. Rather than any private motive of fame or fortune, it was the arbitrary display of hostility by a local "nabob" which necessitated Clive's military intervention in the political affairs of Bengal. By defeating tens of thousands of the Nawab's army with a handful of soldiers, Clive had not only defended English honor, but displayed to the world the supremacy of British arms and courage.[115]

A number of other "impartial" military treatises began to appear in the press, reiterating this version in order to protect Clive against the rising tide of apprehension about his dealings in Bengal.[116] However, the almost epical theme—of a tragedy avenged by the display of English heroism—found a resonance with the historians in another ideological landscape. The story of Clive's valor and Daula's hostility soon found a home in the histories of England, bringing the idea of an empire in India into close proximity with the discursive formation of English nationalism. These histories wove John Holwell's letter

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[115] Linda Colley, in *Britons: Forging the Nation*, has demonstrated the ways in which images of war helped to bring together the various factions of Britain, subordinating local patriotisms in the British Isles and overcoming the differences caused by social and political tensions in the eighteenth century. For an in-depth perspective on the effect of the British military expeditions on its national identity, also see Stephen Conway, "War and National Identity in the Mid-Eighteenth-Century British Isles." He explores the role of the armed confrontations in promoting identification with Britain amongst those who served in the forces and the wider English public. Conway challenges Linda Colley's proposition by demonstrating the continuing attraction of local loyalties—to Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England—and the extent to which they were compatible with the idea of a united Britain.

[116] See, for instance, Robert Orme, *A history of the military transactions of the British nation in Indostan from the year MDCCXLV* and John Campbell, *Memoirs of the revolution in Bengal, Anno. Dom. 1757*. Both Orme and Campbell were close associates of Robert Clive during his years in India, and their histories were published in the early 1760s at the height of the pamphlet wars between Clive and Vansittart.

about his tragic experience of the Black Hole into the accounts of Clive's military exploits, creating a causal relationship to demonstrate the trials and triumphs of the imperial expeditions in distant lands.[117] To a large extent, the story of Bengal became a metonymic representation of the universality of English values, removing the geographical disjunction between England and its colonies.[118]

In order to construct this conceptual continuity between the English nation and its empire, these histories completely ignored the disaffections amongst the so-called "soldiers" of the empire. Despite being written contemporaneously with the slanderous exchanges between Vansittart and Clive, they entirely disguised the personal dynamics between the Company's employees. Though not surprising, this concealment is rather ironic since Holwell was one of the most vocal public voices responsible for the defamation of Clive's administration. After Clive's departure, Holwell had passed his personal allegiance to Vansittart's government and, according to the opposing bloc, profited immensely in the

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[117] Examples of this conflation of the separate events of the Black Hole and the Battle of Plassey can be found in the following mid-eighteenth century histories of England: William Rider, *A new history of England, from the descent of the Romans, to the demise of his late Majesty*, Vol. 41, 29-44 and Tobias George Smollett, *Continuation of the Complete history of England….* Vol. 1, 364-374.

[118] The narrative of Bengal in these histories was generally placed in the category of "England abroad" along with other narratives of English exploits in distant spaces. An instance of imagining a global geography for England through Clive's military transactions can be found in Daniel Fenning, *A new system of geography: or, a general description of the world*, 204.

process.[119] Between 1760 and 1765, Holwell wrote tirelessly to defend his support for the decision to depose Mir Jafar, while Clive's supporters worked equally hard to destroy Holwell's reputation.[120] In these exchanges, Holwell and his friends mention no other asset in Clive's character besides his adeptness at emptying Bengal's treasury.[121] Conversely, Clive's supporters never mention Holwell's suffering in the Black Hole, concentrating only on the charges of corruption. When we look at the pamphlet war between the two parties, it becomes quite apparent that this hostile verbal exchange largely discredited the narratives of trauma and heroism forwarded by the supporters of Holwell and Clive respectively. Each bloc exhibited strong suspicion of the version of events provided by other, and, through the public airing of mutual distrust, they collectively damaged the Company's image as an "honourable" trading enterprise.

This internal battle for power, however, was ironed out in imperial histories through their representations of the English conquest of Bengal. The use

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[119] For the various allegations against Holwell, see the pamphlet titled *Reflections on the present commotions in Bengal*, 35-40.

[120] For Holwell's version of events on Bengal, see the pamphlets titled *An East India Observer extraordinary* and *Mr. Holwell's refutation of a letter from certain gentlemen of the Council at Bengal*. For Clive's side of the story, see *A letter from certain gentlemen of the Council at Bengal, to the Honourable the Secret Committee for affairs of the Honourable United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East-Indies*.

[121] Friends of Mr. Holwell, *A vindication of Mr. Holwell's character, from the aspersions thrown out in an anonymous pamphlet*, 4-6.

of Holwell's narrative of the Black Hole as an alibi for Clive's actions, despite the strong personal differences between the two men, indicates that it was no longer a priority to present the actuality of the Company's territorial ambitions. Though imperialist historiography in the mid-eighteenth century, unmistakably, emerged from the urgent need to salvage the deteriorating public image of the Company, it nevertheless converged with a growing nationalist discourse of English supremacy. By bringing the controversial events in Bengal within the ideological fold of the British nation, these narratives refashioned the Company's image as the custodian of "English honor" in the distant outposts of the British Empire.[122] In this process, internal rivalries were soon erased and replaced by the "real" enemies of the English nation: the "Asiatic" rulers and their despotic forms of rule.[123] As Robert Travers observes in the context of Bengal,

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[122] In *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World*, Linda Colley points towards another important use of these narratives of English heroism in India:

> By focusing attention on the incontestable qualities of the British armed forces, their courage, discipline, endurance, self-sacrifice, comradeship and the like, a new generation of military and imperialist publicists were effectively distracting attention from the more controversial issue of what these men and their kind were actually doing in India and other parts of the world. The casualty-levels, pillage, and destruction inevitably attendant on the policy of extending empire by force of arms were sidelined (304).

[123] One of the most influential philosophical texts to propound the theory of despotism in Eastern forms of rule was Montesquieu's work on comparative politics, *The Spirit of the Laws*, published in 1748. Montesquieu suggested a typology of governments shaped by geographical and historical conditions. While greatly admiring the British constitution, he condemned Asiatic forms of governance as systems of servitude and cruelty.

> While the Company's rapid takeover of the territorial administration was driven by the lure of corporate and personal gain from taxes and trade, it also developed a powerful ideological momentum fuelled by stereotypes of native depravity, Muslim faithlessness and Asiatic despotism…As Company's servants invaded key institutions of central and local government, they often portrayed the *nawabi* [government] as corrupt to the core, a system of organized fraud and plunder. (*Ideology* 67-68)

Travers's observation is borne out by many historical treatises written during the 1760s. For instance, Oliver Goldsmith wrote a history of England in 1764 in a series of letters to his son. This treatise reiterated the theme of Clive's military expedition to Bengal as an act of "revenge" for the treatment of the English in the Black Hole. However, Goldsmith went a step further and located the reason for Clive's success in Plassey in the "natural" depravity and effeminacy of the "Asiatics." His description of the confrontation between the Company's and the Nawab's forces unfolded as follows:

> But, though the forces were so seemingly disproportioned, with respect to number, the victory soon declared in favor of the English commander. In fact, what could the timid Asiatic soldier do against European troops…all the customs, habits, opinions, of the Asiatics tend to enfeeble the body, and effeminate the mind. When we conceive a body of men led up to the attack, dressed in long silk garments, with no other courage but that

> inspired by opium; with no other fears from defeat but that of changing their mode of slavery…If we consider all these circumstances, it will be no way surprising if one or two thousand Europeans should easily discomfit thirty thousand Indians.[124]

In his depiction of the two warring sides, Goldsmith elides the reality that the "Asiatic" soldiers fought on both sides of the battle as did the European soldiers. As Linda Colley explains, the British forces, given the global spread of the Seven Years' War, had a very low recruitment of white soldiers in each of their conflicts. In addition, the casualties during the long passage to India kept the white soldiers to a minority in the Company's troops. Even when the soldiery was categorized as "European," it was hardly a racially homogenous group since it comprised of "American and Caribbean blacks, as well as Germans, Swiss, Portuguese, French and varieties of Britons" (*Captives* 260). These "Europeans" were again greatly outnumbered by the Indian "sepoys"—who, in themselves, were a highly heterogeneous grouping of people—in the Company's military service.[125] Goldsmith's elision of these significant facts fed into an emerging imperialist discourse of inscribing racial difference in the early colonial

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[124] *An history of England, in a series of letters from a nobleman to his son*, Vol. 2, 226.

[125] As Linda Colley further elaborates, by the year 1777, "the Company employed just over 10,000 white soldiers in India. These men were outnumbered seven to one by the Company's sepoys" (*Captives* 260).

encounters.[126] This ideological process sought to create a new understanding of the "Asiatics" and the "Europeans" as monolithic groups who could only be understood in terms of such simplistic racial qualities as enumerated by Goldsmith in the passage above. These nascent inscriptions of race, after the empire became more confidently established in the early nineteenth century, paved the way for more hegemonic forms of racism that converged with the colonialist strategies of power and control.[127]

The construction of such images, however, was not limited to presenting Eastern culture as the effeminate other of the masculinity displayed by the military expeditions of the empire. These representations, almost paradoxically, helped to retain the same indigenous institutions that were condemned as corrupt and archaic during the initial years of the Company's expansion in Bengal. Many privileges, including Clive's *jaghire*, were usurped by the Company's servants on the pretext of preserving the customs emanating from the so-called degenerate regime of the Mughals. Also, the sophisticated and complex polity of the Mughal Empire made it impossible for the Company to transplant new forms of administration in the province. One way of overcoming these contradictions and

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[126] For an in-depth critique of this particular tendency in various genres of English writings on India from the eighteenth century, see Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed*.

[127] One of the most effective writers, in this regard, was Thomas Babington Macaulay. In the final chapter of this dissertation, I examine how Macaulay selectively picked up such representations from eighteenth-century writings and created his own powerful myth of English supremacy during the age of high imperialism.

legitimizing the Company, according to Travers, "was to imagine that it [the East India Company] was restoring some ancient constitution that had degenerated during the decline of the Mughal empire" (*Ideology* 51). For this purpose, the figure of the despotic Nawab performed an important ideological function in the early British inscriptions of the Indian forms of constitutionality. In order to justify the British appropriation of the privileges and customs associated with the *nawabi* culture and polity, imperialist writings projected the Nawabs as provincial rulers who were slowly demolishing the "original" Mughal constitution—a set of regulations which, if the local rulers followed loyally, placed strict constraints on their political power—through their unbridled lifestyle and corrupt administrative practices. Though the Mughal king had granted them the privileges of a sovereign in their respective provinces, these Nawabs had turned mutinous towards their own emperor; as a result, the balance of power had slowly shifted in favor of the local Nawabs, leaving the Mughal emperor powerless and destitute. Under these circumstances, the Company was in fact providing an invaluable service to the Mughal empire by intervening in the polity of the unruly Bengal Nawabs and correcting the imbalances in their administration.

In *Memoirs of the Revolution in Bengal*, published in 1760, John Campbell—a close associate of Clive—used this hegemonic narrative to describe

in great detail the state of confusion in the Mughal Empire.[128] He elaborated how the Mughal emperor, according to the "constitution of Indostan," was the "sole possessor of property, the single fountain of honour, and the supreme oracle of justice" (5-6). His vast empire was governed through the Nawabs, who offered a yearly tribute to the "great Mogul" in return for their privileged position. Despite being subordinate to the will of the supreme ruler at all times, these Nawabs had started to exhibit "a kind of sovereign authority" in their respective provinces, reducing the authority of the monarch. Drunk with power, these nominal rulers engaged in unspeakable excesses in their lifestyles which resulted in the degeneration of their already feeble minds and bodies. Incapable of rational thinking, they had started to display the vices of their lifestyle in their governance by destroying the administrative principles of the Mughal empire. One of the foremost examples of this display of decadence, in Campbell's text, was the Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula. According to Campbell, Daula had his eyes on sovereignty from childhood, but his addiction to luxury made this thirst for power even worse in his adult years. To fulfill these ignoble ends, he defied the "sacred" pact of peaceful trade between the English and the Mughal emperor by attacking Fort William and taking prisoners in the Black Hole. When he deposed a Nawab

[128] The English construction of the Mughal Empire as a declining power has been challenged by many recent historians. Muzzafar Alam's *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India*, for instance, speaks of economic growth in North India during the mid-nineteenth century, making the provinces of Awadh and Punjab extremely alluring for the British.

"intoxicated with Sovereign Power," Clive had, in Campbell's eyes, actually performed a service to the Mughal emperor. By taking a timely charge of the political affairs of the province, the English were, in effect, restoring the emperor to his former powers.[129]

This interpretation of Indian Nawabs as an unruly and inferior bunch of sovereigns was widely circulated in the English press. Even one of the first appearances of the title Nawab—anglicized into "nabob" by the writer—in the English language suggested a certain degree of insubordination by the provincial rulers towards their emperor. In one of the earliest reports of the siege of Calcutta and the subsequent imprisonment of the English officers in the Black Hole, the "nabobs" were described as "a species of viceroys to the Grand Mogul, grown almost independent in their several provinces."[130] Because of the extensive availability of eighteenth-century texts which malign the Nawabs of Bengal, many scholars have been misled into believing that these narratives about the native rulers and their abuses of power took a strong hold on the imagination of the English public during the eighteenth century, thus facilitating the East India Company's transition from a trading corporation into a nascent empire. Kate

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[129] A similar construction of Mughal administration can be found in the Luke Scrafton, *Reflections on the Government of Indostan*, published in 1761. Defending Clive's right to the *jaghire*, Scrafton also argued that Clive's actions were ultimately meant to "correct" the original structure of the Mughal polity.

[130] *The Annual Register, or a view of the history, politicks, and literature, of the year 1758*, 13.

Teltscher, in her analysis of Holwell's letter on the Black Hole, insists that his story created a "great stir when published; references to the event abound in contemporary texts, and the name of the prison soon became proverbial."[131] Though it is undeniable that a number of writings tried to disseminate the myth of Eastern despotism through stories of events like the Black Hole, this propaganda actually failed to have any major impact on public opinion regarding the Company and its officers. As I demonstrate in the next and final section of this chapter, the convoluted interpretations of the Company's activities in India—made public by its wrangling employees—soon shifted the connotations of despotic power from the Indian ruling elite to the Company itself.

III. From Indian Nawab to English Nabob: The Transference of Despotism in the Early Representations of the British Empire

> Concerns it you who plunders in the East,
>
> In blood a tyrant, and in lust a beast?
>
> When ills are distant, are they then your own?
>
> Saw'st thou their tears, or heard'st th' oppressed groan?[132]

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[131] *India Inscribed*, 120. Similar observations have been made by Betty Joseph in *Reading the East India Company*, which I have already analyzed in the preceding chapter.

[132] Richard Clarke, *The nabob: or, Asiatic plunderers. A satyrical poem, in a dialogue between a friend and the author*, 1.

Appearing within fifteen years of the Battle of Plassey in the English press, these opening lines from a satirical poem titled *The Nabob: or, the Asiatic Plunderers* were addressed to an unnamed nabob in India. To an eighteenth-century English reader, the subject of this poem was not a distant despot, but a much more familiar figure at home. By the time this poem was published in 1773, the term "nabob" was no longer used to designate the much maligned Nawabs of Bengal in the propaganda literature of the East India Company, but its own officers who were serving in India. In the cultural history of Britain, nothing confirms the anxiety of the English public over the activities of the Company than the transference in the referent of the term nabob within a few years of its appearance in the press.[133] Many factors contributed to this metamorphoses of the nabob from a native ruler to a Company employee in India.[134] Richard Clark, the author of *The Nabob*, outlined some of these reasons in the preface of his poem:

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[133] For the construction of the "nabob" figure in the English public sphere, see Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips, "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain." Lawson and Philip argue that the methods employed by the Company's servants to make their eastern fortunes and the behavior of those who sought to translate wealth into social position, induced a widespread revulsion and fear that an empire of conquest would wreak profound change in Britain.

[134] A comprehensive study of the East India Company nabob can be found in Tillman W. Nechtman, "Nabobs Revisited: A Cultural History of British Imperialism and the Indian Question in Late-Eighteenth-Century Britain." Nechtman argues that nabobs were representative figures in the political debates surrounding imperialism in South Asia because they were hybrid figures who made Britain's empire more real to domestic British observers. As hybrid figures, they exposed the degree to which the projects of building a nation and an empire were mutually constitutive, leading to great public anxiety about their presence in British society.

> The Muse's Province is double; to commend Virtue and to chastise Vice. Great crimes have been charged on the Servants of the India-Company, from a *National* Inquiry, and yet no one has suffered…The Historians of other Nations, (if not our own) will do Justice to the oppressed Subjects in *India*, and will hand down the Memory of the Oppressors to the latest Posterity, loaded with the Infamy due to the Magnitude of their Cruelties, Extortions, and new modes of Murder.—Nor shall my Pen be wanting, so far as its Power may reach, to perpetuate an honest Indignation against the Enemies of Mankind, Tyrants clothed with civil Authority, and abusing that sacred Trust. (3)

By the time this poem was written, a parliamentary inquiry into the conduct of the Company had already taken place during 1772-73.[135] After receiving reports of the excessive abuses of power by Clive's second administration in Bengal, steps were taken to regulate the affairs related to India.[136] These regulations, as Clark's

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[135] For the official proceedings of the inquiry, see House of Commons, *List of reports from the Committee of Secrecy appointed to enquire into the state of the East India Company*. For documents offering defense of the Company's activities in India, see East India Company, *Treaties and grants from the country powers, to the East-India Company, respecting their Presidency of Fort St. George, on the coast of Choromandel; Fort William, in Bengal; and Bombay, on the coast of Malabar, From the year 1756 to 1772*.

[136] Despite heated resistance from the Company's headquarters at Leadenhall Street and its supporters in the House of Commons, the English Parliament passed a measure called Lord North's Regulating Act of 1773. This was one of the first measures of the government to regulate the activities of the Company by introducing a systematic official

indignation indicates, did not satisfy a public which had become all too familiar with the excesses of the Company. During his second term in Bengal, Clive had instituted strict regulations to contract private trade and to expand the control of the East India Company. It is believed that the sudden changes introduced during the 1760s by the British administration in the trade and revenue structure of Bengal led to the famine that raged between 1769 and 1773, resulting in approximately 15 million deaths in the province.[137] By 1772, many alternate accounts had become available for the perusal of the public to illustrate the exploitative policies of the burgeoning empire, leading to the miserable conditions of the Indian subjects in the English presidencies.[138]

These reports divided public opinion over the advantages of extending imperial interests in India, since a discourse of "vigilant" modernity had started to define Britain's image in the English public sphere. As Kathleen Wilson has

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hierarchy in both England and India. For a detailed analysis of these regulations, see P. J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India 1757-1813*, 15-77.

[137] The chaotic atmosphere of Company's early rule, combined with an unprecedented failure of seasonal rains, plunged Bengal into a massive agricultural crisis and shortage of staple goods. For a detailed account of the economic condition of the province during this period, see R. Datta, *Society, Economy and the Market*, 238-284. For an appraisal of Clive's policies during 1765-67, also see P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, 129-157.

[138] See, for instance, William Bolts' lengthy accusations against the Company in *Considerations on Indian Affairs; particularly respecting the present state of Bengal and its dependencies*, published in three volumes between 1772 and 1775. Bolts—a tradesman expelled from Calcutta in 1760s for illegal trading—called the Company's administration "an absolute government of monopolists" and held it responsible for the deaths during the famine.

observed, an "activist conception of citizenship" emerged in the eighteenth-century press, proclaiming "the *duty* of the subject to monitor and canvass the state to ensure the accountability of those in power" (74). As a result, close scrutiny of powerful institutions became one of the preeminent ways of resisting illegitimate forms of authority and affirming a "sensible" citizenship for the English public.[139] The British identity—at least in the public domain—was split in the second-half of the eighteenth century by the oppositional forces of an autocratic empire and a modern democratic consciousness.[140] To a large extent, the moral outrage in the 1770s and 80s over the archaic structure of the Company gave birth to a new conception of the empire. Largely conducted to pacify an uneasy public, this revision replaced the economic imperatives of the East India Company with the idea of an "enlightened and modern" empire, reflecting the democratic British spirit.[141]

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[139] I am using "sensibility" in the same sense it was used in eighteenth-century moral philosophy to signify both the rationality and the sensitivity of a civil society.

[140] For a highly insightful account of this contradiction in the English public opinion regarding the empire, see P. J. Marshall, "A Free and Though Conquering People: Britain and Asia in the Eighteenth Century."

[141] One of the most significant eighteenth-century figures in this transition was the English philosopher, Edmund Burke. The history of Burke's involvement in Indian affairs takes in some thirteen years—from 1781, when he was appointed to the select committee investigating the East India Company, to 1794, when the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings was concluded. During this time, as Frederick G Whelan notes, he made some significant philosophical and political interventions on several significant topics:

> the nature and purposes of empire; the history, culture, and society of India; the workings of corruption and corrupt political organizations; the pernicious influence of imperial power and wealth on British domestic politics and the

While the next chapter takes a closer look at the discursive reconciliation of the empire with modernity, this chapter continues to concentrate on the reasons for the failure of the Company's propaganda to create a stable discourse of political despotism through the figure of the Indian Nawab. As demonstrated thus far, the "atrocities" of the Siraj-ud-Daula were constructed as the justification for Clive's usurpation of his sovereign powers. However, in the years that followed the Battle of Plassey, the subsequent Nawabs of Bengal—Mir Jafar and Mir Kasim in particular—made frequent appearances in the internal battles and the political intrigues of the Company. Termed Clive's and Vansittart's "nabobs" respectively, these distant nominal rulers were frequently invoked in a pamphlet war, condemning or validating the actions of each opposing bloc. Stripped of any individual voice or agency, the character of these Nawabs was molded in accordance with the public explanations of the Company's actions in Bengal. As a result of these internal altercations, the Nawab did not remain a stable figure of despotic oppression in the eighteenth-century archive. It oscillated between being a perpetrator of irrational aggression to being an innocent victim of the ignoble designs of the Company.

> constitution; the nature of despotic or arbitrary methods of rule; and the claim that the government in Asia was traditionally and inescapably despotic. (1-2)

In contrast to the confusion of the early years of conquest, Burke's reflections reconciled Britain's imperial ambitions with its march towards modernity, giving a far more concrete and "civilized" direction to the English empire in India. I discuss the impact of Burke's writings on the British empire in the next two chapters.

When it came to condemning the rulers of Bengal as despotic figures, John Holwell was one of the most prominent Company servants to give evidence against them. After bringing the Black Hole incident to the public view, he embarked upon the mission of creating a similar image of Daula's successor, Mir Jafar. Soon after the removal of Jafar from the seat of power, Holwell wrote a public memorial to defend Vansittart's actions against the Nawab. He used all his rhetorical skills to vilify the ruler, calling his government an unbroken chain of cruelty, tyranny, and oppression.[142] Outlining the "despotic" nature of Jafar's rule, Holwell painted yet another poignant tale of cruelty by describing the assassination of the wives and children of other Nawabs, including the family of Siraj-ud-Daula.[143] According to him, such displays of violence had made Jafar the

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[142] The Memorial was reproduced by Holwell in his treatise titled *India Tracts*. He characterized Mir Jafar in the following manner

> The Subah Jaffier Aly Cawn was of a temper extremely tyrannical and avaricious, at the same time very indolent; and the people about him being either abject slaves and flatterers, or else the base instruments of his vices, there was no chance of his having the affairs of the government properly conducted but by their removal. He attributed the ill success of his affairs to imaginary plots and contrivances, and sacrificed lives without mercy to the excess of his jealousy. (19)

[143] Describing the heartless killing of innocent children and women, Holwell wrote that the families of Jafar's political rivals

> perished all in one night, at Dacca, about the month of June 1760, where they had been detained prisoners since the accession of Jaffier Aly Cawn to the Subahship. A pervannah (or order) was sent to Jeffaret Cawn, the Nabob of Dacca, to put to death all the survivors of the family of the Nabob Allworde Cawn, Shamut Jung, and Suraja Dowla; but upon his declining to obey so cruel an order, the messenger, who had private instructions to execute this tragedy, in case of the others refusal, took them from the place of their confinement, and having carried

object of much "dread and detestation" by his subjects, who had also started to suffer greatly under his rule. Jafar's negligence of the province's economy had given rise to the scarcity of provisions and goods for the people of Bengal. In addition to this, heavy taxation and other forms of unlawful extraction worsened the situation, leading to a mutinous atmosphere in the province. Jafar's misrule had become a "reproach to the English nation" since he had been appointed with the consent and support of Robert Clive. Holwell went on to describe how a "revolution" was carried out by the "selfless" spirit of correcting the English image which had been marred by the actions of a despotic Nawab. Just like the dethronement of the former Nawab, Holwell constructed Jafar's dethronement as an outcome of his own vices, rather than any unreasonable aggression by the Company. According to him, Vansittart and his supporters had acted in a timely manner in order to protect both English trade and the people of Bengal from an unpredictable and ruthless ruler.[144]

Though contradicting the narrative efforts of Clive's supporters to defend his decision to instate Mir Jafar as the successor of Siraj-ud-Daula, Holwell's sketch of Jafar, nevertheless, fed into the broader conception of indigenous rulers

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> them out at midnight upon the river, massacred and drowned them, with about twenty women of inferior note, their attendants. (*Tracts* 20)

[144] According to Holwell, the Nawab's subjects were elated by the news of Jafar's removal. He wrote: "The people in general seemed much pleased with this revolution; which had this particular felicity attending it, that it was brought about without the least disturbance in the town, or a drop of blood spilt" (*Tracts* 26).

as practitioners of arbitrary power. This construction, ironically, was interrupted by the effort of Clive's followers who were vehemently engaged in discrediting Holwell and Vansittart. In a letter written in 1762 to a committee investigating the events in Bengal, some members of the Governor's council countered Holwell's argument that Mir Jafar was deposed on the count of cruelty and oppression in his government. This letter went over each and every charge against Jafar, dissolving the case made by the Vansittart administration. In this process, the writers initiated an important shift in the emerging discourse of the despotic forms of government by challenging the sequence of events presented by Holwell. According to the political vista painted by the letter, it was the Company's rule that deserved the epithet of tyranny in the governance of Bengal. The writers claimed that Vansittart collaborated with Mir Kasim to lay siege over Jafar's palace with the help of the Company's forces. Jafar, on being deceived by the English, held them guilty of both perjury and breach of faith. Knowing the insatiable greed of the Company, he also desired to know what sum of money Mir Kasim was to give for the throne, and he would give half as much more to be continued as the Nawab. The letter claimed that Jafar went on to say that "although no oaths were sacred enough to bind the English, yet as he had sworn to be their faithful friend, he would never swerve from his engagement, and rather suffer death than draw his sword against them."[145] The letter continued to

[145] *A letter from certain gentlemen of the Council at Bengal, to the Honourable the Secret*

describe the pathetic state of Mir Jafar after the Battle of Plassey, stating, “Want of money was the great difficulty the Nabob laboured under; but this did not proceed from any fault of his, but from the distracted state in which the country had been ever since Colonel Clive’s departure” (13). With only one-fourth of the accustomed revenue in his treasury, the letter illustrated how Jafar was further obliged to maintain an army greater than any Nawab before him, and pay the Company’s troops in addition. After describing these demands on the ruler of Bengal, the letter concluded, “No wonder then at the perilous condition to which Mir Jafffer was reduced; to extricate him from which, it behoved us to exert our utmost abilities; instead whereof, he was treated with the greatest indignity by us, and basely turned his government” (13).

As I have discussed before, this letter was yet another attempt to protect Clive’s personal fortune and the privileges enjoyed by his supporters during Mir Jafar’s rule. Though Jafar’s defenders were hardly concerned about his fate, they, nevertheless, managed to do serious damage to the Company’s image by negating all accusations of despotic excess against him. In *An address to the proprietors of East-India stock*, published in 1764, for instance, Jafar was exonerated from the charges of indiscriminate assassinating of his political enemies and their families. By presenting Jafar’s defense and negating the charges against him, this address

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Committee for affairs of the Honourable United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East-Indies, 13. Subsequent citations appear in the body of the text.

further underlined the misdemeanors of the Company in Bengal. According to this address, some extreme measures were taken by Mir Jafar only "because he feared the *English* Governor was meditating a Revolution, in whose Favour he knew not."[146] The writer further claimed that it was pure self-preservation, and not wanton cruelty, that had forced the Nawab to turn to fatal remedies. According to the address, an inquiry into the Governor's council had revealed that there was no cruelty in Jafar's disposition to merit the epithet of a despot. In contrast to Holwell's descriptions, the address went on to paint Jafar as a grieving father who had just lost a grown-up son in a military mission. Rather than leaving him alone, the address complained that the Company's administration in Bengal had pressed a "thousand cares" on the "unhappy nabob" by constantly demanding money for their military expeditions. These revelations of the transgressions of one faction by another had serious consequences for the Company.

The constant appearance of such convoluted and conflicting versions of the same individuals and events in Bengal completely destroyed the legitimacy of the Company's testimonials in the public eye. In fact, even a cursory look at the eighteenth-century archive presents a highly unstable narrative of the British conquest of Bengal. The image of a "despot" is extremely volatile, fluctuating frequently between the Indian Nawabs and the Company's officers in the

[146] *An address to the proprietors of East-India stock*, 13.

propagandist cycle of the early empire. In view of this instability in the myth of Indian despotism in the colonial archive, it is indeed remarkable to witness the reinvention and, to a large extent, the alignment of despotic forms of governance with Mughal rule in Indian nationalist historiography.[147] As Partha Chatterjee has shown, Indian historians in the nineteenth century chose to represent *Nawabi* Bengal as a period of misrule in the nationalist histories of the province, often conflating it with the overall polity of the Mughal-state in India, and, in the process, reducing both to a decadent and chaotic form of government.[148] This choice, however, did not emanate so much from a reading of the eighteenth-century archive, but from the nationalist response to the mainstream imperial history, prevalent in both India and Britain during the nineteenth century. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, imperialist history had discarded the defensive mode of earlier historical narratives, unfolding now with a new-found confidence arising from Britain's control over larger territories in India. In this new mode of representing the early phases of empire-building, historians like Thomas Babington Macaulay and James Mill undertook the task of reconstructing

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[147] For an example of this interpretation, see Nabin Chandra Sen, *Palasir Yudhha* (The Battle of Plassey). Published in Bengali in 1874, *Palasir Yudhha* is an epic poem, describing the victory of the British forces over a tyrannical Muslim ruler. It is important to add here that Nabin Chandra Sen worked as a Deputy Magistrate in the colonial administration, and his rendition of the eighteenth-century events became part of the curriculum of the government schools in the province.

[148] Chatterjee elaborates this point in his seminal work on Indian nationalism, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 95-115.

the origin of the British as a heroic myth of conquest. Relying heavily on the propagandist histories of the Company from the past century, these writers suppressed many pertinent eighteenth-century debates about the legitimacy of Britain's imperial ambitions in India.

The evasiveness of later imperialist historiography is most noticeable in the context of the decade-long impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India (1773-1785). In an essay titled "Warren Hastings" published in 1841, Macaulay used his characteristic rhetorical style to exonerate Hastings from the charges during the trial and to reinvent him as the "great patron" of all forms of Indian knowledge. While much of the later inscriptions of India's colonial history, following the example of Macaulay and other such historians, does not fail to mention Hastings' orientalist leanings and his love for Indian languages and culture, it would be perhaps remarkable to find in these histories even a single mention of the many accusations of corruption and violence against Hastings and his administration. Rarer still are any references to the chief prosecutor of the trial, the influential politician and philosopher Edmund Burke, whose extensive writings on India are still one of the most consistent and systematic assessments of the effects of imperial domination on Britain's nationalist self. The following chapter investigates the discursive maneuvers through which Burke was simultaneously dissociated from his critique of the

Company's rule in India and canonized as one of the foremost voices of

Enlightenment philosophy in the European intellectual history.

CHAPTER 3

A Sublime Performance of Revenge: Edmund Burke and the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings

> The main drift of their [East India Company's] policy was to keep the natives totally out of sight. We might hear enough about what great and illustrious exploits were daily performing on that great conspicuous theatre [India] by Britons. But…we were never to hear of any of the natives being actors.[149]

With these words began an inquiry into the conduct of the East India Company by the English parliament in the year 1784, followed two years later by the impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of British India. Spoken by Edmund Burke right before the unfolding of the legal trial against Hastings, these lines succinctly summarized the representational structure of the East India Company's policies in India. As I discussed in the last two chapters, the actual functioning and controversies of the early British empire were often disguised by poignant narratives of trauma and heroism, describing the magnitude of challenges faced by young and inexperienced English officers in an unfamiliar country with a menacing and brutal system of rule. This construction of India, however, was slowly dismantled by one of the most influential thinkers

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[149] Great Britain, Parliament, *Narrative of all the proceedings and debates in both Houses of Parliament on East-India affairs,* 386.

and politicians of eighteenth-century England, Edmund Burke. Building a case for prosecution by using erratic, yet exceedingly incriminating reports available against the Company nabobs in the English public sphere, Burke carried out an extremely visible and humiliating trial of Hastings in order to vindicate the values of universal sympathy and human bonding emanating from Enlightenment thought towards the end of the eighteenth century.

While Burke has his share of defenders and detractors on the India question in academia, the enormous body of writing produced by him on topics related to India during the trial remains something of an enigma for scholars.[150] The complexity and, at times, the sheer implausibility of Burke's arguments during the trial make it difficult for current scholarship to assess the effect of his work on the future workings of the British empire in India. Did Burke's criticism of the Company succeed in introducing administrative reforms in India and replacing blatant profiteering with enlightened ideas of modern governance? Or, conversely, did his philosophy assist in centralizing colonial control and shifting the moral responsibility for imperial crimes from the nation-state to rogue individuals? While there are no straightforward answers to these pertinent questions, there is little doubt that Burke, through his scathing criticism of the Company nabobs, did succeed in enforcing the idea that modern empires could

[150] I provide a detailed review of current scholarship on Burke and India later in the chapter.

not function like ancient ones through the deliberate use of military power and armed conquests alone. They required subtle mechanisms of political control in the colony, to be complemented with strong voices of opposition from the British public whenever colonial administrations displayed excessive and arbitrary power towards the native subjects of the Crown. As such, the formation of modern civil institutions in Britain could not reach their full potential without philosophy addressing issues related to the burgeoning empire and the subjugated people in the colonies.

Despite the fact that Burke's writings on India and the Company's affairs form one of the most extensive and systematic discursive interventions on the question of Britain's early imperial ambitions, very little attention has been devoted in either Western philosophy or colonial history to the possible repercussions of his work on future British policies in India. The conventional understanding of Burke as a theorist of sublime aesthetics and as a commentator on the French revolution, for instance, completely suppresses the fact of his long involvement with the indictment of the Company and its chief administrators. It is also responsible for creating the perception that the emergence of an archaic and exploitive ideology like imperialism had little or no impact on the spirit of enlightenment in eighteenth-century Europe. Burke's writings on India, however, correct this perception by exhibiting the collective anxiety of a nation over the potentially debilitating effects of an empire on its modern and enlightened self.

The first section of this chapter demonstrates the fallacious and uni-linear trajectories within the European history of ideas that place British imperialism and Burke's philosophical ideas at an insurmountable distance. After exposing the selective and hegemonic construction of Burke's philosophy in the Western canon, I provide a detailed reading of Hastings' trial to illustrate the rhetorical strategies employed by Burke to construct a collective fervor in eighteenth-century English society against the workings of the Company in India. I specifically look at Burke's representation of the atrocities committed by the Company's officers on the peasants of Bengal during the annual collection of land taxes. By incorporating the aesthetics of the sublime in his description of the Company's methods, Burke created terror and violence as essential traits of mercantile imperialist agenda.

Although Burke desired to establish a model of universal justice by addressing the question of colonial exploitation during the trial, this desire was paradoxically based on a clear perception of the otherness of India. For him, the greatness of British society was all the more possible when it showed sympathy for a people remote in all aspects from Britain. Though Burke's efforts at securing Hastings' impeachment came at the expense of reifying India into a tangible object of sympathy for the English public, it is, nevertheless, important to study Burke's construction of the despotism of the Company nabob for a number of reasons. It defines the juncture where a language of moral authority entered the

empire, predicated largely upon the question of self-improvement for the colonizer rather than the discourse of "white burden" emanating from later high imperialism which remained solely preoccupied with the mission of improving the colonized. Also, once we interpolate Burke's critique of the Company's policies in imperial history, we see the emergence of a different chronology of colonial modernity, one in which the future construction of British India and colonial administrative policies were not so much determined by western paradigms of rule but by this early prefiguring of India in the English public sphere. Moreover, a reading of the trial shows that the European Enlightenment has never been a self-sufficient category; in fact, it has always been dependant on the history of imperial domination to fully articulate the meaning of modernity for itself.

I. Canonizing Burke/ Forgetting India: The Selective Memory of European Intellectual History

As a leading English philosopher of the eighteenth century, Edmund Burke makes frequent appearances in two academic spaces. In literary studies, Burke's name is generally associated with the aesthetic theories of the beautiful and the sublime. No discussion of the sublime is ever complete without a reference to Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*,

published in 1757 and revised in 1759.[151] In this canonical text, Burke reworked the classical notion of the sublime and elevated it to an independent category within philosophy.[152] Similarly, in studies of the European Enlightenment, Burke is usually remembered in the context of his strong opposition to the French revolution.[153] Furthermore, any investigation into the philosophical accounts of the revolution, without a mention of Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, can be best described as partial and incomplete.[154] Published in 1790, this text constitutes one of the initial inquiries into the fundamental claims of the French revolutionaries. As a conservative thinker, Burke condemned the violent

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[151] *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* will hereafter be referred to as *Enquiry*. Given the strong criticism of the 1757 edition, Burke published his work again with more in-depth explanation of his ideas.

[152] Till the appearance of Burke's *Enquiry*, the European understanding of the sublime was dominated by a text from classical antiquity, *Peri Hupsous* (*On the Sublime*). Traditionally attributed to Longinus, the text introduced the distinction between the experience of the beautiful and the sublime in aesthetics. *On the Sublime* was largely concerned with the sublime effects of rhetoric; and, unlike Burke's *Enquiry*, did not extend the concept into other domains of human experience. Despite this, Longinus's treatise was crucial for initiating interest in the sublime affect of aesthetics in the context of ethics and morality during the eighteenth century. The Longinian tradition is both long and complex, informing diverse schools of thought. For a coherent trajectory of the evolution of the idea of the sublime, see Philip Shaw, *The Sublime*.

[153] Edmund Burke belonged to the Whig party and became a leading voice of its conservative faction in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. His analysis of the French revolution is considered to be one of the founding texts of modern conservatism in political philosophy.

[154] *Reflections on the Revolution in France* will hereafter be referred to as *Reflections*.

actions of the Jacobins against the French aristocracy, forewarning Europe about the dangers of an irrational and tyrannical democracy.

Generally interpreted as the bookends of Burke's writing career, the *Enquiry* and *Reflections* are often studied in conjunction with each other, despite a lapse of more than thirty years between the dates of their publication. Rather than reading this temporal distance as a sign of intellectual disjunction in Burke's work, scholars tend to interpret *Reflections* as the logical culmination of the Burkean sublime, an aesthetic process initiated by the *Enquiry*.[155] The theoretical association between the two texts, even at the expense of their historical contexts, is not entirely incomprehensible. David Bromwich sums up this association in the following manner:

> It has become customary to associate the *Reflections* with the *Sublime and Beautiful* by pointing out the antitheses they employ to advance their arguments. Fear and love, grandeur and delicacy, male gallantry and female vulnerability – these pairings are central to both books.[156]

Besides sharing an antithetical structure to construct philosophical premises of human sensibility, critics believe that the two texts also create a sequential

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[155] See, for instance, Terry Eagleton, "Aesthetics and Politics in Edmund Burke." Some other book-length studies investigating the textual relationship between Burke's aesthetic and political theories are Stephen White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* and Peter James Stanlis, *Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution*.

[156] "Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France," *A Companion to Romanticism*, 113.

relationship between Burke's aesthetic and moral philosophy. In *Enquiry*, Burke had introduced—in contrast to classical aestheticians like Longinus—terror and its causes as a definite category in the experience of the sublime.[157] Placing the sublime at an insurmountable distance from the beautiful, he posited all the experiences of sublimity through one governing principle: "Terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime" (*Enquiry* 58). In *Reflections*, he gave this particular sentiment a political and moral thrust by meditating upon the fear evoked by the revolutionary crowds in France. As Geraldine Friedman states in her analysis of the Burkean sublime, the *Reflections* "represented a political event through the aesthetic categories developed in the *Enquiry* well before" (12). Given this relationship, Friedman interprets *Enquiry* as a theoretical exposition of the aesthetics of terror, with *Reflections*—the chronologically latter text—informing the former as a historical exempla. According to her, the "textual echoes" of the texts identify a singular moment in Burke's philosophy where the aesthetic becomes "the site of a

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[157] Though Burke became one of the most influential theorists of the sublime through his philosophical interventions, many British writers engaged with this concept during the eighteenth century. For a sampling of these diverse perspectives, see the anthology by Andrew Ashfield and Peter de Bolla, *The Sublime: A reader in British Eighteenth-century Aesthetic Theory*. For a critical perspective on the period, see Samuel H. Monk, *The Sublime: A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England*. For an analysis of the incorporation of sublimity in religious thought, see David B. Morris, *The Religious Sublime: Christian Poetry and Critical Tradition in 18th-Century England*.

strangely stubborn political antagonism that resists final settlement" (14). Burke, himself, voiced this connection implicitly in a letter:

> England gazing with astonishment at a French struggle for Liberty and not knowing whether to blame or to applaud! The thing indeed, though I thought I saw something like it in progress for several years, has still something in it paradoxical and Mysterious. The spirit it is impossible not to admire; but the old Parisian ferocity has broken out in a shocking manner.[158]

Critics often map the historical moment of the French revolution and the aesthetic moment of the sublime onto each other, especially after Burke's own emphasis on their analogous potential to affect human subjectivity.[159] In such discussions of Burkean aesthetics, the French revolution enters a metonymical relationship with the sublime through the shared experience of irrational passions and paradoxes. For many critics, both the French revolution and the Burkean sublime constitute a

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[158] Letter dated 9 August 1789, *Correspondence*, Vol. 6, 10.

[159] For an illustration of this mode of analysis, see Steven Cresap, "Sublime Politics: On the Uses of an Aesthetics of Terror." Reading the *Reflections* and the *Enquiry* together, Cresap claims, "Burke can be taken as arguing that our political, social, and economic systems all depend, in an essential way, on manifesting the sublime; and, as a corollary, that participating in these systems depend on our ability to appreciate and manage the sublime" (123).

disruptive moment in Enlightenment thought, rupturing its unremitting confidence in human reason.[160]

The alleged propinquity between Burke's two writings has been a crucial discursive maneuver for introducing a conceptual erasure between history and aesthetics in the subsequent theorizations of the sublime. The recent appropriation of the idea of the sublime in postmodern aesthetics has been responsible for creating even greater proximity between an event and its representation.[161] With its formulations of mystique and incoherence, the postmodern sublime often defines the ethical and aesthetic limits of literary and aesthetic response to historical violence. As Srinivas Aravamudan elucidates, the postmodern sublime collapses the distinction between form and content by using presentations that "impart a strong sense of the unpresentable" (191). Working through the

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[160] This view is presented in Vanessa L. Ryan, "The Physiological Sublime: Burke's Critique of Reason." Contrasting Burke with another influential philosopher, Immanuel Kant, on the subject of the sublime, Ryan asserts, "Whereas Kant holds that the sublime allows us to intuit our rational capacity, Burke's physiological version of the sublime involves a critique of reason" (266). Given his insistence on the lurking "darkness" behind the philosophical "light" of the period, the sublime for Burke, according to Ryan, is a question "not of the subject's increasing self-awareness but of the subject's sense of limitation and of the ultimate value of that experience within a social and ethical context" (266).

[161] For a sampling of contemporary philosophical views on sublimity in art and literature, see the collection of essays, *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*. This collection includes essays by leading French theorists like Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-François Lyotard on the subject of representation in the aesthetics of the sublime. Rather than conceding the term to the tradition of aestheticism, the writers retrieve this term from the rhetoric of grandiosity and ecstasy to question the very ability of aesthetic discourse to present us with a modality, to use Nancy's words, for "*being-in-the-world*" (2).

Enlightenment ideas on the subject, Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, refashions the sublime as the most appropriate mode for witnessing historical trauma.[162] In Lyotard's theory of aesthetics, the sublime speaks beyond the limits of language and invests an event with a paradoxical truth by drawing our attention to the unpresentability of terror.[163]

This interpolation of an aporetic device like the sublime into the historicity of an event, however, is not only a product of recent postmodern ruminations on Enlightenment philosophy. The process of aestheticizing a political event was initiated in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century under the rubric of the

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[162] Lyotard's interventions on the sublime's aesthetic and ethical possibilities constitute a major tenet of his philosophical work. Besides the full length study on the Kantian sublime titled *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, see the following texts for an insight into his ideas on the subject: *The Inhuman: Reflection on Time*, 135-143; *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence, 1982-1985*, 67-74; *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, 71- 83.

[163] Though Lyotard's writings have been canonized as one of the most representative texts on the postmodern sublime, they have also been subjected to serious criticism. Timothy Engström, in "The Postmodern Sublime?: Philosophical Rehabilitations and Pragmatic Evasion," questions Lyotard's commitment to the unrepresentability of the sublime:

> His concept of the sublime, however, runs the risk of a certain sort of evasion, the risk of striving to abdicate responsibility for what it is discourses do, whether sublime or not. To make the unpresentable the primary value of the true artist, and to make the avant-garde the new priesthood over the ineffable, seems also to evade much of what is best about much non-Lyotardian postmodern art and theory: that is, its willingness to forgo grand apologetics vis-à-vis the sublime in favor of a more modest acknowledgment that escape is not possible, not desirable, and that mere beauty may not be such a bad thing. (204)

Romantic Movement.[164] Combining insights from both Burke and Immanuel Kant, the Romantic period constructed the sublime as a discernible and definite category of taste.[165] As Nicola Trott asserts, the Romantics were attracted to Burke for two reasons: first, because he pre-empted and critiqued the maneuvers of rational analysis; and, second, because he introduced a certain degree of "obscurity" and "darkness" in the aesthetic responses of Enlightenment thought.[166] However, it was the idea of a "sublime revolution" that made Burke the progenitor of one of the many strands of Romantic philosophy. By reading the *Enquiry* into the *Reflections*, Romantic writers began to associate the Burkean sublime with the actual violence of the French revolution: "The sublime was

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[164] A canonical study on this subject is provided by Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence*. Some other studies on the Romantic sublime can be found in Frances Ferguson, *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation*; Matthew Brennan, *Wordsworth, Turner, and Romantic Landscape: A Study of the Traditions of the Picturesque and the Sublime*; James B. Twitchell, *Romantic Horizons: Aspects of the Sublime in English Poetry and Painting, 1770-1850*.

[165] In contrast to Burke, Kant did not place the sublime outside the purview of reason. Rather, he aligned the aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime, albeit ambivalently, with the faculties of Understanding and Reason respectively. In *The Critique of Judgment*, he forwarded this view:

> The beautiful in nature is a question of the form of the object, and this consists in limitation, whereas the sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of *limitlessness*, yet with a superadded thought of its totality. Accordingly the beautiful seems to be regarded as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of understanding, the sublime as a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason. (68)

[166] "The Picturesque, the Beautiful and the Sublime," *A Companion to Romanticism*, 79-80.

suddenly available to (post-) revolutionary interpretation; and, by the same token, the rhetoric of revolution became merged with that of the sublime" (Trott 82).

Though the above-mentioned transmutations of the sublime hardly capture the centuries-long complexity of this aesthetic category, they point towards a crucial omission in the unfolding of post-enlightenment European intellectual history. Going back to the point made at the beginning of this section, let me reiterate that there was a gap of thirty years between the publication of *Enquiry* and *Reflections*. During this time, Edmund Burke was actively involved in parliamentary affairs as a member of the House of Commons from the year 1765 to 1794. As a leading orator of the Whig party, Burke devoted the largest portion of his public life to the India question. After the Battle of Plassey, the East India Company's interests and powers had moved beyond commerce into the domain of politics in the province of Bengal. As I demonstrated in the last chapter, the territorial expansion of the Company soon divided English public opinion over the wisdom of allowing a mercantile enterprise to establish sovereign rule in India. In this climate of anxieties over a burgeoning empire, Burke emerged as one of the most polemical public figures with regards to the Company's activities in India. Though preoccupied with the subject of Britain's imperial ambitions from the outset of his political career, Burke's strong interest in India began with his appointment to head the Commons' Select Committee on East India Affairs in 1781. On the basis of the investigations of this committee, Burke supported a

major Indian reform Bill in 1783.[167] Convinced about the despotic character of the Company's rule in India, Burke gave a passionate speech in defense of the Bill in the British Parliament. Outlining the abuses of power by the Company in India, Burke hoped that his support of the bill would check the dangerous influence of its officers on the socio-political structure of India and Britain alike.[168] The bill, however, was defeated in the House of Lords, providing Burke with further proof of the corrupt influences of ill-gotten wealth from India.[169] The defeat of this bill only strengthened Burke's critique, leading to parliamentary inquiries into the Company's management of India affairs. In 1785, Warren Hastings—the first Governor-General of Bengal—was recalled by the government after disturbing reports of his participation in large-scale orchestrations of violence and extortion.[170] From 1786 to 1794, Burke was deeply

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[167] This reform initiative, known as *Fox's East India Bill*, was introduced during the Fox-North coalition government which placed the Whig party in power between 1782 and 1783.

[168] Burke's speech on *Fox's East India Bill* can be found in many anthologies, including *On Empire, Liberty, and Reform: Speeches and Letters*, 282-370.

[169] Sympathetic to the Company's interests, George III had authorized Earl Temple to intervene in the voting on the bill. In a correspondence with Burke (dated 19 December 1783), Temple quoted the following words from the king: "whoever voted for the India Bill was not only not his friend, but would be considered by him as an enemy; and if these words were not strong enough, Earl Temple might use whatever words he might deem stronger and more to the purpose" (*Correspondence* 5: 119).

[170] A detailed inquiry into the administration of Warren Hastings can be found in the eleven reports presented by "the select committee appointed to take into consideration the state of the administration of justice in the provinces of Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa" between 1782 and 1784.

involved in the impeachment trial of Hastings, whom Burke believed to be the chief architect of all the abuses of the Company.[171] The prosecution of Hastings was nothing less than an all-consuming obsession for Burke, taking up the most time and effort in both his writing and political career. Though Hastings was finally acquitted, Burke remained convinced that justice had been subverted with this decision. Disgusted with the loss of public interest in the decade-long trial, Burke poured out his contempt in a letter to a friend:

> Let not this cruel, daring, unexampled act of publick corruption, guilt, and meanness go down—to a posterity, perhaps as careless as the present race, without its due animadversion, which will be best found in its own acts and monuments. Let my endeavours to save the Nation from that Shame and guilt, be my monument; The only one I ever will have. Let every thing I have done, said, or written be forgotten but this ... Above all make out the cruelty of this pretended acquittal, but in reality this barbarous and inhuman condemnation of whole Tribes and nations…If ever Europe recovers its civilization that work will be useful. Remember! Remember! Remember![172]

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[171] For a detailed historical study of the trial, see P. J. Marshall, *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings*. A more recent account of Burke's involvement with the India question can be found in Frederick G. Whelan, *Edmund Burke and India*.

[172] "To French Lawrence—28 July 1796," *Selected Letters*, 397-98.

Despite Burke's own impassioned injunction against forgetting the empire, it would be surprising to find a mention of even one of Burke's writings on India in the discussion of his aesthetics. Burke's obsession with the trial of Warren Hastings remains either unmentioned or reduced to the margins in Romantic and Postmodern interpretations of his ideas. While tracing the trajectory of Burke's philosophical musings, these significant intellectual movements of the nineteenth and twentieth century situate India, through the very act of exclusion, outside the philosophical history of Europe. As I discussed in the last two chapters, imperialist historiography in the nineteenth century went an extra mile to transform the controversial beginnings of the empire into a myth of the moral conquest of English ideals over its other. In contrast to this blatant exercise of power in early historical treatises, a more implicit form of discursive control can be witnessed in the canonization of texts representing different strands of Enlightenment thought. Though Burke is recognized in academia as one of the foremost philosophical voices challenging the authority of enlightenment reason, the source of his critique is almost always linked to his writings on the French revolution. The canonization of *Enquiry* and *Reflections* as intellectually inextricable texts of the Burkean sublime demonstrates an inherent assumption, namely that the "sublimity" of an enlightenment thinker can only be interpreted within the framework of the revolutionary thrust of European history. This failure to recognize the impact of the long impeachment trial on the evolution of Burke's

aesthetic and moral philosophy amounts to ignoring Burke's own observations on the debilitating effects of the events in India on the British nation. In the next section, I investigate the implications of Burke's rhetoric during the trial of Warren Hastings for the formation of an imperial imagination in England during the late eighteenth century.

II. The "Savage" East India Company: Burke's Construction of Sublime Terror and Universal Justice during the Trial

> My Lords, I am obliged to make use of some apology for the horrid scenes that I am now going to open to you…The first mode of torture was this: — They began by winding cords about their fingers until they had become incorporated together, and then they hammered wedges of wood and iron between those fingers, until they crushed and maimed those poor, honest, laborious, hands…These are the hands which are so treated…have every day for these fifteen years made that luxurious meal with which we all commence the day. And what was the return of Britain? Cords, hammers, wedges, tortures and maimings, were the return that the British government made to those laborious hands…But, my Lords, there was more. Virgins, whose fathers kept them from the sight of the sun, were dragged into the public court…There, in the presence of day…those virgins were cruelly violated by the basest and wickedest of

> mankind…But it did not end there…they put the nipples of the women into the sharp edges of split bamboos and tore them from their bodies. Grown from ferocity to ferocity, from cruelty to cruelty, they applied burning torches and cruel slow fires—my Lords, I am ashamed to go further—those infernal fiends, in defiance of everything divine and human, planted death in the source of life.[173]

With this description of the punishments inflicted by the East India Company on the peasants of Rangpur and Dinajpur in Bengal for the non-payment of taxes, Edmund Burke began the third day of his opening speech for Warren Hastings' impeachment trial in 1788 at Westminster Hall.[174] Immediately after recounting these atrocities, Burke collapsed in the courthouse, apparently overwhelmed by the horrific imagery of his own oratory. According to many accounts of the trial, the people witnessing the trial could not remain unaffected by Burke's passionate display of anger at the Company and its officers in India.[175]

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[173] *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 6, 419-20.

[174] Contemporary scholars generally reconstruct the history of this trial through multiple sources ranging from official records of the proceedings, speeches and personal correspondences of the principal participants in the trial to historical treatises, literary and personal responses of the witnessing public to the court procedures.

[175] In the words of an anonymous contemporary of Burke, after delivering his speech, "Mr. Burke dropt his head upon his hands, unable to proceed, so greatly was he oppressed by the horror which he felt at this relation. The effect of it was visible through the whole auditory; the late Mrs. Sheridan fainted away, several ladies sunk under the agitation of their feelings, amongst others Mrs. Siddons" (*Beauties* cv).

Members of the audience were shocked into silence and a number of women fainted under the strain of their feelings.[176] The legal proceedings were interrupted by the intense response of the audience and were resumed only after Burke regained his composure and others were revived from their unconscious state.

The reaction of the audience to Burke's terrifying testimony was nothing less than a tribute to his skillful use of language and performance to evoke the aesthetic category of sublime in legal discourse.[177] As Burke had already outlined in the *Enquiry* three decades before, terror was a founding emotion for the sublime: "whatever is in sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is

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[176] One of the most unique features of Warren Hastings' trial was the large-scale presence of women as spectators in the impeachment proceedings. As Daniel O'Quinn observes in *Staging Governance*, "The incursion of women and of new forms of sociability into Parliament was arguably the most spectacular instance of the incremental infusion of women into the public sphere more generally" (117). This increased visibility in the public sphere, however, did not always translate into any new agency for women. In most instances, their public appearances were described in terms of the feminine propensity for expressing strong emotions in the form of crying, blushing or fainting.

[177] In "Edmund Burke's Gothic Romance," Frans De Bruyn demonstrates how Burke employed the fictional modes of gothic romance as narrative threads to enable the writing of new kinds of political and journalistic discourse. In Bruyn's words, "His [Burke's] evocation of eighteenth-century fictional discourse in his political writings is, therefore, no accident, but rather a symptom of a complex interaction in his thought—and in the period generally—between literary patterns on the one hand and political and social structures on the other" (419).

productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[178] Before concluding his theorization of human emotions, Burke had also assigned a special place to language in relation to the experience of the sublime. In his view, words lacked the power to exactly describe ideas or objects generally exhibited by the imitative arts. This lack of semblance in language, however, was capable of raising the sublime to a very high degree because, when provided with the right combination of words, it could display "the effect of things on the mind of the speaker" rather than simply presenting "a clear idea of the things themselves" (*Enquiry* 213). For Burke, a "clear expression" was far inferior to a "strong expression" since the former appealed to the human faculty of understanding by describing an object or an event "as it is," while the latter left a more lasting effect on human passions by describing a thing "as it is felt" (*Enquiry* 217). According to him, sublime passions were not ignited by the description of certain ideas or things but through the strength of our reactions towards them. Words, in themselves, were incapable of conveying the horror of the subject matter unless used by those under the influence of some powerful passion. It was only when language was accompanied by a strong physical revulsion in the speaker that a horrifying event was lifted from the banality of description and became a source of sublimity in language.

[178] *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 51. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the body of the text.

Once we read Burke's description of the Company's methods for extracting taxes along with his elucidation of the sublime in the *Enquiry*, we can witness the emergence of a complex structure of theatricality in the trial of Warren Hastings.[179] By combining the force of his words with bodily collapse during the delivery of the charges, Burke transformed the suffering of distant Bengali peasants into a tragic performance through the well-recognized modes of sentimental drama.[180] That the spectators of the trial largely endorsed his theatrical display of distress is attested in the following words of a bystander: "Such a tragedy was never exhibited on any stage, or delivered in such impassionate tones; and when his tongue could no longer perform its office,

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[179] While Burke's *Enquiry* predates his political involvement with the India question, it consists of, in Sara Suleri's words, "a figurative repository that would later prove invaluable to the indefatigable eloquence of his parliamentary years" (36). However, as Suleri is quick to point out, the *Enquiry* is not simply "aesthetic fodder" for Burke's critique, but "provides in itself an incipient map of his developing political consciousness: as a study of the psychic proximity of aesthetic discourse with the concomitant intimacy of cultural terror, Burke's *Enquiry* converts the sublime into that theatrical space upon which he can most closely observe the emergence and disappearance that empowerment signifies to any discourse of control" (36). Several other critics have also given special attention to the manner in which the theatricality of Burke's presentation is prefigured in his earlier aesthetic writings. See, for instance, Daniel O'Quinn, *Staging Governance*, 164-221; Shiraj Ahmed, "The Theatre of the Civilized Self," 44-46; and Elizabeth D. Samet, "A Prosecutor and a Gentleman," 400-401.

[180] Shiraj Ahmed, "The Theatre of the Civilized Self," 44. As Janet M. Todd also notes, drama, as the most public of literary genres in the eighteenth century, exhibited a strong desire for ethical instruction. In terms of its thematic content, sentimental drama, in particular, frequently voiced the concerns of the disenfranchised classes and, as such, "associated with the parliamentarians, the supporters of the Protestant succession, the mercantile and less educated classes, with women, and those who held Whiggish sympathies" (*Sensibility* 33).

indignation and pity alternately spoke from his brow" (*Beauties* cvi). In the opening speech of the trial, he constructed a theatre of oppression by presenting an extremely vivid description of the crimes committed by the Company's officers to augment their private fortunes. In his testimony on Rangpur and Dinajpur, Burke affirmed that the abusive methods of the Company destroyed all aspects of civilized society by systematically attacking the bodies, feelings and manners of the Indian people. After stripping the peasants of their meager worldly possessions, the Company agents, in order to satisfy their cruel instincts, inflicted such torture on the bodies of these peasants that they were left incapable of earning the paltry incomes of their manual labor. This display of aggression, which would have satisfied any "ordinary cruelty," was not enough for the Company. Burke went on to elaborate how bodily pain did not destroy the spirit of the villagers; rather, their minds strengthened as their bodies suffered unspeakable horrors. When their physical pain gave them the strength to defy the oppressor, their tormentors responded with a greater "refinement of cruelty," so that, "where they did not lacerate and tear the sense, they should wound the sensibilities and sympathies of nature." The "infernal fiends" of the Company, ungratified by the spectacle of corporeal lacerations, transformed their "lust" into a methodical violation of the public and private spheres of their victims. Failing to destroy the spirit of the men with physical torment, they turned towards the women and children in the village because those who could "bear their own

torture" could not possibly bear the "sufferings of their families." Innocent children were brought out and "scourged before the faces of their parents," while the women "lost their honour in the bottom of the most cruel dungeons."[181] Burke concluded his speech with the assertion that the Company "nabobs" had not only tested the fortitude of the people of India who were the embodiment of "patience itself," but, by unleashing the "baseness" of their nature on the innocent and the virtuous, had also brought unparalleled "disgrace" on the English nation.[182]

Burke dwelled in dramatic detail on the terrifying images of torture, rape, and murder in order to shake the complacency of English society about its distant empire in India.[183] He also introduced stark contrasts between the everyday life of

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[181] During the decade long trial, Burke frequently evoked the violation of women's honor to give an emotional appeal to his legal arguments. In "Edmund Burke's Gothic Romance," Frans De Bruyn's argues that the honor of Indian women became "a subject to which Burke reverted endlessly in his speeches, forming the structural climax of his narrative and constituting the emotional and moral core of his indictment" (432). Burke's construction of the Indian woman's body as the site of colonial violence provides an interesting contrast to the early nineteenth-century colonial discourse on the practice of Sati, where the colonizer is presented as the savior of Indian women from the violence of native men. For one of the most powerful instances of Burke's indictment of the Company's hedonistic pursuit of power at the expense of the "chaste" female body, see his presentation of the fourth article of charge concerning the Begums of Awadh, "Princesses of Oude," *Articles of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanors*, 91-157. For a critical overview of the colonialist interpretations of Sati, see Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*.

[182] *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 6, 419-20.

[183] Burke believed that imperial wealth was chiefly responsible for the lack of scrutiny by the public of the means by which the Company's fortunes were accumulated:

> In India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired: in England are often displayed, by the same persons, the virtues which dispense hereditary wealth. Arrived in England, the destroyers of the nobility and gentry of a whole

Bengali peasants and London's fashionable class to illustrate the degenerative effect of the Company's imperial ambitions on the moral fabric of the English nation.[184] In the passage at the head of this section, Burke employs the trope of antithesis to underscore the magnitude of injustice in the torture of the Rangpur and Dinajpur peasants. The "poor, honest, laborious hands" of the villagers, which never had been "lifted to their own mouths but with the scanty supply of the product of their own labour," had ensured, for more than fifteen years, "that luxurious meal" which the English public had become accustomed to after the East India Company's acquisition of the province of Bengal. Rather than receiving gratitude for their labors from the British government and people, these industrious peasants only got "cords, hammers, tortures and maimings."[185] In Burke's testimony, English society, by remaining silent at the abuses of power and by consuming the ill-gotten commodities of the empire, was as guilty a

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> kingdom will find the best company in this nation at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portions of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal. (*Selected Works* 276)

[184] Burke's use of the contrast between the elite class of Londoners and the Indian peasants was rather strategic since the impeachment trial witnessed the inclusion of fashionable London society in parliamentary politics in an unprecedented manner. As Daniel O'Quinn points out, both Parliament and fashionable society were traversed by complex forms of sociability whose organizing principles were not easily reconciled. However, "the impeachment of Warren Hastings before the House of lords brought these spheres together on a scale that had never been seen before" (*Staging Governance* 116-117).

[185] *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 6, 419.

participant in this theatre of cruelty as the actual perpetrators of violence in India.[186]

Burke included detailed descriptions of the atrocities committed by the Company and juxtaposed them with the elite English lifestyle in order to awaken wider public interest in the legal proceedings against the Company's officers. Siraj Ahmed points out in his essay "The Theatre of the Civilized Self" that "Burke had a vivid sense of the crimes that the nabobs committed in India, but his real concern was their effect on British civil society" (37).[187] The defeat of Fox's East India Bill had convinced Burke that Parliament itself was not immune to the corrupting influences of the Company's wealth. For him, the best way to counter any attempt on the part of the accused to derail the trial was to carry out the

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[186] As Siraj Ahmed asserts in "The Theatre of the Civilized Self," Burke's critique of colonial trade was based on the belief that the consumption of luxuries increased an "individual's avarice and rapacity" and, furthermore, acted as a "corrupting agent that would lead to the degeneration of the British body" (43). In her essay "Company Rules," Julie Murray draws our attention to another aspect of Burke's critique by pointing out his fear of the "specter of the Company's archaism" (60). According to Murray, Burke believed that the Company's consumerist culture would push British society away from the civilizing influences of modernity into an archaic feudalism. For this reason, Burke viewed the East India Company—and capitalism more generally—as something other than a purely modern formation: "It is in Burke's specific insistence on the civic critique of the corruption of economic man, that the archaism, rather than the strict modernity, of the Company—and capitalism—comes into focus" (Murray 64).

[187] In his speech on Fox's East India Bill, Burke also linked the indictment of the Company's abuses with the preservation of Britain's Constitution in the following statement: "I am certain that every means effectual to preserve India from oppression is a guard to preserve the British Constitution from its worst corruption" (*Selected Works* 276).

proceeding in the full view of the English public.[188] One of the main reasons that Burke wanted to evoke greater public interest in the trial sprang from his strong belief that the official body presiding over the impeachment was not particularly keen on passing a verdict against Warren Hastings.[189] In a private correspondence, Burke underlined his conviction that he was bringing "before a bribed tribunal a prejudiced cause."[190] If he could proceed under the "publick

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[188] Following Jürgen Habermas's observation about eighteenth-century philosophers' tendency to restrict the idea of the public to property owners, Shiraj Ahmad notes that "this general eighteenth-century class-based definition of the public sphere coincides with Burke's class-based definition of the 'nation' and, hence, that when Burke refers to the public opinion or the 'publick Eye' to which he intends to appeal, he means a specific elite that is the nation as such for him" (51). This observation is especially significant because it places the trial proceedings within the context of the increasing anxieties of the landed gentry over the slow erosion of its political power with the rise of mercantile or "middling" classes. For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain*. It is worth noting here that Burke's constant evocation of the Company's crimes in India was a reminder to the landed classes of the dangers that the "monied" class posed to the future British constitution. To this end, Burke frequently evoked the methods used by the Company to destroy the economic and political sources of power for the traditional ruling classes in India.

[189] In a letter to Phillip Francis, Burke confided

> In the course of a long administration, such as that of Mr. Hastings, which has been coexistent with several administrations at home, it has happened that some are involved with him in one sort of business, who stand clear in others; in which again a different description may feel themselves (or friends, who are as themselves) directly or indirectly affected; to say nothing of the private favours, which such multitudes have received; (which makes at once Mr Hastings's crime and indemnity); and in which every party without distinction is engaged in one or other of its members. Parties themselves have been so perfectly jumbled and confounded, that it is morally impossible to find any combination of them, who can march with the whole body in orderly array upon the expedition before us." (*Correspondence* 5: 241-42)

[190] Letter dated 10 December 1785, *Correspondence*, Vol. 5, 241.

Eye" only then would "all the ability, influence and power that can accompany a decided partiality in that tribunal" be unable to save the "criminal from a condemnation followed by some ostensible measure of Justice."[191] By conducting the trial in the presence of the public and by provoking its indignation, Burke hoped to get greater accountability in the trial proceedings.[192] However, as Ahmed acutely observes, Burke was sure of the fact that the British public would side with him, "not because he believed in the British public's commitment to the principles of civil society, but because he intended to manipulate it" (41-42).[193] From the very beginning of the trial, Burke had unshakable confidence in his rhetorical capacity which could not only evoke a sublime theatre of terror in language, but also transform it into a collective and vehement agitation against the offenses of the Company.

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[191] Letter dated 1 November 1787, Ibid., 357.

[192] As P. J. Marshall notes, "Burke was already convinced of the virtual impossibility of winning an orthodox legal victory in the face of the hostility of the leading figures in the House of Lords; he believed that it was only by attracting continued public attention that the impeachment stood any real chance of success" (*Impeachment* 71).

[193] Even before the opening of the trial, Burke voiced his skepticism over public sentiment regarding the Company:

> A parliamentary criminal proceeding is not in its nature within the ordinary resort of the law. Even in a temper less favourable to Indian delinquency than what is now generally prevalent, the people at large would not consider one or two acts, however striking, perhaps not three or four, as sufficient to call forth the reserved justice of the State (*Correspondence* 5: 242).

In order to solicit greater support for his indictment of the Company's "despotic prince,"[194] Burke complemented the theatre of cruelty in his speech on Rangpur and Dinajpur with a theatre of indignation in the courthouse. His own physical collapse, followed by the fainting spells in the audience, attested to the fact that he had successfully accomplished the task of transforming unseen acts of colonial violence into a sublime performance of moral outrage for the English public. Evoking the sublime, as Elizabeth Samet observes, was not "simply an aesthetic preference for Burke; it was a moral imperative" (401). Even in his earlier treatise, the *Enquiry*, Burke had clearly outlined the ethical underpinnings of his aesthetic theory. The sublime was not an emotion restricted to an individual's response to terror; rather, it constituted the most appropriate place for "configuring the pervasive, elusive appearance of society" (Huhn 16). According to Burke, the emotions related to the sublime effected society as a whole and were held together through three principle links: sympathy, imitation, and ambition (*Enquiry* 56). Out of these three, sympathy was the most important because it is through this emotion that "we enter into the concerns of others; that we are moved as they are moved, and are never suffered to be indifferent spectators of any thing which men can do or suffer" (*Enquiry* 57). Sympathy, however, did not arise on its own accord; it was always contingent on the human desire to mimic the

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[194] Burke used this epithet for Hastings on the second day of the opening speech of the impeachment trial.

passions of others. For Burke, society constructed itself through the mimetic effects of the sublime: "It is by imitation, far more than by precept, that we learn everything; and what we learn thus, we acquire not only more effectually, but more pleasantly. This forms our manners, our opinions, our lives" (*Enquiry* 63). While describing the social role of language, he asserted that the primary function of words was to create affective connections between the members of a community through sympathy, since "we yield to sympathy what we refuse to description" (*Enquiry* 217). This connection, however, could not be achieved "if the speaker did not call in to his aid those modes of speech that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself" (*Enquiry* 217). It is only when we witness the surfacing of strong sympathetic passions in those speaking the words that we understand the moral foundation of their language and are overcome by the desire to mimic their reaction: "Then, by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire, already kindled in another, which probably might never have been struck out by the object described" (*Enquiry* 217).

When we juxtapose the ethical dimensions of the sublime with the impassioned oratory of the impeachment trial, we can interpret Burke's display of moral indignation—both through his body and language—as an attempt to transform English society into a community of sympathetic avengers of the Company's crimes in India. "Sympathetic revenge," in Burke's political thought, was both a moral and aesthetic concept: it was "the grand social principle that

unites all men, in all descriptions, under the shadow of an equal and impartial justice."[195] From Burke's perspective, no society could claim to be either enlightened or civilized until it strived to ensure universal justice. Acts of violence and oppression—no matter how remote—needed to be avenged at the cost of one's own ease and comfort. For him, it was only through this noble sentiment of sacrifice that a vice like revenge was transformed into a heroic virtue:

> To give up all the repose and pleasures of life, to pass sleepless nights and laborious days, and, what is ten times more irksome to an ingenious mind, to offer oneself to calumny and all its herd of hissing tongues and poisoned fangs, in order to free the world from fraudulent prevaricators, from cruel oppressors, from robbers and tyrants, has, I say, the test of heroic virtue, and well deserves such a distinction. (*Works* 11, 179-180)

By casting the Company's employees in the role of "oppressors," "robbers" and "tyrants" through numerous testimonies of cruelty and corruption, Burke hoped

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[195] *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. 2, 405. As many feminist thinkers have suggested in recent times, Enlightenment thinkers, to a large extent, excluded women from their conceptions of the human race. Seen from this perspective, Burke's writings on politics and aesthetics were no exception since he frequently reduced women to passive objects of pleasure or pity. One of the most influential eighteenth-century repudiations of Burke's gendered language is Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; Occasioned by His Reflections on the Revolution in France*, published in 1790. For a more recent critique of the masculinist construction of sublime aesthetics in Burke's writings, see Judy Lochhead, "The Sublime, the Ineffable, and Other Dangerous Aesthetics."

that the English public would be moved into performing the role of untiring avengers for the Company's crimes. Taking the sublimity of his language and legal efforts as a model, others would learn to convert their collective outrage into a rational appeal for the reprisal of injustices against the human race.[196] Burke endeavored to achieve this end by structuring the impeachment around the "presumed existence of a sentimental or chivalric accord among English gentlemen: a community of natural feeling, which the reporting of atrocities might channel into political redress, producing justice for India" (Bolton 882). In order to make his hearers yield to this shared sentimentality, Burke devised a twofold narrative strategy where "his prosecution would not only condemn Hastings, but also vindicate the prosecutor himself" (Samet 407).[197] By introducing moving performances of sympathetic indignation during the presentation of official charges, he transformed his legal role of prosecutor into that of a heroic liberator

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[196] Defining his own work on the trial in epical terms, Burke claimed that his actions were "actuated by some strong, some vehement, some perennial passion, which, burning like the Vestal fire, chaste and eternal, never suffers generous sympathy to grow cold in maintaining the rights of the injured or in denouncing the crimes of the oppressor" (*Works* 11: 180).

[197] During the trial, many pieces appeared in the English press comparing Burke's rhetoric in the court with that of the classical politician and orator, Cicero, in his speeches against the governor of Sicily, Verres. According to Geoffrey Carnall, these parallels arose from the fact that the constitutional controversies in eighteenth-century England made Cicero "a kind of Whig hero of the Roman republic, its heroic defender and, in the end, a martyr to liberty" (78). The comparison of Burke with classical figures like Cicero, however, led to the construction of colonial rule in India as the resurrection of the ancient glory of the Roman empire by the modern British nation in the writings of imperialist historians like Thomas Babington Macaulay. I explore the implications of such comparisons in the final chapter.

of the Indian people. Central to Burke's rhetoric was the exaggerated display of his own distress for a land and a people he never had set his eyes upon during his lifetime.[198] By exposing himself as "the victim's feeling avenger" during the impeachment proceedings, Burke hoped to serve as "a conduit for English sympathies" (Samet 407).[199] Once Britain learned to emulate this essential trait of the sublime—the experience of strong empathic feelings for those who did not exist in physical proximity—in its social life, it would distinguish itself as a "heroic" nation, not by war or conquest, but by laying down sympathy as the universalizing principle of civil society.[200] Addressing the House of Lords in

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[198] Burke's description of the "hero" who takes on the task of rescuing "the greatest number of the human race" from the oppressions of the Company closely resembles his own efforts:

> He has put to hazard his ease, his security, his interest, his power, even his darling popularity, for the benefit of a people whom he has never seen. This is the road that all heroes have trod before him. He is traduced and abused for his supposed motives. He will remember that obloquy is a necessary ingredient in the composition of all true glory…He is doing, indeed, a great good,—such as rarely falls to the lot, and almost as rarely coincides with the desires, of any man. (*Selected Works* 281)

[199] Samet's observation about Burke's self-defined role as the avenging prosecutor for the crimes against India is also echoed by Frans De Bruyn: "Burke casts himself in the role of the paternal protector, the sublime guardian taking up the cause of the oppressed, passive Indians, who have entered into a social contract that constrains them from acting in their own defence" (429).

[200] According to Richard Bourke, Burke's universal morality was an attempt to bring the idea of an empire under the rubric of modernity. As early as 1766, "Burke was struggling to present empire and civility as partners in politics. On the far side of civility lay the stark alternatives of war or military government. However, maintaining the virtue of civilized politics was a matter for practical reason, a matter of accommodating the purposes of government to the opinion of the ruled" (Bourke 455).

1788, Burke expressed his conviction that there would no greater sight for humanity to behold than that of a nation "separated from a remote people by the material bounds and barriers of Nature, united by the bond of a social and moral community,—all the Commons of England resenting, as their own, the indignities and cruelties that are offered to all the people of India."[201]

Burke, nonetheless, knew the difficulties in establishing a civil society based on the principle of universal sympathy from the very outset of his involvement with the East India Company. In different places and at different times, he clearly outlined two major obstacles—the English unfamiliarity with India and "monied" interest[202]—in his quest for securing sympathy for the India cause. In his speech on Fox's East India Bill in 1783, Burke clearly voiced his conviction that it was difficult to initiate any serious inquiry into the activities of the Company because the English public was "so little acquainted with Indian details, the instruments of oppression under which the people suffer are so hard to be understood, and even the names of the sufferers are so uncouth and strange to

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[201] *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. 10, 142. Throughout the trial, Burke used a hyperbolic mode of narration in the context of India. Though "all the people of India" became a stock phrase in Burke's description of the Company's crimes, it is important to remember that the Company control of Indian territory was still limited to a few provinces. Burke's exaggeration of English interests in India is significant because it created a greater sense of urgency around the India question in the public sphere.

[202] As Frans De Bruyn elaborates, Burke viewed commercial capital with deep suspicion because, in contrast to the inert and rigid nature of landed property, such wealth represented "a particularly volatile and unstable species of power" (426).

our ears, that it is very difficult for our sympathy to fix upon these objects" (*Selected Works* 277). In Burke's view, the "guardians" of the Company's colonial interests were well cognizant of the fact that the suffering of the Indian people was not a "natural" object of sympathy for the English public, that it was difficult for the English mind to grasp the trials and tribulations of a distant and unfamiliar country. Secure in this knowledge, the Company officers gave "the cries of India" to "seas and winds" over a "remote and unhearing ocean" before returning to Britain (276). Instead of the atrocities and abuses of power, only the immense riches and fortunes of the returning Company servants remained behind for the English people to witness in their "drawing rooms" and "clubhouses." As Burke pointed out elsewhere, the Company, since its territorial expansion in India, had been bribing "the English nation by the millions and millions of money, the countless of rupees."[203] While unfamiliarity with Indian manners and customs constituted the primary reason for widespread public indifference, the seduction of colonial capital played no small part in lulling the sympathetic passions of English society into apathy.

In order to "rekindle" the dormant sympathies of the public, Burke introduced a universal structure of morality in his pursuit of sublime revenge and

[203] *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 8, 388.

justice.[204] As Siraj Ahmed observes, one of the primary objectives of Burke's prosecution of Warren Hastings was to show "the degenerative influence of empire upon the civilized self" (29) and to demonstrate that the Company's officers had "abandoned their civil selves and returned to a state of savagery" (36). To achieve this end, Burke constructed the East India Company, through sharp contrasts between arbitrary power and the rule of law, as the other of a modern nation state and its civil institutions.[205] According to him, a civilized society was always governed by laws which ensured public accountability for political actions and policies.[206] The Company, on the other hand, functioned like

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[204] Recent scholarship has severely critiqued the universalizing tendencies in Enlightenment thought and exposed its limitations in the context of both European and non-European cultures. It is worth noting here that Burke's own conception of universal justice was highly derivative in nature, for it combined various strands of Western discourse ranging from chivalric romances to Christian humanist traditions. For a detailed discussion of the many influences on Burke's work, see Frans De Bruyn, "Edmund Burke the Political Quixote."

[205] Richard Bourke makes the following observation about Burke's understanding of the Company's administration: "The existence of a commercial bureaucracy claiming charge over both the administration of justice and the management of revenue was to Burke a perversion of all settled procedures of civilized government. It conflated judicial with executive power, and it equated the public benefits of government with the private advantages of commerce" (460).

[206] As Richard Bourke further notes, Burke's chief concern during the trial was the political tyranny of the Company in the absence of any parliamentary control or public scrutiny of its activities in India. Burke believed that

> a commercial monopoly had transformed itself into a political monopoly in which the function of government had been effectively subverted: concern with the public welfare had been replaced by the pursuit of commercial utility…As a political monopoly, the East India Company had been liberated from the constraints of both public opinion and political supervision. (Bourke 460)

a despotic administration in India, and Warren Hastings, as the chief architect of this form of governance, had usurped unprecedented powers for himself.[207] Such powers not only defied all the laws of England, but, more importantly, they disregarded the universal law of sympathetic bonding which held the human race together:

> He [Warren Hastings] have arbitrary power! My Lords, the East India Company have not arbitrary power to give him; your Lordships have not; nor the Commons; nor the whole legislature. We have no arbitrary power to give, because arbitrary is a thing which neither any man can hold nor any man can give away. No man can govern himself by his own will, much less can he be governed by the will of others. We are all born in subjection, all born equally, high and low, governors and governed, in subjection to one great, immutable, pre-existence law, prior to all our devices and prior to all our contrivances, paramount to our very being

[207] In Burke's view, the Company's territorial expansion in India had given rise to an administration suffused with private interests. Since the Company claimed its executive and legislative powers in India to be those of an empire, it had conveniently suppressed a crucial component of an accountable government—the presence of a strong civil society. By interpreting their acquisition of provinces like Bengal as imperial conquests, the Company's officers had completely excluded the Indian public and its interests from the functioning of its bureaucracy. As a result, the English administration of India had become "a commonwealth without a people" and there was nothing in propriety called a public "to watch, to inspect, to balance, against the power of office" (*Speeches* 26).

> itself, by which we are knit and connected in the eternal frame of the universe, out of which we cannot stir.[208]

Burke argued that the Company's agents, since the beginning of their administration in India, had justified their defiance of the universality of moral laws on two principles. They had, time and again, remonstrated that they must be excused from obeying the laws of morality on the following accounts: that they had been placed in a position to rule through imperial conquests, and that the native forms of governance were too deeply entrenched in despotism to allow the execution of universal justice. Using these two "falsehoods" as its alibi, the Company had based its administration in India on "a plan of geographical morality, by which the duties of men, in public and in private situations, are not to be governed by their relation to the great Governor of the Universe, or by their relation to mankind, but by climates, degrees of longitude, parallels, not of life, but of latitudes."[209] Burke asserted that the Company frequently defended its actions, both in front of the English parliament and public, by conflating its territorial and commercial expansion in India with the idea of imperial conquest.[210] In his view, the Company often seized upon the geographical

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[208] *Speeches on the Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, Vol. 1, 102.

[209] *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Vol. 9, 447-48.

[210] In Burke's moral philosophy, expansion of an empire did not simply imply usurping powers of the preceding government, it also meant taking up its responsibilities of

distance between England and India as an opportunity to misrepresent its private interests as selfless acts of empire-building for the glory of the English nation. In addition, the Company's officers had turned the English ignorance about India into a contrivance for creating a conceptual remoteness from that nation and its administration. Misusing the public unfamiliarity with Indian manners and customs, they repeatedly represented native governments as despotic regimes and used the supposed arbitrariness of Indian laws as a justification for their own abuses of power. In the hands of these officers, the alleged despotism of native rulers had become a common ruse for denying universal justice to the oppressed populace of India and to subject them to an inferior and discriminatory code of morality.

Throughout the trial, Burke tried to acquaint the public with Indian manners and actively countered the Company's assertion that it had been placed in a political climate where law and justice were alien concepts and that the governments in Indian provinces functioned according to the whims of the local

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governance. On the fourth day of the trial, Burke countered the Company's construction of its military exploits in India as imperial conquests to justify its arbitrary use of power:

> The title of conquest makes no difference at all. No conquest can give such a right; for conquest, that is force, cannot convert its own injustice into a just title, by which it may rule others at its pleasure. By conquest, which is a more immediate designation of the hand of God, the conqueror succeeds to all the painful duties and subordination to the power of God, which belonged to the sovereign whom he has displaced, just as if he had come in by the positive law of some descent or some election. To this at least he is strictly bound—he ought to govern them as he governs his own subjects. (*Speeches* 100)

sovereigns rather than on the basis of any predetermined principles of governance.[211] On the fourth day of the trial, Burke dramatically declared that "oriental governments know nothing of arbitrary power." He claimed that he had carefully examined different forms of Indian constitutionality and, on the basis of this study, he could now challenge the Company to show him "any of the oriental governors claiming to themselves a right to act by arbitrary will."[212] Burke went on to elaborate how the greatest part of the Indian subcontinent was under Islamic rule and, as such, was bound by the most sacred decree known to the human race

> To name a Mohamedan government is to name a government by law. It is a law enforced by stronger sanctions than any law that can bind a Christian sovereign. Their law is believed to be given by God, and it has the double sanction of law and of religion, with which the prince is no more authorized to dispense than anyone else. (*Speeches* 1, 105)

According to Burke, the Islamic rulers in India strictly followed the injunctions of their religion while dispensing justice. In order to do so, they employed special interpreters to convert religious ethics into laws of governance. These interpreters, known as the "men of the law," were allowed to question and condemn the actions of their ruler whenever they witnessed any violation of divine principles.

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[211] As I discussed in the last two chapters, the Company's officers tried to perpetuate the myth of native despotism through reconstructions of events in India. This trend continued throughout the trial in form of both pamphlets and historical treatises.

[212] *Speeches on the Impeachment of Warren Hastings*, Vol. 1, 105.

Given the importance of these "conservators of law" in administration, the sovereign was never "vested with a real supreme power" and the government, more or less, functioned on the model of a republic (105).[213] Rather than being despotic, Islamic rule insured the double protection of its subjects: first, through the republican constitution of its political power; and, second, through the moral force of divinity in its laws. However, Burke went on to state that "corruption" had become the "true cause" for eroding all the "benefits" of this inherent justice in native governments. Taking the construction of a disintegrating Mughal empire in the Company's propaganda as historical truth, he concluded that the "*practice of Asia*" had given rise to "much blood, murder, false imprisonment, much peculation, cruelty, and robbery" in recent times (106). Though Burke failed to challenge the dubious histories assigned to the Indian polity by the Company loyalists, he, nevertheless, confronted their claim that the acquisition of territories in India was primarily a political strategy through which the Company was

[213] It is important for us to remember that Burke's interpretation of Islamic rule in India did not correspond with the actual functioning of Mughal polity in India. In order to strengthen his case against Hastings, Burke frequently engaged in distorting information and presenting unsubstantiated evidence during the trial. It is also worth noting that Burke, having never visited India, mainly depended on documents written by Europeans who had resided there. Therefore, many incorrect observations of the early travelers also seeped into Burke's construction of Indian customs and manners. For instance, Burke accepted, unequivocally, a commonplace myth in eighteenth-century writings that the Indian subcontinent was inhabited by two races, one comprising exclusively of Hindus and the other of Muslims.

cleansing the Mughal administration of corrupt local sovereigns and restoring the original principles of its constitution.[214]

With declarations of a clear distinction between the "theory" and "practice" of power in Asian governments, Burke made sure that the British acquisition of Indian provinces such as Bengal did not remain a mere question of fraud and deception for his audience. As I indicated in the previous two chapters, inquiries into the conduct of the Company's officials in India were largely undertaken on account of charges of corruption and bribery. In Burke's view, such charges—which also dominated the legal landscape of the trial—did not add up to a sublime crime or a serious indictment if they did not intersect with the more critical questions of power and justice.[215] According to him, when the Company seized power from the "poor" and "unfortunate" provincial sovereigns in India, it did not only commit "a blasphemous, absurd, and petulant usurpation," it also endorsed a much greater crime of replacing "Divine wisdom and justice" with the "feeble, contemptible, ridiculous will" of its officers (*Speeches* 1, 100).

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[214] I have already discussed this particular propaganda in detail in the last chapter.

[215] Burke made this position clear on the sixth day of the trial:

> On a transient view bribery is rather a subject of disgust than horror,—the sordid practice of a venal, mean, and abject mind; and the effect of the crime seems to end with the act…But it will appear in a very different light, when you regard the consideration for which the bribe is given; namely, that a governor-general, claiming an arbitrary power in himself, for that consideration delivers up the properties, the liberties, and the lives of a whole people to the arbitrary discretion of any wicked or rapacious person. (*Speeches* 1: 226-27)

The Company—by usurping territories that rightfully belonged to the native rulers—had not only interfered in the transient political life of India, but had also meddled with the "eternal laws of justice" which emanate from the "natural" constitution of religions and republics. In their thirst to extend greater control over India, the "imperial merchants" had abandoned the traditional laws which had previously prevented the local sovereigns from oppressing their subjects. "Instead of going to the sacred laws of the country," Hastings' government had chosen to "resort to the iniquitous practices of it" and, accordingly, sought acquittal for its crimes in the practices rather than the institutions of the country (106). The Company's employees, on the pretext of "eternal separation" between English and Indian governments, had ingeniously distanced themselves from the laws of both lands to practice their particular brand of "geographical morality." It was under the aegis of this so-called moral principle—which, from Burke's perspective, was nothing more than a synonym for private profiteering—that the arbitrary power of the Company was perpetuated in India. It was in the name of this principle that the horrific crimes of Rangpur were committed: an unparalleled human tragedy where people, instead of being encompassed by the universal bond of sympathy, were reduced to inhuman objects of macabre entertainment.

Burke's reprimand of the Company, carried out in the full view of the English public for more than a decade, has won many accolades in current scholarship. His ambivalent defense of Indian forms of governance, his

construction of a universal structure of sympathy around the plight of Indians under Company rule, his sublime critique of the degenerative influences of commercial imperialism: all these aspects of Burke's engagement with the India question have led many scholars to believe that his impassioned rhetoric can be construed as an extension of the humanistic values visible in his other political writings. Frederick Whelan, for example, insists that the trial of Warren Hastings "provided occasions for Burke to reassert principles that he upheld in other contexts as well: the rule of law, the desirability of constitutional checks on power, the conception of government as a trust for the welfare of the governed" (2). Uday Singh Mehta, on the other hand, chooses to place Burke's work on India within the rubric of counter-Enlightenment currents in eighteenth-century moral philosophy. According to Mehta, Burke "saw through the abusive distortions of civilizational hierarchies, racial superiority, and assumptions of cultural impoverishment by which British power justified its territorial expansionism and commercial avarice in India and elsewhere" (155). Luke Gibbons tacitly agrees with Mehta when he argues that Burke's urgent need to reform the English attitude towards the empire came from "his determination to reinstate the wounds of history into the public sphere, and, by extension, 'obsolete' or traditional' societies in the course of history" (xii). To this end, Burke's use of sublime aesthetics in legal discourse outlines "an alternative, radical form of sensibility—the 'sympathetic sublime'—in which the

acknowledgement of oppression need not lead to self-absorption, but may actually enhance the capacity to identify with the plight of others" (Gibbons xii-iii).[216]

This enthusiasm for Burke's anti-Company sentiments is not shared by many postcolonial critics who place his work within the broader context of imperialist discourse and expose the cleverly masked objectification of India in his use of sublime language. Nicholas Dirks, for instance, points out the implicit structure of subjugation in Burke's idea of "sympathetic revenge": "His sympathy for India was the sympathy of a paternalist who believed his charge could only benefit from the relationship of dependency" (202).[217] Srinivas Aravamudan also recognizes the limitations of Burke's language: an idiom through which "the oriental sublime" empowers its discoverers at the price of converting India into a mere pretext for reforming the English public sphere. Ultimately, Burke's rhetoric against Warren Hastings can only be interpreted as a ruse where "the ends—goals as well as limits—of the sublime" finally converge with a "project of nationalist

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[216] For similar interpretations of Burke's writings on India, see Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* and Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*.

[217] Many critics have made similar observations about Burke's use of a gendered language during the trial. As Nicole Reynolds observes, Burke consistently constructed "imperial conflict as sexual conflict, pitting himself, a champion of chivalric honour, against Hastings, a colonial libertine, in a conquest for dominion over a feminized India" (153). Similarly, Daniel O'Quinn sees, in Burke's language, "a complex argument about the performance of honorable masculinity at home and abroad" (221) where "Burke's deployment of the feminized and violated Indian subcontinent as a rhetorical weapon against Hastings carries with it the silencing of this very constituency" (254).

aesthetics" (Aravamudan 192).[218] Sara Suleri further dismantles the myth of Burke's unconditional sympathy for India when she reads the trial as a "documentation of the anxieties of oppression, where both the prisoner and the prosecutors are equally implicated in the inascribability of colonial guilt" (53). According to Suleri, Burke imputed the actual terror of imperial conquests to an "instrument of aberration": "Such an instrument was Warren Hastings, who, by functioning as a repository of ill-doing, could simultaneously protect the colonial project for being indicted for the larger ill of which Hastings was simply a herald" (45).

While the scholarly response remains heavily divided on Burke's impeachment rhetoric, both his supporters and detractors generally do not disagree on the following points: first, Burke never critiqued the idea of an empire for England despite his strong condemnation of the imperial practices of the

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[218] Many of Burke's fellow politicians, through their interpretation of the trial, validate Aravamudan's observation. For most of them, Burke's actions were nothing less than a vindication of Britain's national honor, which the Company had put in jeopardy with its imperial ambitions. As Charles James Fox—a close associate of Burke throughout the trial—commented on Burke's (failed) efforts at securing justice for native subjects, "if India no longer makes us blush, in the eyes of Europe, let us know and feel our obligations to him [Burke]—whose admirable resources of opinion and affection, whose untiring toil, sublime genius, and high aspiring honor, raised him up conspicuous among the most beneficent worthies of mankind" (*Beauties*: cvi). With Fox, like with many other supporters of Burke, the fact that the outcome of the trial did little to rectify the atrocities committed against the natives in India carried far less weight than the knowledge that Burke's excessively publicized vindication of universal human rights served the purpose of establishing Britain's moral authority as a just and righteous global empire in front of the other European colonial powers.

Company;[219] second, his consciousness about India's right to immunity from the Company's rampant commercialism was itself always dependant on his greater concern for the future of Britain's nationhood;[220] and, third, Burke's powerful construction of sublimity around the legitimacy of Britain's colonial interests, in the final analysis, had little or no long-term impact on either the public opinion in England or the consolidation of British empire in India. As Bolton notes, "Burke's predominantly theatrical handling of the India question demonstrates both the contagion of colonial ambivalence and the inadequacy of romance and sensibility as political responses to the economic conflicts of colonialism" (883). Although very little consensus has been achieved amongst scholars on the motivations behind Burke's opposition to the burgeoning empire in India, most critics agree with this concluding remark by P. J. Marshall in his canonical study of the trial:

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[219] From the very initial stages of his involvement in politics, Burke had consistently believed in the idea of an empire, but his conception of Britain's imperial destiny did not intersect with the commercial bureaucracy of trading companies. As early as 1775, Burke had forwarded the following notion of a British empire: "Perhaps, Sir, I am mistaken in my idea of an empire, as distinguished from a single state or kingdom. But my idea of it is this; that an empire is an aggregate of many states under one common head; whether this head be a Monarch, or a presiding republick"(*Works* 3: 69). For a more detailed discussion of Burke's writings on empire, see Richard Bourke, "Liberty, Authority, and Trust in Burke's Idea of Empire."

[220] Burke voiced his concern innumerable times in different contexts about the detrimental effects of the Company's empire on Britain's selfhood. For instance, on the day the House of Commons declared him in majority on the question of impeachment, Burke made a most revealing statement about the advantages of the trial for Britain's image as a civilized nation: "This is a proud day for England, what a prospect! Her justice extending to Asia, her humanity to Africa, her friendship to America, and her faith and good will to all Europe" (*Beauties* cvii).

> It had been a remarkable achievement on Burke's part to persuade the House of Commons and a wider public to concern themselves, even if superficially, with an Indian question on its own merits; but the price of success seems to have been disillusion with the later stages of the impeachment and apathy to India in the future. (*Impeachment* 189)

Marshall's observation, without doubt, situates the trial within the broader historical context of the relationship between Britain and its growing empire in the East. The trial presented, albeit fleetingly, an intense moment of self-scrutiny for the English nation to reflect upon the ends of an empire. However, it did not take long for this moment of somber introspection to turn into a tediously long—and almost unnecessary—persecution of a "gentlemanly" Hastings in the public responses to the trial.[221] As Bolton notes, "Burke chose to stage the corruption of Anglo-Indian relations in an appeal to the power of public opinion: the political theater he invoked left him dependent on the response of his audience" (883). Burke's quest for a sublime language of prosecution in the absence of legitimate

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[221] One of the most canonical texts capturing this shift in public attitude is the eye-witness account of the proceedings in Fanny Burney, *Diary and Letters of Madame d'Arblay*. On the very first day of the trial, Burney could not help registering her strong sympathies for Warren Hastings who, in her view, had been unjustly reduced to an object of revulsion by his political rivals:

> What an awful moment this for such a man [Hastings]!—a man fallen from such height of power to a situation so humiliating—from the almost unlimited command of so large a part of the Eastern World to be cast at the feet of his enemies, of the great Tribunal of his Country, and of the Nation at large, assembled thus into a body to try and to judge him! Could even his Prosecutors at that moment look on—and not shudder at least, if they did not blush? (*Diary* 62)

arguments soon turned his rhetorical attacks into acts of personal vengeance in the public imagination as the trial proceeded towards the inevitable acquittal of Hastings.[222] When scholars like Marshall and Bolton look at the subsequent history of English indifference towards India, it is not too difficult for them to conclude that the outcome of the decade-long trial did not simply exonerate the Company; it also seemed to free Britain from the collective guilt of discarding universal justice—a core value of its "enlightened" spirit—for the luxuries of an empire.[223]

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[222] An anonymous eighteenth-century compiler of Burke's speeches makes the following observation about the detrimental effects of Burke's rhetoric on the trial proceedings:

> We shall not pretend to say what was the motive which induced Mr. Burke to become the public accuser of Mr. Hastings; but his perseverance in the pursuit undoubtedly tended to increase his fame, which was then on the decline, and if he had abstained from all asperity of language to the accused, he would have stood in a still fairer point of view with the public. (*Beauties* cvii)

According to this writer, Burke could "command all the figures of rhetoric" during the trial, yet he could not "command his temper." He would have saved himself from public rejection "if he had followed the gentleman-like conduct of Mr. Fox, and the rest of the managers" (*Beauties* cvi). For a detailed analysis of how Burke's defiance of societal norms of "polite" language and manners ultimately weakened his appeals during the trial, see Elizabeth D. Samet, "A Prosecutor and a Gentleman: Edmund Burke's Idiom of Impeachment."

[223] It worth noting here that the shift in public opinion in favor of Warren Hastings can also be attributed to an extensive propaganda by his supporters in the English press. Some important pamphlets and texts in this regard are *Letters of Albanicus to the people of England on the partiality and injustice of the charges brought against Warren Hastings* (1786), *An appeal to the people of England and Scotland in behalf of Warren Hastings* (1787), *Reflexions on Impeaching and Impeachers; addressed to Warren Hastings* (1788), *A review of the Principal Charges against Warren Hastings* (1788), *The letters of Simpkin the Second, poetic recorder of all the proceedings upon the trial of Warren Hastings*, *Esq. in Westminster Hall* (1789-91), *Letters containing a correct and important elucidation of the subject of Mr. Hastings's Impeachment* (1790), *A letter from Major Scott to Philip Francis* (1791), *A letter to Mr. Fox, on the duration of the Trial of*

The acquittal of Warren Hastings had become predictable towards the end of the trial on many accounts: loss of public interest, lack of legal evidence and documentation in support of the charges, and the widespread propaganda of the East India Company against the proceedings.[224] While it is now commonplace to associate the post-trial apathy of the English public with Burke's unsuccessful attempt at transforming his passionate indictment of the Company into a legal sentence, it is also a common tendency in recent scholarship to read Burke's failure at securing the impeachment of Warren Hastings as a decisive statement on the ineffectuality of his discursive interventions on the ideological foundations of British India. In fact, as Sara Suleri argues, Burke "continued to stand in too inchoate a relation to the enormity of his claims," that, even if he had been successful in impeaching Hastings, the punishment would have had "little effect on the larger questions of colonial culpability" (51). According to Suleri, Burke and Hastings—representing the interests of the English Parliament and the East India Company respectively—approached the "territory of India" like "two

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Mr. Hastings (1794), *The Merits of Mr. Pitt and Mr. Hastings as ministers in war and in peace, impartially stated* (1794) and *A letter to Lord Hawkesbury, occasioned by the delay of justice in Mr. Hastings's case* (1794).

[224] The predictability of Hastings' acquittal had little to do with the workings of the trial itself. By the end of the eighteenth century, the acquittal had become yet another verdict in favor of a changing political climate which came hand in hand with the rising dependency of the British economy on colonial trade. For a detailed analysis of this symbiotic relationship, see B. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain*.

possible conquerors" and the trial soon became an arena where "each must come to terms with the other's machinery, or powers of usurpation" (25). In this ideological battle between the State and the Company, the warring parties frequently distorted the idea of India, and Burke, in particular, turned the public imagination into an "overdetermined fearfulness" in relation to India through his incessant evocations of sublime terror during the trial. As a consequence of Burke's construction of excessive theatricality around the India question, the political implications of the impeachment were soon lost in the aesthetic experience of the "Indian sublime," and, by the 1790s, the horror of the Company's crimes became inseparable from the production of artificial terror in theatres.[225]

In her analysis of Burke's writings on India, Suleri offers a novel approach for reading the eighteenth-century aestheticization of political discourse as a modality for objectifying colonized cultures as a first step in their consumption by the English public.[226] However, in her evaluation of the trial's political implications, she reverts back to a more conventional interpretation of the

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[225] For an analysis of how Burke's construction of sublime horror gave rise to a "pleasure" industry towards the end of the eighteenth century, see E. J. Clery, "The Pleasure of Terror: Paradox in Edmund Burke's Theory of the Sublime."

[226] Suleri further argues that Burke's engagement with India did not remain limited to the parliamentary idiom but had acute bearings on the Anglo-Indian narrative in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For a detailed discussion of the discursive implications of Burke's rhetoric, see Suleri, *The Rhetoric of British India*, 24-36.

impeachment proceedings, namely that Burke and Hastings personified the escalating conflict between two powers in late-eighteenth-century England: Warren Hastings stood at one end as a herald of the increasing authority of imperial commercialism of the Company in Britain's state politics and India's governance; Edmund Burke at the other as a crusader for the English Parliament, demanding a greater role for its traditional legislative powers in both commercial ventures and administrative policies in India.[227] As Suleri succinctly notes, Fox's East India Bill—Burke's first attempt at addressing the India question in 1783—proposed to coalesce the British government and the East India Company "into a governing body that could serve as a prudent conduit between the merchant's desire to act as a state and the state's desire to own the power of the merchant" (25). But the defeat of this bill set the stage for the trial as a battleground and, consequently, the altercation between the two adversaries—Burke and Hastings—entered a synecdochic relationship with the power struggles between the nation-state and the Company over the future control of the empire in India.

Such readings of the trial, without doubt, capture the political motivations behind the heated debate over the Company's methods of governing its territories in India. To a large extent, Burke's construction of aesthetic terror around the

[227] It is worth noting here that this particular interpretation of the trial was popularized in the nineteenth century by Thomas Babington Macaulay in his essay titled "Warren Hastings." I discuss in detail Macaulay's construction of the eighteenth-century events related to the empire in the following chapter.

Company's crimes came from his desire to reduce the administrative powers of a mercantile enterprise and to place India under direct control of the British nation-state.[228] While this interpretation of Burke's passionate admonishment of the Company sits well within the larger political conflicts of the period, it can, nevertheless, be held responsible for our underestimation of Burke's influence on the Company's administrative policies in India. Since critics frequently posit Burke and Hastings at the opposite ends of the political and ideological spectrum on the question of Britain's imperial interests in India, they tend to pay very little attention to the possible overlaps between the language of prosecution and the language of defense during the trial. This oversight in current scholarship can be largely attributed to the self-proclaimed polarization of British politics on the India question during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. As we have already seen, Burke, in particular, went an extra mile to project himself as both a private and public adversary of the East India Company.[229] For this very reason, there are hardly any investigations available on the possible connections between

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[228] As Shiraj Ahmed notes, Burke, throughout his involvement with the India question, "hoped not for an end to the British empire in India, but rather for its reform. Instead of a corporation of private citizens, he wanted the British state to govern India, on the assumption that the state, itself based on constitutional principles, would reconstruction Indian civil society" (30).

[229] The carefully constructed malice in Burke's anti-Company rhetoric, however, masks an important fact, namely that Burke had close personal associations with many Company officials in India. One of his closest allies was none other than William Jones, the famous Orientalist scholar in the Company's service. Burke, while educating himself on the India question, frequently depended on Jones for information about India and its native governments.

Burke's aesthetic attempts at transforming the English public sphere into a civil society and the discursive strategies employed by the Company to reinvent itself as a harbinger of modernity by the beginning of the nineteenth century. This lacuna also exists in current scholarship because most studies of the trial restrict their analysis to the aesthetic and political effect of the India question on the English public sphere and the British legislature respectively. While it has become commonplace to situate the ramifications of the trial within the evolutionary structure of the English civil society and the British nation-state, there is very little recognition of the fact that Burke's language had some far-reaching consequences on the future rhetoric of the East India Company. Burke's obsession with the sublimity of violence during the trial soon turned the moral concept of "sympathetic revenge" into a categorical dismissal of the idea of self-governance for the Indian populace in the nineteenth century.

Burke's ethico-aesthetic principles of sympathy and human bonding, ironically, were always based on a clear perception of the otherness of India and its subjugated populace.[230] This contradiction in Burke's moral philosophy is not entirely inexplicable in the light of his theorization of the sublime. In *Enquiry*, Burke had outlined how the ideas of pain were far more powerful than those

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[230] In a letter (dated 19 January 1786), Burke voiced the inability of the English public to understand his unrelenting sympathy for a people, who, unlike the addressee (Mary Palmer), have none of her "Lilies and Roses" in their faces, "but who are the images of the great Pattern as well as you and I" (*Selected Letters* 381).

derived from the feelings of pleasure and had voiced his conviction in the human capacity to derive a high degree of "delight" in the "real misfortunes and pains of others" (58). According to him, there is no "spectacle we so eagerly pursue as that of some uncommon and grievous calamity; so that, whether the misfortune is before our eyes, or whether they are turned back to it in history, it always touches with delight" (*Enquiry* 59). This combined experience of "delight" and "pain," rather than preventing spectators from shunning scenes of misery, prompts them to alleviate themselves by relieving those who suffer "by an instinct that works through us to its own purposes without our concurrence" (*Enquiry* 60). This human instinct, however, fails to work when "danger or pain presses too nearly," since actual pain is "incapable of giving any delight, and is simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, it may be, and it is delightful" (*Enquiry* 52). In Burke's aesthetic theory, the extent of sublimity in the experience of pain and distress was inextricably tied to the distance of the spectator from the spectacle. Sublime passions came to the surface only when the spectator felt completely detached and distant from the actual scene of horror. Similarly, sympathy, as a corollary of "delightful pain" in this matrix of feelings, could not function without the primal instinct of "self-preservation": "it is absolutely necessary my life should be out of any imminent hazard before I can take a delight in the sufferings of others, real or imaginary" (*Enquiry* 62).

Burke's inclusion of self-preservation in the structuring of the sublime, when read into the unfolding of the trial, disentangles Britain's nationalist self from the system of exploitation instituted by the Company in India. In Burke's theorization of the sublime, sympathy became a mimetic process under the specter of self-preservation, incapable of functioning in proximity with the "real" source of suffering. Burke's construction of sublimity in language during the trial, by imitating the anguish of the other for its own "delightful" end, rendered the actual infliction of pain on the bodies of Bengali peasants invisible and replaced it with a display of English outrage at the perpetration of such "indignities" on the human race.[231] In response to what he considered to be a systematic corruption of British selfhood in distant India, "Burke attempted to model an act of self-division by which Britain's role in colonial atrocities might be transformed into passive participation in suffering (sympathy) and an active dismantling of the system (benevolence)" (Bolton 881). The trial, as a result, became a means for setting the standard for the public indictment of financially and politically powerful institutions: institutions like the East India Company which sacrificed universal values of liberty and justice for the sake of private profiteering.[232] Instead of

[231] As Betsy Bolton indicates, Burke's performance of his own suffering "attests [to] his moral distance from the atrocities he replicates, ostensibly in order to prevent their recurrence" (882).

[232] As Mary Poovey points out in "The Limits of the Universal Knowledge Project," it is important to remember that the Company was a highly differentiated entity during the eighteenth century. Although the legislators "treated the East India Company as a single

addressing or redressing the exploitative structures of imperialist expansion, Burke envisioned an exclusively English civil society based on a benevolent camaraderie amongst a morally outraged public at the excesses of the Company in India. As Ahmed observes, "for Burke, at least, the 'public sphere' of civil society was not the space in which democratic association leads to the refinement of reason, but rather where people learn to mimic civility" (42). Given the structuring of the trial on the aesthetics of the sublime, the foundational principle of Burke's vision of a civil society was a mimicry of sympathy and benevolence, rather than a genuine need to question imperialist practices through these ostensibly universal principles.

Burke's inclusion of a recognizable structure of theatrical representation in legal discourse, for many scholars, did not arise from any specific concern for the oppressed classes in India either. As Jeff Bass observes, "the British motive for empire was to be located in the need to rectify the shortcomings of *Britons* in India rather than any desire to 'improve' the Indians." From the perspective of the ongoing debates in the English public sphere on the legitimacy of mercantile imperial interests, "Burke's rhetorical assault on the Company's Indian policies functioned to attribute a moral imperative to state-sponsored imperialism" (Bass

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entity—a corporate body apparently so unified as to be regularly personified as John Company—in actuality, the company was composed of various individuals and interests, many of whom competed with each other." Almost each one of the individuals who joined the Company's service, "conducted some personal business alongside the company's official activities" (197).

212). Burke's speech was based on a report about the tax collection practices in Rangpur, submitted by a junior Company officer, John Paterson after his investigation into the reasons for an armed insurrection by the peasants of the district. Much like the reports on the Black Hole and the events surrounding Battle of Plassey, this document had serious inconsistencies and lacked authentication through native testimonies.[233] Moreover, this report, despite its critique of the Company's methods of extracting taxes, had very little legal value in the trial, since it did not connect with any of the charges brought against Hastings by the prosecutors of the trial.[234] According to Paterson (as Burke reported in his speech), the actual perpetrators of violence in Rangpur and Dinajpur were not British officers but their principle native agents, Devi Singh and Ganga Govind Singh, in the districts. Burke, nevertheless, chose to overlook these glaring defects, not in order to voice the plight of peasants in Bengal under

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[233] Despite generating extensive debate and propaganda in the English press, Paterson's report is no longer available in the colonial archive. Fragmented sections of this report can be found in Burke's speeches and other documents of the trial. All later reconstructions of Company's oppression and subaltern resistance in Rangpur are based on Burke's testimony and Hastings' defense presented during the trial proceedings.

[234] Burke introduced twenty-two "Articles of Charge of High Crimes and Misdemeanors" against Hastings between 4 April and 5 May 1786. After revisions by the parliamentary committees of both Houses, Hastings was finally prosecuted on twenty articles. The principle charges on which the House of Lords heard evidence were

i) The Benares charge (concerning allegations of persecution of Raja Chait Singh by Hastings' government which drove him to revolt).
ii) The confiscation of the landed income and treasury of the Begums of Awadh.
iii) The illegal receipt of gifts from the Indian elite.
iv) The awarding of corrupt and extravagant contracts.

Company rule, but to create an effect comparable to that of sensationalist literature.[235] As Betsy Bolton notes, Burke's description of the Rangpur incident reveals "the prosecutor's participation in the atrocity he recounts": his testimony seems to insist that the tortures were not committed as an outrage to human sensibility, but that they needed to be "*recounted* with that specific effect in mind" (875). "Oh what an affair," Burke wrote in a letter, "I am clear that I must dilate upon that; for it has stuff in it, that will if any thing, work upon the popular sense."[236] In an earlier letter to Phillip Francis, he had outlined the need to retain a broad spectrum of incriminating evidence against Hastings, even if some of the crimes were not strictly provable in court, by stating that, "with such a prospect before you, it is very often necessary to take away something from the force of your charge, in order to secure its effect."[237] According to P. J. Marshall, Burke's rather idiosyncratic approach towards conducting this trial came from his belief that "if his material were to be pruned and rendered into legal form, it would become incomprehensible and would lose most of its appeal to the public at large" (*Impeachment* 70-71). Burke himself admitted to being a "little disposed"

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[235] As Sara Suleri's concludes in her analysis of Burke's construction of the "Indian sublime," the figure of the theatre is central to both his aesthetics and political oratory because "it supplies him with a sensationalism to which his rhetoric is inevitably drawn, and further becomes one of the means through which Burke can map out his perception of the fictionality of historical action" (36).

[236] Letter dated 3 January 1788, *Correspondence*, Vol. 5, 372.

[237] Letter dated 10 December 1785, *Correspondence*, Vol. 5, 241.

to weaken the cause of justice "in order to strengthen the importance of an adequate support." Rather than securing reprisal for the peasants of Rangpur, it was far more imperative for Burke to make this report of Company's violent excess yet another instance of "*a general evil intention*" in Hastings' government, manifested through "a long series and a great variety of acts" which "ought to have much greater weight with a *publick political* tribunal."[238]

Unconcerned with questions of imperial culpability, Burke hoped that the English public, after witnessing his vindication of universal rights for the peasants of Rangpur, would use the trial as an opportunity for destroying the powerful "monopoly" of the Company and, simultaneously, for envisaging a "noble" design of a "commonwealth" for the British government.[239] He believed that his account of the corporeal mutilations in Rangpur would not only open the "Publick eye" to the plight of Bengali peasants and—by metonymic extension—the annihilation of the body politic in India, it would also play a crucial role in making visible the debilitating effects of mercantile interests on the inherent rectitude of Britain's constitutional laws and civil society and their combined

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[238] Ibid., 242.

[239] In a speech on the Secret Committee appointed to investigate the administration of the East India Company in India, Burke stated

> You [the British] will teach the people that live under you, that it is their interest to be your subjects; and that, instead of courting the French, the Dutch, the Danes, or any other state, under heaven, to protect them, they ought only be anxious to preserve their connection with you; because, from you only they had to expect public proceeding, public trial, public justice. (*Writings* 5: 137-138)

benevolence towards humanity at large. In Margery Sabin's words, the ideal of English justice in Burke's language spoke "past the actual (unworthy) judges in the case to a superior audience—to an idealized future Parliament and public and, ultimately, to God" (67). With no realistic expectation of political or legal action against Hastings, the whole trial became "a fictive construct for the edification of Britain in the future" and "a symbolic ritual, directed partly to the public but even more to posterity (Sabin 67). Though Burke failed in his ostensible attempt to "develop British sympathy for the particularities and details of a distant people's suffering," he did succeed in winning the admiration of the future architects of British India for "his vision of a government structured along universal principles of justice—a vision which was later used to rule India according to British rather than Indian laws and customs" (Bolton 884). In the following chapter, I demonstrate how the rhetoric of the impeachment trial became one of the most crucial ideological interventions in the history of the empire, as it steadily equipped nineteenth-century British historians with a new language of moral authority for representing and, in the process, legitimizing its policies of governance in India.

CHAPTER 4

Between Romance and History: Macaulay's Reconstruction of the Origin of the Empire

> We have always thought it strange that, while the history of the Spanish empire in America is familiarly known to all the nations of Europe, the great actions of our countrymen in the East should, even among ourselves, excite little interest.[240]

With these words, Thomas Babington Macaulay opened his essay titled "Lord Clive," published in the *Edinburgh Review* in January 1840.[241] This essay was one of Macaulay's two attempts to write a history of the origin of the British empire in India. The other essay titled "Warren Hastings" appeared in the same periodical in October, 1841. As the opening sentence suggests, Macaulay wanted to use this essay to invigorate the imagination of a disinterested audience about British rule in India. In the sentences that followed this declaration, he demonstrated his strong disapproval of the evident lack of pride in the British public about the early exploits of the "heroes" of the empire. He found the English ignorance about the eighteenth-century history of British India extremely

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[240] Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Lord Clive," in *Critical and Historical essays*, vol. 1, p. 479. Subsequent citations appear in the body of the text.

[241] Macaulay contributed consistently to this periodical throughout his writing career. His essays in *Edinburgh Review* cover a gamut of literary, historical, and political topics. Macaulay later compiled these essays into a collection titled *Critical and Historical Essays; contributed to the Edinburgh Review*, published in 1843.

appalling, claiming that even the most educated members of the public could not answer simple questions about their history in the "East." He further lamented that, while the adventures of the Spanish in the Americas were commonly known, there was hardly any interest in the British conquest of India, even though the "people of India, when we subdued them, were ten times as numerous as the Americans whom the Spaniards vanquished, and were at the same time quite as highly civilized as the victorious Spaniards" (479). This lacuna in public knowledge, in Macaulay's view, was highly incongruous with the unfolding of the early empire, where a "handful" of British soldiers had replaced the centuries-long Mughal rule in the subcontinent with an English empire.[242]

Though critical of its ignorance and indifference, Macaulay did not blame the public entirely for this attitude towards their imperial history. For him, the real culprits were the English historians who made this period "not only insipid, but positively distasteful" (479). He accused the historians of adopting too dispassionate a tone towards the empire to induce any enthusiasm in the reader. Though pointing out some merits of the earlier histories, Macaulay did not abstain from chastising their authors for reducing the subjugation of "one of the greatest empires in the world" (479) to a monotonous description of colorless events. He

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[242] As I discussed in the earlier chapters, Macaulay's construction of the early empire borrows heavily from the propagandist histories and biographies written in the wake of the scandals surrounding the question of private wealth accumulated by the Company's officers in India.

was particularly irked by two historians of British India: his contemporary, James Mill;[243] and an eighteenth century chronicler of the East India Company, Robert Orme.[244] He criticized Mill's history for not being "sufficiently animated and picturesque to attract those who read for amusement" (480). Orme, likewise, was reprimanded for being so tediously minute that his narrative, "though one of the most authentic and one of the most finely written in our language, has never been very popular, and is now scarcely ever read" (480).

Macaulay began his essay on Robert Clive with severe criticism of these historians in an attempt to authenticate his own version of history. In his view, other historical works had failed to present the complexity of Clive's character to the public. Historians had the tendency to adopt extreme views on Clive's life and actions in India. James Mill, for instance, passed too severe a judgment and

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[243] Though largely remembered nowadays as John Stuart Mill's father, James Mill was an influential utilitarian thinker of the early nineteenth century. Mill wrote an extensive history titled *The History of British India*, published in 1818. Mill provided a comparative analysis of the systems of governance in both India and Britain, concluding with the assertion that the administration in India must be based on a Western style of politics. Many of Mill's suggestions were adopted by the East India Company in its administrative policies in India. For an appraisal of Mill's political and cultural views, see Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* and Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The history of British India and Orientalism.*

[244] Robert Orme—as the official historian of the Company—authored *A history of the military transactions of the British nation in Indostan from the year 1745* in 1763. This treatise is one of the longest accounts of the British presence in India from the eighteenth century. Like most historical tracts of the period, the structure of Orme's history would appear to be fragmented to a reader unaccustomed to the methodology of authentication in the eighteenth-century historiography. Orme's narrative is constantly interspersed with reproductions of the Company's documents, making the text too complicated for a casual reading.

showed far less “discrimination in his account of Clive than in any other part of his valuable work” (480). On the other hand, John Malcolm, as the biographer of Clive, leaned in the opposite direction of raising his character beyond credence.[245] According to Macaulay, John Malcolm was possessed by the love that all biographers felt towards their subject and saw “nothing but wisdom and justice in the actions of his idol” (480). The sketch of Clive’s life suffered in both extremes since the public failed to get a complete picture of the early history of British India. By discrediting other historians at the very outset, Macaulay framed his essay as a corrective history, which, unlike other writings, would both entertain and educate the public.

When Macaulay’s story of the empire finally unfolds in the essay, it is not difficult to see that it was designed for an audience attuned to Britain’s imperial status in the nineteenth century.[246] The history moves forward with a colorful biographical description of Lord Clive: “the founder of the British empire in India” (481). As a man of “strong will” and “fiery passions” from early childhood, Macaulay judged Clive’s temperament to be perfect for founding the

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[245] John Malcolm had a long career in India in the service of the East India Company. His voluminous biography of Robert Clive, titled *The Life of Robert, Lord Clive*, was one of the most authoritative accounts of Clive’s life in India during the nineteenth century.

[246] Controversies surrounding the Company’s activities in India had abated by the beginning of the nineteenth century and stopped being a topic of public debate (the tensions between the Parliament and the Company continued) with the Charter of 1813 which abolished the monopoly of the Company over trade and asserted the sovereignty of the British crown over the territories held by the Company in India.

British empire in an age of “battles” and “intrigues.” As the narrative continues, Clive’s “headstrong” character unfurls with a detailed description of his military sojourns in various parts of India. Beginning with the “Siege of Arcot,”[247] the essay weaves through many skirmishes of the British forces with Indian rulers, including the famous “Battle of Plassey” in Bengal. The narrative ends with the dawn of a new and progressive phase in Indian history, where the “despotism” of Muslim rulers is replaced by the British administration of Bengal under the efficient supervision of Clive and other competent architects of the empire.

The whole essay functions in the hyperbolic mode of a chivalric romance in order to present Clive as the original “hero” of the British Empire. Macaulay heaps superlatives on Clive, asserting that “our island, so fertile in heroes and statesmen, has scarcely ever produced a man more truly great either in arms or in council” (480). In Macaulay’s opinion, Clive was comparable to an epic hero who, “born with strong passions and tried by strong temptations, committed great faults” (480). These very faults, however, were “those of a high and magnanimous spirit” (508) and, when weighed against Clive’s achievements, did not “deprive him of his right to an honourable place in the estimation of posterity” (548). Only the most vulgar in society would deny Clive this rightful place. The

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[247] This battle was instrumental in establishing Clive’s reputation as a promising military general of the Company. Clive had joined the civil service of the Company as a “writer” in Madras in 1744. Within a few years, however, he distinguished himself as a military commander through his prominent role in defeating the combined forces of the French and the Nawab of Arcot in South India.

people with “piety and genius,” on the other hand, would always remember a young adventurer who brought greater glory to the English shore than the most competent generals of the Roman Empire. Clive’s conquest of India added to England “such an extent of cultivated territory, such an amount of revenue, such a multitude of subjects” that even “the most successful proconsul” had not offered “the dominion of Rome” (549). England surpassed the splendor of all the ancient empires through Clive’s actions in India: this fact alone, Macaulay insists, would diminish all his errors in the annals of history.

Along with raising Clive to the pinnacle of military achievements, Macaulay is equally charitable regarding his administrative skills. He asserts that Clive would be remembered in the future both as a brave general and a compassionate administrator. History would place Clive’s name high in “the roll of conquerors” for subjugating provinces like Bengal, “known through the East as the garden of Eden, as the rich kingdom” (503). It would further venerate Clive, the great reformer, by including him “in the list of those who have done and suffered much for the happiness of mankind” (549). Though his peers had been less than generous in judging his “great” actions in Bengal, Clive would nevertheless occupy an esteemed position in history for freeing the Indian people from an administration “tainted with all the vices of Oriental despotism” (486). Though Clive’s reputation was questionable amongst his contemporaries because of some rare dishonorable intrigues, such behavior would not be attributed to the

man himself in the future. Describing Clive's personality, Macaulay declares, "Neither in his private life, nor in those parts of his public life in which he had to do with his countrymen, do we find any signs of a propensity to cunning" (508). All the negative traits attached to Clive's character by his detractors were only visible in his dealings with the "Orientals" and their style of politics. Macaulay emphasizes that Clive acted in an un-English manner only when he had to deal with people who were "destitute of what in Europe is called honour, with men who would give any promise without hesitation, and break any promise without shame, with men who would unscrupulously employ corruption, perjury, forgery, to compass their ends" (508).

Macaulay adds a liberal dose of biased judgments and racial prejudices to his account in order to justify the presence and the expansion of British rule in India. According to Macaulay, the Mughal Empire, even in its best days, was "far worse governed than the worst governed parts of Europe" (486). By the time the British arrived in India, an already flawed government had fallen into the hands of indolent and debauched nominal sovereigns, who "sauntered away life in secluded palaces, chewing bang, fondling concubines, and listening to buffoons" (487). As a consequence of their gross mismanagement of Indian affairs, "a succession of ferocious invaders descended …to prey on the defenseless wealth of Hindostan" (487). Consistent foreign invasions of India were not surprising since "there never, perhaps, existed a people so thoroughly fitted by nature and by habit

for a foreign yoke" (503). This inherent "servility" of the "Indian race" would have been exploited for many centuries if the English had chosen to remain a trading company with "only a few acres for purposes of commerce" and had not "spread its empire from Cape Comorin to the eternal snow of the Himalayas" (489). By deposing "despotic nabobs" and taming "wild races," the British had protected the Indian people and their property from the constant threat of destruction. Within less than a hundred years, the British in India, through "honest" practices, had become the most "trustworthy government in the midst of governments which nobody can trust" (517). Their public-minded and fair administration would only invoke veneration and admiration in the future generations of "enlightened" Indians.

Taken in its entirety, the essay paints a highly vivid picture of the triumph of Clive's "valor" and "integrity" over a "vile," "dishonorable," and "despotic" East. Throughout the essay, the conquest of India is carried out through a series of such dichotomies, ending in the defeat of "Eastern perfidy" at the hands of "English veracity" in times of both war and peace. Though Macaulay constructed "veracity" as a defining trait of the English character throughout the essay, this particular virtue sits rather uncomfortably with the overall structure of the narrative. With rhetorically charged representations of Clive's personality and actions, the historicity of the narrative slowly becomes indiscernible from the literariness of a romantic adventure. In the guise of Clive's quixotic exploits, the

narrative is transformed, to use Edward Said's famous dictum, into "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (4). The essay, as a result, does not remain a simple recollection of facts and events, but turns into a hegemonic account of the conquest of the English over its other. As Patrick Brantlinger has pointed out, the justification for the "British imperialization of India" is rather simple in Macaulay's narrative: "Indians, because of the baseness of their own social character and moral standards, deserved and needed to be imperialized" (80).

From the standpoint of modern historiography, Macaulay's biased reconstruction of India's past fails to live up to all the formal expectations of an objective history. From the very outset, the essay adopts the subjective language of literature to describe the early British victories in India. Macaulay additionally makes no attempt to prevent the narrative from collapsing into an ideologically charged myth of the moral authority of the British empire. Macaulay's essay, in Brantlinger's words, is a specimen of "Whig history at its most self-indulgent" (81) because it has lost all pretensions of objectivity.[248] As Rolf Aderhold also points out, Macaulay often practiced his political stances through the allegorical devices of literature. To this end, Macaulay frequently uses literary exaggerations

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[248] Macaulay was one of the most prominent public voices of the Whig party in the nineteenth century. He often used the *Edinburgh Review* as a platform for presenting an exclusively Whig view of history. "Whig history" is often used a generic term for forms of history-writing which present the past in an inevitable march of progress towards the Enlightenment, culminating in the modern forms of government.

to construct “antithetical juxtapositions” of two factions in history, with his sympathies leaning unfalteringly in one direction. According to Aderhold, Macaulay was possessed with delivering a Whig interpretation of history and, consequently, “his comparisons were at times far-fetched or incorrect” (222). Since his main impulse was to convince the readers of his own ideological message, Macaulay “was not driven by an urge to write a scientifically sound history” (Aderhold 222).

As was seen in the last three chapters, the early British rule in India had very little in common with Macaulay’s narrative of an uncomplicated triumph of English values in India. Ridden with controversies and scandals, eighteenth-century history of the empire exhibited much less inclination to celebrate “Englishness” in its writings. Far more preoccupied with combating aspersions, history was mainly a tool for preserving private interests and salvaging the public reputation of both the East India Company and its officers in India. However, it is also undeniable that Macaulay’s version of the origin of the empire went a long way in disguising these disturbing aspects of history and substituting scandal with valor in the public imagination. To achieve this end, Macaulay adopted an approach to history-writing not very different from that of Edmund Burke’s by dissolving the conceptual distinction between the discourses of history and fiction in order to narrate the “story of the creation of a great nation and an imperial race” (Hall 33).

In addition to continuing a tradition of writing associated with eighteenth-century philosophers like Burke, Macaulay's subjective use of the past can also be situated within the larger framework of intersecting philosophical trends in the nineteenth century. As Mark Philips has discussed, Macaulay's historical writings emerged from his intellectual negotiations with two different schools of thought on the subject of historiography in his time. The first school comprised the nineteenth-century Romantic theories of the artistic imagination. By reconciling the literary ideas of Romanticism with historiography, Macaulay created "a new sense of history in which the imagination would take a central place" (Philips 119). In contrast to the relatively new trend of romantic writing, the second school consisted of an older and longer tradition of the exemplar theory in history-writing. Within this tradition, Philips asserts that historians "shared with orators and moralists of all kinds the view that the presentation of vivid examples could be far more effective than learning by precept" (120). As a result of this perception, historical writing was "drawn into the same camp as rhetoric and became a literary art governed by rhetorical rules of composition" (Philips 120). Macaulay, in Philips words, hoped to be a historian with a "powerful, yet disciplined imagination" who would "reunite accurate representation and vivid instruction" by synthesizing the ideas of these two schools of thought (121).

Though offering a coherent trajectory of the mixed intellectual heritage of Macaulay's historiography, Philips's analysis, nevertheless, remains limited in its

scope. He restricts the architectonics of Macaulay's historical writings to its correlation with the Romantic ideas of language and literature. As a result, Philips only provides a partial explanation for Macaulay's use of literary devices in the domain of historiography. In his view, Macaulay's effort to reconcile literary imagination with history can be interpreted as a historiographer's response to the rising challenge posed by the novel to other genres of writing in the nineteenth century. Macaulay tried to harness the expressive function of literary language in order to make history writing more competitive in a world leaning towards the fantastic, rather than the pedantic, forms of literature. Such an interpretation might explain Macaulay's reasons for choosing a literary style, but it does not answer some pertinent questions emanating from such a choice. For instance, what role did Macaulay envisage for his historical writings when he valorized the literary imagination?

A partial answer to these questions can be found in Macaulay's own vision of history. Though he never developed any consistent or systematic theory for writing history, Macaulay did discuss the functions of history in two early essays of his writing career.[249] In these essays, not unlike his predecessors such as Burke, Macaulay shifted the focus from history's traditional role of upholding "Truth" to

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[249] Like "Lord Clive," these essays also appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*. The first essay titled "History" appeared in May 1828, while the second titled "Halham's Constitutional History" appeared in the September issue of the same year.

its possible social function.[250] From Macaulay's perspective, the purpose of history was not to authenticate an event by reducing language to a mirror image of the past. Neither did the value of history reside in the accurate description of events nor in the impartial examination of their causes and effects. The legitimacy of a historical account resided in its ability to instruct and in its power to transform the outlook of the future generations. Historians were primarily responsible to their readers rather than to the events of the past. The rightful place of history, therefore, did not belong in the past proper, but in the present and the future. To keep pace with this shift, the locus of history also had to move away from "Truth" to the "Public." As discussed by Lionel Gossman, Romantic historians, in order to write this new kind of history, supplemented the traditional skills of a historian with the unusual power of divination. Aligning consciously with the figure of the prophet-poet, these new historians identified themselves as an integral part of the public and hoped to articulate its deepest experience. By

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[250] Outlining the traditional truth-function of historiography, Scottish thinker and a contemporary of Edmund Burke, Hugh Blair (1718-1800) had asserted in his influential work, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), "As the primary end of History is to record Truth, Impartiality, Fidelity, and Accuracy are the fundamental qualities of a historian" (259). Since "gravity and dignity are the essential characteristics of History," Blair further emphasized that "no light instruments are to be employed, no flippancy of style, no quaintness of wit" (260). History, in other words, required the medium of language to inscribe the past, but this language had to be absolutely transparent in order to reflect the reality of a bygone era univocally. Figurative language—being expressive, rather than being mimetic—distorted the "true picture" of the past, leading to more than one interpretation. Literary representations, therefore, were not only unsuitable but completely antithetical to history.

inscribing the past through their alleged power of prescience, they provided the public with the eyes it needed to move forward and fulfill its historical destiny. According to Gossman, “The writer of Romantic histories, in short, understood his heroes from within; like Christ, Caesar, or Joan of Arc, he too was a resolver of riddles, a facilitator of new births” (28).

Though Macaulay did not identify himself as a Romantic historian, his Romantic world-view is quite palpable throughout the essay titled “History.” He debated, using Greek historians as examples, the fallacy of considering history-writing as a “true” representation of the historical truth. History, after all, resided in language: a medium that did not authenticate the existence of things in the world, but merely represented them through sounds and words. So long as history used language as its mode of communication, it had to follow the logical structure of the imitative fine arts. Macaulay elaborated how a painting rarely provided more than a “shade of truth” about its subject and the onlooker seldom demanded more from it. History—in a similar manner—gave us a “likeness” of the past, and not its exact replica. Like a painting, history “has its foreground and its background,” and, therefore, “some events must be represented on a large scale, others diminished” (54). According to Macaulay, “No picture, and no history, can present us with the whole truth: but those are the best pictures and the best histories which exhibit such parts of the truth as most nearly produce the effect of the whole” (54). By emphasizing the “effect” rather than the “actuality” of past

events, Macaulay performed a significant maneuver regarding the ends of history. He shifted the focus of history away from the authenticity of its content to the structure of its narrative. Describing the practices of history writing down the ages, he asserted that historians—in recent times—had discarded a common practice of Ancient Greece, where writers frequently mingled history with myth. Macaulay doubted whether modern historians, by rejecting this practice, told "more truth than those of antiquity" (60). The quest for a "scientific" history might have ensured "fewer falsehoods," but this pursuit came at the high price of stripping the historical narrative of all its pleasing elements. Historical facts, in themselves, were the mere "dross of history" and required the talent of the historian—akin to that of a "great dramatist" or a "great painter"—to have any impact on the reader. Like a great artist, "the perfect historian is he in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature" (65). In other words, voluminous and detailed accounts of a period were absolutely redundant when it came to capturing the "spirit" of an age.[251] A perfect picture of an epoch could easily be achieved through "judicious selection, rejection, and arrangement" (65).

The locus of this new and abbreviated form of history could no longer be the past, but had to be the future. According to Macaulay, no past event has any

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[251] It is worth adding here that, in comparison to James Mill's nine-volume *The History of British India*, Macaulay encapsulated the whole history of the early empire in his essays on Robert Clive and Warren Hasting which, when put together, do not exceed two hundred pages.

intrinsic importance; rather, "the knowledge of it is valuable only as it leads us to form just calculations with respect to the future" (64). He further underlined this view by asserting that "a history which does not serve this purpose, though it may be filled with battles, treaties, and commotions is as useless as the series of turnpike-tickets collected by Sir Mathew Mite (64).[252] The historians had to sever their ties with "historical truth" in order to construct the events of the past as an ideal model of conduct for future generations. To achieve this end, history could not remain a dry account of the past. It had to become a vivid picture where people and events were illustrated "not merely by a few general phrases, or a few extracts from statistical documents, but by appropriate images presented in every line" (65). Once historians chose to write a history in this manner, the past would no longer remain divorced from the present, but would soon be integrated into the lives of the people as examples of model behavior. Outlining this theory of history writing, Macaulay wrote

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[252] As I discussed in the Introduction, Sir Mathew Mite is a fictional character from an eighteenth-century play titled *The Nabob*, performed for the first time in 1772. This is the same year in which the House of Commons began its official inquiry into the conduct of the East India Company in India. The play was a satirical characterization of the Company's agents who returned to England with ill-gotten wealth and destabilized English society. Written by Samuel Foote, this play established the archetype figure of the returning Company official through the protagonist, Sir Mathew Mite. Macaulay's dismissive reference is rather ironical, since this character was allegedly modeled on Lord Clive. This passing comment in an 1828 essay seems to indicate that Macaulay did not hold Clive—or the Company officials in general—in the same esteemed position that he chose to allot them by 1840. This shift in Macaulay's attitude towards the early empire will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

> History, it has been said, is philosophy teaching by examples. Unhappily, what the philosophy gains in soundness and depth the examples generally lose in vividness. A perfect historian must possess an imagination sufficiently powerful to make his narrative affecting and picturesque. (51)

As this quotation suggests, Macaulay also identified exemplarity as one of the primary functions of history writing. This function, however, could not be performed if the writing did not please the readers aesthetically. According to him, the public would be more inclined to learn the "lessons" of history only after its inscription had excited their imagination. History-writing, as a result, required a perfect blend of historical facts and literary devices. In the same essay, he observed that it could be laid down as a general rule, despite some exceptions, that "history begins in novel and ends in essay" (51). It was only through the admixture of these two powerful genres that the past could be made relevant for both the present and the future. To underline his position, Macaulay wrote, "The instruction derived from history thus written would be of a vivid and practical character. It would be received by the imagination as well as by the reason. It would be not merely traced on the mind, but branded into it" (66).

Macaulay was extremely disappointed by the inability of traditional historians to achieve this "ideal" blend of literary and historical writing. History-writing, in the hands of his predecessors and contemporaries, lacked the "art of narration, the art of interesting the affections and presenting pictures to the

imagination" (64). Macaulay's discontent with the histories of both James Mill and Robert Orme—expressed at the beginning of "Lord Clive"—also arose from their evident lack of ability to fulfill both the didactic and aesthetic functions of history. In his view, it was these insipid inscriptions, rather than the progress of British history, that had failed to capture the imagination of the people. Macaulay showered this scathing criticism on other British historians as well since they had also failed to recognize the changing dynamics of the English reading public. Macaulay was well aware of the fact that history in the nineteenth century was no longer a matter of close scrutiny by a few scholarly members of the society. A new and larger reading public was emerging in Britain which possessed neither the time nor the inclination to peruse the voluminous annals of history. For this new audience, perusal of history was a matter of "amusement" and leisure rather than of keen scholarship. For Macaulay, these readers were more likely to turn towards the novels of Walter Scott, for instance, in order to become familiar with the manners of the medieval period rather than the historical essays of Henry Hallam on the same period.[253]

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[253] Like Macaulay, Henry Hallam was a Whig historian, who published his first major historical work titled *View of the State of Europe during the Middle Ages* in 1818. This was followed by *The Constitutional History of England* in 1827, almost as a sequel to the earlier history. Even though Hallam addressed all political questions through the lens of Whig constitutionalism, he did not escape Macaulay's scathing criticism of his work. In "Hallam's Constitutional History," Macaulay described his writing style as absolutely bland in comparison to Walter Scott's treatment of history in his novels.

To make historical writings alluring to this wider public, it was the historian's task to distill the "lessons" from the annals of history and present them in the tempting guise of literature. Macaulay underlined this position in his essay titled "Hallam's Constitutional History." He asserted

> History, at least in its state of ideal perfection, is a compound of poetry and philosophy. It impresses general truths on the mind by a vivid representation of particular characters and incidents. But, in fact, the two hostile elements of which it consists have never been known to form a perfect amalgamation; and at length, in our own time, they have been completely and professedly separated. (51)

In this essay, Macaulay blamed this separation on the modern propensity to cast the fundamental human faculties of imagination and reason into antithetical disciplines. Such a partition of intellectual labors, in his opinion, had "all the disadvantages of a division of labour, and none of its advantages" (52). As a result of this division, the ingredients of an ideal history were polarized into the irreconcilable genres of historical romance and the historical essay. According to him, the alluring art of making the "past present" by recalling "our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners, and garb" (51) had come under the purview of the romance writer. Consequently, this writer had the great imaginative power of placing the reader "in the society of a great man or on the eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle" (51). On the other

hand, the essayist had the moral authority to “direct on judgment of events and men” and to “trace the connection of cause and effects” (51). Armed with the faculty of reasoning, the essayist had the power to “extract the philosophy of history” and “to draw from the occurrences of former time general lessons of moral and political wisdom” (51).

Macaulay did not see any inherent contradiction between the writing of a historical romance and a historical essay. In his opinion, both dealt with the same historical matter and an attempt to separate the two destroyed the very essence of history. Further in the essay on Hallam, Macaulay demonstrated the dangers of compartmentalizing historiography into distinct genres by using a spatial metaphor. He compared the representational structures of the romance and the essay with those of a landscape painting and a map respectively. According to Macaulay, the work of a romance writer was like that of a landscape painter. As an organic entity, the painting “does not enable us to ascertain with accuracy the dimensions, distances, and the angles” (51). The essayist, on the other hand, was like the cartographer who can “give us the exact information as to the bearings of the various points” (51). While the painting could excite the imagination of a traveler about a place, it could offer no concrete means for reaching that place. A map, on the other hand, was a more useful companion to a traveler, but it was incapable of inciting the desire to undertake the journey in the first place. Though representing the same geographical space, neither the painter nor the map-maker

could, through their respective talents, offer both the inspiration and the means for accomplishing a journey. The writer of history, consequently, had to combine both these talents in order to guide the readers through history.

Throughout his writing career, Macaulay tried to enact the role of both the painter and the cartographer by reconciling the genre of literary romance with history proper.[254] According to Rolf Aderhold, Macaulay's history "was influenced by two basic ideas: his attempt to write an entertaining, popular history, and his Whig affiliation" (259). From his own comments, however, we can conclude that Macaulay also envisaged a larger role for his historical writings in the public life of the British society. In his canonical work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson has shown how the early nineteenth century witnessed the ascendance of three interrelated phenomena: print language, the capitalist economy, and modern nationalism. The absorption of print languages within the logic of the market economy gave rise to the possibility of transforming older forms of community into the modern concept of nation.[255] The printing of

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[254] Macaulay's efforts at this reconciliation are best displayed in his several essays and speeches on the history of England. A representative collection of his writings on eighteenth-century English history can be found in *The History of England in the Eighteenth Century*.

[255] Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, identifies three distinct ways in which print languages laid the foundation of nationalist consciousness. In his words, "First and foremost, they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars…Second, print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which in the long run helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective

literature in non-classical languages, in Anderson's words, gained "the revolutionary vernacularizing thrust of capitalism" (39) and transformed the political value of literature in relation to the nation-state. This idea of embodying the nation in vernacular literature was introduced and sustained by a diverse body of literature and scholarship. When it came to popularizing the right to national self-determination on the grounds of culture and language, English writings were no exception. As my analysis of Burke's rhetoric in the last section illustrates, the discursive field of English nationalism was well under construction by the time Macaulay wrote his history of the British empire in India. If we juxtapose Macaulay's sketch of Lord Clive with these developments, the essay does not remain a straightforward popular history written by a Whig historian for the entertainment of the English public. Romantic ideas about the expressive function of literature, neo-classical notions of exemplar history, and the expanding boundaries of the English readership—all these developments converged together in Macaulay's essay to create an imperial imagination for the British nation.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Macaulay saw the project of history as a step towards creating a collective national memory of the English empire. He recognized a specific function in the structure of a romance in relation to the origin of the British empire in India. The synthesis of the Romantic imagination

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idea of the nation…Third, print-capitalism created languages-of-power of a kind different from the older administrative vernaculars. Certain dialects inevitably were 'closer' to each print-language and dominated their final forms" (44-45).

with history had the potential to become a powerful tool for inventing an imperial propinquity between the past and the future through the pleasures of reading. Macaulay's biographical sketch of Clive can also be seen in the light of his efforts to create an intangible continuity between the English nation and the empire. He perceived this link as a necessity because the history of the empire, when isolated from the cultural discourse of nationalism, was largely a history of aggression and domination, not to mention the endless controversies and scandals. As Alok Yadav asserts, the acquisition of the empire did not depend on the alleged superiority of English culture; however, "imperial stature could not be sanctioned—lacking both legitimacy and a triumph—without cultural preeminence" (18). Besides identifying aesthetic pleasure as an indispensable function of history, Macaulay created a privileged position for himself by being able to "write history into events and not merely distill it into language" (Rajan 177). His main objective was to become not just another historian recounting the early empire, but a soothsayer who offered to the English people "a simple morality of good and evil, peace of mind for the present and boundless hope for the future" (Hall 35). Such an attempt required the expressive—rather than the mimetic—functions of language in order to "contrive a text that would be seamless, that would make the future the fulfillment of the past" (Rajan 177). The construction of the British conquest of India gave Macaulay the opportunity for bringing the idea of empire into an intimate relationship with the idea of progress

already inscribed in the historical march of the British nation by other historians. His historical writings on India, as Balachandra Rajan points out, represented a phase in Britain's self representation where "the nation is brought not exactly into harmony with its empire but into a relationship that enables it to perceive its destiny in the image of empire it places before itself" (177). Macaulay's reconstruction of the early empire was meant to feed into a nationalist imagination which would see Britain as the herald of modernity for the colonies without critiquing the hegemonic practices of imperialism.

In the totality of this process, representing the actuality of the empire becomes a secondary—almost an unnecessary—function in comparison to the creation an uninterrupted narrative of the imperial progress of the British in India. Macaulay's essay on Clive, therefore, unfolds like a *Bildungsroman* where the stages of empire-building correspond neatly with Clive's personal growth during his three visits to India between 1744 and 1765.[256] According to Macaulay, from Clive's first visit to India "dates the renown of the English arms in the East" (548). Though "an inexperienced youth," Clive proved "ripe for military command" through the display of his courage in a "long series of Oriental

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[256] Clive's first visit lasted for almost a decade between 1744 and 1753. The second journey lasted for five years between 1755 and 1760. While Clive's first visit was restricted to military sojourns in South India, the "siege of Calcutta" during the second visit brought him to the eastern province of Bengal in 1756, where he remained as the Governor till 1760. Clive's third visit lasted two years (1765-1767) in which he served his second term as the principal administrator of Bengal.

triumphs" (548). After establishing the British as a military power, a more mature Clive returned to India a decade later to decide the political destiny of the empire. With Clive's second visit "dates the political ascendancy of the English in that country" (548). The final journey to India was the most crucial of all, since "from Clive's third visit to India dates the purity of the administration of our Eastern empire" (548-549). It is during this stay that Clive reached the full maturity of his nature and laid the "true" foundations of the English empire. Macaulay elaborated how the initial body of English officials—left behind by Clive—got "addicted to Oriental usages" and, acting like a "gang of public robbers," spread "terror through the whole plain of Bengal" (549). This type of Company official "behaved with all the faithlessness of an Indian statesman, and with all the levity of a boy whose mind had been enfeebled by power and self-indulgence" (509). In his final visit, Clive took on these corrupt English officials by launching a "dauntless and unsparing war on that gigantic system of oppression, extortion, and corruption" (549). Endangering "his ease, his fame, and his splendid fortune," Clive worked selflessly till the Company's faults were "nobly repaired" (549). This selfless spirit of governance, initiated by Clive's actions, had been maintained ever since through "a body of functionaries not more highly distinguished by ability and diligence than by integrity, disinterestedness, and public spirit" (549).

Within this neat delineation of Clive's career, Macaulay failed to mention that Clive's public reputation was irrevocably damaged in Britain during the legislative assaults of the English Parliament in 1772-73 on the Company's operations and administrative procedures in India. As Philip Lawson states, even a preliminary survey of the popular press over the third quarter of the eighteenth century reveals "a distinctly frosty commentary on the Company and the activities of its servants" (119). Macaulay's omission of the public hostility towards Clive and others, however, can be better understood within the overall objective of his essay. Through his rhetorical flourishes, he aimed to shift the focus of imperial history from the humiliation of the Company at home to the advantages of conquest abroad. With a brazen exhibition of British supremacy in India, Macaulay transformed the Company's fall from grace in the eighteenth century into the rise of a heroic figure that transcended the offences of a trading company. By foregrounding Clive's "English" heroism, Macaulay made the early empire enter a metonymical relationship with the British nation. Clive's actions during his three visits to India, as a result, became a synecdoche of English military power, political acumen, and moral authority, corresponding neatly with each visit. This heroic image of Clive, according to Patrick Brantlinger, gave an "individualistic slant to the history of the British in India" (81). As a result, the history of the empire became a moral allegory of the British nation, where "the

representatives of Anglo-Saxon courage, integrity, and industry" (Brantlinger 81) fought tirelessly to defend English values in the midst of Oriental despotism.

In order to solicit the British imagination, it was not so important for Macaulay to present claims of "Oriental mendacity" and "English veracity" as historical "truths." It was far more crucial to recast the events of the eighteenth century into a series of imperial images—both authoritative and flamboyant—to secure the future of the empire in British history. Macaulay achieved this end in his description of Clive by inscribing empire-building within the nationalist discourse of British domination. In this process, the corruptions of the English officials in India were constructed as "un-English" behavior and, rather than being recognized as the very symptom of imperial expansion, were dismissed as mere aberrations in an otherwise "noble" venture. In this tale of trial and triumph, the empire was not built through exploitive government treaties or oppressive state policies, but by the distinctive "English honor" of individual British subjects. Distinguished heroes of the empire did not only establish English values in the East, but also—whenever necessary—did not shy away from disciplining fellow English subjects who endangered these values under "Eastern influences." Such an allegorization, as Brantlinger observes, had "the double advantage of transferring guilt for violence and rapacity from the home governments as a whole to aggressive individuals acting at the periphery, and then from these individuals to the peoples they conquered" (81). Through literary maneuvering, the origin of

the British Empire, in Macaulay's imperial allegory, was shifted away from the political intrigues and power struggles of the period and situated squarely in the natural "purity" of the English character.

From the discussions above, it is apparent that Macaulay did not simply intend to write an aesthetic history to entertain the English public; rather, he presented an imaginary re-creation of imperial origins in the guise of history. In this discursive reconstruction of the early empire, Macaulay introduced a mythical continuity to an otherwise discontinuous historical experience of imperialism. As Michel Foucault has always reminded us, the historical "myth" of a continuous linear time became, particularly in the nineteenth century, one of the modalities through which to show how the European nations "came from far back in time" and had managed to maintain "their unity through various revolutions" (423). By transforming the "conquest of India" into a narrative of the incessant progress of the "English ideals," Macaulay cloaked the multiple discontinuities within the eighteenth-century experience of the empire. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, the "conquest of India" was a far more complex and paradoxical event than the mere juxtaposition of the monolithic constructions of "Britain" and "India" in Macaulay's recollections. The idea of an English nation, at best, was a work in progress in the eighteenth-century. Similarly, India had not come into existence as a national entity but was still "Indostan," corresponding conceptually with the domain of the Mughal Empire. By presenting the early colonial

encounters as a clash of two fully-formed national identities, Macaulay also overshadowed the fact that the eighteenth-century English public, as a result of the repeated legal prosecution of its officers, did not perceive the East India Company's territorial ambitions as a "natural" extension of the English nation. Unlike his retrospective construction, the origin of the British Empire was an ambivalent moment: marked by a sense of triumph, but also marred by many anxieties over the transformation of traders into sovereigns. Overlooking these integral aspects of the colonial experience, Macaulay used history to institute rigid binaries between Indian and English culture, leaving no space for reconciliation or overlaps in the history of colonial encounters. His writings, as Catherine Hall succinctly describes it, were profoundly influential and paradigmatic "in sharply distinguishing between the nation – a place that could be at home with its history, and the Empire – a place for the peoples without history." To this end, the act of writing history became a crucial site for constructing "a 'we' and a 'them', those who were included in the modern world and those who were consigned to the 'waiting room of history'" (32).

Before concluding this chapter, it is also important to turn to the historical context of Macaulay's essay to understand his urgent need to introduce an architectonics of forgetting into the historical narrative of the empire. Written in 1840, Macaulay's essay on Clive was published exactly five years after his famous *Minute on Indian Education*. Considered to be one of the foremost

documents of cultural imperialism, this document is best remembered for Macaulay's disparaging commentary on Eastern cultures, which functioned to facilitate the introduction of the English language in the Indian administrative system.[257] Because of its notorious statements about the inferiority of Oriental learning, the Minute is seen as a foundational text in making English the medium of modern learning and constructing Western ideas as a model for the education of the future generations in India.[258] Considering the timing of these two writings, it is important to investigate the possible connections between Macaulay's intervention in India's future education and his reconstruction of its colonial past. Seen from the perspective of his passionate defense of the English language in 1835, the essay on Clive presents itself almost as an extension or a sequel to the Minute. We come across similar cultural dichotomies that push the East into an archaic and anarchic past, making the English empire the harbinger of a modern and civilized world. Seen from the perspective of the Minute, Clive's biography presented Macaulay with an excellent opportunity to safeguard his position against the Orientalists about the absolute redundancy of the Indian forms of

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[257] The text of Macaulay's Minute can be found in many anthologies, including *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 374-88.

[258] See Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*.

knowledge in colonial administration.[259] By concentrating on Clive's personal biography as opposed to his administrative policies, Macaulay, again, suppressed the fact that the Company mostly interfered in the power hierarchies of Bengal, leaving the Mughal administrative structure more or less intact in the early years.[260] Regarding Clive's life in India, Macaulay stated, "it is remarkable that, long as he resided in India, intimately acquainted as he was with Indian politics and with the Indian character, and adored as he was by his Indian soldiery, he never learned to express himself with facility in any Indian language" (515). With such statements in his essay on Clive, Macaulay linked his own vision for English with the very origin of the British rule of India. From Macaulay's perspective, if the original hero of the empire could colonize Bengal without any knowledge of its languages, there was no reason to question the role of English in securing the future of the empire in India. By emphasizing Clive's lack of familiarity with Indian languages, he was highlighting the ideological underpinnings of the

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[259] Macaulay's Minute was a crucial text in the long-drawn ideological warfare between the Anglicist and Orientalist schools of thought regarding the medium for education in India. After Macaulay's defense of the Anglicist position in the Minute, Governor General William Bentinck established a permanent position for the use of English language in Indian institutions, especially those of higher education.

[260] During his years in India, Clive did very little to change the existing forms of governance in Bengal. He was largely preoccupied with reforming the trade and commerce structure by cracking down on the private trading in the province. His restructuring of the commercial networks, combined with the lack of administrative initiatives, was largely responsible for the Bengal famine. For a detailed historical account of this cause and effect relationship, see P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes*, 129 -157.

Minute, namely that the British empire, from its very onset, was ready to colonize on its own terms instead of adapting or modulating its functioning to the requirements of the colonized. It was, in fact, an error on the part of the early administrators to fashion its colonial policy according to the native forms of knowledge and means of governance.

While Macaulay's essay on Clive exhibits the tendency to create continuities where they did not historically exist, it also performed the equally important function of unhinging colonial history from some crucial aspects of certain eighteenth-century colonial encounters. From the point of view of Macaulay's objectives, the most disturbing aspect in the early years of the empire was unquestionably the mimetic practices of the Company's early administration. As I have already discussed in the second chapter, the Company officers, for reasons of private interests and political expediency, went to great lengths to represent themselves as the protectors of the Mughal constitutionality.[261] Furthermore, it was almost commonplace for the Company's employees to covet Indian lifestyle and manners, a practice that made the colonized an equal, if not a

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[261] During his years in Bengal, Clive had appropriated the Persian title ascribed to the loyalists of the Mughal emperor. Even more interestingly, he had also taken on a Persian name, making his English identity indistinguishable from that of a Muslim Nawab in the exchange of the *perwannahs* (warrants) and the *sunnuds* (charters) between the Company and the Mughal administration. Clive's name appears in the following form in these documents: *Zubdut ul Muluck* Nasser-ul-Dowla, *Sabut Jung Bahadur* Clive.

superior, to the English in the cultural sphere.[262] In contrast to these practices, Macaulay was alternatively concerned with introducing the figure of the "brown sahib" in the colonial encounter—an English-educated Indian subject of the Crown who would perennially emulate the British and, in this process, fulfill the colonial desire of a "reformed and recognizable Other" (Bhabha 122). For the construction of a colonized subject who, to use Homi Bhabha's words, was "almost the same, but not quite" (122), it was imperative for Macaulay to remove all traces of the colonizer as a hybrid figure in imperial history so as to institute a strict binary opposition between the histories and cultures of the colonizer and the colonized. In order to cast India in the image of Britain and to anglicize its educational system, the empire had to be envisioned as a purely British enterprise without the contaminating influences of Indian traditions on its past history.

To achieve this end, Macaulay condemned the emulation of Indian culture as an anomaly in an otherwise purely English colonial enterprise. He constructed the display of "Eastern manners" as an aberration through his interpretation of the infamous eighteenth-century term, the "nabob." His sketch of the Company servant with Indian "habits" needs to be quoted at length here:

> The great events which had taken place in India had called into existence a new class of Englishmen, to whom their countrymen gave the name of

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[262] A detailed description of the lifestyle of the East India Company's employees can be found in William Darymple, "Assimilation and Transculturation in Eighteenth-Century India." This essay is a scholarly defense of his historical novel titled *The White Mughals*.

> Nabobs. These persons had generally sprung from families neither ancient nor opulent; they had generally been sent at an early age to the East; and they had there acquired large fortunes, which they had brought back to their native land…It was natural that, during their sojourn in Asia, they should have acquired some tastes and habits surprising, if not disgusting, to persons who never had quitted Europe…Wherever they settled there was a kind of feud between them and the old nobility and gentry…The Nabobs soon became a most unpopular class of men…That they had sprung from obscurity; that they had acquired great wealth; that they spent it extravagantly; that they raised the price of everything in their neighborhood…these were things which excited, both in the class from which they had sprung and in the class into which they attempted to force themselves, the bitter aversion which is the effect of mingled envy and contempt. ("Clive" 537-38)

With this description of the English nabob, Macaulay performed some crucial ideological functions. He reinforced the perception that the nabob was a disturbing force in English society; he was someone who dismantled the long tradition of class hierarchies in the eighteenth-century Britain. By concentrating on the "new wealth" of the returning Company servant, he divorced the nabob from the empire-building process and immersed the figure in local class anxieties

and economic concerns.[263] In Macaulay's sketch, the nabobs, despite their great wealth, were men of questionable birth and reputation. Easily overwhelmed by Eastern ways of life, they exhibited these manners in polite society on their return and, as a consequence, were turned into objects of contempt and ridicule in Britain.[264] From Macaulay's perspective, only the "inferior" classes of English society were lured by the ostentatious façade of the Eastern cultures, but such an infatuation led to their marginalization by the "respectable" classes back home. This sketch of social rejection was meant to be a warning for the future employees of the Company who dared to appreciate any aspect of Indian culture.

Macaulay's construction of the nabob as an internal menace removed the strong political sub-text of the term in the eighteenth century. As was discussed in

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[263] Such anxieties over the wealth of the Company's servants formed an integral part of the overall cultural response to the rise of the middle class in the eighteenth century. Some insightful studies in this regard are James Raven, *Judging New Wealth*; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy*; Penelope J. Corfield, *Power and the professions in Britain*; and Dror Wahrman, *Imagining the Middle Class*.

[264] Though objects of both envy and ridicule in many eighteenth-century cultural productions, the Nabobs and the female members of their families—termed as the "Nabobinas" or "Nabobesses" in the literature of the period—received much more favorable reactions for their "Indian manners" by the British public. Their exhibition of "eastern" luxuries and grandeur in the form of materially visible objects of desire—jewelry, fabrics, foods—were coveted by the larger British society, making Indian products like tea and cotton much desired commodities in the emerging culture of mass consumerism in Britain. For a detailed examination of the relationship between the empire and the practice of emulating luxury, see Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East*; John Styles and Amanda Vickery (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America 1700-1830*; and Tillman W. Nechtman, "Nabobinas: Luxury, Gender, and the Sexual Politics of British Imperialism in India in the Late Eighteenth Century."

the previous chapters, the distaste of the English public towards Company servants was not only a result of the disturbing presence of their wealth in the domestic sphere, but also because of their exploitative policies in India. By shifting the focus from the nabob's life in India to his years of retirement in Britain, Macaulay transformed the initial public anxieties about the moral legitimacy of the empire into an apolitical commentary on the private-everyday life of the eighteenth-century English society.[265] He conveniently suppressed the moral dimension of the public outrage, replacing a vigilant political response to the Company's malpractices with a narrative informed by class prejudices. Imperialist history, as we can envisage from Macaulay's sketch of the nabob, was not only engaged in creating derogatory stereotypes of the colonized subject and its culture. In order to control any alternate interpretations of the origin of the English empire in the archive, Macaulay made sure that an equally powerful and disparaging image of the colonizer was always available for the English public. This discursive maneuver was not only crucial in the suppression of the cultural and political hybridity of the early empire, but it also disguised the fact that the colonial desire to anglicize India remained an unfinished project in practice and,

[265] Macaulay's construction of the nabob figure informed some early cultural histories of the British who had resided in India. One of the most canonical studies in this regard is James M. Holzman, *The Nabobs in England: A Study of the Returned Anglo-Indian*.

even at the best of times, gained partial success in the structures of administration.[266]

The Myth of a British India: The Limitations of the Policy of Anglicizing Indian Education

After writing relatively short pieces on the British empire in India in 1840-41, Thomas Macaulay spent rest of his life putting together his magnum opus which got published as the *History of England* in five volumes over the span of thirteen years.[267] Very much like his essays, the history of England was "a story of progress that enabled his readers to feel 'at home' with their society" (Hall 33). However this story, though resplendent with adventure, drama, and excitement, unfolded without hyperbolic descriptions of the glories of the empire. As Catherine Hall states in her analysis of *History of England*, Macaulay's "island story" greatly influenced British common sense and historiography by creating a split between domestic and colonial history which effectively "banished the Empire to the margins" (32). This discursive maneuver raises the following pertinent question: why did Macaulay, after successfully claiming the superiority of the British nation in his Minute and his reconstruction of the early empire, feel

[266] For instance, see Christopher A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*. Bayly argues that the British built their political intelligence in North India by exploiting existing networks and channels of social information through Indian running spies, newswriters and knowledgeable native secretaries in their administration.

[267] The first two volumes were published in 1848, the next two in 1855, and the final volume was published posthumously in 1861.

the need to create an insular history for the "island race"? Macaulay had to write this history of isolation for the British Isles without mentioning its extending empire in order to assure his readers that "England was simply the best place to be" (Hall 35). This story had to be written to hide the fact that the British empire could claim its "Britishness" only in name and not in practice beyond the shores of England. Though Macaulay confidently dismissed native culture in the Minute after his visit to India, the actual experience of the empire must have made him realize that British rule was built on a system which was only nominally English and it depended on native agency to run everything from bureaucracy to military in India.

This realization is also palpable in his essay on Clive because he carefully introduced the trope of metalepsis in this history of the early empire in order to transform the effects of eighteenth-century events into the very causes for the expansion of the British rule in India. In the process of abating public anxieties in Britain regarding mercantile imperialism, the official chroniclers of the empire in the eighteenth century presented the Company as the preserver of Mughal rule, upholding the original constitution of the Mughal forms of governance. They contrasted the insubordination of the local Nawabs with the English officers' regard for and compliance with the Mughal administrative system. In these historical treatises, such contrasts often justified the Company's interference in the political life of a province like Bengal. Rather than recognizing that a

weakened Mughal polity was also a product of the intrusive policies of the Company, Macaulay projected the whole political culture of precolonial India as the reason for the inception of British rule in India. By contrasting a "corrupt" and "immoral" Mughal state with a "valiant" and "honest" Company, he placed the history of India on a chronological path where a "decadent" phase of a weak Mughal rule was replaced by a period of "enlightenment" in the shape of a strong English administration. This kind of rhetoric, no doubt, inaugurated an age of constructing the narrative conquest of India in history-writing, but it also masked the beginning of the empire's end in the actual unfolding of history.

Even at the height of its power, the British empire could not claim complete sovereignty and required indigenous forms of knowledge to govern India. The most relevant example in this case is the chequered destiny of Macaulay's own proposal of reforms in the educational system. A long-drawn ideological warfare had raged between the Anglicist and Orientalist schools of thought regarding the linguistic medium for the education of the Indian subjects of the crown. While the Anglicists—Macaulay himself being one of its most vocal proponents—presented a case for the promotion of English in the colonies, the Orientalists defended instruction in classical languages like Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic. Caught between these opposing forces, educational policy charted an inconsistent course during the first half of the nineteenth century because of the changing structure of the empire in India. Once colonialism entered the phase of

consolidation rather than expansion of British rule with the advent of nineteenth century, there was little need for the tradition of specialized knowledge of Indian knowledge systems initiated by an administrator-scholar like William Jones in the late eighteenth century.[268] The requirement of the day was a broad-based and efficient bureaucracy, equipped with everyday knowledge of socio-economic transactions, which could also stay attuned to local channels of social interaction and communication. As Christopher Bayly points out in *Empire and Information*, the colonial State's surveillance agencies, overlapping and intersecting with local communication networks, were a critical determinant of colonial success in transforming initial trade activities into profitable governance (1). To this end,

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[268] Despite his success as a scholar and promoter of Persian language (the administrative language of the Mughal empire), it was Jones' discovery of Sanskrit for the benefit of European scholarship that earned his indisputable reputation in the history of linguistics for the next two centuries. Frequently referred to as the "father of modern linguistics," Jones had arrived in Calcutta in 1783 and founded the Asiatic Society by 1784. As Jones described in a letter, the idea for a learned society came to him during his voyage to India. Describing his feelings as the ship sailed into the Indian Ocean, he wrote

> It gave me inexpressible pleasure to find myself in the midst of so noble an amphitheatre, almost encircled by the vast regions of *Asia*, which has ever been esteemed the nurse of sciences, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the productions of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion and government, in the laws, manners, customs, and languages, as well as in the features and complexions, of men. (qtd. in Aarsleff 122)

Jones saw the Asiatic society as an institution which, much like the Royal society in England, would unify this diversity of Asia into a unitary discourse. Once totalized, this textual knowledge of Asia could serve the purpose of creating an archive for all future references by colonial administrators in matters of governance. The Asiatic Society lived up to its expectations by institutionalizing oriental scholarship and soon became a major center for philology with special interest in classical languages and Indian antiquity.

government policy tilted towards the Anglicization of natives rather than the "Orientalization" of British officers. By the time Thomas Macaulay came on the scene with his infamous minute on education in 1835, it was clear to the government that administrating India not only required more native participation in the lower echelons of the expanding bureaucracy. In order to maintain its control, it was crucial to recruit a large army of native clerical staff that could also perform the role of native intelligence agents. They would work as an interface between the ruler and the ruled, keeping the bureaucratic quarters well-informed about the social and political climate of the province. With the new requirements of governance, individual Orientalist scholars/ administrators, with their isolated scraps of specialized knowledge, had little use for the government. In comparison, a loyal native informant, who had the edge over Orientalists by being enmeshed in local channels of communication, became a far more desirable commodity in local governance. All that was now required was to instruct these informants in English to ensure an unambiguous exchange of knowledge. Lord William Bentinck's acceptance of English as the medium of education in 1835 not only hoped to create an efficient bureaucracy, but also to introduce a new era in colonial surveillance and vigilance.[269] As a consequence, Orientalism was soon

[269] Lord William Bentinck is best known in colonial history for his reformist and modernizing projects influenced by the policy of utilitarianism in political governance. During the years of 1828-1831, Bentinck, as the Governor-General of India, sponsored several judicial changes and reforms. These reforms included the introduction of Indian judges in positions formerly held by Englishmen, increased status and pay for Indian

squashed as an inadequate policy for native education in Bengal, and Orientalists were reduced to a minority in the British administration in Bengal by the second-half of the nineteenth century.[270]

While Indian learning was losing popularity with the government in an older province like Bengal, it became a unique experiment in mass education and administrative policies in the newer provinces of the empire. Caught between the opposing forces of the Anglicist and Orientalist schools of thought, educational policy charted an inconsistent course during the nineteenth century, until practical initiatives by local administrations finally helped shape a compromise between these rival schools. As a newly acquired province (annexed in 1849), Punjab emerged as the new contact zone between British officials and the cultural life of the province, creating appropriate conditions for re-establishing Orientalism in

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judges, establishment of greater control over revenue and judicial officials by placing them under the supervision of divisional commissioners, removal of police supervision from the duties of the district judge and shifting from Persian to English as the Company's official language. As a supporter of the Anglicists, he also promoted western-style education for elite Indian men in order to create more educated Indians to serve British officialdom. All these reforms were part of his strategy to introduce an extensive range of cost-cutting measures in the functioning of the East India Company, which, by this time, had become a big source of discontent for the British government because it had become a loss-making enterprise.

[270] The Orientalist school of thought, despite falling out of favor with the British administration, laid the foundations of the modern discipline of linguistics through investigations in comparative philology, spearheaded largely by French and German scholars. As envisioned by Jones, the Asiatic Society became a major center for scholars interested in Indian languages and knowledge systems during the nineteenth century. For a brief history of the society, see Moni Bagchee, *The Asiatic Society*.

administration, education, and independent philological research.[271] In the North-Western province (later incorporated into United Provinces with Awadh), *Halkabandi* schools provided an exemplary system for vernacular education at the primary level. Initiated by James Thomason, the system of *Halkabandi* (encircling) comprised of a school in a cluster of villages in a village which enjoyed the most central position in terms of distance. Thomason improvised on the indigenous structure of rural schooling and formulated this concept of education.[272] *Halkabandi* schools imparted instruction in the vernacular, received government grants-in-aid, and were periodically inspected by inspectors from the North-Western Province Education Department. This experiment proved to be a huge success, and by 1854, there were 760 *Halkabandi* schools with

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[271] One such scholar/administrator was B. H. Baden-Powell who wrote extensive studies which demonstrated his command over several areas of Punjab culture and customs, especially its rural life and agricultural systems. Baden-Powell made judgments about the constitution of the North Indian Village, its supposed independence, self-sufficiency and crucially, its concepts of land sharing and property which he drew from his years of experience in Punjab *mofussil* (countryside). Baden-Powell's *Indian Village Community* became a paradigm defining work on rural India in the emerging field of Behavioral Sciences, which was followed by an equally important treatise in three volumes titled *The Land Revenue System and Land Tenures of British India*. Since its publication, no Act related to agricultural land and its tenancy in India has been formulated without the consultation of this magnum opus. Only recently, the canonical status of Baden-Powell's work has been challenged by Ronald Inden in *Imagining India*. Inden points out that while Baden-Powell was composing his discourses on Indian villages, he was simultaneously displacing a complex colonial polity with an "ancient" India—epitomized by the idyllic village community—that could be appropriated by colonialism as an external appendage of a "modern" Britain represented through the metropolis (132).

[272] For details on Thomason's educational schemes, see Henry Verner Hampton's *Biographical Studies in Modern Indian Education*, pp 187- 212.

approximately 17,000 students in the province. By becoming examples of the successful execution of colonial educational ideals through the medium of vernacular languages, these local experiments paved the way for future colonial policies.

In August 1854, the House of Commons unanimously applauded a speech delivered by Sir Charles Wood on a recent Despatch from the offices of the East India Company in London's Leadenhall Street.[273] As the president of the Board of Control for India, he had just finished his address to Lord Dalhousie describing the East India Company's plans for the further organization and diffusion of modern education in India. Following the favorable appraisal of Wood's address, the document in question became popular in the history of colonial education as *Wood's Education Despatch*.[274] Along with a comprehensive review of the Company's earlier policies and the present state of the education system, the educational Despatch of 1854 underlined the necessity of establishing more

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[273] Charles Wood was a liberal politician and a Member of Parliament from 1846-66.

[274] Though Wood's name has been prefixed by historians to the 'Despatch from the Court of Directors of the East India Company to the Governor General of India in Council (no. 49, dated 19 July 1854)', there is very little evidence regarding his involvement with the actual writing of this document. In his diary entry dated October 12 1854, Lord Dalhousie accuses Wood of stealing credit for the educational reforms from the Government of India and local administration. Since then, a number of significant names have been attached to this despatch (including that of John Stuart Mill) by both contemporaries of Wood and later historians alike. For a comprehensive overview of the controversies regarding the authorship of this despatch, see R. J. Moore, "The Composition of Wood's Educational Despatch."

institutions of higher education, government schools and creating Departments of Public Instruction in different provinces. Without undermining the importance of English for advanced education, it nevertheless proposed schemes for a liberal reconstruction of education. Amongst other schemes, it strongly promoted cohabitation of European knowledge with vernacular languages at all levels of education without conflict of interest. As almost a challenge to Macaulay's Whiggish idea of imperial progress and his vision regarding English language, the Despatch made the following proposal:

> It is neither our aim nor desire to substitute the English language for the vernacular dialects of the country. We have almost been most sensible of the importance of the use of the languages which alone are understood by the great mass of the population. These languages and not English have been put by us in the place of Persian in the administration of justice and in the intercourse between the officers of Government and the people. It is indispensable, therefore, that in a general system of education, the study of them should be assiduously attended to, and any acquaintance with improved European knowledge which is to be communicated to the great mass of people—whose circumstances prevent them from acquiring a high order of education, and who cannot be expected to overcome the

> difficulties of a foreign language—can only be conveyed to them through one or other of those vernacular languages.[275]

As this clause indicates, the Despatch envisaged a coordinated system of education for entire India. It declared that the aim of the government's policy was to promote a liberal education in art, science, philosophy, and literature. For higher education, the chief medium of instruction was to be English, but the importance of vernacular languages and Indian forms of knowledge was not undermined. Along with proposing the establishment of European-style universities as institutions of higher education, the Despatch underlined the need for setting up several vernacular primary schools in villages as the first stage of learning. It further proposed Anglo-Vernacular high schools and an affiliated college at the district level. The Despatch also recommended a system of grants in aid to encourage and foster private initiatives on the part of native subjects in the field of education.[276]

The unique blend of "Western" knowledge and "Eastern" languages in *Wood's Education Despatch* met with great success in colonial circles. At the

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[275] B. D. Bhatt, and J. C. Aggarwal (eds.), *Educational Documents in India*, 58.

[276] One of the first major institutions to emerge out of private initiative was the Muhammedan Anglo-Oriental College (known as the Aligarh Muslim University today) founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in 1875. This college became the seat of the "Aligarh movement" started by Syed Ahmed to perpetuate reformist ideas amongst Indian Muslims. For a history of the institution and the movement, see David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India*.

time of its release, the reasons behind the positive reception of this Despatch by the House of Commons and the local administration in India were rather different. In England, this success can be largely attributed to the reformist overture of the Despatch, which was very much in line with the liberal and utilitarian spirit upheld by the English Government through most of the nineteenth century.[277] As a reflection of this spirit, the educational objectives of this Despatch gave a more humane and benevolent face to colonial domination and provided the justification for imperial expansion at home. Carefully formulated sentences shifted emphasis from commercial profit and administrative expediency to the importance of disseminating “practical knowledge” for the prime purpose of “moral and material progress” of the colonies. While such demonstrations of British liberal ideals were the stock and trade of all new policies of the Company after its humiliating trials during the eighteenth century, they did little to make England the vanguard of the civilizing process envisioned by historians like Macaulay. They largely remained a discursive façade for disguising the disjunctions between the overarching ideology of Anglicization and the actual practices within the empire. On the contrary, it was the pragmatism of provincial governments in implementing imperial policies—as in the case of colonial education—that ensured the expansion and preservation of British rule for almost another century in India.

[277] For a detailed analysis of the effects of Utilitarian thought on the colonial governance in India, see Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*.

Unlike earlier educational policies, Wood's Despatch received a much warmer welcome by the local administrations in new provinces. Despite its reformist overture, the proposals of Wood's Despatch were no exception when it came to expanding the sphere of colonial authority. They formed part of a practical answer to the pressing need for the recruitment of a larger number of Indian employees for the administrative machinery of a growing empire which could not wait until India was entirely Anglicized. For the first time, the directives of an educational policy from London addressed real obstacles faced by local institutions in putting Metropolitan educational ideals into practice. In the history of colonial education, the significance of Wood's Despatch far exceeds that of Macaulay's Minute in terms of the practical feasibility of a policy. Despite a powerful rhetoric against Oriental literature and eulogies to the English language, Macaulay's Minute was quite ineffectual in providing a successful model for mass education in India. The "downward filtration model,"[278] suggested by him for educating the masses turned out to be a complete failure in the newly-created provinces of the empire, such as Punjab and the United Provinces in the nineteenth century, because of the sheer shortage of infrastructural support to create a "class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in

[278] Macaulay's policy was to give 'good' i.e. European knowledge through the medium of English to a chosen few natives who would take upon themselves the task of educating the masses in the vernaculars.

opinions, in morals, and in intellect."[279] In contrast, Wood's Despatch became the "magna carta" of modern Indian education for the larger part of colonial history.[280] Before all the recommendations of the Despatch could be implemented, the revolt of 1857 broke out and education under the East India Company came to an end. Nevertheless, the significance of the Despatch outlived Company rule and the directions of the Despatch continued to be followed in broad outline until the appointment of the Indian Universities Commission by Lord Curzon in 1902. Soon after the receipt of the Despatch, the Government of India put its directives into action and Departments of Public Instruction were constituted in 1855-56 in every province. By 1857, the preliminary groundwork for organizing universities at Calcutta, Madras and Bombay was completed. In the period between 1854 and 1902, five major universities at Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Allahabad and Lahore were established using suggestions of this Despatch as the model for their organization.

The advent of the twentieth-century saw far greater literacy in North India, particularly in vernaculars like Urdu and Hindi, as a direct result of the educational directives emanating from *Wood's Education Despatch* of 1854.

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[279] "Thomas Macaulay: Minute on Indian Education," *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, 375.

[280] For a detailed comparative analysis of the impact of Macaulay's Minute and Wood's Despatch on Indian educational system, see Syed Nurullah and J.P. Naik, *History of Education in India, 1800-1961*.

Though isolated initiatives had started taking place during the early nineteenth century, a serious scheme for making vernaculars the medium of mass education was implemented as a result of this Despatch. The execution of its proposals ensured a greater immediacy between indigenous public life and local authorities in the decades following the rebellion of 1857.[281] In step with educational initiatives came a rise in vernacular presses to meet the demands of an increasingly literate population.[282] As local administrators practiced more flexibility and solicited greater Indian participation in carrying out the directives of this Despatch, the late-nineteenth century became a period of greater cooperation between the Indian populace and colonial institutions in the formation of a vernacular public sphere.[283] Often ignored in current scholarship on the rise of Indian nationalism, the Despatch inaugurated an era of education which placed

[281] After the rebellion, colonial administration practiced an appeasement policy of promoting Indian languages and literatures in North India and, in this process, instituted a rigid binary between languages like Hindi and Urdu by aligning them with separate religions identities of Hindus and Muslims respectively. Such policies are explored in detail by Christopher King in *One Language, Two Scripts.*

[282] For a detailed historical analysis of the rise in publications and the formation of a vernacular public sphere, see Margarita Barns, *The Indian Press; a History of the Growth of Public Opinion in India*.

[283] For instance, the following initiatives were taken by the provincial government of Punjab to strengthen Urdu as a public language: first, adoption of Urdu as the medium of instruction in both primary and higher education; second, the establishment of a book depot under the Department of Education for Urdu publications; third; the formation of a vernacular society called *Anjuman-e Punjab* as an interface between the government and the people; and finally, the promotion of a new school of Urdu literature under official patronage which emphasized the reform of Muslim society.

the demand for self-governance right at the centre-stage of nationalist politics by the end of the nineteenth century. A definite tendency towards the integration of Indian vernaculars into the colonial education system; a marked skepticism about the English language as the appropriate medium in which to assuage a growing native desire for learning; and most significantly, the vision of Indian languages carrying the weight of Western liberal education; all these components of the Despatch laid the foundations of nationalist assertions in the vernaculars during the anti-colonial agitations and calls for India's independence in the late nineteenth century. In this context, the proliferation of printing presses and the organized dissemination of liberal education in Indian vernaculars facilitated the penetration of Enlightenment thought into the Indian episteme, and the ideas of vigilant citizenry and civil society—propounded by thinkers like Edmund Burke in the English public sphere—made their way into the relatively autonomous sphere of aesthetic activity in Indian vernaculars. However, this diffusion of Western ideals did not take place in the form of the "moment of departure" neatly extrapolated by Partha Chatterjee from late-nineteenth-century Indian literature. According to Chatterjee, Indian nationalist thought can be divided into three moments (departure, manoeuvre, arrival) where the "*moment of departure* lies in the encounter of a nationalist consciousness with the framework of knowledge created by post-Enlightenment rationalist thought. It produces the awareness—and acceptance—of an essential cultural difference between East and West"

(*Nationalist Thought* 50). Somewhat accepting monolithic demarcations like "East" and "West" in imperialist historiography himself, Chatterjee sees literature as the space where Indian nationalist thought asserted its superiority over the "materiality" of the West through the "spiritual" aspects of its culture. Without disagreeing with Partha Chatterjee's understanding of literary writing as the forerunner of anticolonial nationalist struggle, I end this thesis with a short narrative to illustrate how these tidy theoretical delineations between colonialist/nationalist discourses, British/Indian public spheres, colonial/postcolonial India become untenable once they are placed outside the world of paper and ink in the actual convulsions of history.

Epilogue

When a *kar sevak* (religious volunteer) by the name of Shive Prasad climbed on the dome of Babri Masjid in late-twentieth-century India, I am assuming that he had not read the writings of Jonathan Zephaniah Holwell, Robert Clive, Edmund Burke or Thomas Babington Macaulay. On December 6, 1992 a crowd of more than a hundred and fifty thousand volunteers like Shive Prasad gathered in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, to attend a religious ceremony organized by the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), a radical right-wing political party in India. This ceremony was performed to lay the foundation of a temple for Lord Rama (a major Hindu deity) and to repossess an area known as the *Rama Janmabhoomi* (the birthplace of Rama). This gathering was the culmination of a *rath yatra* (chariot ride) inaugurated by the leader of BJP, L. K. Advani, two years earlier which started from Somnath in Gujarat and made its way to Ayodhya after covering large parts of Central and North India. Advani had initiated this *rath yatra* with the objective of awakening the Hindu majority to its past and the injustices done to their community by what he described as the "despotism" of Muslims during their rule in India. Throughout his ride atop a Toyota minibus decorated like a chariot, Advani gave highly provocative speeches about how the first Mughal emperor of India, Babur, seized an ancient temple from the local Hindu priests and built a mosque in its place. This act, in Advani's speeches, was a dark spot on India's history and the mosque—known as the Babri Masjid—was

a constant reminder of the centuries of oppression of the Hindus by Muslims. His journey was a symbolic—and almost a parodic—act of Hindu masculinity designed to reclaim a piece of land as the birthplace of a mythological Hindu god from a Muslim ruler dead for centuries in order to start the construction of a temple at the sacred site. What followed immediately after the ceremony was neither humorous nor metaphorical because it changed the course of Indian politics forever.

Immediately after the ceremony and the speeches of major right-wing leaders, thousands of *kar sevaks*, Shive Prasad amongst them, charged towards the sixteenth-century mosque and razed it to the ground. This act started a series of cataclysmic events that shook India for the next decade and still continues to threaten the secular constitution of the Indian nation-state.[284] Soon after the nation-wide telecast of the demolition, communal riots broke out in several parts of the country, in which Hindus and Muslims attacked one another, burning and looting homes, shops and places of worship. The demolition and the deaths in the ensuing riots continued to add fuel to other incidents of communal violence like the 1993 Mumbai bombings and the 2002 Godhra riots. All this became possible

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[284] The political climate in India became tense again when the 2009 report of the Liberhan Commission inquiring into the events leading up to the demolition blamed 68 people for the destruction of the mosque. These were mostly leaders from the BJP and a few bureaucrats. Among those named in the report were A. B. Vajpayee, the former BJP prime minister of India, and L. K. Advani, the then opposition leader in the Indian parliament.

because a certain kind of history writing had convinced right-wing activists that edifices like the Babri Masjid were symbolic reminders of India's humiliation at the hands of foreign Muslim invaders who had defiled their motherland and their religion and that it was time to reconstruct India through the tenets of *Hindutva* ideology in order to vindicate a history of the emasculation of the Hindu race, the "true" inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent, at the hands of the Muslims, the "outsiders" who should either exist on the margins or have no place at all in a Hindu nation. The basic principles of *Hindutva*, the ideology of extremist Hindu nationalism played out in the full view of India's public and its political leaders during the demolition were scripted by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in the early twentieth century in the form of histories of India's glorious past.[285] Savarkar's mode of history writing, in no small part, owed its reconstructions of Hindu-Muslim relations to a tradition of imperialist historiography that presented the British rule in India as an act of saving the Hindu population from their tyrannical Muslim rulers, a history of good and evil known by heart to each and every young man who had chosen to be a *kar sevak* and was present in Ayodhya on the fateful day of December 6. What these young *kar sevaks* perhaps didn't know while standing on the dome of the Masjid and shouting the slogan of *Vande Mataram* (hail motherland) were significant parts of this history.

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[285] These include *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History* and *Hindu Rashtra Darshan* (Philosophy of Hindu Nation).

Bankim Chandra Chatterji, a Bengali littérateur,[286] had composed the hymn, *Vande Mataram*,[287] for his 1882 novel, *Anandamath* (The Abbey of Bliss). Almost a century before it became a slogan for Hindu right-wing political organizations demanding the recognition of the Indian state as a Hindu nation, *Vande Mataram* was a popular song of the emergent freedom movement against the British in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and was adopted as the national song soon after India's independence from colonial rule in 1947. Despite the popularity of this hymn as an anticolonial slogan during the nationalist struggle, the politics of the novel, *Anandamath*, is not entirely anti-British and is much closer to the *Hindutva* ideology of the *kar sevaks*. Though

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[286] Bankim Chandra is widely recognized as a key figure in literary renaissance of Bengal as well as a pioneer of nationalist literature in India. For further details of his life and literary career, see Amiya P. Sen, *Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay: an Intellectual Biography*.

[287] A canonical translation of the hymn is as follows:

I bow to thee, Mother,
richly-watered, richly-fruited,
cool with the winds of the south,
dark with the crops of the harvests,
the Mother!

Her nights rejoicing
in the glory of the moonlight,
her lands clothed beautifully
with her trees in flowering bloom,
sweet of laughter,
sweet of speech,
The Mother,
giver of boons, giver of bliss! (Aurobindo Ghose, *Karmayogin*, 20 November 1909)

canonized as one of the early voices of anticolonial nationalism, Bankim—as another example of the chequered history of the British empire and Indian nationalist thought—remained in the service of the British administration for the larger part of his life and was made a Companion, Order of the British Empire in 1894, after his retirement from the post of Deputy Magistrate in 1891. As one of the first two graduates of the University of Calcutta,[288] he received his share of education in English literature and Indian history. Using all the skills that the *Wood's Education Despatch* had envisioned for young Indians like him, Bankim wrote a number of romantic novels in Bengali before embarking on *Anandamath*, a historical novel loosely based on the Bengal famine of 1770 and the Sannyasi Rebellion. Also known as the Fakir-Sannyasi Rebellion, this movement refers to the activities of both Hindu and Muslim ascetics which took place in the districts of Murshidabad and Jalpaiguri after the depopulation of the province of Bengal following the famine of 1770. Though the historical accuracy of the events involving ascetics is highly debatable, Bankim Chandra presented this rebellion as an early war for India's independence in *Anandamath*.[289] Interestingly, he removed the presence of Muslim ascetics from his narrative and presented the

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[288] Following the proposal of Wood's Despatch, the University of Calcutta was established in 1857 during the administration of Lord Canning.

[289] Some recent readings of this rebellion are David N. Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History" and A. N. Chandra, *The Sannyasi Rebellion*.

agitation as a purely Hindu venture against foreign rule. Using the construction of Islamic rule as a period of decadence in imperialist historiography, the novel calls for the rise of Hindu nationalism to uproot the "despotic" Muslim rulers in Bengal and puts forth as a provisional substitute the East India Company till the Hindus are fit for taking over the reigns of governance.[290]

In order to present the Sannyasi Rebellion as a moment of the awakening of Hindus against "foreign" domination, Bankim consciously fashioned *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) in the image of Durga,[291] a popular Hindu goddess in Bengal and devoted the hymn *Vande Mataram* to her. Because imperialist writers like Macaulay—embarrassed at their own history of controversies and scandals—constructed the beginning of the British empire as the end of the "dark age" of Islamic rule and nationalist writers like Savarkar and Bankim accepted such constructions in their historical and literary writings unequivocally, the *kar sevaks* shouting *Vande Mataram* in Ayodhya a century later did not know that someone

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[290] Bankim was one of the leading figures of the Bengal Renaissance during the late nineteenth century and his writings reflected a general trend in nationalist literature of the period which conflated India's history with a Hindu past. According to Partha Chatterjee, the use of Hindu nationalism as a synonym of Indian nationalism became a part of the English-educated Hindu middle-class consciousness in nineteenth-century Bengal and "In their literary and dramatic productions as well as in their schools and colleges, this narrative of national history went virtually unchallenged until the early decades of the twentieth century" (*Nation and its Fragments* 110).

[291] For an analysis of the nationalist desire to imagine the nation through the twin image of the Indian woman and the Hindu goddess, see Sangeeta Ray, *En-gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* and Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism.*

in a land far far away had already imagined their nation as a woman resplendent with beauty and riches who needed to be protected from foreign plunderers. They were unaware that an Englishman in eighteenth-century London had fought for decades to protect her, not from Islamic invaders, but from the greed of his fellow countrymen, or that this person sang the praises of Mughal constitutionality in the English Parliament, saw the Muslims as much as a part of India as the Hindus, and considered the British traders to be their common enemy. And little did they realize that when Rabindranath Tagore sang *Vande Mataram* at the 1896 Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in defiance of a ban on its recital in public forums by the British government, it carried the echo of the following words that Edmund Burke spoke out of sarcasm in the House of Commons against the silence of the Parliament in the affairs of the East India Company and the catastrophic famine in Bengal:

> Sir, in the year 1767, administration discovered that the East India Company were guardians to a very handsome and rich lady in Hindostan. Accordingly, they sat parliament in motion: and parliament, (whether from love to her person or fortune, is, I believe, no problem) directly became a suitor, and took the lady into its tender, fond, grasping arms, pretending all the while that it meant nothing but what was fair and honourable; that no rape or violence was intended; that its sole aim was to rescue her fortune

> out of the pilfering hands of a set of rapacious stewards, who had let her estate run to waste, and had committed various depredations.[292]

Macaulay's history is the history of the British empire, Savarkar's of a nationalist India. But these curious overlaps reveal that they were both unknowingly chronicling two stories with the same denouement.

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[292] *The Speeches of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, in the House of Commons, and in Westminster Hall*, Vol. 1, 148.

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Zunshine, Lisa. "Eighteenth-Century Print Culture and the 'Truth' of Fictional Narrative," *Philosophy and Literature* 25.2 (2001): 215-232. Print.

Curriculum Vitae (Selected Portion): NIDA SAJID

Education

2011: Ph.D. Comparative Literature
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
University of Western Ontario, Canada

2004: M. Phil. Linguistics and English
Centre of Linguistics and English; School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

2002: M.A. Linguistics
Centre of Linguistics and English; School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

1999: B.A. with Honours. Spanish Language and Literature
Center for Spanish Studies; School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Academic Employment

July 2008 – Present: Lecturer
Primary Appointment: Department of Humanities
Cross-Appointment: Global Asia Studies
University of Toronto Scarborough, Canada

Undergraduate Course Offerings
LGGA71H3F LEC01 Introductory Hindi II (Winter 2011)
LGGB71H3F LEC01 Hindi II for Students with Prior Background (Winter 2011)
LGGA70H3F LEC01 Introductory Hindi I (Fall 2010)
LGGB70H3F LEC01 Hindi I for Students with Prior Background (Fall 2010)
LGGA71H3F LEC01 Introductory Hindi II (Winter 2010)
LGGB71H3F LEC01 Hindi II for Students with Prior Background (Winter 2010)
LGGC70H3F LEC01 Advanced Hindi: From Hindustan to Modern India (Summer 2010)
LGGA70H3F LEC01 Introductory Hindi I (Fall 2009)

LGGB70H3F LEC01 Hindi I for Students with Prior Background (Fall 2009)
LGGA70H3F LEC01 Introductory Hindi I (Summer 2009)
LGGA71H3S LEC01 Introductory Hindi II (Winter 2009)
LGGA70H3F LEC01 Introductory Hindi I (Fall 2008)
LGGA70H3F LEC30 Introductory Hindi I (Fall 2008)

2004 – 2008: Teaching Assistant
Department of Modern Languages and Literatures
University of Western Ontario, Canada

Courses
CLC023 **Sex and Culture** (2005-6, 2006-7, 2007-2008)
CLC020 **From Homer to Picasso: Western Culture through the Ages** (2004-5)

2003 – 2004: Course Instructor
Centre of Linguistics and English
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

Courses
LE748L **Linguistics, Language and Literature** (Fall 2003)
LE634E **Language, Culture and Cognition** (Winter 2004)

Graduate Research Profile

Comprehensive Exams:

1. Postcolonial Theory and Literatures [Areas of Concentration: Theory (Race, Gender, Nationalism, Globalization, Subaltern Studies); Literature (South Asian, Caribbean, African)]
2. Literary Theory and Continental Philosophy [Areas of Concentration: Structuralism and Poststructuralism, New Historicism, Marxism, Deconstruction, Cultural Studies]
3. Global Cinema and Popular Culture [Area of Concentration: South Asia]

Publications

"Revisiting the Woman's Question on the Nation-Stages: New Directions in Research on Indian Theatre." *Feminist Review* (2006) **84,** 124–129.

Book Review

Review of *Gender, Religion, and Modern Hindi Drama* by Diana Dimitrova. *The Journal of Hindu Studies* (forthcoming 2011).

Invited Talks

"Makings of Hindi as a Public Language: Vernacular Philology and Pedagogy in Colonial India." *Centre of Indian Languages Symposium*, Jawaharlal Nehru University, October 2009.

Invited Workshops

"Poetic Transvestism: Rekhti Poetry and the Representations of the Feminine." *Trans-Forming Feminism Conference*. State University of New York, April 2006.

Conferences

"Shakespeare's Last Sigh: Bollywood's Appropriation of *Othello* and *Macbeth*." *Expanding Adaptations*. Université de Bretagne Sud, Lorient, France, June 2011.

"In 'Savage' Company: Edmund Burke's Construction of Sublime Terror and India." *American Comparative Literature Association*. Vancouver, British Columbia, March 2011.

"Vagrant Nationality: Looking Within and Beyond Nationalism in Indian Literature and Cinema." *Modern Languages Association Annual Convention*. Chicago, December 2007.

"Forgetful Utopia: Inventing National Community in Indian Cinema." *Society for Utopian Studies Annual Conference*. Toronto, October 2007.

"Re-visioning the Moor: Reading a Bollywood Adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*." *Popular Culture Association (PCA) National Conference*. Boston, April 2007.

"Living the Past: Everyday Spatial Practices and the City in Abdul Halim Sharar's *Guzishta Lucknow*." *Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (CACLALS) Annual Conference*. York University, Toronto, May 2006.

“Transvestic Verses/ Homely Voices: Rekhti Poetry and Domestic Discourse in Indian Nationalism.” *Seventh Annual Symposium on Gender and Women’s History*. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, March 2006.

“Reiterating the Image: Use of Language in Indian Advertising.” *Indian Aesthetics and Cultural Studies Conference*. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, July 2005.

“Dialogism and Code-mixing in Speech Patterns of Hindi.” *Association of Language Studies Conference*. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, August 2004.

Scholarships, Assistantships and Awards

2009 – 2010: Project Research Assistantship (CD $ 2500)

2008 – 2009: Project Research Assistantship (CD $ 2000)

2007 – 2008: Mary Routledge Fellowship (CD $ 1000)
Western Graduate Research Thesis Award (CD $ 2000)
Graduate Research Assistantship (CD $ 2500)

2006 – 2007: Mary Routledge Fellowship (CD $ 1000)
Western Graduate Research Thesis Award (CD $ 2000)
Graduate Research Assistantship (CD $ 2500)
Graduate Teaching Award (CD $ 1000)

2005 – 2008: Western Graduate Research Scholarship (CD $ 15,000 p.a.)

2004 – 2008: Graduate Teaching Assistantship (CD $ 10, 000 p.a.)

2004 – 2005: Special University Scholarship (CD $ 9,000)
International Graduate Student Scholarship (CD $ 6,000)