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## A People So Different from Themselves: British Attitudes Towards India and the Power Dynamics of the East India Company

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**ABSTRACT**

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Today, many characteristics of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century British Raj are well ingrained in the public consciousness, particularly Victorian Era Britons' general disdain for numerous aspects of the many cultures found on the Indian Subcontinent. Moreover, while many characteristics of the preceding East India Company's rule in India were no less exploitative of Indian peoples, evidence shows a much different relationship between British and Indian cultures during the East India Company's hegemony over India than those of the later Raj. Prior to the nineteenth century, many Britons, both those who traveled to India and those who did not, appeared to hold relatively positive views on the "advancement" or "level of civilization" possessed by Indian cultures. During that period, Indians still retained significant political and economic power within India. Thus, the British during Company rule did not hold a dominant enough position over India to be as outwardly dismissive and contemptuous of Indians as did the British during the Raj. Power, or the relative lack thereof, played a critical role in how Britons perceived Indians and interacted with them.

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# *Introduction & Historiography*

## *The Anglo-Indian Relationship and Early Modern British Society*

The title of this paper refers to a line from a speech given by British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, regarding the passage of the Indian Independence Act in 1947. Prime Minister Attlee attempted to console Britons over the loss of their empire's "crown jewel" by explaining that the British Raj would "stand in comparison with that of any other nation which has been charged with the ruling of a people so different from themselves."<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Attlee's sentiments reflected a widespread belief amongst Britons during the era of the British Raj (1858-1947) that Indians were entirely different and incompatible with British culture. Many Britons also felt overt racial superiority over Indians during that period. While many characteristics of the preceding East India Company's rule in India were no less exploitative of Indian peoples, evidence shows a much different relationship between British and Indian cultures during the East India Company's hegemony over India than those of the later Raj. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, during their interactions with Indians, many Britons appeared to withhold most negative feelings towards Indians they may have held in private.

However, that does not necessarily indicate that Britons prior to the mid-nineteenth century were without their prejudices. While the virulent scientific racism prominent in Britain and the rest of the Western World during the nineteenth century was not a factor for much of the East India Company's reign on the subcontinent, Britons in India during that period still expressed negative opinions about Indians as individuals and about aspects of Indian cultures in general. Additionally, some instances of Britons apparently accepting foreign customs were less

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<sup>1</sup> Hansard, accessed April 14, 2019, <http://bit.ly/2QzGUD8>.

outright egalitarian when analyzed beyond the surface level. Certainly, some of the acceptance, or even adoption, of Indian customs by employees of the East India Company occurred as a means to expedite trade with Indians, while other apparently egalitarian opinions recorded by Britons could be interpreted as rationalizing Indian customs in the context of British cultural norms.

Therefore, simply stating that the Britons of the Early Modern Period expressed relatively egalitarian views toward Indians and acted with more equanimity than did their descendants in the nineteenth century leaves much to be desired as an explanation for the differences between Company rule and the Raj. Indeed, such a comparison between the British Raj and the East India Company stands as a false equivalency because of the highly divergent power dynamics between Britain and India during the two periods. Prior to the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the Battle of Buxar in 1764, the East India Company wielded little direct power over India compared to the direct rule of most of the subcontinent by the Raj following the failure of the Indian Rebellion of 1857. British opinions regarding Indians no doubt changed due to the British Empire's subjugation and emasculation of India during the Raj. From their nineteenth century point of view, Britons had little incentive to look upon subjugated Indians favorably, whereas their ancestors in the previous two centuries interacted with independent Indian states. Simply put, the British during Company rule did not hold a dominant enough position over India to be as outwardly dismissive and contemptuous of Indians as did the British during the Raj. Power, or the relative lack thereof, played a critical role in how Britons perceived Indians and interacted with them.

Power can be a nebulous and complicated term, but this work employs a reasonably simple working definition of the term. Firstly, this work concerns itself with power dynamics in

the relationship between England/Great Britain/the United Kingdom and the various states and entities of the Indian subcontinent. This involves concepts such as economic, political, social, and military power. As seen in the primary sources utilized in this work, the English/British held little direct control over the politics of India until the latter-half of the eighteenth century. The Mughal Empire and its semi-autonomous regional governors held de facto and de jure control over the vast majority of India politically and economically. During this phase of the relationship, English/British merchants and diplomats could only influence for Indian rulers with promises of economic benefits.

Even after the Battle of Buxar solidified East India Company control of Bengal, local Indian elites still maintained significant political and economic power, therefore Indian traditions and social customs still played an important role in the Company's actions. The need to obtain the official grant of *diwani* (right of tax collection) from the Mughal Emperor displayed the importance the Company placed on maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of Indians, even as the Company's direct political power increased and they became the single most powerful military force in India. That need for legitimacy can also be gleaned from the emphasis of Company agents on learning Indian languages and customs, as well as their frequent intermarriages with Indian women. By the end of Company rule, even the power of local Indian elites and Indians within the Company's colonial administration eroded, which may have helped facilitate some of the controversies that alienated Indians and eventually led to the Rebellion of 1857.

Power dynamics also accounted for variance in the opinions of Britons on an individual level during East India Company rule. Thus, it is necessary to understand the demographics of the Britons who recorded their opinions on India and its people, as well as the conditions of Britain during this era. From the beginning of the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century,

Britain underwent substantial changes in regards to economics, commerce, and imperialism. The trade networks of British merchants and advantageous policies of the British parliament developed a capitalist economy that quickly developed into the first truly industrialized economy in the world. Goods from all across the world entered Britain for purchase by consumers and as raw materials for fledgling industries. The acquisition of these consumer and industrial goods brought Britons into contact with peoples all across the world, beginning in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. During that time, the subcontinent of India quickly developed into the most vital commercial interest of British merchants.

Those merchants carried countless tons of Indian products, most importantly spices and cotton, across the vast distance between India and their destination back in the British Isles. These products created profound effects on British society during this period. Historian Jan de Vries described it as the “Industrious Revolution,” which he defined as sweeping changes in work and consumer habits, in his book of the same name.<sup>2</sup> De Vries wrote that Britons at home began to forsake leisure time and produce more from their work in order to afford the comforts of these new consumer products brought in from abroad.<sup>3</sup> De Vries also argued that these changes helped precipitate the Industrial Revolution in Britain.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, contact with India and its commercial goods resulted in profound changes in the British Isles.

This begs the question of whether or not British people attributed any of the responsibility of those changes to their lives. E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* detailed numerous anxieties held by English workers in the late eighteenth and

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<sup>2</sup> Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 10.

<sup>4</sup> De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 7.

early nineteenth centuries regarding the changes in work habits and the emergence of industrial work.<sup>5</sup> Thompson wrote that many working-class Englishmen denounced the usurpation of traditional work habits by the rigid and exhausting conditions of factory work.<sup>6</sup> However, working class Britons apparently kept those negative opinions toward industrialization separate from their opinions regarding India and their nation's ever-growing presence on the subcontinent. Despite the direct correlation between imports from India and the growth of Britain's industrial economy seen in hindsight, the majority of British people during this period rarely thought of distant India in relation to their consumer products and raw industrial resources originating from there.

Nonetheless, members of other segments of British society during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries undoubtedly concerned themselves with events in India and their implications back home in Britain. Typically, these were individuals in the upper class who never traveled to India and were unnerved by returning merchants of the British East India Company who brought back aspects of Indian culture as well as Indian wealth—derisively named “Nabobs.”<sup>7</sup> And of course, the “Nabobs” themselves formed and recorded numerous opinions, both positive and negative, regarding India and Britain's involvement there. These myriad opinions concerned trade, warfare, religion, diplomacy, and morality among others. The disconnect between Britons who recorded opinions regarding India and those who did not typically fell upon class lines. Restated: typically, British people in possession of some degree of

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<sup>5</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 203.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Keirn & Norbert Schürer, eds., *British Encounter with India, 1750-1830: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2011), 6-7.



political or economic power travelled to India and recorded their opinions of the land and its people.

Those factors formed the rationale for the source materials chosen for this work. The main sources analyzed in the following chapters include the writings of the English diplomat Sir Thomas Roe, the East India Company governor William Hedges, the Scottish footman John MacDonald, and the British soldier and explorer Thomas Skinner. With the notable exception of John MacDonald, these men were English and wealthy. All of them appeared to be adherents of Anglicanism or other accepted Protestant faiths. Thus, even during this period in which Britain did not completely dominate India, these men held varying degrees of power within in their own society, which influenced their opinions regarding India and Indians.

John MacDonald, seemingly the most egalitarian of the sources used in this analysis, stands out demographically from the others. MacDonald, a Highlander Scot employed as a servant by various upper- and middle-class Britons throughout his life, lived most of his life as an outsider to the predominant culture wherever he resided and possessed almost no political or economic power. Thus, MacDonald as an individual had incentive to cooperate with, and seemingly accept, peoples that appeared quite different to him; just as Britain's less advantageous position over India prior to the Raj incentivized more powerful men like Roe and Hedges to be seemingly less negative about Indians than Britons during the Raj. Power mattered on an individual level as well as on a geopolitical level.

### *Historiography*

The British East India Company and British imperialism in India have proven popular subjects for historical analyses, particularly by historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. An examination of the last near-century's worth of historical research regarding the British East India Company reveals that this specific field of historical inquiry generally followed the broad historiographical trends of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Research conducted during and prior to the 1960s displayed strong Eurocentrism, focused on political and great man history, and generally follow the progressive mindset of Whig history. However, beginning in the 1960s historical research regarding the British East India Company began broadening its focus to include analysis of social history, the agency of non-Europeans, and non-Whig interpretations of history.

To understand the current state of historical inquiry regarding the British East India Company, older works on the subject, even those that are undoubtedly out of vogue by current standards, prove to be a useful starting point. Foster Rhea Dulles' *Eastward Ho! The First English Adventurers to the Orient* provides a prime example of such a work. The last three chapters of Dulles' book discussed the English diplomat Sir Thomas Roe (one of the primary sources of this work) and his diplomatic mission to the Mughal Empire from 1615 to 1618. *Eastward Ho!* displayed several characteristics of older historical research, many of which now come across as crude or even problematic.<sup>8</sup> Dulles' chapters on the Roe mission essentially provided an account of the actions of Sir Thomas Roe and the many tribulations he faced on his journey to and while at the court of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. While the values of current

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<sup>8</sup> Foster Rhea Dulles, *Eastward Ho! The First English Adventurers to the Orient*, (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1931), 153.

historians would deem this focus on the actions of one political leader as simply substandard for a proper analysis of history, Dulles also committed several other cardinal errors in work. His accounts of Indian people and Mughal officials, which Dulles used as mere window dressings for Sir Thomas Roe's story, stand out as blatantly prejudiced. His depiction of the Emperor Jahangir painted the picture of an indolent, childish Eastern despot whose excesses frequently exasperated the righteous Sir Thomas Roe.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Dulles' only analysis of this episode came in the form of his moral judgements--- mostly judgements that disparaged Indians and their behaviors.

Another feature of Dulles' work, which stands in stark contrast to current sensibilities, was the manner in which he described Indians. While he avoided overt racism against the non-English in his narrative, his biases in favor of Sir Thomas Roe and against Indian individuals remains readily apparent. Dulles introduced Roe as a man with "something of the Elizabethan spirit of adventure and all of its independence," and "diplomatic skill and persuasive tact," as well as someone "considered distinguished-looking in any age."<sup>10</sup> Yet Dulles described Mukarrab Khan, the Mughal governor in Surat, as a "haughty and avaricious official," who plagued the English envoy with "a facilitating policy of willful annoyance followed by childish gestures of reconciliation."<sup>11</sup> Dulles' description of the Emperor Jahangir read as slightly more flattering, Dulles wrote, "Jahangir was a man of fantastic whims and strange contradictions of character. He was a cruel tyrant, a great hunter, a drunkard. And at the same time he was a just ruler, a lover of animals, and a poet of real feeling and artistic appreciation."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 170.

<sup>10</sup> Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 159.

<sup>11</sup> Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 164-165.

<sup>12</sup> Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 169.

The contrast between Dulles' description of Roe and his descriptions of Mukarrab Khan and Emperor Jahangir reek of a sense of patronizing superiority of English society and morality over Mughal India. Again, just as was the case with Dulles' lack of analysis, this fault most likely stemmed from the era in which Dulles lived and trained as a historian; but just as before, this remains a critical failing in the work. Curiously, Dulles' description of Jahangir even contrasted with Roe's impressions of the Mughal Emperor. Dulles wrote that Roe viewed Jahangir as "gentle, soft, and of good disposition."<sup>13</sup> And whereas Dulles' descriptions of Mughal wealth came across as flattering, Dulles described the "free and liberal Englishman" Roe as somewhat off-put by the opulence of the Mughal court compared to the poverty of the common people.<sup>14</sup> In many respects, it appeared that the seventeenth-century Roe judged the Emperor Jahangir with more equanimity than the twentieth-century Dulles.

As the twentieth century progressed, some of the problematic features of Dulles' work began to appear less frequently in professional historical research. Particularly in the 1960s, which saw the beginnings of a drastic demographic expansion in history students and faculty, historical research on the British East India Company (and historical research in general) began to focus on analyzing sources beyond moral judgements and studied subjects other than important individual political figures. Some researchers during this era even recognized the agency of non-Europeans and the importance of studying them in their own right and not as mere obstacles in the narrative of European progress. These changes in research subjects and methods happened gradually and often works displayed one or two developments in historical thinking while retaining some flaws of past research. The changes observed in research from the 1960s

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<sup>13</sup> Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 169.

<sup>14</sup> Dulles, *Eastward Ho!*, 174.

did not come wholesale and immediately, but they contained certain aspects that proved to be forbearers to current historical research.

C.H. Philips' 1961 book, *The East India Company 1784-1834* provides an excellent starting point for the incremental and staggered changes to the historiography of the British East India Company that took place during the 1960s. Philips' work dealt with the complicated relationship between the officials of the British East India Company in India, Company officials in London, and the British government itself. In particular, Philips focused on the Company's influence on government policy and the relative lack of attention given to Indian affairs by the British government during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Philips' work utilized several aspects of modern historical research, most notably how he analyzed the connections between events in very distant regions and pointed out some of the problems the British East India Company caused for local Indian populations. Philips' work also retained some of the flaws found in older works, most obviously his focus on the actions of political leaders. Nonetheless, Philips' *The East India Company 1784-1834* stands out as an important historiographical contribution.

Philips' work studied an auspicious time in British East India Company history. The year 1784 marked the resignation of Warren Hastings as the leading officer of the British East India Company on the subcontinent and the tumult with the Company and the British government over Hastings' supposed crimes and corruption.<sup>15</sup> His work then covers the various attempts by British politicians, Company officials in London and in India, and various "interests" to sway policies regarding, among others, trade and territorial expansion in India. While Philips focused

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<sup>15</sup> C.H. Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834*, (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1961), 10.

heavily on the actions taken by individual figures in the government and in the Company, he also provided context of outside events that effected the choices of those individuals. For example, when discussing Henry Dundas and his struggles to reform trade in India in the late eighteenth century, for which previous historians criticized Dundas, Philips pointed out that Britain's war with France complicated trade in Asia and played a significant role in the delay of Dundas' reforms.<sup>16</sup> Philips also examined interest groups within the Company, such as the "shipping interest," which came closer to analyzing a broader section of British society than a simple focus on individual political leaders.<sup>17</sup>

The majority of the faults in *The East India Company 1784-1834* centered on Philips' tendencies towards Eurocentrism and "great man history." As previously mentioned, the bulk of *The East India Company 1784-1834* focused on the actions of various important and powerful individuals in the British government and the British East India Company, though Philips also paid significant attention to the somewhat broader group of various "interests." Such groups, like the shipping interests within the Company, still only extended to a very small, elite group within British society. Granted, Philips' focus on the British East India Company does not necessarily warrant a study of broad swaths of British society in the vein of the works of E.P. Thompson. However, the limited expansion of his attention from individual leaders to the mostly unnamed group of commercial ship owners still does not provide much insight into British society as a whole during this era.

Philips' work also displayed a somewhat complicated example of Eurocentrism. Most notably, while Philips acknowledged that the presence of the Company in India caused

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<sup>16</sup> Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834*, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834*, 83.

considerable upheavals in Indian politics and societies, his solution to such crises was intensified intervention by the British East India Company into the affairs of Indian states.<sup>18</sup> This type of criticism of the Company's actions and policies without wholesale condemnation of British imperialism in India occurs in several other works examined in this historiography. In fact, a pattern emerged among these selected works in which several historians of the 1960s took a stance against British East India Company rule and gave a generally favorable opinion of the rule of the British Raj after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857-1858. Meanwhile, many later historians criticized the British Raj and either held positive or neutral views of the British East India Company. The core theme of this work is to avoid sanctifying one form of imperialism over the other, and simply explain some of the differences between them.

Continuing the theme of gradual changes in how historians wrote about the British East India Company, P.J. Marshall's 1968 book *Problems of Empire: Britain and India, 1757-1813* was another example of a work with clear improvements, but some issues characteristic of older historical research. Broadly, Marshall's *Problems of Empire* explored the mechanisms by which the British East India Company ruled their Indian territories from the mid-eighteenth century to the early nineteenth. Similarly to C.H. Philips, Marshall focused on the decisions and actions of British policy makers in London, however his analysis of those politicians revolved around the consequences of their decisions on a national and international scale. Whereas much of Philips' work primarily dealt with explanations of the actions of British political figures, in some cases even defending certain figures from their detractors, Marshall concerned his research with the issues that influenced certain decisions as well as their outcomes.

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<sup>18</sup> Philips, *The East India Company 1784-1834*, 301-302.

Marshall's work began with a description of the changes in the relationship between the British East India Company and Indian territories, as well as changes in British opinions on government intervention in India, following the Company's 1757 victory at the Battle of Plassey. Marshall wrote that the instability born from the battle made Company officials more comfortable with territorial expansion in the ensuing decades, which in turn caused many political figures in Britain to believe in the necessity of state intervention in Company affairs in India.<sup>19</sup> However, as Marshall wrote, slow travel times between Britain and India and the willingness of Company leaders to act without (or against) orders from London greatly hampered attempts at state intervention during this period.<sup>20</sup> Marshall also posited that India remained a primarily commercial concern for most interested Britons despite the increased interest in the governance of the Company's Indian territories.<sup>21</sup> *Problems of Empire* ended with the conclusion that British interest in India during this period never reached the population at large or even most politicians, but that those interested came to understand the importance of events in India for Britain.<sup>22</sup> Marshall also argued that British officials in the home islands felt some obligation for the British East India Company's presence in India to be beneficial for Indians as well, even if the primary concern was British commercial interests.<sup>23</sup>

A lack of social history in favor of political history appeared to be a common lingering issue of historical works concerning the British East India Company during the 1960s. Just as with the previous two works discussed in this historiography, Michael Edwardes' *Glorious Sahibs: The Romantic as Empire-Builder 1799-1838* examined Company rule in India through

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<sup>19</sup> P.J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India, 1757-1813*, (London: George Allen, 1968), 22.

<sup>20</sup> Marshall, *Problems of Empire*, 52.

<sup>21</sup> Marshall, *Problems of Empire*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Marshall, *Problems of Empire*, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall, *Problems of Empire*, 104.



the lens of its leading officials during the early nineteenth century. Edwardes' work analyzed the careers of David Ochterlony, Charles Metcalfe, John Malcolm, and Mountstuart Elphinstone in order to "give colour and reality to a rather neglected period of imperial history."<sup>24</sup> Edwardes' interesting wrinkle to great man history, which he acknowledged as unfashionable in 1968, is that he used these four political figures as a means of discussing the broader subject of Company rule in India during the first few decades of the nineteenth century rather than simply discussing these leaders for their own sake.<sup>25</sup> This approach appeared again in, with even greater extrapolation on British and Indian societies, in William Dalrymple's 2002 book *White Mughals*, discussed in detail later in this analysis.

*Glorious Sahibs* began with an appraisal of the political landscape of late seventeenth-century India in the wake of the disintegration of Mughal authority over much of the subcontinent, particularly in regards to the growing tensions between the British East India Company and the Maratha Confederacy. Edwardes noted a few key observations, notably that both factions desired legitimacy bestowed by Mughal traditions in the same way that medieval European states looked to the fallen Roman Empire for legitimacy and that the Hindu Marathas' wars against their Muslim neighbors often contained intense religious fervor.<sup>26</sup> Edwardes continued by connecting events in India with Napoleon's campaigns in Europe, noting that Napoleon's 1807 alliance with the Tsar of Russia spurred Company leaders to action on the frontiers of Company territory.<sup>27</sup> Edwardes also provided some degree of insight into Indian societies during this period, such as the difficulties faced by the Sikh rulers in Punjab in balancing their own relatively young religion with the overwhelming number of Hindus and

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs: The Romantic as Empire-Builder 1799-1838*, (London: Eyre, 1968), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 9.

<sup>26</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 19-22.

<sup>27</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 66.

Muslims who lived in their realm.<sup>28</sup> The bulk of the book dealt with the expansion of Company territory on the subcontinent in the early nineteenth century, culminating in their final victory over the Pindari in 1819.<sup>29</sup> The final section of the book covered the careers of Edwardes' four main subjects during the 1820s and 30s. This portion also contained an important observation that officials of the British East India Company during this period (in stark contrast to the Victorian era) mostly respected Indian societies as "civilized" and typically adapted Indian customs and laws to their rule over their Indian territories.<sup>30</sup>

Edwardes' commentary on broader topics than the four individual Company officials marked his work as another step, however incomplete, away from some of the faults in older histories. However, to an even greater degree than Marshall's *Problems of Empire*, Edwardes held a mostly positive view of this early period of British imperialism in India. He appeared to accept the prevailing opinion of his subjects that problems caused by the British in India also needed to be solved by the British.<sup>31</sup> Just as with Philips and Marshall's works, Edwardes' *Glorious Sahibs* displayed a degree of Eurocentrism, though most likely not out of malice for non-Europeans. However, other works from this era made greater strides in that regard, particularly the works of historians from more diverse backgrounds than historians of the first half of the twentieth century.

During the 1960s, some historians began to move away from Eurocentrism in their historical analyses. The inclusion of people from more diverse backgrounds stands out as one of the key developments in the field of history in the English-speaking world during the second half

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<sup>28</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 189.

<sup>30</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 232.

<sup>31</sup> Edwardes, *Glorious Sahibs*, 94.

of the twentieth century. The addition of individuals outside the narrow demographic of relatively wealthy White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, who dominated the field of history prior to the 1950s and 60s, brought forth new and different perspectives that looked beyond just the nations of Europe and the actions of Europeans when examining history. Brijenk Gupta's *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company, 1756-1757* provided such a perspective for the historiography of the British East India Company.

Gupta's 1962 book stands as an important addition to the study of the British East India Company for several reasons. First, Gupta's focus on the eponymous Nawab of Bengal and his struggle against the encroaching British East Indian Company displayed the agency of an Indian leader to a far greater degree than works like Dulles' *Eastward Ho!* Second, while Gupta primarily studied Sirajuddaullah and his actions, Gupta also paid significant attention to the broader affects that stemmed from the Nawab's defeat at the Battle of Plassey. Thus, Gupta's work made significant strides to move past a purely Eurocentric view British imperialism in India and even made a small move away from purely political history centered on important individual leaders.

Gupta began his work with an account of the political situation in Bengal and the British interests in the region leading up to 1756, namely that Bengal existed in a precarious state with the breakdown of Mughal authority over the Indian subcontinent and that the Nawab attempted to ally with the French to protect Bengal from the British.<sup>32</sup> Gupta then described the early proactive movements of Sirajuddaullah to secure his position against Indian rivals and the embolden officials of the British East India Company.<sup>33</sup> The rest of the book provided a

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<sup>32</sup> Brijenk Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company, 1756-1757*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962), 45-47.

<sup>33</sup> Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company, 1756-1757*, 83.

description of the Nawab's political and military losses to Company forces and the numerous consequences of Sirajuddaullah's downfall after the Battle of Plassey, most notably that the Company's usurpation of power in Bengal provided the necessary resources to dominate more of India.<sup>34</sup> Gupta's account of the Bengali Nawab's campaign against British expansion portrayed Sirajuddaullah and other Indian leaders as on equal footing with their European counterparts and adversaries. While Gupta's work primarily relied on great man history, its focus on Indians and their actions marked a significant step toward the modern historical study of the British East India Company.

Whereas many of the previously discussed works made small or incomplete leaps toward the sensibilities of current historians, one of the earliest works of the 1960s very closely approached many of those sensibilities. George D. Bearce's *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858* stands out as among the most impressive works regarding the British East India Company that came out of the 1960s. In his 1961 book, Bearce studied primary source materials from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to analyze the opinions of a broad swath of British society regarding the British presence in India. Bearce placed an emphasis on the philosophical basis behind British opinions regarding India.<sup>35</sup> Bearce found that many among the British public formed their opinions without any real knowledge of India or its peoples, though this was not absolute.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, he also found that many Britons readily admitted their nation's presence in India caused problems for the people of India.<sup>37</sup> Rather than another account

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<sup>34</sup> Gupta, *Sirajuddaullah and the East India Company, 1756-1757*, 134-135.

<sup>35</sup> George D. Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 7.

<sup>36</sup> Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858*, 245.

<sup>37</sup> Bearce, *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858*, 300.

of the actions of political leaders, Bearce's work provided insight into the thoughts and motivations of a greater portion of British society.

Bearce's *British Attitudes Towards India, 1784-1858*, especially compared to other works of the 1960s and before, holds up particularly well by the criteria of modern historical research. Bearce approached his analysis of British opinions quite holistically and provided an insightful look in to this facet of British society from 1784 to 1858. Due to his chosen subject matter of British opinions, Bearce's work appeared necessarily Eurocentric. However, Bearce also showed an understanding of the importance of India and Indians in the formation of British opinions, when applicable to the focus of his research. These historiographical developments found in Bearce's 1961 work continued to feature in later histories in the ensuing decades and into the twenty-first century.

Whereas *British Attitudes Towards India* proved to be a herald of things to come and ahead of its time many respects, some ensuing historians adhered to older historiographical trends well past the 1960s. In his 1991 book, *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics, 1757-1773*, historian H.V. Bowen followed many of the same methods as Marshall, Edwardes, and Philips in his examination of the relationship between the British home government and the British East India Company's rule over its Indian territories. A focus on economics stood out as the main distinguishing feature between Bowen's work and the aforementioned historians of the 1960s, aside from a gap of roughly thirty years between their works and *Revenue and Reform*. Bowen ultimately concluded that shortsighted grabs for revenue in India hampered attempts to reform governance in British territories in India.<sup>38</sup> This subject not

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<sup>38</sup> H.V. Bowen, *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics, 1757-1773*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 189.

only placed *Revenue and Reform* among older works that examined the relationship between the British state and Company rule in India, Bowen's conclusion added him to the camp of historians who took a dim view of the British East India Company's policies in their Indian dominion. Bowen's work displayed that changes in research methods and historical understanding are not monolithic and that older trends can persist well beyond the height of their popularity. However, *Revenue and Reform* proved to be an outlier, as most works after the 1960s asked questions beyond the scope of political history and increasingly incorporated Indian sources and perspectives in their inquiries into the history of the British East India Company. In particular, social history relating to Company rule in India developed into a popular subject for historical inquiry.

Bonaventure Swai's 1979 article over Indian merchants placed many of the developments of the 1960s on full display. Swai's "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800" examined Indian merchants as a class and their intricate relationship with the British East India Company.<sup>39</sup> Swai analyzed questions about the nature of local merchants in India, namely whether or not they lacked proper development as a class and thus prevented the development of capitalist economies in India during the eighteenth century, while capitalism emerged in Britain.<sup>40</sup> Swai dismissed this claim, agreeing with other historians that Britain's colonial policies hampered capitalism in India far more than defects in India's merchant class.<sup>41</sup> Rather, Swai's research found that the Indian merchants of Tellicherry were not only just as developed as the merchant classes of Europe that helped give rise to capitalist economies, but that they also played an instrumental role in the Company's domination of much of southern

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<sup>39</sup> Bonaventure Swai, "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800," *Social Scientist*, Vol. 8, no. 1 (Aug. 1979), 58-70.

<sup>40</sup> Swai, "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800," 60.

<sup>41</sup> Swai, "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800," 63.

India.<sup>42</sup> Whereas so many previous works focused on the roles of British politicians and Company leaders, Swai's work displayed the role played by a group closer to the average Indian person of the era.

Swai's work stands out as a quite significant addition to British East India Company historiography due to a combination of its of class analysis, its discussion of the role of economics in history, and its examination of the relationship between the Company and Indian people. Swai's article provided a multi-faceted look into British colonialism in India, as it focused not just on British or Indian peoples and actions, but both groups and the importance of their interactions. Swai's work displayed a synthesis of many of the separate developments in historical research that came about during the 1960s. Moreover, "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry" stands alongside several other later research projects in this regard.

Santhi Hejeebu's 2005 article, "Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company," also examined a greater portion of people beyond important political figures in its analysis of the role of contracts in the British East India Company. Hejeebu stated that his work "provides a comprehensive view of the employment experience within the English East India Company."<sup>43</sup> Moralizing the actions of people in the past stood out as one of the chief issues present in Dulles' *Eastward Ho!*, though Dulles directed his moralizing primarily at Mughal political figures, and for many years moral judgements featured in examinations of the British East India Company and its policies. Hejeebu's work, however, examined the subject of private

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<sup>42</sup> Swai, "East India Company and Moplah Merchants of Tellicherry: 1694-1800," 70.

<sup>43</sup> Santhi Hejeebu, "Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company," *The Journal of Economic History* 65, no. 2, (June 2005), 500.

trading by Company employees without such moralizations, rather “Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company” examined the motivations and legal justifications of Company employees who partook in the often-maligned practice of private trading.

Rather than simply dismissing Company employees engaging in private trade for their personal profit as opportunistic and immoral, Hejeebu provided a more objective explanation for the practice. In short, Hejeebu argued that private trading was an incentive for the strenuous and often dangerous work of conducting overseas commerce for the British East India Company.<sup>44</sup> Leading officials of the Company typically curtailed what they believed to be excessive private trading by its employees, but generally permitted the practice as an incentive for its traders.<sup>45</sup> Thus, rather than simply chiding the actions of people in the past, Hejeebu provided a more insightful account of this subject.

On the subject of moralizing, some historians even examined the moral judgements regarding the practices of the British East India Company of contemporary figures like Edmund Burke. Brian Smith’s 2008 article, “Edmund Burke, the Warren Hastings Trial, and the Moral Dimension of Corruption” examined the rhetoric of Edmund Burke during his prosecution of the British East India Company leader Warren Hastings. Smith analyzed the social influences behind the moral rhetoric Burke used against Hastings. So rather judging Company figures and policies himself, Smith studied the influences that shaped the moral judgements of previous historians and their historical subjects alike.

Smith’s article began with an examination of the concepts of political authority and proper imperial rule held by Burke; that ideally trustees, those most fit to rule, form a “natural

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<sup>44</sup> Hejeebu, “Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company,” 504.

<sup>45</sup> Hejeebu, “Contract Enforcement in the English East India Company,” 510.



aristocracy” that rules properly.<sup>46</sup> Smith then related Burke’s ideals around governance with his idealized conception of the British East India Company during its earlier, and in Burke’s view uncorrupted, period.<sup>47</sup> Smith then listed Burke’s charges against Hastings, which Smith described as “a narrative of moral decline, a slide into corruption that proceeds parallel to the company’s gradual divorce from English law and government.”<sup>48</sup> Thus Smith’s article, alongside Hejeebu’s work, demonstrated the shift away from moral judgements embedded in historical research typical of early to mid-twentieth century historians.

William Dalrymple’s 2002 book, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, displayed a contemporary synthesis of the historiographical developments since the 1960s; in many ways a culmination of different approaches to the subject of the British East India Company and its presence in India. Dalrymple’s work followed the tragic story of the marriage between the Hyderbadi noblewoman Khair un-Nissa and the Company officer James Achilles Kirkpatrick at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> Impressively, while Dalrymple’s book ostensibly focused two individuals, his work avoided the pitfalls of great man history and used the story of the ill-fated couple to describe many facets of broader British and Indian society during the eighteenth century.

Dalrymple’s narrative of Kirkpatrick and Khair un-Nissa’s life together also described an era of change in British attitudes towards Indians. For example, Dalrymple noted that while previous Company officers considered the local Hindu people “inheritors of a sublime and

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<sup>46</sup> Brian Smith, “Edmund Burke, the Warren Hastings Trial, and the Moral Dimension of Corruption,” *Polity* 40, no. 1, (January 2008), 77.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, “Edmund Burke, the Warren Hastings Trial, and the Moral Dimension of Corruption,” 82.

<sup>48</sup> Smith, “Edmund Burke, the Warren Hastings Trial, and the Moral Dimension of Corruption,” 72.

<sup>49</sup> William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India*, (New York: Penguin, 2002), 1.

ancient wisdom,” many Britons in India at the end of the eighteenth century viewed them as “poor benighted heathen.”<sup>50</sup> While Company men adopting Indian dress and customs had been commonplace up to this point, Dalrymple showed that “Anglo-Indians” were quickly falling out of style by the nineteenth century. *White Mughals* also described in detail the complex role of women within the Muslim ruling class of India during this period. According to Dalrymple, women (even Hindu women married to Muslim Men) attained significant power within the courts in which they resided; much to the shock of an Iranian scholar who visited Hyderabad during this time.<sup>51</sup> *White Mughals* contains numerous insights of this nature into Indian and British societies of this era.

Dalrymple’s work synthesized decades of historiographical development into a single work that displayed a modern approach to understanding the history of the British East India Company. However, *White Mughals* does not stand as an endpoint for the historiography of this subject. Subsequent works evolved in new directions to seek a deeper understanding of Britain’s empire in India. Stephanie Barczewski’s *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700-1930* examined the preserved estates of wealthy Britons, many decorated with goods from India, and the intricate relationship between British society and the nation’s empire in India revealed by those ornate homes. Barczewski desired to understand the economic impact of the empire in regards to the development of country houses and how much empire influenced British society, which she concluded waxed and waned at various times and was expressed through myriad outlets.<sup>52</sup> *Country Houses and the British Empire* provided an example of how historians

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<sup>50</sup> Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, 36.

<sup>51</sup> Dalrymple, *White Mughals*, 132.

<sup>52</sup> Stephanie Barczewski, *Country Houses and the British Empire, 1700-1930*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 14.

increasingly consider new materials beyond written sources as a means for understanding the past.

Similarly, the 2014 book *India and the British Empire*, a compilation of works edited by Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu, endeavored to show the multilateral nature of the relationship between Britain (and by extension the British East India Company) and its empire in India. The various authors of the works compiled in *India and the British Empire* presented a more nuanced understand of that relationship than as a simple dichotomy of colonizer and colony. Douglas and Gooptu framed this works as enabling an appreciation of “the vitality of regional dynamics as well as the transnational flows of capital, people, and ideas,” as well as “how these flows occurred below and above the level of the state.”<sup>53</sup> Both *India and the British Empire* and *Country Houses and the British Empire* demonstrated the newer emphasis on nuance and new perspectives to understanding the history of the British presence in India, including the period of Company rule.

The works examined in this historiography present a clear, though not necessarily linear, progression in the histories written on the British East India Company, which mirror the greater evolution in the approaches to historical research from the early twentieth century to the present day. Early works, such as Dulles’ *Eastward Ho!*, presented a mostly narrative based history without deeper analysis into the past. These works even glorified important individual figures in British history, often at the expense of non-Europeans. The 1960s proved a turning point away from those standards, whereby historians of the era examined history beyond the deeds of individual leaders and in some cases even extended their focus to include the actions and

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<sup>53</sup> Douglas M. Peers and Nandini Gooptu, eds., *India and the British Empire*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14.

concerns of Indians. However, these new trends emerged piecemeal, with works like Bearce's *British Attitudes Towards India* adopting many (but not all) new aspects of historical research. Histories written in the years following the 1960s generally adhered to nearly all of these modern standards for historical inquiry, while in recent years the newest works concerning the British East India Company seek greater nuance in understanding the relationship between the Britain and India.

### *Conclusion*

This work seeks to incorporate positive aspects of the historiography discussed above, while avoided the pitfalls of the older works examined. However, the nature of the sources utilized in this work made that no easy task. As previously mentioned, the major sources of this work consist of accounts from British men, most of them wealthy. The incorporation of Indian sources, and any relevant sources from British or Indian women during Company rule, would be a natural progression from the foundation established in this work. Additionally, at its core, this work is a comparison between the East Indian Company and the British Raj. However, this work is not an attempt to judge one superior to the other, or one less offensive to modern sensibilities. The interest of this work is to explain some of the nuance between these two forms of colonial government, both the differences and similarities between them, through the lens of power dynamics and their influence on British attitudes.

Historians recognize Father Thomas Stephens (c.1549–1619), a Jesuit missionary in Portuguese Goa, as the first Englishman to step foot in India.<sup>54</sup> Father Stephens, whose early life came at an auspicious and dangerous time for Catholics in England, left England in the 1570s to

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<sup>54</sup> James Southwood, "Thomas Stephens, S. J., the First Englishman in India," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 3, no. 2 (1924), 231.

escape persecution in his homeland and receive training by the Catholic Church.<sup>55</sup> After his training in Rome, Father Stephens made the long and difficult journey to the Portuguese outpost of Goa on India's western coast.<sup>56</sup> While in Goa, Stephens performed administrative tasks, aided local converts to Catholicism, continued proselytization efforts with the local population, and studied the Konkani and Marathi languages to aid in his endeavors.<sup>57</sup> Father Stephens' actions in India and his letters to his father in England revealed his impressions on the foreign land and its peoples. Though a Catholic expatriate in a Portuguese outpost, Father Stephens' experience remains applicable to a wider discussion of British opinions regarding India, particularly in terms of power dynamics.

For all the faults and abuses of the British East India Company's rule in India prior to the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the agents of the Company generally expressed a willingness to learn languages important for politics and commerce on the subcontinent. This practice appeared to have roots with the first Englishman in India. As previously mentioned, Father Stephens learned the local languages of Konkani and Marathi, even translating Christian liturgies into these tongues.<sup>58</sup> Father Stephens also recognized the linguistic relation between these north Indian languages and those of Europe, and reported to his father that he found their "phrases and constructions as being of a wonderful kind."<sup>59</sup> Later Britons in the eighteenth century expressed a similar enthusiasm for Persian (the lingua franca of Mughal India) and its value for their activities in India.<sup>60</sup> This degree of accommodation, interacting with Indians in their own

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<sup>55</sup> Southwood, "Thomas Stephens, S. J., the First Englishman in India," 232-233.

<sup>56</sup> Southwood, "Thomas Stephens, S. J., the First Englishman in India," 234.

<sup>57</sup> Southwood, "Thomas Stephens, S. J., the First Englishman in India," 239.

<sup>58</sup> Southwood, "Thomas Stephens, S. J., the First Englishman in India," 239.

<sup>59</sup> Southwood, "Thomas Stephens, S. J., the First Englishman in India," 239-240.

<sup>60</sup> "Learning in the East," *Times* (London, England) 15 Jan. 1818: 3. *The Times Digital Archive*. Web. 4 Dec. 2018.

languages, suggests a lack of power by Stephens and later British merchants to simply impose their will. To achieve their goals of commerce or conversion, Stephens and the agents of the East India Company compensated their relative lack of power with what appeared to be an acceptance of Indian languages.

In addition to his fondness for Indian languages, Father Stephens' purpose in India also revealed something of his opinion about Indian people. Father Stephens' desire to convert Indians to Christianity suggests that he at least viewed them as fully human in the same manner as himself, and thus capable of salvation through his ministry to them. Further, the Jesuit order to which Father Stephens belonged traditionally held sympathetic views towards non-Europeans, particularly indigenous peoples in the South American colonies of Spain and Portugal. However, his desire and attempts to convert Indians from their traditional faiths, backed by the power of the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church, suggest that Stephens was not wholly accepting of Indian culture and possessed some degree of power to act on those beliefs. Father Stephens' ministry displayed a broader dynamic between Europeans and other civilizations in Asia and Africa during the Early Modern Period. A dynamic in which Europeans possessed precursors to the virulent racism of the nineteenth century, some relatively benign and others less so, but did not possess enough power over non-European civilizations to fully act such impulses, outside of the Americas.

## *The King's Envoy*

### *Sir Thomas Roe's Mission to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir*

In the last years of Father Stephens' life, another Englishman arrived in India, Sir Thomas Roe (c. 1581 – 6 November 1644) an ambassador from the English King James I to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir.<sup>61</sup> Roe grew up in the courts of Elizabeth I and James I and developed a friendship with James' son Henry, Prince of Wales.<sup>62</sup> After a failed mission to find gold in Guyana, Roe sat in Parliament the year before his selection to lead a diplomatic and trade mission to the court of Jahangir and for several years after his return.<sup>63</sup> Roe arrived in the port city of Surat on India's western coast, hundreds of miles north of Father Stephens' residence in Goa, and proceeded inland to Jahangir's capital at Agra after some hindrances from the Mughal governor in Surat.<sup>64</sup> Roe's account of his journey to Mughal India provides several insights into his views of the land and its peoples.

Sir Thomas Roe, as well-connected member of the aristocracy, held a significant degree of power within his own society. While never a preeminent figure in English politics, Roe's relationship with the Prince of Wales and his position in Parliament displayed his status as a man of means and influence. Roe's high standing in English society is important to understanding his experience in India and his impressions of Indians. Additionally, Roe's position as the official ambassador of King James I greatly influenced his actions and opinions while in India. In several entries into his journal, Roe specified that he took different actions than he normally would have because his conduct directly reflected upon his monarch. Also of importance, Roe's mission to

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<sup>61</sup> Foster Rhea Dulles, *Eastward Ho! The First English Adventurers to the Orient*, (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1931), 156.

<sup>62</sup> *Eastward Ho!*, 157.

<sup>63</sup> *Eastward Ho!*, 158.

<sup>64</sup> *Eastward Ho!*, 162.

India occurred in the early years of the seventeenth century, when the Mughal Empire still reigned supreme in India and the newly established East India Company barely maintained trade outposts on the Indian Subcontinent. While Roe was a powerful man in English society, his nation held little power in India at this juncture. These social and political dynamics colored Roe's conduct and his opinions on both Indian and non-Indian peoples throughout his multi-year journey.

Sir Thomas Roe's journey began in 1615, sailing down the western coast of Africa to reach the Indian Ocean. His first description of non-European peoples came when he noted the people of "Soldanya" in a journal entry, meaning Saldanha Bay in modern South Africa. Roe's full quote reveals much of his mindset and the wider view of Britons towards other cultures during this period. According to Sir Thomas the people of Soldanya were:

The most barbarous in the world, eating Carrione, wearing the guts of sheepe about their Necks for health, and rubbing their heads (curled like Negroos) with dung of beasts and durte. They have noe other Cloathing then beastes skins wrapt on their shoulders, the skinne next the body in heate, in could the hairy syde. They have lefte their stealinge by trading with vs, and by signes make shoue their harte is good. They knowe noe kind of God or religion.<sup>65</sup>

Clearly, Roe held little regard for the local non-European population of the south African coastline. These were a people who possessed fewer technologies than seventeenth-century Britain and lived in a social structure that would have appeared as near anarchy to Britons living in a highly stratified society headed by a centuries-old monarchy. Though Roe almost certainly never had an opportunity to learn the specifics of south African religions, his characterization of these people as not knowing religion is telling. Roe's dismissal of these people as godless and lacking religion indicated some measure of religious prejudice, as Roe could not conceive of

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<sup>65</sup> Thomas Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619, as Narrated in His Journal and Correspondence*, (London: Hakluyt Society, 1899), 11-12.



their non-Abrahamic faith as a real religion. Also of note, Roe's lone positive statement on this group, that they show signs of having a good heart, stemmed from their willingness to trade with English ships. This statement points toward Roe valuing non-Englishmen by their utility to his goals and the welfare of England. Some of Roe's later interactions in India reinforce this idea, as he described a man who opposed trade with England as being in "want of Ciuility and barberisme."<sup>66</sup> While wrote of an ally to the English, "this man showed me both most affection and most honor in all his actions."<sup>67</sup> Regardless of nationality, Roe showed disdain for people who hindered his mission and the goals of England.

Several days later Roe's ship made its way to the Comoros Islands, specifically the island he called Molalia, most likely the island now known as Mohéli. Roe also gave the people of Molalia/Mohéli a mixed description. Roe stated that the islanders "are helde a false and an vnfaithful people, having betrayed some of James Lancasters men long sithence, but nowe, havinge experience of vs at other Islandes, I doubt not they would regayne theyr Creditts."<sup>68</sup> Evidently, the people of the island came into conflict with the English in the past, but as of Roe's journey were amiable enough for Roe's party to disembark onto Molalia/Mohéli. Although, Roe also mentioned that some of the island's inhabitants aggressively warned the English to stay away from the women of island and its mosque.<sup>69</sup> Even so, once again non-English people receive some modicum of praise in Roe's journal if they served the interests of Roe or England in some way.

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<sup>66</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 127.

<sup>67</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 87.

<sup>68</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 17.

<sup>69</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 21.

Roe's expedition continued their voyage by sailing up the eastern coast of Africa before stopping at the island of Socotra off the Somali coast in August of 1615. Roe described the inhabitants of Socotra dispassionately, but went into detail about the four types of Socotrans he was told lived on the island. Roe recorded that Socotra contained a Muslim Arab ruling class who conquered the island in the past, a majority Christian community which predated the island's Arab rulers, a slave population brought onto the island by the Arabs, and a mysterious "savage" people who did not live in houses and wore no clothes.<sup>70</sup> The last group Roe described could potentially be something from Socotran folklore rather than an actual population of "wild" people. Sir Thomas Roe appeared to be relatively well informed about the world outside the British Isles for his day, but some information which he took for fact, such as the existence of Prester John's kingdom in Abyssinia, does not match the known historical record.<sup>71</sup> Some of the opinions Roe formed at least partially came from inaccurate information.

By late September 1615, Roe's expedition reached the Indian port city of Surat. Once ashore, Roe encountered the first real complication of his journey. The English established a "factory" and trade outpost in Surat three years prior to Roe's arrival, which meant that the few Englishmen who travelled to India before Roe were able to provide the diplomat with some manner of intelligence on the land he at which he just arrived.<sup>72</sup> One of the first pieces of information imparted to Roe was that "he should find the new gouernor of Suratt a Clowne and a frend of our enemyes."<sup>73</sup> The newly appointed Mughal governor in Surat, Mukarrab Khan, did in fact prove to be a source of trouble for Roe. The core issue between the two men revolved around Mukarrab Khan's insistence that Roe's cargo be searched, as was required of all ships

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<sup>70</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 33-34.

<sup>71</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 23 & 34.

<sup>72</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 44-45.

<sup>73</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 45.

that entered Surat, while Roe maintained that his status as an official ambassador of the King of England exempted his cargo from searches.<sup>74</sup>

This dispute between the English envoy and the Mughal administrator clearly weighed heavy in Roe's mind, as it warranted over a dozen pages of Roe's journal. Initially thinking he had convinced Mukarrab Khan to relent, Roe and his belongings disembarked for Surat, whereupon the governor's agents nonetheless seized the cargo of Roe and his companions.<sup>75</sup> Outraged, Roe demanded their immediate return to him and threatened to inform the Mughal Emperor Jahangir about this insult, or even prematurely end his diplomatic mission.<sup>76</sup> Roe also took exception to the Surati delegation not immediately rising from their seats to greet him and the lack of Mukarrab Khan's physical presence. Roe complained that, "I hoped they had come to entertayne and honor me, not to enslaue and entangle me with barbarous Customes."<sup>77</sup>

Roe and Mukarrab Khan attempted to compromise on the issue and Roe agreed to travel to the meet with the governor in person.<sup>78</sup> However, on the way to this destination, the Surati men traveling with Roe's party attempted to search the Englishmen. This enraged Roe and he threatened to resort to violence and suffer his own death before suffering any further insult on this matter.<sup>79</sup> This situation resolved without bloodshed, but Roe and the English insisted on finishing the journey separate from the Indians.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 45.

<sup>75</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 46.

<sup>76</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 46.

<sup>77</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 46 & 48.

<sup>78</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 47-48.

<sup>79</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 50.

<sup>80</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 50.

Once he finally met face to face with the Mughal governor, Roe explained his obstinacy on this matter. Roe stated that:

Desiring him not to esteeme it pryde, that I insisted on such termes with him : that as a priuatt man I would alway be ready to meete him or prevent him in any Curtesye, but in the place and qualetye I now held I could not haue done yt without dishonoring and disobeying my Master, whose expresse Chardge was that I should preserue the rights of an Ambassador and visitt no subject vntil I had presented my selfe before the great Mogull, except such as, having the Mogulles authoritye, did first show that respect toward his Maiestie and Curtesye toward me that was due.<sup>81</sup>

Roe claimed that he would have acquiesced to Mukarrab Khan's search if he were only representing himself. However, because Roe represented King James I as his envoy, for Roe to accept the search would be as if the James I's own property was subject to search. Indeed, many of the items in Roe's cargo were gifts from the English monarch to his prospective trading partner in Agra. If Roe's claim is to be believed, he would not have objected to this Indian custom if he only represented himself. The fact that Roe's conduct directly reflected his monarch changed the dynamics of his interactions in India.

The dispute between Roe and Mukarrab Khan also provides insight into the relationship between England and India in the early years of the seventeenth century. The East India Company held very few outposts in India at this juncture and the entire point of Roe's mission was to solidify the trading relationship between the Mughal Empire and England. Roe came to India to negotiate, and though he "did not doubt that my [his] Comming would proue beneficiall and acceptable to them," much of Roe's "negotiations" involved convincing the Mughals that furthering their relationship with England would indeed be beneficial for them.<sup>82</sup> During this period, the England and the East India Company were in no position to dictate terms to the

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<sup>81</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 60.

<sup>82</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 47.

Mughals or any other Indian state. In fact, at the time of Roe's mission the Portuguese enjoyed a stronger position in India with their large and well-defended outpost at Goa.

After finally settling his conflict with Mukarrab Khan, Roe began the overland journey from Surat to the court of Jahangir in Agra. After arriving at the Mughal capital, Roe wrote several letters regarding his first weeks in India and his impressions of the country and the people with whom he interacted. Roe penned most of these letters to fellow Englishmen, such as King James I and the Bishop of Canterbury, though Roe sent one to the Safavid Shah in Persia. These letters contained some of Roe's less diplomatic opinions regarding India. Many of the opinions Roe recorded up to this point in his journal came from what appear to be direct quotes or paraphrases of his conversations with Indians. These tended to display Roe's diplomatic restraint, such as one conversation between Roe and Mukarrab Khan regarding their feud, in which Roe wrote that he "tould him he was a souldier and did not vnderstand what loss of tyme was to Merchants insuch delays as he dayly gaue."<sup>83</sup> This statement stands out as much less harsh than some of Roe's other words regarding the governor of Surat while away from his presence.

Roe also wrote a letter to Mukarrab Khan, which appears harsher than Roe's words when directly speaking to the governor. The letter began with Roe standing his ground on the issue: "The Injuriyes you haue offered me, Contrary to the faith giuen by your King, to all Ciuilitye and law of Nations, beeing a free Ambassador, and Contrary to your owne honor and promise, forceth me to send you woord I am resolued not to endure yt. I come hither not to Begg, nor doe nor suffer Injurye."<sup>84</sup> Later in the letter, Roe listed his grievances against Mukarrab Khan:

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<sup>83</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 65.

<sup>84</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 73.

“Under which Confidence I let you knowe that, without seeking farther frendship from you, that haue ransacked my Chests, taken by violence the Presents sent your Kyng, Cruelly whipt a seruant of the Merchaunts for doeing his duty, abused with Contempt all the English.”<sup>85</sup> The letter ended with Roe making plain his belief that Mukarrab Khan is wholly in the wrong and Roe in the right of this matter. Roe wrote, “I am sorry for nothing but the euer I vouchsafed to send you any remembrance of mee, of whom in loue you might haue receiued any thing; but by this course of me nor my Nation I am resolued to dye vpon an enemye then to flatter him, and for such I giue you notice to take me vntill your master hath done me Justice.”<sup>86</sup> Roe made his displeasure with the conduct of Mukarrab Khan plain in his letter to the Mughal governor. However, despite the aggressive tone of the letter, Roe appeared to still operate as a diplomat writing to a political figure of another nation. Another letter Roe wrote to a Portuguese official in Goa closely matched Roe’s tone with Mukarrab Khan.

As previously mentioned, the Portuguese established their presence in India well before the English arrived in Surat. Trade with Portugal enriched many within the Mughal elite and earned the Portuguese key allies within the Mughal administration, allies that could be used to help keep the English from cutting into Portugal’s trade profits in India. Roe believed the Portuguese to have acted against English interests in India and sent the following words to the Viceroy of Goa:

The Injuries your Excellence or your predecessors haue offered to the subjects of the high and mighty Prince, the King of England, my royall Master, by assalting them in that peacable course of trade, contrarye to the Amytye and leauge of both our Soueraynes, although by the asistance of God you haue receiued shame and Confusion in your vnchristian Attempts, yet I haue commandement to admonish you, like the subject of a

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<sup>85</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 74.

<sup>86</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 74.

Prince at Peace with my Master, to desist from vndertaking that which can bring forth no other effect but warr and reuenge and shedding of Christian blood.<sup>87</sup>

Roe finished his letter by stating, “if auarice doe not blynd all reason in your Excellence,” and signed off as “Your frend or enemye at your owne Choyce.”<sup>88</sup>

These excerpts from Roe’s letters provide a comparison between his diplomatic correspondence with Europeans as opposed to non-Europeans. Roe addressed the Viceroy as “Most Illustrious Lord,” and frequently referred to him as “your Excellence.”<sup>89</sup> On the other hand, Mukarrab Khan received no such formalities from Roe. This could stem from a number of factors. For one, the governor of Surat acted directly against Roe and his embassy and by extension King James I himself. Roe could have taken those affronts personally, or taken them personally on behalf of his monarch. Whereas the Portuguese actions against the English were a long-standing disagreement over Indian trade and not actions taken directly against Roe. Roe may have simply been angrier with the man who directly offended him and therefore wrote less formally to him.

Roe may have also perceived a difference in rank between the Mughal governor and the Portuguese Viceroy, which required greater ceremony for addressing the Portuguese official than for Mukarrab Khan. Of course, race and religion could have played a role in this discrepancy. Roe referred to the shared Christianity between the English and Portuguese several times and, interestingly, made no mention of the difference in denomination between England and Portugal. However, evidence may point more toward perceived differences in rank being a greater factor than race or religion in this matter.

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<sup>87</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 76.

<sup>88</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 77.

<sup>89</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 76-77.

Sir Thomas Roe also penned letters to the Safavid Shah in Persia and to his own sovereign, King James I. The contents of these letters make clear that Roe respected monarchs, even those of different faiths and outside Europe. From Agra, Roe reported to his king on the status of his mission and various world events he learned about from the Mughal court. Roe began his letter an exceptional degree of deference to his monarch, writing: “May it please your Majestie, That I haue the Honor to be calld your Majesties Ambassador me thinckes requires out of the nature of the Place, at least embouldens mee, to send your Majestie these humble lines; otherwise the importance of what I can write is not woorth one the least pause or interruption of your maiesties higher meditations.”<sup>90</sup> Roe also expressed great respect for the Mughal Emperor Jahangir personally, writing that “it cannot be denied that this King is one of the mightiest Princes in Asia.”<sup>91</sup> Even when Roe criticized the administration in Mughal India, which he called “so vncertayne, without written law, without Policye, the Customes mingled with barbarisme,” he excluded Emperor Jahangir when he mentioned “reseruing due reuerence to the Persons of Kyngs.”<sup>92</sup> Roe evidently felt a fair degree of repugnance toward the difference in governance in India and England, but nonetheless respected Emperor Jahangir as he would any other monarch.

Roe’s letter to the Safavid Shah corroborates this idea as well. At the beginning of his letter, Roe addressed the Persian Shah as “Most magnificent and Highly descended Emperor,” and referred to the Shah as your Majesty throughout the letter.<sup>93</sup> And while the purpose of the letter was to probe the Shah for potential trade concessions to England, Roe’s tone was respectful and reads as a diplomat speaking to a head of state he viewed as roughly equal to his own. The

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<sup>90</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 120.

<sup>91</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 120.

<sup>92</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 120.

<sup>93</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 132-133.



only mention of religion in the letter to the Shia monarch was the last line in which Roe wrote that he was “Praying to the Creator of Heauen and earth to giue you victory on your Enemyes and renown in your life and Posterytye.”<sup>94</sup>

Sir Thomas Roe possessed some degree of power and influence within English society and aligned himself very closely with the monarch and traditional English social institutions. This produced instances of disapproval toward features of foreign societies that differed from his own. He looked down on the people of Saldanha Bay, who he viewed as uncivilized and backward. Even in India, Roe viewed Indians as effeminate and described the region as a whole as “the dullest, basest place that I ever saw.”<sup>95</sup> However, Roe also showed respect for the Mughal Emperor and any Indians who proved sympathetic to his cause. Roe certainly preferred his own culture to those found in Mughal India, but Roe’s strongest condemnations of foreigners came when they had hindered his mission to secure trade rights with the Mughal Empire. Those condemnations extended to the Portuguese, fellow Europeans. Roe’s actions were mostly tempered by England’s fragile position in India during the early seventeenth century and the fact that his conduct directly reflected his monarch. Thus, Roe displayed some of the disdain for India common amongst Britons during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but did not have the power to act upon those negative feelings, despite his own relatively high position in English society.

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<sup>94</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 133.

<sup>95</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul*, 113.

## *The Company's Agent*

### *The Brief Residency of William Hedges in Bengal 1682-1684*

Several decades after Sir Thomas Roe's mission to the court of Emperor Jahangir, the English expanded their presence in India and established important outposts in Madras and Bengal. From these bases, the East India Company conducted trade and attempted to influence Indian politics in their favor. Eventually those efforts proved fruitful, but in the 1680s, the Company still held a relatively unfavorable position in India and constantly sought *firman*s and *perwanna* from the Mughal emperors and their regional nawabs, much like Roe desired to receive from Emperor Jahangir during his mission. The diary of William Hedges (1632-1701), the first East India Company governor of Bengal, displayed this precarious situation.

William Hedges was born in 1632, in the County Cork, Ireland, though his family originally hailed from Wiltshire, England.<sup>96</sup> Hedges likely joined the Levant Company early in career and described himself as possessing "colloquial" language skills in Arabic and Turkish.<sup>97</sup> Hedges later joined the East India Company and became one of the Company's directors in 1681.<sup>98</sup> Thus, as a wealthy Englishman in a leadership position of the nation's most important trade company, Hedges possessed no small degree of political and economic power within England. Hedges' appointment in Bengal resulted from the directors of the East India Company deciding to separate the administration of their growing possessions in that region from the distant residency in Madras, from which Company holdings in Bengal had been administered.<sup>99</sup> Because of the distance between the Company outpost at Fort St. George in Madras and their

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<sup>96</sup> Henry Yule, ed. *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. During His Agency in Bengal as Well as on His Voyage Out and Return Overland (1681-1687) Vol. 3*, (New York: B. Franklin, 1964), vii.

<sup>97</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 3*, vii.

<sup>98</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 3*, xi.

<sup>99</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 3*, viii.

concerns in Bengal, significant problems developed and began to hinder the Company's efforts in the region.

Indian rulers, mostly the nawabs under Mughal suzerainty, frequently denied special privileges to Company merchants and demanded the payment of customs fees, European "interlopers" attempted to break the Company's monopoly on Indian trade, and allegations arose that Company agents in Bengal engaged in excessive private trading.<sup>100</sup> Hedges even received orders to find the Company agent Matthias Vincent, "seize upon his person" and "send him forthwith a prisoner."<sup>101</sup> Hedges' agency in Bengal started with lofty goals to improve the Company's position, and thus its profits, in eastern India. Hedges appeared to make an honest effort to carry out his duties; indeed, much of his diary recorded his numerous attempts to obtain official privileges from the nawabs and the Mughal court and to stop the schemes of various "interlopers." However, Hedges quickly lost the confidence of the Company's directors due to the manipulations of some of the Company men he was sent to police and received his dismissal from his position in 1684.<sup>102</sup>

As mentioned above, a key goal of Hedges' commission and a significant portion of his diary centered on obtaining trading privileges from the nawab of Bengal and other dealings between Hedges and Indian individuals. Hedges recorded little in the way of opinions towards Indians, or other Europeans for that matter, though a few instances appeared in his writing. While traveling up a river in Bengal, Hedges wrote that the area was the "most pleasant country that ever I saw in all my life."<sup>103</sup> One of Hedges' rare opinions towards Indian people came when

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<sup>100</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 3*, x-xi.

<sup>101</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 3*, xv.

<sup>102</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 3*, xviii-xix.

<sup>103</sup> Henry Yule, ed. *The Diary of William Hedges, Esq. During His Agency in Bengal as Well as on His Voyage Out and Return Overland (1681-1687) Vol. 1*, (New York: B. Franklin, 1964), 41-42.

he described the “insufferable” nature of the “severall affronts, insolencies, and abuses” committed by an Indian man name Bulchund, whom Hedges described as the Company’s “chief Customer” in the region.<sup>104</sup> Hedges also wrote very positively about a Turkish agent he met in Bengal, named Aziz Beg, who Hedges said, “received me with great kindness and respect; assuring me of his favour upon all occasions. He speaks Turkish currently, and seems much delighted that I understand that Language.”<sup>105</sup>

Some of the few harsh judgements found in Hedges’ diary targeted other Englishmen in conflict with Hedges. Hedges wrote of a man named Mr. Ley, who Hedges claimed, “holds and combines with Mr. Beard in everything, right or wrong, just or unjust, out of Malice to me,” and that Mr. Ley was ignorant in general and incapable of arithmetic.<sup>106</sup> However, perhaps just as important as opinions, Hedges’ diary does contain copious records of interactions between English and Indian individuals, which displayed the power dynamics between England and India during the late seventeenth century.

Early in Hedges’ time in Bengal, the Company agent and his entourage were “overtaken by some horsemen ashore, and divers boats full of armed men” while the Englishmen attempted to travel from their base in Hooghly to the city of Dhaka, referred to as Decca by Hedges.<sup>107</sup> Unwilling to initiate violence with the armed Indians, Hedges and his group waited for word from the local official to allow them to continue their journey to Dhaka.<sup>108</sup> As they waited, another representative of the local Indian official approached the group, accompanied by a Dutch agent, and “beseched” Hedges and his group to return to Hooghly or the Indians would harm

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<sup>104</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 33.

<sup>105</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 145.

<sup>106</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 150.

<sup>107</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 34.

<sup>108</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 35.

some of Hedges' soldiers.<sup>109</sup> Hedges' group returned to Hooghly and he again attempted to leave later that night, but once again armed Indians turned him back. The English were denied their journey to Dhaka for several more days until the local official, whom Hedges called Permesuradass, met with Hedges in person and allowed their passage.<sup>110</sup>

Once in Dhaka, Hedges met first with a man he called Ray Nundelall, a representative of the Nawab of Bengal, Shaista Khan. Hedges wrote that Nundelall showed great respect to him, but also put off listening to Hedges' complaints about the previously mentioned troubles with Permesuradass.<sup>111</sup> Hedges also presented his gifts for Shaista Khan to Nundelall, though the Nawab's representative reported that Shaista Khan did not care for the cloths given to him by Hedges and desired "some rarities."<sup>112</sup> While Hedges attended the *darbar* (court) of Shaista Khan, he also attained promises from "the King's Duan" of freedom from paying customs duties for a future shipment and for reparations from his incident with Permesuradass.<sup>113</sup> The "King's Duan" likely referred to a representative of the reigning Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb. From the text it appears that Hedges did not meet directly with Shaista Khan, besides during his public *darbar* time, rather Nundelall and other intermediaries handled private negotiations with Hedges. During one such public meeting, the Company agent also wrote about his obligation to present the Nawab with gifts upon the birth of a son during this mission to Dhaka. Hedges wrote that he presented Shaista Khan with "13 Gold Mohurs and 21 Rupees, which he accepted so kindly that

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<sup>109</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 35.

<sup>110</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 37.

<sup>111</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 42-43.

<sup>112</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 46.

<sup>113</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 48.

I took ye opportunity to request his Perwanna in conformity to that granted by ye King's Duan.”<sup>114</sup>

Despite his requests and the promises he believed he attained, Hedges later learned that his requests were denied by Shaista Khan, who believed that the ships Hedges wished to be exempted from customs were private vessels rather than Company property and thus not covered by any agreements with the East India Company.<sup>115</sup> Later, Hedges also encountered troubles with a newly appointed Duan, who Hedges also asked for an exemption from customs fees. Hedges wrote that he met with the new Duan “to desire a Perwanna for the free passing of our goods,” but that the Duan “told me plainly we must pay Custome at Surrat or in this place, and would admit of no reasons to the contrary.”<sup>116</sup> Hedges then told the Duan that such customs costs would force the English to abandon their activities in India, but Hedges wrote that the Indian representative then replied that, “We [the English] might go when we pleased.”<sup>117</sup> Luckily for Hedges, Shaista Khan then relented and promised the Company agent a *perwanna* freeing the East India Company from further customs duties.<sup>118</sup>

Hedges’ record of his brief time in Bengal revealed much concerning the relationship of England and India during this period. As was the case with Sir Thomas Roe’s mission in the early seventeenth century, the East India Company possessed little leverage in their dealings with Indians during the late seventeenth century. While Hedges may have enjoyed significant influence in England, in India he had no choice but to bargain and beg for the favor of Indian rulers. Likewise, while the East India Company expanded their operations to include many

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<sup>114</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 48.

<sup>115</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 50.

<sup>116</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 54.

<sup>117</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 54.

<sup>118</sup> *The Diary of William Hedges Vol. 1*, 54.

manufactories on both the eastern and western coast of India, Indian rulers still held both *de facto* and *de jure* sovereignty over their territories. It would take nearly a century for the East India Company to establish its rule over vast expanses of Indian territory.

Hedges' diary also revealed the intricate nature of sovereignty in India during this period. Hedges' account displayed low-level officials like Bulchund and Permesuradass disobeying the decrees of the regional ruler and even the Mughal Emperor. Despite their disobedience, Hedges felt that these men faced few repercussions for their actions against him. Within their own fiefdoms, these men felt comfortable making their own decisions regardless of what the English or their own sovereigns desired. This displays the presence of local economic and political power structures in India, many of which persisted even after the Mughal Emperors began to lose their *de facto* power over the subcontinent in the years following the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb. Even when the East India Company usurped power from many regional rulers, as they did in Bengal following the Battles of Plassey and Buxar, the Company and its agents still contended with men like Bulchund and Permesuradass. As such, the Company made a point to receive the official grant of *diwani*, the right to collect taxes, from the weakening Mughal Empire to legitimize their presence in Bengal.

William Hedges' account of his short mission to Bengal demonstrated the slowly shifting power dynamics between England and India, as well as the changing dynamics within India. Whereas Sir Thomas Roe dealt directly with the Mughal Emperor, William Hedges interacted with local and regional officials who arguably held greater sway over their territories during this period than the Mughal Emperor, who resided hundreds of miles from Bengal and spent much of his reign leading military campaigns. Hedges himself provided few opinions regarding Indians, but the power dynamics displayed in his diary, those that changed and those that remained,

should be kept in mind when considering the opinions of future English/British individuals regarding India.



## *The Colonel's Footman*

### *John MacDonald's Time in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Western India*

John MacDonald's account of his time in India (1769-1773) provides intriguing insight into aspects of eighteenth-century British culture, particularly in the prevailing attitudes of Britons during this period towards the numerous groups of people living in India. As will be described in detail below, MacDonald perceived the relationship between the British and the Indian peoples living in East India Company control as quite harmonious, though certain details MacDonald mentioned in passing belied the cheery coexistence he observed between Indians and their British hegemon. However, based on his writings, MacDonald's ignorance of the inequities of East India Company rule in India appeared to stem from his own personal affinity towards any people, regardless of their race or religion. While MacDonald's apparent racial and religious egalitarianism stand out at first glance, this does not necessarily reflect a greater openness towards Indian cultures by eighteenth-century Britons just for decency's sake. MacDonald was a Highland Scot and lower middle class, meaning he most definitely held a different perspective and power dynamic with Indians compared to the wealthy Englishmen and Lowland Scots of the East India Company.

Perhaps more important than MacDonald's personal positive feelings towards people of different religions and darker skin tones, his memoirs also provide many details of other Britons' actions in India and their attitudes towards the peoples of the subcontinent. The British India of MacDonald's experience involved a great deal of intermingling between the newly arrived British rulers and the Indian peoples they ruled or with which they cooperated. MacDonald observed Britons who learned foreign languages in order to communicate in India, some Britons who respected the religious customs of the Hindu and Muslim populations in India, and even

Britons who married Indian women. MacDonald also mentioned instances of intolerance by British officials and even expressed his own belief in some stereotypes regarding Indian peoples.

The idea one derives from MacDonald's account of eighteenth-century British India is a curious duality of acceptance of many aspects of Indian civilization by Britons in India, but also a clearly unequal relationship between the two groups, designed to benefit and enrich the British. In other words, the British India experienced by MacDonald did not include the "civilizing mission" of the later British Raj of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but for all their seeming acceptance of Indian cultures as civilized, the British of the seventeenth century were undoubtedly there for their own profit. While the British of the eighteenth century incorporated themselves into Indian societies in several ways, rather than imposing themselves upon Indian civilizations from above, they did so principally to facilitate their economic goals in India. The agents of the East India Company chose those methods because Britain did not yet have the completely dominant relationship over India, which it gained in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though still an unequal relationship, the British India of MacDonald's memoirs held many different and complicated nuances not found after the establishment of the Raj.

Though MacDonald's time in India stands as the main concern of this work, basic information regarding his life prior to his time outside Europe bears mentioning. John MacDonald's life began in 1741 as the fourth child of a Scottish Highlander cattle farmer and a woman of the Mackay family; MacDonald does not mention the first names of either of his parents.<sup>119</sup> At the age of four, MacDonald and his four siblings became orphans when their father died at the Battle of Culloden during the Jacobite Uprising of 1745, while MacDonald's mother

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<sup>119</sup> E. Denison Ross & Eileen Power, eds. *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald: Travels (1745-1779)*, (London: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 3.

died two years previously giving birth to his younger brother Alexander.<sup>120</sup> After the death of their father, John's eleven-year-old brother, Duncan, lived and worked for a man named Boyd, while their fourteen-year-old sister, Kitty, led John and their two other brothers to Edinburgh where they lived homeless, forced to beg for a time.<sup>121</sup>

John recounted that the Countess of Murray took in Kitty and Alexander after the noblewoman nearly ran over the pair with her carriage.<sup>122</sup> John and his brother Daniel continued to live on the streets, as they were absent from the incident with the Countess, until a Mr. Goolen took them into his home in 1746.<sup>123</sup> Later that same year, John entered the service of a Mr. Gibbs as a postilion, driving and caring for Gibb's horses, thus at the age of nine MacDonald began his long career as a servant.<sup>124</sup> John worked with the horses of a dozen different individuals from 1746 until a Colonel Alexander Dow hired him as a footman (servant) in 1769 and took John along on his journey to India.<sup>125</sup>

After brief stops on the island of Madeira and in Brazil, Colonel Dow and MacDonald made an extended stop on an island in the Comoros MacDonald referred to as "Joanna," now commonly known as Anjouan.<sup>126</sup> MacDonald left an overwhelmingly positive account of Joanna/Anjouan and its inhabitants, which warrants mentioning in this work as a comparison to MacDonald's later descriptions of India and its peoples. John described Joanna/Anjouan as "a fine island and a beautiful view," and said that the Comorian man who greeted Colonel Dow's party was "the King's son-in-law, a very handsome man, in the Mohametan dress."<sup>127</sup> For

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<sup>120</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 3-4.

<sup>121</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 5.

<sup>122</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 11.

<sup>123</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 13.

<sup>124</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 16-17.

<sup>125</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, xvii.

<sup>126</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 101.

<sup>127</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 101-102.

clarification, MacDonald's frequent use of archaic terms such as "Mohametan" to describe Muslims and "Gentoos" to describe Hindus was simply born from the accepted terminology of the time and should not be construed to contain any connotations such terms may carry today.

MacDonald continued his praise of the inhabitants of Joanna/Anjouan by describing the island's ruler and his family. MacDonald recounted, "The King was a stout old man, his own son a genteel Prince about thirty," and that "The Prince's sons came to pay their respects to the Colonel--- fine young boys."<sup>128</sup> John also praised a feast held by the King, which he called "the best dinner I ever ate," and apparently felt quite beguiled by the women at the feast, as he said "I declare they were like a diamond: they made my hair stand on end to see them."<sup>129</sup> While John's positive feelings towards the Comorians tell much about his apparently accepting nature, his actions and the actions of Colonel Dow on Joanna/Anjouan, also reveal important information about British conduct in the Indian Ocean during the mid-eighteenth century.

MacDonald stated that Colonel Dow spoke "the Moorish language" (Arabic) and presented their Comorian hosts with Arab language books printed in London, including the "Alcoran" (the Quran).<sup>130</sup> When the island's king presented the Colonel, MacDonald, and a third member of their group with colorful turbans, the trio gladly wore these foreign garments.<sup>131</sup> John noted, "The Colonel thanked the King of Joanna for his politeness and attention."<sup>132</sup> In addition, when invited into a mosque on the island, MacDonald and the other British visitors removed their shoes and showed respect for the holy place of a different religion.<sup>133</sup> This in particular

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<sup>128</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 103-105.

<sup>129</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 107.

<sup>130</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 102 & 105.

<sup>131</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 108.

<sup>132</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 107.

<sup>133</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 109.

stands out as markedly different from Sir Thomas Roe's experience with being warned to stay away from a mosque during his time in the Comoros.

MacDonald's account of his brief stop in the Comoros Islands displayed the surprising lack of prejudice John held for people quite different from himself. Neither the dark skin color nor the Muslim faith of the Comorians appeared to hinder John from regarding them in favorable terms, or even commenting on the beauty of the women of the island. While John's position as an outsider to English culture during his many years as a servant possibly conditioned him to readily accept different demographics of people, his lack of power in his own society and the fact that his actions would reflect on his master put MacDonald in no position to regard the Comorians as beneath himself. Likewise, Colonel Dow's conduct displayed the imminently practical nature of East India Company officials during this era. Colonel Dow learned to communicate in the *lingua franca* of the greater Indian Ocean community and took care to show respect toward potential allies and trade partners. Also of importance, the Comorians retained their independence from European colonial powers at this point in history, meaning Colonel Dow's interactions with the rulers of Joanna/Anjouan were on more equal footing than his interactions with Indians living under British hegemony.

After staying in the Comoros for a few days Colonel Dow and MacDonald departed for Bombay (now Mumbai) on the western coast of India. Once in India, MacDonald's description of the local peoples and his account of his interactions with them generally mirror his account of the layover in the Comoros. John appeared to be very happy with the various different groups of Indians, whether they were Muslim, Hindu, or Parsi, and cooperated quite harmoniously with every Indian he with whom he worked. Likewise, John's descriptions of the actions of other Europeans reflected the harmony between the Britons and the Comorians to a degree, with many

British individuals educated in Indian languages, and many took care not to offend the local peoples. Colonel Dow even showed respect for the sovereignty of independent Indian rulers, as will be described below. However, several details of less amicable relationships lie buried inside MacDonald's description of a harmonious and prosperous British India.

MacDonald's first comment on the local people of Bombay was a positive comment, "the servants are excellent and sober in India."<sup>134</sup> He also remarked that only two other European servants lived in Bombay, but that "all the black men (Indians) seemed very well pleased to assist in anything they were desired to do, and seemed surprised to see an Englishman have the command."<sup>135</sup> John also claimed, "They were more happy to be directed by me than by one of their own people," and that he was "very much respected by the black men."<sup>136</sup> Later on in the memoir, John described two Sepoys as "as worthy fellows as ever lived."<sup>137</sup> Toward the end of his stay in India, MacDonald traveled to a town he called Marr and seemed quite pleased with the people living in the town.<sup>138</sup>

Once again, these excerpts from his memoirs displayed the unique lack of prejudice John MacDonald apparently held. He also extensively commented on aspects of Islam, Hinduism, and Parsi Zoroastrianism he witnessed during his time in India. These sections are remarkable enough in that MacDonald described the beliefs and practices of non-Christian religions without any apparent judgement; but additionally, after describing a Hindu ceremony and the major Hindu gods, MacDonald surmised that Hindus were likely descendants of Abraham and a moral

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<sup>134</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 113.

<sup>135</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 114.

<sup>136</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 115-116.

<sup>137</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 137.

<sup>138</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 145-146.

people even without knowledge of the Christian Bible.<sup>139</sup> Later John described the ancient practice of *Sati*, in which a widow would immolate herself on her recently deceased husband's funeral pyre, and appeared to accept the foreign ritual as a legitimate practice because of his mistaken understanding that the women who immolated themselves believed such an act would earn them entrance into heaven.<sup>140</sup> MacDonald's need to reconcile Hindu practices with Christianity indicate that internally he did not accept such foreign ideas on their own merits, but because he was in no position to outright reject them Macdonald rationalized what he saw in familiar terms.

MacDonald also commented frequently that peoples of different faiths could not dine together in India, a fact he seemed accept without insult.<sup>141</sup> While relatively minor, such dining restrictions indicated some inequities between different groups of people in India, which John typically failed to perceive or at least comment upon. However, MacDonald did record one incident regarding religious differences very early in his account, in which a British general by the name of Pimble greatly offended many Indians under his command. MacDonald stated:

At this time an evil thought came into the mind of General Pimble, I believe for himself as well as for others. He wanted all the officers to wear boots on duty. It was against the caste or religion of the Gentoo (Hindu) officers to eat beef or wear their skins, even calves' or sheep-skins. Some of the principal officers waited on the General, to tell him they could not possibly comply with his order to wear boots that were made of the skins of those creatures, which was entirely against their caste or religion; if they did, they would lose their caste and be deprived of the company of their relations. The General insisted that they should wear the boots or give up their commissions.<sup>142</sup>

The "evil thought" of General Pimble, which bears a striking resemblance to some of the policies which later sparked the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857, created significant rancor among the local

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<sup>139</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 140-143.

<sup>140</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 158-159.

<sup>141</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 126-127.

<sup>142</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald*, 118.

Hindu population. According to MacDonald, when General Pimble died of illness, a ship carrying his staff and belongings came under attack from coolie laborers and exploded when fire reached the ship's gun powder stores.<sup>143</sup>

But MacDonald's text revealed more inequities than just General Pimble's intolerant policy regarding the leather boots. John himself appeared to accept some stereotypes about Indians when he described them as "naturally very sleepy."<sup>144</sup> Additionally, John's employer after Colonel Dow, Colonel Keating, told John that when the Indians learned that Keating would soon return to Britain they would steal from him.<sup>145</sup> John also frequently described British people being carried on "palankeens" (palanquins) and even claimed that on one particularly hot day the carriers were happy to carry the Europeans across a river.<sup>146</sup> Perhaps these palanquin carriers simply saw the task of walking through water as a lesser evil. MacDonald's stereotyping of "naturally sleepy" Indians and Colonel Keating's assumption that Indians would steal from his belongings at an opportune time display how prejudices were still extant during Company rule in India. But these stereotypes and prejudices were not yet to the extent of those seen in the British Raj, because the British relationship with India was not yet quite so one-sided.

Some other details gleaned from MacDonald's writing further complicates the structures of British rule during this period, as it becomes apparent that some local autonomy survived and that certain aspects of Anglo-Indian society could be flexible. MacDonald commented that Colonel Keating's servant, Bapu, actually owned land and provided for a large family, even refusing to accept a wage from Colonel Keating because such an arrangement was below Bapu's

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<sup>143</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald, 124.*

<sup>144</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald, 134.*

<sup>145</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald, 162.*

<sup>146</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman, John MacDonald, 145.*



status, instead accepting “gifts” from his employer.<sup>147</sup> John stated that Colonel Keating hired him in the first place because Bapu did not work for him full time, apparently meaning that the Indian servant had some measure of control in his relationship with the British officer.<sup>148</sup> Even more surprising, John described “a black woman” (it is somewhat unclear from the text if she was of Indian or African descent) named Sally Percival as the wealthy widow of an English doctor.<sup>149</sup> According to John, Percival inherited a house in Bombay from her late husband and had a worth between 4,000 and 5,000 pounds sterling.<sup>150</sup>

MacDonald’s account of Sally Percival and her ability to own land indicates some degree of fluidity in gender and racial norms in British India, as white women in the British Isles faced severe challenges to such examples of autonomy during this period. Curiously, this aspect of British India carried over to the Raj, in which the wives of British officials frequently had a greater role in public life and fewer domestic responsibilities than their counterparts in the home islands.<sup>151</sup> However, juxtaposed to this example are other details from MacDonald’s account that show disparities between men and women in British India during this period. As previously mentioned, widows were expected to immolate themselves in the *Sati* ritual, but the same was not expected of widowers. John himself also appeared to have something of a penchant for harassing Indian women. He mentioned that he frequently enjoyed watching Indian women bathe in an outdoor tub.<sup>152</sup> John also made advances on an Indian woman and despite her rejections persisted until she threatened to tell her husband.<sup>153</sup> These examples show that gender inequities,

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<sup>147</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman*, John MacDonald, 132.

<sup>148</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman*, John MacDonald, 129.

<sup>149</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman*, John MacDonald, 122.

<sup>150</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman*, John MacDonald, 122.

<sup>151</sup> Mary Procida, *Married to Empire, Gender: Politics, and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>152</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman*, John MacDonald, 125.

<sup>153</sup> *Memoirs of an Eighteenth-Century Footman*, John MacDonald, 156-157.

much like racial inequities, were complicated but certainly extant in this period of Company rule in India.

John MacDonald's account of his time in India revealed many things about his own personal feelings towards people different from himself, the broader societal opinions towards out-groups during this period of British history, and the complicated structures of racial and gender relations in eighteenth-century British India. Taken together, MacDonald's writings show that British people in India were willing to accept aspects of Indian cultures and were not completely intolerant of Indian civilization. However, that semi-acceptance of Indian civilization did not halt British endeavors to extract wealth from India, regardless of the consequences for Indians. Indeed, much of the seeming "tolerance" of this period stemmed from Britain's lack of complete domination over India, which essentially forced the agents of the East India Company to treat Indians with some degree of respect. Just as MacDonald lacked the power to allow himself to be more intolerant, Britons in general lacked the power to act with complete contempt of Indian cultures and still achieve their goals of trade and resource extraction during Company rule in India.

## *The Empire's Soldier*

*Thomas Skinner and Britain in Early Nineteenth-Century India*

By the time Thomas Skinner arrived in India in 1826, Britain's relationship with the subcontinent and the world at large changed from the days of William Hedges' administration in mid-seventeenth-century Madras, and especially John MacDonald's time in late eighteenth-century Bombay. By 1826, the East India Company controlled immense swathes of territory from Bengal to Bombay and removed France as a rival power in India. The Mughal Empire still existed in theory, but in practice the Mughal Emperor's authority only truly existed in his own home. Britain gained a dominant position over India politically, economically, and militarily. However, Indians still held significant power within the military and civil administration of the East India Company. While Britain clearly held the upper hand in this relationship, Indians continued to exercise a significant, though diminished, level of political and economic power within their homeland.

Likewise, Thomas Skinner's position within British society differed from those of Sir Thomas Roe, William Hedges, and John MacDonald. Skinner followed his father's example and joined the British Army in 1816, eventually rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839-1842) before his death from poor health in 1843.<sup>154</sup> Thus, like Roe and Hedges, Skinner resided within the upper echelons of British society, though not quite as highly as did those two men. Skinner's activities exploring in India and leading troops in the Afghan War meant that he interacted directly with common people in India, much like MacDonald, though Skinner held much more power in his position than did MacDonald. Thus,

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<sup>154</sup> H.C.G. Matthew, Brian Harrison, and British Academy, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: In Association with the British Academy: From the Earliest Time to the Year 2000, Vol. 50*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 232.

not only did the power dynamic between Britain and India differ during the era of this source compared to other sources, the power dynamic within British society of the source's author differs significantly from others utilized in this work.

Skinner frequently interacted with Indians during his time on the subcontinent and left several impressions of the people living there. When several people fell in a river due to a boat accident and the Muslim crew of Skinner's boat neglected to make an attempt to save the people, Skinner generalized this as a product of "true Moslem indifference."<sup>155</sup> Skinner also complained of "the annoyance of Hindoo apathy."<sup>156</sup> Regarding Hindu dietary rules, Skinner wrote that, "No one, I hope, would be inclined to ridicule prejudices, sincerely adopted, however absurd."<sup>157</sup> Another of Skinner's comments complained of the "besetting sin of dirtiness, however, still holds a firm seat among their characteristic faults."<sup>158</sup> Skinner also commented on an Indian celebration he witnessed, writing that, "The singing of the women was lament able enough ; the great merit seemed to be who could shout loudest, and so equal were their talents that it would be difficult to adjudge the prize," and that "they have very few good songs."<sup>159</sup>

Skinner was not alone in such sentiments. The London-born writer Emma Roberts travelled to India twice during the 1830s and wrote extensively of her observations in India.<sup>160</sup> In an 1835 piece, Roberts criticized the living conditions of Indians. Roberts wrote, "A mud hut, or a rows of hovels, constructed of mats, thatch, and bamboos, not superior to the rudest wigwam, often rest against the outer walls of palaces, while there are avenues opening from the principal

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<sup>155</sup> Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India: Including a Walk over the Himalaya Mountains, to the Sources of the Jumna and the Ganges*, (London: R. Bentley, 1833), 21.

<sup>156</sup> *Excursions in India*, 82.

<sup>157</sup> *Excursions in India*, 24-25.

<sup>158</sup> *Excursions in India*, 123.

<sup>159</sup> *Excursions in India*, 73.

<sup>160</sup> Tim Keirn & Norbert Schürer, eds., *British Encounter with India, 1750-1830: A Sourcebook*, (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2011), 194-195.

streets, intersected in all directions by native bazaars, filled with unsightly articles of every description.”<sup>161</sup> Roberts also reported that few houses in India, “excepting those exclusively occupied by Europeans, are kept in good repair,” and that “an air of squalor spread over the whole establishment which disgusts the eye.”<sup>162</sup> The British intellectual Thomas Babington Macaulay also described India in an 1835 piece, in which he characterized the various languages of India “so poor and rude” and devoid scientific and literary terminology, while he regarded English as “pre-eminent even among the languages of the West.”<sup>163</sup>

A further example of disdain for aspects of life in India, as well as simple ignorance, comes from an 1833 correspondence between a British woman living in England and her brother working in India. The woman, referred to only as Mary in her brother’s reply, inquired to her brother about the extravagance and riches he must have witnessed since his arrival in India, about “the splendid array of nobles, appareled in vests of gold and silver embroidery, their turbans glittering with crescents of gems, and their weapons brilliant with the spoil of the diamond-mines.”<sup>164</sup> Her brother, Frank, chastised Mary’s visions of oriental opulence in his reply, Frank questioned when his sister and other Britons in the home islands would “attain some accurate idea of the real state of things” in the East India Company’s Indian territories.<sup>165</sup> In his agitated response, Frank criticized Indian servants, the lack of luxuries available to him, and the presence of rats in his living quarters.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> *British Encounter with India*, 196.

<sup>162</sup> *British Encounter with India*, 196.

<sup>163</sup> *British Encounter with India*, 198.

<sup>164</sup> *British Encounter with India*, 191-192.

<sup>165</sup> *British Encounter with India*, 192.

<sup>166</sup> *British Encounter with India*, 193-194.

These passages displayed some of the same haughtiness typically ascribed to Britons during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Though not as virulently hateful toward Indian cultures, Skinner's words denoted a paternalistic sense of superiority over the Indian cultural norms he witnessed. As a man with some degree of power in British society and in his occupation, and as a British man living during a period in which Britain held the upper hand in their relationship with India, Skinner's position in life conducive to prejudice. However, Skinner also expressed positive, albeit paternalistic, opinions regarding Indians. Skinner wrote, "in spite of much that may be uncongenial to an European in their character, they cannot fail to inspire him with esteem, if not affection. I wish that many of my countrymen would learn to believe that the natives are endowed with feelings."<sup>167</sup> Skinner wrote that a light-skinned Indian woman "formed so a picturesque a figure" while she wore a white robe draped from her shoulder "in the graceful manner of the Hindoo women."<sup>168</sup>

Skinner also noted that he "often witnessed, with wonder and sorrow, an English gentleman stoop to the basest tyranny over his servants, without even the poor excuse of anger, and frequently from no other reason than because he could not understand their language."<sup>169</sup> Skinner's writing displayed that in this environment of increased Company control, physical abuse of Indians by Britons happened. Skinner believed that such abuses were "becoming more rare," but also noted that the "younger members of society" typically committed such acts of violence.<sup>170</sup> Naturally, many those younger members of Anglo-Indian society would be older, and in positions of greater power, during the end of Company rule and the early years of the Raj.

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<sup>167</sup> Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India: Including a Walk over the Himalaya Mountains, to the Sources of the Jumna and the Ganges*, (London: R. Bentley, 1833), 131.

<sup>168</sup> *Excursions in India*, 143.

<sup>169</sup> *Excursions in India*, 131.

<sup>170</sup> *Excursions in India*, 132.

While still different from the era after the Indian Rebellion, Company rule during the first half of the nineteenth century progressed toward the inequalities associated with the Raj. Though different eras in British colonial rule with notable differences, continuity between the two also existed.

Thomas Skinner also recorded his observations about Indian religious practices, similar to John MacDonald. However, unlike MacDonald, Skinner made no attempt to reconcile Hinduism with his own faith. When he observed Indians refusing to take water from people they considered pariahs, Skinner wrote, “Such is the high feeling of a Hindoo: the devotion to a false creed of such people, who will perish rather than break the smallest of its commands.”<sup>171</sup> He worried that he might “find some difficulty in obtaining a draught of water” because of Hindu restrictions on drinking from the same vessel as an outsider like himself.<sup>172</sup> Skinner described the “martyrdom” of Hindu religious customs, including the practice of *Sati*, as “the sad scenes acted every day in the East.”<sup>173</sup>

Skinner’s attitude toward the “false creed” of Indians demonstrates some of the key differences between his position in British society and that of John MacDonald, as well as the changes in the relationship between the East India Company and India during the decades between MacDonald’s time in India and Skinner’s journey. Skinner’s higher social position and the Company’s greater control over India provided less incentive for him to actively reconcile his beliefs with the beliefs of the Indians with whom he interacted. Skinner could afford to be more dismissive and less accepting than MacDonald. Like the negative comments on Indian culture, housing, and language discussed above, Skinner’s comments on Indian religion demonstrated a

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<sup>171</sup> *Excursions in India*, 123.

<sup>172</sup> *Excursions in India*, 218.

<sup>173</sup> *Excursions in India*, 125.

shift in attitudes that more closely resembled the prevailing attitudes of Britons during the Raj.

The accounts of Skinner and other Britons present in India during the 1830s represent a degree of continuity between Company rule and the British Raj.



## *Conclusion*

After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the direct rule of the British Raj essentially pushed out all Indians from the positions of power they held in the colonial administration and military during the East India Company's administration of the region.<sup>174</sup> The dominant position in the British-Indian relationship that developed over the course of Company rule, now stood unfettered from the influence of Indians holding important positions within colonial administration. This trend extended to other areas of British Empire as well, even in cases in which the British held little direct control of territory, most notably in the British relationship with China following the Opium Wars. China's monopoly on tea production represented the nation's last measure of leverage in its relationship with the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century. British botanists believed that learning the secrets of tea cultivation was part of their scientific mission to understand the natural world, but more importantly for the East India Company and the British government, obtaining those secrets solidified their advantage in their dealings with the Chinese.<sup>175</sup> Aside from the indirect rule through Indian and African collaborators in some colonies deemed too unimportant for direct rule, the British imperial project during the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century was to be carried out by Britons, or not at all.

As was typical of nineteenth-century European societies, most Britons of that era felt an unwavering confidence in the superiority of their own culture, their own traditions, and their ability to govern a territory. Unlike the tradition of French Universalism, which much of the

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<sup>174</sup> Mary A. Procida, *Married to Empire, Gender, Politics, and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 7-8.

<sup>175</sup> Sarah Rose, *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 4.

French intelligentsia believed to be applicable to most cultures, the British held little faith that their system could be operated by non-British peoples. They not only believed their system to be superior, but that only the British were capable of properly implementing this superior system of governance. This was especially true for the administration of the United Kingdom's overseas empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

As seen in Mary Procida's *Married to Empire: Gender, Politics, and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947*, the colonial administration of British India differed after the 1857 Rebellion. Whereas Indians served in key roles as administrators and military officers during Company rule, the Raj government consisted of white British men, exclusively--- at least officially. The British belief in their own superiority, as well as the vitriol the British public felt over Indian conduct during the Rebellion (both real and imagined) meant that the British no longer considered Indians to be appropriately "civilized" or competent enough to hold any degree of power in the Raj.<sup>176</sup> Outside the collaborators in the Princely States, many of whom were eventually ousted under the Doctrine of Lapse, Indians no longer shared a role in ruling India.

The fact that so much of India was now a subjugated population fueled negative British perceptions of Indians. In the British mind, Indian men became simultaneously effeminate incompetents and hypersexual threats to British women in the Raj.<sup>177</sup> Indian men's conduct toward Indian women, such as the much-maligned practice of *Sati*, now marked them as misogynists, highly ironic given gender relations in nineteenth-century Britain. The obligation of widows to immolate themselves on their deceased husbands' funeral pyres became proof to the British that Indians were a backwards, barbaric people. Some Britons took this as a call to action

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<sup>176</sup> Mary A. Procida, *Married to Empire: Gender, Politics, and Imperialism in India, 1883-1947* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 51.

<sup>177</sup> *Married to Empire*, 166.

to “uplift” Indians into a more civilized people.<sup>178</sup> Others decided that Indians simply lacked the capability to reach the heights of British culture.

Procida’s work described the emasculation of India by the near total exclusion of Indians from colonial administration and the surprising hierarchy this arrangement created in the Raj. Because the British as a whole resided above Indians as a whole on that hierarchy, British women in India enjoyed a far greater status than Indian men, despite rampant misogyny in nineteenth-century British society. Further, British women performed more “masculine” tasks in the public sphere than many Indian men, and certainly more than British women back in the home islands.<sup>179</sup> Their work originated as unofficial outgrowths of their husbands’ positions in the military and colonial civil service, and indeed Anglo-Indian women were expected to assist their husbands in their public service positions, in stark contrast to their contemporaries in Britain, expected to cloister themselves to domestic life. While the presence of women in the public sphere was controversial in the British Isles, this dynamic was expected of Anglo-Indians in the Raj, if unofficial.<sup>180</sup>

Anglo-Indian women lived quite divergent lives from British women in the home islands. As a result of extremely cheap labor in India, Anglo-Indian women spent far less time of their time personally performing domestic duties.<sup>181</sup> One Anglo-Indian woman confided that she spent a short portion of her morning giving a cursory inspection of her home’s kitchen and pantry, which completed her portion of the household chores for the day.<sup>182</sup> Childcare also burdened Anglo-Indian women far less than British women back in Britain, as most children were sent

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<sup>178</sup> *Married to Empire*, 166.

<sup>179</sup> *Married to Empire*, 57.

<sup>180</sup> *Married to Empire*, 11.

<sup>181</sup> *Married to Empire*, 58

<sup>182</sup> *Married to Empire*, 94.

back to Britain for education around the age of six.<sup>183</sup> Without childcare and domestic burdens, Anglo-Indian women spent much of their time providing invaluable assistance to work of their husbands. Anglo-Indian women performing functions in the public sphere was not only accepted in the Raj, but in fact women were generally considered poor wives if they were not up to the task of sharing the burden of their husbands' professional duties. Britons were so sure of their own superiority that the sexism of nineteenth-century British society appeared to be outweighed by their racism towards Indians.

Sarah Rose's *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History* demonstrated a similar theme of Britons' sense of their own superiority even outside of British territory. Similar to silk and porcelain, Chinese dynasties jealously guarded the secrets of tea production for centuries. The emergence of worldwide trade networks during the Early Modern Period brought processed tea leaves to Britain, where the beverage brewed from them became a national institution. But the Chinese did not allow for tea plants or their methods of processing tea leaves to leave their borders and Britons' remained ignorant of even basic information regarding tea.<sup>184</sup> Prior to the expeditions of Robert Fortune, the central narrative of Rose's work, Britons believed green and black tea to come from distinct species of tea plants, rather than the same plant processed differently.<sup>185</sup>

This ignorance became unacceptable for Britain during the nineteenth century. The popularity of sciences, like botany, grew rapidly in Europe during this period. Europeans held a belief that all knowledge could be obtained through the research and experiments of heroic

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<sup>183</sup> *Married to Empire*, 46.

<sup>184</sup> Sarah Rose, *For All the Tea in China: How England Stole the World's Favorite Drink and Changed History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 60.

<sup>185</sup> *For All the Tea in China*, 62.

scientists and that humanity could be improved through their work and technological advancement. That feeling naturally extended to botanical science, and because of their deeply Eurocentric worldview, if a British scientist had not yet recorded some type of information, then that information was completely unknown and needed to be “discovered.” Thus was the case with tea, something the Chinese discovered centuries ago, but was unknown from the perspective of the British. The desire for a British botanist to record information about tea, in part, drove the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew to send the Scottish botanist Robert Fortune to China to “discover” the secrets of tea.<sup>186</sup>

However, financial considerations also drummed up support for Fortune’s venture. The East India Company wanted Fortune to obtain live tea plants to start their own tea growing and processing industry in their Indian territories, particularly in the Western Himalayas.<sup>187</sup> While the dynamic between Britain and China already shifted decidedly to Britain’s advantage following the Opium Wars, China’s monopoly on tea cultivation provided some degree of leverage in that relationship, and of course revenue for the Qing government. The British not only wanted to further advantage themselves over the Chinese, but they also believed that their presumed superior intelligence and work ethic would lead to great improvements in the procedures of growing tea plants and processing the leaves into a finished product for consumption.<sup>188</sup>

Despite the odds stacked against him, Robert Fortune succeeded in retrieving specimens of tea plants for British production in India and convincing a small group of Chinese tea growers to travel to India to help guide the British effort. However, the experience of those Chinese experts displayed the prevailing sense of superiority possessed by the British. At almost every

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<sup>186</sup> *For All the Tea in China*, 11.

<sup>187</sup> *For All the Tea in China*, 5.

<sup>188</sup> *For All the Tea in China*, 27.

turn, the British officials overseeing this project ignored Chinese advice and attempted to swindle or exploit the Chinese tea experts.<sup>189</sup> Despite their relative ignorance on the production of tea, the British maintained a haughty attitude toward the non-British experts, even though the East India Company specifically requested the expertise.

Until the calamity of the First World War, Britons and other Europeans commonly possessed complete confidence in the superiority of their culture and their methods of administration. Before the war shattered the illusion of absolute supremacy fostered throughout the nineteenth century, the British saw little need to include others in their imperial ventures. The Indian Rebellion of 1857 soured many British towards Indians, though the roots of their prejudices towards Indians were far older. This developed into the administration of the Raj, which barred Indians from positions of power in their own homeland. Similarly, the discovery that Chinese tea manufacturers used poisonous additives to make their green teas more visually appealing to British consumers reinforced the notion that the Chinese methods of tea cultivation needed British improvement. During the Raj, the British trusted themselves above all others and indeed viewed Indian as “a people so different from themselves.” This arrangement differed greatly from previous dynamic between Britain and India during Company rule.

As several of the sources in this work displayed, the East India Company relied on collaboration with Indians, to varying degrees, throughout its reign in India. Initially, Company agents begged and plotted for the favor of Mughal Emperors and their regional governors, seeking their all-important *firman* and *perwanna*. Sir Thomas Roe and William Hedges sought their special privileges from sovereign rulers, over whom they held little influence, let alone

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<sup>189</sup> *For All the Tea in China*, 200.

power. Even after the dynamics between the Company and India changed following the Battles of Plassey and Buxar, Company agents desired the formal grant of *diwani* to justify their rule in their newly acquired Bengali territory. Three years after Buxar, East India Company military officer Robert Clive described this dynamic to the directors of the Company back in London, writing that, “since the acquisition of the dewany, the power formerly belonging to the soubah [*nawab*] of those provinces is totally, in fact, vested in the East India Company. Nothing remains to him but the name and shadow of authority. This name, however, this shadow, it is indispensably necessary we should seem to venerate.”<sup>190</sup>

Clive understood that despite the East India Company’s recent victory over Bengal and the Mughal Empire, Indian symbols of legitimacy like the *diwani* still held value for the Company in the late eighteenth century. Even with the *nawab* of Bengal deposed and the Mughal Emperor merely a figurehead in the region, the Company still needed support from local landholders, merchants, and officials in its newly conquered territories. The relationship between Britain and India drifted closer to that of the Raj at turn of the nineteenth century, yet key distinctions remained in the power held by Indians.

The shifting power dynamics of the different eras of the East India Company’s activity in India influenced how Britons interacted with Indians and perceived them. Sir Thomas Roe conducted himself diplomatically in his interactions with Indians, outside a few isolated outbursts toward Mukarrab Khan. William Hedges spent a great deal of his time in India negotiating for privileges with Indians who clearly did not view their relationships with Hedges and the Company as vitally important to their interests in the same way Hedges and his superiors

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<sup>190</sup> Alfred Mervyn Davies, *Clive of Plassey: A Biography*, (New York: C. Scribner's sons, 1939), 443.

felt about those business relationships. Thomas Skinner began to display some of the haughtiness associated with Britons during the Raj. The shift in power within the British-Indian relationship during Company rule partially accounted for the change in their conduct with Indians.

But power dynamics within British society also factored into British attitudes and actions towards Indians. John MacDonald's account of his time in India displayed the difference ethnicity and social class could play in the British-Indian relationship. MacDonald appeared to be the most outwardly favorable toward Indians of the major sources studied in this work. MacDonald also held the lowest social standing of said sources and held the distinction of being a Highlander Scot rather than an Englishman. To expand this work, more sources like MacDonald could be analyzed to further examine the importance of social class and ethnicity in British opinions towards Indians. Furthermore, a greater emphasis on sources from British women in India during both periods of colonial rule would add another critical dynamic to study, namely gender. For example, in 1902 the socialist intellectual Annie Besant stated that, "India is not ruled for the prospering of the people, but rather for the profit of her conquerors, and her sons are being treated as a conquered race."<sup>191</sup> Besant's remarks, written during the height of the Raj, provide a counter-example of the prevailing attitudes of her time. Applying the framework of this study, Besant's anti-imperialist message could indicate how her position outside mainstream British society influenced her opinions towards Indians and the British Empire. Her socialist views also hint at other factors besides power dynamics, such as ideology, which influenced the formation of attitudes.

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<sup>191</sup> Rosemary Dinnage, *Alone! Alone!: Lives of Some Outsider Women*, (New York: New York Review Books, 2004), 125.



The East India Company and the British Raj both existed to extract wealth from India for the benefit of the British Empire. However, difference in their structures regarding the amount of power Indians held within each system created a dichotomy between the two eras in which it could appear that Company rule was less racist and more equitable than the Raj. By extension, this could lead one to believe that perhaps British society was simply less prejudiced during the era of Company rule than during the Raj. This answer, which some historians in the past have accepted, lacks the nuance to truly represent the dynamics of Company rule in India. Britons' did possess prejudices against Indians during Company rule and expressed those prejudices.

Sometimes those prejudices manifested in negative opinions towards Indians, though of a different nature than negative opinions commonly found from the Raj. For example, despite the "civilizing mission" to bring British ideas of modernity to India, many Britons during the Raj doubted the ability of Indians to act like proper Britons. In contrast, during certain periods of Company rule, East India Company officials were quite insistent that Indians conduct themselves like Englishmen, a critical factor in the outbreak of the Sepoy Rebellion. Whereas Britons of the Raj viewed Indians as "a people so different from themselves," Britons during Company rule viewed Indians as compatible with British culture, yet Britons of both periods felt that Indians needed to be changed by the British. Power dynamics, both between Britain and India and the power dynamics within British society played a role in such divergences between the two periods. Of course, that distinction does not justify either of those forms of prejudice or imperialist ideology, but it remains a distinction worth noting in order to attain a deeper understanding of the nuances of this subject.

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