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AGAINST “ANOMALY”: INDIA REFORMISM AND THE POLITICS OF
COLONIAL DISSENT

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This dissertation seeks to recover a transregional tradition of colonial dissent that was sustained by a network of reformers extending from Boston to Bengal. Approaching British India as a zone of exception where colonizers’ “liberal” values were frequently overridden by rationalizations for despotic rule, this tradition critiqued the various anomalies that undergirded an exploitative system of authoritarian statecraft. Although the reformers who participated in the British India Society (est. 1839), the India Reform Society (1853), and the East India Association (1866) belonged to varying races and classes, most adopted certain liberal principles: constitutionalism, free trade, governmental accountability, and individual, unfettered proprietorship of land were key concerns. At the same time, many articulated “conservationist” ideologies that favored the use of the Indian villages’ municipal machinery and the defense of princes’ internal sovereignty. Reformers also drew attention to India’s widespread impoverishment, observing that the country had long been regarded purely as “a carcass for a certain number of Englishmen to prey upon.” Seeking to bolster India’s productive capacities and spur much-needed material development, they fused an orientalist affirmation of native political structures with a vision of unfettered intra-imperial communication and equitable economic exchange. By excavating these reformist networks over a fifty-year period, this study offers a non-canonical analysis of Victorian liberal imperialism and diverges from historical narratives that foreground Britain’s civilizing mission.

Although these societies anchored the diffuse reformist community, agitators sustained webs of association that extended beyond the membership lists of any particular

organization. This dissertation therefore charts the evolution of reformist thought and agitational techniques by plotting the informational “circuits” that enabled network formation. Chapter One examines the rise of the professional public moralist and situates early India reformism among concurrent campaigns like transatlantic abolitionism, free trade, and aboriginal protection. This chapter also outlines the theoretical components of the reformers’ ideological conservatism, which they largely inherited from an earlier generation of Scottish colonial administrators. While a minority of reformers championed an assimilative, “causative” form of liberalism, most subscribed to a “reflexive” liberalism that was concerned with checking the colonial state’s arbitrary power. Chapters Two and Five specifically probe the reformers’ modes of rhetoric that highlighted two disturbing anomalies. To raise metropolitan awareness of distant injustices in the post-Emancipation era, they drew attention to the “virtual slavery” suffered by peasant cultivators, subordinated princes, and the British working classes alike. Denouncing expansionism – which entailed the violation of the colonial state’s own “rule of law” – they further defended the sovereignty of native rulers by amalgamating classical law of nations theories with the contents of early international law treatises.

Aside from clarifying the reformers’ shared ideologies, this study also identifies the sources of dissension that fractured the movement. Reformers regularly observed that India’s communications and irrigative works had fallen into a state of decay under British rule as a result of the state’s extractive military-fiscalism. They therefore hailed infrastructural improvement as the germ of a new “state-idea” that prioritized the Indian public good. Chapter Three focuses on the careers of John Chapman, the promoter of the

Great Indian Peninsula Railway, and Sir Arthur Cotton, the leading proponent of irrigative canals in India. Chapman sought to stimulate metropolitan investment in colonial public works, which would lead speculators to increasingly scrutinize Indian affairs. The colonial state would then function as a referee, arbitrating conflicts between these private enterprises. Cotton also called for transparency and hoped to deal with public works “in a public spirit.” But unlike Chapman, he urged the government to assume an overtly bio-political role and tasked it with the preservation of life in a period of escalating famines. Within reform circles, disagreement persisted as to whether rail or canal construction would yield the most benefits to the population at large.

Chapter Four analyzes the myriad, often-divisive schemes that reformers introduced to ameliorate India’s poverty. In the 1840s, many believed that India’s anomalous exclusion from a system of “real” free trade had contributed to the collapse of the native manufacturing sector. Reducing tariffs and land taxes, they argued, would facilitate cash crop production, boost Indian employment, and provide Britain with a stable, free-labor source of sugar and cotton. Yet reformers struggled to bring this utopian scheme to fruition. Many of their potential allies, including Lancashire textile manufacturers and Anglo-Indian planters, sought access to raw cotton and land freeholds but refused to address broader issues of Indian governance. Once a radical “nativist” faction of reformers turned against laissez-faire policy in the 1870s, it became apparent that British and Indian economic fortunes were no longer so clearly intertwined.

The final chapter of the dissertation argues that British and Indian agitators were attempting to construct an entirely new social formation: an imperial civil society based on inter-associational linkages. Early reformers in the metropole endorsed the formation

of native political societies in the presidency towns that could provide reliable information on local conditions. Webs of contact also formed on an individual level, as veteran reformers in Britain advised members of the incipient native associations on constitutionalist techniques. To improve race-relations, the East India Association discussed various ways of educating the English public on Indian affairs and fostering the expression of native public opinion beyond voluntarist organizing.

What I am unearthing, then, is an alternative vision of a moralized Indian Empire that arose through public sphere agitation. It may seem incongruous that reformers who campaigned for emancipation, free trade, global peace, the extension of the franchise, and aboriginal protection against settler violence did not demand Britain's immediate withdrawal from India. But the fact that India reformism was not explicitly anti-colonial in orientation should not lead us to disregard the movement as insufficiently progressive. Instead, we ought appreciate the extent to which their challenge of vested interests and their rebuke of autocratic statecraft abroad were provocative in their day. If we are to understand how and why reformers continued to operate within a liberal conceptual framework, we must avoid classifying Victorians as either imperial jingoists or "Little Englanders." Many believed that closer relations, rather than abrupt separation, would ensure the mutual prosperity of both metropole and dependency; they therefore sought to expose the anomalies that facilitated a "rule of colonial difference." If the British did not generate new state-ideas and reconfigure their administration accordingly, the only foreseeable outcome was armed revolt.

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— Introduction —

In 1827, nineteen-year-old George, a recent graduate of the East India College at Haileybury, began receiving letters from a relative stationed at the princely court of Satara in modern day Maharashtra. Drafted with the aim of preparing him for a civil service posting in India, these missives were chock full of practical information. Their author instructed George to broaden his horizons before his departure by undertaking a nine-month tour through Europe; having interacted with various foreigners, he would be less likely to “meet the natives of this country with repugnance.”¹ George was also advised to delve into his language studies during the long journey, as competence in vernaculars was the only means of removing “the veil that exists between us and the natives.” It was imperative that he should avoid the path trod by his older brother, Charles, who had committed all manner of indiscretions upon entering the East India Company’s (EIC) military service at the age of sixteen. Not only did Charles lose considerable sums by gambling recreationally, but he had also begun to exhibit a disconcerting “antipathy to color” and abuse his domestic servants accordingly. George, his interlocutor urged, ought remember that “those nations now indiscriminately called ‘black fellows’” had once been at the forefront of “modern science and civilization.”

If India was not the land of barbaric horrors that so many missionaries had made it out to be, George may have questioned the utility of the colonial presence. His correspondent anticipated this query. Through the application of their advanced “moral and intellectual powers,” Britons had won the admiration of Indians and now relied upon

¹ John Briggs, *Letters Addressed to a Young Person; Calculated to Afford Instruction for his Conduct in General, and more Especially in his Intercourse with the Natives* (London: John Murray, 1828), 4-15.

the “voluntary aid of the population itself” to maintain their rule.² For the time being, caste restrictions precluded any sustained union between the two races; the British were therefore obliged to organize themselves into a distinct “caste of rulers” and govern sympathetically from on high. George’s relative was likely familiar with the Whig statesman Edmund Burke, who had famously observed that the caste system imposed a “great gulf” that the British could not bridge. Like Burke, he also bemoaned the tendency of colonial officials to “introduce plans of government of our own, without comprehending those which we are superseding.” In many cases, the traditional mechanisms that animated the native social body needed only to “be a little more excited” rather than wholly replaced. India’s “village republics,” for instance, boasted judicial councils (*panchayats*) and a hereditary division of labor; they had operated effectively until the Company began meddling with land taxation systems.³ George’s mentor was also convinced that legislative ameliorants to social problems would prove ineffectual. Obstructing the passage of the body-crushing carriage at the annual Jagannath festival might inadvertently prompt Hindus to martyr themselves in protest; the legal abolition of *sati* would simply lead widows to substitute poisoning for self-immolation. Rooted in “superstition and prejudice,” these practices would only subside through the “slow and solemn march of intelligence.”⁴

We cannot know how George responded to this affirmation of Indian political institutions because George never existed. Both he and Charles were figments of the

² Ibid., 185-87.

³ After 1827, the *panchayats* operated in a “new, more restricted role” as either advisory bodies to British judges or, more rarely, “voluntary boards of arbitration.” See James Jaffe, *The Ironies of Colonial Governance: Law, Custom, and Justice in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 246.

⁴ Briggs, *Letters Addressed to a Young Person*, 142.

imagination of Lt. Col. John Briggs, the “resident” at Satara who drew up this didactic exchange to prevent green recruits from devolving into petit despots. The fictional nature of this narrative should not lead us to discount it; rather, the fact that the Bombay government commissioned it in the first place reflects a persistent anxiety over colonial comportment and a recognition of the inherent precariousness of British dominion in India. Through his admonitions, Briggs was elevating a peculiar variant of liberal imperialist thought, one premised on the somewhat paradoxical belief that colonial rule would only endure through the consent of the governed.

Having entered Company service in 1801, Briggs had risen through the ranks during a tumultuous period in which the British dramatically extended their territories in western India. After serving as an assistant for two high-ranking Scottish administrators, Mountstuart Elphinstone and John Malcolm, he received a collectorate in the recently annexed district of Khandesh. There, he sought to conciliate the Bhil tribes, who historically furnished police forces for the villages but had taken to raiding amidst depopulation and economic depression. As collector, Briggs followed Elphinstone’s lead in reinstating the *panchayats*, which he converted into a *de facto* jury in both civil and criminal cases.⁵ By revitalizing - and occasionally expanding - the duties of these municipal entities, Briggs was eschewing the British tendency to “take the interior management of the people’s concerns into our hands” and to “place our paid servants everywhere” without sufficient concern for the desires of the peasantry.⁶ Unseating the village magnates and hereditary officeholders, the British were imposing a “leveling system” that would soon “reduce the whole population to the condition of mere serfs of

⁵ Arvind M. Deshpande, *John Briggs in Maharashtra: a Study of District Administration under Early British Rule* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), 72, 156.

⁶ Briggs, *Letters Addressed to a Young Person*, 109.

the soil.”⁷ As Malcolm had previously recounted, natives widely believed that the colonial “system of rule [was] at variance with the permanent continuance of rank, authority, and distinction.”⁸ This leveling, together with officials’ increasing distaste for native intermediaries, prompted Indians to look upon themselves as “an inferior and degraded race.” Briggs worried that this unraveling of the social fabric would also have an economic cost, as a “nation of paupers” would be as “equally incapable of raising articles for exportation as of purchasing the imports of Europe.”

Aside from idealizing the village communities, Briggs advocated for the conservation of India’s numerous princely states. Stationed at Satara, Mysore, and Nagpur, he emulated Malcolm, who had exercised restraint during the treaty negotiations that concluded the Third Anglo-Mahratta War (1817-18).⁹ In mediating between the leading Mahratta families, Malcolm came to favor a policy of limited intervention in princely affairs. States that were “virtually or declaredly dependent” on British protection should nonetheless be permitted to enjoy “the active exercise of their sovereign functions” when it came to internal administration.¹⁰ Exploiting the princes as puppets only diminished them in the eyes of their subjects and produced internal conflagrations. Briggs echoed these cautions. To ward against misrule, he called for “the formation of a regular system” with a “constitution,- which should be binding on the head of the

⁷ Ibid., viii.

⁸ Ibid., 192, 197.

⁹ Although the youthful Bhimabai Holkar had joined the Peshwa Bajee Rao in his anti-colonial designs, Malcolm had no wish to retaliate by overthrowing “one of the ancient states of India and one which had now for many years been on terms of friendship” with the British. To preserve Holkar’s sovereign status, Malcolm pressured him to renounce his nominal claims to certain territories; retaining them served “no purpose but that of allowing lawless military chiefs to collect predatory hordes and plunderers in the name of his family.” See John Malcolm to John Adam, December 15, 1817, Bodleian Library, John Briggs Papers, Eng.hist.c332, ff. 4, 24.

¹⁰ Briggs, *Letters Addressed to a Young Person*, 212.

Government, and which ought not to be essentially altered or departed from.”¹¹ This anti-expansionism put him at odds with an administration that was rapidly centralizing its authority and consolidating its dominion. Briggs therefore sought the company of other heterodox individuals like John Sullivan, a former member of the Madras Legislative Council who shared his admiration for India’s municipal institutions.¹² Upon retiring to England in 1835, Briggs waded into the nascent field of India reform that had arisen out of the abolitionist and aboriginal protection campaigns.¹³ For these agitators, caste restrictions were but one impediment to the formation of interracial affective relations. The Company’s penchant for extraction and extortion was equally to blame for Britons’ estrangement from native society.

This dissertation analyzes perceptions of British India as an anomalous conquest and a zone of exception, a terrain where its colonizers’ “liberal” values were frequently overridden by rationalizations for despotic rule. It seeks to recover a transregional tradition of colonial dissent that was sustained by a network of reformers extending from Boston to Bengal. Informed by what I term “reflexive liberalism,” this tradition amplified critiques of authoritarian statecraft and modes of exclusion. Although the reformers belonged to varying races and classes, most adopted certain liberal principles: constitutionalism, free trade, governmental accountability, and individual, unfettered proprietorship of land were key concerns. At the same time, many articulated “conservationist” ideologies that favored the use of the villages’ municipal machinery and the defense of princes’ internal sovereignty. Reformers also drew attention to India’s

¹¹ Thomas Evans Bell, *Memoir of General John Briggs, of the Madras Army* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 226.

¹² *Ibid.*, 232, 247.

¹³ Briggs served as treasurer of the British India Society from 1839 to 1841 and remained a prominent commentator on Indian affairs for decades.

widespread impoverishment, observing that the country had long been regarded purely as “a carcass for a certain number of Englishmen to prey upon.”¹⁴ Seeking to bolster India’s productive capacities and spur much-needed material development, they fused an orientalist affirmation of Indian political structures with a vision of unfettered intra-imperial communication and equitable economic exchange.

Established in the wake of the 1837-38 Agra famine by a coterie of abolitionists, Quakers, and Anglo-Indians, the British India Society (BIS) aimed to address the prevailing public apathy regarding Indian affairs.¹⁵ Led by the vociferous George Thompson, its members sought to stabilize the land tax, curb the Company’s remaining monopolies, and spur public works construction; they popularized this agenda at numerous meetings before the organization’s absorption into the free trade movement in 1841. The India Reform Society (IRS) was founded in 1853 to raise awareness of colonial malfeasance in the lead-up to the Company’s charter renewal.¹⁶ Under the helm of John Dickinson, it produced a copious amount of polemical tracts that reprobated the Company’s annexationism. Its members were also instrumental in publicizing the acts of torture perpetrated by revenue collectors and police in the Madras presidency.¹⁷ The organization itself formally existed until the late 1860s. In 1866, the Parsi educator and merchant Dadabhai Naoroji founded the London-based East India Association (EIA) to stimulate public opinion on Indian issues, serve as a non-partisan advisory body, and provide a forum for debate. A slew of former IRS members contributed papers to the

¹⁴ Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, *On the Civil Administration of the Bombay Presidency* (London: John Chapman, 1853), 4.

¹⁵ *Prospectus of the Provisional Committee for Forming a British India Society, for Betting the Condition of our Fellow-Subjects – the Natives of British India* (1839), 2.

¹⁶ In 1853, the IRS began its existence with 38 MPs on its rolls. See *Last Counsels of an Unknown Counsellor, John Dickinson*, ed. Thomas Evans Bell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

Association in its first decade and lent a politicized tone to its proceedings; thereafter, retired officials began to swamp the organization and distance it from any controversial lines of agitation.¹⁸

Although these societies anchored the diffuse reformist community, agitators sustained webs of association that extended beyond the membership lists of any particular organization. This dissertation therefore charts the evolution of reformist thought and agitational techniques by plotting the informational “circuits” that enabled network formation.¹⁹ Chapter One examines the rise of the professional public moralist and situates early India reformism among concurrent campaigns like transatlantic abolitionism, free trade, and aboriginal protection. This chapter also outlines the theoretical components of the reformers’ ideological conservatism, which they largely inherited from Briggs and his fellow Scots. While a minority of reformers championed an assimilative, “causative” form of liberalism, most subscribed to a “reflexive” liberalism that was concerned with checking the colonial state’s arbitrary power. Officials could scarcely govern in the interest of Indians so long as they continued to destabilize the economy, topple ruling dynasties, and deprive subjects of constitutional protections. Chapters Two and Five specifically probe the reformers’ modes of rhetoric that highlighted two disturbing anomalies. To raise metropolitan awareness of distant injustices in the post-Emancipation era, they drew attention to the “virtual slavery” suffered by peasant cultivators, subordinated princes, and the British working classes

¹⁸ In 1868, the EIA boasted 594 members, out of whom 324 were Indian. By 1879, its numbers had fallen to 73. See Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 246.

¹⁹ Ward defines a “circuit” as “a partial segment of a network, without which the network would likely continue, though perhaps in an altered or diminished state.” See Kerry Ward, *Networks of Empire: Forced Migration in the Dutch East India Company* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.

alike. Denouncing expansionism – which entailed the violation of the colonial state’s own “rule of law” – they further defended the sovereignty of native rulers by amalgamating classical law of nations theories with the contents of early international law treatises.

Aside from clarifying the reformers’ shared ideologies, this study also identifies the sources of dissension that fractured the movement. Reformers regularly observed that India’s communications and irrigative works had fallen into a state of decay under British rule as a result of the state’s extractive military-fiscalism. They therefore hailed infrastructural improvement as the germ of a new “state-idea” that prioritized the Indian public good. Chapter Three focuses on the careers of two under-studied reformers: John Chapman, the promoter of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway, and Sir Arthur Cotton, the leading proponent of irrigative canals in India. Chapman sought to stimulate metropolitan investment in colonial public works, which would lead speculators to increasingly scrutinize Indian affairs. The colonial state would then function as a referee, arbitrating conflicts between these private enterprises. Cotton also called for transparency and hoped to deal with public works “in a public spirit.” But unlike Chapman, he urged the government to assume an overtly bio-political role and tasked it with the preservation of life in a period of escalating famines. Within reform circles, significant disagreement persisted as to whether rail or canal construction would yield the most benefits to the population at large.

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the native manufacturing sector. Reducing tariffs and land taxes, they argued, would facilitate cash crop production, boost Indian employment, and provide Britain with a stable, free-labor source of sugar and cotton. Yet reformers struggled to bring this utopian scheme to fruition. Many of their potential allies, including Lancashire textile manufacturers and Anglo-Indian planters, sought access to raw cotton and land freeholds but refused to address broader issues of Indian governance. Once a radical “nativist” faction of reformers turned against laissez-faire policy in the 1870s, it became apparent that British and Indian economic fortunes were no longer so clearly intertwined.

The final chapter of the dissertation argues that British and Indian agitators were attempting to construct an entirely new social formation: an imperial civil society based on inter-associational linkages. Early reformers in the metropole endorsed the formation of native political societies in the presidency towns that could provide reliable information on local conditions. Webs of contact also formed on an individual level, as veteran reformers in Britain advised members of the incipient native associations on constitutionalist techniques. To improve race-relations, the EIA discussed various ways of educating the English public on Indian affairs and fostering the expression of native public opinion beyond voluntarist organizing.

What I am unearthing, then, is an alternative vision of a moralized Indian Empire that arose through public sphere agitation. It may seem incongruous that reformers who campaigned for emancipation, free trade, global peace, the extension of the franchise, and aboriginal protection against settler violence did not demand Britain’s immediate withdrawal from India. But the fact that India reformism was not explicitly anti-colonial in orientation should not lead us to disregard the movement as insufficiently progressive.

Instead, we ought appreciate the extent to which their challenge of vested interests and their rebuke of autocratic statecraft abroad were provocative in their day. If we are to understand how and why reformers continued to operate within a liberal conceptual framework, we must avoid classifying Victorians as either imperial jingoists or “Little Englanders.” Many believed that closer relations, rather than abrupt separation, would ensure the mutual prosperity of both metropole and dependency; they therefore sought to expose the anomalies that facilitated a “rule of colonial difference” and marginalized the Indian population. If the British did not generate new state-ideas and reconfigure their administration accordingly, the only foreseeable outcome was armed revolt.

Scottish Intellectualism and Colonial Statecraft

Situating Briggs’ conservatism within the context of early-nineteenth-century Scottish colonial intellectualism allows us to compile a partial intellectual genealogy of reformist thought. In his review of Briggs’ tenure in Maharashtra, Arvind Deshpande surmises that he possessed the “vision of a disoriented romanticist of the late 18th century” and aimed to “postpone that day when the Empire would come to an end as far off as possible.”²⁰ In this way, Briggs seemingly resembled prominent Whig-Liberals who recognized that India was destined for independence, but feared that a premature devolution of power would unleash anarchy. Colonial official Charles Trevelyan predicted that the politically immature Indians would one day “grow to man’s estate”; James and John Stuart Mill also conceived of the colonized as a deviant child who was

²⁰ Deshpande, 211.

“familiar, though deformed.”²¹ But rather than investing in this narrative of stunted development and corrective pedagogy, Briggs marveled that Indian institutions had largely withstood the “shock of eight centuries of conquest.”²² What Indians required was the immediate restoration of their historical “rights and privileges,” without which they would “gradually sink lower and lower in the scale of humanity.”

Briggs echoed the sentiments of his Scottish colleagues that British India was an “empire of opinion” that could only survive so long as Indians derived a “recurring sense of benefits” from their continuing subjection “to foreign masters.”²³ This insight can be interpreted as a response to a transimperial dilemma, namely “the fragility of white mastery” that resulted from “numerical vulnerability.”²⁴ The Jamaican Colonial Assembly, for instance, declared in 1815 that the “dominion of whites [was] found on opinion”; this logic led it to block the extension of political rights to mixed race groups, so as to preserve public confidence in a racially-coded social hierarchy. Officials like Elphinstone, Malcolm, and Thomas Munro took a rather different tack by incorporating Indians into the ruling edifice to foster the expression of their civic virtue and stoke their ambition. Dismissing the need for Anglicist educational schemes, Munro provocatively claimed that the “great stimulus to the pursuit of knowledge [was] the prospect of fame, wealth or power.”²⁵ By monopolizing government postings, the British lessened Indians’ “interest in the concerns of the community and degrade[d] their character.” Elphinstone similarly lauded the opportunities for social advancement in the native states, where there

²¹ Francis Hutchins, *The Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 74; Uday Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: a Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 33.

²² Briggs, *Letters Addressed to a Young Person*, 118.

²³ *Ibid.*, 194.

²⁴ Brooke Newman, *A Dark Inheritance: Blood, Race, and Sex in Colonial Jamaica* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 264.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 490.

was “a connected chain throughout the society, and a free communication between the different parts.” British rule, in contrast, was making the people “torpid and inactive.”²⁶ These critiques persisted in reformist polemic throughout the century. In his seminal disquisition on the “Poverty of India,” Dadabhai Naoroji quoted Malcolm at length to evidence the injustice of “a system which excludes...the Natives from every station of high rank and honourable ambition.”²⁷ And when W. C. Bonnerjee, an EIA member and future president of the Indian National Congress, was looking for material to evidence Indians’ “instincts for self-government,” he naturally cited Elphinstone’s account of the village municipal system.²⁸

Scholars have debated whether the members of this Scottish triumvirate were influenced by stadial development theories, strategic imperatives, or orientalist affinities. For Martha McLaren, they were attempting to identify a proper balance between “liberty, required for the moral well-being of a people, and authority, necessary in the interests of national unity and state power.”²⁹ Their ethnographies and histories of the Afghans, Persians, and Sikhs spoke to this concern. Based on the insights gleaned from these studies, the Scots came to favor a kind of “progressive authoritarianism” that provided “the necessary order under which a better form of civil government could be

²⁶ Furdoonjee, 7, 67-69. See also Shahamat Ali, *Notes and Opinions of a Native on the Present State of India and the Feelings of its People* (Isle of Wight: George Butler, 1848), 7-17; John Bruce Norton, *The Rebellion in India: How to Prevent Another* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1857), 84; John Sullivan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir John Hobhouse, Bart. M.P: Concerning the Opinions of Sir Thomas Munro, Sir John Malcolm, and Mr. Elphinstone, on the Impolicy of Destroying the Native States* (London: G. Norman, 1850), 5-8.

²⁷ Dadabhai Naoroji, “Poverty of India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1876): 283.

²⁸ W. C. Bonnerjee, “Representative and Responsible Government for India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 1, no. 2 (1867): 171.

²⁹ Martha McLaren, “From Analysis to Prescription: Scottish Concepts of Asian Despotism in Early Nineteenth-Century British India,” *International History Review* 15, no. 3 (1993): 476.

introduced.”³⁰ Whereas McLaren emphasizes the influence of Scottish Enlightenment theories on these officials’ thought, Jack Harrington explicates the “immediate historical circumstances” that informed their writings.³¹ In his early works, Malcolm urged the Company to impress its power upon its rivals and evolve into a security state. But pacification presented its own logistical and existential problems. Eager to maintain a semblance of “oriental kingship,” Malcolm bestowed lavish pensions on native grandees and began to promote a system of indirect rule after 1818.³² Adopting a historicist perspective, he represented the Mahrattas as Hindu “freedom fighters” eager to throw off the Mughal yoke and compared them favorably to the plundering Pindarees. He further mined folklore and myth to give “each dynasty historical legitimacy” and affirm their position as natural rulers.

Approaching Malcolm as both a theoretician and pragmatist, Theodore Koditschek imbeds his subject within two peculiarly Scottish traditions of “orientalism” and “bordering.” Historians have long noted that language and culture study under the aegis of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (est. 1784) aimed to improve affective relations between Britons and natives.³³ Updating this thesis, Koditschek argues that orientalist scholarship continued to operate “as an instrument of liberal imperialism” that recast “British hegemony...in consensual terms.”³⁴ For Malcolm, it proved useful in managing defeated “warlords and potentates...whose acquiescence had yet to be gained.” Like his associate Walter Scott, who romanticized Scottish feudalism after the Jacobite defeat,

³⁰ Ibid., 484.

³¹ Jack Harrington, *Sir John Malcolm and the Creation of British India* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 7.

³² Ibid., 90, 111-18.

³³ Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 34.

³⁴ Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 66.

Malcolm adopted a nostalgic literary style to humanize a former enemy and promote reconciliation. Other officials like James Tod went even further by identifying innate commonalities between the Highlander clans and Rajput tribes on the basis of comparative mythology. In a like manner, Briggs speculated that the “Romans and Greeks got their religion from the East,” while the “ceremonies which gave rise to the Paganism of Europe” survived in contemporary Hinduism. In his exhaustive work on the history of Indian land taxation, he observed similarities between Indian and German village communities and suggested that the laws of Wurtemberg “might afford useful hints” for colonial legislation.³⁵

Associating Malcolm and Briggs with an orientalist vein of liberal imperialism upends an older historiography that identified them as the “true conservative element” of the colonial edifice.³⁶ Embracing the “politics of sentiment,” these paternalistic Scots rejected the “cold, lifeless, and mechanical principles” that underpinned Cornwallis’ Permanent Settlement of Bengal in 1793 and remonstrated against the India-wide imposition of general rules. In so doing, they took inspiration from Edmund Burke, who regarded “human society as a continuous community of the past, present, and future” and exhibited a “reverent humility in the face of difference.”³⁷ In contrast to Burke (and presumably his Scottish disciples), liberals like John Locke, James Mill, and John Stuart Mill generated theories that were “transhistorical, transcultural, and most certainly transracial.”³⁸ In his formative work, Uday Mehta argued that these thinkers subscribed to

³⁵ John Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India Considered as a Measure of Finance* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1830), 441.

³⁶ Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9, 15.

³⁷ Mehta, 164. For Malcolm’s approbation of Burke, see Harrington, 134, 191.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

“a vision of universal history” that was “tethered to an eschatology of progress.”³⁹ Their brand of liberalism undergirded forms of exclusion that deprived members of “backward” societies of political rights and recognition. This doctrine was essentially world-transformative, overriding distinctions between communities and rejecting “considerations of territoriality, history, and the psychological implications that follow from them.”⁴⁰ Although some liberals bridled at this level of government interference in the private sphere, the argument that the expansion of the state’s powers would ensure “the betterment of life” in the colonies usually won the day.⁴¹

Approaches to the Study Liberal Imperialism

If Mehta’s account of a Manichean clash between the abstract and concrete, the individual and the collective, and the universal and the particular seems slightly overdrawn, we may perhaps attribute it to his reliance on Eric Stokes’ classic scholarship. Per Stokes’ formulation, “English liberalism” in British India rested upon the individualist pillars of free trade, Evangelicalism, and philosophic radicalism.⁴² The acolytes of these limitless doctrines generally supported Anglicization efforts and sought to liberate Hindus from the deadening thrall of their “slavish” religion. Beginning in the 1830s, a Utilitarian push to centralize the colonial administration revealed the “latent authoritarianism” residing within this broadly conceived liberal thought. Abolishing the provincial governors’ legislative councils, the Charter Act of 1833 endowed the Governor-General of India with near-despotic powers; Bentham’s caution that an

³⁹ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁴¹ Ibid., 79.

⁴² Stokes, xiv, xvi, 250.

empowered executive must operate with increased publicity and inspectability was largely ignored. For decades, scholars fully accepted the premise that “free traders, utilitarians, and evangelicals created a distinctive ideology of imperial governance shaped by the ideals of liberalism.”⁴³ Recent studies of Britain’s civilizing mission have slightly altered this narrative by downplaying the distinction between Stokes’ paternalists and liberals. In these accounts, a “secular group of civilizing missionaries” composed of Utilitarians and stadial thinkers join the Evangelicals in perceiving India through a series of Saidian dichotomies.⁴⁴

This enduring characterization of liberalism as a vehicle for cultural renovation abroad underplays the extent to which liberal imperialism fostered a trenchant spirit of auto-critique. Thomas Metcalf is right to suggest that liberals aimed to “free individuals from their age-old bondage to priests, despots, and feudal aristocrats so that they could become autonomous, rational beings.”⁴⁵ But we should not assume that these oppressors were necessarily Indian. Describing liberalism as a “shape-shifting amalgam of philosophical arguments and political-economic practices,” Duncan Bell reminds us that its evocation could also “underpin...a concern with the dangers of state coercion, individual freedom, toleration, collective self-government, and universal moral

⁴³ Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 28. See also Elizabeth Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, 1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 51.

⁴⁴ Michael Mann, “‘Torchbearers Upon the Path of Progress’: Britain’s Ideology of a ‘Moral and Material Progress in India,’” in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tine & Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 8, 23. Jon Wilson, in stark contrast, has asserted that service in the colonial administration merely provided Britons with “a career that did not link to any great national or social purpose.” See Jon Wilson, *The Chaos of Empire: the British Raj and the Conquest of India* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 7.

⁴⁵ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 29.

equality.”⁴⁶ Lauren Goodlad similarly notes that liberal ideologies could just as easily support a process of “engraftment,” which called for the blending of “Indian and British traditions,” as they could affirm a civilizing mission.⁴⁷ What this polymorphic liberal imperialism could not do, however, was reconcile the extension of the franchise at home with the colonial state’s coercive governmentality in the later nineteenth century.

To make some sense of this quagmire, scholars like Jennifer Pitts have exposed significant fluctuations in liberal thought from the late eighteenth century onwards. Burke’s harangues targeted the Company’s systematic abuses and invalidated its leaders’ rationalizations for their arbitrary mode of rule. He was especially perturbed by Britons’ “excessively constricted circle of sympathy and moral concern”; if colonial agents presumed that they were sent out to lord over a “set of vile, miserable slaves,” the affective relations that were essential for good governance would fail to develop.⁴⁸ According to Pitts, Burkean interventions on behalf of excluded natives diminished in frequency following the trial of Warren Hastings (1788-1795). New theories of “imperial liberalism” increasingly legitimized the Company’s despotism by establishing facile dichotomies between backwards and civilized peoples. John Stuart Mill, for instance, posited that barbarians and savages would require training to esteem cooperation and reciprocity before they could flourish under liberal rule.⁴⁹ If a colonized people rejected these pedagogical overtures, policymakers simply attributed their resistance to “cultural intransigence.”

⁴⁶ Duncan Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 27.

⁴⁷ Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty and Transnational Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43, 56.

⁴⁸ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2005), 61, 74.

⁴⁹ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 31-33.

Offering a somewhat cynical account of Burke's project, Nicholas Dirks also identifies the Hastings trial as a point of rupture. By his understanding, Burke's concern for his nation's moral health eclipsed all other considerations, including the promotion of cross-cultural understanding. It was his parochial mission "to keep the scandals of the East firmly outside the borders of Britain" by any means necessary.⁵⁰ Any allusions to the benighted Indian masses were window-dressing designed to obscure his nationalistic motivations. Dirks ultimately concludes that Burke played a "vital if unwitting role in the legitimization of the British imperial mission."⁵¹ By effectively scapegoating Hastings, his purifying tirades "ennoble[ed] the idea of empire" and restored a "moral authority for Britain's imperial ambitions."⁵² Its original sins expunged, the British nation began to fixate on an alternative kind of cultural scandal: the superstitious and barbaric practices of the colonized population.⁵³ The implication here is that Burke cleaned the Augean stables too well and perhaps underestimated the public's unremitting desire for sensationalist revelations.

Dirks' tenuous causation narrative offers a partial explanation for why "anti-imperialist political thinking was virtually absent from Western European intellectual debates" of the nineteenth century, aside from the contributions of "philosophically obscure and politically marginal figures."⁵⁴ This dissertation, however, challenges the notion that Burke's fusillade against Hastings constituted a drawn-out last gasp of

⁵⁰ Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Belknap Press: Cambridge, MA, 2006), 79.

⁵¹ Nicholas B. Dirks, *Autobiography of an Archive: a Scholar's Passage to India* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2015), 194.

⁵² Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire*, 169, 296-97.

⁵³ Of course, Evangelical missionaries routinely identified cultural scandals beyond India. In New Zealand, they favored "humanitarian narratives" that foregrounded the corporeal suffering within Maori society that stemmed from rampant "social evils." See Tony Ballantyne, *Entanglements of Empire: Missionaries, Maori, and the Question of the Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 219-22.

⁵⁴ Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 5.

imperial critique. According to Lida Maxwell, Burke conceived of his crusade as an initial experiment rather than a capstone project. His “appeals to multiple sets of laws” in the trial reflected a “dissonant” approach to transnational justice. There was simply no moral consensus regarding Britain’s imperial role, nor any established system in place to interrogate colonial malpractices of such magnitude.⁵⁵ Recognizing these limitations, Burke presented a new model of disinterested “reflective judgment” for the Lords to emulate, while tentatively enlisting the general public as a sympathetic body in the event of elite failure.⁵⁶ Maxwell even suggests that he came to regard the history of the impeachment as a funereal monument that could serve a didactic purpose. Indeed, generations of reformers represented their rebuff of geographical morality as a continuation of Burke’s project and adopted his rhetorical techniques to bombastic effect.

Some of the agitators under examination here were likely regarded as marginal in their day, but others earned notoriety in official circles for their unceasing exposure of colonial misdeeds. Notable politicians and journalists like Joseph Hume, George Thompson, John Bright, Richard Cobden, John Malcolm Ludlow, and Frederick Chesson all contributed to India reformism. Influential Parsis like Nowrozjee Furdoonjee and Dadabhai Naoroji castigated the administration for its inefficiency and developed the enduring theory of an economic “drain.” Despite their rebuke of colonial practices, these figures did not typically call for Britain’s immediate withdrawal from India. As with Burke, who refrained from demanding the Company’s dissolution, there were personal limits to their critiques. Some reformers like Briggs feared the advance of “bureaucratic despotism” in the mid-1850s and desired to retain the Company directorate as an

⁵⁵ Lida Maxwell, *Public Trials: Burke, Zola, Arendt, and the Politics of Lost Causes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 51.

⁵⁶ Maxwell, 39.

independent, freethinking body; others argued that a transition to direct rule would enhance parliamentary oversight of Indian affairs. The fact that the permeable India reform movement was not a single-issue campaign like abolitionism or free trade enabled this variability of opinion. Yet we ought not portray the reformers as being overly atomized or thoroughly Anglocentric in their concerns. Contrary to Miles Taylor's hypothesis, they were not inordinately fearful that "territorial empire in the East [was] perverting liberal morality at home," nor did their agitation automatically ramp up when "liberalism seemed to be weakening" domestically.⁵⁷ Their repudiation of the political, legal, and economic anomalies that propped up an extractive system of colonial rule remained consistent over generations and had little to do with the strength or weakness of any parliamentary opposition to the ruling ministry.

Causative versus Reflexive Liberalism

In debating whether liberalism and empire-building were diametrically opposed or intimately related, historians may profit from teasing out two distinct "causative" and "reflexive" strains of liberal imperialist thought. Notably "judgmental," to borrow Mehta's descriptor, causative liberalism was future-oriented and aimed to reprogram the behavior of the colonized. Its exponents dangled the possibility that Indians, with proper education and moral uplift, might one day enjoy the privileges of Britain-born subjects and thrive under a system of liberal governance. In the short term, causative liberalism's emphasis on cultural difference could either aggravate a "kind of hard-edged, racially

⁵⁷ Miles Taylor, "Imperium et Libertas? Rethinking the Radical Critique of Imperialism during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19, no. 1 (1991): 12, 17. These were concerns of "Greater British" liberals like Herman Merivale, Charles Dilke, and Goldwin Smith. See Goodlad, 57.

exclusionary, Anglocentric arrogance”⁵⁸ or it could inform efforts to create virtual Englishmen through cultural assimilation. Macaulay, for instance, declared that the conversion of Indians “to the worst form that Christianity ever wore in the darkest ages would be a most happy event.” The duties of the colonial government were by necessity paternal, as India continued to be ruled “by the sword, and not by free stipulation with the governed.”⁵⁹ Causative liberalism often had this Anglicizing element, but it could also justify the Utilitarian augmentation of state power to catalyze a grander societal reconfiguration.⁶⁰ One of James Mill’s passion projects was the extension of the *ryotwari* land taxation system, which positioned the government as the supreme landlord entitled to the full Ricardian rent and empowered hordes of collectors to annually assess parcels based on their soil fertility.

While causative liberalism often differentiated Britons and Indians through the creation of “civilizational typologies,”⁶¹ marginalized subjects could demand redress by availing to reflexive liberalism. Directed against the state, this often-radical strain militated against the exercise of arbitrary, unaccountable power and its defiance of liberal norms through coercion. Accusations of “un-British rule,” or what C. A. Bayly termed “counter-preaching,” naturally belonged to this form of liberalism.⁶² As a variant of rights-talk, it could affirm an ideal of “republican citizenship” that championed

⁵⁸ Koditschek, 87.

⁵⁹ In these passages, Macaulay was disputing Gladstone’s claim that treaty relations prohibited the Company from supporting an Established Church in India. See Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Gladstone on Church and State* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1851), 38-40.

⁶⁰ According to Stokes, Mill doubted that English *or* vernacular education would prove efficacious until India’s poverty was fully alleviated. See Stokes, 58.

⁶¹ Mehta, 81.

⁶² C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 105.

“participation in public discourse, and the free circulation of honest information.”⁶³ From the 1820s, non-official Britons in Calcutta called upon the Company to unfetter the press, while members of the Indian intelligentsia sought the ability to sit on juries. Decades later, reformers would draw on the reflexive strain to denounce the government’s *de facto* monopolization of political power that limited native employment in the colonial bureaucracy. While reflexive liberalism was often concerned with moderating state power and fostering inclusion, it could also support a restorative political program that drew on “golden age” narratives and emphasized continuity with pre-colonial precedents.⁶⁴ Reflexive and causative strains of liberal thought, it should be noted, could appear simultaneously within a single text, though India reformers consistently favored the former over the latter.

These concepts are designed to function as analytical tools, insofar as they help us to perceive distinct patterns within the broad spectrum of liberal imperialist thought. It is abundantly clear that Burke was rather more tolerant of colonial difference than James Mill. But we may yet identify a common reflexive strain in their writings on interstate relations in South India, which similarly denounced the Company’s abuses of power. Probing the tussle between the EIC and its two treaty partners, the Muslim Nawab of the Carnatic and the Hindu Raja of Tanjore, Burke declared that the British had severed the bonds that connected native rulers with their subjects. He first raised this alarm in his *Enquiry* (1779), where he remonstrated against the nawab’s attempted conquest of

⁶³ Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 39.

⁶⁴ The metropolitan radical tradition also employed golden age imagery in this period. See Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism*, 30.

Tanjore with the Company's support.⁶⁵ While the nawab claimed that the raja was deficient on his tribute payments and had provoked hostilities with chiefs within his borders, Burke questioned whether these insults were sufficient to warrant the fall of a princely dynasty. The British had imported a notion of absolute conquest that was incompatible with pre-colonial practices; hitherto, victorious parties had ended conflicts "by receiving very moderate compensations, and by mutual marriages, according to the usages of a mild and civilized people."⁶⁶ To add insult to injury, the enfeebled nawab could not even enforce his demands for tribute without colonial military support.

Using the language of communal conflict, Burke identified anomalies that had arisen from the Madras administration's complicity in the nawab's ploys. Not only had "the army of a Christian and free people" enabled "the ferocious rapacity of a Mahometan despotism," but the largely-Hindu population of Tanjore had been deprived of their "natural sovereign."⁶⁷ Indeed, Burke was convinced that "all men...infinitely prefer a subjection to Princes of their own blood, manners and religion." Such "natural and reciprocal partiality...among those nations where there is not settled law or constitution" militated against autocracy.⁶⁸ The British, then, were aiding and abetting a Muslim invasion of India that had never quite ended; the masses were suffering in equal measure to their fallen nobility under the "yoke" of a foreign conqueror. Here, Burke seemed to realize that his invective could also be martialled against the Company, and

⁶⁵ A Select Committee at Madras, which had been erected "with a view to confining [British] influence and possession," permitted these aggressions without the approbation of the Court of Directors. See William and Edmund Burke, *An Enquiry into the Policy of Making Conquests for the Mahometans in India, by the British Arms* (London: J. Dodsley, 1779), 25.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 116-17.

⁶⁸ Burke famously observed that a nation's civil society was rooted in public affection born out of a love for the "little platoon" of one's immediate community. See Richard Boyd, "'The Unsteady and Precarious Contribution of Individuals': Edmund Burke's Defense of Civil Society," *Review of Politics* 61, no. 3 (1999): 470.

clarified that its officialdom lacked both the inclination and boldness to directly pursue wholesale annexations. Still, the British undercut any moral justification for their rule by encouraging the nawab's pretensions and enabling him to "destroy not above twenty considerable Princes, a thousand times better men and better born than himself."⁶⁹

In subsequent speeches, Burke abandoned the trope of Muslim despotism and increasingly represented the penurious nawab, Mohamed Ali, as a pawn of British creditors within the Madras administration. Beginning in 1767, these lenders had provided Ali with three major loans while encouraging his war-making against regional potentates. Their long-term windfall depended upon this insupportable aggrandizement. When the nawab could not maintain his overextended military, he took on further loans; unable to pay back these debts at high interest, he conferred the tax revenues of his lands directly to the claimants. For Burke, this self-perpetuating cycle was a farce with grave consequences for the local population. Pressured by his British enablers, Mohamed Ali had rejected an offer of peace from Mysore ruler Hyder Ali. Rebuffed and insulted, Hyder "resolved...to leave the whole of the Carnatic an ever-lasting monument of vengeance" and lay waste to the territory.⁷⁰

Whereas the nawab had threatened Tanjore as a plundering conqueror and an unnatural sovereign, he was now sacrificing the welfare of his own people for the sake of Britons' illicit enrichment. In his *Enquiry*, Burke had surmised that a common religion in Tanjore helped sustain the "intergenerational contract or partnership" on which human

⁶⁹ William and Edmund Burke, *An Enquiry into the Policy of Making Conquests*, 129.

⁷⁰ Edmund Burke, *Mr. Burke's Speech, on the Motion Made for Papers Relative to the Directions for Charging the Nabob of Arcot's Private Debts to Europeans, on the Revenues of the Carnatic* (London: J. Dodsley, 1785), 50.

societies were based.⁷¹ What drew the inhabitants of the Carnatic into political combination was their shared commitment to extending “the dominion of their bounty beyond the limits of nature.” Inhabiting an inhospitable terrain, past rulers had recognized that the future of their society was contingent on access to water supplies; in sponsoring irrigative and storage works, they were “testators to a posterity which they embraced as their own.”⁷² Neither the nawab nor the Company expressed this concern for the self-perpetuation of native society or had taken any action to prevent the descent of the drought-stricken, war-ridden Carnatic into social atavism.

Burke’s reflexive liberalism also led him to interrogate the home government’s role in this conspiracy. The newly formed Board of Control (BoC) had approved a 4 million-pound compensatory package for the creditors from the Carnatic’s land revenue, while also ordering Tanjore to provide 400,000 pounds in “tribute” to the nawab. Burke identified the germ of a constitutional crisis in this decision. Pitt’s 1784 India Act had expressly appointed the Company’s directors as commissioners to inquire into the realities of the debt, but the BoC prematurely curtailed their investigations. Denouncing the “intermeddling of ministers in this affair as a downright usurpation,” Burke implicated MP Paul Benfield and his attorney, Richard Atkinson, as beneficiaries of the long running credit con and accused them of bending the government’s ear.⁷³ In revealing the ethical perils of this special lobbying, Burke was gathering the materials for his influential critique of “Indianism.” This neologism referred to the social and political destabilization wrought by Britain’s “India-returned boys,” as well as to their “expedient,

⁷¹ Sunil Agnani, “Jacobinism in India, Indianism in English Parliament: Fearing the Enlightenment and Colonial Modernity with Edmund Burke,” *Cultural Critique* 68 (2008): 134.

⁷² Burke, *Mr. Burke’s Speech, on the Motion Made for Papers*, 55.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 3, 83-85.

but not moral, use of law and force” in India itself.⁷⁴ More insidiously, Indianism delegitimized the idea of “formal government” itself, which opened the floodgates to revolutionary Jacobinism.

Scholars have often noted that Burke’s oratory in the Hastings trial was designed to elicit a particularly “sentimental response” that could shock his audience from their moral complacency.⁷⁵ His use of this technique led opponents to accuse him of shameless theatricality. But Burke’s preoccupation with a normative expression of fellow-feeling was apparent much earlier in his career. Lamenting the subjugation of the Raja of Tanjore, he had matter-of-factly observed that the “total extinction, of noble houses...commonly excites no small degree of commiseration in all liberal minds.”⁷⁶ Burke’s presiding concern, then, was to preserve defeated rulers’ liberty in the aftermath of war by encouraging displays of generosity and mercy from the victors.⁷⁷ Malcolm clearly shared this objective. Respect for “ancient and noble families,” he posited, was a “natural and legitimate sentiment” that provided “the great link of order in every society.”⁷⁸ India reformers affirmed this belief in natural leaders, as they believed that the “Oriental [was] above all things personal in his attachments.”⁷⁹ But they also insisted that the princes boasted certain rights as treaty partners, while their administrations provided employment for educated Indians who were ostracized from the colonial bureaucracy.

⁷⁴ Agnani, 153.

⁷⁵ Maxwell, 68.

⁷⁶ William and Edmund Burke, *An Enquiry into the Policy of Making Conquests*, 119.

⁷⁷ During his opening speech in the Hastings trial, Burke similarly recounted that the early Muslim conquerors of India “left the ancient people in possession of their states” and allowed their rulers “to continue in a separate state of Sovereignty.” See Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 105.

⁷⁸ Harrington, 134.

⁷⁹ John Malcolm Ludlow, *British India, its Race, and its History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1858), 273.

While Burke's writings featured the kind of reflexive liberalism that informed later reformist agitation, the strain could also appear in more unlikely places. Delving into the political writings of James Mill, for instance, reveals an often-contrapuntal relationship between causative and reflexive modes of liberal thought. Historians have long noted Mill's penchant for anti-Company critiques before the directors effectively stopped his mouth with a plum job offer. Koditschek has even claimed that Mill "saw himself as a radical anti-imperialist...and a staunch opponent of aristocratic privilege in all its forms."⁸⁰ Instances of Mill's reflexive liberalism appear in his early contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*. His purpose, which would remain constant throughout the writing of his *History of British India*, was to expose Orientalist renderings of a bountiful, wealth-laden India as fallacious. Far from being a financial asset, governance of India was a drain of British resources; in fact, the government's revenue rarely sufficed to cover its own operating expenses. This deficit would only worsen in time, as the Company increased its military expenditure to subvert the designs of India's mendacious princes.

After dwelling on the Company's ineptitude, Mill stopped short of endorsing Burke's call for increased parliamentary oversight over colonial affairs. Such an arrangement would be logistically impossible. What India required, Mill famously posited, was a "simple form of arbitrary government, tempered by European honour and European intelligence."⁸¹ This phrasing certainly reflected Mill's Utilitarian disposition, but it also spoke to his grander purpose: the conversion of India into a prosperous settler

⁸⁰ Koditschek, 83-85.

⁸¹ [James Mill], "Affairs of India," *Edinburgh Review*, no. 31 (April, 1810): 155-57.

colony unencumbered by economic monopolies.⁸² At this point, governing Indians was very much a secondary concern. Rather than trying to modify the Hindus' character, Mill suggested that colonial lawmakers might enlist the brahmins to sanctify new legal codes. As these native intellectuals readily discerned equivalences between Indian and European ideas, they might be led to believe that a thoroughly modern regulation was actually "the law of the Hindus" all along.

A subtle shift occurred between the appearance of Mill's *Review* article in 1810 and the publication of his *History of British India* in 1817. A searing indictment of Hindu despotism and priestcraft, this latter text has often been read as an affirmation of a state-driven civilizing mission that promoted happiness, not liberty.⁸³ Exhibiting scant "sociological sensitivity," Mill painted the entire non-western world with the same defamatory brush; India and China alike were "frozen in an immobility from which they could be saved only by the intervention of a heroic lawmaker or a more advanced society."⁸⁴ In essence, this work "shaped a theoretical basis for the liberal programme to emancipate India from its own culture."⁸⁵ However, Javed Majeed further notes that Mill's rebuke cut both ways; in judging societies by the utility of their legislation, he was also casting aspersions on the convoluted mess that was English common law. More generally, his *History* portrayed the evolution of British power in India as "a sorry saga of stupidity and greed."⁸⁶ Alongside Mill's unpalatable cultural critique, we may thus

⁸² Taylor, 4.

⁸³ Stokes, 56-57, 64.

⁸⁴ Pitts, 129.

⁸⁵ Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 127

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 149.

identify a countercurrent of reflexive liberalism that faulted the Company's conduct and anticipated reformers' legalistic protests.

Mill took issue with the government's coercive dealings with the princely states, as demonstrated by its sordid dealings in the Carnatic. Having charged Nawab Mohamed Ali and his son, Umdat ul-Umara, with violating the law of nations by colluding with Mysore ruler Tipu Sultan, Governor-General Richard Wellesley embarked on a campaign to confiscate the state's civil and military administrations. In 1801, he offered Umdat's heir, the eighteen-year-old Ali Hossain, a new treaty that authorized this forfeiture of *de facto* sovereignty. When this offer was rejected, Wellesley sought a more pliable pawn and anointed a rival claimant to the throne.⁸⁷ For Mill, this supersession of authority was symptomatic of a more endemic evil: "English rulers in India [were] deprived of the salutary dread of the scrutinizing minds and free pens of an enlightened public."⁸⁸ In committing their misdeeds, they were fully aware that "distance and other circumstances so completely veil[ed] the truth from English eyes."

Although Wellesley neglected to inform the Company directors of his aggrandizing scheme, word of his exploits soon attracted metropolitan attention. When Ali Hossain was passed over for consideration, he hired James Stuart Hall and Samuel Johnstone as his legal representatives and instructed them to circulate a petition in the metropole protesting his treatment. The prince made it clear that the Madras administration had long desired the full acquisition of the Carnatic, but refrained from overt action. Apprehensive "of the opinions of the European and Asiatic world, they

⁸⁷ Through this treaty, the new nawab, Azim-ud-Dowla, secured his inheritable title and was allocated one fifth of the Carnatic revenues along with a sizeable monthly stipend. See N. S. Ramaswami, *Political History of the Carnatic Under the Nawabs* (Delhi: Abhivan Publications, 1984), 398.

⁸⁸ James Mill, *The History of British India*, 5th ed., vol. 6 (London: James Madden, 1858), 227.

determined on arriving at their ends by means the least alarming and suspicious.”⁸⁹ The day after the death of Umdat ul-Umara, the authorities at Fort George dispatched a force to ensure the security of the nawab’s Chepauk Palace. Hossain interpreted this order as an intimidation tactic, as the soldiers lingered “seemingly with a view to dictate the order and terms of the succession.” Remarkably, Hossain claimed ignorance of any treasonous correspondence between his father and Tipu Sultan throughout these negotiations. In his subsequent petition, he sought assistance from the home ministry, Company, and general public alike, even urging his ancestors’ British creditors to intercede on his behalf.

Dispossessed, Hossain died in April of 1802. Two months later, Richard Sheridan (Burke’s colleague in the Hastings trial) demanded that the House of Commons take Hossain’s petition and any official papers relating to the succession into its consideration.⁹⁰ Over the next several years, Wellesley’s conduct became a matter of parliamentary debate, with some members actually calling for his impeachment. During one heated session in 1808, the nawabs’ advocates lamented that India’s native rulers had “been made slaves” under Wellesley’s tenure, thereby disturbing a fragile balance of power.⁹¹ But it mattered little to Lord Castlereagh, the President of the BoC, whether Hossain himself had a hand in any treason. The Company could simply assume his complicity, much as the English nation had driven the Stuart descendants of James VII out of their country. Upon hearing this analogy, Sheridan rose to protest the idea that “the rights and laws of nations” could be “trampled upon with impunity, merely upon the

⁸⁹ “State Papers,” in *Asiatic Annual Register, or, A View of the History of Hindustan, and of the Politics, Commerce and Literature of Asia, for the Year 1802* (London: J. Debrett, 1803), 204.

⁹⁰ “Proceedings in the Last Session of Parliament,” in *The Gentleman’s Magazine: and Historical Chronicle. For the Year MDCCCII* (London: Nichols and Son, 1802), 1050.

⁹¹ Thomas Turton, Speech to House of Commons, June 17, 1808, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 11 (1808), col. 942.

alleged policy of the measure.”⁹² Sympathetic MPs concurred and disputed the notion that the nawab was a mere vassal of the Company subject to its boundless power. While law of nations theorists affirmed a state’s right to self-preservation, pre-emptive, defensive measures could only be justified by “the fact of real danger.” Declaring “there was no parallel in the history of [India] which presented so unbridled an instance of insatiable ambition,” Sheridan implied that the national lessons learned from the Hastings trial had clearly been forgotten.

In his *History*, James Mill had few kind words for the nawab. Indeed, he declared that “no considerable improvement could be introduced” while the nawab, or any other prince for that matter, retained his sovereignty; it would be a joyous occasion when “every inch of ground within the limits of India were subject to [the Company’s] sway.”⁹³ Fifteen years after the publication of this text, Mill’s stance on the moral necessity of colonial annexation remained unchanged. This inevitable process, he hazarded, was only being stalled by uninformed English public opinion.⁹⁴ At first glance, Mill’s “remarkably bellicose views” were fully in line with the principles of causative liberalism, which could justify despotic rule in the interest of long-term progress. But labeling Mill as a forerunner of expansionists like Governor-General Dalhousie only provides a partial picture of his somewhat paradoxical liberalism. While Mill approved of the *result* of Wellesley’s provocations, he could not condone the legally dubious *manner* in which the administration of the Carnatic was seized.⁹⁵

⁹² Richard Sheridan, Speech to House of Commons, June 17, 1808, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, vol. 11 (1808), col. 936.

⁹³ Mill, 232.

⁹⁴ Stokes, 249.

⁹⁵ This distinction seems to confirm Majeed’s suspicion that the representation of India that appeared in Mill’s *History* was “important only in so far as it played a part in a larger political and epistemological venture...to fashion a critique of the ruling British ideology of the time.” See Majeed, 198.

As reformers would frequently note, Mill pointedly argued that Wellesley's handling of the treasonous correspondence between the nawabs and Tipu Sultan was highly improper. The governor-general's aim was simple. A 1792 treaty with the Carnatic had enabled the Company to take over its administration in the event of war, but Wellesley wished to make this temporary measure permanent. The detection of the letters provided the leverage that the Company needed to efface the sovereignty of a historically faithful ally. Putting forth an uncharacteristic, culturally attuned analysis of courtly forms of address, Mill contended that the letters contained no trace of intrigue. Although the 1792 arrangement had forbidden any intercourse between the nawab and other "foreign" powers,⁹⁶ Mohamed Ali "felt himself in a state of degradation" and sought to "sooth his vanity" by corresponding with a leading potentate.⁹⁷ His adulatory mode of address, moreover, was hardly inviting collusion. Since "Oriental expressions of compliment [were] all extravagant and hyperbolic," it would have been exceptional if the nawab had selected "the most feeble and cold" forms. The nawab's use of a cypher could similarly be explained by "the state of civilization under which [Indian rulers] were educated," which led them to "make a great affectation of secrecy on very trifling occasions."

While the Company's interpretation of the so-called "evidence" was rife with error, the fact that it could summarily pass judgment on the nawab was a matter of even greater import. Removed from the metropole's "salutary" influences, Company personnel had deluded themselves into believing that their duplicitous actions were above board. In his 1810 article, Mill had approved of the Company's evolution into an arbitrary government "tempered by European honour"; without this meliorating influence, he

⁹⁶ Referring to the classical law of nations, Malcolm concluded that the breach of a single article of a treaty abrogated the entire arrangement. See Ramaswami, 371.

⁹⁷ Mill, 221-225.

could not endorse the organization's self-promotion to judge, jury, and executioner. Adopting an "arbitrary" structure untrammelled by intermediary legislative councils did not give the Company license to "push [its] warfare to dethronement" without just cause, nor did it allow the British to "carry hostilities beyond the line of redress for indubitable injury."⁹⁸ Mill's account of the mistreatment of rights-bearing, native sovereigns in many ways prefigured the reformers' legalistic rhetoric of the 1850s. It was apparently so controversial that orientalist H. H. Wilson, a later editor of the text, clarified in a footnote that the nawab was actually the Company's "creature, not their equal" all along.

Following scholars like Dirks and Karuna Mantena, we might presume that liberals in the pre-Uprising era were disavowing the sordid origins of British India to absolve themselves of the "crimes of conquest."⁹⁹ Once these lingering spirits were banished, a new, morally viable empire could arise. While certain prominent figures like James Mill and the Company director Charles Grant required this cleansing tonic, their attempts at purgation were hardly successful. The interventionist colonial state that they helped design was still subjected to endless accusations of corruption and wrongdoing; their belief in a causative imperial liberalism that delayed the recognition of Indians' rights was similarly contested. Rather than rationalizing forms of legal, political, and economic marginalization, reformers adopted a reflexive register and demanded the resolution of longstanding anomalies through the immediate application of liberal norms to colonial governance. Fashioning their own conservationist templates for an imperial union, they engaged in a prolonged war of position within an opaque bureaucratic system that rarely permitted negotiation.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 231.

⁹⁹ Mantena, 29.

As the boundaries between historicist political science and intellectual history become more permeable, some scholars have begun to critique their peers' "over-reliance on canonical interpretations of liberalism."¹⁰⁰ Bell suggests that we might table the Mills and shelve Locke altogether in order to pay greater attention to "rejectionist" liberals of the nineteenth-century like Richard Cobden, Herbert Spencer, and the Comtean positivists.¹⁰¹ In selecting these individuals, who certainly function as "exemplary figures" in their own right, Bell largely replicates the sample pool from Gregory Claeys's study of "imperial sceptics."¹⁰² In so doing, he runs the risk of simply creating an alternative canon to that favored by Mehta. A solution to this impasse lies in the excavation of expansive, transregional reformist networks that developed from the 1830s and directed the course of public sphere agitation well into late-nineteenth century. By tracing these connections, we may better understand why reformers believed they could establish a consensual "empire of opinion" by working within a liberal imperial framework when this body of thought could just as easily justify the exclusion of Indians from "civilized" society.

¹⁰⁰ Bell, 20.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁰² Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

The Origins of India Reformism: Pressure Group Formation and the Conservationist Turn

In the spring of 1838, abolitionist George Thompson was about halfway through a fiery denunciation of coercive labor practices in the West Indies when a sudden bolt of lightning and peal of thunder interrupted the proceedings at the Devonport Town Hall. He had been citing the testimonies of several Special Justices who spoke of former slaves' willingness to work on well-managed plantations. This evidence suggested that Parliament could terminate the apprenticeship system ahead of schedule without fear of an economic implosion. The disruptive meteorological event added some flourish to Thompson's recitation. Such occurrences, he noted, were "emblematical" of abolitionist agitation, by which "the lightning of British indignation shall smite the throne of despotism reared in the West [and] the mild rays of freedom shall light up the Antilles."¹ Indeed, this sublime imagery of light and darkness was pervasive in the reformist literature of the period, which interlaced opposition to "Old Corruption" in the metropole with newfound anxieties over British practices on the colonial periphery. Autocratic powers, be they slaveholders, East India Company agents, or the landed aristocracy, could only abuse their authority if their actions were concealed. India, in particular, remained obscured by a metaphorical "veil that ha[d] been suffered hitherto to shroud the mingled misery and splendor of this land of wonders."² Reformers anticipated that a

¹ George Thompson, *Speech of George Thompson, Esq., at a Great Meeting for the Extinction of Negro Apprenticeship* (London: Central Negro Emancipation Office, 1838), 32. Thompson further castigated the Colonial Office for its continued support of the "unholy human contract" of apprenticeship "in defiance of the righteous law of God."

² *British India. The Duty and Interest of Great Britain, to Consider the Condition and Claims of Her Possessions in the East. Addresses delivered before the Members of the Society of Friends* (London, Johnston and Barrett, 1839), 9.

proper system of trusteeship could arise once India was firmly integrated into the broader empire and imbedded within metropolitan consciousness.

From the vantage point of 1891, journalist John Hyslop Bell deemed India reformism to be symptomatic of a great spirit of improvement that had swept the nation sixty years prior. The abolition of slavery throughout the empire and the termination of the Company's lingering monopoly powers in 1833 were "largely concessions to a popular agitation as unselfish in its objects as character."³ Bell based this claim partially on the testimony of Elizabeth Nichol, the daughter of prominent Quaker and British India Society (BIS) co-founder Joseph Pease, who had dutifully served as Thompson's behind-the-scenes advisor during the heady days of the early 1840s. It was the 1832 Reform Act, Mrs. Nichol surmised, that catalyzed a political awakening amongst the common people and expanded their global gaze. Eager to exercise their new electoral powers, Britons took it upon themselves to "assuage the misery and relieve the oppression of the less favoured inhabitants of distant dependencies."⁴

Disdainful of this Whiggish narrative, some scholars have offered a rather more cynical take on Britain's humanitarian turn. A generation ago, C. Duncan Rice interpreted the blossoming of the anti-slavery movement in the provinces as a "response to signs that society had become irreligious and atomized." Abolitionism was thus a redemptive exertion to save British souls; it mattered not whether it "took a foreign or domestic direction."⁵ More recently, historical geographers have offered an alternative

³ John Hyslop Bell, *British Folks & British India Fifty Years Ago: Joseph Pease and his Contemporaries* (London: John Heywood, 1891), 7.

⁴ "A Quaker of Sixty Years Ago," in *The Westminster Review*, vol. 139 (London: Henry and Company, 1893), 418.

⁵ C. Duncan Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists, 1833-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 35.

reading by focusing on processes of network formation in the “‘real’ and ‘imaginary’ geographies of colonial philanthropy.”⁶ According to Lester and Lambert, organizations like the BIS, Aborigines Protection Society (APS), and British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) functioned as nodes in a web, processing information transmitted from the colonial periphery into a “more seamless philanthropic discourse.”⁷ Their process of synthesis, however, triggered the formation of a trans-global settler press that sought to limit the extension of British subject rights to colonized peoples.⁸ It was these shifting, polarized webs that caused an “action initiated in one part of the globe to result in the activation of people elsewhere.”⁹ At the same time, India reformers like Thompson were influenced by extra-imperial informational inputs like American abolitionist debates and accounts of indigenous decline. Heeding Zoe Laidlaw’s advice, this chapter will therefore venture “beyond the bounds of any particular colony or type of colony, and indeed beyond the empire” to comprehend the “universal aspirations of imperial critics in this period.”¹⁰

Building upon histories of individual societies and explorations of “nineteenth-century discursive spatialities,”¹¹ this chapter identifies the ideological and structural forces that alternatively drew reformers into combination and repelled them. Adapting a theoretical framework from Pierre Bourdieu, we may situate Victorian reformers on a “socially constructed field of action in which agents endowed with different resources

⁶ David Lambert and Alan Lester, “Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy,” *Progress in Human Geography* 28 (2004): 322.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁸ Alan Lester, “British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire,” *History Workshop Journal* 54, (2002): 24-48.

⁹ Lambert and Lester, 327.

¹⁰ Zoe Laidlaw, “‘Justice to India – Prosperity to England – Freedom to the Slave!’ Humanitarian and Moral Reform Campaigns on India, Aborigines and American Slavery,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 2 (2012): 323.

¹¹ Lester and Lambert, 322.

confront[ed] one another to conserve or transform the existing power relations.”¹² For our purposes, it is useful to distinguish between a *super-field* populated by organizational actors and a *sub-field* composed of individuals. On the super-field, reformist associations often attempted to forge alliances with each other through “link-ups.” In contentious situations, however, groups might defame each other in the public press or co-opt each other’s leading lecturers. Each moral cause was also structured by its own sub-field, in which individual actors vied to gain mass approval for their strategies and beliefs. This two-field paradigm, which speaks to the relationships *between* moral causes and the wars of position *within* discrete movements, has a wide application. The Anti-Corn Law League, for instance, vigorously competed for dominance on the super-field, clashing with the BFASS over free-trade, soliciting the support of moral-force Chartists, and ultimately enlisting Thompson to canvass throughout southern England.¹³ But the single-issue focus of the movement resulted in a rather quiescent sub-field; despite periodic shifts in organizational strategy, leadership hierarchies remained relatively static. Conversely, the early India reform movement, with its broad-spectrum approach, dispersed pool of participants, and colorful personalities, was actively engaged on both fields of struggle.

A reformer’s position within both super and sub-fields was not only based on popular captivation with his ideological platform, but also reflected his network of contacts, mobility, lecturing capabilities, and personal assets. Put simply, agents obtained dominance by appropriating varying amounts of economic, cultural, and social capital;

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 34.

¹³ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845 on the Case of the Deposed Raja of Sattara and the Impeachment of Col. C. Ovens* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1845), 231.

conflict within the fields intensified “whenever the relative value of the different kinds of capital [was] questioned.”¹⁴ Once again we may refer to Bourdieu, who famously challenged the assumption that the accumulation of economic capital was an inherently self-interested pursuit that rendered other “forms of exchange” disinterested. Rather, he postulated that cultural and social capital are often “transformed, disguised forms of economic capital” that produce “their most specific effect only to the extent they conceal” their origin.¹⁵ Embodied cultural capital, for instance, is often facilitated by “hereditary transmission.” With material support from one’s kin, an individual can delay his entry into the market and pursue educational qualifications that might yield a long-term, economic reward commensurate with his “accumulated labor.”

The cultivation of social capital, which is most germane to this study, consists of forming a network of “social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term.”¹⁶ An individual’s volume of social capital, then, depends both on the “size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of capital” that each member of this network possesses. Entry into a group or association allows one to multiply his capital, though his actions may not be consciously “conceived as a calculated pursuit of gain.”¹⁷ These groups frequently rely on “institution rites” and similar forms of “consecration” to cement relationships within the network and ensure mutual recognition of members’ “durable obligations” to the body. Members can also delegate their social capital to representatives to amplify their influence and protect the group against

¹⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: on the Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 35.

¹⁵ Idem., “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J Richardson (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), 252.

¹⁶ Ibid., 249.

¹⁷ Ibid., 257.

“individual lapses.”¹⁸ In certain cases, these delegates come to personify the group and its ideologies as *nobiles*.¹⁹

Anticipating Bourdieu to an extent, German sociologist Georg Simmel was also concerned with interrogating the limitations imposed by group membership on the expression of individuality. By his understanding, “the self-preservation of very young associations requires the establishment of strict boundaries and a centripetal unity.”²⁰ It is only after these movements grow and experience divisions of internal labor that “the rigidity of the original demarcation against others is softened.” While Simmel framed this model of gradually diminishing restrictions as universal, it imperfectly describes the Victorian paradigm. Unlike kin groups, secret societies, or political parties, reformist communities did not rigidly police their boundaries, nor did they regularly excommunicate delinquent members. Rather - to borrow Ernest Gellner’s phrasing - the reformer was a “modular” agent in the public sphere; he was capable of flexibly combining “into specific-purpose, *ad hoc*, limited association without binding himself by some blood ritual” or ceremonial display.²¹ A defining feature of British abolitionism was the “constant spillover of individuals into new causes.”²² The *National Temperance Chronicle* ruminated on this modularity in 1851: “he who begins in seeking the welfare

¹⁸ Ibid., 251.

¹⁹ William Lloyd Garrison and Richard Cobden may be classified as *nobiles*, as they obtained a cult-like following within the abolitionist and free trade movements.

²⁰ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*, ed. Richard Sennett (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 54.

²¹ Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994), 100.

²² British women who had honed their protest skills during the anti-sati campaign of the 1820s turned their attentions to opposing animal cruelty and vivisection in the following decade. See Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 56, 70.

of his fellow-men in one thing is led step by step to seek it also in other things.”²³ The resultant organizational permeability allowed for encouraging bursts of moral enthusiasm, but hindered societies’ membership retention and financial viability.

The “philanthropic pound,” as Laidlaw puts it “was thinly spread.”²⁴ The initial activities of the BIS were sustained largely through one-time donations from principal backers like Joseph Pease (of the Darlington Peases), Major-General John Briggs, and planter Francis Carnac Brown, who contributed as much as 50 pounds sterling a piece.²⁵ But organizations of this sort required a constant influx of new capital to stay afloat, let alone expand. Annual subscriptions from casual members rarely exceeded a single pound, which was hardly sufficient to subsidize publication of the society’s organ, the *British Indian Advocate*. One solution lay in forming connections with the new commercial and political associations that were arising in India’s presidency towns. By staging these link-ups, reformers not only accessed new sources of economic capital but could also accumulate social and even symbolic capital (i.e., status and authority) as spokesmen for India. Native and Anglo-Indian groups entered into these arrangements with the hope of facilitating their own advancement in the long-term through a kind of virtual representation. Appointing a metropolitan agent, especially one who could speak on behalf of multiple native groups, could also be a cost-cutting strategy. These transregional relationships were necessarily asymmetric; the Indian associations were strictly feeders of capital and, as such, could not appropriate the resources of the British

²³ Quoted in Brian Harrison, “Civil Society by Accident? Paradoxes of Voluntarism and Pluralism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions*, ed. Jose Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82.

²⁴ Laidlaw, 305.

²⁵ *Prospectus of the Provisional Committee for Forming a British India Society, for Bettering the Condition of our Fellow-Subjects – the Natives of British India* (London, 1839), 3.

organizations. As a result of this structure, link-ups were often impermanent. Representing the Calcutta Landholders' Society in the late 1830s, John Crawford provided the BIS with a 500-pound sponsorship, only to withdraw his support once Thompson and his Quaker allies came out against the Company's opium trade.²⁶

In the 1830s, reformist organizations began to rely heavily on charismatic, combative lecturers who could spearhead their out-of-doors agitation. The roguish George Thompson epitomized this new kind of professional public moralist and attempted to convert the advocacy of various causes into a full time occupation.²⁷ Born in Liverpool to a poor Wesleyan Methodist family and apprenticed in a counting house at age twelve,²⁸ he embarked upon a career in 1831 as a professional agitator for the Anti-Slavery Agency Committee. Three years later, Thompson earned a degree of infamy by conducting an American lecture tour in the company of the "fanatical" William Lloyd Garrison.²⁹ His intemperate speeches targeting respected ministers in central Massachusetts prompted critics to malign him as a meddling foreigner dispatched by "the old pussy-cats of Glasgow" to stir up trouble.³⁰ In Boston, two local merchants plotted to corner him outside of Garrison's headquarters and had raised a "purse of 100 dollars" to "reward the individual who shall first lay violent hands on Thompson, so that he may be brought to the tar-kettle before dark."³¹ Rioters ultimately targeted him on five occasions

²⁶ S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971), 19.

²⁷ Thompson's hefty, vacillating portfolio led one historian to describe him as "sort of street Arab of reform." See Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists*, 55.

²⁸ Ronald M. Gifford, "George Thompson and Trans-Atlantic Anti-Slavery, 1831-1865" (unpublished PhD diss., Indiana University, 1999), 19. Thompson admitted to having embezzled 50 pounds during his rough and tumble youth, though he paid back the sum at a high rate of interest. See Rice, *The Scots Abolitionists*, 73.

²⁹ Garrison was the architect behind the New England and American Anti-Slavery Societies.

³⁰ C. Duncan Rice, "The Anti-Slavery Mission of George Thompson to the United States, 1834-1835," *Journal of American Studies* 2, no. 1 (1968): 28.

³¹ F. W. Chesson, "William Lloyd Garrison," *Leisure Hour* (January 1886): 23.

in the summer and fall of 1835, while pro-slavery pamphleteers rumored that he had taken a black mistress.³² Thompson later cast this American sojourn as a Christian trial which he had embraced with “no party connection, without wealth, no arms, no diplomatic appointment [and] no introduction to great men.”³³ His pacifist “retreat” did not signal failure, but rather sanctified his mission.

Reformism was an uncertain occupation. Periods of great frenzy were followed by deep lulls in activity depending on the national mood. One could not pass up employment opportunities when they came along. Towards the end of 1837, Thompson informed his wife, Anne, that he had been offered six months pay to lecture for the Central Negro Emancipation Committee. While the claims upon him “from all parts of the country [were] very numerous and perplexing,” he longed to “be at home again” in Edinburgh and wondered if he could provide for his “undivided family” on a restricted income.³⁴ But Thompson remained on the circuit; as leading lecturer for the BIS, he was keen to take India reform “out of doors” and modify “the views of the Lords and Commons...in exact proportion to the diffusion of information generally.” Seeking a more stable arrangement, Thompson readily accepted retainers from both the Raja of Satara and the Mughal emperor, but it caused him no end of grief. Opponents began to impute mercenary motivations to his agitation and generally complain of the reformers’ departure from the civic republican ideal of disinterested philanthropy. Defending his probity, Thompson declared in one letter to the editor of the *Bengal Hurkaru* that he

³² W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrison, Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2013), 53-55.

³³ *Reception of George Thompson in Great Britain*, ed. C. C. Burleigh (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836), 126.

³⁴ George Thompson to Anne (Jenny) Thompson, November 29 1837, John Rylands Library (JRL), REAS 4/1.

“would see [his] children starve, rather than feed them on the wages of prostitution.”³⁵ He particularly resented the fact that Company directors’ pay-for-play patronage networks were above board, while reformers’ receipt of any support from India rendered their testimonies suspect. Such aspersions, which devalued their symbolic capital, were “nothing better than an imputation on the justice of a universally recognized maxim, that the labourer is worthy of his hire.”³⁶

When campaigns accomplished their objectives or ran out of money, reformers often found themselves adrift. Some took up journalistic piecework or else fled the country as debtors; Thompson did both. Particularly zealous reformers who needed relief could convert the social and symbolic capital that they had accumulated through their exertions into a kind of safety net. Frederick Chesson, the secretary of the APS and Thompson’s son-in-law, served as a nexus redistributing charitable relief within the broad reform community. In the winter of 1858, he received a 20-pound donation for Thompson’s upkeep from W. T. Pritchard, the recently appointed consul of Fiji, on the condition of anonymity.³⁷ Several years later, he loaned 35 pounds to John Dickinson, the chairman of the India Reform Society, who was in fact channeling it to Louis Chamerozow, the former secretary of the APS (with whom Chesson had bad blood). Even in a state of debt, reformers could still accrue what Bourdieu terms “symbolic profit” from their agitation,³⁸ whether it was through rubbing elbows with beatified abolitionists like Thomas Clarkson or by investing in a personal narrative of self-martyrdom. Garrison somewhat reveled in his state of chronic persecution, noting that it

³⁵ *Ninth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow, 1843), 55.

³⁶ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845*, 70.

³⁷ Diary of Frederic Chesson, February 25, 1858, JRL, REAS 11/6; February 8, 1862, REAS 11/9; December 27, 18262, REAS 11/9.

³⁸ Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” 249.

was the lot of “genuine abolitionists” to be “despised and rejected, as was Jesus, the Prince of emancipators, by the chiefs, priests, scribes, and Pharisees.”³⁹ In his India exertions, Thompson similarly comforted himself with the adage that “public opinion has ever been against reformers.” While vocal opponents of Company policy were relatively few in number, Noah, too, “was in a minority of one, when he preached righteousness to the antediluvians.”⁴⁰

This chapter evaluates Thompson’s attempts to bolster his limited symbolic capital as a self-trained authority on Indian affairs and legitimize the imperial public moralist as a lynchpin of the constitutionalist political order. Once he began to interrogate the Company’s practices, he increasingly articulated an ideological “conservationism” that favored the retention of native institutions and modes of governance. In many ways, this was a refrain of Edmund Burke’s mandate that Britain must “govern [Indians] upon their own principles and maxims” and “must not force them into the narrow circle of our ideas.”⁴¹ Such rhetoric notably diverged from the standard Evangelical line that attributed British dominion in India to providential circumstances and lauded its extension as a Christian duty. Even after Thompson’s rise to prominence within the sub-field of India reform, colonial commentators like Robert Montgomery Martin continued to call for the Anglicization of Indian society and its gradual cultural incorporation into the British Empire. Cultivating social capital was a fraught affair, as the various reformist associations continue to lock horns on the super-field. Despite Thompson’s eagerness to

³⁹ William Lloyd Garrison to Daniel O’Connell, December 8, 1843, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, ed. Walter M. Merrill, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1974), 230.

⁴⁰ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th*, 1845, 203.

⁴¹ Edmund Burke, “Impeachment of Warren Hastings, Esq., Speech – Third Day,” in *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, vol. 7 (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1852), 309.

form link-ups with adjacent societies, these circuits easily frayed when it came to specific policy initiatives. The BFASS and the India reformers tussled over the advisability of global free trade and the necessity of Company support for Indian cash crop production. The abolition of customary forms of slavery in India also proved to be an invidious issue. Although Garrison found it “quite incomprehensible” that the English anti-slavery community did “not espouse the British India movement en masse,”⁴² it was his own connection to Thompson and the BIS that provoked these hostilities. With a surfeit of competitors and a paucity of allies, India reformers after 1841 were forced to rely on informal networks to maintain their various forms of capital and keep their public careers afloat.

Conservationist or Christian? Alternatives for an Integrated Empire

While Thompson had initially surmised that “the battle of liberty anywhere” could only progress through a philanthropic “division of labor” with specialized lecturers attached to each discrete cause,⁴³ he soon began to amass a varied – and hefty – portfolio of reformist causes. He was drawn to the plight of the Indian *ryot* in 1838 while touring the north of England with colonial statistician Robert Montgomery Martin to establish link-ups between the provincial emancipation organizations and the newly founded APS. What attracted him to this society was its message of humanity as a mutual dependency in which “the oppressed, the helpless and the ignorant on every spot of the Globe”

⁴² Bell, 111.

⁴³ Gifford, 190.

wielded a claim to the benefice of the powerful.⁴⁴ The APS took a particularly strident stance in attributing the oppression of “the natives of barbarous countries” to governmental inaction, noting that unmediated colonial expansion had “banished from our confines, or exterminated, the natives who might have been profitable workmen, good customers, and good neighbors.”⁴⁵ Going one step beyond the select committee of inquiry that spawned it, the APS defended the brokering of treaties with the “Caffree or the Indian,” who were just as capable of understanding their terms “as the civilized man.” Thompson applauded the organization’s stirring revelation of imperial injustices, as he resented the British “custom to point rather to the small spots we had civilized and enlightened, than to the vast continents and innumerable islands we have covered with the ashes of a slaughtered race.”⁴⁶

A fledgling entity, the APS was all too willing to bask in Thompson’s star power. Publications like the *Birmingham Journal* admitted to having no knowledge of the APS or its goals, but implicitly trusted that Thompson had lent his abilities to a worthwhile cause.⁴⁷ Yet Thompson’s working relationship with the APS was short-lived, as founding members like Joseph Sturge cautioned him against misdirecting the organization’s energies to the plight of the *ryot*.⁴⁸ Other leading voices either exhibited a disinterest in Indian issues or utilized the society to further a scientific interest in non-western cultures

⁴⁴ George Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes of the British Settlements and Colonies, and the Manufacturing and Commercial Prosperity of the Parent Country,” *Renfrewshire Reformer*, November 24 1838.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes. Reprinted, with Comments by the “Aborigines Protection Society”* (London: William Hall, 1837), 104, 122.

⁴⁶ *Report of the Proceedings at a Meeting of the Aborigines’ Protection Society held in the Lecture Room – Nelson Street, Newcastle upon Tyne on Tuesday, August 22, 1838* (Newcastle upon Tyne: W. & H. Mitchell, 1838), 14.

⁴⁷ *Birmingham Journal*, September 14, 1838, Library of Congress (LOC), Scrapbooks collected by Thompson and Chesson (Scrapbooks), E449.S43, vol. 6.

⁴⁸ Gifford, 197. Thompson also clashed with APS co-founder Thomas Hodgkin over his sponsorship of the American Colonization Society. See Laidlaw, 310.

at the expense of reformist agitation.⁴⁹ The APS, meanwhile, was gradually incorporated within a governmental system of “humanitarian regulation” that linked the protection of indigenous races with “enlightened autocratic rule” in the settler colonies.⁵⁰ By January 1839, Thompson was firmly disenchanted with the society’s avoidance of “the East India question” and its inability “to attempt anything by means of real agitation.”⁵¹ Although he feared that the appearance of a new reform organization might splinter public attention or result in crosscutting negotiations with the government, he nevertheless rejected the Society’s last-ditch offer to establish a sub-committee on Indian issues.

Thompson’s doubts were soon dispelled following a meeting with the Malabar planter Francis Carnac Brown, whose “soul seem[ed] absorbed in the great question of ‘how shall the state of things in India be mended?’”⁵² Hired as the travelling secretary for the incipient British India Society, a group co-founded by Brown and a handful of radical Quakers and Anglo-Indians, Thompson further boosted his public profile. He was joined in this pursuit by prominent figures like Henry Brougham and Daniel O’Connell, who had assisted in dismantling the apprenticeship system and now wished to address the “ignorance, poverty, crime, and disaffection” that prevailed across famine-stricken India.⁵³ To enhance public awareness of these distresses, the BIS aimed to disseminate extant colonial knowledge and extract new data directly from the subcontinent. From the outset, it challenged the concatenated systems of monopoly and arbitrary power that

⁴⁹ James Heartfield, *The Aborigines’ Protection Society: Humanitarian Imperialism in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, South Africa and Congo, 1836-1909* (London: Hurst & Co., 2011), 26.

⁵⁰ Lester and Dussart have suggested that this form of governmentality paralleled the “emergence of the [the] modern state system in Europe.” See Alan Lester and Fae Dussart, *Colonization and the Origins of Humanitarian Governance: Protecting Aborigines across the Nineteenth-Century British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 21-39.

⁵¹ Letterbook of George Thompson, January 7, 1839 and March 12, 1839, JRL, REAS 4/1.

⁵² Letterbook of George Thompson, March 7, 1839, JRL, REAS 4/1. Carnac Brown served as the secretary of the BIS.

⁵³ *Prospectus of the Provisional Committee for Forming a British India Society*, 1.

marginalized disenfranchised groups throughout the empire.⁵⁴ Cultural difference was immaterial, as the Indians' claims were as deserving of public attention as those of the nonconformists, Catholics, or chattel slaves. The reformers' agitation simply extended the circumference of the so-called "circle of the we" in an easterly direction.⁵⁵

Agitators associated with the BIS represented India reform as the logical outgrowth of various existing movements. Joseph Pease, for instance, urged O'Connell to turn his attentions to Indian bondage by stressing the similarities between the impoverished *ryots* and the rack-rented Irish peasants.⁵⁶ This comparison was likely inspired by the writings of fellow BIS co-founder William Howitt, which suggested that India was governed as the "Ireland of the East...pouring out wealth upon us" while millions of its native population suffered in "the lowest state of poverty and wretchedness."⁵⁷ Thompson also familiarized his audiences with the outrages suffered in Ireland and India, noting that both colonies "seem to have been made for England, and their Aborigines only to be plundered by her tyranny."⁵⁸ With some prodding, the Irish could likely be induced to join in common cause with other marginalized populations; they had "learned to feel keenly for the oppressed" having "been themselves cruelly

⁵⁴ Thompson later asserted that the Test Acts, working class disenfranchisement, and the West Indian plantation system were all the products of related forms of monopolization. See George Thompson, *Lecture on the Corn Laws* (Carlisle, 1842), 3.

⁵⁵ Thomas W. Laquer, "Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of 'Humanity,'" in *Humanitarianism and Suffering: the Mobilization of Empathy*, ed. Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 55.

⁵⁶ Laidlaw, 309.

⁵⁷ William Howitt, *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in all their Countries* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1838), 300.

⁵⁸ George Thompson, "Mr. Thompson's Lecture on the Duty of Great Britain to her Hundred Million of Subjects in the East, delivered in George Street Chapel, Glasgow, on Wednesday, Nov. 14 1838," in *Scrapbooks*, vol. 6.

misgoverned.”⁵⁹ Writing to the Irish Quaker and publisher Richard Webb, Thompson prayed that the country could overcome its political factionalism and contemplate “the sorrows and slavery of others,” so as “to make the world as free from tyrants and oppressors as she is herself from the venomous reptiles of the earth!”⁶⁰ After his election as MP for Tower Hamlets in 1847, Thompson continued to keep Ireland within his frame of vision by opposing the suspension of *habeas corpus* and advocating “for religious equality over the whole face of the earth.”⁶¹

It should be noted that the British India Society established in July 1839 was not the first of its kind. Nearly twenty years earlier, the *Observer* reported that a consortium of premier reformers (including William Wilberforce and future APS co-founder Thomas Fowell Buxton) had convened in London to produce a “great moral operation” in India. Attendees concluded that Hinduism rendered its followers superstitious and inured them to the forces of despotism; Providence had “consigned the population of 100 millions to Great Britain, that she might redeem them from this immoral vassalage” and “lift this people from their vices.”⁶² Ignorance of Christian doctrine predictably promoted un-Christian behavior, including the practice in Sumatra of fattening native children “to prepare them for sale as human food.” Evangelical groups in the metropole continued this crusade against native heathenism throughout the 1840s. Baptist clergy and their parishioners flooded the Court of Proprietors (CoP) with petitions urging the Company to withdraw its support from Hindu institutions and abolish the pilgrim tax (in conformity

⁵⁹ “Wrong and Claims of Indian Commerce,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 2 (February 1 1841): 15. The editors of the *Advocate* rejoiced that the Irish *Freeman’s Journal and Morning Register* had begun to “speak with warmth and heartiness of the claims of India.”

⁶⁰ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, February 15, 1839, Boston Public Library (BPL), Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v8, 6.

⁶¹ George Thompson, *Addresses of George Thompson, Esq., M.P., and Acton Smee Ayrton, Esq., to the Electors and Non-electors of the Tower Hamlets* (London: A. Nisbet, 1852), 8.

⁶² “British-India Society,” *Observer*, May 27, 1821, 3.

with the directors' instructions from 1833). The stockholders, however, retorted that the EIC had pledged to "defray the expenses" of the Temple of Jagannath in 1805 after it acquired the province of Cuttack.⁶³ It could not renege on this promise simply because the Baptist missionaries reported "scenes of infamy, misery, and death, which no pen can describe."⁶⁴

Reformist proprietors like Robert Montgomery Martin would have been well acquainted with these impassioned applications. Though he refrained from invoking religion before the Court, Martin associated the material improvement of Indian society with Anglicization and conversion in his printed polemic. His was no fringe voice. In the late 1820s, he had been involved in radical, free trade publishing ventures in Calcutta with the assistance of James Silk Buckingham and Rammohun Roy. Upon returning to England, he attempted to find permanent employment with the Company by publishing a defense of its Chinese tea monopoly and rejecting the schemes for European colonization that he had hitherto supported.⁶⁵ Reflecting on this turnabout, Lynn Zastoupil has identified a shift in Martin's sentiments after 1832 towards a "kind of Tory radicalism" that was primarily concerned with the preservation of "the status quo."⁶⁶ But while it is true that his subsequent works, including the five bulky volumes of his *History of British Possessions* and twelve works for the *Colonial Library*, affirmed the utility of the

⁶³ *Accounts Respecting the Annual Territorial Revenues and Disbursements of the East India Company*, vol. 34 (1854), 86.

⁶⁴ "Petition of the General Baptist Missionary Society," June 23, 1847, Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, IOR/B/271, f. 293. Later petitions were drawn up by the Baptist churches in Burton-on-Trent, Louth, and the Midland Conference of General Baptist Denomination. See *ibid.*, f. 412.

⁶⁵ In the second edition of this work, Martin clarified that he was only supporting the continuance of the tea monopoly for a limited period of time to recuperate Indian finances, after which "the commerce in tea [could] be opened to the nation at large." See Robert Montgomery Martin, *The Political, Commercial, & Financial Condition of the Anglo-Eastern Empire in 1832* (London: Parbury, Allen and Co., 1833), v.

⁶⁶ Zastoupil, 124.

Company, he was hardly an apologist for system of double government as it permanently stood.

Like the BIS reformers, Martin denounced the home government's continued reliance on mercantilist, unequal tariffs that disadvantaged Indian produce in British markets and impeded the country's economic development. In 1840, he established the *Colonial Magazine and Maritime Journal* to further his vision for an integrated empire that incorporated British India alongside the settler colonies.⁶⁷ For generations, politicians had "looked on British India as a step-child and refused to treat it as a member of a great [imperial] body."⁶⁸ Meanwhile, an "inordinately selfish spirit" led British merchants who dealt with the subcontinent to pursue an unchristian "career of ambition, opulence, and rank."⁶⁹ The metropolitan public, in turn, normalized this behavior and displayed a "criminal indifference" to India's plight that could only result in a "terrible retribution."⁷⁰ This criticism echoed the Garrisonians' belief that India's woes would only worsen so long as the British public was "kept in profound ignorance of the misdeeds of their government."⁷¹

Despite their common demands for publicity and adherence to free trade principles, Thompson and Martin approached reform from dissimilar ideological standpoints. Whereas Thompson took issue with the Company's extractive spirit and its

⁶⁷ While the contributions to this journal are unattributed, the preliminary articles in each volume bear Martin's distinctive voice. The ideological bent of the publication, moreover, remained consistent under Martin's editorship.

⁶⁸ "Cultivation of Sugar in British India," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 6 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1841), 177.

⁶⁹ "British versus Foreign Industry," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 6 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1841), 258.

⁷⁰ "Justice for India," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 2 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1840), 273.

⁷¹ William Lloyd Garrison, "Preface," in *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends' Meeting-House, Manchester England* (Pawtucket, RI: William and Robert Adams, 1840), viii.

lack of investment in free labor agriculture, Martin reified Indian governance as a divinely ordained trial by fire for the colonizing nation. Like many Evangelicals, he subscribed to the belief that immense power had been granted to Britain “for great and holy purposes,” namely “extending to distant parts of the world the blessings of Christianity, and giving them our language and laws and literature.”⁷² His idealized vision of colonial rule was fully in keeping with the principles of causative liberalism and emphasized the need to foster individual autonomy and moral responsibility among native populations. While Britain’s maritime system of colonization cushioned it from the border disputes and internal devolutions of power that had plagued ancient territorial empires, it was the recognition of civil rights that ultimately distinguished it from Jerusalem and Rome. These political freedoms could only originate in a state of “self-agency” and gain expression according to one’s “power of resisting temptation and of controlling the passions.”⁷³ As a non-Christian society lacking this ethical imperative, Indians (and more specifically Hindus) occupied a nebulous stage of development that justified their subjecthood under a colonial oligarchy. Martin therefore lauded the Company for having “annihilated” Indian feudalism and severing “the slavish dependence of the low, upon the high caste.”⁷⁴

Martin’s triumphalist vision of a colonial Christendom was dependent on the organic gestation of settler networks. He repeatedly compared his system to a “spider’s web, which vibrated to the centre when touched at any one of its extremities.”⁷⁵ Once

⁷² “Public Meeting,” *Glasgow Argus*, September 10 1838, LOC, Scrapbooks, vol. 5, 63.

⁷³ Robert Montgomery Martin, *Colonial Policy of the British Empire*, vol. 1, *Government* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1837), 24, 36.

⁷⁴ Robert Montgomery Martin, *History of the British Possessions in the East Indies*, vol. 1 (London: Whittaker & Co., 1837), 355.

⁷⁵ “Public Meeting,” *Glasgow Argus*, September 10, 1838, 64. See Scrapbooks, vol. 5.

Britain's language, laws, institutions, and Christian doctrines firmly took root abroad, they would "grow to be like the vast and shadowing banyan-tree...sending around new shoots, not only yielding support to the parent stem, but extending its advantages afar."⁷⁶ Aside from exposing heathen populations to moral truth, strengthening colonial ties would also allay class tensions in the metropole. Affirming Edward Wakefield's scheme of systematic colonization, Martin dramatized the demoralization of the working classes at home and estimated that the government-assisted emigration of one thousand Britons daily would preserve the country from internal revolt.⁷⁷ A moralized empire, however, would only arise if these settlers went forth as emissaries of "a Christian kingdom," otherwise "every extension of colonies would lead to the propagation of vice."⁷⁸ Adopting a biological rationale, he further predicted that incoming waves of Britain's huddled, but virtuous, masses would fruitfully intermarry with the "vigorous" settlers who were "free from the diseases to which long-established societies are so liable."

Whereas Martin foresaw that Britain's imperial destiny lay in the formation of global Christian networks, reformers associated with the BIS were rather more circumspect when it came to the dissemination of religious doctrine. Co-founder William Adam, a former American missionary who had converted to Unitarianism, was well aware of the practical limitations of conversion in India. He had broken ranks with Baptists in Calcutta because he "could not approve of the plans which they prosecuted of

⁷⁶ "State of British India," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 6 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1841), 142.

⁷⁷ Martin had little sympathy with the Chartists; he broodingly lamented that "republicanism in its worst features, and too often allied with infidelity, stalks naked throughout the land" and threatened "all possessed of property." See "Duties and Responsibilities of a Conservative Government," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 7 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842), 4.

⁷⁸ "Social Effects of Colonies on England," in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 1 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1840), 293-295.

preaching principally to the poor and the illiterate.”⁷⁹ The natives who did convert were wholly dependent on the missionaries and “too few, too poor, too ignorant, and too much despised among their countrymen” to be of much significance.⁸⁰ The missionaries’ proselytizing methods were also problematic, as they produced Christian tracts that were “either mystical, puerile, or both”; there was “scarcely one fit to be put in the hands of a native of understanding and reflection.”⁸¹ As editor of the reformist *British Indian Advocate*, Adam challenged prevailing notions of Christian governance and the efficacy of the Company’s “Anglomania” more generally. Its proprietors were certainly alive to the grievances of their “fellow Christian countrymen” in India, which were “heard, heeded, reiterated, and forced upon public attention” in the metropole.⁸² Meanwhile, the injuries sustained by millions of natives were habitually overlooked. Disputing the efficacy of Anglicization, Adam drew from his own education reports and propounded the need for vernacular teaching initiatives that had met with success under the auspices of the Calcutta School Society.⁸³ Using English exclusively as a language of instruction had failed in the Scottish Highlands and Ireland and was sure to falter on the banks of the Hoogley as well.⁸⁴ At the same time, Adam shared Martin’s distaste for the caste system, which “cuts the very sinews, and spreads misery, disease, and death through the whole

⁷⁹ *Correspondence Relative to the Prospects of Christianity and the Means of Promoting its Reception in India* (Cambridge, MA: Hillard and Metcalf, 1824), 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 13. As editor of the *India Gazette* in the late 1820s, Adam also “challenge[d] traditional British depictions of Indians as illiterate and uncivilized.” See Julie L. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 152.

⁸² “The Parliament of India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 1 (January 1, 1841): 3.

⁸³ This organization received 500 rupees from the CoD per month and led instruction in orthography, Bengali, geography, and “moral truths and obligations.” See William Adam, *Report on the State of Education in Bengal* (Calcutta: Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1835), 11-13.

⁸⁴ “Indian and Eastern News,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 2 (February 1, 1841): 11.

frame of Hindoo society.”⁸⁵ Articles in the *Advocate* observed that the drudge-like inhabitants of India’s villages were “not slaves by nature or inheritance,” but had simply ceased “to aspire to the possession of anything likely to better their lot.”⁸⁶

Like Adam, Thompson lamented the prevailing Anglomania, for accounts of the natives’ “complete moral turpitude” were “untrue and wholly unfounded.”⁸⁷ The roots of his ideological conservatism were clearly observable in his early speeches on Indian questions. With thoroughly Burkean phrasing, he discouraged any attempt to “Anglicise India, to attempt to colonize India, or to destroy her institutions, or to give her those which are of mushroom growth in Europe.”⁸⁸ India’s municipal machinery had survived intact for centuries, though it was presently “dilapidated by the hand of the modern Goth.” These sentiments echoed those of Thompson’s colleague, John Briggs, who lauded the local system of subsidized education as a “mighty instrument...ready made to our hands, for conveying useful and general instruction.”⁸⁹ Perhaps attempting to deflect Evangelical criticism, Thompson routinely cited Bishop Heber’s classic travelogue, which spoke to the innate civility of Hindus and Muslims alike and compared their advancement to that of the Italians and inhabitants of southern France. Heber’s evidence further suggested that India’s laborers were willing to enter global markets; they were “just as desirous of accumulating wealth, as skillful in the means of acquiring it, and as

⁸⁵ *Correspondence Relative to the Prospects of Christianity*, 64.

⁸⁶ “Social Condition of India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 4 (April 1, 1841): 28.

⁸⁷ Thompson, *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House, Manchester*, 37.

⁸⁸ *British India. The Duty and Interest of Great Britain*, 11.

⁸⁹ *British India. Speeches Delivered by Major-General Briggs and George Thompson, Esq., at the Annual Meeting of the Glasgow Society*, 6, 8. Briggs approved of William Adam’s educational scheme, in which a central college in the presidency would teach vernacular languages grammatically and offer English-language instruction for aspiring teachers and translators. The government, meanwhile, would provide the parish schoolmasters with books and materials. See John Briggs, *India & Europe Compared; being a Popular View of the Present State and Future Prospects of our Eastern Continental Empire* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1857), 158-59.

prone to all its enjoyments, as any people on earth.”⁹⁰ Still, Thompson’s approbation of native civilization alarmed meeting attendees like the peripatetic John Crawford, who remained convinced that Indians were “still a rude people, who had much to learn from Europe.”⁹¹

A close analysis of conservationist reform propaganda reveals a curious interplay between the “friends of humanity” and the “India experts.” Thompson, from the time of his association with the APS, had attempted to embed the rights of Britain’s Indian subjects within a broader natural rights discourse. As a self-identified advocate of the global oppressed, he had counted the “philosophic Brahmin, the roving Arab...the manly savages of the Oronoko, and the ferocious men eaters of New Zealand”⁹² as his “brethren” and “clients.” Elevating the rights of humanity certainly gave Thompson a veneer of impartiality, as he constantly deflected the epithets of “paid agitator” and “stipendary agent.” Linking the fates of these groups also allowed him to craft a historical narrative of fatal contact through unmediated colonialism and racial conflict. In his anti-apprenticeship lectures, Thompson had spoken of ongoing cruelties in Jamaica after emancipation. These incidents suggested that the partially liberated African laborers were destined to meet a similar fate as the “slaughtered and exterminated race” of indigenous island-dwellers who had suffered at the hands of “men calling themselves Christians.”⁹³ India, meanwhile, was at a similar tipping point as famines exacerbated by the

⁹⁰ *British India. The Duty and Interest of Great Britain*, 41.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 51. An ardent free trader and defender of the indigo planters’ interests, Crawford achieved notoriety in later decades for his espousal of polygenist ethnological views. See Zastoupil, 116.

⁹² Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes of the British Settlements and Colonies...,” n.p.

⁹³ George Thompson, *Speech of George Thompson, Esq., at the Great Anti-Slavery Meeting, held in Hood Street Chapel, Newcastle* (Gateshead: Lowthin & Douglas, 1838), 7.

Company's neglect and hoarding had rendered the country a "carnival of death!"⁹⁴ The entry of British mechanics and planters - which Calcutta's elite had long called for - would likely boost production in the short term by virtue of capital investment, but their unmonitored influx could also consign the "defenceless" natives to "the fate of the Red Indians."⁹⁵

While Thompson's rhetoric of catastrophic encounters rested on a degree of analogy, Briggs' materialist defense of Indian society was firmly rooted in his experience as a collector and political agent stationed at various princely courts. He had viewed the "remains of [India's] cities, and public works of vast labour and high utility."⁹⁶ He had encountered Sanskrit heroic poems that were comparable to the "Iliad and the Odyssey," and knew full well that South Indians "possessed the secret of making steel in the time of Alexander the Great."⁹⁷ Such innovations were characteristic of a thoroughly advanced culture that prospered whilst Britain's forefathers "painted their bodies, and wore the skin of beasts." The stagnation experienced in recent centuries was simply the product of despotic rule, internecine conflict, and foreign invasion. Briggs thus placed India at a high, if arrested, state of development quite dissimilar from that of the "savages of North America, the Negroes and Hottentots of Africa, [or] the cannibals of the islands of the Pacific Ocean." Whereas these groups may have required the humanitarian aid of organizations like the APS, India was fully capable of spearheading its own development

⁹⁴ Thompson, *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends' Meeting-House, Manchester*, 58.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁶ John Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India Considered as a Measure of Finance* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1830), 421.

⁹⁷ *British India. Speeches Delivered by Major-General Briggs and George Thompson, Esq., at the Annual Meeting of the Glasgow Society*, 7.

if artificial blockages to its trade were removed.⁹⁸ Briggs specifically challenged notions that Indians lacked the skills or inclination to produce high-quality cotton for export. Given their “scant means,” few populations were “more assiduous to improve, and more industrious in their vocation, than the Maratta peasantry,” whose exertions he had witnessed as revenue collector for Khandesh.⁹⁹ Advocating for what we may term “reindustrialization,” Thompson went one step further by suggesting that a “native class of artizans and engineers” trained in western forms of mechanical production might soon give rise to an “Indian Sheffield, and an Indian Birmingham, and an Indian Manchester.”¹⁰⁰

Following Thompson and his metropolitan allies, native reformers increasingly adopted a conservationist ideological stance in their published writings. In an influential tract intended for metropolitan consumption, Shahamat Ali, a former *munshi* in Company service, echoed Edmund Burke’s pronouncement that an ideal statesman would exhibit “a disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve taken together.”¹⁰¹ For Ali, the contraction of employment opportunities, alongside the state’s violation of landholding rights and perverse fascination with centralization, was the cause of rampant societal destabilization. Refusing to establish continuity with pre-colonial forms of statecraft,¹⁰² the Company had weakened patronage structures and obstructed the circulation of

⁹⁸ The recent construction of the Saugor Iron Suspension Bridge over the Beas river using locally oxidized metals illustrated that India possessed sufficient resources, if only it could secure an infusion of foreign capital and an increase in public works funding.

⁹⁹ John Briggs, *The Cotton Trade of India: its Past and Present Condition* (London, 1839), 42

¹⁰⁰ George Thompson, *Addresses; delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta and on other Occasions* (Calcutta, 1843), 167.

¹⁰¹ Shahamat Ali, *Notes and Opinions of a Native on the Present State of India and the Feelings of its People* (Ryde, Isle of Wight: George Butler, 1848), 30.

¹⁰² For a discussion of “continuity” and “contingency” as rival political temporalities, see Jon Wilson, *Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780-1835* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 37.

resources within Indian society. The retainers of vanquished rulers could not find employ in its military and were thus thrust upon the land. Impoverished, they no longer subsidized the works of public utility that had once earned them symbolic capital.¹⁰³ Artisans who historically produced commodities consumed at princely courts were similarly forced to take up agricultural pursuits. Not content with toppling the middling ranks of society, the colonial state had also taken to expropriating tax-free landholdings like *jagirs* and *inams*.¹⁰⁴ “Thousands and thousands of people, widows, orphans, indigents and strangers” had once “received education and every proper care and support” from the charitable institutions that these lands supported.¹⁰⁵ Under the British, however, these assets were seized to pay off the government’s debt or spirited away to England in the form of private wealth.

In theory, the conservationist reformers were simply updating Burke’s protest against geographical morality while articulating a formative complaint against “un-British rule.” What conscientious Briton would disavow the protection of private property and applaud the decay of infrastructure in order to support colonial parasitism? And yet, this message did not always come across clearly. Thompson found himself reminding sympathizers that the BIS was neither a commercial nor a religious endeavor. After receiving a concerned memorial from Bombay, its provisional committee had actually edited out the term “Christian” from its prospectus and vowed instead to “appeal to the humane feelings” of the public. This document also made explicit reference to Britons’ “social and moral duties” to their fellow Indian subjects instead of their “social and

¹⁰³ Ali, 65-68.

¹⁰⁴ Thompson had previously cited testimonies from Calcutta that likened the government’s resumption of ancestral lands to the “Spanish inquisition.” See Thompson, *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House, Manchester* 63.

¹⁰⁵ Ali, 103.

religious” ones.¹⁰⁶ These alterations were apparently palatable to zealous Society members like Daniel O’Connell, who had previously pressured the EIC to sponsor conversions to Catholicism.¹⁰⁷ But commentators outside of the BIS refused to differentiate India reform from an Evangelical civilizing mission. Upon Thompson’s voyage to India in 1843, *Fisher’s Colonial Magazine* (the successor to Martin’s venture) urged him to impress “upon his auditory the iniquity of Mahomedanism, or Bhuddism or Brahminism, and the purity of Christianity.”¹⁰⁸ Thompson predictably shirked this self-aggrandizing narrative, suggesting instead that the Mughals “in many respects...surpassed our rule” by settling “in the countries which they conquered” and admitting the natives “to all privileges.”¹⁰⁹ In his earlier Manchester lectures, he had echoed Dwarkanath Tagore’s provocative claim that “the just, the liberal, the enlightened English” were depriving the Indians “of all that a tyrannical, bigoted, semi-barbarian’s government bestowed.”¹¹⁰ The popular representation of British rule as a superior - if flawed - alternative to Mughal governance merely perpetuated a state of “ignorant complacency” by curtailing any inquiry into the natives’ suppressed rights or impoverished condition.

Eager to secure much-needed backing for his printing costs, Thompson occasionally accepted aid from parties whose true motives were at odds with his agenda. In April 1842, he approached Hugh Charles, a vocal Catholic member of the House of Lords who had taken to publicly commenting on Indian affairs. Although Charles

¹⁰⁶ “Draft of Resolutions,” John Ludlow Papers, Cambridge University Library (CUL), MSS.Add.7450/14, f. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Maurice Bric, “Debating Empire and Slavery: Ireland and British India, 1820-1845,” *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 3 (2016): 562.

¹⁰⁸ “Mr. George Thompson’s Visit to India,” in *Fisher’s Colonial Magazine and Commercial Maritime Journal*, vol. 3 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1843), 53.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *Addresses Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta*, 105.

¹¹⁰ Thompson, *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House, Manchester*, 73.

commended Thompson's lecturing in print and decried the "inexplicable" deposition of the Raja of Satara, he was hardly cut from the same Quaker, free-trader cloth as the bulk of the BIS.¹¹¹ Beginning in 1841, he singlehandedly launched a press campaign to popularize the outrages perpetrated by a Mr. Blackburne, the current collector and magistrate of the South Indian district of Madura. While Charles generated a laundry list of grievances,¹¹² he was particularly incensed by a tale recounted by his brother Walter, an active missionary in the region. In the interest of settling a fractious jurisdictional dispute, Blackburne had declared in 1838 that more than sixty churches and chapels in the vicinity of Madura rightfully belonged to "schismatic" Goan priests; this ruling invalidated the claims of the British missionaries who had utilized these spaces for the past several years.¹¹³ The matter came to a head in 1840 when a European clergyman attempted to preach at one of these chapels at the behest of the native community. Blackburne, in retaliation, fined the local Catholic community and allegedly tortured a number of the faithful to give up the keys to buildings. For Charles, this incident provided ample evidence that the Company's policy of religious non-interference actually constituted an attack against organized religion.¹¹⁴ Although Charles' vision of a palpably Christian administration was clearly at odds with the BIS's platform, Thompson required the patronage and authorized the printing of 500 copies of his Manchester lectures on

¹¹¹ Incidentally, supporters of the Free Church of Scotland accused Thompson of proposing that "India could be regenerated" through the "spread of Jesuit Colleges." Thompson contended that he had merely visited "a native school, with which the Jesuits at this time have nothing to do." See George Thompson, *The Free Church of Scotland and American Slavery* (Edinburgh: T. & W. M'Dowall, 1846), 13.

¹¹² Charles charged Blackburne with having obstructed the introduction of Roman Catholic teachings in colonial jails. He further drew on the case of Captain Peter Gordon, a former Company agent at Ramnad, who had allegedly been deprived of an appeal for more than a decade (and was frequently ejected from the CoP by force on account of his harangues).

¹¹³ Hugh Charles, Lord Clifford, *Letters to the Editors of the Morning Chronicle and Tablet Newspapers on East India Affairs* (London: T. Jones, 1841), 11.

¹¹⁴ Hugh Charles, Lord Clifford, *A Letter to the Editor of the Bombay Times* (London: W. Davy, 1842) 26-27.

Charles' dime in May 1842.¹¹⁵ He then let the matter of payment linger while Charles was off on the Continent, only to be informed upon reaching India that this monetary support was only intended for Thompson's personal upkeep and could not sustain his publishing ventures.¹¹⁶

Rival Economies, Rival Societies

Agitation on Indian affairs in 1839 and 1840 yielded a bumper crop of auxiliary societies that seemingly arose out of every public meeting that the reformers convened. From South Durham to Rochdale, where John Bright established an Auxiliary British India Association, public men signaled their intent to remedy colonial evils.¹¹⁷ Trade lobbyists in the East India Association of Glasgow endorsed the reformers' demands for a permanent land tax, an end to the salt monopoly, and the abolition of differential duties. Yet Thompson's India reform campaign was at a disadvantage compared to other radical and middle-class movements that proliferated at the time. From the outset, it was largely conceived as a pedagogical exercise; the metropolitan public had to be informed of concealed misdeeds abroad before they could awaken to a sense of their duty. As such, the movement revolved around lectures and petitioning, but lacked the more rambunctious or convivial elements that traditionally characterized the British mass platform.¹¹⁸ India reformers were well aware that swaying public opinion would be a

¹¹⁵ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, May 20, 1842, BPL, Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.12.2, 51.

¹¹⁶ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, February 24, 1843, BPL, Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.13, 11.

¹¹⁷ Similar associations formed in Leeds, Ashton-under-Lyne, Salford, Bolton, and Oldham. See "The Parliament of India," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 1 (January 1, 1841): 7-8.

¹¹⁸ Vernon has discussed the radicals' adoption of a new "sober" style of mobilization that challenged "exclusive definitions of citizenship in the public sphere." See James Vernon, *Politics and the People: a Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 219-35.

gradual process and predicted that they “must be defeated twenty times” before they could succeed in their endeavors.¹¹⁹ By 1841, Elizabeth Pease, the daughter of co-founder Joseph, was urging Thompson to controversially “strike for the Abolition of the Company’s charter,” as it was a “plain issue, and the people would understand it.”¹²⁰

While its core network retained its integrity throughout the 1840s, the London-based BIS was a rather short-lived operation.¹²¹ Its rapid decay can partially be attributed to competition from other newly established groups like the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) and British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) that were vying for the attentions of the philanthropic public. Thompson had initially anticipated that Manchester would furnish a solid base of support for the BIS, but by August of 1839 was “discouraged by the lukewarmness of some from whom he had reason to expect better things.” Briggs similarly bemoaned the ACLL’s “extreme jealousy” of the India reform movement early the following year and admitted that “any attempt to have propelled our cause during their recent gatherings would have done more harm than good.”¹²² Under Cobden’s leadership, the ACLL continued to oppose broad-spectrum reform, opting to sidestep Irish and Indian issues alike in favor of total repeal.¹²³

Having failed to secure popular backing as a “broad-based movement” by June 1841, the leaders of the BIS opted to provisionally unify with the ACLL until repeal was

¹¹⁹ Bell, *British Folks & British*, 84.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹²¹ Under the helm of Joseph Pease, the South Durham British India Society continued to petition the Company to abolish Indian slavery and support free labor cultivation of cash crops. See “The Address of the South Durham British India Society,” *Liberator*, October 20, 1843, 167.

¹²² John Briggs to George Thompson, January 18, 1840, JRL, REAS4/3.

¹²³ Paul A. Pickering, *The People’s Bread: A History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2000), 83. O’Connell nonetheless applauded the League’s petitioning tactics and enthusiastically supported the movement. See Bric, “Debating Empire and Slavery,” 570.

achieved.¹²⁴ The India reformers' attempts to reconfigure the circuits of colonial trade naturally dovetailed with the goals of the ACLL, as "the friends of Indian emancipation were, almost to a man, the advocates of the freedom of British commerce."¹²⁵ And despite Manchester's earlier frostiness, the establishment of the Northern Central British India Society likely encouraged Joseph Pease's belief that sustained reform could only originate in the industrial provinces. Corporate interests suffused the metropolitan government and had rendered London a "great stagnant pool" that "philanthropic and good men [had] not the power to stir."¹²⁶ With ACLL support, the BIS rump could drum up support in northern England for O'Connell's parliamentary motion to extend the permanent settlement throughout India and reduce the threat of famine.¹²⁷

On the face of it, the India reformers' economic platform should have been palatable to a range of classes and interest groups. A moderate land tax (payable in kind rather than in coin) would boost Indian cotton and sugar exportation, which would free Manchester from its dependence on slave-grown produce. With access to markets downstream, Indian cash crop growers would in turn accumulate capital and increase their consumption of British piece goods. As BIS treasurer, Briggs affirmed that the wants of the people of India [were], like those of the rest of the human race, bounded only by the means of attainment."¹²⁸ Unlike policymakers in newly liberated Jamaica, who feared that former slaves would abandon the sugar and coffee estates in favor of their own provision grounds, India reformers looked forward to the emergence of an

¹²⁴ Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress*, 23.

¹²⁵ George Thompson, *Free Trade with India: its Influence on the Condition and Prospects of the Country, and on the Slave Systems of America* (Kennington: J. Birdseye, 1847), 3.

¹²⁶ Bell, 50.

¹²⁷ Joseph Pease to Anon., May 12, 1841, John Ludlow Papers, CUL, MSS.Add7450/14, f. 7.

¹²⁸ Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India*, 448.

uninhibited yeomanry class. Yet their support for Indian agricultural exportation as a catalyst for gradualist, universal emancipation put them squarely in the midst of an intractable conflict between the protectionist BFASS and the free-trade community. Dissimilar stances on indigenous slavery, coupled with the fusion of India reform and Garrisonian networks, also perturbed more moderate voices in the British abolitionist community. The following section will speak to the origins of these ruptures and assess their constraining impact on the India reformers' position within the super-field.

Like many supposedly humanitarian projects in the Victorian era, the reformers' move to "open" India to global commercial circuits can alternatively be interpreted as part of a principled abolitionist program or as a subtle strategy of imperial consolidation. While Julie Holcomb has recently discussed the BIS's agenda as a corollary to that of the American Free Produce Association, J. Barton Scott approaches the advocacy of free-labor agriculture from a Weberian perspective. By "demanding that empire create self-disciplined, hard-working capitalist subjects," Howitt and his fellow Quakers in the BIS supposedly transmuted the Protestant ethic into "an explicitly imperial technology of subjectivation."¹²⁹ This is a familiar conclusion. According to David Brion Davis' classic thesis, middle-class Quaker entrepreneurs in the first quarter of the century gravitated toward abolition as a means of consolidating their "social control" over their laboring poor at home; their philanthropy "gave a certain moral insulation to economic activities less visibly dependent on human suffering and violence."¹³⁰ Scott perhaps goes too far in suggesting that the Quakers' rhetoric created a scenario in which "the economically

¹²⁹ J. Barton Scott, *Spiritual Despots: Modern Hinduism and the Genealogies of Self-Rule* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 83.

¹³⁰ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 251.

inefficient denizens of India” could only be saved through the “benevolent imposition” of the British state.¹³¹ After all, the BIS was well aware that the home government had imposed protectionist tariffs, decimated the Indian manufacturing industry, and assented to the Company’s oppressive land revenue demands.

The spirit of the BIS’s economic vision was very much in keeping with Thomas Clarkson’s nearly fifty-year old scheme to boost African agricultural exports by means of free labor. Described by Peter Stamatov as the “forerunner of the full time social organizer,”¹³² Clarkson had burst onto the abolitionist scene in 1780s with the intent of broadening the Quakers’ flagging following. Utilizing the financial resources of the London Committee, he orchestrated innovative “ocular” displays of human suffering while presenting the abolitionists’ “moral cause in the language of commercial and national interest.” His 1788 treatise on the *Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* employed a style of shifting rhetorical registers that served as a template for later India reform polemic. In vivid prose, he enumerated the many cruelties suffered by British sailors at the hands of the slave ship captains,¹³³ interspersing this character-based narrative with statistical data illustrating the unprofitability and unsustainable nature of the slave trade “lottery.” Like many early moralists who sought abolition rather than wholesale emancipation, Clarkson foregrounded Africa’s “export potential” and sidestepped any discussion of a fall-out with the colonial legislatures.¹³⁴ The evidence he had gathered suggested that Africans

¹³¹ Barton, 83.

¹³² Peter Stamatov, *The Origins of Global Humanitarianism: Religion, Empire, and Advocacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 158.

¹³³ By lingering on the physical dehumanization of Britain’s seafaring population, Clarkson represented the sailors as virtual slaves in their own right and fellow victims of an unsustainable economic practice that compromised national security. See Thomas Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), 48-58.

¹³⁴ Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 321.

possessed a robust commercial spirit and a willingness to work, though they lacked sufficient knowledge of global commodity demands. Fostering a direct trade in raw materials would not only reduce costs for merchants but also enrich native cultivators, thereby ensuring a new base of customers for British textiles and manufactured equipment. Per Clarkson's reasoning, the motive of self-interest would even lead the West Indian planters to embrace abolition as a prophylactic against slave uprisings. A ban on trafficking would facilitate the rise of a self-perpetuating Creole population, "inured from their infancy to labour," who would "find no hardship in their allotted task" and lack any inclination to rebel.¹³⁵

While Clarkson appealed to the economic rationality of the planter, merchant, and national policymaker, his belief in the efficacy of free labor did not go unchallenged. The productivity of Africans and slaves alike remained a matter of concern. Writing again in the early 1820s, Clarkson expressed his frustrations with the Caribbean slaves' arrested development in the wake of the Slave Trade Act of 1807. The first generation of militant abolitionists had attacked the slave trade as "the root of the whole evil," predicting that a limited labor pool would incline masters to treat their slaves benignly and eventually allot them greater liberties. Experiments like Joshua Steele's three-tier system of villenege in Barbados demonstrated that former slaves could indeed be acculturated to a high degree of industriousness. Yet plantation owners had generally failed to adjust to the changing times. Few had developed any preparatory program to convert their slaves into market-oriented capitalists willing to labor without the threat of coercion. Resultantly, any

¹³⁵ Clarkson, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade*, 99.

economic distress they suffered thereafter was very much “their own fault.”¹³⁶ If the planters were unwilling to heed economic logic, it was the duty of the metropolitan government to fashion emancipationist legislation and invalidate their legal title to human property by means of the repugnancy principle.

Clarkson’s approbation of African and Creole free labor remained contentious into the 1840s,¹³⁷ as critics contended that climatic and cultural influences prohibited the former slaves from reacting to market forces. These charges, however, could not easily be levied against Indian producers who had engaged in a bountiful global textile trade before the disastrous advent of prejudicial duties. Reformers could thus take the *ryots*’ capacity for labor for granted and focus on the mutual advantage to be derived from a build-up of India’s export sector. Many free traders followed the Quaker economist James Cropper in lauding the rise of the Bengal indigo industry, which had supplanted the slave-grown produce of Colombia.¹³⁸ Thompson himself admitted to “the advantages of India over Africa” as a “settled and civilized country” with “no tribes to locate, no barbarians to tame [and] no unhealthy climate to contend with.”¹³⁹ India remained “foremost among the regions of the globe, as the choice storehouse of nature” and offered a boundless supply of free labor. Unlike the American slave, whose forced labor cost his or her owner a half dollar per day, the native cotton cultivator would offer his services for two or three

¹³⁶ Thomas Clarkson, *Thoughts on the Necessity of Improving the Condition of the Slaves in the British Colonies and a View to their Ultimate Emancipation*, 2nd ed. (London: Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, 1832), 53.

¹³⁷ Even reformers like the ardent free trader Joseph Hume suspected that the total transition to free labor produce for “staple cultivation” was premature and doubted the feasibility of schemes like Thomas Fowell Buxton’s Niger expedition of 1841. See Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134.

¹³⁸ George Thompson, *Report of a Lecture at Darlington, on the State of British India* (Durham: J. H. Veitch, 1840), 7.

¹³⁹ *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House*, 60.

pence.¹⁴⁰ By offering these comparisons, reformers attempted to appeal to skeptics' fiscal common sense. The home government spent thousands annually on patrols to "shield the coast of Africa from the visits of the slave-trader" while its own subjects furnished "millions to the slave-holders of America."¹⁴¹ English manufacturers' willingness to import slave-grown cotton, no matter the moral cost, thus stood out "as the prime inciting cause of untold and unutterable misery and crime."

Initially, abolitionists had been wary of trusting market mechanisms as a substitute for emancipation by political means. In 1839, Garrison's Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society expressed concerns that the BIS would distract British agitators from the plight of the American slave; it hoped that the reformers' "hearts will still bleed" and their "eyes will still overflow, at the remembrance of his suffering and his wrongs."¹⁴² By the following autumn, however, Garrison had evolved into an apostle of native cotton production and was rebuking the Company for having "systematically plundered [Indians] of their most sacred rights."¹⁴³ American abolitionists like Wendell Phillips further rejoiced that Thompson's economic arguments would reach "the callous hearts of selfishness" in the cottonopolis that had hitherto been unaffected by ethical entreaties. For the freeborn African-American Charles Lenox Remond, Indian cotton production was nothing less than "the instrument which will put to death American slavery."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ "Abolition of Slavery and the Slave-Trade: Letter from F. C. Brown to Joseph Pease," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 13 (November 1, 1841): 160.

¹⁴¹ Thompson, *Free Trade with India*, 8.

¹⁴² Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society to George Thompson, John Ludlow Papers, CUL, MSS.Add.7450/14, f. 4

¹⁴³ William Lloyd Garrison to Joseph Pease, September 1, 1840, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, ed. Walter M. Merrill, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1973), 689. Garrison nevertheless broke ranks with a number of American Quaker abolitionists by rejecting a total boycott of slave-grown produce. See Holcomb, 167.

¹⁴⁴ Christine Kinealy, *Daniel O'Connell and the Anti-Slavery Movement* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 88.

Speaking before the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, an elderly Clarkson echoed these pleas to affect the “temporal interests” of commercially minded Britons. India, he predicted, would be able to overtake American cotton production in twelve years due to its abundance of arable land and the ready availability of cheap labor. This endorsement famously raised the ire of BFASS founder and “immediatist” Joseph Sturge, who edited out portions of Clarkson’s speech favoring East Indian produce from the convention proceedings.¹⁴⁵

It was not a foregone conclusion that the BIS and its free-trade contingent would viscerally oppose the BFASS throughout the 1840s. Thompson had previously supported Sturge’s Central Negro Emancipation Committee in its mission to “humble the Colonial Office and awaken the nation from its trance” during the apprenticeship years.¹⁴⁶ And the BFASS soon after vowed in its constitution to advocate for the “use of free-grown produce, as far as is practicable, in preference to slave-grown.”¹⁴⁷ But Sturge was predominantly concerned with the economic prospects of newly liberated populations, having personally established the West India Land Investment Company to buy up bankrupt plantations for subdivision and resale to members of Baptist congregations in Jamaica. For many reformers, he went one step too far by insisting upon preferential duties “to preserve the West Indian sugar economy from competition.”¹⁴⁸ The BFASS’s push to ban the importation of slave-grown Brazilian and Cuban produce altogether in

¹⁴⁵ Thompson later lamented that he had prematurely withdrawn “from active labour in the Anti-Slavery field,” thereby allowing the BFASS to make Clarkson the “dupe and victim of their unworthy arts.” See George Thompson to Richard Webb, April 12, 1852, BPL, Anti-Slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.21, 16.

¹⁴⁶ Alex Tyrrell, *Joseph Sturge and the Moral Radical Party in Early Victorian Britain* (London: C. Helm, 1987), 79.

¹⁴⁷ Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration to the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 90.

¹⁴⁸ Simon Morgan, “The Anti-Corn Law League and British Anti-Slavery in Transatlantic Perspective, 1838-1846,” *Historical Journal* 52, no. 1 (2009): 97

1841 alarmed cotton lords like the Quaker and ACLL supporter Henry Ashworth, who feared that such a move would close foreign markets to English manufactures in retaliation. In advancing the “liberty of the blacks,” Ashworth cautioned, the emancipationists should mind “they did not throw down the industrial population at home.”¹⁴⁹ Any exclusion of foreign sugar, corn, or timber would reinforce the “class interests” of the monopolist, landowning aristocracy and tighten their hold over the laboring population. The BFASS, however, refused to vote on amending its stance on restricted importation at the 1843 World Anti-Slavery Convention and blocked Thompson from bringing up the matter the following year. The total equalization of sugar duties in 1846 was therefore a blow for the protectionist BFASS, one that forced the society to relinquish “its pretensions to a monopoly of anti-slavery sentiment in Britain.”¹⁵⁰

Scoble’s Crusade

As the BIS’s leading spokesman, Thompson increasingly butted heads with representatives of Sturge’s BFASS. In the fall of 1839, he received a censorious letter from BFASS secretary John Scoble advising him to avoid “the occupancy of a position...which may inflict the deepest injury on the interests of humanity.”¹⁵¹ The BIS’s presumption that the prosperity of the *ryot*, American slave, and British laborer lay in the reorientation of global commerce distracted from the BFASS’s platform of

¹⁴⁹ “British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society,” *Morning Chronicle*, May 15, 1841. Daniel O’Connell approved of Ashworth’s free trade stance and concurred that the West Indian proprietors had already enjoyed excessive favoritism from the 20 million pound compensation package of 1833.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Huzzey, “Free Trade, Free Labour, and Slave Sugar in Victorian Britain,” *Historical Journal* 53, no. 2 (2010): 361.

¹⁵¹ John Scoble to George Thompson, November 16, 1839, Bodleian Library (BOD), Brit.Emp.s.22/G92/A.

immediate emancipation via legislation. Scoble feared that such polemic would mislead the public into believing “that the deliverance of Africa from the horrors of the slave trade can only be effected through India, and that the universal abolition of slavery can only be secured by doing justice to the deeply injured natives.” The BIS was “not an anti-slavery society, much less ‘*the Anti-Slavery Society*’ which...it has been assented to be.”

The BFASS further clashed with the BIS over the matter of immediate emancipation in India proper. The colonial administration had long viewed Indian slavery as a comparatively benign institution generally observable “within a private, secluded Indian domestic space.”¹⁵² Regulation X of 1811 had prohibited the transportation of slaves into British territory but did not outlaw the practice as such.¹⁵³ The question of emancipation arose once more during the Company charter debates of 1832-33 and received the support of Earl Grey’s ministry, though the Court of Directors reaffirmed the general mildness of domestic slavery and classified individual emancipation as a “judicial proceeding.”¹⁵⁴ This *laissez-faire* approach sat poorly with abolitionist Quakers and their allies; Thomas Fowell Buxton notably called for motions of inquiry into the subject on numerous occasions before the House of Commons. In late 1838, Robert Montgomery Martin brought the matter directly to the attention of the BoC and produced officials’ testimonies that spoke to the pervasiveness of agrestic, or praedial, slavery in Travancore and along the coast of western India. Low-caste, agricultural “slaves” were paid a

¹⁵² Andrea Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism and Empire in India, 1772-1843* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 144.

¹⁵³ Regulation II of 1832 further extended this ban on trafficking between the British Indian provinces.

¹⁵⁴ [John Scoble], *Slavery and the Slave Trade in British India* (London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1841), 54. The Indian Law Commissioners criticized this arrangement whereby “the extent of the power of a master over his slave” was determined by the “disposition of the particular functionary who happens to be in charge of a district.” See “Slavery, Domestic and Praedial, in British India,” in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, vol. 3, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1840), 161.

pittance of grain for their labor, frequently ostracized by their communities, and routinely transferred between owners in lieu of interest payments on a debt.

To address this social evil, Martin urged BoC president John Hobhouse to establish an expansive registry. Under this system, each district collector would submit statistical data on the number of slaves under his jurisdiction; a commissioner in London would then compile these missives and present the findings before parliament on an annual basis. Emancipation, Martin cautioned, was best done “quietly” and would be accomplished most efficiently by liberating all enslaved children born after a certain date. Local magistrates would ensure that adult slaves were permitted to own property, enjoyed the same legal protections as other Indian subjects, and were not forcibly removed from their district of residence. Looking to fast-track this program, Martin recommended that Queen Victoria mention the proposed scheme in her upcoming speech upon the opening of Parliament. Hobhouse would be wise to “conciliate” abolitionist public opinion, as the “Anti-Slavery Societies in this country [could] make or unmake any govt.”¹⁵⁵ We must assume that Martin was somewhat chagrined when Victoria limited her remarks the following February to an endorsement of the recent Afghan expedition.¹⁵⁶

But the murky issue of Indian enslavement was not long deferred. Having returned to England, the members of the Indian Law Commission reconvened in late 1838 to process their data on Indian slavery; their subsequent report, which appeared in 1841, called for several measures to reduce the “harsher features” of the practice.¹⁵⁷ This recommendation precipitated a caustic exchange in the columns of the *Morning*

¹⁵⁵ Robert Montgomery to John Cam Hobhouse, December 5, 1838, BL, Add MS 36469, ff. 208-20.

¹⁵⁶ *The Queen's Speeches in Parliament*, ed. F. Sidney Ensor (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1882), 8.

¹⁵⁷ The BFASS press campaign was triggered by parliament's failure to debate the 1841 report on Indian slaveries, See Howard Temperley, “The Delegalization of Slavery in British India,” in *After Slavery: Emancipation and its Discontents*, ed. Howard Temperley (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 182.

Chronicle when a contributor disparaged the abolitionist turn to India as the result of “aggressive noisy benevolence.”¹⁵⁸ The fact that “certain classes of people in India are black, and are called in England slaves” had contributed to a false equivalency.¹⁵⁹ In reality, many domestic slaves, or *khanazads*, occupied an enviable position in wealthy households and could even inherit the property of their masters.¹⁶⁰ The abolitionists’ misplaced zeal had also led them to inflate the occurrence of praedial slavery, a practice confined to remote zones in Bihar. Their move to certify all exports of Bengali sugar as free labor produce merely served to “mortify and humiliate” India as a subordinate province and impede future free trade. Legal statute, moreover, would have a scant influence in regions like Malabar, where caste hierarchies had long inured segments of the population to a subservient economic role.

In response to this upbraiding, Scoble characterized Indian slavery as an endemic institution responsible for widespread privations. The number of slaves in India did not approach 320,000, as BIS co-founder William Adam had estimated,¹⁶¹ but rather soared into the millions as a market for slaves had “given rise to a fearful extensive system of kidnapping” orchestrated by the Banjaras and Thugs. Scoble therefore trumpeted the BFASS doctrine that “slavery, however modified or sanctioned in any part of the British Empire, must be abolished immediately and completely.”¹⁶² In April 1841, a deputation composed of Adam, BIS secretary Francis Carnac Brown, and Garrisonian lawyer W. H. Ashurst approached Scoble with a differing recommendation: since coercive labor

¹⁵⁸ “Does Slaves Exist in India? No. II,” *Morning Chronicle*, March 18, 1841.

¹⁵⁹ Speaking before a select committee in 1840, colonial official Charles Trevelyan suggested that Indian slavery was in fact “a very modified form of servitude, and does not deserve to be called slavery; it is much more like the villeinage of the Middle Ages.” See *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce* (1840), 91.

¹⁶⁰ “Does Slavery Exist in India? No. I,” *Morning Chronicle*, March 13, 1841.

¹⁶¹ John Scoble, “Slavery in British India. No. 1,” *Morning Chronicle*, March 20, 1841.

¹⁶² John Scoble to J. Beaumont, April 2, 1841, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G91.

practices were imbedded in the caste system, appealing to the Indian upper classes was the only chance for reform.¹⁶³ Editorials in the *British Indian Advocate* also urged the BFASS to “proceed with due caution and consideration of all the circumstances of the case.” No legislative measure would succeed unless it was in conformity with the “institutions, laws, customs, and usages of the people.”¹⁶⁴ Inflating the prevalence of customary forced labour practices, as the BFASS was allegedly wont to do, was also pernicious to the BIS’s free trade agenda. India reformers found themselves repeatedly assuring their abolitionist colleagues in America that “not a single pound of sugar, coffee, cotton, rice, or tobacco exported from India” was produced by actual slaves.¹⁶⁵ Praedial slavery was generally confined to southern India, although the colonial government on occasion accepted custody of privately owned slaves as payment for arrears and utilized their labor on road-building projects. While Scoble was preoccupied with abolishing longstanding labor hierarchies, Thompson and his allies were focused on a somewhat different objective: revealing the extent to which the Company and the British aristocracy had reduced the *ryots*, mill workers, and native princes to “virtual slaves” through institutionalized forms of coercion and degradation (see Chapter 2).

Scoble predictably turned a deaf ear to the reformers’ cautions and transmitted a circular to various missionaries and government personnel in June of 1842 to glean further information on the existing forms of Indian bondage. The response was less than encouraging. Wesleyan missionary and Buddhism scholar R. Spence Hardy admitted that

¹⁶³ BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G91. Two years prior to this meeting, Thompson had called upon the EIC to inquire into and abolish all forms of indigenous slavery so long as such matters came “within the legitimate sphere of our authority.” See *British India. Speeches Delivered by Major-General Briggs and George Thompson, Esq., at the Annual Meeting of the Glasgow Society*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ “Slavery in India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 14 (December 1, 1841): 162.

¹⁶⁵ “Slavery in India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 3 (March 1, 1841): 17. See also *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention* (London: British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1841), 88.

he was unaware of any cruelties suffered by enslaved laborers in Ceylon proper. Certainly there was no separation of husband from wife, or parents from children, that typically characterized chattel slavery.¹⁶⁶ Writing from Coimbatoor, Reverend W. B. Addis predicted that any anti-slavery committee established in the Indian interior would lack sufficient European membership and surely incur the government's disfavor.¹⁶⁷ Abolishing debt slavery would also prove difficult, as such arrangements were hereditary; it was "therefore quite out of [his] power to even suggest a remedy for this kind of slavery." The diversity of Indian forms of indenture further defied any "systematic arrangement" akin to plantation slavery. Few missionaries had even observed Indian slaves firsthand let alone detected instances of physical abuse or overwork. If anything, it was the native laborers who complained of the Christian planters, "who are strict in principle [and] will not give them employment on the Sabbath day."¹⁶⁸ India reformers and BFASS polemicists continued to debate the most efficacious approach to emancipation following the passage of the milquetoast India Act V in 1843, which asserted the "free and equal" status of Indian slaves by removing any "legal protection" for slave ownership rather than banning the practice outright.¹⁶⁹ The South Durham British India Society chided the BFASS for settling for a half measure rather than lobbying Company directors directly to invest in cash crop production and eradicate

¹⁶⁶ Hardy did claim that the British government had distributed gold medal to local chiefs in 1838 after they liberated the slaves in their possession. See R. Spence Hardy to John Scoble, December 1842, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G92/A.

¹⁶⁷ W. B. Addis to John Scoble, December 1, 1842 and December 2, 1844, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G92/A.

¹⁶⁸ Henry Chapman to John Scoble, September 1842, BOD, Brit.Emp.S22.G92/A.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 179.

slavery globally. The BFASS, in a curt response, simply claimed that such advocacy did not come within “the legitimate sphere” of its Anti-slavery Committee.¹⁷⁰

Transatlantic Abolitionism Divided

The latent tensions between the BFASS and the BIS were not solely the product of divergent policy positions on free trade and Indian slavery, but also stemmed from India reformers’ flirtations with radical Garrisonian abolitionism. The fracturing of the American Anti-Slavery Society in the late 1830s had resulted in a Garrisonian rump organization and a breakoff American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS) under the helm of the more conservative Tappan brothers. The effects of this rivalry were keenly perceived across the Atlantic. Once Thompson’s network of India reformers established lines of communications with Garrison’s camp, moderate British abolitionists began to close ranks. Early tremors of fractiousness were felt at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention; the BFASS’s decision to restrict female participation incensed Garrison, who had invited eight women to represent their auxiliary societies. Sectarian strife at the convention persisted, as British and American delegates failed to definitively concur whether slavery was “sinful and inconsistent with Christianity.”¹⁷¹ By the winter of 1841, Thompson was privately expressing his frustrations in seeing “men whose hearts should have been fused into one by a fervent zeal for a common cause...biting and demeaning one another!”¹⁷² Personal feuds and doctrinal controversies were often at the root of obstructed link-ups. Sturge, for instance, distrusted Garrison’s “religious

¹⁷⁰ *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, vol. 9 (London: Lancelot Wild, 1843), 189.

¹⁷¹ Bric, “Debating Slavery and Empire: the United States, Britain and the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840,” 65.

¹⁷² George Thompson to Elizabeth Pease, March 27, 1841, JRL, REAS2/4, f. 16.

anarchism” and even rebuked him for breaking the Sabbath by boarding a steamer on a Sunday.¹⁷³ He was not alone in his spiritual discomfiture; erstwhile ally Daniel O’Connell had also begun to distance himself from the Garrisonians following his establishment of a Repeal Association that aimed to annul the Union with Ireland Acts of 1800. Accused once more of Sabbath-breaking,¹⁷⁴ Garrison questioned how O’Connell could classify him as a “maniac in religion” while avoiding any critique of Sturge’s ardent Quakerism.¹⁷⁵ As O’Connell fell into the orbit of the BFASS and continued to accept donations from Irish separatists in the American South, his involvement in India reform diminished precipitously.

Garrison’s Christian perfectionism and his apolitical program of non-resistance and moral suasion could frustrate even his most loyal adherents.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, his willingness to cultivate relationships with Continental revolutionaries to sustain a higher “sphere of moral action” beyond the nation-state was hardly typical of moderate reformism.¹⁷⁷ Yet these controversial strategies were born from necessity. The emancipation of slaves throughout the British Empire was the product of intense parliamentary wrangling over issues like “labor continuity,” protectionist guarantees, and planter compensation.¹⁷⁸ American abolitionists, in contrast, struggled to pursue their agenda through political channels. The question of slavery remained “exclusively religious” at the time of Thompson’s first American sojourn in 1834, as the politician had

¹⁷³ Betty Fladeland, *Abolitionists and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 64; Tyrrell, 112.

¹⁷⁴ Kinealy, 125.

¹⁷⁵ William Lloyd Garrison to Daniel O’Connell, December 8, 1843, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 231.

¹⁷⁶ Enrico Dal Lago, *William Lloyd Garrison and Giuseppe Mazzini: Abolition, Democracy, and Radical Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 69.

¹⁷⁷ McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy*, 133.

¹⁷⁸ Drescher, 43-44.

yet to “come in, and in his own place be an effective agent.”¹⁷⁹ A congressional gag order in 1836 excluding abolitionist petitions from consideration further inhibited this political awakening.¹⁸⁰ Thompson therefore encouraged American clergy of various denominations to exclude supporters of slavery from their congregations. But social expulsion was but one tactic in the battle to win “the spiritual freedom of the human race” in conformity with “Christian principle, and by Christian means.”¹⁸¹ As early as 1838, Garrison began to develop his principle of non-resistance, which required adherents to heed their consciences while avoiding all forms of violence or “disorderly conduct.”¹⁸² This doctrine was overtly non-political; abolitionists and their Southern sympathizers were instructed to “obey all requirements of Government” except those that they deemed “contrary to the commands of the gospel.” Women, in particular, could participate in non-resistance by imbuing their children with abolitionist sensibilities. Though female philanthropists often fixated on Continental independence movements and the plight of the “suffering Greek,” their attentions were best directed toward to “the poor, ragged, wretched negroes...at their own doors.”

Hardline Garrisonian reformism entailed nothing less than a universal reprobation of the oppressive and coercive practices that enabled varying forms of enslavement. This program required acolytes to “speak and act boldly; to assail iniquity, in high places and in low places [and] to apply our principles to all existing civil, political, legal and

¹⁷⁹ *Reception of George Thompson in Great Britain*, 165.

¹⁸⁰ Maurice Bric, “Debating Slavery and Empire: the United States, Britain and the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840,” in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William Mulligan (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 60.

¹⁸¹ *Reception of George Thompson in Great Britain*, 55.

¹⁸² William Lloyd Garrison to Samuel J. May, August 30 1838, in *William Lloyd Garrison on Non-Resistance* (New York: The Nation Press Printing Co., 1924), 26-30.

ecclesiastical institutions.”¹⁸³ Although this willingness to challenge authority could manifest as “vicious and caustic rhetoric” in the columns of the *Liberator* newspaper,¹⁸⁴ the Garrisonians’ performative advocacy of absolute moral truths broke new ground. As Lynn Festa explains, abolitionist parliamentarians in the late eighteenth century were essentially concerned with the cultivation of their public selves and battened their emotional hatches against “excessive, mobile, or inadequate feeling.”¹⁸⁵ A masculinized, measured sentimentality was desirable in that it could augment politicians’ moral authority through “affective distinction.” In contrast, Garrisonians embraced polemical hyperbole; many adopted seemingly fanatical tactics in order to provoke fence-sitting moderates into reassessing their ethical complacency.¹⁸⁶ Simply pitying the suffering of others was no longer sufficient to establish the spectator’s moral standing. Appeals to Americans’ reason had failed, as establishment interests opted to table the slavery question indefinitely. Effective abolitionism therefore required a “total separation from Church and State, and warfare upon both as the existing bulwarks of the slave system.”¹⁸⁷ By 1845, Garrison was roundly decreeing the federal union to be “the work of men’s hands” and therefore liable to be “imperfect, oppressive, or monstrous.”¹⁸⁸ The system of “American religion,” moreover, was nothing but a doctrine “of whips and chains, of

¹⁸³ “Declaration of Sentiments Adopted by the Peace Convention,” in *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3 (Boston, 1852), 75.

¹⁸⁴ Morgan, “The Political as Personal,” 79.

¹⁸⁵ Lynn Festa, *Sentimental Figures of Empire in Eighteenth Century Britain and France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 186-87.

¹⁸⁶ Joel Olson, “The Freshness of Fanaticism: the Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 4 (2007): 688.

¹⁸⁷ William Lloyd Garrison to James Miller McKim, July 19, 1845, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 307. Though Garrison had long been branded as a Paineite, he only got around to reading *The Rights of Man* in 1845; this text corroborated his finding that moral truth was “older than any parchment.” See Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 523.

¹⁸⁸ William Lloyd Garrison to Elihu Burritt, July 6, 1845, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 299.

branding-irons and bloodhounds...of tyranny and heathenism.”¹⁸⁹ By disavowing coercive, mortal institutions, Garrisonians earned themselves a reputation as borderline anarchists pursuing a millenarian crusade for spiritual self-government.¹⁹⁰ Garrison, however, assured wary British abolitionists that pro-slavery advocates had trumped up charges of anti-clericalism and heterodoxy to delegitimize the AASS and “cripple our movement.”¹⁹¹

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, Garrison’s *Liberator* served as a clearinghouse for India reform propaganda, allocating numerous columns to transcripts of Thompson’s lectures and publishing private correspondence relating to Indian affairs. Elizabeth Pease was a key link in this network, granting Garrison access to letters that celebrity reformers like Cobden and Clarkson had written to her father.¹⁹² While these informational circuits frayed with the decline of the BIS and the death of Joseph Pease, the *Liberator* began to increase its coverage of colonial affairs in 1846 following the establishment of the Garrisonian Anti-Slavery League {ASL}. Helmed by Thompson, this organization drew renewed attention to India’s potential as a cotton exporter and popularized F. C. Brown’s pamphlets on the matter; its period of operation overlapped with John Bright’s select committee on the growth of cotton in India, on which Thompson served. Implicitly representing itself as the successor to the BIS, the ASL held high hopes that it could

¹⁸⁹ William Lloyd Garrison to the Editor of the *Christian Witness*, December 4, 1846, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 459.

¹⁹⁰ Perry suggests that the abolitionists’ emphasis on the slave’s “individual sovereignty” made them “wary of the all the restraints in their own lives.” See Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 53-54.

¹⁹¹ William Lloyd Garrison to Thomas Clarkson, August 26, 1846, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 386.

¹⁹² “Letters from Thomas Clarkson and Rich’d Cobden, to Joseph Pease, Sen.” *Liberator*, July 28, 1843, 1.

count on the “cooperation of the bone and sinew of the Anti-Corn Law League,” as Parliament had voted in favor of repeal that same year.¹⁹³

Despite this purported pivot to India, the bulk of the ASL’s energies were actually spent denouncing the transatlantic Evangelical Alliance, which had formed in the late summer of 1846. British abolitionists widely agreed that membership in the Alliance (from which Quakers and Unitarians were excluded) should be contingent on an outright refutation of slavery. Yet the American clergy, who constituted 77 out of the 900 delegates in attendance at the London convention, envisioned the Alliance primarily as a unified front against global Catholicism.¹⁹⁴ Remediating the plight of slave was not high on their agenda. A planning conference held in Birmingham months earlier had determined to withhold invitations from clergymen who “by their own fault” retained slaves “from regard to their own interest,” but the question of membership arose once more during the August proceedings. Under the auspices of the ASL, Garrison, Thompson, and Frederick Douglass¹⁹⁵ contended that the wobbly wording of the Birmingham resolution lent itself to abuse. Clergymen who tolerated slavery would only claim to be obeying the temporal law of the land; Southern states barred masters from liberating slaves who could not ensure their expatriation to free territory. Others validated their purchase of slaves as a means to a benevolent end, be it manumission or a relatively

¹⁹³ Robert Smith, “Letters from England,” *Liberator*, November 26, 1847, 2-3. The organization attracted the bulk of its support from Bristol and Glasgow. See Morgan, “The Political as Personal,” 83.

¹⁹⁴ J. F. Maclear, “The Evangelical Alliance and the Antislavery Crusade,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (1979): 149.

¹⁹⁵ Douglass had spent the autumn of 1845 in the company of the Webbs in Ireland. In January, he proceeded to Scotland to demand that the Free Church return a donation of 3000 pounds from American slaveholders. Prominent Garrisonians initially feared that Douglass might defect to the BFASS if he was not sufficiently monitored. Douglass was none too pleased to hear of these misgivings secondhand. See Frederick Douglass to Maria Weston Chapman, March 29, 1846, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. John R. McKivigan, ser. 3, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 99.

improved quality of life under their paternal care.¹⁹⁶ Although British critics debunked the concept of involuntary slave-holding,¹⁹⁷ the Alliance could not overcome American intransigence and ultimately allowed its branches to tailor their membership in accordance “with their peculiar circumstances.”¹⁹⁸

In response to this betrayal, the Garrisonian cadre in Britain chastised the clergy for placing mortal legislation above natural law. Slavery was nothing less than an “act against God” as “the creator and sole proprietor of man.” No temporal statute or legal nicety could obscure this fact; moral truth could not be clouded by context. Analogously, the fact that the Mughal state permitted idolatrous practices did not give Thompson license to partake in un-Christian behavior during his Indian travels.¹⁹⁹ Douglass repudiated any divine sanction for human bondage and vowed to trample over any ministers who had “thrown themselves across our path.” He found it particularly opprobrious that the Alliance permitted the attendance of Reverend Thomas Smyth, whose mock-marriages between slaves enabled their masters to separate husband from wife.²⁰⁰ Thompson, however, aspired to build a broad base for the ASL by incorporating free traders and moral-force Chartists. He therefore found it regrettable that “an anti-slavery meeting in England should, of necessity, be an anti-clerical [one],” as such dissension reduced the League to an inflammatory protest group. Indeed, the editor of the *Christian Witness* went so far as to accuse the ASL of seeking nothing less than the

¹⁹⁶ Frederick Douglass, “Slavery in the Pulpit of the Evangelical Alliance: an Address Delivered on September 14, 1846,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, vol. 1, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 407.

¹⁹⁷ One writer for *The Patriot* newspaper suspected that Culling Eardley Smith, the chair of the Evangelical Alliance, tolerated these rationalizations to favor his own interests in the slave-dependent Brazilian Mining Company. See T. H. Thorne, *Patriot*, October 3, 1846, in Scrapbooks, vol. 6.

¹⁹⁸ Maclear, 160.

¹⁹⁹ *Great Western Local Chronicle*, October 10, 1846, in Scrapbooks, vol. 6.

²⁰⁰ “Anti-Slavery League Meeting,” *Patriot*, September 18, 1846, in Scrapbooks, vol. 6.

“extinction of Christianity.”²⁰¹ The Garrisonians would have to wait until 1851 for the British branch of the Alliance to officially ban foreign slaveholding delegates from joining its ranks.²⁰²

Garrison’s brand of moral perfectionism clearly set a high bar that reformers operating in the British public sphere were not always able to meet. When Thompson acquired his parliamentary seat in 1847, Garrison withheld his congratulations, as he did not know “by what oath of affirmation [Thompson] may be bounded” and feared the office might “contract rather than enlarge his sphere of usefulness as a popular reformer, and a world-embracing philanthropist.”²⁰³ This prediction was rather on the mark; aside from re-litigating the Satara case, Thompson largely refrained from partaking in sustained debates. Many of the petitions he presented – like those advocating universal suffrage, import duty reductions, and the abolition of ecclesiastical courts and the death penalty alike – jibbed with his radical, secularist stances. Still, Thompson’s particular oratorical talents were best suited to the tavern or meeting hall rather than the stuffy chambers of Parliament. Adherence to rigid protocol dampened his charismatic presence, while the Board of Control and Company directors doggedly attempted to hobble his Satara agitation by exposing him as an unprincipled stipend-seeker. The question of whether India reform would be most efficaciously advanced through established political channels or out-of-doors agitation would remain an open one.

²⁰¹ “The ‘Christian Witness’ Examined on a Defamatory Charge of Infidelity against William Lloyd Garrison,” *Liberator*, July 30, 1847, 1.

²⁰² Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), 247.

²⁰³ William Lloyd Garrison to Maria Chapman, July 19, 1848, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 568.

While the melding of Garrisonian and India reform networks familiarized American audiences with the extent of the East India Company's misgovernment, this link-up potentially constricted domestic support for the latter movement. Moderate abolitionists in the BFASS and Evangelical ministers alike rebuked the ASL for its extremism, which – in their minds – bordered on heresy. But the League also received abuse from less likely sources. On one occasion, Thompson's speech on the Raja of Satara's plight was interrupted by travel-writer James Augustus St. John, who rose to "defend the character of the magnates at the India House." A short while before this incident, St. John's literary son, Percy, had unsuccessfully attempted to verbally "annihilate Mr. Garrison" during his speech protesting the Evangelical Alliance.²⁰⁴ Accounts in the *Liberator* lingered on these clashes, rendering the St. John clan as dandyish, comical foils whose opposition simply invited reformers to showcase their rhetorical virtuosity.

Capital Conversions and the *Empire* Scheme

Following the death of Raja Pratap Singh and the termination of his Satara stipend, Thompson encountered financial difficulties and sought succor from his Garrisonian allies. An American tour in the summer of 1850 offered a temporary reprieve; charging 12.5 cents a head for admittance, he lectured on British reforms, Indian affairs, and anti-slavery before large crowds throughout New England and New York.²⁰⁵ Widely advertised in the *Liberator*, these speaking engagements seem to have

²⁰⁴ "Labors of Mr. Thompson," *Liberator*, December 25, 1846, 1.

²⁰⁵ The turnout in the city of Rochester was 1300. See George Thompson to Anne Weston, March 28, 1851, BPL Anti-slavery Collection.

reignited tensions between the BFASS and the Garrisonians.²⁰⁶ When Thompson gave an address to his Tower Hamlets constituents upon his return, none other than John Scoble rose from the crowd and denounced his American tour as a dereliction of his parliamentary duty.²⁰⁷ Soon after, Scoble entered into a caustic exchange with the Irish Garrisonian Richard Webb in the columns of the *New York Anti-Slavery Standard*. Both Scoble and Lewis Tappan had recently spoken out against the Garrisonians' aggressive techniques, namely their supposed anticlericalism and preference for the abrogation of the American union over the continuance of slavery. Webb countered that the lame-duck BFASS was only lumbering on as a result of Scoble's indefatigable animosity. Tappan's society, meanwhile, was a vanity project that met for three hours annually and lacked any organizational framework, paper, or funding source. Whereas the AFASS was sustained largely through its relationship with the American Missionary Association, Garrison's established American Anti-Slavery Society was not concerned with proselytizing; it had "neither time nor funds to spare from the heathen and slaves in the United States, for the promotion of Christianity and the abolition of slavery in Siam."²⁰⁸ Thompson relished Webb's evisceration of Scoble, noting that the BFASS secretary's incessant backbiting had rendered him "a poisonous creeping plant upon the anti-slavery tree in this country."

Money troubles did not dissuade Thompson from attempting to broaden his following by purchasing the *Empire* newspaper, which necessitated converting his invested social capital into economic capital. Chesson, his partner in the affair, very much hoped the deal would succeed; if it fell through, "it really would seem as if fortune,

²⁰⁶ "Thompson Lecture on British Misrule in India," *Liberator*, June 13, 1851, 2.

²⁰⁷ George Thompson to Richard Webb, April 15, 1852, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.21, 16.

²⁰⁸ Richard D. Webb, *The National Anti-Slavery Societies in England and the United States* (Dublin: Charles Hedgelong, 1852), 53.

position, and influence fled with it.” In December of 1854, Thompson managed to wrangle control of the paper and vowed to use it as a vehicle to support free trade, the rights of industry, religious equality, and “justice to our colonies.” Positioning himself against establishment interests from the outset, he informed his readers that institutions were “but the machinery for promoting liberties, and securing the rights of the people”; like all products of “mere human invention,” they were “liable to defects, and prone to decay.”²⁰⁹ This was no mere rhetorical flourish, but rather a populist call to arms that was reflected in the layout of the paper itself. A section on its first page, entitled “The Platform,” provided a space for contributors to “speak as they are inspired.” Another column aptly called “The Voice of the People” aired readers’ grievances, even those directed against the paper’s own staff. Thompson’s personal ideologies and rivalries heavily influenced the *Empire*’s content, as its pages increasingly covered India reform agitation and the unfolding “crisis” afflicting transatlantic abolitionism. Aside from bemoaning endemic jobbery within the Company, which the 1853 charter act had largely rectified, the paper featured transcripts of House of Commons speeches delivered by India Reform Society members. Revelations of torture at the hands of the police in South India and Bihar received particular attention; Thompson demanded that the “veil of secrecy should be rent from the top to the bottom, and the horrors of the prison-house exhibited to the world.”²¹⁰ In several articles, he also recorded the anti-slavery societies’ half-hearted attempts at reunification and corrected a misconception that he had slighted the Garrisonians at a recent conference.

²⁰⁹ *Empire*, December 4, 1854.

²¹⁰ “Torture of British Subjects in India,” *Empire*, January 13, 1855, 105; “Torture of British Subjects in India – no. II,” *Empire*, January 20, 1855, 121.

The *Empire*'s sudden embrace of reform seems to have confused some of its 56,000 subscribers.²¹¹ Thomson initially clarified that the title of "Empire" referred in a "broad and wide sense" to "English guardianship wherever English rule has a footing."²¹² Ideally, this expansive purview would deter parochialism and remove readers "from the narrow vision of sect, party, province, or central power." But Thompson's acerbic style, honed through years on the lecture circuit, was not to everyone's taste. Some readers got the wrong end of the stick after reading a satirical piece entitled "Plea for Dictation and Despotism," while others balked at the paper's opposition to the Crimean War. One "Lancashire lad in London" accused the paper's editors, along with Cobden and Bright, of producing propaganda for the Czar of Russia; if they were "to set up a literary shop in St. Petersburg, their storehouse would soon be emptied."²¹³

From a financial perspective, the *Empire* was mismanaged from the outset. A frustrated Chesson threatened to sever his connection with the venture several months after the acquisition, though he helped keep it on life-support until June 1856. He very much regretted "the extinction of a journal" that had initially "promised to produce reputation and influence" and was grateful that employment on Cobden's *Morning Star* paper had granted him some financial stability. As for Thompson, he was forced to abruptly leave England again in 1855 and seek out the rent-free hospitality of Prassana Coomar Tagore in Calcutta until his new employer, a John Lister, could settle his debts.²¹⁴ He continued to send various articles on Indian affairs to Chesson, who was

²¹¹ Based on the government's quarterly recording of stamps. This estimated circulation was equivalent to that of *The Economist* and even surpassed *The Guardian*.

²¹² "The Empire," *Empire*, December 9, 1854, 25.

²¹³ "Cobden's Alienation from Popular Respect," *Empire*, February 3, 1855, 154.

²¹⁴ George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, March 8, 1856, JRL REAS2/2. In late 1856, Thompson's son-in-law, Frederick Chesson, reported that "no member of Mr. Thompson's family is able to give him anything like a satisfactory account of his affairs and of what is necessary to be done in order to settle them

“very sorry there is no *Empire* to receive them.” For a while, Thompson’s symbolic capital as famed advocate for Indian interests took him far. Enjoying the hospitality of the Raja of Burdwan in 1856, he resided in a lakeside dwelling, visited the tiger in the estate’s menagerie, and occasionally joined his host for a game of billiards.²¹⁵ But recurrent liver attacks, coupled with the collapse of his new business concern, eventually forced his withdrawal to England. Three hot seasons in India had brought him to “the verge of the grave,” culminating in a prolonged illness and temporary paralysis in the summer of 1858.²¹⁶

The progress of India reformism in the 1840s was checked by rampant contestation on the super-field. Opposed by the BFASS, condemned by the Evangelical Alliance, and cajoled by the ACLL, reformers within Thompson’s circle clearly struggled to operate within a formal, associational framework that could multiply their forms of capital. Yet this capacious network of Garrisonians, free traders, and former Company personnel nevertheless retained its integrity even after the demise of the BIS. Its members persisted in their provocations, exposing the anomaly of “virtual slavery” in the post-Emancipation empire. The following chapter will probe these reformers’ attempts to stimulate an imperial public consciousness by intertwining the suffering of the famine-stricken *ryots*, metropolitan working-classes, and degraded princes at the hands of coercive and monopolist interests.

altogether.” Chesson discouraged Louis Chamerovzow, another *Empire* investor, from visiting Thompson’s private creditors to alter their arrangements. See Diary of Frederick Chesson, November 9, 1856, JRL, REAS 11/4.

²¹⁵ George Thompson to Anne Thompson, March 25, 1856, JRL, REAS/2/1, f. 47

²¹⁶ “Letter from F. W. Chesson – Illness of George Thompson, Esq.,” *Liberator*, August 6, 1858, 127.

“A Blot on English Justice”: India Reformism and the Rhetoric of Virtual Slavery

In the winter of 1904, exiled publisher Vladimir Chertkov received a letter from his mentor, Leo Tolstoy, congratulating him on his recent biography of American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.¹ Tolstoy had long endorsed Garrison’s principle of non-resistance as an expression of “concord and love” that consisted “in the substitution of persuasion for brute force.”² Garrison had shrewdly recognized that enslavement was not solely an economic phenomenon, but rather stemmed from “the ancient and universal recognition, contrary to the Christian teaching, of the right of coercion on the part of certain people in regard to certain others.” In assailing the institution of American slavery, he was therefore compelled to advance “the principle of struggle against all the evil of the world.” The righteousness of this global outlook was confirmed following Garrison’s sojourns to Britain in the 1830s and 40s, during which time he bore witness to “oppression, degradation, vice, starvation...side by side with monarchy, royalty, aristocracy, monopoly.”³ Social conditions were so combustible that he predicted a republican revolution would occur in the event of Queen Victoria’s death. Garrison’s colleagues in the American Anti-Slavery Society concurred that the British aristocracy and “bayonet-archy” had conspired to chase ‘liberty from their beautiful island, or kept it

¹ The heterodox William Lloyd Garrison was the architect of the New England and American Anti-Slavery Societies and a close associate of George Thompson from the mid-1830s onwards.

² “Tolstoi on Garrison,” in *William Lloyd Garrison on Non-Resistance*, ed. F. G. Villard (New York: The Nation Press Printing Co., 1924), 49-54.

³ William Lloyd Garrison to S. J. May, September 6, 1840, in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 2, ed. W. M. Merrill (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1973), 696.

from ever landing on it.”⁴ Although few reform movements, by Garrison’s reckoning, were sufficiently “based on the broad, immovable foundation of human rights,”⁵ leading abolitionists, moral-force Chartists, and repealers of the Anglo-Irish union gravitated toward his camp.⁶ India reformers, in particular, subscribed to a capacious understanding of what I will term “virtual slavery,” a form of artificial constraint that bolstered the power of monopolistic cabals throughout the empire. Linked through lecturer George Thompson, a veteran abolitionist and a key spokesman for the British India Society (BIS, est. 1839), they characterized famished Indian *ryots* (peasant cultivators), impoverished British workers, and ousted native rulers as fellow victims of coercion.

Epitomizing a new kind of professional public moralist, the roguish Thompson hoped to convert the advocacy of various causes into a full time occupation. As the BIS experienced an organizational decline from 1841 onwards, Thompson remained the animating force behind India reform while lending his energies to the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL), Anti-Slavery League (ASL) and the self-determinist Peoples’ International League (PIL).⁷ Throughout these ventures, he maintained that monopolistic practices bred a global “school of corruption” that “slavery attends...freedom abhors [and] religion condemns.”⁸ The aristocracy’s monopolization of political power bound

⁴ The original writer in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* nevertheless praised the efforts of abolitionist India reformers like George Thompson, Elizabeth Pease, William Adam, and Daniel O’Connell. See “British Abolitionists,” *Liberator*, December 4, 1840, 194.

⁵ William Lloyd Garrison to Elizabeth Pease, February 28, 1843, in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, ed. W. M. Merrill (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1974), 125.

⁶ One could identify as a Garrisonian while holding contrary opinions on Christian perfectionism, disunionism, and non-voting. See W. C. McDaniel, “Repealing Unions: American Abolitionists, Irish Repeal, and the Origins of Garrisonian Disunionism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 2 (2008): 255-57.

⁷ Acknowledging the famine deaths in Ireland, reformers at the inaugural meeting of the PIL concluded that the disenfranchised Briton was “a slave to all intents and purposes.” See *Report of a Public Meeting held at the Crown and Anchor...to Explain the Principles and Objects of the Peoples’ International League* (London, 1847), 13.

⁸ “Free Trade, Monopoly, and their Effects,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 15 (January 1, 1842): 177.

the disenfranchised working classes “in chains,” while its sequestration of the “green earth” through the Corn Laws had turned the English countryside “into a desert.”⁹ The East India Company (EIC) had relinquished the bulk of its economic monopolies following the Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833, but it continued to exercise a boundless authority over the *ryots* and princes alike. Some reformers speculated that its directors had purposefully converted India into a permanent battlefield where their sons could readily receive “promotions; and load themselves with the spoils of unhappy nations.”¹⁰

In analyzing the reformers’ imbricating rhetoric of virtual slavery, we may identify two primary protest “scripts.” The first, based on abolitionist tropes of physical dehumanization, was used to advocate for voiceless groups like the *ryots* and the metropolitan mill-workers and agriculturists. Delivered in the idiom of natural rights, this script foregrounded issues of production, consumption, and self-preservation with an implicit affirmation of free trade economics. Unable to fulfill their basic corporeal needs, these subjects’ bodies and minds were no longer their own. The second script was grounded in the proposition that Indians were entitled to the same constitutional protections enjoyed by Britons “now walking the streets of London.”¹¹ Reformers rallied behind Pratap Singh, the deposed Raja of Satara, as a virtual political slave removed from his hereditary position upon trumped-up evidence that would ‘not have warranted the hanging of a *dog*.’¹² In bringing the Bombay government’s duplicity to light, they situated the dethronement as the most recent episode in a long catalogue of colonial

⁹ George Thompson, *Speech of George Thompson, Esq. at the Great Anti-Corn-Law Conference* (Manchester, 1842), 3.

¹⁰ William Howitt, “India, the Proffered Salvation of England, No. II,” *Howitts’ Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* 2 (1847): 274.

¹¹ George Thompson, *Addresses; delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta and on other Occasions* (Calcutta, 1843), 24.

¹² John Sullivan, *Speech of Mr. John Sullivan, in the Court of Proprietors at the East India House* (John Wilson: London, 1843), 23.

scandals dating back to the Warren Hastings regime (1772-1785). By warping treaty terms and exploiting India's native princes as disposable puppets, the colonial administration continued to undermine societal hierarchies for the sake of bureaucratic expediency.

Pratap Singh was not the only Indian ruler swept up in the tide of colonial alarmism in 1839. As rumors of an anti-British Wahhabi conspiracy came to light, Company authorities dethroned and imprisoned a number of Muslim notables in the Deccan region. In these cases, as in Satara, local animosities cast a long shadow over the legal proceedings; hard evidence of collusion remained elusive and damning documents were revealed to be forgeries with some regularity. Gesturing to the minority of officials who debunked these fabrications, Chandra Mallampalli observes that "liberal imperialism" provided "a language for exposing the Company's abuses of power and breaches of the rule of law."¹³ But he further suggests that these pragmatic liberal agents, who first and foremost sought to maintain the loyalty of the Muslim aristocracy, may not be entirely worthy of our praise. The fact that their protests "arose *after* the fact of violence diminishes their authenticity and purchase" and might indicate that they were simply conducting "mere rituals of conscience."¹⁴

As a scholarly construct, the concept of liberal imperialism is notoriously slippery. Lauren Goodlad has gone so far as to argue that it was "neither internally consistent nor reliably expressive of any single liberal logic or philosophy."¹⁵ While some metropolitan liberals sponsored a chauvinistic program of cultural renovation, non-official Britons

¹³ Chandra Mallampalli, *A Muslim Conspiracy in British India? Politics and Paranoia in the Early Nineteenth-Century Deccan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 176.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁵ Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty and Transnational Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43.

residing on the subcontinent adopted the reflexive strain of liberalism to safeguard their own privileges. They were particularly concerned with issues of European settlement, the composition of juries, press freedoms, and the opening of the Chinese tea trade.¹⁶ As C. A. Bayly has demonstrated, native intellectuals also reformulated the “ambient ideologies” within liberal thought to speak to “specific political and economic conflicts within the Indian world.”¹⁷ The writings of Raja Rammohun Roy, in particular, espoused a kind of liberal constitutionalism that was informed by concurrent political events in Europe. Observing that the ancient Hindu constitution had suffered corruption, Roy proposed various reforms that would promote governmental transparency, individual property ownership, and civilizational blending.¹⁸ Beginning in the early 1840s, his civic brand of liberalism was increasingly overshadowed by a more radical strain that endowed marginalized groups like the *ryots* with inalienable rights.

In approaching liberal imperialism as an evolving “historical constellation,”¹⁹ we ought further consider how a selective defense of its key tenets could bring the state itself into disrepute. England’s premiere liberal thinkers may have erected a mental barrier between their anti-slavery activism and their colonial politics,²⁰ but the same cannot be said of the network of former officials, abolitionists, free traders, and native polemicists who coalesced around Thompson and the BIS. Recurrent allusions to virtual slavery in their rhetoric indicate that there was a reflexive register of the language of liberal

¹⁶ Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 111-17.

¹⁷ C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁹ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8.

²⁰ Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 16.

imperialism, one capable of unifying an array of causes at home and abroad. Going far beyond any ritualization of conscience, it was an adversarial, uncompromising idiom that would only tolerate British dominion in India if certain anomalies were remedied. The colonial regime, Ranajit Guha once argued, relied upon its own persuasive “idiom of Order”²¹ to cloak its pernicious nature. Reformers sought to discard this screen and unmask the Company as an atavistic agent of disruption in its own right. The following sections of this chapter will both probe their neo-Burkean attempts to stimulate an imperial public consciousness and identify the numerous obstacles that confronted their agitation. A series of case studies will further clarify how reformers intertwined the mistreatment of the *ryot*, British laborer, and native prince to fashion a stinging reproof of coercive governance.

The Search for Redress

In the early 1830s, policymakers began to re-conceptualize India as a “single terrain” that could be subjected to the “unaccountable exercise of British power” and governed with “mechanical regularity.”²² The 1833 Charter Act curtailed the provincial governors’ legislative abilities and enabled the metropolitan Board of Control (BoC) to issue unilateral orders regarding “levying war or making peace, or treating or negotiating with any of the Native Princes or States in India, or with any other Princes or States” directly to the colonial administration through the Secret Committee.²³ The act also

²¹ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997), 25.

²² Jon Wilson, *The Chaos of Empire: the British Raj and the Conquest of India* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 212, 221.

²³ “Article XXXVI,” in *Preliminary Papers Respecting the East-India Company’s Charter* (London, 1833), 517.

stripped the Company of its remaining trading privileges while retaining its Court of Directors (CoD) as an administrative body. In the metropole, this reshuffle lent an air of inscrutability to Indian affairs. The collision of the BoC and CoD, one director admitted, was “calculated to produce delay, incongruities, and sometimes an absolute suspension of the functions of government” while ensuring the “total absence of all responsibility.”²⁴ Reformers like John Briggs went one step further, comparing the system of double government to a household in “which the President of the Board of Control represents the master, and the Court of Directors the mistress.”²⁵ Moreover, there was “a growing tendency...manifested by Ministers, without distinction of party, to prevent Parliament from acting as a court of revision and censure over the executive proceedings.”²⁶ Constitutional government, Briggs warned, was meaningless if it did “not include a system of checks on autocracy, mystery, and unadvised undertakings.”

So long as Indians were barred from the halls of political power and obstructed from securing a judicial appeal in sensitive cases, it fell to the reformers to air their grievances by any means necessary.²⁷ As the Anglo-Afghan War dragged on, colonial statistician and editor Robert Montgomery Martin asserted that the “Hindoo fellow-subjects” who fought alongside their “European brethren” in the mountainous defiles had earned the “poor privilege of raising their voices against oppression.”²⁸ While earlier

²⁴ Saville Marriott, *India: the Duty and Interest of England to Inquire into its State*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman and Co., 1857), 39.

²⁵ John Briggs, *India & Europe Compared; a Popular View of the Present State and Future Prospects of the Eastern Continental Empire* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1857), 224-29.

²⁶ Thomas Evans Bell, *Memoir of General John Briggs, of the Madras Army* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 236-37.

²⁷ Established in 1833, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council could serve as a court of appeal for subjects abroad. The Company itself was charged with forwarding cases from the Sadr Diwani Adalats in the presidency towns to the attention of the committee. See P. A. Howell, *The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, 1833-1876* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 44.

²⁸ “Debate at the India House,” February 8, 1843, British Library (BL), Mss Eur E932/282, f. 647.

reformers had suggested that a single orator could most effectively thrust Indian issues before the House of Commons,²⁹ Martin instead sought to reconstitute the Company's lame-duck Court of Proprietors (CoP) as an expert body composed of retired officials.³⁰ Few stockholders, however, were inclined to transform their forum into the "domestic Indian parliament" that he envisioned.³¹ Even when dissenting proprietors secured sufficient votes to bring an issue to the attention of the directors, the BoC ultimately controlled the flow of official information and could hobble investigations.³² In May of 1847, a number of reformers complained that the Secret Committee had concealed papers regarding the dethronement of Pratap Singh for the past fourteen months.³³ Thompson, who had acquired EIC stock solely for the purpose of making speeches in the CoP, predicted that these documents would provide damning evidence of the Bombay government's machinations, but his optimism was ultimately misplaced.³⁴

The invigoration of public opinion through pressure group activism offered an alternative to this institutional impasse. Much as Garrison and Thompson characterized their agitation as non-partisan, they celebrated the fact that the transatlantic abolitionist was typically the scourge of establishment interests. Thompson noted early on that

²⁹ "Debate at the East-India House," in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, vol. 20 (London: W. H. Allen, 1836), 122. Charles Forbes believed that this imagined parliamentarian could emulate MP Daniel O'Connell, the famed advocate of Irish interests.

³⁰ Former Bombay governor John Malcolm had put forth a similar scheme a decade prior. See Joshua Ehrlich, "The Crisis of Liberal Reform in India: Public Opinion, Pyrotechnics, and the Charter Act of 1833," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no 6 (2018): 14.

³¹ "Responsible Government for British India," *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, vol. 3, ed., R. M. Martin (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1842), 57.

³² Writing to Dalhousie in 1848, Hobhouse urged him "not to be afraid of Blue books, or any books over which I have a control." See John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, Marquess of Dalhousie, December 23, 1848, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, f. 89.

³³ Petitioners included John Sullivan, Holt Mackenzie, John Briggs, Charles Forbes, and Joseph Hume.

³⁴ By November 1847, Thompson was convinced that he had "got the Govt and the folks in Leadenhall Street into such a fix" that they would likely "kneel down their flag and give us victory." See George Thompson to Richard Webb, November 12, 1847, Boston Public Library (BPL), Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.17, f. 70.

slaveholding stemmed from the exercise of despotic power; upending this system called for the substitution “of public, judicial, and responsible authority, for private, arbitrary, and irresponsible control.”³⁵ These demands could readily be interpreted as affirmations of radical constitutionalism. Garrison even identified English abolitionists as “the genuine reform party of that country” and predicted that their exertions would ultimately “abolish the unholy union of Church and State,” the House of Lords, and the landed monopolies altogether. It was the Tory party, after all, that had always been “in favor of both white and black slavery.”³⁶

Improving the *ryots*’ condition was a priority for British abolitionists, as their American detractors – who accused them of meddling – routinely observed that exploitation and forced labor were pervasive under colonial rule.³⁷ As advocates of universal emancipation, the Garrisonians also anticipated the day when natives would “no longer be crushed to the earth, either by feudal lords of the avarice of monopolists.”³⁸ But India reformers were often skeptical that emancipation by fiat would be practicable in India or else feared that the wanton liberation of presumed slaves might constitute religious interference on the part of the Company.³⁹ Wary of this minefield, members of the BIS charged the colonial administration itself with having innovated *new* forms of

³⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, *Lectures of George Thompson, with a Full Report of the Discussion between Mr. Thompson and Mr. Borthwick, the Pro-Slavery Agent* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836), 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, xxxi-xxxii.

³⁷ “Correspondence: Opinions of American Abolitionists,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 6 (June 1, 1841): 48. Defenders of the Free Church of Scotland levied this critique against Thompson after he denounced the Church for its receipt of donations from Southern slaveholders. See James Heartfield, *The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838-1956: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 48.

³⁸ “Slavery in British India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 13 (November 1, 1841): 155.

³⁹ Despite the “de-legalization” of Indian slavery in 1843, customary forms of labour coercion continued to perplex the colonial administration decades later. In the South Indian Chingleput *taluk*, a series of revenue collectors in the 1880s argued that the low caste *paraiyars* still lived in a state of virtual slavery under the landholding *mirasidars* on account of their debt peonage and lack of housing rights. The Board of Revenue, however, preferred to refer to the *paraiyars* as “farm servants” and concluded that private charity would most efficaciously promote their uplift. See Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795-1895* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 153-90.

enslavement through its fiscal policies and coercive approach to inter-state relations. Under the present system, “princes and people [were] bought and sold like bales of cotton” to appease the Company’s investors, who traded in “thrones and nations” in the manner of “goods and merchandise.”⁴⁰ If the British state, by extension, continued to use the “rod of oppression” to bind its foreign subjects “down in slavery,” it would surely meet the fate of Rome, Carthage, and Nineveh.⁴¹ In the post-Emancipation era, this conduct was particularly truly anomalous. As a cornerstone of the reformers’ reflexive liberalism, the trope of virtual slavery provided agitators various stripes with a common rhetorical mooring that enabled them to represent distant suffering in familiar terms.

Expansion and Contraction in the Rhetoric of Slavery

Metaphors of slavery had long pervaded British literary culture, appearing in fervent sermons against sinfulness and early feminist tracts.⁴² In the late 1820s, journals like the Unitarian *Monthly Repository* called upon abolitionists to denounce the practice of sati, as Indian widows were “the unhappy captives of a barbarous superstition.”⁴³ Slavery analogies were also attractive to the “sailors, servants, colonists, convicts, and religious minorities” throughout the empire who wished to protest their marginalization.⁴⁴ In the India reformers’ polemic, references to slavery signaled a violation of the natural right to self-preservation or an exclusive dependence on a single person or institution. A

⁴⁰ “The Changes of a Century,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 7 (July 1, 1841): 60.

⁴¹ George Thompson, *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House, Manchester, England* (Pawtucket, RI: William and Robert Adams, 1840), 59-60.

⁴² Brad Pasanek, *Metaphors of Mind: an Eighteenth Century Dictionary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 126, 132.

⁴³ Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy*, 68.

⁴⁴ Lauren Benton, “Just Despots: the Cultural Construction of Imperial Constitutionalism,” *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 9, no. 2 (2011): 213.

process of “natal alienation,” which genealogically isolated the dishonored slave and forbade him “any independent social existence,” often facilitated this subordination.⁴⁵

The fluidity of Thompson’s network invited participation from reformers differing in locality, class, and gender. Given this ease of admittance, debates over scope naturally arose, namely whether national issues should take precedence over the uplift of the global oppressed. Following an economic downturn in the early 1840s, Chartists and their sympathizers co-opted the rhetoric of political slavery to dramatize the immiseration of the labouring poor.⁴⁶ The agents of oppression were certainly legion; Chartist imagery of tyrants crushing “the yielding, suppliant slave” evoked the common villainy of “the slaveholding planters, factory overseers, and upper-class government officials.”⁴⁷ Writing in Garrison’s *Liberator* newspaper, Chartist lawyer W. H. Ashurst declared that “the workingman in Europe is a slave in fact, though a freeman in name.”⁴⁸ The workshop system imposed by the New Poor Law of 1834 had disturbed the familial order and brought about “apathy, brutality, and moral degradation.” In a “slave state” of ignorance, the working classes exhibited illicit behaviors that reflected their rescinded humanity. It was this unholy reduction of men to beasts that alarmed the abolitionist Joseph Sturge, who condemned political slavery as a “means of degrading men without the use of the

⁴⁵ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: a Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982) 7-10.

⁴⁶ The manifesto put forth by the Chartist General Convention in 1839 declared that “the Government of England is a Despotism and her industrious Millions are Slaves.” See Peter Gurney, “‘Rejoicing in Potatoes’: the Politics of Consumption in England during the ‘Hungry Forties,’” *Past & Present*, no. 203 (2009): 107.

⁴⁷ Betty Fladeland, “‘Our Cause being One and the Same’: Abolitionism and Chartism,” in *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846*, ed. J. Walvin (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 80.

⁴⁸ W. H. Ashurst, “Interesting Letter from England,” *Liberator*, July 15, 1842, 110. Ashurst was a mutual associate of Garrison and Giuseppe Mazzini; Garrison published a number of Mazzini’s articles in the *Liberator* that compared American slavery with forms of Italian political oppression. See Enrico Dal Lago, *William Lloyd Garrison and Giuseppe Mazzini: Abolition, Democracy, and Radical Reform* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 132.

lash.”⁴⁹ The demoralizing effects of disenfranchisement were only compounded by the proletarian slavery of the wage labour system that, in the words of Friedrich Engels, established the bourgeoisie’s “monopoly of all means of existence.”⁵⁰

Historians differ over whether common invocations of slavery entwined parallel reform campaigns or prompted pressure group jostling. According to Gregory Vargo, Chartists projected “a crystallized image of the worst injustices of English society” onto colonial rule and opposed militaristic overseas expansion.⁵¹ Press organs like the Scottish *Chartist Circular* reprinted articles by BIS members; Thompson raged against the Anglo-Afghan War and castigated the political establishment for capitalizing on Russophobia to play up domestic sedition charges.⁵² However, the Chartists’ enthusiasm for colonial revolts and their habit of storming anti-slavery meetings to elect their own chairmen incensed the respectable sort.⁵³ David Turley therefore warns against an over-simplified reading of abolitionist-Chartist amity, as rioting in the summer of 1842 deterred any stable link-up between the middle-class and proletarian organizations.⁵⁴ The reports of the Garrisonian Glasgow Emancipation Society (GES) further testify to the difficulty of fashioning a globally oriented movement. Although most members embraced Thompson’s efforts to “protect the liberties, and advocate the rights of the Natives of the British dependencies” through his Satara agitation, the Chartist reverend Patrick Brewster

⁴⁹ Joseph Sturge, *Reconciliation between the Middle and Labouring Classes* (Manchester: Abel Heywood, 1842), 17.

⁵⁰ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, trans. F. K. Wischnewetzky (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), 76.

⁵¹ Gregory Vargo, “‘Outworks of the Citadel of Corruption’: the Chartist Press Reports the Empire,” *Victorian Studies* 54, no. 2 (2012): 248.

⁵² George Thompson, *The Affghan War. A Lecture* (Cheltenham George Rowe, 1842), 7.

⁵³ One eruption occurred in Darlington, the hometown of Joseph Pease; Francis Carnac Brown surmised that “the end of the world is coming, and Chartism and chaos are to reign over it supreme.” See “A Quaker of Sixty Years Ago,” in *The Westminster Review*, vol. 139 (London: Henry and Company, 1893), 425.

⁵⁴ The unrest doomed Sturge’s Complete Suffrage Union. See David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 193.

attempted to draw his comrades' focus to the Corn and Provision Laws, which concerned the suffering of "multitudes of men [rather] than individuals."⁵⁵

Radical advocates of universal emancipation also engaged in a fraught discursive relationship with the exceptionalism of chattel slavery. "For the most part," Richard Huzzey posits, "transatlantic abolitionist networks often distinguished tactfully between the struggle for global abolition and questions of domestic politics."⁵⁶ Rejecting the metaphor of political slavery, American orator Frederick Douglass famously compared the plights of the working classes and plantation slaves to the difference between "light and darkness" during his British lecture tour.⁵⁷ Chattel slavery alone hindered Christian self-improvement by smothering "the intellect burning – the spark of divinity enkindled" in all men. This was a refrain on a classic abolitionist trope: the singular evil of personal slavery as something akin to "soul-murder."⁵⁸ A master effectively committed an atheistic act of brutalization by "depriv[ing] God himself of his prerogative, as the sole proprietor...of his immortal and accountable workmanship."⁵⁹ Still, Huzzey notes that Garrison (Douglass' fair-weather colleague) solicited the support of the British working classes and encouraged abolitionist advocacy of the People's Charter. In past orations, Garrison had defined slavery broadly, noting that "Every man has a right to his own body – to the products of his own labor – to the protection of law – and to the common

⁵⁵ "Adjourned Meeting," in *Seventh Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow: Aird & Russell, 1841), 50. Joseph Pease also disapproved of the Satara agitation, suggesting that Thompson should aid India's "dumb millions" instead. See Bell, *British Folks*, 140.

⁵⁶ Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 86.

⁵⁷ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 304. One scholar has argued that Douglass associated Irish poverty with intemperance rather than institutionalized oppression; in contrast to actual slaves, the Irish abused the freedoms they already possessed. See Fionnghuala Sweeney, *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), 88.

⁵⁸ Garrison, *Lectures of George Thompson*, x.

⁵⁹ "American Slavery," *Royal Leamington Spa Courier*, February 27, 1847, 2.

advantages of society.”⁶⁰ By the 1840s, he was wondering whether “England or America demand[ed] the liveliest sympathy,” for both were “laden with iniquity” and “full of the elements of self-destruction.”⁶¹ He nonetheless refrained from endorsing the broad concept of white slavery, as the degradation suffered by British labourers was fundamentally distinct from the supposed wage slavery of enfranchised Americans.⁶²

Reformers within Thompson’s network generally concurred that poverty alone did not necessarily testify to one’s enslavement. Conditions mattered insofar as they unjustly deprived a person of freedom of action or impaired their natural rights. According to philosopher William Paley (whom Thompson cited), these included “a man’s right to his life, limbs, and liberty; his right to the produce of his personal labour; to the use, in common with others, of air, light, and water.”⁶³ Yet the theoretical distinction between personal and political/virtual slavery was sometimes a murky one, as reformers adapted content from a wide range of sources. In one lecture directed against the Free Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Alliance in 1846,⁶⁴ Thompson declared that true slavery consisted not of “curtailing rights, but annihilating them,” thereby converting a “free agent” into “a mere *tool* for another’s benefit.”⁶⁵ These insights were actually derived from an 1837 article by Reverend George Bourne that probed the “teachings of the Old Testament on the subject of human rights.” For Bourne, neither “restrictions upon

⁶⁰ William Lloyd Garrison, “Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Convention,” in *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston: R. F. Wallcut, 1852), 68.

⁶¹ William Lloyd Garrison to H. C. Wright, April 1, 1843, in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 125.

⁶² Prominent Garrison Edmund Quincy declared soon after that the “white laboring men in America” held “the scepter of Sovereignty in their own hands.” If they approached a state of slavery, they had “nobody to blame but themselves.” See “Chattel Slavery and Wages Slavery,” *Liberator*, October 1, 1847, 158.

⁶³ Garrison, *Lectures of George Thompson*, 149.

⁶⁴ At the time, this Alliance was still accepting slaveholding clergymen into its American branches.

⁶⁵ George Thompson, *The Free Church of Scotland and American Slavery* (Edinburgh: T. & W. M’Dowall, 1846), 18.

freedom,” “apprenticeship,” or “political disabilities” were indicative of enslavement.⁶⁶ Defining slavery narrowly as an act of “man-stealing,” he claimed that Jewish law had severely penalized such transgressions and affirmed “the entire separation of human beings from brutes and things.”⁶⁷ Thompson opportunely appropriated this biblical exegesis to rebuke the pro-slavery clergy, though he had previously denounced apprenticeship in the West Indies and the Indian coolie trade as forms of slavery by another name.

The shifting valences of slavery can also be attributed to the demands of the lecture circuit and the interplay between the languages of constitutionalism and natural rights.⁶⁸ In January of 1847, Thompson was airing the Raja of Satara’s grievances before literary clubs, taverns, and the Eastern Institution while simultaneously participating in the Free Trade Club and Anti-Slavery League (ASL).⁶⁹ At one meeting the following month, he lauded the anti-slavery movement as a “vindication of the rights of man” and reminded his audience that he “had long ceased to discuss the question of slavery as one of colour or climate, of locality or treatment.”⁷⁰ Whether “in the rags of an American outcast” or “decked out in robes in the palace of an Oriental despot,” all humans boasted “the right to be free.” The following evening, he returned to the local hall to protest the mistrial of Pratap Singh; attendees resolved that it was the “inalienable right of every man, whether prince or peasant, to be heard in his defence, when accused of crime.” By featuring

⁶⁶ George Bourne, “Is Slavery from Above or from Beneath?” in *Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine*, vol. 2, ed. Elizur Wright (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1837), 241-42.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

⁶⁸ Epstein suggests that “distinctions...between arguments based upon historical precedent and those based upon natural rights, were rarely drawn very sharply” at the level of popular politics. See James Epstein, “The Constitutional Idiom: Radical Reasoning, Rhetoric and Action in Early Nineteenth-Century England,” *Journal of Social History* 23, no. 3 (1990): 555-56.

⁶⁹ Diary of George Thompson, John Rylands Library (JRL), REAS 7/2.

⁷⁰ “American Slavery,” *Royal Leamington Spa Courier*, 2.

summaries of these lectures in the same newspaper column, the *Royal Leamington Spa Courier* linked the two campaigns as complementary assaults “against the various forms of oppression existing in the world.”

Huzzey’s hypothesis of a bifurcation between the abolitionists’ global and domestic concerns may hold water in certain cases, but it does not adequately take into account the imperial dimension of reformist agitation. In tracing the artificial origins of the Agra famine and the “hungry forties” in England, reformers observed that institutionalized hardships prevented the starving *ryots* and cotton operatives from educating themselves, embracing religion, or benefitting from the produce of their labour. Once officials classified Pratap Singh as a puppet king who ruled at the whim of his colonial superiors, they effectively converted him into a disposable tool and endorsed his natal alienation. The Satara debacle also prompted a legalistic debate over whether stringent treaty terms could legitimately reduce a native sovereign to the position of a virtual slave. The reformers’ campaign against monopolism in its political and economic forms was essentially an exercise in rendering the ineffable complexities of Indian governance comprehensible. A moralized, reflexive version of liberal imperialism predicated on safeguarding individuals from coercion would only thrive under unremitting public scrutiny.

Script 1: The Dehumanization of the *Ryot* and British Laborer

With a contemporary estimated mortality rate of 500,000,⁷¹ the 1837-38 famine in the North-Western Provinces provided seemingly incontrovertible evidence of societal

⁷¹ Later famine experts put the death toll at approximately 800,000. See *Report of the Indian Famine Commission*, vol. 1, Famine Relief (London, 1880), 11.

decline under British rule. The event triggered an interrogation of land taxation policies and infrastructural neglect amidst a reconceptualization of the *ryot* as a rights-bearing subject. The question of metropolitan publicity, however, has largely been dwarfed in the historical literature by a focus on state famine policy as the colonial extension of a middle-class “reform complex.” Despite the failure of the summer and winter monsoons, a number of colonial officials determined the cause of the famine to be a dearth of work and a surge in prices rather than a scarcity of food. Instead of barring grain hoarding or prohibiting its export, the government set nearly 80,000 able-bodied Indian paupers to work principally on road building projects. This modern system of relief, Sanjay Sharma argues, functioned as a mechanism of control whereby the state extended its purview over the local economic sector.⁷² Like the temperance and Sunday school movements initiated in the metropole, the relief works aimed to instill sufferers with self-discipline and discourage deviancy.⁷³

Reformers averred that the Company’s response failed to address the root causes of the famine. This pushback against the inevitability of “natural” disasters was part and parcel of a long-running critique that Burke had initiated decades earlier in his speech on Fox’s East India Bill, when he maligned the Company’s failure to have “left some monument, either of state or beneficence, behind.”⁷⁴ The absence of material improvements was without precedent in the annals of conquest and more befitting “the

⁷² Sanjay Sharma, *Famine, Philanthropy, and the Colonial State: North India in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 168.

⁷³ Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery*, 135-39.

⁷⁴ Edmund Burke, “Speech on Fox’s East India Bill,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, eds. P. J. Marshall and W. Todd, vol. 5, *India: Madras and Bengal: 1774-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 402.

ourangootang or the tiger” than an enlightened government.⁷⁵ The following year, Burke blasted the Company for its parsimony during the parliamentary debate on the Nawab of Arcot’s private debts. In their depressed state, the lands of the Carnatic could not possibly yield a sufficient tax base to fund the nawab’s civil establishment, army, and repayments to his European creditors. Instead of attempting to recuperate fictitious debts, the government ought to have recognized its “fundamental duty” to repair the region’s thousands of reservoirs, the monuments of “real kings” of bygone ages.⁷⁶ Burke’s criticisms were revived in the parliamentary inquiries and debates that preceded the 1833 renewal of the Company’s charter. Ardent free-trader James Silk Buckingham linked India’s “liability to destruction from floods and tigers” to the EIC’s “barbarous system of rack-renting” and its “utter disregard” for the land’s future condition.⁷⁷ Even more damningly, this state of affairs contrasted with the relative prosperity of princely states where “great useful works are found and maintained.” Buckingham also drew attention to the Company’s opprobrious monopoly over salt production in Bengal. Reflecting on the sight of peasants compelled “to work in the salt pans under the scorching heat of the meridian sun,” he suggested that the African sugar cultivators in the West Indies enjoyed a slightly more favorable existence.

⁷⁵ For Thompson, “Burke’s severe rebuke” still held true: “if the English were driven from India, they would leave behind them no memorial worthy of a great and enlightened nation.” See Thompson, *Addresses; delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta*, 69. Later reformers made use of this quote as well. See Malcolm Lewin, *The Government of the East India Company, and its Monopolies*, (London: James Ridgway, 1857), 9.

⁷⁶ Edmund Burke, “Speech on the Nabob of Arcot’s Debts, 28 February 1785,” in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 5, 522.

⁷⁷ J. S. Buckingham, Speech to House of Commons, July 22 1833, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 19, 1833, cols. 1071-72. In the same debate, the Company surgeon-turned-parliamentarian Joseph Hume attributed numerous diseases afflicting the poorest Bengalis to the absence of salt in their diet.

Between 1837 and 1839, a handful of colonial agents published unofficial accounts testifying to the extent of misgovernment in India and the results of the grinding revenue system. In one influential text, magistrate Frederick John Shore likened the districts outside of Bengal to an “apple in a cider press” being constantly squeezed by avaricious collectors.⁷⁸ As the state had anointed itself sole proprietor, or universal landlord, redress from this extortive system was “almost unattainable.”⁷⁹ Former judge-advocate G. E. Westmacott also observed that the Company had failed to adequately redistribute its resources: “charitable institutions, the asylums for the poor, the sick, and the maimed, [and] splendid and useful public works” were all “crumbling to dust.”⁸⁰ Dr. Henry Spry’s *Modern India* travelogue, a favorite primer for aspiring India reformers, reiterated Buckingham’s claim that the only well-maintained works were to be found in princely territories.⁸¹ American visitors concurred that the over-taxed *ryots* were reduced to a state “below that of our Southern slaves.”⁸²

These revelations provided reformers with key evidence of Indians’ ongoing debasement. Listing a litany of injustices, Howitt questioned why the “avowed slavery of some half million of negroes in the West Indies” continued to excite abolitionist interest, while “the virtual slavery of these *hundred millions* of Hindus in their own land” went unobserved.⁸³ Once Thompson took up the cause of India reform, local presses characterized the enterprise as an abolitionist offshoot and applauded his efforts to rescue

⁷⁸ F. J. Shore, *Notes on Indian Affairs*, vol. 1 (London: John W. Parker, 1837), 171. India reformers cited this same passage during the hearings of the Select Committee on the Growth of Cotton in India in 1848.

⁷⁹ Quoted in [R. M. Martin], “Prosperity of India,” in *The Oriental Herald and Colonial Intelligencer*, vol. 3 (London: Madden & Co., 1839), 122.

⁸⁰ G. E. Westmacott, *Our Indian Empire* (London: “Free Press” Office, 1838), 47.

⁸¹ Henry Spry, *Modern India; with Illustrations of the Resources and Capabilities of Hindustan*, vol. 2 (London: Whittaker & Co., 1837), 11.

⁸² Thompson, *Lectures on British India, delivered in the Friends’ Meeting-House*, 69.

⁸³ William Howitt, *Colonization and Christianity: a Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in all their Colonies* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1838), 304.

“over a Hundred Million of our fellow-subjects...from a condition of poverty and slavery.”⁸⁴ Incidentally, improving the *ryots*’ standard of living would create a new customer base for British manufactures and thereby promote the “happiness of the population at our own doors.” By the time of the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, reformers had come to consider the East Indies as a “place where the worst slavery exists” for “not only the actual bondsman [but] every occupier...under the basest tyranny.”⁸⁵ Similar sentiments expressed in the *Liberator* deplored the “degrading slavery” under which the *ryots* had “no title to their land, no right to their houses, [and] no species of permanent property, because the maladministration of the British Government in India has left them beggars in their native land.”⁸⁶ This defense of the *ryots*’ interests dovetailed with the reformers’ campaign to curtail the Mauritius and Guiana coolie trade. It was the oppressive land tax, Pease determined, that led “to want and starvation...compelling millions to become slaves for a long series of years.”⁸⁷ Aligning himself with Pease and Martin,⁸⁸ Irish MP Daniel O’Connell bombastically claimed that he would prefer “the total annihilation of [the Indian] race” over “their being subjected to a new species of slavery.”⁸⁹

⁸⁴ George Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes of the British Settlements and Colonies, and the Manufacturing and Commercial Prosperity of the Parent Country,” *Renfrewshire Reformer*, November 24 1838, 1.

⁸⁵ Anna Stoddart, *Elizabeth Pease Nichol* (London, 1899), 106.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸⁷ Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor Migration to the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 120.

⁸⁸ Martin opposed the India Labourers Protection Bill in 1838, as he feared it would draft Indians “from their native country to pestilential climates, in order that sugar, molasses, and coffee, might be raised out of their blood and bones.” See “Debate at the East-India House,” in *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, vol. 27 (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1838), 52.

⁸⁹ Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 154.

To provoke the kind of “exact, slow, active, engaging seeing” that Thomas Laquer associates with the “creation of sentiment,”⁹⁰ reformers adapted forms of narration that foregrounded the pathos of bodily suffering. There were certainly many templates from which they could draw. During the Hastings trial, Burke had recounted the harrowing experiences of the native population under the governor-general’s reign of terror. Upstarts like tax collector Devi Singh subjected the cultivators to “cursed anarchy under the pretence of revenue,” as the non-payer could suffer a loss of limbs or be thrown into a well.⁹¹ In the 1806 trial of Trinidad governor Thomas Picton for the torture of Louisa Calderon, the prosecution’s lurid portrayal of the event was captured in images that were recreated and circulated in the metropole.⁹² Abolitionists, too, noted that members of the giving public were wont to contribute to causes that they could observe firsthand. Lingering on the “sensual details of cruelty,” their polemic exposed the condition of slavery as a perversion of the Victorian domestic ideal and recounted tales of desperate slaves driven to inhumane acts.⁹³

Accounts emanating from India told of the “total debasement of human nature” amongst the peasantry as “every natural affection [was] being absorbed in the universal principle of self-preservation.”⁹⁴ Thompson and Martin embellished this narrative of dehumanization by depicting a benighted country in which *ryots* were “dying like dogs,”

⁹⁰ Thomas Laquer, “Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of ‘Humanity,’” in *Humanitarianism and Suffering: the Mobilization of Empathy*, eds. R. A. Wilson and R. D. Brown (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40.

⁹¹ Lida Maxwell, *Public Trials: Burke, Zola, Arendt, and the Politics of Lost Causes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 66.

⁹² James Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule: Power and Subversion in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 29-30.

⁹³ Abruzzo references a gruesome illustration in the *Anti-Slavery Almanac* of an enslaved mother hacking her children to pieces to prevent their sale. See Margaret Abruzzo, *Polemical Pain: Slavery, Cruelty, and the Rise of Humanitarianism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 129-38.

⁹⁴ T. B. H., ‘Famine in India,’ *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany* 26 (1838): 269.

while mothers threw their starving children into the Jumna River under the cover of darkness.⁹⁵ Elsewhere, Thompson lamented that a land of “gorgeous scenery” and “unequalled fertility” was now being “ravaged by disease and famine, and infested with mendicants, robbers, and murderers.”⁹⁶ The jungle threatened to reclaim civilization; scavengers pounced upon the dying while corpses impeded “the courses of small rivers.”⁹⁷ Identifying the Company as a habitual offender, Howitt offered excerpts from Abbé Raynal’s account of the 1770 Bengal famine that depicted the Ganges choked with bodies, infants expiring “on the breasts of their mothers,” and peaceable natives “trampling under foot all authority, as well as every sentiment of nature and reason.”⁹⁸ Utterly demoralized, these *ryots* had thrown “themselves at the feet of the Europeans, entreating them to take them in as their slaves.”

The present crisis offered nothing less than a test of national morality. Inverting Evangelical language so often levied against Hindu practices, reformers rallied against famine deaths as a “horrid sacrifice to a selfish and inhuman system.”⁹⁹ Though metropolitan philanthropists were familiar with the “dreadful cruelty and suffering under the system of black-slavery,” the Agra famine cast light upon the comparable level of human devastation wrought by “fiscal oppression.”¹⁰⁰ Outside of Bengal, *ryots* contended with a hefty land tax that varied by the year and could only be paid in specie rather than in kind. Briggs, the author of an influential tome on the matter, declared that the

⁹⁵ “Public Meeting,” *Glasgow Argus*, September 10, 1838, Library of Congress (LOC), Scrapbooks collected by Thompson and Chesson (Scrapbooks), E449.S43, vol. 5, 60. See also British India Society, *British Subjects Destroyed by Famine* (London: Johnston & Barrett, 1839), 2.

⁹⁶ Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes,” 4.

⁹⁷ *British India. The Duty and Interest of Great Britain*, 15.

⁹⁸ Howitt, *Colonization*, 269-71. Well into the nineteenth century, the colonial administration continued to tolerate “distress sales” of native children.

⁹⁹ *Speeches, delivered at a Public Meeting for the Formation of a British India Society* (London, 1839), 56.

¹⁰⁰ [Untitled], *Morning Herald*, December 25, 1838, LOC, Scrapbooks, vol. 5.

government's inflated assessment "bears down the peasant, and reduces him to a condition little better than that of a slave of the soil."¹⁰¹ The employment of costly European collectors, who each maintained a retinue of grasping agents, further contributed to a tax burden that had nearly doubled since the transition from direct Mughal rule.¹⁰² Reformers therefore demanded the extension of the Permanent Settlement, which would enable the *ryots* to utilize the surplus produced in bountiful years to temper periods of depression.¹⁰³ But land taxes were not the sole source of India's woes. Prejudicial tariffs compelled natives to receive England's steam-wrought manufactures "almost duty free," while Indian textiles and produce were effectively barred from the home market.¹⁰⁴ The transmission of Company officials' private fortunes to England, which totaled half a million pounds annually, also justified their reputation as "birds of prey and passage."¹⁰⁵ Subtracting these remittances, additional home charges, the interest on the Indian debt, and exhaustive military costs, the colonial government was only left to operate on about one fifth of the revenue collected. The vampiric nature of this drain was not lost on the Indian intelligentsia, who grew to resent the British as "angels in theory but demons in practice."¹⁰⁶

Company apologists repudiated the reformist line that famine conditions were preventable. One editorial in the colonial press resented "the interference of mistaken

¹⁰¹ George Thompson, *British India; its Condition, Prospects, and Resources* (Sheffield, 1839), 5.

¹⁰² John Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India Considered as a Measure of Finance* (London; Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1830), 438-42. Briggs also served as treasurer for the BIS.

¹⁰³ The Permanent Settlement of 1793 fixed the Company's land revenue assessment in Bengal in perpetuity. O'Connell lobbied to extend the settlement throughout India. See *Proceedings of a Public Meeting for the Formation of the Northern Central British India Society* (Manchester, 1840), 37.

¹⁰⁴ R. M. Martin, *Taxation of the British Empire* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1833), 230.

¹⁰⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce* (House of Commons, 1840), 296.

¹⁰⁶ "Debate at the East-India House, Dec. 19. – Land Revenues of India," in *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, vol. 28 (London; W. H. Allen and Co., 1839), 66. Reformist commentators also compared the Company's conduct to that of a "vampyre" whose sole purpose was to drink India's national "life-blood and drain its strength, to the last stage of exhaustion, in the shape of gold." See "Present Condition of British India," *Eclectic Review* 7 (1840): 311.

philanthropists at home' and sardonically predicted that Martin would move to recall the governor-general and appoint himself as successor.¹⁰⁷ An incredulous writer for the *Edinburgh Review* also questioned the necessity of the BIS, noting that "Mr. Thompson's picture [was] not like enough to be even a tolerable caricature" of the present state of India.¹⁰⁸ Still, some non-official Anglo-Indians, like one "young married lady" in Madras, observed that Thompson's "accounts of the shameful taxation" were "not in the least exaggerated."¹⁰⁹ The reformers' agitation also found favor with members of the incipient Bengal British India Society who concurred that the Company had violated the *ryots'* customary landholding rights. No government could justly anoint itself sole proprietor of a country's territory for "property, as being the product of labour, [was] natural with man."¹¹⁰ Some radical voices even went beyond Thompson and charged *zamindars* and brahmins with subjugating the *ryots* in a manner reminiscent of the American plantation owners.¹¹¹

In establishing virtual slavery as an endemic imperial evil, reformers asserted that the same coercive state apparatuses rooted in monopolization were curtailing the liberties of the *ryots* and metropolitan labourers alike. Much as the Company's tax demands inhibited the peasantry's productive powers, the aristocracy's manipulation of the grain market impoverished the British worker. Due to mill stoppages, 15 per cent of cotton

¹⁰⁷ "Asiatic Intelligence – Calcutta," in *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, vol. 30 (London: W H. Allen and Co., 1839), 178.

¹⁰⁸ "Revenue System of British India," *Edinburgh Review* 70, no. 142 (1840): 394.

¹⁰⁹ "A Lady" [Julia Charlotte Maitland], *Letters from Madras, during the years 1836-1839* (London: John Murray, 1846), 114.

¹¹⁰ Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 93.

¹¹¹ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 114. Later social reformers like Jyotirao Phule similarly condemned the Aryan brahmins for having invented the caste system to subjugate the indigenous population and "rivet firmly on them the chains of perpetual bondage and slavery." See J. G. Fule, *Slavery. (In This Civilised British Government under the Cloak of Brahmanism)*, 1873.

operatives were thrown out of employment by the end of 1841 and quickly degenerated into shades of their former selves amidst Manchester's urban squalor.¹¹² In response, Chartists and ACLL polemicists employed Gothic imagery, giving credence to rumors that the urban poor were consuming the remains of dead dogs and committing infanticide as an act of mercy.¹¹³ Leading an investigation into the plight of these labourers, philanthropist Joseph Adshead collected statistical data and anecdotal evidence confirming the extent of economic distress. His informants noted the "strange anomaly" of seeing "in wealthy, civilised, Christian England, multitudes of men living in the lowest state of physical degradation, and absolutely perishing from neglect."¹¹⁴ Searching for a prophylactic against such recessions, Adshead had previously demanded the "removal of the shackles upon industry" that restricted the entry of Indian produce into the home market and reduced the natives' purchasing power.¹¹⁵ Reformist publications also admitted that it was impossible to "look upon a languid, unemployed operative, without being reminded of the errors... which have marked our government of India."¹¹⁶

In the fractured realm of middle-class philanthropy, some leaders of the ACLL considered India reform a distraction and sought to poach its leading lecturer.¹¹⁷ Thompson agreed to temporarily enlist with the League, although he reassured supporters that he was not "ceasing (even for a time) to labour for India," as the two campaigns were

¹¹² G. R. Boyer, "The Historical Background of the Communist Manifesto," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 12, no. 4 (1998): 159.

¹¹³ Gurney, "Rejoicing in Potatoes," 116.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Adshead, *Distress in Manchester. Evidence of the State of the Labouring Classes in 1840-42* (London: Henry Hooper, 1842), 50.

¹¹⁵ *Proceedings of a Public Meeting for the Formation of the Northern Central British India Society*, vii. Abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, a famed advocate of free labour cultivation in Africa and India, served as this organization's first president.

¹¹⁶ "Justice to India," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 13 (November 1, 1841): 45.

¹¹⁷ His transfer signaled the beginning of the end for the BIS. See Laidlaw, "Justice to India – Prosperity to England – Freedom to the Slave!" 317.

mutually reinforcing.¹¹⁸ In depicting the havoc wrought by protectionism throughout the empire, Thompson once more relied on tropes of inversion and atavism. The Corn Laws, he declared, converted “plenty into scarcity” and turned “the field into a forest” by triggering price fluctuations and panics.¹¹⁹ Such despoliation was contrary to natural law, as it impeded “the free gifts of God to the creatures he has made, and for whom he cares with the solicitude of a parent.” Unable to satiate their “animal wants,” the working classes suffered a ‘concomitant deterioration of public and private morals’ and lacked any incentive for self-improvement.¹²⁰ Artificial poverty also impaired the labourer’s liberties by making him solely dependent on the state’s reformatory institutions. In most cases, the pauper could not claim any protection unless he was “in a union house, the outcast in a prison, or the exile...far from the place of his nativity.”¹²¹ The most needy Britons were effectively banished from their homeland and compelled “to find asylum in some foreign land from penury and helplessness.”¹²²

One of Thompson’s initiatives for the ACLL, which had begun to rebrand repeal of the Corn Laws as a Christian duty, was to organize a “sanctified parliament” of clergymen modeled on the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention.¹²³ Ditching the usual Evangelical interpretation of economic calamity as a sign of divine retribution, attendees

¹¹⁸ George Thompson, *Corn Laws. Lectures, delivered before the Ladies of Manchester and its Vicinity, on the Subject of a Memorial to the Queen* (Manchester: Haycraft, 1841), 19. Upon voyaging to India in 1843, Thompson was appointed agent for Calcutta’s Landholders’ Society; he subsequently established an office in London on its behalf. See S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Vikas Press, 1971), 13.

¹¹⁹ Thompson, *Corn Laws. Lectures, delivered before the Ladies of Manchester*, 36-37, 42. Instead of exchanging manufactures for foodstuffs, Britain was forced to pay for foreign grain in gold in the event of a poor harvest.

¹²⁰ George Thompson, *Farewell Address of George Thompson, Esq., to the National Anti-Corn-Law League* (Manchester, 1842), 9.

¹²¹ Thompson, *Corn Laws. Lectures, delivered before the Ladies of Manchester*, 14.

¹²² Thompson, “The Connection between the Protection and Civilization of the Native Tribes,” 6.

¹²³ Paul Pickering, *The People’s Bread: a History of the Anti-Corn Law League* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), 95.

concurred that Britain's plight was "self-inflicted," the "result of a departure, by human legislation, from the spirit and mandates of the divine law."¹²⁴ But ministers would win few converts to the cause of free trade so long as Britain's agriculturists remained in a state of "abject dependence upon those whose will can any time dispossess them of their means of subsistence."¹²⁵ Facing high food prices and rack rents, the farmhand was bound in "slavery to his landlord" and condemned to "ignorance [and] tame submission to feudal tyranny."¹²⁶ These observations echoed the classic anti-monopoly line that arbitrary rent hikes "virtually include[d] the essence of personal slavery" by obliging "one man to labour for the benefit of another without an equivalent."¹²⁷ Nursing great expectations, Thompson anticipated that repeal would finally liberate the English tenant farmers "from their bondage to the aristocratic proprietors of the soil" and lead them to embrace finance and franchise reform.¹²⁸ As MP, he continued to rail against the electoral system of "mock representation" that was "directly calculated to make men crouching slaves."

Thompson's fellow lecturers on the free trade circuit invoked the motif of virtual slavery in a complementary fashion. According to one pamphleteer, the Corn Laws constituted a "Jacobin" assault against customary labour rights; forcing a worker to toil "twelve hours for the bread that might be got in eight" was nothing less than an act of

¹²⁴ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: the Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 247.

¹²⁵ "National Conference of Ministers of Religion of all Denominations on the Subject of the Corn Laws," *British Indian Advocate*, no. 10 (September 1, 1841): 111.

¹²⁶ George Thompson, *Lecture on the Corn Laws* (Carlisle, 1842), 13.

¹²⁷ Thomas Perronet Thompson, *Catechism on the Corn Laws; with a List of Fallacies and the Answers*, 18th ed. (London, 1834), 31.

¹²⁸ "Speech of Mr. Thompson," *Liberator*, November 22, 1850, 187.

“man-stealing,” an unjust tax of men’s “nerves and sinews.”¹²⁹ Locking horns with the protectionist BFASS, which prioritized the economic interests of recently liberated cultivators in the West Indies, Howitt denounced the tariffs that prevented the influx of cheap sugar into England. Slavery, he reminded his abolitionist listeners, did not simply consist of being “bought and sold,” but rather was a general “condition of privation of free will, and being put under the arbitrary will of another.”¹³⁰ Idle, starving metropolitan workers were effectively “the slaves of political enactments” and the victims of market manipulations. Their emancipation could only come about through investment in the low-cost, free labour production of Indian sugar and cotton.

By representing concomitant reform initiatives as a grand rebuff of monopolization, polemicists within Thompson’s circle were able to orient the *ryots* and working classes as victims of a common plight. The recession and Agra famine had not been triggered by pestilence or internal wars, but rather were the result of governmental malfeasance. When Britain suffered yet another downturn in 1847, reformers once more declared that the Company ought put India’s “millions in motion, and bury American Slavery for ever beneath the limitless mass of free-labour produce that she will pour in upon us.”¹³¹ Evidence presented to John Bright’s select committee on the growth of Indian cotton spoke to the adequacy of soils and the capitalistic disposition of the native population. If the “land were not incumbered by taxes” and “the natives were not in a state of almost

¹²⁹ Philip Harwood, *Six Lectures on the Corn-Law Monopoly and Free Trade* (London: John Green, 1843), 24-26.

¹³⁰ William Howitt, *A Serious Address to the Members of the Anti-Slavery Society on its Present Position and Prospects* (London, 1843), 7, 9.

¹³¹ William Howitt, “Thomas Clarkson, the Advocate of the Extinction of Slavery by Means of India,” *Howitts’ Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* 2 (1847): 338.

inextricable slavery,” the subcontinent’s supply of cotton would surely increase.¹³² As reformers continued to charge the Company with obstructing economic development, they simultaneously contested its coercive approach to inter-state politics by popularizing the figure of the fallen prince as a virtual slave. The following section will plumb the depths of the prolonged Satara agitation, a historically neglected but contemporarily provocative affair that tested the limits of public sphere agitation.

Script 2: The Native Prince as Disposable Tool

On the night of September 4, 1839, Raja Pratap Singh was roused from his slumber and ousted from his palace, the victim of a cabal between his brother Appa Sahib and political agent Colonel Charles Ovans. Thrown “half-naked” into a palanquin, the newly minted political prisoner was marched into exile with his courtly retinue. The raja’s advisor, Balla Sahib Senaputtee, pleaded for a halt when his wife gave birth shortly after the journey commenced; denied this request, he suffered a fit of duress, contracted an illness, and died. Pratap Singh’s *vakeels* (legal agents) denounced these events as “repugnant to justice and humanity” and demanded “as their birthright...a fair and impartial inquiry into the charges against his Highness.”¹³³ As acting chairman of the BIS, Charles Forbes petitioned the House of Commons in September 1841 to account for the cruelties endured by the raja. Ovans refuted his accusations, claiming that the march was a lavish and leisurely affair that had been planned three months in advance.¹³⁴ This

¹³² George Thompson, Speech to House of Commons, June 18, 1850, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 112, 1850, col. 57.

¹³³ E. R. R. Sirkey, B. R. Wittul and R. Bapojee, *A Letter with Accompaniments from Eswunt Row Raja Sirkey, Bhugwunt Row Wittul and Rungo Bapojee, Vakeels of His Highness the Deposed Raja of Sattara* (London, 1841), 34-36.

¹³⁴ “Letter from Lieutenant-colonel C. Ovans, Resident at Sattara, to J. P. Willoughby,” in *Copies or Extracts of Correspondence and Papers relating to, and explanatory of the Deposition of the Raja of*

rebuttal was hardly the end of the matter. As late as 1847, John Cam Hobhouse, the President of the BoC, was still denouncing Forbes' petition as a libelous assassination of Ovans' character. Regarding the dethronement, he concluded that "the forfeiture of the dominion of a dependent chief" could not "be placed on the footing of a criminal trial in a court of judicature."¹³⁵ The raja's right to a fair trial, in other words, was denied.

Full of "the marvelous, the romantic, and the affecting,"¹³⁶ what Garrison termed "the atrocious case of the afflicted Rajah of Sattara" could be transposed into a constitutionalist morality play in a way that fiscal debates could not.¹³⁷ From the arrival of Pratap Singh's representatives to London in 1838 to the Company's contested annexation of the territory in 1849, the matter galvanized reform networks that persisted long after the BIS had fallen into abeyance. Throughout this period, Thompson and his associates enumerated the injustices suffered by Pratap Singh as a semi-autonomous ruler. The victim of a conspiracy orchestrated by Company officials and local brahmins alike, he had been tried by an illegal secret commission and deprived of the universal right to contest the charges. Forced to admit his guilt or suffer exile in Benares, the raja confronted the startling reality that British paramountcy over the princely states knew no legal bounds.¹³⁸

Sattara, Part II, House of Commons (London, 1843), 1291. According to Lieutenant F. Cristall, who supervised the march, Balla Sahib had taken ill with a cold in late January and refused the aid of a Company surgeon; both he and the former raja preferred to use a *hakim* in medical matters. See F. Cristall to C. Ovans, March 12, 1840, BL, Papers of Sir John Willoughby, Mss Eur E293/152.

¹³⁵ John Cam Hobhouse, Speech to House of Commons, July 6, 1847, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 93, 1847, col. 1236.

¹³⁶ George Thompson, *The Plot Unravelled. Speech of George Thompson, Esq., at a Great Meeting in the Hanover Square Rooms* (London: Ridgway, Piccadilly, and Effingham Wilson, 1847), 33.

¹³⁷ William Lloyd Garrison to Helen Garrison, September 13, 1846, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 3, 393.

¹³⁸ Company apologists countered that the raja was merely obliged to reaffirm his subservience to the British resident, which the second article of the 1819 treaty had initially mandated.

The fact that Thompson received a retainer as a paid agent of the raja (which he later used to fund his parliamentary campaign) has led to an undue emphasis on his pecuniary motivations.¹³⁹ Historian S. R. Mehrotra disparaged Thompson for having “wasted time and energy in taking up the cause of the deposed Raja” rather than “working for the people of India” more generally.¹⁴⁰ A contributor to the *Calcutta Review* levied this same criticism in 1848, remarking that the very mention of Satara functioned as a “potent talisman...to clear the benches” of the House of Commons and discourage readership of India reform propaganda.¹⁴¹ But other commentators denounced the dethronement as a reckless scheme of territorial aggrandizement reminiscent of “the days of Lord Clive and Warren Hastings.”¹⁴² The Company’s meddling in Satara also gained notoriety in the aftermath of the Uprising of 1857, when critics denounced the annexation as a formative experiment with the doctrine of lapse¹⁴³ and a blatant disavowal of the law of nations.

Even before the Satara quagmire, reformers were echoing Burke’s conclusion that there was not “a single prince, state, or potentate, with whom the rulers of India had come in contact that they had not sold.”¹⁴⁴ Prefacing a transcript of one of Thompson’s lectures, the editor of the *Glasgow Argus* bewailed the fact that the “princes of India [were] now but slaves of the Government of India...crouching and often disaffected vassals of British

¹³⁹ Thompson was forced to publicly defend his probity, declaring in one letter to the editor of the *Bengal Hurkaru* that he “would see [his] children starve, rather than feed them on the wages of prostitution.” See *Ninth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society* (Glasgow: David Russell, 1843), 55.

¹⁴⁰ Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress*, 23.

¹⁴¹ W. Murray, “Satara, - And British Connexion Therewith,” in *Selections from the Calcutta Review*, vol. 3 (London: Trübner & Co. 1882), 218.

¹⁴² “Dethronement of the Raja of Sattara,” *Liverpool Mercury*, April 23, 1841.

¹⁴³ Governor-General Dalhousie utilized this pseudo-legal mechanism to confiscate princely states from Hindu rulers who failed to produce a blood heir. See J. C. Marshman, *The History of India*, vol. 2 (Serampore: Serampore Press, 1867), 724.

¹⁴⁴ “India and the Colonies. A Lecture by Mr. George Thompson delivered in Rose Street Chapel, Edinburgh, December 17, 1838,” LOC, Scrapbooks, vol. 6, 6.

power.”¹⁴⁵ Elsewhere, Thompson audaciously claimed that the “misery engendered” by colonial governance in India could exceed that of “the West India system, with all its horrors.”¹⁴⁶ The ruling classes, in particular, were “compelled to bow humbly” before juvenile British tax-gatherers and suffered a striking loss of status. Thompson offered the example of the Raja of Nagpur, who was forced to construct and maintain a road exclusively used by Company officials for their evening drives; soldiers stationed along its course prevented the raja’s own subjects from even setting foot on the thoroughfare. Other reformers confirmed that the Company had pulled every one of the princes “from their thrones, or has left them there the contemptible puppets of a power that works its arbitrary will through them.”¹⁴⁷

Pratap Singh’s dynasty was initially “resurrected” in 1818 during the Third Anglo-Mahratta War to diminish popular support for the insurgent Peshwa. In placing the raja at “the head of an independent Sovereignty,” Bombay governor Mountstuart Elphinstone also aimed to guarantee the allotment of pensions to leading brahmins and preserve tax-free *inams*.¹⁴⁸ According to a series of British “residents” stationed at the raja’s court, Pratap Singh internalized the principles of enlightened governance; he established schools, collected taxes efficiently, sponsored public works, and oversaw an efficient judicial system.¹⁴⁹ If these agents identified one fault with the raja, it was his tendency to

¹⁴⁵ “Mr. Thompson’s Lecture on the Duty of Great Britain to her Hundred Million of Subjects in the East, delivered in George Street Chapel, Glasgow, on Wednesday, November 14 1838,” LOC, Scrapbooks, vol. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Thompson, *British India; its Condition*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Howitt, *Colonization*, 213. This critique echoed Burke’s claim that the Company rendered native princes “odious” to their subjects by converting them into the instruments of the colonial regime.

¹⁴⁸ John Sullivan, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir John Hobhouse* (London: G. Norman, 1850), 17; “Dissent by Henry St. George Tucker,” in *Papers relating to the Question of the Disposal of the Sattara State, in Consequence of the Death of the Late Raja* (London: J. & H. Cox, 1849), 161.

¹⁴⁹ John Briggs, “Final Report on the Raja’s Government,” January 1, 1827, Bodleian Library (BOD), John Briggs Papers, MSS.Eng.hist.C333, ff. 69-71.

guard his prerogatives as a semi-autonomous ruler. Although an 1819 treaty declared that he would govern in “subordinate cooperation” with British authorities, the details of this arrangement were never fully clarified. In one instance, Briggs (the resident at the time) had clashed with Pratap Singh over a property inheritance involving two young widows and a selection of possible heirs. Resenting Briggs’ interference, the raja bypassed him altogether and sought confirmation from Bombay that he alone could settle the matter.¹⁵⁰ Pratap Singh also maintained a watchful eye over local notables who were in possession of certain *jagirs*.¹⁵¹ Elphinstone seemingly confirmed that these territories were personal land grants that the raja could redeem upon the death of their present holders.¹⁵² When Pratap Singh pressed the issue in the early 1830s, the CoD decreed “the Raja’s claims to the reversion of the feudal chiefs, of whom by treaty he was a sovereign...should be admitted.”¹⁵³ The Bombay government dissented and withheld the Court’s reply for nearly three years. In the interim, its officials gave credence to rumors that the raja was entertaining hostile designs toward the Company and had violated the treaty article that forbade association with foreign powers.

In his final report on Satara, Briggs informed Elphinstone of whispers that Pratap Singh was engaged in unapproved communications with the Raja of Kolhapur and other

¹⁵⁰ John Briggs, “The Phulthun Nimbalkur Family Case,” October 31, 1826, BOD, John Briggs Papers, MSS.Eng.hist.C333, ff. 21-39. Despite this friction, Briggs received a diamond ring and a sword from Pratap Singh upon his resignation in 1827; he later advocated on behalf of the raja throughout the 1840s. See Arvind Deshpande, *John Briggs in Maharashtra: a Study of District Administration under Early British Rule* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1987), 178.

¹⁵¹ Feudal estates granted by a princely sovereign often in recognition of past service. Advocates in the CoP asserted that the 1819 treaty fixed the boundaries of Satara at the Neera River, but also gave the raja jurisdiction over these specific *jagirs* beyond its borders. See *Proceedings at a Special General Court of Proprietors of East India Stock...Respecting the Dethronement of his Highness the Raja of Satara* (London: J. Wilson, 1840), 34.

¹⁵² Elphinstone informed the subordinate *jagirdars* that the raja ruled as the *de facto* paramount power and would determine the legitimacy of their adoptions. See “Dissent by John Shepherd,” in *Papers relating to the Question of the Disposal of the Sattara State*, 165.

¹⁵³ Pratap Singh, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Sir Henry Hardinge* (London: Alex Munro, 1845), 6.

petty chiefs. But he speculated that these rumors need “create no suspicion in the mind of the Honorable Governor in Council as to the fidelity and attachment of the present Raja.”¹⁵⁴ Elphinstone concurred that these liaisons were likely an attempt at self-inflation. A decade later, accusations of conspiracy emerged once more and ultimately cost the raja his throne. In July 1836, Resident Peter Lodwick informed his superiors in Bombay of an unsubstantiated allegation: Pratap Singh had attempted to involve two *subedhars* (native officers) in an anti-British plot. Despite the absence of hard evidence backing these claims, Governor Robert Grant notified the Secret Committee in September and dispatched Ovans and government secretary J. P. Willoughby to convene a secret commission of inquiry.¹⁵⁵ This investigation functioned as a kind of summary court martial. Barred from conducting a cross-examination, the raja was neither permitted legal representation nor provided with copies of the officers’ depositions in Marathi, his native language. A regretful Lodwick later alleged that his colleagues were eager to convict the raja from the outset as a “damned scoundrel...treacherous to that power which had raised him from a prison to a throne.”¹⁵⁶ Though the commission officially disbanded in November after a key informer admitted to perjury, Ovans continued to linger at Satara as a “grand inquisitor” and was appointed as Lodwick’s successor the following June.

From that point on, Ovans proceeded to dredge up new conspiracies at every turn. Pratap Singh had reportedly connived with the Raja of Jodhpur to foment a Maratha restoration and encouraged Mudhoji Bhonsle, the indigent Raja of Nagpur, to facilitate a

¹⁵⁴ Briggs, “Final Report on the Raja’s Government,” f. 93.

¹⁵⁵ In a later minute, Grant admitted that the raja “has a right to be heard in his own vindication” and urged his subordinates to avoid a “farce of a trial.” See Rungo Bapojee, *Rajah of Sattara. A Letter to the Right Hon. J. C. Herries, M.P.* (London: G. Norman, 1852), 46.

¹⁵⁶ “Letter from Major-General Peter Lodwick to the Chairman of the Court of Directors,” in *Papers Respecting the Case of the Raja of Sattara* (London; J. L. Cox & Sons, 1842), 7.

Russian invasion of India with Turkish support.¹⁵⁷ The Bombay authorities noted that Pratap Singh had sent Bhonsle a pair of shoes and a sword as a collusive overture, though this claim itself was uncorroborated. More shockingly, Ovens reported that the raja had approached Don Manoel, the Viceroy of Goa, to secure 30,000 troops for his revolt.¹⁵⁸ Even after Pratap Singh was deposed and exiled to Benares, the Bombay government continued to situate him at the nexus of multiple transregional plots.¹⁵⁹ Thompson and Briggs contended that any treasonable correspondence was a forgery, the work of a long-running brahminical conspiracy to unseat the raja and his supporters belonging to the Kayastha Prabhu caste.¹⁶⁰ Ovens, the reformers declared, was party to these machinations from the outset and could soundly be counted amongst “the greatest living criminals” for his role in the regime change.¹⁶¹

Since the late eighteenth century, the Company had utilized its residency system to monitor the native sovereigns and curb their communication with other Indian rulers or foreign powers. The opening of steamship routes in the 1830s put this programme of “official and enforced isolation” under severe stress.¹⁶² In April 1837, Governor Grant tentatively allowed Pratap Singh to hire an agent who could bring the *jagir* debacle to the attention of the metropolitan authorities. The central government acknowledged the raja’s

¹⁵⁷ A handful of itinerants detained at Nellore in 1838 implicated Pratap Singh as the conduit linking the Raja of Jodhpur with Mubariz ud-Daula, the sponsor of Wahhabism in Hyderabad. See Sullivan, *Speech of Mr. John Sullivan, in the Court of Proprietors*, 27-28.

¹⁵⁸ Manoel vigorously contested this charge after Joseph Hume contacted him directly in 1841.

¹⁵⁹ *Papers regarding the Motion of William Hume M.P. in favour of the deposed Raja of Satara*, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/109. In the spring of 1841, Ovens suspected that the raja had somehow dispatched the ‘blind Brahmin’ Nursoo Punt to incite a rising of Arabs in Badami. See *Raja Shahji of Satara, 1830-1848: Select Documents from the Satara Residency Records, Peshwa Daftar, Poona*, ed. R. D. Choksey (Poona, 1974), 7.

¹⁶⁰ John Briggs, “*The Plot Discovered.*” *Speech of Major-General Briggs, Exposing the Conspiracy to Dethrone the Raja of Sattara* (London: A. Munro, 1847), 19-23.

¹⁶¹ George Thompson, *The Raja of Sattara: his Innocence Declared by the Governor-General’s Agent* (London: Tyler and Reed, 1847), 23.

¹⁶² Michael Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764-1858* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 62.

right to dispatch his personal physician, Dr. Milne, to London. Having relinquished its economic monopoly, the Company could no longer circumscribe the movements of British subjects with ease, let alone bar “respectable individuals...from undertaking the defence of natives of rank.”¹⁶³ But the Bombay administration soon altered its position and declared that the home government was effectively a foreign power; if the raja directly interacted with the BoC or CoD, he would be in violation of the treaty of 1819.¹⁶⁴ Acting-Governor James Farish sabotaged one deputation’s attempted venture to England in the winter of 1838 by instructing the Collector of Sea Customs at Bombay to bar a French-owned ship from departing with the agents onboard. Treating the raja’s representative as contraband irked leading representative Rungo Bapojee, who bemoaned his countrymen’s apparent lack of legal rights.¹⁶⁵ Whereas the “slave-born native of Africa” became free upon touching British soil, “the free-born, but wronged, Native of India’ was “hunted, tracked, imprisoned, heavily fined, and the law twisted and tortured to chain him to the earth.”¹⁶⁶ In practice, the directors were under no obligation to recognize the delegations that did arrive. *Vakeels* were frequently forced to linger in London until they had exhausted their allowances, at which point the Company purchased their passage home.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845 on the Case of the Deposed Raja of Sattara and the Impeachment of Col. C. Ovens* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1845), 283.

¹⁶⁴ According to Thompson, Grant learned that the raja had appointed Mir Afzul Ali as his agent in the summer of 1836 and trumped up the *subedhar* case to discredit future metropole-bound deputations. See George Thompson, “The Raja of Sattara,” *Howitts’ Journal of Literature and Popular Progress* 1 (1847): 47.

¹⁶⁵ Major. B. D. Basu of the Indian Medical Service lionized Bapojee as “the first Indian agitator in England” and a forerunner of Congress leaders Dadabhai Naoroji, Lalmohan Ghose, and Surendra Banerjee. See B. D. Basu, *The Story of Satara* (Calcutta: R. Chatterjee, 1922), 183.

¹⁶⁶ Rungo Bapojee, *Statement of Rungo Bapojee, accredited agent of His Highness Purtaub Sing...at a great meeting in the Hanover Square Rooms* (London, 1846), 11.

¹⁶⁷ Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857*, (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 280.

Reformers vowed that the government could not prohibit the influx of agents into London unless “a law be passed that should make it a felony for a native to come to England at all.”¹⁶⁸ Upon their delayed arrival in London, the raja’s emissaries were incorporated within an incipient India reform network. Forbes subsidized the first deputed *vakeel*, Syed Mir Afzul Ali; Satara agents were also in attendance at the inaugural meeting of the BIS. After corresponding with Bapojee in early 1842, Thompson became “more than ever convinced of the perfect innocence of the Raja of all the acts laid to his charge.”¹⁶⁹ From that point forward, Bapojee occupied a prominent position in the reform community, accompanying Thompson to lectures on Indian governance, abolitionist gatherings, and even a party for the Lord Mayor of London.¹⁷⁰ One meeting at the Hall of Commerce, which prominently featured a reading of Bapojee’s statement on the Satara case, drew between 400 and 500 attendees and lasted over three hours.¹⁷¹ Noting his ubiquity about town, some skeptical proprietors began to discredit him as a pawn of the reformers who was simply “brought here for stage effect.”¹⁷²

India reformers contended with numerous institutional blockages while advocating on behalf of the raja. In February 1840, sympathizers in the CoP moved for an inquiry into the dethronement and were swiftly rebuked for their audacity, as it was “inexpedient” for the Court “to interfere with the responsible Executive.”¹⁷³ The Company, however, could not dismiss the House of Commons’ call for papers that came

¹⁶⁸ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845*, 171.

¹⁶⁹ George Thompson to Richard Webb, April 11, 1842, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.12.2, f. 43. Thompson initially communicated with Bapojee by using Briggs as a translator.

¹⁷⁰ “Entertainment at the Mansion-House of London,” *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, July 27, 1849.

¹⁷¹ “The Rajah of Sattara,” *The Times*, November 27, 1846, 6.

¹⁷² “Debate at the India House,” February 8, 1843, BL, Mss Eur E932/282, f. 647.

¹⁷³ Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, February 13, 1840, BL, IOR/B/270, f. 112.

down the following year. This development triggered a new barrage of requests from proprietors for a fulsome investigation; by July 1848, reformers had reportedly brought the Satara scandal to the CoP's attention on 31 occasions.¹⁷⁴ In most cases, detractors rebuffed the agitation as the work of a "small knot of persons" who had deluded the raja into squandering his resources.¹⁷⁵ Obstructionist proprietors challenged the reformers on matters of protocol, moved to strike their accusations against deceased personnel, and prematurely adjourned special general courts before their motions had received a vote. As early as August 1842, Thompson was privately admitting that the likelihood of the raja receiving an appeal was slight, but nonetheless vowed to persevere by circulating petitions amongst sympathetic MPs.¹⁷⁶ Briggs applauded Thompson's efforts to force the "defence of the Rajah of Sattara down the throats of [his] unwilling auditors," though he also doubted that Pratap Singh would ever "be replaced on the throne of his ancestors."¹⁷⁷

While reformers like Bapojee broadly "framed [their] arguments on moral and legal grounds recognized as sacred by the British establishment,"¹⁷⁸ we may further discern two distinct polemical modes that established Pratap Singh as a conscientious victim of coercion. The first characterized Ovans as a conniving scoundrel and exposed the Company's reluctance to censure its own employees.¹⁷⁹ The second cast the raja as a rights-bearing subject who had been ill-used as a virtual slave and denied a fair hearing.

¹⁷⁴ James Hogg, Speech to House of Commons, July 11, 1848, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 100, 1848, col. 437.

¹⁷⁵ "Dethronement of the Raja of Sattara: Proclamation," *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, September 11, 1839, 578.

¹⁷⁶ Thompson even suggested to radical Irish publisher Richard Webb that he reconfigure one of the raja's own dispatches as a visual prop and 'hang it up where it might be seen.' See George Thompson to R. D. Webb, August 25, 1842, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v.12.2, f. 81.

¹⁷⁷ John Briggs to George Thompson, August 2, 1842, JRL, REAS 4/3, f. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism*, 288.

¹⁷⁹ Thompson defamed Ovans as "a man with all the vices, but without one of the atoning or extenuating characteristics of Warren Hastings." See *Impeachment of the Conduct of the Court of Directors, in the Case of the Raja of Sattara* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1846), 40.

In contrast to trials of wayward colonial agents like Hastings and Picton, which operated as acts of purgation and served to “re-sanction legitimating norms,”¹⁸⁰ the Ovans debacle demonstrated that a governmental *esprit de corps* could effectively safeguard officers from public scandal. Among the reformers’ charges was the damning allegation that Ovans had extorted a false confession from imprisoned minister Govind Rao affirming the raja’s involvement in the *subedhar* affair. Ovans also allegedly came into possession of a letter signed by the minister’s mother, who implicated Pratap Singh and twelve accomplices in anti-colonial plotting in the hope of receiving clemency for her son. Upon learning that this document was inauthentic, he paid the forger, Krushnajee, a small amount of hush money rather than informing his superiors of any subterfuge.¹⁸¹

When Thompson first related this saga to the CoP in 1842, the Bombay government demanded his prosecution. He continued to encounter opposition from the majority of directors thereafter. James Hogg, a chief adversary of the reformers, inveighed that an “inquiry into charges so false and malicious” would not only place a stigma on Ovans, but also bring about “an end to the civil and military services...if a servant of the East India Company...were to be so treated.”¹⁸² In the CoP, a Mr. Fielder denigrated Thompson for behaving in a thoroughly un-English manner and called upon the chair to “stop this abuse – this venom, venom, venom.”¹⁸³ Hobhouse rebuked the Company itself for having “suffered one of their own honest servants to be calumniated and reviled by

¹⁸⁰ Epstein, *Scandal of Colonial Rule*, 42.

¹⁸¹ The mother, Girjabae, denied that she had signed the letter altogether. Krushnajee, who was initially assured he would receive a reward for his services, soon demanded more compensation and petitioned the Bombay government seven times before ultimately applying to a judge at Poona. Later, Krushnajee accused Ovans of extorting stipends for his family members from the raja, along with “gold, bullion, and Venetian necklaces” valued at 50,000 rupees. See Joseph Hume, Speech to House of Commons, July 22, 1845, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 82, 1845, col. 905.

¹⁸² *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845*, 114.

¹⁸³ Thompson, *The Raja of Sattara: his Innocence Declared by the Governor-General’s Agent*, 24.

one of the most unscrupulous scoundrels who ever lived.”¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Thompson’s Burkean invective damaged his target’s reputation and raised suspicions that Ovens’ high-ranking brother-in-law, Company secretary James Cosmo Melvill, had safeguarded his relation from further fall-out. One published poem even charged Melvill with reimbursing “his countless kindred from the public purse...wring with hot haste, by peculating knaves / From [India’s] oppress’d and *too* submissive slaves.”¹⁸⁵

While Thompson’s excoriation of Ovens met with a backlash, his defense of the raja’s natural and constitutional rights garnered wider support. Pratap Singh had been “hurled to the dust; stripped of his state, and even personal possessions” amounting to 300,000 pounds in land and private property accumulated for the support of his retinue.¹⁸⁶ In 1846, Thompson complained that the ex-raja was still languishing “in bondage a thousand miles from his native hills.”¹⁸⁷ This particular case, however, was hardly isolated, for it could very well set the stage for a more grasping style of colonial diplomacy unconcerned with maintaining the social standing of native sovereigns.¹⁸⁸ Authorities like former Bombay governor John Malcolm had previously noted the danger of rendering princes “the mock and degraded instruments of our power” while allotting them an ambiguous amount of residual sovereignty.¹⁸⁹ Reformers also observed that political agents at the native courts assumed “that these princes [were] mere tools or puppets” in their hands. Hobhouse, too, looked upon “a throne in India [as] a mere

¹⁸⁴ John Hobhouse to Henry Hardinge, October 25, 1847, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 120.

¹⁸⁵ “A Prognostic,” *British Friend of India* 8, no. 47 (1845): 177.

¹⁸⁶ “Mr. Thompson and the Rajah of Sattara,” *Indian Examiner and Universal Review* 2, no. 1 (1847): 20; Anonymous, *India Wrongs without a Remedy* (London; Saunders & Sanford, 1853), 16.

¹⁸⁷ “East India-House,” *The Times*, September 24, 1846, 6.

¹⁸⁸ *Proceedings at a Special General Court of Proprietors of East India Stock*, 51.

¹⁸⁹ J. W. Kaye, *The Life and Correspondence of Major-General Sir John Malcolm, G. C. B.*, vol. 2 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1856), 373.

bauble” that could “be taken away from these unfortunate princes just as though they were children or infants.”¹⁹⁰

If the raja was, in fact, a dependent ruler, he boasted the “undoubted privilege of all Englishmen” to contest the charges levied against him.¹⁹¹ Few parties disputed the fact that his extra-legal trial was grossly mishandled. Director John Forbes had condemned the proceedings in 1840 as a farce, noting that “no Grand Jury in England would have sent a case to trial” based on such scanty evidence.¹⁹² Former Madras official John Sullivan concurred that a charge alone “does not criminate,” for there was not a British “peasant who tills the ground, who [could] be deprived of his land except by a regular sentence of a judicial tribunal.”¹⁹³ Dragging Pratap Singh before the secret commission, moreover, was a wanton insult that only served to “degrade him in the eyes of his own subjects.”¹⁹⁴ Writing directly to the governor-general in 1844, Pratap Singh had asked for the most basic rights “which the Law, the Constitution, and the Religion of England, grants to the traitor and the assassin.”¹⁹⁵ Reformers concurred that the raja’s right to be heard was confirmed “by the laws of nature, of society, and of God”; the Company could “no more destroy that right than they [could] disturb the pillars of the universe.”¹⁹⁶ By 1847, Thompson had recast the Satara case as a moral parable in which “the right of universal humanity” had come under fire. Not even the North American Indians, who were well “accustomed to the use of the tomahawk and scalping knife,” deprived a

¹⁹⁰ William Ewart, Speech to House of Commons, July 6, 1847, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 93, 1847, col. 1334.

¹⁹¹ “Mr. Thompson and the Rajah of Sattara,” 21.

¹⁹² Singh, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Sir Henry Hardinge*, 32.

¹⁹³ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845*, 78.

¹⁹⁴ Sullivan, *Speech of Mr. John Sullivan, in the Court of Proprietors*, 11. As a polemicist for the India Reform Society in the 1850s, Sullivan would continue to advocate for the perpetuation of princely states.

¹⁹⁵ Singh, *A Letter to the Right Hon. Sir Henry Hardinge*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Debates at the India House: August 22nd, 23rd and September 24th, 1845*, 151.

prisoner of an oral defense.¹⁹⁷ Recalcitrant officials attempted to discount such rights-talk by arguing that the commission's investigation was a *political* act and not a trial at all, legally speaking. By extension, the "technicalities of the British constitution" could not be applied to the case, as the raja's overthrow "concerned the interpretation of a treaty and not of a law."¹⁹⁸ This maneuver irked reformers, for it threatened to set a precedent whereby wronged princes would be deprived of a parliamentary appeal.¹⁹⁹

In laying the Satara case before the CoP, the CoD, and the House of Commons, India reformers were searching for an impartial forum that could hear the grievances of marginalized imperial subjects. Although Thompson's condemnation of the deposition as an illegal act contrary to statute law failed to move the directors,²⁰⁰ the plight of the native rulers began to acquire a higher profile within a number of reformist organizations. Dr. Burns of Paisley, a member of the GES, interpreted the destruction of the colonial army in Afghanistan as a divine protest against the Company's "cupidity and cruelty" in India.²⁰¹ According to the Hibernian British India Society, the native population had perceived the injustice of the Satara case as evidence that their country was under occupation by a "government of force."²⁰² Thompson himself went so far as to suggest that the despoliation of Satara had provoked the recent aggressions in the Punjab; a people who had often "had to choose between slavery and death," the Sikhs believed

¹⁹⁷ Thompson, *The Plot Unravalled*, 9.

¹⁹⁸ "Debate at the India House," February 8, 1843, BL, Mss Eur E932/282, f. 625.

¹⁹⁹ Ewart, Speech to House of Commons, July 6, 1847, col. 1335.

²⁰⁰ Thompson argued that Governor James Carnac had gone rogue and confiscated the raja's sovereignty without prior authorization from the governor-general or the Secret Committee, thereby violating the 33rd of George III, Chapter 52, Section 43. See Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, March 18, 1846, BL, IOR/B/271, f. 169.

²⁰¹ *Ninth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society*, 28.

²⁰² *Appendix to the Reports of the Select Committee of the House of Commons on Public Petitions*, 1845, 410. James Haughton and Richard Allen, the chairman and secretary of the HBIS, were also the co-founders of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society. See also Maurice Bric, "Debating Empire and Slavery: Ireland and British India, 1820-1845," *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 3 (2016): 572.

themselves to be the next target of the Company's wrath.²⁰³ Speaking before an audience of several hundred in 1846, MP John Bowring hoped that a sympathetic spirit of resistance might soon be conjured in the metropole.²⁰⁴ If English public opinion could be brought to bear on the recent Polish uprisings, why should it not condemn the Company's despotic overthrow of Pratap Singh?

The reformers' ongoing efforts to make Indian policy a public issue only incensed the BoC, thereby perpetuating the raja's captivity. Distraught by the reemergence of the "absurd Sattarah question" in the summer of 1847, Hobhouse mused that he could "put an end to it in five minutes by striking off the final 0 of the ex-Raja's retired allowance."²⁰⁵ Pratap Singh died in exile that fall, followed by his brother the following spring. In the absence of a blood heir, Appa Sahib's widows continued to engage Bapojee's services to oppose the looming annexation of their state. This development led Hobhouse to privately defame Bapojee as a "good-for-nothing personage" who continually "threatens us with parliamentary squabbling...and holds up Lord Dalhousie and the Court to the vengeance of the public."²⁰⁶ By 1849, he was pressuring Lord Falkland, the governor of Bombay, to restrict the widows' stipend so that they could not "keep alive a party in India" or pay for agitation in England.²⁰⁷ When Falkland expressed his discomfiture with depriving Appa Sahib's widows of their station, he was swiftly

²⁰³ George Thompson, *Case of His Highness Pertaub Shean, the Raja of Sattara* (London: Alex Munro, 1846) 47.

²⁰⁴ "The Rajah of Sattara," *Morning Chronicle*, November 27, 1846. Bowring co-founded the PIL the following year. News of the Satara agitation reached the Continent, appearing in French papers like the Paris-based *National*. See "The French Press and the Raja of Sattara," *British Friend of India* 8, no. 44 (1845): 152.

²⁰⁵ John Hobhouse to Henry Hardinge, July 24, 1847, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 24.

²⁰⁶ John Hobhouse to Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, December 24, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, f. 236.

²⁰⁷ John Hobhouse to Lucius Cary, June 7, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, f. 176.

chastised.²⁰⁸ With his purse strings cut, Bapojee announced that his employer “had been starved into a written renunciation of all [her] infant’s rights” to the throne.²⁰⁹ He nonetheless continued his crusade until 1853, when accumulated debt forced him to accept 2500 pounds from the Company in exchange for abandoning “all supposed claims against the Government of India.”²¹⁰

The widows’ anxieties were well founded, for expansionists in the late 1840s doubled down on their characterization of Pratap Singh as a “mere instrument, set up to answer certain political ends.”²¹¹ As the raja’s advocates tirelessly denounced the violation of his constitutional and natural rights, the character of the 1819 treaty also became a matter of debate. Critics in the colonial press condemned the treaty early on as an iniquitous document that would never have been presented to a potential European ally.²¹² Yet they maintained that Pratap Singh, while baited, had never violated its articles. Although the raja had been reduced to a “mere slave without the power of proposing or acting in anything” without his resident’s leave, “the laws of nations and of nature” justified his legal claim to the *jagirs* as an aggrieved party. Edward Thornton, a Company undersecretary commissioned by the CoD to pen a voluminous history of British India, offered an inverted reading of the 1819 treaty: Pratap Singh had in fact “exchanged the condition of a titled slave” under the Peshwa’s thrall for “the exercise of

²⁰⁸ Hobhouse regretted that Falkland’s “tender feelings have been excited by the Sattara princes or princesses” and glibly suggested he write “to Lady Falkland to warn her against their influence.” See John Hobhouse to Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, August 3, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, fol. 198.

²⁰⁹ Bapojee, *Rajah of Sattara. A Letter to the Right Hon. J. C. Herries, M.P.*, 10.

²¹⁰ Michael Fisher, “Indian Political Representations in Britain during the Transition to Colonialism,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 672.

²¹¹ “Paper by Ross Donnelly Mangles,” in *Papers relating to the Disposal of the Sattara State* (London, 1849), 182.

²¹² “The Case of the Rajah of Sattarah,” *East India Magazine* (November 1841): 347.

actual sovereignty” after his liberation.²¹³ Following the raja’s alleged indiscretions, Governor Carnac had avoided a formal trial lest it place him in “the situation of a subject” when “he had always been treated as a sovereign.” While Thornton at least recognized the anomalous nature of British paramountcy over princely states like Satara, Company director Ross Mangles saw the issue in starker terms. The 1819 treaty, quite simply, had deprived the raja of “the freedom of action enjoyed by the humblest individual in a private sphere of life.”²¹⁴ By accepting British protection, the raja had knowingly condemned himself to virtual enslavement and forfeited all opportunity of redress. Twenty-five years after the annexation, Bapojee’s former patron, the Ranee Suguna Bai Saheb, resurrected the case in an exhaustive formal appeal to Queen Victoria. Among her many points of contention was a refutation of Mangles’ treaty interpretation couched in the language of unequal alliances and semi-sovereignty. Her conclusion was clear: a stronger contracting power like the late East India Company could not have legally condemned the “Rajas of Sattara to be [its] slaves” in perpetuity.²¹⁵

As the annexation of Satara garnered public attention, the BoC took additional measures to guard against external interference in the Company’s affairs. Hobhouse urged the Indian government to plug the leak of sensitive information from within its own ranks and stymie all communication with the Anglo-Indian press.²¹⁶ After one official allegedly published documents held by the Secret Committee, Hobhouse demanded

²¹³ Edward Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India*, vol. 6, (London: W. H. Allen, 1845), 85-86. For a refutation of Thornton’s analysis, see “The Court of Directors and their Hired Apologists,” *British Friend of India* 8, no. 44 (1845): 137-44.

²¹⁴ “Paper by Ross Donnelly Mangles,” 181.

²¹⁵ Suguna Bai Saheb, *Memorial to Her Majesty the Queen* (Bombay: Union Press, 1874), 314. By means of analogy, the ranee reasoned that the “humiliating terms imposed by the victorious Romans on the state of Carthage” following the Punic Wars did not abrogate the independence of the conquered party.

²¹⁶ Kashmiri intermediary Mohan Lal informed Hobhouse that an agent of the ex-raja had paid a *babu* in the governor-general’s office ten thousand rupees for copies of the Secret Committee’s dispatches. See Mohan Lal to John Hobhouse, November 15, 1847, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 224.

Dalhousie make an example of him, lest reformers like Thompson get their hands on such material.²¹⁷ He further chastised Bartle Frere, the last resident at Satara, for drafting a minute that weighed the adopted heirs' vying claims to the throne, as he had given an Indian newspaper the mistaken impression that the annexation had been called off.²¹⁸ Aside from browbeating his underlings, Hobhouse attempted to discredit Thompson as a paid agitator. He even admitted to Dalhousie that he might have permitted an adopted heir to inherit sovereign powers if such a suggestion had originated with the Indian government. It was instead a proposal "made by the enemy"; its acceptance would only have "encourage[d] further attempts to interfere with the decisions of Government" and given "a decided triumph to the party who have kept us in hot water for so many years."²¹⁹ Regardless of any treaty obligations, the fate of Satara had become a matter of principle.

Virtual Slavery after Satara

Tracing the convergences between abolitionist, free trade, and India reform polemic in the post-Emancipation period sheds light on the conceptual germination of a critical liberal imperialism rooted in accountable governance and anti-monopolism. Earlier transregional alliances like the anti-sati campaign of the 1820s had been infused with an Evangelical spirit of cultural improvement. As such, they had called upon the Company to extend its purview over the indigenous social sphere and intercede against the Hindu

²¹⁷ John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, April 25, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, f. 151.

²¹⁸ John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, June 25, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, ff. 180-181.

²¹⁹ John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, June 7, 1848, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, f. 10.

patriarchy.²²⁰ Thompson's network, in contrast, assumed a confrontational posture by identifying the Company as both an agent of oppression and a beneficiary of virtual slavery. In so doing, reformers contributed to an alternative imperial constitutionalism that transcended class lines and geographical boundaries. *Ryots* and British workers could be represented as slaves with relative ease, as monopolistic forces had violated their right to self-preservation and alienated their labour. Reformers rarely depicted Pratap Singh as a slave in this economic sense, though they denounced the trial as a "blot on English justice" and challenged mischaracterizations of the raja as an expendable puppet.²²¹ The Satara case also indicated that virtual enslavement had begun to afflict the Company hierarchy itself. In curbing dissent over the raja's treatment, the governor-general claimed "the right of annihilating the responsibility of his agents to their Divine Superior, and of absolving them from their obligations to observe the law of God."²²² Commanded to absolute "obedience to the injunctions of superior authority," officials were reduced to mere cyphers and dehumanized by corporate autocracy.²²³

Aside from resisting the annexation of princely states, reformist voices also began to characterize the near-exclusion of educated Indians from high governmental postings as a form of political enslavement.²²⁴ Former *munshi* Shahamat Ali informed metropolitan readers that every man, in accordance with "universal law," deserved "a

²²⁰ While Roy initially rejected legislative ameliorants for sati and favored working through the Bengali *samaj*, he publicly defended Bentinck's abolition of the practice in 1830. See Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy*, 74.

²²¹ Bickham Escott, Speech to House of Commons, July 6, 1847, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 93, 1847, col. 1349.

²²² Thompson, *The Raja of Sattara: his Innocence Declared*, 29.

²²³ John Hobhouse to Lucius Cary, May 7, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27.

²²⁴ Reformers implicitly extended John Stuart Mill's claim that "the only security against political slavery" in civilized states was "the check maintained over governors, by the diffusion of intelligence, activity, and public spirit among the governed." See John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, vol. 2, 5th ed. (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1862), 555.

share in the making of the laws which are enacted to protect his rights and property.”²²⁵ The inability of his countrymen to directly pursue legislation reduced them to a state of “slavery, or worse”; they were afforded no protections, but forced to rely upon “the empty consolation of *good intentions* and fine speeches.” At one large political meeting in Calcutta, Hurrochunder Dutt of the Hindu College artfully addressed this issue by setting up a dubious contrast. It was true that Bengal was “in a better condition than many an American slave colony,” as its inhabitants were never “sold by public auction” nor hunted down like the characters in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Nevertheless, systemic racial prejudices prevented the Bengali from making use of his political talents in a state of supposed freedom. The “Anglo-Saxon,” somewhat ironically, kept “up the same distinctions of caste, against which, as an institution of Hinduism, he declaims so violently.”²²⁶

Polemicists connected with John Dickinson’s India Reform Society (IRS, est. 1853) echoed these critiques with aplomb. In 1855, Malcolm Lewin, an IRS committee member and agent of the Madras Native Association, delivered a scathing oratory before the CoP where he denounced the manner in which “Indians have hitherto been treated as vassals and slaves.”²²⁷ Degraded by Europeans, the native population was roundly “despised by us because they submit.”²²⁸ The CoD had done little to remedy this racial animus; the recent charter act provision that permitted Indians to sit for civil service exams in

²²⁵ Shahamat Ali, *Notes and Opinions of a Native on the Present State of India and the Feelings of its People* (Ryde, Isle of Wight: George Butler, 1848), 117-21.

²²⁶ James Silk Buckingham, *The Coming Era of Political Reform* (London: Partridge, Oakey and Co., 1853), 233.

²²⁷ Malcolm Lewin, *Speech of Malcolm Lewin, Esq., delivered at the Quarterly Meeting of the Court of Proprietors of the East India Company, Wednesday, December 19, 1855* (London: Edward Stanford, 1856), 20. A former judge, Lewin had been removed from the bench in 1846 for acquitting Hindus accused of anti-Christian rioting in Tinnevely.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

England was widely regarded as a “mere sham, a mockery, and a delusion.” In light of its historical obstructionism, Lewin demanded the Company’s annihilation and motioned for the “perfect transfer” of the colonial administration to the Crown. Facing opposition, he continued to prophesize that the system that leveled educated Indians ‘with the slave, and insults them with legal freedom’ would soon result in a violent societal combustion.²²⁹ These fears proved to be prescient. Following the Sepoy Uprising, press organs like the *Westminster Review* concluded that the Indians’ state of “political slavery” was historically comparable only to that of the provincial communities who were “degraded into a sort of tame cattle” under Roman rule.²³⁰

The rhetoric of virtual enslavement belonged to a weaponized strain of liberal imperialist thought that re-emerged when the colonial government risked lapsing into blatant authoritarianism. Writing in the context of the Great Wahhabi Trial of 1870, Julia Stephens has argued that a liberal outcry against the misuse of executive power continued to constitute a “potent – if chameleon-like – element of public debate.”²³¹ Such protests aimed to preserve the rule of law and should not be conflated with the administration’s liberal program of “fostering social progress among ‘backward’ peoples.”²³² This oppositional “brand of liberalism,” I would suggest, owed much to earlier reformist resistance and counter-preaching, which was necessarily reactive and concerned with the amelioration of specific injustices perpetrated by the state. The slipperiness of liberal imperialism results from the mingling of these two distinct ideologies that respectively

²²⁹ Lewin was particularly incensed by the Madras Torture Commission’s revelation of state-sponsored violence. See M. Lewin, *The Way to Lose India; with Illustrations from Leadenhall Street* (London: James Ridgway, 1857), 6.

²³⁰ “Our Relation to the Princes of India,” *Westminster Review* 69 (1858), 251.

²³¹ Julia Stephens, “The Phantom Wahhabi: Liberalism and the Muslim fanatic in mid-Victorian India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2013), 47.

²³² *Ibid.*, 41.

challenged arbitrary, extractive forms of governance and demanded the cultural reformation of a colonized society. Ultimately, it was the colonial state's inability to process the reformers' critiques that brought the viability of liberal imperialism itself into question.

Public Works, Publicity, and the Search for a New State-Idea

In the fall of 1850, a number of articles began to appear in *The Times* that detailed the sorry state of the roads and public works in western India. Written by “an old Indian,” these missives suggested that “the existence of Indian maladministration” was no longer “an abstract question, about which the public can either be sentimental or indifferent without any immediate consequence.”¹ Following a lackluster American harvest in 1847 that sent cotton prices soaring, a select committee on the growth of Indian cotton confirmed that Indian exports to Britain had only marginally increased in the past thirty years. Common wisdom held that the “improvident and unenterprising” *ryot* was to blame for this shortfall and Indian underdevelopment more generally, but this claim did not hold up under further scrutiny. Eighteenth-century travelogue writers, for instance, had been “dazzled by the pomp and splendor of the cities of Hindostan” and regularly testified that India “flourished wonderfully under its native rulers.”² What, then, were the causes of the country’s current economic malaise?

According to reformers, the colonial government had shirked its obligation to develop India’s public works and facilitate the transport of crops from the interior to the coast. Fields in Gujarat, which supplied half the cotton exported from the Bombay presidency, were located only twenty miles from the ports. But in the absence of suitable piers, the cotton was rolled through mud and sand before it could be loaded onto the boats. The absence of all-weather roads also impeded interregional trade. Citing the

¹ John Dickinson, “The Roads of Western India,” *The Times*, November 15, 1850.

² John Dickinson, “Cotton Cultivation in Western India,” *The Times*, November 28, 1850.

testimony of a Company engineer, the “old Indian” estimated that nearly one third of the sheep conducted to Bombay from the Deccan died en route from either a “want of pasturage” in the dry season or from the “inundated and muddy state of the roads” during the monsoon.³ More injuriously to the human population, seasonal roads obstructed the transportation of grain from bountiful districts to those suffering from famine conditions. Rather than attending to these issues, the Company generally refused to take on loans for public works, despite its relatively minor debt. In one recent instance, Calcutta authorities had censured the Bombay administration for commencing a road to Sholapoor without its previous authorization. Such governmental parsimony compared unfavorably with other colonies like South Australia, where nearly one sixth of the annual budget was allocated to the construction of roads and bridges.⁴

While the author of these editorials emphasized the wanton waste of produce, animal, and human life throughout western India, he also contributed to a burgeoning assault against the Company’s institutionalized “system of secrecy.” Officials in Calcutta had recently rejected the Asiatic Society’s request to consult official statistical records on trade.⁵ And after the Society’s agricultural committee published a paper describing the ineffectual transport of cotton from Berar on bullocks’ backs, the government offered the author an appointment in order to “stop his mouth.”⁶ Maps of India were difficult to locate even in London; John Rennell’s surveys of Bengal had been “brought home by some of the high authorities in India and treated as private property, till they were

³ John Dickinson, “The State of India,” *The Times*, December 12, 1850.

⁴ John Dickinson, “The State of India,” *The Times*, December 17, 1850.

⁵ John Dickinson, “The Roads of Western India,” *The Times*, November 15, 1850.

⁶ John Dickinson, *India: its Government under a Bureaucracy* (London: Saunders and Stanford, 1853), 112.

accidentally discovered in the collection of a lady of rank.”⁷ Testifying before the 1840 select committee on East Indian produce, India-born planter-turned-reformer Francis Carnac Brown similarly reported that he was unable to access documents that his own father had compiled for the use of the Madras government.⁸ As a transparent informational order had failed to materialize, it typically took “years of private reports and then years of public notoriety and scandal to get any grievance addressed in India.”⁹ Even in the event that an accusation with ample “presumptive evidence” was aired before the House of Commons, it was “sure to be voted a bore and treated as a calumny.”¹⁰

Expanding upon the previous efforts of the British India Society, reformers in the 1850s and 1860s attempted to once more represent India’s infrastructural decline under colonial rule as both an anomaly and a scandal in its own right. The “old Indian” himself played a key role in these efforts. Neither old nor Anglo-Indian, John Dickinson was in fact the son of a wealthy paper manufacturer and mill owner. His uncle Thomas, a colonel of the Bengal army, had introduced him to the subject of Indian misgovernment while on furlough in 1850.¹¹ During Dickinson’s nine years serving as honorary secretary of the India Reform Society (IRS, est. 1853) and seven years as the organization’s chairman, he operated as a nexus linking retired officials, radical MPs, and so-called “Manchester men.” The society itself produced a flurry of propaganda leading up to the 1853 charter debates and, after a downturn in 1858, developed a second wind in the

⁷ John Dickinson, “The Geography of India,” *The Times*, October 29 1850, 4. J. C. Marshman, the editor of the *Friend of India*, also complained of the difficulties that Anglo-Indian journalists encountered in accessing governmental statistical information. See *Second Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories* [c. 479] (1853), 58.

⁸ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce* (1840), 261.

⁹ Dickinson, “Cotton Cultivation in Western India,” *The Times*, November 28, 1850.

¹⁰ Dickinson, *India: its Government under a Bureaucracy*, 95.

¹¹ Colonel Thomas Dickinson had joined members of the BIS in remonstrating against the dethronement of Pratap Singh. See *Last Counsels of an Unknown Counsellor, John Dickinson*, ed. Thomas Evans Bell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 6.

1860s through its advocacy of native sovereignty and public works. The organization “did not flatter, and did not flourish” from a financial perspective; Dickinson’s inability to secure funding from his father for a potential parliamentary race did not help matters. He could, however, count on the erstwhile support from the radical Quaker John Bright, an ally of free-trade doyen Richard Cobden¹² and an MP for Rochdale, Manchester, and Birmingham.

The president of the IRS for a number of years, Bright pointed the organization on a more radical path that moderate groups like the Manchester Chamber of Commerce (MCC) avoided. Like Dickinson, Bright found it quite anomalous that the Indians were “in a state of poverty, and of decay, unexampled in the annals of the country under their native rulers.”¹³ The native political associations in the presidency towns also lamented the want of internal communications in the interior that deprived merchants of potential cotton supplies and impeded famine relief.¹⁴ Their petitions found it “humiliating” that nearly two thousand miles of rail had been built in the United States in the time that it took the Company to survey a thirty-five mile line; on account of these communicative deficiencies, “many valuable articles of produce” in India were “often left to perish in the field.”¹⁵ The Bombay Association therefore demanded that the local governments allocate 5% of the annual land revenue for reinvestment in infrastructural projects. Although the government often claimed penury, Bright noted that it somehow managed

¹² Cobden lauded Dickinson as “a single-minded devotee who labours like a galley-slave from the purest impulse of benevolence.” See James Laverne Sturgis, *John Bright and Empire* (London: Althone Press, 1968), 32.

¹³ John Bright, Speech to House of Commons, June 3, 1853, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 127 (1853), col. 1186.

¹⁴ “Slavery and India Reform,” *Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines’ Friend* 1, no. 5 (1853): 112.

¹⁵ *Petition to Parliament from the Members of the Bombay Association and other Native Inhabitants of the Bombay Presidency relative to the British-Indian Government* (Bombay: Bombay Education Society’s Press, 1852), 21.

to find resources to fund ill-conceived military expeditions on its frontiers. Consummate critic James Silk Buckingham also observed that the Company was all too willing to raise new taxes or seize the treasures of “a suspected Rajah” with all due haste. When it came to initiating public works, however, it was then “that the energy is found wanting, and procrastination, ‘the thief of time,’ retards as long as possible the execution of them.”¹⁶ Reformist publications like George Thompson’s *Empire* newspaper concurred that the Company had utterly failed to materially regenerate India over the last hundred years. Rather than pursuing any progressive, civilizing mission, it had used its “vampire power to “strip the dead and feed upon their flesh till nothing remained but skeletons.”¹⁷

In taking the Company and the home government to task, India reformers relied heavily on two outspoken advocates of infrastructural improvement: Great Indian Peninsula Railway (GIPR) promoter John Chapman and Madras-based engineer Arthur Cotton, a dogged proponent of canal and irrigation works. Lauded as visionaries and derided as “enthusiasts” in their day, Chapman and Cotton rarely saw eye to eye. Confiding to former BIS treasurer John Briggs, Chapman admitted that he believed the whole of Cotton’s all-India irrigative scheme to be “too comprehensible”; the errors of Cotton’s 1854 *Public Works* tract were therefore likely “to lead to great mistakes and disappointment.”¹⁸ Though Cotton had acquired clear mastery of building conditions in South India, he seemed to think himself “entitled to pronounce *ex cathedra* for all the rest.” Cotton, in response, rejected costly schemes like the GIPR and counted Chapman

¹⁶ James Silk Buckingham, *The Coming Era of Practical Reform, not “Looming the Distance,” but ‘Nigh at Hand’* (London: Partridge, Oakey and Co., 1853), 207.

¹⁷ “The Old Seats of Empire in the East,” *Empire*, February 3, 1855, 153.

¹⁸ John Chapman to John Briggs, April 9, 1854, British Library (BL), John Chapman Papers (JCP), Mss Eur E234/103, f. 23; John Chapman to John Briggs, April 13, 1854, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/103, f. 27.

among the many speculators who worshipped the “idol of speed.”¹⁹ To advance their agendas, both men engaged with sectors of the reformist community. Cotton enjoyed the support of Bright, Dickinson, and members of the East India Association (EIA), while Chapman cultivated allies among the members of the BIS and the nascent Bombay Association. Shortly before his death in 1854, he was challenging the IRS’s demand for direct Crown rule, as he believed that this transition would simply hand India “over to a bureaucratic despotism.”²⁰

While reformist promoters could call schemes into existence, they had little say in the long-term management of these projects. After obtaining a guaranteed 5% return on capital invested in the GIPR, Chapman was ostracized from the organization. Reinventing himself as reformist commentator, he disavowed the very guarantee that he had struggled to secure; thereafter, he extolled the virtues of private associationalism and warned against over-reliance on the state. After publicly sparring with Sir Proby Cautley, the engineer behind the Ganges Canal, Cotton was hounded for his support of the ill-fated Madras Irrigation Canal and Navigation Company and the affiliated East India Irrigation Company in the 1860s. He also received scorn for his fervent advocacy of the ambitious Godavery Canal when costs for the project began to balloon. As Chapman and Cotton became personally identified with the cause of public works, skeptics in both the official sector and the public sphere subjected their philanthropic motivations to more rigorous interrogation.

¹⁹ Arthur Cotton, *Public Works in India, their Importance; with Suggestions for their Extension and Improvement* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1854), 254.

²⁰ John Chapman, “India and its Finance,” *Westminster Review* 60 (1853): 104. Chapman suspected that reformers who had previously served in India like Joseph Hume and John Sullivan favored retaining the Company, while Bright and the IRS more generally sought to abolish it. See John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, June 24, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 188.

Despite their rivalry, Chapman and Cotton concurred that the Indian administration was fundamentally resistant to change and should be subjected to an enhanced degree of oversight through the invigoration of public opinion. While Chapman, like many early India reformers, linked the influx of raw cotton with the material welfare of Britain's manufacturing population, he was also emphatic that a concern for the "public good" in India should underlay colonial governance. Britain's "connection with India, even in its lowest view, ha[d] an elevated, solemn, almost sacred interest, which cannot be separated from it."²¹ Ventures like the GIPR would not only stimulate the production of cash crops, but also facilitate the circulation of life-sustaining salt within the Bombay presidency. Like Chapman, Cotton denounced the Indian government's fixation on revenue extraction; he therefore rejected military fiscalism in favor of a biopolitical understanding of state power that was concerned with the preservation of life.

Redirecting attention to Chapman's early activity as a free trade advocate and his later career as an India reform polemicist for the radical *Westminster Review*, I will suggest that he approached rail investment largely as a means of drawing English attention to Indian affairs. Cotton, too, realized that any effort to "promote the real welfare of India" would rarely originate from within the colonial government itself."²² By conceiving of infrastructural improvement as a wedge issue, both men invited public scrutiny of Indian governance and a reassessment of the state's fiscal priorities. In reconsidering the reformers' developmental schemes as forms of political censure, I will borrow conceptual scaffolding from historical sociologist Patrick Carroll's study of the

²¹ John Chapman, *The Cotton and Commerce of India, Considered in Relation to the Interests of Great Britain* (London: John Chapman, 1851), 130.

²² Lady Hope, *General Sir Arthur Cotton: his Life and Work* (London: Hodden and Stoughton, 1900), 189.

“state-science plexus.” Emphasizing the influence of an experimentalist “engine culture” on eighteenth and nineteenth-century Irish statecraft, Carroll pushes back against the idea of a unitary actor-state. In its place, he offers a “triangulated distinction” between the state-idea, the state-system, and the state-country.²³ The *state-idea* is informed by discourses of legitimacy, political representation, governmental authority, security, and finally, design. The *state-system* reflects the actual bureaucratic institutions and apparatuses of the government; these bring the *state-country* into being through practices that “materially incorporate land, bodies, and the built environment.” With these concepts in mind, this chapter will probe Chapman and Cotton’s attempts to clarify under-defined state-ideas and challenge the efficacy of prevailing state-systems.

Tools of Empire?

Although the colonial state often approached infrastructural improvement as a matter of pounds and pence, historians have rightly noted that “development constitutes a more complex historical subject than any list of cost and benefits could ever indicate.”²⁴ As linkages connecting the state with its subjects, public works catalyzed economic reorientations while furthering military objectives. Ravi Ahuja observes a dramatic shift from the pre-colonial era, when only a limited amount of surplus goods circulated in “supra-local” space. In that period, local magnates were more inclined to establish rest houses and landmarks as symbols of their social status and largesse rather than for commercial purposes.²⁵ But by the 1840s, a limited number of colonial transit works had

²³ Patrick Carroll, *Science, Culture, and Modern State Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 17-25.

²⁴ David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 185.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

begun to impose “new patterns of circulation upon the subcontinent’s social spaces.”²⁶ Goods entering global markets acquired an “exchange” value rather than a customary “use” value; the expense of transporting these commodities for export was further added to their cost. According to Manu Goswami, these new communicative works enabled processes of “imperial scale-making” that prioritized the ascendance of a “Britain-centered global system of financial and economic liberalism.”²⁷ Centralizing administrative practices, meanwhile, produced an “all-India scale” that obfuscated regional economic unevenness. Goswami therefore views the nationalist conceptualization of a territorialized, bounded economy as a reaction to this imperial subsumption of India as an agricultural frontier. By the latter part of the century, native reformers who had previously identified “large irrigation works, railways, and roads” as “the only salvation for India” were rejecting these projects as abettors of the economic drain.²⁸

Historians generally concur that the formative events of 1857-58 triggered a paradigm shift that led policymakers to recognize the military and strategic necessity of public works investment. With the support of the India Office, the government privileged large rail and irrigation projects that demanded a hefty amount of capital and oversight; these works were dependent on “coercion and centralised power” to a much higher degree “than in Britain itself.”²⁹ Funding for more modest works like local roads evaporated as a result. For Goswami, this newfound interest in the colonial state’s

²⁶ Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire: Circulation, “Public Works,” and Social Space in Colonial Orissa, 1780-1914* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan 2009), 73-74.

²⁷ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: from Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 32-33.

²⁸ Dadabhai Naoroji, *The Wants and Means of India* (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1870), 9.

²⁹ Ahuja, 105.

materiality was part and parcel of a broader, conservative campaign to construct a “spectacular display” of the regime’s “authoritative presence.”³⁰ And while promoters had emphasized the military value of rails since the earliest negotiations, Ritika Prasad asserts that the Uprising so boldly revealed the “strategic core of railways” that the “government had to actively reintroduce the language of public convenience” thereafter.³¹ These historical arguments support a straightforward, instrumentalist narrative in which “the interests of Indians were incidental” in the planning of rail lines and possibly canal works as well.³² If anything, their construction served to awe the native population and conceal the state’s weak “social foundation” and “limited revenue base.”³³

While a revival of the classic “tools of empire” approach may be on the ascendant, localized case studies can easily frustrate such sweeping narration. Smritikumar Sarkar’s work on the governmental processes of land acquisition for rail construction in Bengal notably undercuts the notion that these projects were simply foisted upon an unwilling native public. Eminent Calcutta industrialists and members of trading castes embraced the coming of the rails and did not usually object to receiving compensation for their lands along the routes. Industrialist Dwarkanath Tagore, for one, was doggedly intent on connecting his collieries at Raniganj with Calcutta at a distance of 121 miles.³⁴ The groups that did protest the rails were either unwilling to sacrifice their sacred landholdings on the banks of the Ganges or else were engaged in river-borne

³⁰ Goswami, 46.

³¹ Ritika Prasad, *Tracks of Change: Railways and Everyday Life in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 204.

³² Ian J. Kerr, *Engines of Change: the Railroads that Made India* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 18.

³³ Jon Wilson, *The Chaos of Empire: the British Raj and the Conquest of India* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 278.

³⁴ Smritikumar Sarkar, “Land Acquisition for the Railways in Bengal, 1850-1862: Probing a Contemporary Problem,” *Studies in History* 26, no. 2 (2010): 109.

trade. A small number of recalcitrant Europeans even determined that government agents had undervalued their land and initiated litigation. Yet Sarkar concludes that the Bengal administration, after an initial period of disorder, committed to learning from its missteps and minimizing further dislocation. After the events of 1857, it took pains to direct its lines away from religious sites and major towns, while undertaking a “liberal revision of the rate of compensation.”³⁵

Regardless of whether we view the creation of public works in India as a jarring imposition, an artful mirage, or a collaborative affair, we may question whether a new state-idea premised on modern intercommunication emerged in the mid-Victorian era. Some texts, like Governor-General Dalhousie’s famous 1853 railway minute, represented the construction of an India-wide network first and foremost as a security concern. As this document was designed for a British audience, Hurd and Kerr speculate that Dalhousie deemed “the progressive social role of railways” to be too much of a “self-evident truth” to warrant much mention.³⁶ Later officials certainly identified interconnectedness and mobility as civilizing attributes, while Indian intellectuals valorized rails as tools of unification and nation building. This triumphalism, however, should not blind us to the fact that the state’s investment in public works (in proportion to its overall budget) was anemic throughout the period and rarely exceeded 1% of the state’s annual revenue. Well into the 1860s, critics were reminding colonial policymakers that the “first duty of a government is to develop the resources of a country; and the first

³⁵ Ibid., 139.

³⁶ John Hurd and Ian J. Kerr, *India’s Railway History: a Research Handbook* (Leiden, Brill, 2012), 109-115. Stokes makes the counterargument that Dalhousie was “narrow-eyed on public works”; less concerned with regional development, he advocated for the Bari Doab canal in Punjab because its construction would provide employment for the recently defeated Sikh soldiery. See Eric Stokes, “Bureaucracy and Ideology: Britain and India in the Nineteenth Century,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 30, (1980): 153.

step in development is the provision of roads.”³⁷ As Cotton put it, every European who “learnt in England the essential importance of communications and other public works” acted in India “as if he knew nothing about it.”³⁸ Reformers therefore dismissed Dalhousie’s bold scheme to connect the presidency towns as a political maneuver to curb metropolitan dissent before the 1853 charter renewal.³⁹

Securing material evidence of Britain’s benevolence became a matter of political necessity once Dalhousie commenced his conquest of princely states in 1849. In the twilight years of Satara, key officials were privately anticipating that annexation would yield an additional ten lakhs of revenue if the Company would only “lay out some money on roads and bridges, and works of irrigation.”⁴⁰ Writing to Hobhouse at the Board of Control (BoC), the Governor of Bombay was somewhat mortified that Raja Appa Sahib had “completed an excellent cart road to the verge of his possessions...while we have a bad road, impassable for carts, and made on a bad line, on our side descending to the sea.” The following year, the governor was again reminding his superiors that American cotton varieties could only become marketable following the construction of a transit line between the Deccan and the coast. “If the Government of India will allow us to make a road or two...five years hence the people of Sattara will bless us as their greatest benefactors.”⁴¹ This was not the first time Hobhouse had heard such critiques; Governor-General Hardinge had previously observed in their private correspondence that “our rule has been distinguished by building large Prisons; and the contrast with the Mogul

³⁷ John Watts, *The Facts of the Cotton Famine* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1866), 435.

³⁸ Cotton, *Public Works in India*, 11.

³⁹ John Dickinson, *Address to the Members of the House of Commons on the relation between the Cotton Crisis and Public Works in India* (London: P. S. King, 1862), 12.

⁴⁰ J. Lucius Carey, Viscount Falkland to John Hobhouse, April 29, 1849, BL, Broughton Papers, F213/24, f. 153.

⁴¹ J. Lucius Carey to John Hobhouse, April 3, 1850, BL, Broughton Papers, F213/24, f. 348.

Emperors, in the respect of public works, is not to our advantage.”⁴² Conservative politician Lord Stanley expressed similar concerns in 1857 when he charged the Company with a long-standing dereliction of duty before the House of Commons. Objective observation suggested that “many dynasties, which are justly termed barbarous, had, in ages long gone by, provided far better than we now did for the material wants of their subjects.”⁴³ Despite the absence of comprehensive data on public works in the contemporary princely states, Stanley suspected that the Company’s accomplishments would also be found wanting upon comparison.

The effects of the government’s dilatoriness were particularly acute in the Madras presidency, nicknamed “the Cinderella of the East...for the benighted state in which she has been kept.”⁴⁴ A Public Works Commission convened in 1852 corroborated this assessment; its report revealed that the Public Works Department of the Board of Revenue had failed to authorize the construction of a key road to South Arcot, the further exploration of the Godavery River, and the hiring of additional engineers. Referring to the 3,200 acres of land irrigated by water from deteriorating tanks, the commissioners concluded that “the Government is in a degree morally bound to maintain them in repair, independently of, and in addition to, the consideration of the revenue.”⁴⁵ These whistle-blowing officials assumed they were furthering the goals of former governors like the Marquis of Tweeddale, who had sought to harness the waters of the Godavery, the

⁴² Quoted in Blair Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1876), 70.

⁴³ Lord Stanley gestured to the ruins of an estimated 27,000 water storage tanks in Mysore dating to pre-colonial times. See Edward Stanley, Speech to House of Commons, June 23, 1857, *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 3rd ser., vol. 146 (1857), col. 296.

⁴⁴ John Bruce Norton, *A Letter to Robert Lowe, Esq. on the Condition and Requirements of the Presidency of Madras* (Madras: Pharoah and Co., 1854), 179.

⁴⁵ *Proceedings and Correspondence, connected with the late Public Works Commission for the Madras Presidency*, BL, IOR/V/26/700/8, 29.

Kistna, and the Cauvery Rivers to secure the presidency “against the failure of crops, and the horrors and loss from the scarcities and famine, nowhere so severely felt.”⁴⁶ But the current Madras administration rebuked the commissioners for “exhibiting low contempt toward their superiors.” Governor Henry Pottinger even rescinded their admittance to the Government House when they attempted to present their second report at a public breakfast.⁴⁷

Reformers were rather more willing to circulate the commissioners’ findings and specify the manifold benefits that would accrue to natives and Britons alike following a public works construction campaign. Some, like advocate-general John Bruce Norton, associated subaltern dissidence with limited economic opportunities. If Malabar had been “opened by good roads,” the “national energy” of insurgent groups like the Moplahs might “have been turned into the peaceful and beneficial channel of active enterprise to trade.”⁴⁸ Norton also touched upon the more existential issue of the administration’s ever-worsening estrangement from its own subjects. He observed that local officials rarely ventured outside of their jurisdictions for want of good roads; vegetating where they “happen[ed] to root,” small talk revolving around “tittle tattle, scandal, Mount-road dust, punkahs, and mosquitoes” remained the order of the day.⁴⁹ Cotton concurred that this insularity was thoroughly unnatural, though he bewailed the colonial agent’s isolation from the fortifying influences of *his own* society. Surrounded “by his slavish Native Cutcherry servants” and lacking “intercourse either with Europeans or with books,” the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁸ Norton, *A Letter to Robert Lowe*, 65. Former Bombay Council member Saville Marriott shared his concern that the bountiful district had been “unable to oppose with success the paralyzing and depressing nature of our rule.” See Saville Marriott, *India: the Duty and Interest of England to Inquire into its State*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman and Co., 1857), 20.

⁴⁹ Norton, *A Letter to Robert Lowe*, 8.

young civil servant dispatched to the backcountry became increasingly acclimated to his role as a petit despot.⁵⁰ In both cases, this physical stasis produced considerable anxiety because it revealed the government's ideological lethargy. A conquering behemoth, the Company had failed to substantively transition into a peacetime power. By facilitating its subjects' material uplift, the state could legitimize its tenuous position in India and extend its metaphorical root system in the native soil. How it would pay for a massive public works program was another matter entirely, one that led rail promoters like Chapman to represent metropolitan investment in colonial projects as a moral imperative.

Identifying the "Public Good"

Demarcating the role of the state in the provision of public works was not a uniquely Indian concern. The British nation had confronted similar questions with the contagious outbreak of railway mania in the 1830s and early 1840s. Throughout this period, railway construction had proceeded in a haphazard manner as individual companies lobbied Parliament for authorization of their lines. A slew of issues soon exposed the shortcomings of the rail companies' practical monopoly over transit. Numerous lines failed to adequately provide for third class passengers; travellers remonstrated against the artificially high ticket prices, which were nearly triple the amount paid in continental countries like Belgium.⁵¹ Following a resurgence of the mania, politicians began to suspect that rail promoters were not uniformly acting in the public's interest. It had become common practice, for instance, to pitch redundant lines

⁵⁰ Cotton, *Public Works in India*, 46.

⁵¹ William Galt, *Railway Reform: its Importance and Practicability* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865), xix, 143,

that intersected with existing rails with the expectation that they would be bought out by competitors. The deleterious effects of this speculative spirit were especially acute in East London, where landlords in a search of sale ousted the poor from their homes at only one week's notice. This flurry of construction tested the limits of laissez faire political economy, as rail directors cited "popular maxims" to make the case for non-interference in their affairs.⁵² The government, however, was hesitant to take any dramatic action. The Railway Act of 1844 effectively tabled the question of state intervention until 1865, at which point Parliament would be entitled to adjust fare rates on highly profitable lines and purchase rail companies' shares in exchange for government stock.

The Act's deferred buy-out strategy was essentially experimental, as politicians (to quote William Gladstone) were "dealing with a new system, producing new results, and likely to produce unforeseen effects."⁵³ But only three years later in 1847, the issue of the public good arose once more during an acrimonious House of Commons debate. Addressing the devastation wrought by the Irish famine, MP George Bentinck posited that the abundant rail construction projects in England had given substantial aid to the working population during the economic downturn of the early 1840s. Ireland, in contrast, was stagnating; out of 1522 miles of rail approved by Parliament, only 123 had been constructed.⁵⁴ If these projects were completed, they could potentially provide employment to 110,000 Irish workers. To foster additional investment in Ireland's transit infrastructure, Bentinck sought the succor of the Exchequer and called upon the British government to loan railway companies up to sixteen million pounds over the course of

⁵² Ibid., 44.

⁵³ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁴ Charles Mackay, *Life and Times of Sir Robert Peel*, vol. 4 (London: Peter Jackson, Late Fisher, Son & Co., 1851), 49-52.

four years. Investors would pay this sum back at an interest rate of 3.5% on two-thirds of the total cost of construction. This was no mere give-away, Bentinck clarified, but rather a potential stimulus package to encourage Anglo-Irish trade. Income from railway work would furnish Irish men “with cloths of Yorkshire, women with cottons of Manchester, and bedizen them with the ribbons of Coventry.” Though this level of governmental participation in commercial dealings would be nearly unthinkable in industrial England, it was necessary in Ireland where private enterprise was stillborn. As Benjamin Disraeli bluntly observed, English misgovernment of Ireland had long prevented “the free action of the commercial principle”; it was only just that the state should “step in to alleviate the injury and inconveniences it has produced.”⁵⁵

For Bentinck and Disraeli, the matter was clear-cut: governmental sponsorship of transit works did not automatically constitute market interference. This was not a violation of classical political economy, but rather an observation that its standard dictums did not apply in exceptional cases. Such reasoning unnerved supporters of the Railway Act like former Prime Minister Robert Peel, who noted that the promoters of Irish works had applied to the public purse for support in the past. In the late eighteenth-century, the Royal Canal Company commenced a scheme to create a navigable passage linking the two coasts of Ireland. Its directors had successfully solicited 60,000 pounds from the Irish Parliament along with private contributions of 134,000. An 1811 investigation, however, revealed that the project had consumed nearly 186,000 pounds of public money, as the state had taken over management of the works following the

⁵⁵ Benjamin Disraeli, Speech to House of Commons, February 15, 1847, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 89 (1847), col. 1432.

bankruptcy of the company.⁵⁶ Peel therefore prophesized that Bentinck's scheme would lead to a case of history repeating itself. Moreover, the fact that the bill mandated repayment of the full loan only after a thirty year period threatened to unleash all forms of improvident speculation in the meantime. Yet Peel was also concerned about the state of the metropolitan money market. Any sums raised to "benefit the shareholders in Irish railways" would naturally add to the "heavy burden of taxation" in England proper. This was therefore a case of two contending public goods. Regardless of England's past missteps in Ireland, Peel held fast to his belief that "commercial considerations" alone "ought to determine commercial undertakings."⁵⁷

From the 1840s onwards, the negotiation of public and private risk in Indian rail investments remained a topic of unceasing debate. The progress of the GIPR was far from illustrious in its first decades. Construction over the Thul and Bhoire Ghats was no easy task, requiring seven years and an average work force of 25,000.⁵⁸ The combination of a harsh climate and fractious labor relations proved combustible, leading to a revolt against the European overseers in 1859. The building process itself was beleaguered by setbacks; nearly 2000 bridges, buildings, and masonry works had collapsed by the late 1860s as a result of poor oversight and shoddy sub-contracting.⁵⁹ Amidst this chaos, costs soared to 18,000 pounds per mile, well over initial estimates of 4,000.⁶⁰ The main line was also hampered by bottlenecks that limited the influx of raw cotton into Bombay.

⁵⁶ Robert Peel, Speech to House of Commons, February 16, 1847, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 90 (1847), col. 83. Soon after construction began, a disaffected director parted from the Company and secured public funding for a parallel competitive work, the Grand Canal.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, col. 77.

⁵⁸ Daniel Headricks, *Tentacles of Progress: Technology Transfer in the Age of Imperialism, 1850-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69.

⁵⁹ Kerr, *Engines of Change*, 24.

⁶⁰ Stuart Sweeney, *Financing India's Imperial Railways, 1875-1914* (Brookfield, VT: Pickering & Chatto, 2011), 14.

Arthur Cotton estimated that the rails could not even handle the old traffic of 20,000 tons, let alone the 1-2 million that the Bombay Chamber of Commerce had optimistically anticipated.⁶¹ Running at a net loss most years, the GIPR imposed hefty freight rates that allegedly impeded the export of grains from western India to famine stricken regions in the mid-1870s. The company's continued importation of English iron rails and engines at exorbitant prices well into the late nineteenth century further fueled suspicions that it was not, in fact, serving the Indian public good.

While John Chapman assiduously promoted the GIPR between 1844 and 1849, his visions for the line far exceeded those of a run-of-the-mill speculator. A self-made entrepreneur in the trade of colonial information, he positioned himself as a progenitor of new state-ideas. Unlike the more radical reformers, Chapman was not seeking to dismember the Company, for he believed that India's war-torn communities had called upon Britain to usher them into an era of constitutional governance. However, a love of lucre had distracted officials from this sacred mission. Under native rule, a prince's debts were his alone own to bear, but the Company had transmogrified the government's deficit into "the debts of the nation" in order to fund its costly military apparatus.⁶² This bounty was "the first pretext and almost only thing sought for; everything else is accidental and subordinate."⁶³ Proprietors spoke "ten [words] of Revenue for one of just laws, public improvements, periodical and fiscal reforms and all other objects put together. Chapman concluded this tunnel vision had produced an "idle India, [which if] let alone, may change in time to a mountain of gunpowder, which any wild spark may ignite." It was

⁶¹ Arthur Cotton, *Reply to Sir Proby Cautley's Valedictory Note on the Ganges Canal* (London: Private Circulation, 1865), 24.

⁶² Chapman, "India and its Finance," 102.

⁶³ John Chapman to George Thompson, October 1842, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/91, ff. 60-62.

incumbent on Britons both in and outside of the Company, he declared, to stop “this improvident drain for the profit of today” and realize that they were “no longer owners of the taxes, but trustees for the fulfillment of certain objects at whatever cost.”

Concerned with the Company’s legitimacy and longevity, Chapman also complained of the manner in which “the rulers of India work[ed] in the dark” and left the ordinary Englishman ignorant of their dealings.⁶⁴ At present, few candidates seeking election to the Court of Directors ran issue-based campaigns, while cadets dispatched to India at a young age turned their sights exclusively to revenue collection. Without sufficient oversight and publicity of their actions, local officials were “angels, if they do not become tyrants.”⁶⁵ Soliciting investments in infrastructural projects like the GIPR offered a means of familiarizing the moneyed public with colonial politics, thereby laying a framework for a more transparent bureaucratic state-system. The “infrequent fits of attention” given to Indian affairs during charter renewals, annexations, and dethronements were “altogether insufficient for the formation of an effective public opinion.”⁶⁶ When investors failed to exhibit sufficient interest in Indian governance, Chapman repudiated the railway guarantee and threw his support to private capitalistic ventures. By the early 1850s, he was identifying “freedom of enterprise in Indian territorial works” as “an end to be aimed at” and articulating a new state-idea that recast the government as an arbiter of fair play.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ John Chapman, *Principles of Indian Reform: being Brief Hints*, 2nd ed. (London: John Chapman, 1853), 27.

⁶⁵ Chapman to Thompson, October 1842, f. 61.

⁶⁶ Chapman, *Principles of Indian Reform*, 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 14. Chapman still kept the door open for the government to provide *temporary* guarantees, so long as it refrained from “minute control over details.”

John Chapman: Colonial Knowledge Broker

Trained as a mechanist, Chapman did not set out to be an engineer, or even a railway promoter for that matter. Instead, he had turned his sights to the burgeoning free trade movement when his own business ventures ran aground in the late 1830s. Writing to George Thompson in October 1841, he offered his services as a polemicist for the cause and put forth dual schemes for a free trade tract society and weekly paper provisionally called the *Free Trader*. Chapman introduced himself as a distant acquaintance: his father had been the last apprentice and successor in the business of Joseph Donisthane, the Baptist minister of Loughborough, from whom Thompson was descended.⁶⁸ Even in this initial correspondence, Chapman clarified that his concerns were not strictly limited to economic matters. The same principle that animated free trade was behind religious “dissent and of every other kind of objection to the interference of political government with the honest freedom of individual action.” Though Chapman made scant headway with his tract society, his research for an inaugural essay led him to the conclusion that “the most enormous evils which desolate the world are to be traced...to the usurping interference of government.”⁶⁹ The effect of the on-going Opium War on Chapman’s thinking was certainly palpable, as he noted that the vast majority of global conflicts originated as state efforts to circumscribe or artificially stimulate the masses’ behavior for the sake of profit. The solution to such overreaching lay in the enlivenment of public opinion. Even organizations like the ACLL, Chapman asserted, had focused an excessive amount of resources on lobbying sympathetic parliamentarians to the detriment of popular education. A “correct and effective public opinion” could only

⁶⁸ John Chapman to George Thompson, October 1841, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/91.

⁶⁹ John Chapman to George Thompson, January 1842, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/91.

germinate through the combined exertions of “the living voice and the enduring print, the enthusiastic meeting and the silent thought.”

With the merger of ACLL and BIS networks in the fall of 1842, Chapman’s engagement with metropolitan free trade was gradually superseded by an interest in colonial affairs. Upon reading John Briggs’ 1839 pamphlet on the prospects of large-scale Indian cotton cultivation, Chapman called for new roads to link the cotton fields of Nagpur with the Indian coasts, which would go far toward “stimulat[ing] the energies of the people of the East.”⁷⁰ At this stage, Chapman surmised that it was “useless to look to government to undertake these works,” as “half a generation must pass away before it would be brought to engage” with the matter in any concrete way. Yet he maintained that India was replete with commercial opportunities that only awaited the application of British private enterprise. In 1841, the Bombay Chamber of Commerce (at the behest of the provincial government) had staged an inquiry into cotton growing conditions and determined it would be thoroughly unfeasible for mercantile houses to send European purchasing agents into the interior. To ensure the quality of the cotton produced, direct management of the fields was necessary. Chapman therefore entered into correspondence with the fledging East India Cotton Company, which represented itself as a model joint stock company. To render Indian cotton competitive on the English market, the EICC would furnish *ryots* with advances, provide them with seeds, and introduce improved methods of picking and cleaning.⁷¹ This venture was also designed as a pedagogical enterprise. The company would eschew any monopolization of the trade, opting instead

⁷⁰ John Chapman to George Thompson, November 1842, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/91, ff. 43-47. Chapman suspected that the “pregnant intercourse” of railroad through the Nizam of Hyderabad’s territories would act as a prophylactic against future uprisings.

⁷¹ BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/97b, f. 35.

to encourage native imitation of its practices; after thirty or forty years, its agents would have successfully “nurtured [its] neighbours into successful rivals” and “conclude their work is ended. Further perseverance would only bring them into loss.”⁷² Despite support for the company amongst provincial magnates like Alexander Wardop, the secretary and treasurer of the Glasgow East India Association, it appears that it was stillborn. Though former backers recognized that the “philanthropic and patriotic operations of the intended company are admirable” they wished “the commercial part was equally so.”⁷³

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest that Chapman was simply caught up in the abolitionist reformers’ crusade for a free labor cotton supply. At the same time that he was extolling the virtues of cotton roads, he was also positioning himself as an informational hub to facilitate the transmission of British technologies to colonial realms. Writing to Dwarkanath Tagore, he predicted that Indians would gain infinite advantages from machinery tailor-made to accommodate the country’s diversified agriculture. Chapman offered his services as an informational nexus; he pledged to heed instructions from India and collaborate with local machinists to acquire the latest knowledge on British innovations. Tagore need only subsidize the costs of publication and provide Chapman with a moderate stipend for travelling and accommodations.⁷⁴ Thompson would willingly provide a reference, if need be. This exchange with Tagore was but one component of a broader scheme to aggregate content on recent inventions for a wide readership amongst the “dispersed British public.” Chapman proposed to not only publicize the new patents registered with the government office, but also identify which technologies had been rendered obsolete. Stealing a page from Edward Wakefield’s

⁷² BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/97a, f. 189.

⁷³ Letter from J. J Burn, January 1845, Bodleian Library, Brit.Emp.S22.G91.

⁷⁴ John Chapman to Dwarkanath Tagore, n. d., BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/91.

playbook, he declared that new machinery was essential in settler colonies where labor was scarce: it “leaves not its master for uncleared lands or a naval colony, neither does the absence of settled society tend to make it wild or violent or dishonest.”⁷⁵

Historians have generally cast Chapman as an emissary of shadowy railway interests rather than as a broker in the fledging field of colonial information. Having formed the provisional committee of the GIPR in 1844, Chapman travelled to Bombay the following year to reconstitute the existing Inland Railway Association into a GIPR sub-agency. When he returned to Britain from his yearlong tour in 1846, he dedicated his attentions to ensuring that shareholders of the GIPR would accrue a guaranteed amount of annual interest on the capital that they had invested. In doing so, he was following the lead of East India Railway promoter Rowland Stephenson, who had struggled to generate metropolitan interest in his Calcutta-Delhi line.⁷⁶ While the schemes for both the GIPR and the EIR had met with a favorable response from colonial officials and Company directors, the Board of Control continued to withhold its approval throughout the late 1840s.⁷⁷ Chapman had little patience for the resulting backroom negotiations. Writing directly to the secretary of the BoC, he noted that all matters “connected with an English line of railways [are] discussed openly before the public, and all who are interested in any way about it participate in the discussion.”⁷⁸ Promoters of an Indian rail line could “scarcely expect less, when their views are opposed, than an equally open and effectual enquiry.” Chapman even suspected that the BoC was indefinitely postponing discussion

⁷⁵ John Chapman to L. Wright, November 7, 1842, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/91, f. 57.

⁷⁶ Daniel Thorner, *Investment in Empire: British Railway and Steam Shipping Enterprise in India, 1825-1849* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 48.

⁷⁷ The economic crash of 1847 further limited support for speculative investments abroad.

⁷⁸ John Chapman to William Leach, 1847, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/70, f. 10.

of the GIPR, as it favored the EIR as a strategic line and was reluctant to split the pool of investors.⁷⁹

Seeking a solvent for this stonewalling, Chapman garnered support for the GIPR from a range of provincial chambers of commerce and offered testimony before John Bright's 1847 select committee on the growth of Indian cotton. Before this parliamentary body, Chapman implied that the onerous terms of the guarantee were designed to prolong negotiations indefinitely. These conditions, which were "stated so generally as to let in almost any sense or any amount of control which the Government hereafter might choose to assume," were seemingly at odds with the home government's guidelines on foreign rail development.⁸⁰ As recently as 1846, Colonial Secretary William Gladstone had drafted a dispatch that advised colonial governments to encourage the "freest scope to private and associated enterprise by the avoidance of minute interference." Bright urged Chapman to form a deputation of leading manufacturers to approach the BoC and pledged his participation. But as the plans for the GIPR lingered in bureaucratic purgatory, Chapman's personal finances precipitously declined. In August 1847, he was regretting having advanced sums of money to certain relatives. One needy brother had been employed at the workshop run by the Eastern Countries Railway, but was forced to quit when his fellow workers stole his tools. Acknowledging that "the end of my purse is the end of my resources," Chapman was soon compelled to request a hundred pound loan from GIPR board member R. W. Crawford to keep his lobbying afloat.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Reformers like John Sullivan, a contributor to the Satara agitation and future member of the IRS, rebuked the Company for "selecting one railway for its especial patronage" and observed that other colonial governments had mortgaged the public revenue to fund railways in Jamaica, Trinidad, and Ceylon. See "Indian Railways," *Allen's Indian Mail and Register of Intelligence*, vol. 5 (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1847), 374.

⁸⁰ *Growth of Cotton In India*, vol. 9 of *Reports from Committees* (1848), 351.

⁸¹ John Chapman to Robert Crawford, August 1847, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/70, f. 53

Chapman saw himself not merely as a promoter, but also as a self-trained expert on Indian conditions. Once the GIPR secured a more favorable guarantee from the government in February of 1849,⁸² Chapman attempted to cement his position amongst the company leadership as a managing director of operations in Bombay. To meet his expenses, he advised the board that he would require a salary of 1800 rupees a month; the directors consented to give him a paltry 1250.⁸³ Negotiations deteriorated from that point on, as Chapman “felt it necessary on public grounds, to make a stand against incompetent advice on Indian subjects.” He clearly resented that the fate of his career was being decided by outsiders like Cornelius Nicholson, a director of the East Lancashire Railway Company who had replaced one of Chapman’s allies at the helm of the GIPR. But even more alarmingly, the directors’ intransigence confirmed Chapman’s fears that they cared only for “the management of the capital as an investment, irrespective of the working objects of the undertaking.”⁸⁴ The payout from the guarantee, in other words, eclipsed any specific concern for Indian commercial development. It should be noted that Chapman was not shouting into the void. Director Crawford, who had led the Inland Rail Association before its merger with the GIPR, lauded Chapman as an ideal candidate for the managerial position in light of the fact that the EIC prohibited its own agents from overseeing private ventures. Crawford resigned his seat on the board in August 1849; the following month Chapman was fired on account of his “manifest want of discretion, temper and judgment.”⁸⁵

⁸² This compromise secured GIPR shareholders a guarantee of five percent interest on the capital invested; which the Indian government paid regardless of whether the lines generated a profit. See Thorner, 159-160.

⁸³ John Chapman, *Letter to the Shareholders of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway Company* (London: John Chapman, 1850), 11, 48.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

Given Chapman's grand, nearly utopian aspirations for the GIPR, conflict with the corporate board was perhaps unavoidable. Improved means of circulation, he posited, would not only open "channels for personal intercourse with the natives of the interior," but also grant them access to "many of the appliances of civilised life and agricultural and manufacturing industry."⁸⁶ Like the conservationist India reformers, he lauded the system of municipal government that sprung from the village communities, though he took issue with the practice of subsidizing local artisans with grain or tax-free lands in exchange for their "customary services." This division of labor was thoroughly appropriate for the "early ages of India," but it ultimately stifled "that growth of desire and of effort which is indispensable to social advance."⁸⁷ It was the *ryots'* isolation, however, that principally accounted for economic underdevelopment. Their hesitance to take up American varietals for export was thoroughly justified, as they simply cultivated enough cotton to fulfill the quotas imposed by the local moneylenders. A "Manchester spinner," Chapman hypothesized, would be similarly resistant to "alter his machinery, and disturb all his connections, in order to supply some new article for a half mythical city in central Africa, from which the demand" was highly uncertain.⁸⁸

From the outset, Chapman predicted that "no Railway in India will depend entirely, or even chiefly, on Cotton for its receipts." Cotton exports would likely amount to only one tenth of the GIPR's entire traffic, as the introduction of cheap transit would also give a fillip to the production and importation of salt gathered in the pans along the

⁸⁶ John Chapman, *Papers Illustrative of the Prospects of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway* (1846), BL, E293/288, 4.

⁸⁷ Chapman, *The Cotton and Commerce of India*, 94.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

western coast.⁸⁹ Before the rails, its conveyance into the interior necessitated a reciprocal trade: bullocks laden with grain or cotton came down from the Ghats and returned from Bombay with salt and manufactures. In times of famine, however, the chances of a steady traffic were slim. The cost of transit, coupled with the tax of 8 annas per maund of salt levied by the Bombay government, limited individual consumption in India to approximately 12 pounds annually, compared to 22 pounds in England. In spite of his laissez-faire principles, Chapman reckoned that salt manufacture was “perhaps the last branch of domestic industry of which the natives of this country should be deprived, if by any reasonable means it can be preserved to them from the rivalry of foreign commerce.”⁹⁰ In taking this stance, he was challenging the assertions of D. C. Aylwin, a Calcutta-based merchant who was whipping the metropolitan chambers of commerce into a free-trade frenzy in 1846.

The Company’s monopoly over the manufacture and sale of salt in Bengal had long been a target of reformers’ scorn. Since its imposition in 1790, British overseers had relied on the coerced labor of *ryots* to dam and distill the seawater in the flood-prone delta districts. The government would then price this salt at 300% of its production cost and sell it directly to merchants and country agents about ten times a year.⁹¹ In the 1833 charter debates, reformist free traders like Joseph Hume had vigorously remonstrated against this reckless profit-making; Thompson brought the issue forth again during the inaugural meeting of the BIS. Riding the free-trade wave in 1847, Francis Carnac Brown observed that the *ryots*’ inability to purchase salt rendered them “victims to the most

⁸⁹ John Chapman, *Remarks on Mr. Aylwin’s Letter to the Chairman of the Manchester Commercial Association* (London: Lewis and Son, 1847), 13.

⁹⁰ Chapman, *Papers Illustrative of the Prospects*, 8.

⁹¹ *Two Reports on the East India Salt Monopoly* (Liverpool: George Smith, 1837), 10.

loathsome and miserable diseases” and gradually made “them objects truly horrible to behold.”⁹² European traders, meanwhile, were discouraged from interfering in the Indian salt trade by a hefty customs duty of up to 400%. Lacking access to warehouses at the ports, they were often forced to sell their foreign salt at a loss.⁹³

Although Company mouthpieces lauded the salt duty as a textbook tax that fell evenly on the population, its opponents deemed it “offensive in the eyes of God and man” to derive profit from a “prime necessary of life.”⁹⁴ Once journalist J. H. Stocqueler fervently took up the cause, the metropolitan press joined in condemning the monopoly as “the corn law of the peninsula” and a “prohibition upon all improvement in the condition of the people.”⁹⁵ It was thoroughly “anomalous” that Company personnel should anoint themselves the sole “makers and venders of salt, and collectors of the tax thereon.”⁹⁶ If the salt of Cheshire and Worcestershire was admitted to Calcutta on equal terms, it could be sold at one fifth of the current price. A key informant for the metropolitan free-traders, Alywin suggested that the *ryots* would devote this savings to agricultural reinvestment or else dramatically increase their consumption of British textiles. British ships, however, would only carry an estimated 200,000 tons of Cheshire salt to India annually if they could return with raw cotton in their hulls. Alywin therefore rejected Chapman’s plan for the GIPR and proposed an alternative rail line from Dacca to Calcutta. Bombay, he posited, would never become a center of cotton exportation on account of shifting tax demands, poor roads, and the want of local markets for the *ryots*’

⁹² Brown further noted that the ancient laws of Holland had declared that “convicted men should be kept on bread alone, unmixed with salt, as the severest punishment.” See Sir John Parkington, Speech to House of Commons, July 28 1853, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 129 (1853) col. 917.

⁹³ J. H. Stocqueler, *The Memoirs of a Journalist* (Bombay: *Times of India* Offices, 1873), 163.

⁹⁴ “From the ‘Liverpool Chronicle,’ Oct. 10,” in *The Press versus the Salt Monopoly in British India* (Norwich, 1846), 26.

⁹⁵ “From ‘The Times’ of Sept. 25, 1846,” in *The Press versus the Salt Monopoly in British India*, 2.

⁹⁶ “The Salt Monopoly in British India,” *Spectator*, August 29 1846, 13.

produce. In contrast, Eastern Bengal possessed a permanently settled land tax, a rich alluvial soil, and a “sweltering” heat that was ideal for the cultivation of American varieties.⁹⁷

In response to this public takedown, Chapman enumerated the many historical errors and unsubstantiated speculations in Aylwin’s tract. “The fineness of the Dacca muslins prove[d] nothing for the fitness of Dacca cotton,” as the manufacturing hub had been an importer of raw cotton before its collapse.⁹⁸ It was only recently that local officials had attempted to cultivate the Pernambuco varietal on a limited scale. The cotton-producing districts controlled by the Nizam of Hyderabad, which the GIPR sought to tap, produced more cotton in their current mismanaged state than Bengal could ever hope to muster. Chapman further challenged the notion that Calcutta could emerge as a cotton-shipping hub. The raw cotton of Berar had once found its way to Calcutta via Mirzapur, but the pacification of western India following the Mahratta wars had rendered this route obsolete. Moreover, the abolition of the monopoly would not necessarily advantage English manufacturers, as the salt gathered in Bombay could be conveyed to Calcutta and sold at far lower prices. This exchange between Aylwin and Chapman illustrates how reformist developmental schemes, which ostensibly aspired to similar objects, could collide. With his lucid cause-and-effect narrative, Aylwin had managed to marshal free traders’ interest in Indian affairs and even form a deputation to lobby the BoC. His agitation confirmed Chapman’s fears that metropolitan merchants would follow the Indian government and augment Bengal’s gravitational force at the expense of the other less-developed presidencies.

⁹⁷ D. C. Aylwin, *A Letter on Cotton Cultivation in India: as Affected by the East India Company’s Salt Monopoly* (London: James Madden, 1847), 5.

⁹⁸ Chapman, *Remarks on Mr. Aylwin’s Letter*, 6.

Chapman not only had to contend with parallel ventures stealing the spotlight of the GIPR, but also with critics within the colonial administration who doubted the feasibility of his planned route.⁹⁹ In 1850, Bombay engineer C. W. Grant published an inflammatory pamphlet declaring that the newly-guaranteed GIPR would “force upon the inhabitants of a country, whether they like it or not, a totally new and, to them, incomprehensible system of conveyance.”¹⁰⁰ Grant posited that the natives of Bombay, in their present state of education, were unlikely to alter their habits to accord with the new “economy of time” that the rails would usher in. From an engineering and economic vantage point, the GIPR was also doomed to fail. Grant doubted whether the rails could ever successfully ascend the Ghats at Malsej and balked at the expected cost of tunnel construction. Replicating the English system of grand, heavy rail works would also wreak untold environmental disasters; the “vibrations, concussion, and shocks occasioned by the great weight and speed at which the heavy locomotives travel” would destabilize embankments that were “subject to the effects of four months of continuous rain.”¹⁰¹ A system of viaducts was preferable, as the embankments themselves might interfere with cart movements and native grazing practices. Grant also questioned whether the extension of the line eastwards would truly impact export levels, given that the bulk of raw cotton shipped out of Bombay was presently grown further north in coastal Gujarat.¹⁰² What the interior of Bombay truly required was a comprehensive system of irrigative works modeled on Arthur Cotton’s anicuts in South India.

⁹⁹ Per Chapman’s original plan, the GIPR would have ascended the Western Ghats at Malsej before splintering into northeast and southwest branches.

¹⁰⁰ C. W. Grant, *Bombay Cotton and Indian Railways* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1850), 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 36.

In airing his grave reservations, Grant was grappling with the ambiguous matter of the public good: the state authorities who imposed a “monopoly of transit” were “bound to consider the good and claims of the inhabitants of that country, as much as the interests of the proprietors of the monopoly.”¹⁰³ Chapman, he asserted, had placed too much emphasis on the untold commercial benefits of a rail line that may or may not reach cotton-rich Khamgaon in the distant future.¹⁰⁴ As a stakeholder in the GIPR, the Indian government was well within its right to secure its own advantage. In this instance, it would be advisable to reorient the line to the military station at Poona, where it would branch off to connect with the artillery headquarters at Ahmednuggur.¹⁰⁵ Chapman forcefully challenged this reasoning. Far from being a hub of manufacture, Poona was merely a center of consumption fueled by the tastes of pensioned-off Mahratta nobles. Any talk of military advantage, moreover, was a feint, as the actual “safety and tranquility of India depend[ed] on its intimate economics, — that is, the upon the condition of the people.”¹⁰⁶ Enhancing the *ryots*’ purchasing power through cheap transit would affix the natives to the government and render the need for rapid troop transfers superfluous. Irrigation was all well and good, but the peasants would hardly benefit from an abundance of produce if they lacked the means to convey it for sale. Chapman also disputed the notion that the limited rails constituted a monopoly of transit in a country as large and varied as India. The *banjaras* (bullock drivers) should not, he warned, be characterized as the passive victims of technological transfers. If their role was “ever superseded,” it would “be by the slow agency of remote circumstances, operating as

¹⁰³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁰⁴ Historically, *banjaras* transported the bulk of the town’s cotton eastwards to Mizapur.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁶ Chapman, *The Cotton and Commerce of India*, 205-211.

much with their own concurrences and on themselves, as on the circumstances in which they are placed.”¹⁰⁷

Much to Chapman’s likely disdain, Anglo-Indian publications like the *Calcutta Review* heaped praise on Grant’s treatise. The colonial engineer had exposed the GIPR for what it was: a flimflam operation designed to deceive metropolitan “factory interests” with promises of boundless cotton stores in the interior. Chapman, the *Review* implied, could be counted among the “impudent and forward men” who induced “capitalists to enter into useless and fruitless speculations.”¹⁰⁸ Grant had aptly recommended that the colonial state emulate “the old Indian monarchies” and invest in irrigation, lest the destitute *ryots* give up cotton cultivation once and for all. At the same time, India need not retrace England’s “steps of improvement” through the successive adoption of foot-paths, carriage roads, canals, and railways. The immediate construction of cheap, light rails would enable Britain to “conquer the material empire of India, by the employment of the first and best principles of modern science.”¹⁰⁹ For all of Grant’s sagacious advice, the reviewer was still confronted with a most pressing conundrum. Without citing any particular example, he repeated the axiom that private companies that invested in land improvement or transit projects in India did not turn a profit; the government was therefore looked upon as “the Deus ex machina” in these instances. At the same time, it was unthinkable that the provincial cotton lords should sit idly by and wait for the colonial administration to take the initiative at the *ryots*’ expense. The matter of responsibility was ultimately one for “the Manchester people to settle with the Home

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 227.

¹⁰⁸ “Bombay Cotton and Indian Railways,” *Calcutta Review* 13, no. 26 (1850): 328.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 338.

Government and the Board of Control.”¹¹⁰ This hope proved to be a remarkably optimistic one indeed.

Beyond the Guarantee

When the prospects of the GIPR had looked dim in early 1849, Chapman began to cast doubts on the efficacy of his long-sought guarantee. In one pamphlet, he affirmed the “broad principle” that public works “are not the business of governments.”¹¹¹ If the government ran up exorbitant costs, the figures merely entered the national ledger and disappeared in the general balance. While governmental sponsorship would be a “usurpation” in the metropole, Chapman acknowledged that British India was in a “transition state of society.” Historically, Indians put the faith in the mantra *sirkar kuringa*: “the government would do it.” But it was this excessive dependence on the state that made India, “rich as it is by nature, so poor by art.”¹¹² To rouse a progressive spirit of competition, Chapman insisted that the colonial administration should be relegated to the position of “a free and impartial umpire between all parties” and should “*appear distinctly* in that character to the native population.”

After his ejection from the GIPR, Chapman reinvented himself as a commentator on Indian issues and continued to refine his belief in “the value of non-governmental action in many matters of common concern.”¹¹³ Called before the select committee on Indian territories in 1853, he speculated that the GIPR would have been able to amass

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 331.

¹¹¹ John Chapman, *On the Question, Government versus Companies, for the Construction and Management of Railways and other Public Works in India*, 1849, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/106, f. 5

¹¹² Chapman, *Principles of Indian Reform*, 28.

¹¹³ John Chapman, “The Sphere and Duties of Government,” *Westminster Review* 6 [new series] (1854): 474.

sufficient private capital in the 1840s had not the competing EIR precipitately called for the guarantee and convinced potential investors of its necessity. Chapman further reminded the directors that this security had acted as an “effectual quietus” that dissuaded the well-compensated shareholders from inquiring into the GIPR’s progress and management.¹¹⁴ The initiation of the project was also frustrated by bureaucratic red tape. As the colonial state had neglected to formulate a comprehensive public works policy, plans for the GIPR lingered for years in purgatory while Chapman waited for the BoC, CoD and Indian authorities to come to some consensus. Soliciting opinions from the Supreme Government in Calcutta was often a futile exercise, as its engineers were unaware of the peculiar challenges that companies operating in different regions faced. This was a riff on an established criticism that reformers had revived earlier in the charter debates. Former Madras Council member John Sullivan, who was lending his pamphleteering services to the IRS, traced the root of the problem to the 1833 Charter Act, which had severely curtailed the autonomy of the local governments and required the central administration to sign off on all expenditures. Plans for projects approved by the local Board of Works and the Madras government therefore ended up on the desk of the governor-general, who referred them to an engineer in Bengal for a final verdict despite his “perfect ignorance of the localities.”¹¹⁵ In the interest of efficiency, Sullivan recommended a reversion to decentralization and suggested that the overworked governor-generals be divested of their financial powers so that they might better focus their attentions on military and political matters.

¹¹⁴ *Fifth Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories*, July 14, 1853 [HC 768], 67

¹¹⁵ *Third Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories*, June 2, 1853 [HC 556], 2.

As Chapman published articles in the *Westminster Review*, testified before parliamentary committees, and served as the Bombay Association's metropolitan agent, he was increasingly functioning as a clearinghouse for the dissemination of information on colonial affairs. In early 1854, he was in communication with planter W. Williamson Ramsay, who had inquired about the feasibility of setting up an irrigation company in Khandesh to stimulate the growth of sugar, chilies, tobacco, and indigo. Given the "imperfect knowledge prevailing at present in the public mind of England regarding India," Ramsay suspected that his scheme would require a guarantee and a degree of governmental intervention to bypass customary water rights.¹¹⁶ Chapman was less sanguine about this arrangement, noting that "years have been little better than lost in waiting for the government so far."¹¹⁷ Irrigation schemes, if properly promoted, would attract the attention of metropolitan manufacturers for whom accessing raw cotton was "only one part of the matter." Economic panics erupted when England oversupplied the colonial agency houses with goods that they could not sell. It was therefore in the manufacturers' interest to augment the *ryots*' agricultural capabilities, boost their profits, and stoke their consumerism. While Chapman advised that the agreements between the proposed water companies and their clients should be arbitrated in the courts, he resisted any proposal that would grant the state manifold powers of intervention. To this end, he directly petitioned Major Oliphant, the chairman of the EIC, to address the lack of legislative protections for foreign investments in India.

In Chapman's mind, the expansion of public works through metropolitan investment would also affix leading natives to the colonial regime. As the Company

¹¹⁶ W. W. Ramsay to John Chapman, January 1854, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/103, f. 9.

¹¹⁷ John Chapman to W. W. Ramsay, January 1854, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/103, ff. 14-15.

retained “the privacy and exclusion of the counting house,” its subjects were wont to look upon the organization as a conquering body and submit to its edicts accordingly. Apathy was a logical response to this estrangement, as Indians accustomed to the clashes of rival regimes presumed British rule to be impermanent. They therefore perceived any edict issued from on high as “a calamity” which “they would evade or resist at the time, but against which they have nothing to say.”¹¹⁸ Chapman therefore surmised that the longevity of the colonial state hinged upon its ability to facilitate the expression of native public opinion and enlist Indians “as partners of our destiny.”¹¹⁹ The British, to use Ranajit Guha’s phrasing, had hitherto failed to establish their hegemony through persuasive means; the “idiom of improvement” lost its hypnotic hold once western-educated Indians in the presidency towns found themselves unable to secure gainful employment.¹²⁰ Acknowledging Britons’ pedagogical role in India, Chapman suggested that the state should increasingly “afford occasions for the use of the knowledge which we impart.” By partaking in the “construction and management of great public works of communication,” as well as the “prosecution of augmented industry and commerce,” Indians would begin to have a vested interest in the perpetuation of colonial rule.

Curiously, Ahuja reads Chapman’s comments on the present underdevelopment of native public opinion as a declaration that English interests *alone* should be consulted in infrastructural planning.¹²¹ This interpretation affirms the prevailing scholarly consensus that Indian public works were not designed to yield direct benefits to the native

¹¹⁸ Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, *On the Civil Administration of the Bombay Presidency* (London: John Chapman, 1853), v.

¹¹⁹ Chapman, *The Cotton and Commerce of India*, 126-29. Noting that “the engineer-drivers in Jamaica are American blacks,” Chapman had previously testified that Indians could operate the trains themselves (though their courage might falter in the event of a collision). See *Growth of Cotton In India*, 355.

¹²⁰ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1997), 65.

¹²¹ Ahuja, 85.

public. Yet reformers like Chapman eagerly introduced prominent Indians to constitutionalist techniques and emphasized the “importance of the native British subjects of Bombay distinctly and emphatically... acting on their rights as British subjects.”¹²² Prior to the 1853 charter renewal, he communicated extensively with Jagannath Sunkersett, a leading merchant and Bombay Association founder. Sunkersett, Chapman advised, ought temper his faith that the government of its own volition would enact sufficient educational reforms or embark upon infrastructural projects. What India’s mercantile interests truly required was a “just practical law regulating property in public works and defining the conditions under which private parties may undertake them, with the necessary legal security.”¹²³ By establishing well-managed municipal corporations and joint stock associations to oversee these ventures, educated Indians in search of higher political office could showcase their powers of combination and their fitness as participants in an imperial civil society.

The impoverishment of India was merely one example of a larger historical trend in which “extensive interferences with individual energy” had wrought societal ruin.¹²⁴ Chapman’s much-desired guarantee for the GIPR had simply been a means to an end that had never fully materialized. In the early 1850s, he was lamenting that “railways, guaranteed as at present, do very little towards improving public opinion in England in relation to India.”¹²⁵ Satisfied with their annuities, metropolitan speculators generally failed to inquire into the political causes of India’s stagnation, let alone address the anomalies that undergirded the Company’s closed-shop system of governance. The

¹²² John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, December 24, 1852, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

¹²³ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, December 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 295.

¹²⁴ Chapman, “The Sphere and Duties of Government,” 498.

¹²⁵ Chapman, *Principles of Indian Reform*, 17.

establishment of a transparent and accountable state-system would also preoccupy Chapman's nemesis, canal enthusiast Arthur Cotton.

Arthur Cotton: Water on the Brain

With a surfeit of allies and detractors, Arthur Cotton was nothing if not a divisive figure. During the mid-nineteenth century, he boasted a reputation in the Madras presidency as “the founder of the cheapest School of Engineering in the world” for his anicuts (or dams) in the Cauvery, Godavery, and Kistna river deltas.¹²⁶ Although the costs on certain projects had a tendency to snowball, they generally proved remunerative. Reflecting on the need for further irrigative improvements in the wake of the 1876 Madras famine, Secretary of State Salisbury noted that these three projects had yielded returns on the capital outlay at rates of 86%, 32%, and 15% respectively.¹²⁷ As late as 1878, one former official proclaimed Cotton's anicut on the Godavery at Rajahmundry to be “the noblest feat of engineering skill which has yet been accomplished in British India.”¹²⁸ Dickinson, too, enumerated the benefits that the dam and canal had bestowed upon the district: the irrigation of 700,000 acres had preserved thousands of lives during recent scarcities, while the “gift of free navigation” on the river had increased the traffic in goods by approximately 30%.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Models of the Godavery and Kistna anicuts were presented by the Government C. E. College in Madras for display at the 1873 Vienna Universal Exhibition. See J. Forbes Watson, *Vienna Universal Exhibition 1873. A Classified and Descriptive Catalogue of the Indian Department* (London: W. H. Allen, 1873) 209.

¹²⁷ *British India. Speeches of the Right Hon. John Bright and Sir Arthur Cotton, K.C.S.I at a Meeting of the Manchester Indian Association* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1877), 5.

¹²⁸ Henry Morris, *A Descriptive and Historical Account of the Godavery District in the Presidency of Madras* (London: Trübner & Co., 1878), 109.

¹²⁹ John Dickinson, *A Letter to the Lord Stanley, M.P. on the Policy of the Secretary of State for India* (London: P. S. King, 1863), 7.

Contemporary historians, however, have hardly been as generous with their praise. G. N. Rao suggests that the *ryots*' interest in the anicut diminished precipitously after 1857 on account of hefty assessments on "wet" lands; B. Eswara Rao further argues that Cotton's scheme to introduce cash crops was causative of significant environmental degradation by the turn of the twentieth century.¹³⁰ Extrapolating data from a limited number of governmental reports, these histories nevertheless convey the up-hill challenges inherent in the formation of a new "state-country." Other scholars have targeted Cotton on a more personal level, dismissing his schemes as grandiose and expressing discomfiture with his Evangelical streak (which his daughter-cum-biographer emphasized to great effect). Daniel Headricks, for instance, describes him as "a man who combined great engineering talent and the enthusiasm of a technocratic visionary with very poor administrative skills."¹³¹ Jon Wilson has similarly suggested that Cotton's "prophetic style of engineering led him to argue that the natural environment could be radically reshaped by divinely inspired men."¹³² More problematically, Cotton's transformative program was a solution to a problem that the Company itself had created. Whereas the British had once sought personal alliances with the local chiefs in Rajahmundry, they increasingly eschewed all "non-modern forms of affiliation and

¹³⁰ G. N. Rao, "Canal Irrigation and Agrarian Change in Colonial Andhra: a Study of Godavari District, c. 1850-1890," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 25, no. 1 (1988): 36; B. Eswara Rao, "Taming 'Liquid Gold' and Dam Technology: a Study of the Godavari Anicut," in *The British Empire and the Natural World: Environmental Encounters in South Asia*, eds. Deepak Kumar, Vinita Damodaran, and Rohan D'Souza (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154.

¹³¹ Headricks, 182.

¹³² Wilson, *The Chaos of Empire*, 273. Having read his Ruskin, Cotton believed human intervention to be essential; if left to their "lawless flow," Indian rivers would bring forth the "the last and deadliest of national plagues, water of Marah, the water which feeds the roots of all evil." See Proby Cautley, *A Reply to Statements made by Major-General Arthur Cotton on the Projection of the Ganges Canal Works* (London, 1863), 61.

practice.”¹³³ As the chiefs’ social and political prestige eroded, their power diminished; by the 1820s, they were no longer able to maintain the irrigative works that had once secured them a loyal following. Rajahmundry’s land revenue declined precipitously, prompting a colonial investigation that identified the need for government-sponsored irrigation. The works that Cotton subsequently initiated were simply the fruits of a nascent bureaucratic despotism: they “were an effort to rule without engaging with people at all.”¹³⁴

Wilson’s reading is somewhat uncharitable, given the fact that reformers routinely complained of the Indian government’s destabilization of social and economic hierarchies. In the wake of the 1861 famine that swept through the North-Western Provinces, Dickinson took the administration to task for having toppled the gentry, or *talukdars*, who had provided the *ryots* with capital in times of dearth.¹³⁵ Any society consisting solely of peasants and isolated government officials was inorganic and doomed to implosion. Confronted with these historians’ assessments more generally, India reformers would likely have admitted that administrative resistance to infrastructural improvements resulted in unnecessary vacillation and subpar management of various works. As “projectors,” they were tasked with reorienting the trajectory of Indian governance, but they could not be held responsible for the state’s quotidian missteps. Any gains were generally made *in spite* of the government, which devoted the bulk of its resources to paying off the railway guarantees and the costs incurred by the military. The construction of Cotton’s brainchild, a 328-mile navigable canal on the

¹³³ Jon Wilson, “How Modernity Arrived to Godavari,” *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2017): 427.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹³⁵ John Dickinson, *The Famine in the North-West Provinces of India: How We Might Have Prevented It, and May Prevent Another* (London: P. S. King, 1861), 13.

Godavery to reach the interior of Berar, was an especially fraught affair. After 35 years of piece-meal construction and repeated delays, the bill on the project had risen to 1.3 million pounds from an original estimate of half a million. As a result, leading officials began to doubt the reliability of Cotton's projected figures and accuse him having "water on the brain."¹³⁶

Cotton's tireless advocacy of navigable canals gave him a platform on which to espouse provocative state-ideas. Like Chapman, he insisted that the colonial administration overcome its obsession with tax collection; in a period of advanced peace, it was essential that the extractive priorities inherent in military fiscalism be replaced by a biopolitical imperative. In introducing this concept, Michel Foucault observed that the eighteenth-century European state arrogated the "function of administering life" through "two poles of development." In an initial "anatomic" stage, new disciplinary mechanisms configured the body as machine in an effort to boost its efficiency. In the second stage, which is more relevant for our purposes, the state began to exert regulatory control over the "species body...as the basis of the biological processes" and involve itself with the reproduction and longevity of its population.¹³⁷ India reformers usually reasoned that additional anatomic-political forms of discipline were unnecessary, as natives would naturally engage in productive commerce if they were granted sufficient capital and market access. Rather, they sought to carve out a bio-political role for a colonial state that did not substantively undermine popular notions of laissez-faire. Cotton, for instance, asserted that the government should undertake preventive works rather than allocating piecemeal famine relief after disaster had struck. In Foucauldian terms, his agitation may

¹³⁶ Lady Hope, *General Sir Arthur Cotton*, 261.

¹³⁷ Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life," in *Biopolitics: a Reader*, eds. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 43-44.

be interpreted as an attempt to “establish a sort of homeostasis” by mitigating calamity.¹³⁸ Achieving this regularization would also require the colonial administration to adopt a transparent state-system, lest engineers in the Public Works Department continue to squander public funds without adequate oversight.

In issuing these demands, Cotton struggled to craft a dual public persona as both a reformist agitator and a scientific authority. Adversaries like Sir Proby Cautley, the engineer behind the much-abused Ganges Canal, resented his interference and accused him of mercenary motivations. Cotton’s exertions also cast the distinction between the planning and management of public works into stark relief. Irrigation projects could be perfectly functional, but few *ryots* would reap their advantage if the state imposed onerous water rates and increased land assessments. The trials of the Madras Irrigation Canal and Navigation Company and the East India Irrigation Company evidenced the obstacles that could afflict any guaranteed, private ventures that were insufficiently monitored past the planning stages.

Although Wilson charges Cotton with duplicitously attempting a “bold break with the past” and disavowing “the importance of old waterworks,” he actually referenced native precedents repeatedly throughout his career.¹³⁹ In building his first major anicuts across the Upper Coleroon branch of the Cauvery in 1835, Cotton aimed to conclusively prove that “what was done by the natives hundreds of years ago...with their little science and poor means, can also be done by us.”¹⁴⁰ According to his brother Fred, Cotton’s modeling of his works on the ancient Grand Anicut at Tanjore in 1828 was a mark of

¹³⁸ Michel Foucault, “‘Society Must be Defended,’ Lecture at the Collège de France, March 17, 1976,” in *Biopolitics: a Reader*, eds. Timothy Campbell and Adam Sitze (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 67.

¹³⁹ Wilson, “How Modernity Arrived to Godavari,” 430.

¹⁴⁰ Arthur Cotton and Proby T. Cautley, *A Discussion, Regarding the Projection and Present State of the Ganges Canal* (London, 1864), 122.

ingenuity: “no English Engineer would have risked his reputation on the works he carried out so triumphantly” at minimal cost.¹⁴¹ Where Cotton diverged from the native architects of yore was in his sense of scale. It was through the construction of interregional, navigable canals and grand storage tanks that Cotton hoped to “bring to bear the great principles of science” on the Indian environment.¹⁴²

Cotton’s praise for modern, European technical knowledge, together with his dismissal of “the poor wretched ideas of the bookless Asiatics,” have led historians to liken him to Thomas Macaulay, whose preference for a single shelf of English literature over the entire Sanskrit and Arabic corpuses is well known.¹⁴³ Was Cotton simply a bigoted avatar of European civilization? Certainly he did not hold the “drivelings such as are found in the Hindoo religious writings” in high esteem.¹⁴⁴ Yet he also recognized that the Indian was “by nature a very intelligent being,” albeit one “without our advantages.” The Anglo-Saxon officers, in contrast, had little excuse for having “surrendered all their English wits” upon touching Indian soil. If Indians had possessed the colonizers’ “Western knowledge and unbounded means,” they would scarcely have “followed such an example as we have set.”¹⁴⁵ Without white-washing Cotton’s culturalism, we may interpret the engineer’s admonitions as a form of political counter-preaching designed to spur the administration into action. In this regard, his tactics mirrored those of Dickinson and Bright, who vigorously supported Cotton’s schemes despite their lack of Evangelical fellow feeling.

¹⁴¹ Lady Hope, *General Sir Arthur Cotton*, 139.

¹⁴² Cotton, *Public Works*, 256.

¹⁴³ Ahuja, 101.

¹⁴⁴ Cotton, *Public Works*, 11.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.

From the late 1840s to the early 1880s, Cotton publicly despaired that the colonial regime had failed to rule in a manner befitting a moral, enlightened people. Although the British continued to engage in internecine disputes on its borders, internal disturbances had largely abated. There was “no new province to be won, no foe to be chastised,” and only the occasional “hill robber to be reduced.”¹⁴⁶ It was therefore incumbent upon the Company to communicate the “beneficent effects of being under a Christian Government,” which would “have a far more decisive influence upon the peace of the country, than any power of concentrating troops.”¹⁴⁷ A *Times* review of Cotton’s *Public Works* concurred that the colonial administration required a new philosophy of rule to govern its conduct, as adhering to the “stationary maxims of Oriental despotism” would hardly suffice for a Christian nation.¹⁴⁸

Unlike its Indian predecessors, the Company had failed to recognize the “primary duty of Government to prevent by all means in its power the wholesale destruction of human life by famine.”¹⁴⁹ Cotton realized that native rulers had long maintained the goodwill of their subjects through the provisioning of water. Kings who devoted resources to tanks and canals were venerated, but the British were held in somewhat lower regard. Indeed, it was a “common idea among the natives that the English are a sort of enlightened savages”; they were militarily capable, but “totally ignorant of the arts of peace, and not to be compared with their own former great men.”¹⁵⁰ Unlike certain

¹⁴⁶ *Papers Extracted from ‘The Times,’ of Public Works for India* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1856), 40.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16. Cotton’s daughter offered a summation of his views: despite recurrent famines, India was “not cursed of God,” but rather “neglected” by the “representative[s] of a nation favoured above all other nations of the earth.” See Lady Hope, *General Sir Arthur Cotton*, 364.

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Evans Bell and Frederick Tyrrell, *Public Works and the Public Service in India* (London: Trübner & Co. 1871), 17.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur Cotton, *Profits upon British Capital Expended on Indian Public Works* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1856), 49.

stuffed shirts in the India Office, the *ryots* understood the distinction between “a Government that merely compels them to pay revenue and one that also enables them to do it.” It was high time, Cotton suggested, that British India follow the lead of native states like Travancore, which was investing one fifth of its annual revenue on infrastructure. If only the colonial authorities “would condescend to learn a lesson from our native friends, or borrow some black Commissioners from them for our own provinces,” they might finally appreciate the need for a more principled public works policy.¹⁵¹ Cotton’s acolytes like Lt. Colonel Frederick Tyrrell, the former executive engineer of Berar, echoed the critique that the colonial regime was shirking its obligations. In former times, “no country was better provided with such hydraulic works, as the science of those days and the limited means at their disposal enabled Native Princes and private benefactors to construct.”¹⁵² Emulating these practices, the reformers advised, would be a thoroughly strategic pursuit for the colonial government. Members of the East India Association (EIA) even postulated that the Company’s repair of old tanks in the states of Rajputana had secured the allegiance of the native population during the 1857 Uprising.¹⁵³

When the colonial governments did scruple to construct irrigative works, they were historically in response to the devastating famines of 1837, 1861, and 1866. As Bright adroitly put it, “they generally wait till the horse is stolen before they lock the stable door.”¹⁵⁴ Why did the state require such coaxing? According to Dickinson, the home government was thoroughly corrupted; seduced by metropolitan lobbyists,

¹⁵¹ *East India (Public Works)*, vol. 3 of *Reports from Committees* (1878), 188.

¹⁵² Bell and Tyrrell, 16.

¹⁵³ Arthur Cotton, “The Prevention and Counteraction of Indian Famines,” *Journal of the East India Association* 11 (1878): 30.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

Secretary of State Charles Wood had “sacrificed the public interest of two great empires to the private interests of a railway party.”¹⁵⁵ Cotton had rightly observed in 1854 that it was all too common for “the interest of the shareholders, and that of the community in a line of rail, [to] be diametrically opposed.”¹⁵⁶ Far from opening the interior, constructing extravagant rail lines in regions without preexisting infrastructure was like “trying to bleed a frozen body, before the blood has begun to circulate.”¹⁵⁷ If the grand Indian rails served one purpose, it was as a “symbol of our enterprise and power, which will strike the people with awe, and ensure their submission.” But the age of symbolism, Dickinson reasoned, was over. Indians required cheap, rapid transit to sell their goods at distant markets rather than the “expensive communication of highly civilized life.”¹⁵⁸ Navigable canals could capture the extant river-born trade and, following the introduction of steam boats, might even rival the Mississippi River and the Erie Canal.

Much as Dickinson and Cotton denigrated the metropolitan railway cliques, they held out hope that English investors would soon be drawn to irrigation and canal projects. So long as the state funded these long-term projects solely out of the uncertain annual land revenues, it was incapable of seeing them to fruition. Using the revenue in this fashion also violated theories of equitable taxation; it threw the “whole cost on the present generation” despite the fact that “the living race of the natives of India [could] only receive a comparatively small proportion of the profit of such Works.”¹⁵⁹ If the colonial government could be allowed to borrow between three and four million pounds a

¹⁵⁵ Dickinson, *A Letter to the Lord Stanley*, 16.

¹⁵⁶ Cotton, *Public Works*, 87.

¹⁵⁷ Dickinson, *Address to the Members of the House of Commons*, 17.

¹⁵⁸ John Dickinson, *Remarks on the Indian Railway Reports published by the Government, and Reasons for a Change of Policy in India* (London: P. S. King, 1862), 21.

¹⁵⁹ Dickinson, *A Letter to the Lord Stanley*, 24.

year at a low interest rate for cheap transit projects,¹⁶⁰ private contractors could then “undertake parts or the whole of any scheme” sanctioned by the administration’s engineers. Echoing John Stuart Mill, Cotton concluded that “the Government should only carry on material improvements directly, till other effective agencies are raised up, and no longer.”¹⁶¹ Redirecting investment to irrigation works would also wean British speculators from the practice of loaning money to foreign governments. This line of argument proved especially compelling during the catastrophic Madras famine of 1876, which aligned with the Ottomans’ brutal suppression of the April Uprising in Bulgaria. Responding to Cotton and Bright’s lectures, notables like the Bishop of Manchester urged their fellow Englishmen to invest in Indian works rather than buying shares in the Ottoman public debt to prop up an oriental despotism.¹⁶²

Like Chapman, Cotton sought to pierce the cloud of obfuscation that enveloped Indian governance and introduce a new state-system grounded in accountability. In England, he noted, “no work [was] undertaken without endless discussions” shaped by the “wits and experience of hundreds of professional Engineers.”¹⁶³ But in India, proposals for public works that originated at the local level were quickly mired in bureaucracy as they passed from the Boards of Revenue to the provincial government to Calcutta. Like Dalhousie, who credited the intermediary military boards with having

¹⁶⁰ Dalhousie had obtained a loan for remunerative, or “extraordinary,” public works in 1854, but irrigative projects were omitted from this category until 1867.

¹⁶¹ Cotton and Cautley, *A Discussion, Regarding the Projection and Present State of the Ganges Canal*, 132. Mill believed that the state should step in if private investors were unable or unwilling to subsidize infrastructural works. But voluntary enterprise was preferable; a “good government” should thus “give all its aid in such a shape, as to encourage and nurture any rudiments it may find of a spirit of individual exertion.” It is somewhat difficult to reconcile this emphasis on pedagogy with Mill’s earlier representation of public works as “practical monopolies” subject to the state’s control. See Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. 2, 590.

¹⁶² *British India. Speeches of the Right Hon. John Bright and Sir Arthur Cotton*, 27.

¹⁶³ Cotton, *Public Works*, 6.

“managed everything and marred everything,”¹⁶⁴ Cotton took issue with the lack of a straightforward approval process. Part of his ire was personal, as the Madras government had held up construction of the Godavery project despite the prior sanction of the CoD and the local Board of Revenue. But Cotton also articulated his dissatisfaction with the institutionalized inscrutability of Indian governance on the whole. Colonial agents who insisted that “gagging and secrecy are essential to good and effective government” perpetuated an ostrich-like state of ignorance; those who dreaded publicity often did “not want to know the real state of things in the country.”¹⁶⁵ In a truly radical gesture, Cotton demanded the “immediate exposure of every public document connected with the ordinary business of Government, for free discussion by young as well as old.”¹⁶⁶

Cotton’s reformist acolytes also remonstrated against the creeping insularity that had begun to infect the colonial bureaucracy. Tyrrell encountered a good deal of resistance within the insolvent Public Works Department (PWD), which had degenerated into a “closed service” under the sole purview of the military engineers. These officials were talented mathematicians and punctual “in keeping up correspondence and in furnishing monthly reports,” but they rarely amassed practical knowledge of the interior.¹⁶⁷ Tyrrell therefore called for a decentralization of authority in the hopes of toppling the PWD’s elaborate hierarchy and quashing its “regimental spirit.” The government, he advised, ought train a batch of native engineers who could be loaned out to the native states in Central India and Rajputana. “It would be a simple defiance of

¹⁶⁴ H. A. Young, *The East India Company’s Arsenals & Manufactories* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 17.

¹⁶⁵ Cotton, *Public Works*, 51, 60.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁶⁷ Bell and Tyrrell, 25. Similar hostilities arose in the Punjab canal colonies, where expert practitioners of an “irrigation science” ran up against pragmatic administrators who prioritized the acquisition of “local knowledge.” See David Gilmartin, “Scientific Empire and Imperial Science: Colonialism and Irrigation Technology in the Indus Basin,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 53, no. 4 (1993): 1127-1149.

monumental history and of facts” to suggest that these rulers had no desire “to see works of irrigation or improved communications in their territories.”¹⁶⁸

Not all colonial engineers were as willing as Cotton and Tyrrell to subject their projects to public scrutiny. The vicious pamphlet war between Cotton and Proby Cautley reveals the extent to which a debate over principles could devolve into ad hominem attacks. Although Dalhousie had lauded the Ganges Canal project in 1854 as a “work unequalled in its class and character among the efforts of civilized nations,” it was evident by the early 1860s that something had gone awry in its construction.¹⁶⁹ The canal had failed to substantially simulate irrigation and transit; as a result, it was only yielding a paltry profit of 3% through enhanced water rates. In 1862, the East India Irrigation Company (EIIC) had brought Cotton out of retirement to consult on its planned works in Bihar. While in India, Cotton had taken the liberty of inspecting the Ganges works (which the EIIC was allegedly considering purchasing) and compiled a memo for private circulation. Technicalities aside, Cotton charged that the canal’s steep incline, inordinate depth, and use of bricks rather than durable stones inhibited its navigability while tripling its cost. The issue of profitability was a personal one for Cotton, as he suspected that the poor returns from the Ganges Canal had dissuaded the central government from investing in his own pet projects.

After this memo leaked, an incensed Cautley found himself forced to reply, “not for [his] own justification only, but as a duty to the Government whom [he] had served so long.”¹⁷⁰ Cotton, he charged, was simply an expert in low incline deltas who was attempting to universalize his principles. If his damming techniques were applied to high

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶⁹ “Irrigation in India,” *The Times*, November 2, 1864.

¹⁷⁰ Cotton and Cautley, 76.

velocity rivers like the Ganges and Jumna, the works would be swept away in the season's first flood. And while Cotton and fellow advocates of shallow canals were apparently indifferent to the issue of inundation and the spread of malaria, Cautley was alive to such concerns. Cotton, in response, rejected the notion that he was insensitive to locality. He would "no more think of putting on the Ganges such gigantic works as we have had to construct in the South, than [he] should think of dressing a little boy in his father's clothes."¹⁷¹ Although he disputed the notion that his works had ever been linked to fevers, a handful of critics continued to speculate that his large storage tanks were ill-suited to North India, where an absence of good drainage in the soil rendered the lands supersaturated, salinized, and pestiferous.¹⁷² Cotton's allies in the EIA controverted these critiques with evidence from Sanskrit texts, in which "the Kings of Delhi [were] asked if the tanks in their kingdom were properly maintained and full of water."

Why did the Cotton-Cautley spat become so acrimonious? Cotton insisted that he was "not trying the projector but the project" itself.¹⁷³ It was the duty of any experienced individual to "induce the utmost possible use of a national work, which, through mistakes, has certainly become a powerful instrument of obstruction and injury." He was even thankful that Cautley had published his confidential memo, as it gave him the opportunity to "deal with a public work in a public spirit."¹⁷⁴ All too often, the Indian government disseminated official accounts that were dismissive of Cotton's works

¹⁷¹ Arthur Cotton, *Reply by Major-General Sir Arthur Cotton to Colonel Sir Proby Cautley's 'Disquisition' on the Ganges Canal* (London, 1864), 16.

¹⁷² Cotton, "The Prevention and Counteraction of Indian Famines," 35-38.

¹⁷³ Cotton and Cautley, 128.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

without publishing his defenses.¹⁷⁵ Unfortunately, Cautley had failed to respond in a temperate manner. His overly technical rebuttals only convinced casual readers that the Ganges dispute was a “case of doctors differing, and that consequently it is hopeless for them to attempt to unravel it.”¹⁷⁶ By 1865, Cotton was suggesting that the “excessive centralization of Indian government” inhibited any frank discussion of public works. Engineers like Cautley who were based in Bengal had the ear of the Supreme Government and were inclined to “look on the public servants of the minor Presidencies as an almost inferior caste.”¹⁷⁷

Unbeknownst to Cotton, the origins of Cautley’s distemper were rather more personal. Upon reading a critical account of the Ganges Canal in *The Times*, he concluded that the author was likely John Dickinson, “a declared enemy of Lord Dalhousie.”¹⁷⁸ Following a promotion to a seat on the Council of India, Cautley lamented that Dickinson and his reformist cadre were conspiring to make a public target out of him in order “to show how badly works are done” under the aegis of the government.¹⁷⁹ He had few kind words for Cotton, who was “as unscrupulous as he is false” and “deserve[d] to be well kicked” for his shameless advocacy of private irrigation companies.¹⁸⁰ Singing a different tune, reformers like Francis Carnac Brown celebrated Cotton for pulling back the curtains on the inner workings of the colonial administration. Given the “ignorant rubbish being written and propagated in England, relative to the unhealthiness of India,”

¹⁷⁵ Cotton was especially critical of the 1878 report of the select committee on Indian public works and fumed after *The Nineteenth-Century* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* declined to publish his response. See Letter from Arthur Cotton, September 29, 1879, East India Association Meeting Book, no. 2, BL, F147/27, f. 345.

¹⁷⁶ Cotton, *Reply by Major-General Sir Arthur Cotton*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Cotton, *Reply to Sir Proby Cautley’s Valedictory Note*, 17.

¹⁷⁸ Proby Cautley to Crofton, November 10, 1864, BL, Mss Eur A38. The recent death of Cautley’s son, Alec, likely colored his mood.

¹⁷⁹ Proby Cautley to Crofton, October 26, 1865, BL, Mss Eur A38.

¹⁸⁰ Proby Cautley to Crofton, November 8, 1865, BL, Mss Eur A38.

few objective observers bothered to undertake any tour of inspection.¹⁸¹ The “English public at home,” however, had a “right to know from this striking instance...how Indian public works of great magnitude and of the highest importance are really executed.”

Private Irrigation Companies: a Failed Experiment

Cotton’s relationship with the Madras Irrigation Canal and Navigation Company (MCINC) and the associated EIIC brought his objectivity into question, as critics charged him with encouraging improvident speculation despite his assertion that he had “nothing to do with commercial men.”¹⁸² The underwhelming performance of both ventures did not improve his credibility. Established in the late 1850s, the MICNC eventually secured a guarantee of 5% interest on capital of one million pounds, the first of its kind for an irrigation company. The fulcrum of its grand, inter-regional scheme was a 310-mile canal linking Kurnool with Kadapa that proceeded from an anicut on the Tungabhadra River. As Reddy recounts, the PWD resented this competing venture and prohibited the company from supplying water to *ryots* after December for the *rabi* crops.¹⁸³ Collision with the local government also hindered the EIIC’s works on the Mahnuddy and Soane Rivers in Orissa and Bihar. Begun in 1862, the construction of the Orissa canals unfortunately aligned with a 30-year revenue revision; *ryots* were therefore unwilling to make use of its water, as they feared that enhanced agricultural productivity would inflate their land assessment.¹⁸⁴ In accounting for the work’s shortcomings before the 1871 East

¹⁸¹ Francis Carnac Brown to Anon., June 23, 1865, BL, Mss Eur F227/11, ff. 251-53. Brown speculated that climatological fears were purposefully inflated in order to demonstrate “the necessity of paying doubly and trebly for the services of the precious persons” who took service in the colonial government.

¹⁸² *Report from the Select Committee on East India Finance* (1871), 445.

¹⁸³ M. Atchi Reddy, “Travails of an Irrigation Canal Company in South India, 1857-1882, *Economic and Political Weekly* 25, no. 12 (1990): 622.

¹⁸⁴ John Westwood (EIIC) to the Secretary of State, March 13, 1867, BL, IOR/L/AG/47/1/65, f. 34.

Indian Finance select committee, Cotton initially lay the blame on the Odia people themselves. Unaware of the “amazing difference of the race” and “their great inferiority to our races in Madras,” colonial engineers had nursed overly sanguine expectations.¹⁸⁵ Several years later, Cotton revised his thesis and accused the zamindari tax system of inhibiting the take-up of the waters, as *ryots* recognized that their landlords would primarily benefit from the land’s irrigation.¹⁸⁶

By the late 1860s, reformers were pronouncing the overextended EIIC to be the victim of both internal and external sabotage. Having briskly sold shares in the Orissa project several years prior, its directors had attempted to solicit private interest in a parallel work in Bihar. But in this instance, prolonged negotiations with the Indian government gummed up the works. In reviewing the contract, the administration had added two controversial amendments: the government could withdraw at any time if both parties could not agree on specific routes, and it could assume control over the works without compensation if the Company breached any terms of the contract. Forced to submit plans and begin construction on a “sectional” basis, the EIIC struggled to secure financial backing. In March of 1867, its directors were pleading with the secretary of state for loans and pledging that both projects upon completion would check “the appalling destruction of human life, of cattle, and of other property lately caused by famine and floods.”¹⁸⁷ By November, the colonial administration had begun to smell blood in the water. Forcing the company to sell water from the Mahnuddy at a fraction of the government’s own rate, it was allegedly reducing the price of the EIIC’s shares in

¹⁸⁵ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Finance*, 444.

¹⁸⁶ *East India (Public Works)*, vol. 3 of Reports from Committees, 187.

¹⁸⁷ John Westwood to the Secretary of State, March 13, 1867, BL, IOR/L/AG/47/1/65.

anticipation of a total buyout.¹⁸⁸ The following year, the India Office offered to provide an influx of capital for the Orissa works if it was permitted to completely take over the Bihar project. Once Dickinson caught wind of these proceedings, he denounced the entire enterprise in a series of pamphlets and editorials. If the EIIC had properly followed Cotton's "Madras principle," it would have constructed a head works, weir, and storage tank as quickly as possible without waiting for additional capital to accrue. The EIIC, however, had "starved" the project of resources to such an extent that engineers were not even able to pay their laborers during the Orissa famine.¹⁸⁹ Its directors, Dickinson suspected, were mainly preoccupied with the progress of the MICNC and routinely transferred EIIC engineers to these "new fields of action."¹⁹⁰

The Orissa and Bihar works were supposed to have provided concrete evidence that Cotton's style of engineering could be applied anywhere in India. Instead, an ineffectual directorate had crippled both ventures. Dickinson refused to blame the Odia for their refusal to make use of the incomplete works, as they were "one of the most backward races in India [and] one of those that have been the worst treated by their foreign rulers."¹⁹¹ If the EIIC "Management had been only tolerably enlightened and energetic," he predicted that shareholders "should now be receiving large profits instead of being on the verge of insolvency." Still, Dickinson and the EIIC higher-ups agreed on one point: the Indian government had failed to formulate a comprehensive, biopolitical state-idea. The rapid turnover of higher-ups in both the India Office and Government of India was largely to blame for this shortcoming. Individual officials might approve

¹⁸⁸ "Money-Market & City Intelligence," *The Times*, November 30, 1867.

¹⁸⁹ John Dickinson, *A Warning to the Shareholders of the East India Irrigation Company* (London, 1867), 17.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 28, 33.

particular projects, but the companies in the long run were subjected to the whims and caprices of their successors. Recognizing that the colonial state had long been wary of “interlopers” in India, Dickinson also represented its takeover of the EIC as a “final effort to expel private enterprise from the country.”¹⁹² This kind of rationalization allowed reformers to cling to their principles while finding various faults in the application of their schemes. Their state-idea of “enabling the natives of the soil to live upon the soil” was perfectly sound, regardless of what the colonial ledgers might indicate.¹⁹³

Historian Mike Davis identifies critics like Cotton, Florence Nightingale, and the radical Socialist Henry Hyndman as members of a new “India opposition” that emerged in the wake of the 1876 Madras famine.¹⁹⁴ In actuality, their proposals to reduce the land assessments, salt tax, and military expenditure were emblematic of an India reform platform that had originated in the 1830s. The Madras famine did, however, prompt reformers to ratchet up their rhetoric. Cotton had long dismissed the high-speed, high cost rails as unsuited to the needs of the yeoman farmer. By 1877, he estimated that the 7,000 miles of operable rail lines had consumed 100 million pounds of capital and generated 50 million pounds of debt.¹⁹⁵ Based on these figures, Cotton scandalously suggested that a series of governor-generals had purposefully left the canals incomplete at the behest of the railway interests.¹⁹⁶ Both he and Bright concluded that the government was solely interested in the rails as a military asset, as increasing troop mobility would allow it to

¹⁹² John Dickinson, *A Second Warning to the Shareholders of the East India Irrigation Company* (London, 1867), 4.

¹⁹³ Arthur Cotton, “Opening of the Godavery,” *Journal of the East India Association* 2 (1868), 111.

¹⁹⁴ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2002), 55.

¹⁹⁵ *British India. Speeches of the Right Hon. John Bright and Sir Arthur Cotton*, 6.

¹⁹⁶ *East India (Public Works)*, vol. 3 of Reports from Committees (1878), 200.

trim its standing army. Riling up a Manchester audience, Bright went one step further by disparaging the government as a modern day marauder unaccountable to native public opinion. It was ultimately the English press that influenced the course of Indian policy by demanding the “annexation of more territory, more places, more salaries, and ultimately more pensions.”¹⁹⁷ India’s proneness to famine was no accident, but rather the result of concerted exploitation.

In the 1870s, Cotton found support for his anti-rail campaign amongst members of the EIA who recognized that the lines had done little to mitigate rural poverty. Speaking at one combative meeting, MP David Wedderburn lamented that these costly works had been foisted upon the destitute peasantry. The colonial government had operated in the manner of an extractive, absentee landlord who demanded modernization without considering whether his estate could sustain the cost.¹⁹⁸ While Wedderburn suggested that the state turn its attentions to humble irrigative works, Tyrrell put forth a differing plan. The only way to pay out the guaranteed interest on railway investments would be to develop the country’s iron mining and coal production. These bulky materials would be most efficiently transported on canals; incidentally, Cotton had long pressured the state to extend the Godavery canal into the coal-rich Wurdah Valley.¹⁹⁹ For their part, the representatives of Manchester’s manufacturing sector — who often lobbied for rail extensions — denied any responsibility for India’s current economic distresses. If the imperial state prioritized high-speed rails to facilitate troop movements, it was no fault of theirs.

¹⁹⁷ *British India. Speeches of the Right Hon. John Bright and Sir Arthur Cotton*, 22.

¹⁹⁸ Response of David Wedderburn, “What the True Interests of Manchester Really are in India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 100.

¹⁹⁹ Frederick Tyrrell, “The Wants of India, and how we are to Obtain a Hearing for Them,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1875): 61.

Skepticism Mounts

While Cotton was able to drum up associational support for irrigative works throughout the famine years of the 1870s, his demands continued to meet with official apathy. Combining the ballooning costs of the Godavery Canal with the lackluster performance of the EIC's projects, numerous administrators had concluded that irrigative works and navigable canals simply did not yield a fair return on the investment. Since the construction of the Rajahmundry anicut, skeptics had accused Cotton of fabricating revenue increases from irrigated lands. In 1853, Patrick Smollett, the former Collector of Vizagapatnam, alleged that the district's newfound prosperity could not solely be attributed to the hydraulic works. The booming exports of oilseeds and date jaggery owed nothing to the irrigation project.²⁰⁰ Rajahmundry's famine conditions in the 1840s had not been triggered by a want of water, but rather resulted from the rapacity of the revenue collectors who had plundered the land. Smollett further took issue with both the Public Works Commissioners and the IRS for blindly accepting Cotton's estimate that his anicut would eventually provide irrigation for approximately three million *ryots*. Other officials likewise concluded that Cotton's fanciful numbers served primarily as "striking illustrations of the projector's views, and perhaps were intended for nothing more."²⁰¹

This issue of fiscal prudence came to the fore once more in the early 1860s after Secretary of State Wood approved an extension of the Godavery Canal with the intention of reaching the cotton-rich provinces of central India. One naysayer in the metropolitan

²⁰⁰ Patrick B. Smollett, *Madras: its Civil Administration, being Rough Notes from Personal Observation, Written in 1855 & 1856* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1858), 47-49.

²⁰¹ *Official Report of Colonel Baker...on Col. A. Cotton's Papers on Indian Public Works* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1856), 4.

press soon after accused Cotton of pioneering a “system of quackery” based on the presumption that the country could “only be saved by digging and delving.”²⁰² The planned canal would not only contend with numerous natural obstructions in the river, but also pass through a malarial jungle populated by feuding rajas and “actual savages who live in a state of utter nudity, feeding on roots and herbs and flying into the woods at the sight of a stranger.”²⁰³ Had the Godavery been destined to become a commercial route, pre-colonial rulers would have developed it to this end. In 1864, Wood himself complained that the project was consuming capital far in excess of various official estimates and castigated the Government of India for the apparent “absence of check or control” over its construction.²⁰⁴ A decade later, detractors like Col. George Chesney would speculate that authorities only persevered with the Godavery project because they were “ashamed to stop, after throwing so much money into the river, and having sacrificed so many lives in battling with its pestilential banks.”²⁰⁵ Despite these charges, Cotton held fast to the belief that any navigable canal would yield untold profits to the colonial state if only it saw them to completion instead of constructing them in a fitful manner. But his singular commitment to this new state-idea progressively diminished his professional credibility. In the eyes of the 1878 select committee on public works, the indefatigable Cotton was inclined to “put forward some schemes rather with the view of stimulating the energies of the Government, than with the belief that they are perfectly

²⁰² “Public Works in India. The Navigation of the Godavery River, Etc.,” in *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, vol. 66 (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1862), 77-79.

²⁰³ L. T. Haig to the Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department, 1856, BL, IOR/L/PS/6/477 coll.36/2, f. 38

²⁰⁴ “Public Works Despatch to India,” in *Selections from Despatches Addressed to the Several Governments in India by the Secretary of State in Council* (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1864), 355.

²⁰⁵ Col. Chesney’s Note on Sir A. Cotton’s First Memorandum on Land and Water Carriage in India (1877), 13.

practicable.”²⁰⁶ Diagnosed with “water on the brain,” Cotton could be a visionary reformer or a scrupulous accountant, but he could not be both.

In generating their critiques, Chapman and Cotton were not only indicting the state for India’s economic underdevelopment, but also searching for a new ideological basis for the colonial enterprise. The British may have brought peace to India by trampling over all competing claimants to power, but this crusade had drawn to a close; military-fiscalism alone would not furnish sufficient moral grounds for a long-term occupation. Internalizing this anxiety, Chapman postulated a state-idea that redefined the colonial government as an arbiter of private interests in the economic sphere. In this role, it would provide the basic legal structures that would encourage gradual commercial progress by ensuring the security of private property. British investment in Indian public works would also produce a radically transparent state-system, as the information gained through these transactions would enliven public opinion and promote governmental accountability. By the premature end of his career, Chapman had become thoroughly convinced that “a weakling body of guaranteed proprietors will never do any service in these matters either to India or to themselves.”²⁰⁷ Cotton, meanwhile, sought to catalyze the evolution of the colonial state into a biopolitical entity that would dedicate its resources to famine prevention. The government seemed to embrace this role in the late 1860s, when it “publicly announced its responsibility for the life of the least of its subjects” in its annual *Material and Moral Progress* report.²⁰⁸ Officials’ subsequent laissez-faire responses to famine relief, however, revealed the superficiality of this

²⁰⁶ *East India (Public Works)*, vol. 3 of *Reports from Committees* (1878), 203.

²⁰⁷ John Chapman to J. W. Smith, June 1854, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/103, f. 37. Chapman contracted cholera and died suddenly in 1845; an unfinished review of Wilhelm Von Humboldt’s *The Sphere and Duties of Government* was found on his writing desk and later published in the *Westminster Review*.

²⁰⁸ Dadabhai Naoroji, “On the Commerce of India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 5 (1871), 83.

commitment. Like Chapman, Cotton and his reformist allies attempted to make Indian works a topic of popular debate and expose the operations of the insular Public Works Department to public scrutiny. Unfortunately, this whistle-blowing often devolved into an airing of personal grievances and attacks.

While Chapman and Cotton remained steadfast in their beliefs, other reformers approached the conceptualization of state-ideas in a more experimental fashion. These shifts are particularly notable in the speeches and pamphlets of Dadabhai Naoroji, the founder of the EIA. Distinguished by his statistical analyses, Naoroji was no stranger to the contours of global trade and even boasted some practical experience. Earlier in the 1850s, he was deputed to London as an agent for the Cama Cotton Company and soon after established his own venture. Legal records suggest that Naoroji encountered his fair share of commercial hiccups. In one court case, he brought breach of contract charges against boat-builder John Mare, who had failed to properly construct three steamers designed to compete with American ships on the Hong Kong to Canton trade route.²⁰⁹ In another dispute, Naoroji discovered that his Bombay cotton supplier, Pestonjee Curstjee Shroff, had died in debt; the Central Bank of Western India claimed eleven bills of exchange that Naoroji had provided Curstjee as payment, although the 1,048 bales in question had yet to be shipped from India or sold.²¹⁰ Soon after these trying ordeals,²¹¹ Naoroji turned his attentions to public lecturing, in which capacity he emerged as a vocal proponent of Indian public works.

²⁰⁹ Dadabhai Naoroji and John Isaac Valckenier vs. Charles John Mare, April 30 1862, National Archives, C16/01.

²¹⁰ Naoroji refused to approve of the payout until he had received a bill of lading indicating the quantity of cotton that would actually be shipped. In light of the extent of Curstjee's debt, the Asiatic Banking Corporation wanted a share of Naoroji's profit upon his sale of the bales to the provincial mills. See Dadabahi Naoroji vs. Asiatic Banking Corporation, November 25, 1865, National Archives, C16/290/n48.

²¹¹ Palsetia estimates that Naoroji ended his business career with a debt of three lakhs rupees. See Jesse S. Palsetia, *The Parsis of India: Preservation of Identity in Bombay City* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 293.

In the early proceedings of the EIA, Naoroji came out strongly in favor of rail construction. Such projects were to be undertaken in accordance with Say's Law, as a supply of rail lines would yield a demand for their use. If investors waited until they were "sure that the traffic will be a paying one," they would likely "wait till Doomsday."²¹² The system of guaranteed rails pursued up until 1869 was undoubtedly wasteful because it failed to stoke investors' "self-interest." Collaborations between private associations and the government – with each party taking "its risks and profits according to its share" – would ward against this misallocation of resources.²¹³ Two years later in 1871, Naoroji reasserted his demands for infrastructural investment alongside an early articulation of his famous (and controversial) "moral and material drain" theory.²¹⁴ Speaking before the Society of Arts, he focused his attentions on debunking the official claim that the general prosperity of India could be gauged by the amount of Indian exports that were "liquidated in silver" in the metropole. This tabulation failed to mention the annual drain to Britain that India incurred through home government payments, railway guarantee pay-offs, and private remittances. Similarly, the rise in food prices at sites of railway and public works construction did not indicate a general rise in wages, but rather a shortage of food and labor in these boom zones that led to inflation.²¹⁵ A lack of proper communications in India lay at the root of these local distortions. The fact that certain parts of India had

²¹² Response of Dadabhai Naoroji, "Proposed Additional Expenditure of 100 Millions of Indian Railways," *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (1870): 128.

²¹³ Naoroji, *The Wants and Means of India*, 10.

²¹⁴ Anticipating Naoroji, John Malcolm Ludlow declared in 1859 that a portion of the native cultivator's produce should optimally "go to a man of his own race, residing probably in his neighborhood, spending his income there, and spending it in great measure on articles of native production" rather than "going wholly to the British Government," which transmitted it abroad "in the shape of charges in Europe, in greater part devoted to the payment of high salaries to foreign officers, without root in the country, who either save money for the purpose of carrying it away, or spend it for the most part on articles of British growth or manufacture." See Ludlow, *Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown*, 225.

²¹⁵ Naoroji, "On the Commerce of India," 74-80.

exported enormous amounts of rice and grain globally while the North-Western Provinces, Orissa, and Madras were stricken by famine in the 1860s was also lamentable. Naoroji therefore concluded that irrigation and cheap communications remained the “crying wants of a country like India.” The imperial state had been on the right track when it sanctioned the borrowing of money for extraordinary (profit-bearing) public works two years prior.

By 1876, Naoroji’s faith in communicative works had faltered. He had come to realize that Indians cultivators, unlike their American counterparts, seldom benefitted from enhanced employment opportunities following rail expansion. Foreign demand for Indian produce influenced the *direction* of labor, but it did not necessarily augment the profits retained by the agriculturist; most often, it was the middlemen who benefited from cash crop sales. Naoroji therefore reiterated John Stuart Mill’s postulation that industry was “limited by capital.”²¹⁶ India was stuck in a tragic cycle, for the country’s ability to accumulate this capital was severely hindered by the various types of “drain” that the rails themselves facilitated. Playing on Britons’ subconscious paternalism, Naoroji likened India’s “anomalous” condition to that of a sickly child fed sugar by its doting parent. Unable to ingest this “foreign substance,” the child expelled the contents of its stomach with additional force. These graphic insights formed the basis of what Vikram Visana has termed Naoroji’s “labour theory of value.” As a MP with a London constituency, he would later represent the capitalistic exploitation of the working classes as a universal scourge and vow to uphold the sanctity of “labour-property.”²¹⁷ In a sense, Naoroji was outlining a new kind of trans-imperial state-idea: the establishment of a

²¹⁶ Dadabhai Naoroji, “The Poverty of India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1876): 280-281.

²¹⁷ Vikram Visana, “Vernacular Liberalism, Capitalism, and Anti-Imperialism in the Political Thought of Dadabhai Naoroji,” *Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (2016): 15, 22.

reciprocal, fair trade between Britain and India that would engender an equitable distribution of wealth. His evolving concept of virtuous imperial citizenship required the free expression of subjects' productive and consumptive powers, which was necessarily contingent on their ability to accumulate capital.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a sea change was occurring as officials under the thrall of “technics” increasingly saw themselves as the trustees of India’s “standing reserve” of human and natural resources. As Gyan Prakash notes, India’s “growing technological density” enabled the government to recast itself “as an instrument of public benefit” and make the case that the amelioration of social and environmental ills required the application of state-driven science.²¹⁸ Here, finally, was the germ of a new state-idea that reformers had sought for so long. While Prakash believes that this turn signaled the apotheosis of a system of colonial governmentality, it could also be construed as a belated face-saving measure. It was the reformers’ longstanding conviction that the British had “worked in India without [their] brains, blindly by lust of gain” and maimed their “moral hands” in the process.²¹⁹ Now nationalists, too, were charging the government with perpetuating a level of economic under-development that was causative of “desolation and ruin.”²²⁰ If the colonialist, technic state-idea, with its attendant state-system rooted in an early “rule of experts,” was engineered to appease critics at this late stage, it surely failed. It did, however, enjoy an afterlife upon its appropriation by the

²¹⁸ Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 169. Ahuja similarly argues that the British civilizing mission — which had once aimed to catalyze cultural transformations — was “cut down to size” in this period and “reduced to an enterprise...predominantly in the sphere of technology, science, and economy.” See Ravi Ahuja, “The Bridge-Builders’: Some Notes on Railways, Pilgrimage and the British ‘Civilizing Mission’ in Colonial India,” in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tine & Michael Mann (London: Anthem Press, 2004), 101.

²¹⁹ Tyrrell, 62.

²²⁰ Prakash, 182.

Indian nation-state, whose supposed unity of purpose promised to spur rationalist planning of untold proportions.

Politicizing Decline: Reformist Approaches to Indian Cash Crop Agriculture

One cannot say that Francis Carnac Brown was lucky in business. By the summer of 1850, the former secretary of the British India Society was a virtual exile in Boulogne, having been “made a bankrupt in England.”¹ His troubles stemmed from sizeable loans he had made as an investment in two mishandled ventures, the Coomorthin Quarry and the Great Polgooth Mine. The mine was sold and the profits distributed to other swindled investors, but Brown was left holding the mortgage when the bank came calling. Two years later, he relocated to Cork, where he attempted to set up a sugar refining operation. This time, the enterprise was doomed by inadequate charcoal, leaks in the vacuum pan, and an ornery German boiler who was suing Brown for lost wages. When the lease on the property expired after six months, Brown had invested two thousand pounds more than he had initially intended. By 1855, he had returned to his plantation in Malabar and was desperately trying to pay off his balance to Forbes & Co., the firm that managed his exports of pepper and cinnamon. This debt persisted even after Brown changed agents, as his daughters racked up charges of 1100 rupees on the Forbes account during a sojourn to Bombay in 1859. In his elder years, Brown was considering any and all possible measures to straighten out his finances, including governmental postings. He ultimately concluded that the competitive exam was “too schoolboyish”; in any event, entry into the

¹ Francis Carnac Brown to John Malcolm Ludlow, August 1, 1850, Cambridge University Library (CUL), John Malcolm Ludlow Papers, MSS Add7540/11, f. 10; Brown to Ludlow, June 24, 1842, MSS Add7540/11, f. 24; Brown to Ludlow, July 30 1853, MSS Add7540/11, f. 57; Brown to Ludlow, July 11, 1860, MSS Add7540/11, f. 111.

revenue and judicial departments was limited to candidates under twenty-five years of age.

Although Brown's financial issues were the source of much misery, his particular background and his ardent advocacy for free trade gained him ready admittance into India reform circles. Born to Murdoch Brown, a prominent planter who had assisted the EIC in brokering treaties with the rajas of Cochin and Travancore, Brown inherited the whole of the family's Anjarakandy estate.² Having witnessed his father's struggle to privately export his pepper crop before 1813, the younger Brown emerged as a vocal opponent of the Company's monopolies of salt, tobacco, and cardamom.³ By the late 1830s, he had begun to take up political issues and was castigating the Madras administration for imposing martial law after an armed posse crossed the border from Coorg and gathered in the jungle near Mangalore. Brown remonstrated against the administration's subsequent reprisals; one innocent youth had "been sent up to trial capitally, without it being possible to find any person, who ever did or would accuse him."⁴ He further observed that the handling of the affair evidenced a growing gulf between the government and the subjects under its dominion. Beginning in May of 1837, the governor no longer accepted native petitions directly; henceforth, complaints were to be directed to the local officers whose conduct, in many cases, provoked the petition in

² Francis Carnac Brown, *Free Trade & the Cotton Question with Reference to India* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1847), 3. F. C. Brown rubbed shoulders with leading abolitionists despite the fact that his father was accused of replicating a system of plantation-style slave labor. Murdoch Brown retorted that he was simply purchasing *pulayas*, whose caste status confined them to a hereditary "state of bondage." See Andrea Major, *Slavery, Abolitionism, and Empire in India, 1772-1843* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 189-194.

³ Brown found it hypocritical that statesmen criticized royal monopolies of these goods in the Neapolitan states as violations of the "science of political economy," while they permitted the Company to retain them. See Brown, *Free Trade & the Cotton Question*, 8

⁴ Francis Carnac Brown, *Letters to and From the Government of Madras relative to the Disturbances in Canara* (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1838), 29.

the first place. For Brown, these new rules normalized official aloofness and placed “the Natives, in cases of liberty and property, out of the pale of humanity.”⁵

The inhabitants of South India not only contended with an increasingly reactionary government, but were also encumbered by the myriad restrictions and imposts that hindered their material improvement. Following his father, who conducted agricultural experiments on his plantation, Brown staged his own inquiry into the numerous factors that contributed to the decline in cotton production in the 1840s. Before John Bright’s select committee on Indian cotton growth in 1847, he recalled that he had toyed with the idea of setting up a cotton operation in Broach (a district of the Bombay presidency) and even paid a Glasgow carpenter to replicate a Whitney saw gin for use in India.⁶ But Brown soon realized that this venture would founder on account of local taxes like the *moturfa*, which was applied to numerous artisanal tools and cotton-cleaning instruments. His plans to initiate cotton cultivation in Malabar and Coimbatore were similarly foiled by the sea customs tariff, which had assessed raw cotton of all qualities at a uniform rate of 5% until its abolition in 1844. It was therefore prohibitively expensive to ship the unseeded cotton along the coast to a more populous location where it could be properly cleaned.⁷ Although the *moturfa* in Bombay was abolished in the early 1840s, it continued to handicap agricultural production in Madras. Decades later, Brown would affirm that this impost, along with the 515 import and 165 export duties that constituted the colonial customs system, had gradually suppressed India’s cotton production since the

⁵ Ibid., 34.

⁶ *Growth of Cotton In India*, vol. 9 of *Reports from Committees* (1848), 231-33.

⁷ John Briggs referenced Brown’s complaints in his influential tract on cotton growth from 1839. See John Briggs, *The Cotton Trade of India: its Past and Present Condition* (London, 1839), 71.

mid-1780s.⁸ Given Britain's turn away from indirect taxation, he was led to skeptically wonder: "is the road to national wealth in England one, in India another?"

During the metropolitan "cotton famine" (autumn 1861-1863), Brown once more railed against the government's remaining monopolies, its exorbitant land taxes and tariffs, and its restrictions against the purchase of wastelands in fee simple as "flagrant violations of economical discourse." Brown had suspected that the transition to Crown rule in 1858 would remedy these incongruities, but it had only "buttress[ed] up afresh the Chinese wall of import and export duties which was built up round India under the Company."⁹ John Stuart Mill, he quipped, "ought be sent to India, to report how his Political Economy has been practically applied."¹⁰ While Brown trumpeted the advantages of free trade for planters like himself, he came to question the universal efficacy of laissez-faire prescriptions. Any metropolitan paper was obligated to "talk Political Economy and denounce protection, if it expects to be read," but these regurgitations failed to address the "ruin and starving of the thousand weavers of India, and either point out a way of securing these innocent victims from death, or come forward with subscriptions adequate to sustaining them in life."¹¹ These reservations capture in miniature a broader intellectual dilemma that would progressively afflict India reformism: a loss of faith in free trade's ability to materially catalyze colonial uplift.

This chapter is concerned with discourses of economic development, many of which may appear overly sanguine, if not outright naïve, to the modern critic of colonial

⁸ Francis Carnac Brown, *Obstructions to Trade in India. A Letter by F. C. Brown*, ed. John Dickinson (London: P. S. King, 1862), 18.

⁹ Francis Carnac Brown to J. D. Sims, May 1862, British Library (BL), Murdoch Brown Collection (MBC), Mss Eur F227/11, f. 39.

¹⁰ Francis Carnac Brown to John Malcolm Ludlow, October 14, 1858, CUL, MSS Add 7540/11, f. 92.

¹¹ Francis Carnac Brown to John Malcolm Ludlow, BL, MBC, Mss Eur F227/11, f. 137.

capitalism. Few historians would controvert the truism that cash cropping could be an exploitative pursuit with detrimental long-term social and environmental consequences. Some have even credited the British with willfully deindustrializing India; this literature will be discussed at length in this chapter's first section. Yet our contemporary awareness of these issues begs a curious question: why did India reformers, with their abolitionist roots and longstanding opposition to labor coercion, condone such projects? Even agitators like Dadabhai Naoroji, the famed expositor of the drain theory, believed that India should take the lead in supplying Britain with "cotton, coffee, sugar, tea, silk seeds, or anything else" that the metropole required.¹² Departing from much recent literature, I will suggest that reformist members of the Company's Court of Proprietors (CoP), the India Reform Society (IRS) and East India Association (EIA) conceived of sugar and cotton production from the 1830s onwards as an emergency *response* to deindustrialization and the collapse of social hierarchies. Suppressed official reports dating to the early nineteenth century routinely testified to "the richness of the country surveyed; and second, the poverty of its inhabitants."¹³ In the intervening years, the state had done scandalously little to remedy India's economic malaise, which was exacerbated by the contraction of princely patronage networks and the decline of specialized weaving communities. Reformers therefore compared the Company unfavorably "not only [to] the civilized Government of Europe and America, but also to its less enlightened predecessors, the Mahommedans."¹⁴ Preventing capital accumulation and refusing to reinvest its land revenue locally, its agents had "systematically degrade[d] a whole

¹² Dadabhai Naoroji, "On the Commerce of India," *Journal of the East India Association* 5 (1871): 74.

¹³ Naoroji excerpted this quote from Robert Montgomery Martin in his influential "Poverty of India" lecture. See Dadabhai Naoroji, "Poverty of India," *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1876): 269.

¹⁴ John Dickinson, *India: its Government under a Bureaucracy* (London: Saunders and Stanford, 1853), 133.

people” and created “two distinct bodies of privileged foreigners and native serfs.”¹⁵ Reformers predicted that the opening of global markets would trigger a fructifying division of labor and catalyze the formation of new middling classes. Most did not perceive the domestic weaving of fabric and spinning of yarn within subsistence-based, rural communities as viable industries that could reverse India’s misfortunes.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the exertions of early reformers who attributed India’s impoverishment to its economic segregation within the broader empire. “Integrationists” like Charles Forbes and Robert Montgomery Martin denounced the prejudicial tariffs levied by the home government that inhibited the importation of Indian manufactures and produce alike. India, they declared, should receive the commercial benefits of the Crown colonies rather than being anomalously classified as a foreign nation. The nascent sugarcane industry would benefit from an equalization of duties, thereby providing struggling textile producers with an alternative mode of employment. In calling for this removal of fiscal anomalies, reformers also refuted the colonial government’s claim to be “sole proprietor” of its Indian territories, which entitled it to arbitrarily collect land taxes and violate its subjects’ private property rights. Paradoxically, this advocacy of free trade was not always synonymous with a demand for laissez-faire governance. Observing that stable export markets had yet to form, reformers insisted that the Company impose experimental land tax remissions and reductions while improving the quality of the raw cotton brought to market. Manchester manufacturers amplified these calls for widespread governmental intervention in the Indian economy, which forced a recalcitrant India Office to reiterate its belief in the efficacy of private industry.

¹⁵ Ibid., 154.

In challenging the colonial government's autocratic rule over an undifferentiated mass of subsistence-based *ryots*, reformers attempted to enlist capitalistic groups that could hold the state to account. This chapter's third section demonstrates that these instrumentalist link-ups were susceptible to erosion as groups' economic priorities shifted. Reformers threw in their lot with the free-trader Lancashire textile manufacturers at an early date, but the relationship was a fair weather one. Unlike John Dickinson, John Bright, George Thompson, and Francis Carnac Brown, many mill owners were not overly concerned with the specific trajectory of India's internal development so long as their raw cotton quotas were met. By the mid-1860s, it was becoming clear that Manchester's apolitical lobbyists would not soon evolve into committed agents of imperial oversight. Seeking alternative allies, reformers called for European supervision of cash crop production and attempted to mobilize the planter community as a political counterweight to the colonial government. These attempted link-ups, too, proved acrimonious, as reformers could not abide the realities of settler violence and coercion.

Probing the reformers' shifting justifications for cash-cropping ultimately reveals an unresolved contest between the universal and the particular: would India, as an anomalous economic zone, simply benefit from integration into the empire, or did its peculiar position require a tailor-made approach? In its fourth section, this chapter will turn to the 1870s, when the reformers' foundational, Cobdenite message of mutually beneficial economic imbrication was losing its allure. As Manchester cotton lords harped on the inequity of the import duties levied on their textiles, millions of Indians were dying in famines that reformers deemed preventable. Amidst these debates, a "nativist" wing of reformers began to suggest that laissez-faire dogmatism, with its reliance on

abstraction, perpetuated a kind of machine rule that was engineering an unnatural atomization of Indian society.

Deindustrialization Revisited

Grand theories of deindustrialization and corporate-state collusion have largely eclipsed reformist contributions to developmental discourses. Among economic historians, adherents of the deindustrialization school have enumerated the various ways in which the colonial state subjugated native labor to transform India into a virtual plantation. A pioneer of the concept, Amiya Bagchi asserted that deindustrialization could be identified by a decline in the proportion of workers deriving their income from secondary industry (processing and manufacturing), a decline in the proportion of the GDP derived from secondary industry, and possibly “a fall or stagnation of income per head.”¹⁶ This totalizing economic narrative was controversial in its day,¹⁷ as some scholars hesitated to speak of an all-India economy in the nineteenth century due to the relative paucity of comprehensive statistics.¹⁸ More recently, B. D. Tomlinson has reminded us that one “cannot write an economic history of modern India by simply letting the data speak for themselves”: it is “not a story with a strong plot” influenced by a single causal mechanism.¹⁹ Overarching accounts of deindustrialization that are solely

¹⁶ Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *Colonialism and Indian Economy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), xxiii.

¹⁷ For a fulsome overview of this literature, see Peter Robb, “British Rule and ‘Improvement,’” *Economic History Review* 34, no. 4 (1981): 507-23.

¹⁸ Vicziany took Bagchi to task for postulating his change-over-time thesis using minimal data points, namely Francis Buchanan Hamilton’s under-quantified 1809-1813 survey reports on Bihar and the findings of the 1901 Indian Census. See Marika Vicziany, “The Deindustrialization of India in the Nineteenth Century: a Methodological Critique of Amiya Kumar Bagchi,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 16, no. 2 (1979): 105-143.

¹⁹ B. R. Tomlinson, *The Economy of Modern India, 1860-1970*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 2, 8. .

concerned with long term economic patterns cannot easily account for mobility and adaptation. Household spinning, for instance, declined in cotton districts like Berar, but some weaving communities responded by adopting cheaper Manchester-made yarn and setting up workshops in cities like Sholapur along the Great Indian Peninsula Railway (GIPR) line.²⁰

When interpreters of deindustrialization do reference historical actors, they have often focused on the acts of collusion by which corporate agents manipulated the colonial state. In his magisterial study, Sven Beckert identifies a gradual process wherein mercantile and governmental interests merged in various parts of the British Empire to give rise to new forms of industrial capitalism. The ascendance of seemingly autonomous market forces, he argues, “amplified” the state’s power while simultaneously making it “less visible.” Impersonal forms of coercion like “contracts, laws and regulations” were imbued with the influence that regional rulers and “age-old custom” had once wielded.²¹ For a time, the conflux of coercive labor, land expropriation, and militarized trade that Beckert terms “war capitalism” failed to revolutionize production in the Indian interior, where “local rulers, local power structures, [and] local property ownership patterns” retained their integrity.²² European firms utilizing the consignment system remained dependent on Indian agents into the early 1870s, at which point the establishment of telegraphic communications with Liverpool and the opening of the Bombay-Khamgaon branch of the GIPR enabled a higher level of vertical integration.²³ Although Beckert

²⁰ Douglas Haynes, *Small Town Capitalism in Western India: Artisans, Merchants, and the Making of the Informal Economy, 1870-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 43.

²¹ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: a Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 78.

²² *Ibid.*, 129.

²³ Christopher Dejung also argues that European agency houses remained dependent on the moneylenders, or *sowcars*, until the late-nineteenth century, as they did not possess sufficient capital to give advances to the *ryots* directly. See Christopher Dejung, “Transcending the Empire: Western Merchant Houses and

notes that the “manufacturers’ and the government’s interests never entirely converged” in this period, he nonetheless posits that British India (based on the Berar case study) might “indeed be considered the archetype for the flexible pragmatism by which states helped capitalists gain access to cotton-growing labor.”²⁴

Beckert sources a good deal of his information on Berar from Laxman Satya, who infuses his account of deindustrialization with a Subaltern Studies sensibility. According to his analysis, the colonial state from the 1860s onwards fell under the thrall of the Lancashire textile manufacturers and converted Berar into its own plantation. Indigenous cotton varieties for local consumption were banned; the bullock-cart drivers (*banjaras*) were displaced; the toll-collecting *hoondakurs* who controlled the cotton-routes lost their economic position.²⁵ Cash crop agriculture also aggravated peasant indebtedness. Upon annexing Berar in 1853, the colonial government created a class of registered agricultural tenants (*khatedars*), who were responsible for the payment of the land revenue. These occupants, in turn, leased portions of their land to subtenants at rack rents. The *khatedars* themselves were compelled to acquire working capital from a rising class of moneylenders who charged usurious rates of interest and demanded payment in exportable Oomra cotton. The state, meanwhile, continued to lay claim to the wastelands and forests, thereby restricting the peasants’ base of resources even further.

Local Capital in the Indian Cotton Trade (1850s-1930s),” in *Commodities, Ports and Maritime Trade since 1750*, ed. Ulbe Bosma and Anthony Webster (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 208.

²⁴ Beckert, 254, 296.

²⁵ While the two species of long-stapled Indian cotton known as Oomra enjoyed great favor in the Liverpool markets, the model farms in Berar struggled to produce a sufficient exportable crop well into the 1860s. In 1880, the compilers of the gazetteer for the district of Khandesh in the Bombay presidency determined that it was inadvisable to root out the local Varhadi varietal completely, as a quantity was “required for the low courts of yarn used in the coarse cloth worn by the local poor.” The practice of mixing it with the Dharwar/New Orleans export crop, however, was to be discouraged. See *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 12, *Khandesh* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1880), 161.

Satya's argument is predicated on the basic assumption that Berar was simply derailed from its course along a preordained developmental track by the advent of cash cropping. He boldly states that "the *khatedari* system suppressed all the local skills of manufacturing and prevented Berar's economic transformation from agriculture to industry."²⁶ The region would presumably "have seen the growth of cotton textile industries" if local prices for raw cotton had not exponentially risen in the 1870s on account of global demand.²⁷ Yet the decline of household-based spinning and weaving was hardly a new phenomenon in this period. Even if the government had not implemented a tax on *churkas* (hand roller gins) and handlooms,²⁸ it is unclear how these cottage industries would have experienced revitalization. Satya's grand claims also extend into the realm of social relations. Reflecting on the rise of an upper-caste bureaucracy of "collaborators" under British rule, he posits that their subtenants suffered an "intensification of caste oppression" as cotton production was "used as an instrument of bondage and social control."²⁹ His account, in short, is replete with various forms of oppression, as all parties involved seem to be extracting the most profit for themselves in the most injurious ways. Individuals' political ideologies and dissenting viewpoints are therefore given short shrift in the resulting analysis.

Parts of Satya's work anticipate the findings of Manu Goswami, which highlight colonial attempts to deterritorialize India into a "second-order space welded to a globally organized imperial economy." Political economists like John Stuart Mill fomented this

²⁶ Laxman D. Satya, *Cotton and Famine in Berar, 1850-1900* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1997), 129.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁸ As Brown noted, *churkas* in some parts of India were still subject to the *moturfa* tax, which was first instituted in 1792.

²⁹ Satya, 198-99. Satya also details the coercive nature of the pre-colonial *balutedari* system, under which upper-caste villagers barred lower castes from property ownership, conscripted them as corvée laborers, and monopolized water distribution.

conceptual shift by regarding the colonies as an agricultural frontier, an exporter of raw produce akin to the English countryside.³⁰ A close reading of Mill's *Principles of Political Economy (PPE)*, however, suggests that this reduction of India to a second-order space was not as straightforward as one might assume. In the passage in question, Mill was specifically describing the West Indies as an exceptional economic zone; lacking their own capital, the islands produced crops at the behest of absentee, metropolitan landholders who benefited from their sale.³¹ In contrast, agriculture in India was "conducted entirely on the system of small holdings" and produced only a "miserably small" yield.³² The naturally fertile village lands could certainly bear more crops, but a lack of easy access to distant towns sapped the rural cultivators' acquisitive spirit and perpetuated subsistence agriculture. In light of this impasse, Mill sought to initiate a division of labor in the countryside. *Ryots* who produced cash crops for distant markets would themselves generate a new customer base for their fellow cultivators who sowed their grains for domestic consumption. As both types of agriculturist acquired a surplus income, they would naturally desire commodities of either European *or* Indian manufacture. To deduce that Mill intended the entirety of India to take up cash crop production would be a step too far. At no point in *PPE* did he confront the challenges of conveying the crops from the interior, nor did he specify how the various produce (including cotton and sugar) would enter the metropolitan markets at competitive prices.

³⁰ Manu Goswami, *Producing India: from Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 45.

³¹ John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy with Some of their Application to Social Philosophy*, vol. 2, 5th ed. (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1862), 244.

³² John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1877), 163.

Despite the allure of narratives that represent deindustrialization in conspiratorial terms, there was actually a diversity of opinion within the colonial administration as to the long-term feasibility of cash cropping. In contrast to Cotton Commissioner John Henry Rivett-Carnac,³³ the crop's leading propagandist, district officer Alfred Lyall resented the transformation of civil administrators into veritable "cotton fanciers" during the American Civil War and eagerly anticipated a return to wheat cultivation.³⁴ Tasked with compiling the Berar gazetteer in 1870, he expressed doubts that a permanent economic shift towards cash cropping had occurred. Despite the success of some cotton cultivators who had managed to free themselves from the grip of the moneylenders, the *ryots* were on the whole "lazy and easy-going" and could not be persuaded to "do the full day's work" by "the hope of great profits nor the fear of ruin."³⁵ The extent to which colonial officials desired a monoculture in the cotton districts may also be questioned. By 1869, nearly 30% of Berar's cultivable area and 6.5% of the Central Provinces' was devoted to cotton; Rivett-Carnac himself doubted it could expand much further while "allowing for the rotation of crops, and for the garden lands, which an enriched peasantry requires."³⁶ In 1879, the uptick in cotton planting in Berar actually took officials by surprise, as the prices offered for *jowari* grain (which was grown in rotation with cotton) were considerably higher.³⁷

³³ Rivett-Carnac eagerly anticipated the day when Berar's non-competitive weaving population would be reconditioned as field laborers. See Beckert, 296.

³⁴ Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 34.

³⁵ *Gazetteer for the Haidarabad Assigned Districts, Commonly called Berar*, ed. Alfred Lyall (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1870), 65.

³⁶ W. S. Fitzwilliam, "On the Present and Future Product of Cotton in India Compared with American and other Cotton-producing Countries," *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (1870): 187.

³⁷ See R. J. Meade, *Report on the Administration of the Hyderabad Assigned Districts* (Hyderabad: Residency Press, 1879), vi.

Once one injects a sense of contingency into accounts of deindustrialization and corporate-state collusion,³⁸ it becomes apparent that resource extraction was not necessarily the driving order of the day. Seemingly straightforward endeavors, like the construction of the rail link connecting the GIPR main line with the cotton mart of Khamgaon, required fortuitous circumstances to come to pass. Khamgaon's potential as a cotton hub had been established since the mid-1830s, when planter R H. Fenwick began collecting information on the regional trade for the use of his sons. By 1840, Fenwick's letters had found their way to the secretary of the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of Bombay, who in turn forwarded them to a government agent in the hope that the administration would "take prompt and efficient measures to remove all existing impediments to the free and easy transport of Cotton to this market."³⁹ Several years later, Fenwick's evidence provided railway promoter John Chapman with compelling promotional material that demonstrated the commercial utility of the planned GIPR. Khamgaon was floated as a terminus from the get-go, but the Board of Control's intransigence forced Chapman to temper his aspirations and request a guarantee for a mere 35 mile experimental line from Bombay to Kallian.⁴⁰ If the eventual construction of the branch in 1869 indicated a heightened level of state intervention, it also testified to the colonial regime's thirty-year record of half-hearted support.

³⁸ This modern hypothesis closely resembles J. A. Hobson's classic "bondholder thesis," which infamously revealed the extent to which Britain's colonial commitments in Egypt were determined by metropolitan business interests.

³⁹ Peter Ewart to Captain W. J. Morris, January 1840, BL, John Chapman Papers, Mss Eur E234/90. Bombay

merchants like Robert Wigham Crawford of Remington & Co. had speculated since the late 1840s that a rail connection between Khamgaon and Bombay would "go far to diminish the dependence of [Britain] on America for cotton." See *Growth of Cotton In India*, vol. 9 of *Reports from Committees*, 110.

⁴⁰ Daniel Thorner, *Investment in Empire: British Railway and Steam Shipping Enterprise in India, 1825-1849* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 144.

This dilatoriness begs the question: what changed in 1869? Significantly, the appointment of Lord Mayo — an improving landlord in Ireland — to the viceroyalty catalyzed a new governmental interest in agricultural matters. For some years, Rivett-Carnac had been calling for the construction of a branch railway. The GIPR, as he explained it, had intentionally avoided the major markets, incorrectly assuming that the trade would reorient itself to the line. Although Rivett-Carnac had been unable to get such projects “through the Secretariat,” Mayo favored the scheme and delegated him atypical powers of oversight.⁴¹ When construction stalled in April 1869, Rivett-Carnac threw himself into the breach and urged his superiors to appoint him executive engineer so that he might resolve the technical issues. Treating the line as his pet project, he admitted his desire to see it completed before his planned return home the following year.⁴² But for Mayo, the small line was but one piece in a much grander puzzle. In 1869, the government had begun to subsidize a new system of state-run railways, presuming that it could construct lines at a cheaper rate than private firms. Having taken personal control of the Public Works Department, Mayo ambitiously intended to lay a record-setting 1500 miles of rail in one year spread over fifteen lines. He therefore approached the Khamgaon connector “as an experiment to shew to the world that Govt Engineers can do a thing quickly, and well – a fact which is very much doubted by the public at large.”⁴³ His temper erupted later that year after sizeable delays, at which point he demoted the engineer in charge and vowed never to trust any experts’ time estimates ever again.

⁴¹ John Henry Rivett-Carnac, *Many Memories of Life in India, at Home and Abroad* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1910), 192.

⁴² Henry Rivett-Carnac to “Colonel,” April 26, 1869, CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490, 18/7.

⁴³ See CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490 16/5 and 18/15. Beckert, in contrast, implies that Mayo’s principal goal for the line was to stimulate cotton production.

Mayo's strenuous exertions to complete the line before the onset of the monsoon found favor with his supporters in Manchester. Due to Parliament's failure to discuss the Indian budget in a timely fashion, the Cotton Supply Association (CSA) and some sympathetic MPs elected to meet directly with Secretary of State Argyll. Much to the shock of recently retired Viceroy John Lawrence, who attended this gathering, the CSA demanded that the Indian government begin borrowing ten million pounds a year for public works expenses. Its members also advised Argyll to favor the Khamgaon line and approve plans to establish a new governmental department exclusively concerned with collating statistical information on Indian agriculture. Chomping at the bit, this delegation was none too pleased when the Argyll's underlings produced a map illustrating the lines that the government intended to construct over the next *thirty years*.⁴⁴ Mayo urged patience, informing the CSA that his cash-poor administration was already allocating 40,000 pounds annually to promote the interests of the cotton trade. Tempering their expectations, he cautioned that the success of any schemes would pale in comparison to similar initiatives in America. There, agricultural undertakings were "effected by the spontaneous and unaided efforts of the most energetic people in the world" who belonged to the industrious "Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic races."⁴⁵ But in India, such progress could only be attained through the unilateral exertions of the government.

Indulging in counterfactuals allows the historian to take a step back from discourse and consider how specific individuals and events contributed to the reorientation of India as an agricultural frontier. If Rivett-Carnac had not brought his enthusiasm to the Khamgaon project, even subverting the proper chain of command on

⁴⁴ Edmund Ashworth to Lord Mayo, August 11, 1869, CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490, 18.

⁴⁵ Government of India, Memorandum on the Memorial of the Cotton Supply Association, f. 8

one occasion, would it have come to fruition? And if the privately managed rail lines had not failed so spectacularly from a commercial standpoint, would Mayo have considered the Khamgaon line worthy of his time as a symbolic venture? It should be noted that the CSA's aggressive posturing unnerved prominent India reformers who were already alarmed by the Indian government's unfolding financial crisis. Speaking before the East India Association (EIA), Thomas Evans Bell took issue with the notion "the India should pay for unprofitable railways because Lancashire wants cotton."⁴⁶ His commentary riled up at least one meeting attendee, who contended that Manchester had enriched India by 100,000,000 pounds by paying inflated war time prices for cotton during the Civil War.

It is these tensions that are often masked in deindustrialization meta-narratives that privilege abstracted, long-term economic trends, but hardly aid us in understanding the nitty-gritty of decision-making processes or the conceptualization of alternative economic futures. Deindustrialization, as it has appeared in much historical literature, is synonymous with a willful obstruction of industrialization. It is essentially a charge of exploitation, one that reformers themselves levied against the home government and later, their erstwhile allies – the Manchester manufacturers. For these agitators, cash cropping was not in itself an inherently coercive pursuit. It was instead a provisional strategy to mitigate further economic decline, one based on the assumption that the *ryots* involved would reinvest their profits as capital in their lands. Few reformers, however, could justify the retention of prejudicial tariffs, which privileged metropolitan interests at the expense of Indian producers and impeded a salubrious program of economic integration.

⁴⁶ Thomas Evans Bell, "Is India a Conquered Country? and If so, What then?" *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (July, 1870): 209.

Reversing Decline: Sugar and the Tariff Debates

Long before the founding of the Anti-Corn Law League (ACLL) in 1838, free-trade sentiment was gaining force in England's leading ports and manufacturing centers. Forming various and shifting alliances, trade associations in Glasgow, Manchester, and Liverpool bristled against their mandated use of Company-owned ships, which were either prohibitively expensive or insufficiently sized.⁴⁷ The 1793 Charter Act partially relaxed the Company's monopoly, though private traders were still barred from dealing with territories outside of the presidencies. For these merchants, free trade primarily revolved around tapping export markets and undercutting the Company's stranglehold over the Chinese tea trade. After 1813, Anglo-Indians in Calcutta participated in this agitation by sending John Crawfurd, the former Resident of Singapore, to London as their paid representative. The provincial organizations also solicited the support of leading radicals and Indian notables in Bengal who opposed the Company's restrictions against European colonization; Crawfurd even arranged for Rammohun Roy's accommodations during his London sojourn.⁴⁸ The brand of free trade that emerged from these collaborations generally manifested as an adversarial challenge against the monopolist stranglehold of the Company state.⁴⁹ The trade groups involved readily secured protectionist concessions from the home government by way of differential tariffs that effectively barred the importation of foreign manufactures. At an early date, the Indian textile industry was sacrificed upon the altar of metropolitan self-interest.

⁴⁷ Yukihiisa Kumagai, *Breaking into the Monopoly: Provincial Merchants and Manufacturers' Campaigns for Access to the Asian Market, 1790-1833* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 19-20, 37.

⁴⁸ Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 113.

⁴⁹ Kumagai clarifies that the Glasgow East India Association attempted to avoid political matters, insisting that it was simply objecting to the union of the Company's "sovereign and mercantile character." The Association determined that outspoken free traders like James Silk Buckingham went too far in attacking the Company administration outright. See Kumagai, 98.

Regional extensions of the “Great Divergence” historical debates have elucidated the role of the European state in facilitating the growth of infant manufacturing industries. Prasannan Parthasarathi’s work, in particular, reveals the British government’s tendency to “reshape market outcomes which were deemed to be unacceptable.”⁵⁰ English wool producers were badgering Parliament to curb the importation of Indian cotton textiles as early as the 1620s; the Act of 1721 prohibited British printing on Indian cloth for the home market.⁵¹ To compete with finely produced native piece-goods, Lancashire spinners initially focused their attentions on improving the quality of their yarn through technological innovations.⁵² The invention of the mule in the late-eighteenth century enabled the domestic production of calicoes and muslins of a quality that rivaled Indian varieties.⁵³ Prejudicial import duties on Indian cloth continued to cushion the industry. Although colonial observers pronounced the death of Bengal’s textile manufacturing sector as early as 1800,⁵⁴ the home government proceeded to increase import tariffs twelve times between 1797 and 1819. Other scholars, however, contend that tariffs were not the causative factor in the decline of native manufactures; even after the import duties into Britain were drastically reduced in 1826, Bengal’s cloth exports continued to plummet. Indrajit Ray therefore concludes that it was the influx of cheap British goods into Bengal that ultimately rendered the native weavers non-competitive and doomed their industry.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia did Not: Global Economic Divergence, 1600-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 144.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵² At the turn of the century, Manchester became more concerned about the quantity of available yarn rather than its quality and therefore pressured the home government to reduce the import duties on Indian yarn.

⁵³ Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich*, 106.

⁵⁴ Beckert, 75.

⁵⁵ Having lost the patronage of the princely courts, it was Dacca weavers of high quality textiles who principally suffered from the loss of British markets. See Indrajit Ray, *Bengal Industries and the British*

At the time, early reformers latched onto the differential tariffs as a “gross fraud practised by the legislature of England on the people of India.”⁵⁶ With the aid of Charles Forbes, Robert Montgomery Martin brought this complaint to the attention of the CoP in June 1839 and generated sufficient momentum to yield a select committee on East Indian produce the following year. In presenting his testimony, Martin sought to correct the prevailing misconception of a winner-takes-all competition between the English and Indian weavers. Rather than reducing India entirely “to the position of an agricultural country,” which would effectively “lower her in the scale of civilization,”⁵⁷ he declared that Parliament ought abolish the import tariffs that suppressed Indian output. Lower grade silken goods (choppahs, bandanas) and cashmere shawls sustained heavy duties despite the fact that they did not significantly compete with any British production.⁵⁸ As editor for the *Colonial Magazine*, Martin reproduced petitions from merchants (including Francis Carnac Brown) calling for a reduction to the duty on Bengali silks to give the industry a fillip. Reformers also clarified that Indian goods were not only disadvantaged in metropolitan markets; British textiles entering the Crown colony of Ceylon only paid a duty of 5%, compared to imposts of 10-20% for Indian manufactures. Similarly, goods “not specially enumerated” that originated from “Great Britain, Ireland, or even any part of Europe,” were charged at the 5% customs rate, while Indian merchandise incurred a

Industrial Revolution, 1757-1857 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 68. Parthasarathi points to two periods of deindustrialization in southeastern India; the first (from the late-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries) was brought about by the weavers’ loss of European markets, while the second (1820-1850) resulted from the influx of cheap British textiles. See Prasanna Parthasarathi, “Historical Issues of Deindustrialization in Nineteenth-Century South India,” in *How India Clothed the World: the World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 426.

⁵⁶ “Free Trade With India - Whig and Tory Politics and Principles,” in *The Colonial Magazine and Commercial-Maritime Journal*, ed. Robert Montgomery Martin, vol. 2 (London: Fisher, Son & Co., 1840), 485.

⁵⁷ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce* (1840), 278.

⁵⁸ British imports of Bengali silk pieces were entirely banned until 1826. See Ray, *Bengal Industries*, 109.

10% penalty.⁵⁹ These arrangements were indicative of a long-running tendency to treat India, in the words of John Briggs, as a “*foreign country*, not as a foreign independent state even, but as a conquered country.”⁶⁰ If the Company was allowed the same degree of fiscal self-management as the governments of the settler colonies, it was possible that India could yield “ten times the revenue” to the colonial state that it presently furnished.

Not all commentators shared Martin’s optimistic belief in the resurgence of Indian industry. Dacca, a historic center of fine textile production, had economically collapsed by the late 1830s, with its population plummeting from 150,000 inhabitants to around 30,000.⁶¹ Contemporary political economists offered few solutions to mitigate this dislocation. Theorists like J. R. M’Culloch lauded Manchester’s burgeoning domination of the Indian markets as nothing less than “the greatest triumph of mechanical genius.”⁶² At the same time, he recognized that the Indian consumption of British manufactures was limited by the “difficulty under which they are placed, of furnishing equivalents to them.”⁶³ Other commentators like official Charles Trevelyan, the erstwhile defender of laissez-faire policy, downplayed the negative consequences of this deindustrialization. The weavers of Dacca had surely suffered, but the “population of India, as a whole, gained very much by the change, because they got their clothes and cooking utensils, and so on, much cheaper than before.”⁶⁴ But even if British textile manufacturing was in the

⁵⁹ Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, December 18, 1839, IOR/B/270, ff. 103-06.

⁶⁰ Briggs, *The Cotton Trade of India*, 85.

⁶¹ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce*, 108.

⁶² Quoted in Gareth Stedman-Jones, *An End to Poverty? A Historical Debate* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2004), 172.

⁶³ Reformers like Thompson regularly cited this quote as evidence of the Hindus’ innate commercial sensibility. See *British India: its Condition, Prospects, and Resources: A Lecture, Delivered by Mr. G. Thompson, in the Music Hall, Sheffield* (1839), 7.

⁶⁴ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce*, 104. John Stuart Mill later posited that the native manufacturing sector historically rose out of the native sovereigns’ surplus revenue. Elite weavers produced fine fabrics for the court; a limited supply of these textiles gave rise to a class of artificers, who

ascendant as a result of the “natural course of trade,” a number of members of both the CoP and Court of Directors (CoD) deemed it “unnecessary and oppressive to aggravate the difference between the British and the Indian manufacturers by unequal duties.” Observing that British importation of Indian textiles had dropped by nearly one million pieces between 1829 and 1834, proprietors found fault with the policies that were “depriving the aged and infirm female of her spindle, by which she has been accustomed to earn a scanty livelihood.”⁶⁵

Led by Forbes, reformist stockholders attempted to supply India’s redundant artisans with an alternative mode of employment: sugarcane cultivation. Company administrators and abolitionists alike had long looked upon the growth of sugarcane in the East Indies as a humane, pragmatic pursuit. A downturn in Caribbean production in the wake of the French Revolution triggered a price surge for sugar in the metropole, thereby giving the Company added incentive to develop its own supply. As Ulbe Bosma recounts, the Board of Trade expressed a keen interest in these early ventures, establishing botanical gardens in the presidency towns and implementing a short-lived system of advances to the *ryots*.⁶⁶ Even after the government limited its operations to the purchase of refined sugar, forward-looking officials continued to sponsor cash crop cultivation. Thomas Munro, the progenitor of the *ryotwari* system, entertained an unsuccessful scheme to establish his own plantation and continued to circulate sugarcane cuttings amongst the *ryots* after the Company dismissed his proposal.

received a share of the “surplus food” (i. e. the land revenue) that their customers in lower officialdom extracted.⁶⁴ Clearly, the toppling of a native ruler would bring a swift and unavoidable end to this recirculation of resources. See Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. 1, 31-32.

⁶⁵ “Debate at the East-India House, May 6 – Equalization of Sugar Duties” in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China, and Australasia*, vol. 20 (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1836), 119.

⁶⁶ Ulbe Bosma, *The Sugar Plantation in India and Indonesia: Industrial Production, 1770-2010* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49, 53.

By 1836, it had become evident that any effort to boost Indian sugar production would run aground so long as prejudicial tariffs favorable to the West Indies persisted.⁶⁷ In May of that year, Company proprietors determined to make a concerted effort towards equalization. The time was ripe, as the Caribbean planters were still enjoying their twenty million pound buy-out from the 1833 emancipation legislation and could hardly object to a little competition. As the British had “destroyed the muslin manufacture” of India, it was only just that the metropolitan “markets should receive, on an equitable footing, the sugars and other produce of the Indian soil.”⁶⁸ British opium-producers could hardly abuse the Chinese for refusing their product while their own country refused to receive Indian cash crops on equal terms. India’s disadvantaged position also brought up issues of a constitutional nature. As the chairman of the CoP remarked, it was “quite an anomaly in legislation, to see two regions, which ought, in the eye of the parent state, to be viewed with the same degree of favour” placed on such a footing. These calls for intra-imperial free trade would have resonated with metropolitan consumers who dreaded the prospect of slackening sugar production in emancipated Jamaica. Promoters of East Indian sugar ventures therefore preyed on fears that the freed slave possessed a naturally “indolent temper” and would seek “the means of livelihood and other productions, which require not the lash to stimulate his exertions.”⁶⁹

The proprietors’ wishes were partially fulfilled by legislation passed in June that equalized the metropolitan import duties on sugar shipped exclusively out of Bengal. The

⁶⁷ At this time, imported Indian sugar was taxed at 37 shillings per hundredweight compared to 27 shillings for sugar originating in the West Indies. See S. Ambirajan, *Classical Political Economy and British Policy in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 189.

⁶⁸ “Debate at the East-India House, May 6,” 115-124.

⁶⁹ *Observations with Reference to the Establishment of the East-India Sugar and Agricultural Company* (London: Drury, 1836), 24.

House of Commons imposed this caveat due to Bombay's position as a regional entrepot; there was some concern that Asian and Dutch sugar would pass through its ports and creep into England to the detriment of the West Indies interests. This measure therefore retained the discriminatory rates on all sugar issuing from Bombay and Madras, while banning the entry of foreign sugar into Bengal altogether. Proprietors contended that these restrictions were insensible. As Bengali sugar had long required a certificate of growth for exportation, the port from which it was shipped was wholly irrelevant. India, Forbes demanded, must be "considered as one whole and undivided possession." To penalize individual presidencies was akin to making "different laws for different portions of the island of Jamaica."⁷⁰ Allowing Bengali sugar to be shipped from the other presidency towns would also boost subsidiary trades. Cotton wool, for instance, could be used as ballast on England-bound vessels in place of the stones that typically served that purpose. In 1839, the CoP and the CoD continued to protest the ambiguities and anomalies stemming from the home government's half-hearted equalization efforts. Proprietors also took issue with the lackadaisical manner in which the British state altered its tariffs, as the Privy Council would occasionally "publish in the *London Gazette* where importation from other parts of India is acceptable." Stockholders feared that the governor-general — who was allocated vague powers of imposing and annulling restrictions — might soon prohibit Bombay and Madras from receiving foreign sugar as well.⁷¹

Reformist publications echoed these stockholders' belief in sugar cultivation as a sustainable enterprise. The manufacture of indigo and silk required hefty amounts of

⁷⁰ "Debate at the East-India House, July 11 – Sugar Duties," in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China, and Australasia*, vol. 20 (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1836), 253.

⁷¹ Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, Dec. 18 1839, IOR/B/270, ff103-06.

capital and invited labor coercion, but sugar could be grown by “the poor farmer, with the smallest portion of land.”⁷² After boiling the cane into *ghor*, the *ryots* could hold on to their supply until they deigned to sell it to a refiner, thereby developing an awareness of market conditions. In heralding the merits of sugar, one like-minded official looked beyond the household economy and delineated a greater role for the imperial state as a sponsor of public works. Arthur Cotton’s early reports suggested that irrigation of the Godavery delta would enable a single acre (under European supervision) to yield six thousands pounds of Mauritius cane sugar a year.⁷³ Monsoon rains alone were often insufficient to yield a decent crop, as the cane required ten or twelve months to mature.⁷⁴ Cheap labor was abundant, though the impoverished *ryots* were easily tempted into entering the coolie trade by the promise of higher wages. Observing the recent decline of the Indian cloth trade in Rajahmundry, Cotton also associated the vitality of the indigenous manufacturing sector with the ease of crop production. The hefty price of rice essentially reflected its labor cost. Indian weavers were forced to sell their goods at higher prices to buy this rice, which precluded them from competing with their English competitors.⁷⁵ What South India required was an irrigative revolution that would secure *ryots* cheap food and lead them to abandon subsistence agriculture in favor of a further division of industrial labor.

⁷² “Growth of Sugar in India,” *East-India Magazine* (July 1842): 528.

⁷³ Arthur Cotton, *Sugar Cultivation in India* (London, 1845), 8.

⁷⁴ Arthur Cotton, *Public Works in India, their Importance; with Suggestions for their Extension and Improvement* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1854), 170. While Cotton estimated that his anicut at Rajahmundry would enable 1.2 million acres of sugar cane cultivation, only 2,314 acres were producing sugar two years after the work’s completion. Critic Patrick Smollett ascertained that the local population was more inclined to produce sugar from date and palm jiggery rather than cane. See Patrick B. Smollett, *Madras: its Civil Administration, being Rough Notes from Personal Observation, Written in 1855 & 1856* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1858), 61.

⁷⁵ This was not always the case. Parthasarathi argues that eighteenth-century South Indian weavers were able to sell their goods far cheaper than British handloom weavers due in part to the relative cheapness of rice compared to wheat. See Parthasarathi, “Historical Issues of Deindustrialization,” 417.

Reformers were well aware that metropolitan interest in the question of native sugar cultivation often stemmed from a fear of dwindling supplies rather than a sincere concern for the *ryots*' welfare. Martin's patience notably diminished over the course of his testimony before the 1840 select committee as members badgered him on the long-term prospects of Caribbean production. He was forced to disabuse them of the notion that the naturally "indolent" freed-slaves of Haiti would automatically take up coffee cultivation to the detriment of sugar on account of its minimal labor requirements.⁷⁶ The central issue, he reminded the panel, was the statistical fact that provincial interests had lobbied for a "free trade *from* this country, not a free trade between India and this country." The fact that all raw produce and manufactures emanating from the princely states were penalized upon their entry into Britain was galling, as coffee from Mysore could feasibly replace the slave-grown imports from Brazil. In other cases, the abolition of discriminating duties could even promote intercultural harmony. Books printed in India, for instance, had been saddled with a tariff of 5 pounds per cwt until a leading publishing house lobbied for a reduction in 1839. By stifling a metropolitan interest in oriental literature, this trade barrier had impeded the germination of a "moral influence" that could bind "the two countries closer together."⁷⁷ Aside from tariff policy, Martin also remonstrated against the *lascar* system, which compelled the owners of India-bound vessels to hire four British seamen for every 100 tons of cargo and subsidize their return journey if employment in India was not forthcoming.⁷⁸ Indian-owned ships, he declared,

⁷⁶ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce*, 271.

⁷⁷ *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce* (1840), 271, 284.

⁷⁸ "Free Trade *With* India - Whig and Tory Politics and Principles," 487.

must be admitted into British ports “on the same terms as those of foreign nations of Europe and American who have treaties of maritime reciprocity with England.”⁷⁹

Despite a flurry of interest in free-labor Indian sugar production, which led to the establishment of seventy-eight sugar factories, a series of events damned the industry. Local demand for refined sugar was limited from the outset, as Indians preferred the raw *khandsari* variety made from thickened cane syrup.⁸⁰ The metropolitan equalization of sugar tariffs in 1846 further hindered the marketability of the processed sugar that was produced for export. Competition from plantations in Brazil and Cuba was fierce; barring a return to an “adequate differential Duty,” the CoP concluded that the growth of sugar in India “must gradually diminish, and finally, become altogether extinct.”⁸¹ The struggles of this infant industry put reformers like Martin in a fraught position. When the House of Commons discussed the re-imposition of preferential import tariffs that favored both West *and* East Indian sugar, he was forced to dissent on pragmatic grounds. Such measures would direly “diminish the supply of that necessary to the poor at home,”⁸² whose nutrition depended on the staggering annual consumption of forty-eight pounds of sugar. But perhaps more crucially, Martin was no longer certain that his lofty vision of imperial unity would come to fruition through economic favoritism alone. Permanent progress necessitated nothing less than the colonies’ “full participation in [England’s] civil and religious liberty, in her wealth and her resources, in a similarity of institutions,

⁷⁹ “Debate at the India House,” February 8, 1843, BL Mss Eur 932/282, 658.

⁸⁰ Bosma, 75.

⁸¹ “Resolution,” Minutes of the General Court of Proprietors, June 14, 1848, IOR/B/271, f. 393.

⁸² Robert Montgomery Martin, *The Sugar Question in Relation to Free Trade and Protection* (London: J. B. Nichols and Son, 1848), 6.

an identity of language, [and] a community of objects with the greatest kingdom in the world.”⁸³

While Martin came to believe that “real” free trade with India was only one component of lasting imperial integration, other critics called upon the EIC to vigorously adopt any and all measures to check India’s further decline. Organizations like the Bombay Chamber of Commerce observed that Britain’s “new and improved machinery had robbed” the Indians of “their cotton and silk manufactures” and questioned whether it was not the colonizers’ “duty, if possible, to open other sources of industry?”⁸⁴ After Indian sugar production began to falter, George Thompson declared that Britain was still morally bound to give the natives “some compensation for the almost entire annihilation of their manufactures and their exports,” namely a “remunerative pursuit like the cultivation of cotton.”⁸⁵ Any further neglect would signal “a censurable indifference to their condition.” Reformers, however, were convinced that the prospects for cash cropping were dim on account of the government’s injurious tax policies and its dogmatic refusal to facilitate market formation. Citing political economy and native precedent alike, they problematized the notion of a universal landlord in India who could run roughshod over his suffering subjects.

Who Owns the Land?

By wrangling over tariff policy, Forbes, Martin, and their colleagues were contending that the blame for India’s fiscal mismanagement rested with the *home*

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Bombay Chamber of Commerce to the Government of Bombay, 1841, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/97b, f. 3.

⁸⁵ George Thompson, Speech to House of Commons, June 18, 1850, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 112 (1850), col. 58.

government. For too long, the West Indies planters and provincial manufacturers had goaded policymakers into stifling India's productive energies. Later reformers, however, targeted the colonial regime itself for abusing its power to arbitrarily extract resources from the land and its people. At some point before the Permanent Settlement of 1793, the Company had anointed itself "sole proprietor" of its Indian possessions in supposed emulation of the Mughal regime. Whether this assignation was legally or morally defensible was hotly debated. The issue of tax burdens remained at the forefront of the cash cropping debates, as critics asserted that *ryots* in a state of pauperism would only grow vegetable food for their own consumption. Thompson spoke for many when he predicted that the cultivator might very well improve his lands of his own accord if he was "permitted to retain a little capital to get him out of the jaws of the money-lenders."⁸⁶ One possible, albeit controversial, solution lay in the remission of land taxes on holdings sown with particular crops.

Tinkering with taxation for the sake of economic stimulus was not beyond the pale. Shortly before the 1833 charter renewal, Bombay Council member Francis Warden had posited that "relinquishing the assessment on land producing cotton [would] lead to an increased cultivation" in Gujarat, Khandesh, and the Southern Mahratta country.⁸⁷ Several years later, Thomas Williamson, a revenue commissioner in Ahmednuggur, provisionally granted five-year land tax exemptions to cultivators growing cotton or Mauritius sugar. In 1836, Williamson had been a key influence in inducing the Bombay government to disband its model farm in Broach that had absorbed 70,000 rupees. As cotton was already "produced in a vast abundance in that highly cultivated district," it

⁸⁶ *Growth of Cotton In India*, vol. 9 of *Reports from Committees*, 218.

⁸⁷ *Appendix to the Report from the Select Committee*, 36.

was doubtful “if the successful cotton cultivators there have much to learn from the examples set before them at the farm, even if they had the disposition to follow them.”⁸⁸ There were certainly precedents for Williamson’s scheme to offer favorable terms to cotton growers; the government in Ceylon had waived the tax on land sown with export crops for a remarkable twelve years.⁸⁹ Yet the Calcutta authorities soon caught wind of the proposal and successfully urged the CoD to block it on the premise that the practice of preferential taxation would spread uncontrollably throughout the country.⁹⁰ Reformers proclaimed this turn-about to be “a double crime,” as ordering “the waste land of India not to grow cotton...was starving the native, and preparing the starving and the ruin of English operatives and manufacturers” during the hungry forties.⁹¹

Proselytizers of laissez-faire economics like Trevelyan stoutly objected to the concept of remissions, as such incentives would turn regions “into one great cotton field” at the expense of grain. To boost cultivation, the government need only grant a “perfect protection of property, and the greatest possible encouragement to enterprise, and the outlay of capital, particularly by Europeans.”⁹² Reformers encountered a similar level of hostility amongst the Company leadership. When Thompson called upon the colonial state to remit the land tax on cotton lands in 1850, director James Hogg rejected his proposal as a complete repudiation of all “political economy and free-trade doctrines.”⁹³ John Stuart Mill, the examiner of Indian correspondence at the time, somewhat inverted the issue: the fact that the Company no longer levied a surge-charge on lands bearing

⁸⁸ Thomas Williamson to E. H. Townsend, March 21, 1836, IOR/F/4/1635/65503, f. 135

⁸⁹ Bosma, 73.

⁹⁰ *Growth of Cotton In India*, vol. 9 of *Reports from Committees*, 166.

⁹¹ Brown, *Free Trade & the Cotton Question*, 121.

⁹² *Report from the Select Committee on East India Produce*, 111-12. Trevelyan further claimed that funds for public works could be secured by annexing princely states, as their administration supposedly yielded revenue in excess of expenses.

⁹³ Hogg, Speech to House of Commons, June 18, 1850, col. 60.

high-profit crops was sufficient evidence of its liberality. Any further reductions for cotton growers would “give a bounty” to its cultivation and constitute an unwarrantable interference with market forces.⁹⁴ Throughout the 1860s, the India Office would continue to discourage any talk of tax abatements, despite the fact that Ottoman cotton lands (according to Manchester’s lobbyists) were flourishing as a result of five-year rent remissions.⁹⁵

Trepidatious officials in 1847 had feared that reformers might exploit Bright’s select committee on the growth of Indian cotton to stage an “inquiry into the management of the land revenue and into the condition of the cultivators of the soil, in order to get up a grievance.” For John Hobhouse, the President of the BoC, the whole thing promised to be “a very long, a very tiresome, and a very unprofitable affair.”⁹⁶ While the committee’s report did not stir up a major scandal, the ensuing debates compelled reformers and Company men to re-litigate the state’s responsibilities as universal landlord over its Indian demesne. Contributors struggled to reach a consensus as to whether the land tax in India was an arbitrary impost that inhibited cash crop cultivation or merely a differential rent that reflected soil fertility. Authorities like Captain George Wingate reasoned that assessment reductions would have little effect if the current rates were not in excess of this “natural rent.”⁹⁷ America’s dominance in the cotton trade was not a result of lower

⁹⁴ John Stuart Mill, *Memorandum on the Improvements in the Administration of India during the Last Thirty Years* (London: W. H. Allen & Co, 1858), 17.

⁹⁵ Cotton Supply Association, *The Sixth Report of the Executive Committee* (Manchester: Garidan, 1863) 5; Peter Harnetty, “The Imperialism of Free Trade: Lancashire, India, and the Cotton Supply Association, 1861-65,” *Journal of British Studies* 6, no. 1 (1966): 82. Brown supported the Godavery scheme but believed that cotton production would still be inadequate unless the land tax was remitted for five years. See Francis Carnac Brown to John Bowring, July 3, 1862, BL, MBC, Mss Eur F227/11, f. 51.

⁹⁶ John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, Marquess of Dalhousie, March 2 1848, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 346.

⁹⁷ *Growth of Cotton In India*, 333.

taxation, but rather attributable to its planters' access to virgin soils and navigable rivers connected to large ports.

Commentators who wished to avoid unceasing debates over political economy could simply liken the policies of the colonial administration to those of past regimes. Company director Ross Mangles, for instance, used his time before the select committee to elucidate the government's position as an enlightened overlord with wide ranging powers of resource distribution. Unlike English rents, which were private property, land revenue in India traditionally constituted a public fund that was used "for the purposes of good government" and the provision of public works. If officials happened to "take this money and waste it in foreign wars, or waste it in any other way," they were "*pro tanto*, unfaithful trustees."⁹⁸ Putting forth a narrative of continuity, however, could open the door for alternative interpretations of pre-colonial precedents. Robert Knight, the combative editor of *The Times of India*, believed that "the terms lease, rent, landlord, and tenant, as applied to the relations existing between the State and the land in India are suggestive of so much error, that their use is greatly to be deprecated."⁹⁹ Historically, Indian governments had never functioned as landlords; they simply demanded an annual *kiranj*, a tax of about one third of the *ryots*' produce that "might, or might not, represent the true [differential] rent of the soil." Per Knight's estimation, the value of Indian lands had risen so dramatically in the past decades that the share of the profits retained by the *ryots* had increased exponentially. These occupiers paid a mere quit-rent to subsidize the operations of the government, but this fell far short of the amount that the construction of modern public works required. A leading advocate of Bombay's municipal development,

⁹⁸ Ibid., 314.

⁹⁹ Robert Knight, *Speech on Indian Affairs, delivered before the Manchester Chamber of Commerce* (London: William John Johnson, 1866), 60-63.

Knight took umbrage with policies like the income tax that compelled the urban classes to fund such improvements in the distant *mofussil*. Rather than suggesting that the state hike the *ryots*' assessments, he insisted that the colonial administration, like any other modern state, should be allowed to take on loans for its infrastructural projects.

Some reformers associated with both the moribund BIS and the IRS refuted the notion that the government was entitled to a money rent at all.¹⁰⁰ Citing Richard Jones, the professor of political economy at Haileybury College, Francis Carnac Brown alleged that the government's collection of the land tax in coin was at variance with the practice of Asian despots who historically claimed a share of the produce. Jones had famously challenged the universal application of Ricardo's differential rent theory, suggesting that the normal proscriptions of classical political economy assumed the presence of open market exchanges and did not pertain to subsistence economies like Ireland and India.¹⁰¹ Under Asiatic rule, land taxation was influenced by social factors rather than soil fertility. Brown therefore suggested that the transition to money-rents in India had not occurred "in the natural state of things"; *ryots* continued to barter for goods, only securing coinage from moneylenders to pay the collectors.¹⁰² This specie, in turn, was spirited away to the presidency towns to pay for the upkeep of the troops stationed there. Shortages of currency in the outlying districts resulted, triggering deflation. On his Anjarakandy plantation, Brown often lacked sufficient copper to pay his *ryots* and was forced to give them pieces of palm leaves that they could use as tokens with the local shopkeepers.¹⁰³ Brown also took issue with the fact that the native *tehsildars*, who executed land surveys

¹⁰⁰ *Growth of Cotton In India*, 240.

¹⁰¹ William J. Barber, *British Economic Thought and India, 1600-1858: a Study in the History of Development Economics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 195-199.

¹⁰² *Growth of Cotton In India*, 267.

¹⁰³ Brown, *Free Trade & the Cotton Question*, 79.

under the oversight of the European collectors, also tended to be the heads of police of their respected counties. Rather than accepting the appeal of an over-taxed *ryot*, these officials paid their goons to instigate a tussle with the complainer and then file a grievance against him. Having fallen into the *tehsildar's* grasp as an alleged disturber of the peace, the appellant was liable to be unduly punished for his fictitious crimes and coerced into silence.¹⁰⁴

As the central government refused to countenance revenue remissions or general tax reductions, reformers increasingly sought to place limits on the state's universal proprietorship of Indian lands.¹⁰⁵ In his formative work on the Indian land tax, John Briggs had suggested that the "occupant of the land was its sole proprietor." Under Hindu rule, the cultivator had simply furnished a fixed, "limited portion of the produce of his estate" as a kind of income tax in peacetime.¹⁰⁶ In the late eighteenth-century, the conniving Bengali *zamindars* had convinced the Company that it could, as universal landlord, "impose taxes ad libitum on the cultivating tenants" and allocate property rights. After some consideration, advocates of the *ryotwari* system in South India broke with this model and identified the *ryot* as the soil's true proprietor. But for Briggs, this qualification was "absolutely worth nothing" so long as these agents declined to firmly fix the state's revenue demands.¹⁰⁷ This "odious system of taxing the farmer to the full extent of his profits" was the brainchild of two misled Utilitarian "oracles," namely

¹⁰⁴ *Growth of Cotton in India*, 251. See also Ludlow, *British India*, 284.

¹⁰⁵ This was not a novel development; prominent officials including Philip Francis, Mark Wilks, and Mountstuart Elphinstone had previously speculated that the state was not traditionally viewed as the sole proprietor of the soil. See Bagchi, 195.

¹⁰⁶ John Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India Considered as a Measure of Finance* (London, 1830), 108, 177. For a succinct overview of the zamindari versus ryotwari revenue system debates, see David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 159-163.

¹⁰⁷ Briggs, *The Present Land-Tax in India*, 406.

James Mill at the India House and Holt Mackenzie at the BoC.¹⁰⁸ “What would be the consequence,” Briggs wondered, “if all the occupants of the land in America or New South Wales, not to say of Great Britain, were compelled to surrender all their profits...to the State?” Reformist contributions to the *British Indian Advocate* concurred that the government’s claim to the entirety of the land was a “monstrous usurpation” that inhibited cotton cultivation.¹⁰⁹ Historical research confirms that the reformers in this case were not being histrionic. As Peter Harnetty explains, the cotton boom triggered by the Civil War coincided with the government’s land re-assessments; in Bombay, the tax was enhanced by 24% on account of the high prices paid for the crop. Following the collapse of this bubble in 1865, *ryots* could not afford to pay the new rates and became ensnared in their local moneylenders’ credit network.¹¹⁰

The question of land proprietorship acquired greater prominence during the Great Rent Case of 1865, which scrutinized the Bengali *ryots*’ legal claim to occupancy rights and “fair and equitable rents.” Legal verdicts eventually determined that *zamindars* and planters could not claim the entirety of the unearned differential rent, as the *ryots* had invested their labor in the land. According to Andrew Sartori, scholar-administrators thereby massaged “custom” into a “liberal and political-economic” concept that could clarify the “normative obligations” of an “agrarian civil society.”¹¹¹ Indian intellectuals involved in these debates took this Lockean argumentation one step further by asserting

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Evans Bell, *Memoir of General John Briggs, of the Madras Army* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885), 228.

¹⁰⁹ “The Cotton-Trade of India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 4 (April 1, 1841).

¹¹⁰ Peter Harnetty, “Cotton Exports and Indian Agriculture, 1861-1870,” *Economic History Review* 24, no. 3 (1971): 422.

¹¹¹ Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: an Alternative History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 38, 97. Used as a legal aid in the Great Rent Case, custom “represented a different instantiation of political economy: one that sought to distinguish natural fertility from capital improvement, and on that basis apportion the rent fund between zamindar and ryot.” See Sartori, 58.

that private property predated the erection of governing structures, thus bringing the administration's claim to sole proprietorship into question. In the Bengali context, it was debatable rather the *zamindars* (as one-time revenue farming officials) should have any right to the land's natural rent. Moreover, this official recognition of the intimate connection between custom and land tenure suggested that boilerplate readings of classical political economy could not be applied uniformly throughout the empire without some modification.¹¹²

For some time, reformers like Brown had been invoking Lockean theory by describing the "institution of private property in the soil" as the "foundation of civil society." Only the "capital, the labour, and the knowledge of [the *ryots*'] forefathers, could have redeemed from the waste, could have converted into *the property*, [that] which the Sovereign-lord now seizes as *his own*."¹¹³ Despite its claim to be sole landlord, the colonial state had never scrupled to plant a "tree for fruit, or shade, or for one of the ameliorating uses of soil and climate, for which trees, in the wise economy of nature, are the indispensable agents." Indeed, recent evidence from New Holland indicated that the wanton felling of trees was invariably "followed by the desertion of rain and moisture from the tract" which contributed to famine conditions. Reflecting on the *ryotwari* system in Madras, Briggs reiterated his belief that former rulers only claimed a lien on the cultivators' produce and a right to sustain their troops with local food during tours of the

¹¹² There was precedent for this casuistry. In the wake of the Irish Famine, John Stuart Mill famously opined that the *laissez-faire* dictates of political economy did not wholly pertain to subsistence-based nations like Ireland, where rent spikes were triggered by population increases rather than enhanced agricultural productivity. In such cases, private property rights should only be defended so long as such ownership yielded improvements to the land and benefitted society at large. See Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 323-37.

¹¹³ Brown, *Letters to and From the Government of Madras*, 82-83.

countryside. Pre-colonial legal minds “pronounced the property in land to belong to the party who first cleared it, and rendered it fertile and gave it life.”¹¹⁴

Even if the colonial state could claim universal proprietorship, such a title did not justify its recent history of predation. In 1858, Patrick Smollett, a former collector for Vizagapatam and Ganjam who operated on the fringes of reform circles, published a tirade against the *ryotwari* assessments, noting that decline in cotton-rich districts like Dharwar and Khandesh had often followed the transition to colonial rule. Yet he also accused the administration of “petty larceny” in furthering the “decay of the native landed gentry.”¹¹⁵ Rather than encouraging indebted landowners to sell off individual villages or taking temporary custodianship of an “incapacitated” proprietor’s holdings, most collectors simply pounced when the estates fell into arrears. Although these seizures generally worsened labor conditions, officials continued to operate “under the idle and contemptible pretext of a benevolent desire to improve the condition of the cultivators oppressed and enslaved by native landlords.”¹¹⁶ Smollett’s remarks echoed the reformers’ critique that the colonial state was “comparatively valueless as the guardian of the private property of its citizens.”¹¹⁷ In private correspondence, Brown fulminated against the “attacks of this idiotic Government upon the property of individuals.” He was particularly incensed that Lord Harris, the Governor of Madras, had laid claim to every locatable cart and bullock, along with 180 bearers, for the upkeep of his suite during a recent visit to Malabar.¹¹⁸ Following the governor’s example, “every official, high or low, white or

¹¹⁴ John Briggs, *A Letter Addressed to Right Honorable Lord Viscount Stanley* (London: James Warner, 1859), 5.

¹¹⁵ Smollett, 99.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹¹⁷ Ludlow, *British India*, 289.

¹¹⁸ Francis Carnac Brown to John Malcolm Ludlow, November 8, 1858, CUL, MSS Add 7540/11, f. 95

black, [went] forth upon the highway” and seized private property for their own use “all in the name of the Sirkar.”

As Sartori notes, mid-Victorian liberals valorized petit land ownership as a bulwark against the deleterious effects of wage labor-driven industrialization. Bright and Cobden feared that workers consigned to the factory would “labour without hope of improvement, and without motive to industry and frugality” if they lacked a garden plot to call their own.¹¹⁹ These issues also perplexed the Christian Socialists led by John Malcolm Ludlow, a lawyer and nephew of Brown. In his early efforts to promote working men’s associations, Ludlow sought to educate his critics on the distinction between communism and socialism: the former “starts from the *thing*, and is in essential antagonism to absolute property,” while the later “starts from the *person*, and is in essential antagonism to human discord and rivalry.”¹²⁰ Socialism, in other words, was a “science of the relations of men” designed to mediate the profit-motivated impulses of classical political economy. Resisting the forces of what Fourier termed “industrial feudalism” required laborers to band together in cooperative associations to ensure “fair prices and living wages.”¹²¹ Humanizing the interactions between classes did not necessitate the repudiation of market forces *en toto*. In his writings on Indian affairs, Ludlow alleged that the colonial regime was intent upon abolishing “individual property in land”; in so doing, it practiced an anomalous “form of bureaucratic Socialism” that was “the dream of many a French revolutionist.”¹²² He discredited the notion that the

¹¹⁹ Sartori, 89.

¹²⁰ John Malcolm Ludlow, *Christian Socialism and its Opponents: a Lecture* (London: John W. Parker, 1851), 11.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹²² John Malcolm Ludlow, *Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown Towards India* (London: James Ridgway, 1859), 321.

state alone should oversee the distribution of the land to protect the “interests of the cultivators and of the whole community.” Per such reasoning, radical Chartists like “Mr. Ernest Jones and Mr. Bronterre O’Brien” might justly pronounce themselves the *de facto* government of England and lay claim to the entirety of its lands “with a view to beneficial cultivation.”¹²³

Several years prior to Ludlow’s writing, John Dickinson had articulated similar views in a seminal reform tract. In that work, he repudiated the Bombay administration’s resumption of tax-free *inam* lands, many of which had been held by noble families for generations. How would the English people react, he pondered, if the British state had wantonly seized the Duke of Wellington’s Strathfieldsaye estate after his recent death?¹²⁴ Nearly twenty years later, Dickinson reiterated his findings before the 1872 select committee on East Indian finance and challenged the contributions of self-proclaimed political economists. Before this forum, he highlighted a fundamental distinction between a simple land rent and a land tax designed to subsidize the functions of the government: the former would rise in proportion to population and wealth increases, while the latter would fall.¹²⁵ Certain Manchester men proposed that the colonial state should hold the land in perpetuity for the benefit of the Indian people at large. But this level of state empowerment set a dangerous precedent. Unlike English landowners, Indian proprietors could not acquire capital at reasonable interest rates by using their estates as security. More alarmingly, the government’s theorizing was not all that dissimilar from “Socialist

¹²³ Ibid, 318.

¹²⁴ Dickinson, *India: its Government under a Bureaucracy*, 50.

¹²⁵ This was a common reformist line. In 1853, John Chapman had informed Jagannath Sunkersett that the Indian government should rightfully be exacting a tax rather than a land rent to cover its costs, as raising assessments on productive lands dissuaded the *ryots* from all improvement. See John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, October 8, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 276.

doctrine, which involves the confiscation of private estates, in the name of an abstract ‘public.’”¹²⁶ Dreading a possible blowback effect, Dickinson feared that the colonial state’s “rent-theory of the land-tax” might easily be “appealed to by our Communists at home to justify their seizure of the rent of land in this country.”

Reformers thereby advanced an economic version of the repugnancy principle: even if the colonial state claimed despotic powers, private property was universally inviolable both at home and abroad. In effect, this critique anticipated the polemic of Indian nationalists like Mahadev Ranade that charged the colonial regime with introducing socialist principles in contravention of classical political economy.¹²⁷ By the late 1870s, debates over the state’s landlord status took on a new urgency as famines swept through southern India. The EIA continued to receive testimonials from informants like R. Rangunath Rao of the Madras Uncovenanted Service, who attributed “the root of this evil” to “the denial of property in land to the people and the entertainment of the suicidal idea that the Government is the landlord of India.”¹²⁸ These rancorous debates over taxation and land proprietorship led reformers to further question the constitutive elements of imperial sovereignty: was the government obligated to improve its territory and incentivize development through direct investment and legislation, or should it focus on removing the obstacles to trade that hindered private initiatives?

¹²⁶ John Dickinson, *Speech of J. Dickinson, in a Discussion of the Land Question in India* (London: W. J. Johnson, 1873), 5.

¹²⁷ Goswami, 213.

¹²⁸ East India Association Meeting Book, February 1879, no. 2, BL, Papers of the Royal Society for India, Pakistan and Ceylon and its Antecedent Organizations, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 318.

Redefining Laissez-Faire Governance

Since the early nineteenth century, the Company had struggled to articulate a clear stance on the applicability of classical political economy to colonial governance. This conundrum was brought to the fore by a dust-up between Bombay Council member Robert Rickards and Governor John Duncan that consumed the provincial administration. A disciple of Adam Smith and the French Physiocrats, Rickards declared that the state's onerous land tax was at the root of widespread poverty and sapped all commodity consumption.¹²⁹ He further took issue with the Company's virtual monopoly of cotton cultivation in the newly annexed territories of Gujarat and Broach. In keeping with the Mahratta model, the state accepted raw cotton in kind as payment for the land tax *and* purchased the *ryots'* surplus cotton at a fixed price. Rickards therefore surmised that the Company would overrun the non-official mercantile community so long as it was wearing two hats as both sovereign and commercial entity.¹³⁰ Following the passage of the 1813 Charter Act, which opened up India to private enterprise, the CoD came to a similar conclusion and ordered the Bombay government to cease its cotton speculations.¹³¹ Throughout these debates, Duncan denied that foreign, abstract doctrines of political economy should have a greater bearing on governance than practical experience and customary norms. Even after Smith's theories gained traction with the

¹²⁹ Neil Rabinovitch, "The Control of Fate and Fortune: the Origins of the Market Mentality in British Administrative Thought in South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 4 (1991): 740.

¹³⁰ Interestingly, Rickards was concerned that the government's fixed rate for cotton was actually *too* high. Nevertheless, early reformers like Thompson routinely referenced his published tracts when denouncing the *ryotwari* system of land taxation.

¹³¹ During the 1853 charter debates, the Blackburn Commercial Association once more demanded that the Indian government, beyond "making useful experiments...should not be permitted to become cultivators, manufacturers, or traders" of cotton. See *First Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories* [c. 426] (1853), 510.

Company leadership, individual officers in western India continued to disregard their laissez-faire stipulations when famine conditions emerged.¹³²

From the 1830s onwards, the Company generally declined to involve itself with individual entrepreneurial initiatives. The correspondence between the Bengal government and Dr. William O’Shaughnessy, a chemical engineer and instructor at the Calcutta Medical College, offers clear insight into this official mentality. In 1839, the Materia Medica Committee received a dispatch from the CoD regarding the heavy expense of importing European earthenware used in the medical dispensary and mint. Taking up the challenge to locate cheaper alternatives, O’Shaughnessy set his sights on producing vessels for culinary and industrial uses that could withstand high temperatures. The central government approved of the scheme and urged the doctor to pursue the “profitable adoption of any ornamental improvements” that could expand this infant industry.¹³³ O’Shaughnessy’s initial hopes were high. While the majority of Hindus would likely retain their inexpensive, coarse vessels, the “spread of chemical knowledge” might excite a demand among select consumers. The potters of Calcutta, in turn, would readily “adopt any new and cheap process they might be taught.”¹³⁴

But without overt governmental support, O’Shaughnessy failed to secure the superior clay from Kolgong that could withstand the furnace. Even though he offered a potter a sizeable advance for the first ten thousand bricks produced, this intermediary only pretended to send a purchasing agent upcountry for two months. The doctor also realized at a late stage that he had failed to impose sufficient quality control, as any hair or fiber mixed with the clay could “cause a whole batch of vessels to be perforated by a

¹³² Rabitoy, 760.

¹³³ G. A. Bushby to William O’Shaughnessy, January 27, 1841, BL, IOR F/4/1957/85401.

¹³⁴ William O’Shaughnessy to the Government of Bengal, December 10, 1840, BL, IOR F/4/1957/85401.

minute hole” upon firing.¹³⁵ After financial concerns prompted O’Shaughnessy to withdraw from India,¹³⁶ the Bengal government updated the CoD on the project’s stillborn status. Officials in Madras and the North-Western Provinces had shown particular interest in the venture, but the central administration did “not deem it advisable to encourage experimental undertakings on the public account or to take a direct part in promoting these manufactures, which are best left in this country, as elsewhere to the industry and competition of individuals.”¹³⁷ The government’s role was limited to disseminating instructive information “to the public by any channel.”

O’Shaughnessy’s trials and tribulations capture in miniature the same difficulties that Manchester’s manufacturers encountered in the following decade, when lackluster American cotton harvests brought the stability of their supply lines into question.¹³⁸ Testifying before Bright’s select committee on Indian cotton growth, they initially aimed to extend the basic strictures of political economy to Indian commerce with little adjustment. Thomas Bazley, a prominent member of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce (MCC) and future MP, noted that mill owners were “simply guided by the quality of the cotton, and not the place from which it comes.”¹³⁹ Admitting his own lack of knowledge of Indian conditions, he nevertheless declared that private efforts to develop the cotton trade would prove sufficient. Firms need only “rely upon the natural influence of an increased demand for cotton in England” to invigorate the profit-oriented

¹³⁵ William O’Shaughnessy to G. A. Bushby, August 30, 1841, BL, IOR F/4/1957/85401.

¹³⁶ With the patronage of Governor-General Dalhousie, O’Shaughnessy designed the first experimental telegraph from Calcutta in 1852 and soon after was appointed Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs in India.

¹³⁷ Government of Bengal to the Court of Directors, November 24, 1841, BL, IOR F/4/1957/85401.

¹³⁸ Bombay merchants exported 53,957 bales of cotton to China and 16,875 bales to Britain in the peak month of May, 1845; one year later, these amounts had fallen to 34,555 and 3,055.5 respectively. See John Chapman, “Cotton Facts,” BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/97a ff. 93.

¹³⁹ *Growth of Cotton In India*, 53.

“minds of the cultivating classes.” In bowing to the idol of supply and demand, Manchester’s representatives avoided pledging themselves to any concrete initiatives. When asked whether a sizeable number of spinners and manufacturers would invest in schemes like the GIPR to boost cotton importation, James Aspinall Turner (the president of the Manchester Commercial Association) replied in the negative. Even a guaranteed annual return of five per cent on the investment, he reckoned, would only attract wealthy speculators looking for an outlet for their surplus capital. Challenged by Thompson, Turner further admitted he had no knowledge of the prices of cotton at Dharwar or the cost of transit to Bombay, nor had he received any information “respecting the views of the natives themselves upon the cotton question.”¹⁴⁰ Not all informants, however, shared the manufacturers’ prevailing belief in the “natural rule of demand.” A. N. Shaw, a collector in the cotton-rich district of Dharwar, questioned whether the *ryots*’ economic rationality could be taken for granted. The Indian “lower orders” were “not guided by a common sense view of what is to their own interest,” as they were “under the thralldom of a bigoted class of Brahmins and dealers, who profit by their ignorance.”¹⁴¹ In later debates, skeptics like Mangles would affirm that “the Indian people had not energy and they had not honesty, and the men of Manchester should supply those qualities.”¹⁴²

Behavioral explanations aside, there were ample reasons why Indian cotton failed to make headway in the English market. Certain varieties were short-stapled and unsuitable for metropolitan processing, or else were grown in insufficient quantities to sustain global trade circuits. An acre in the American South could produce between 300

¹⁴⁰ *Growth of Cotton In India*, 87.

¹⁴¹ *Report of the Bombay Cotton Committee*, f. 66.

¹⁴² Ross Mangles, Speech to House of Commons, June 23, 1857, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 146 (1857), col. 292.

and 400 pounds of clean cotton, compared to 30 to 40 pounds in India.¹⁴³ As the debates over the underperformance of Indian cash crop production ramped up, the conceptual framework of classical political economy became ever more elastic. Attempting to preemptively obviate metropolitan criticism, the Indian government declared outright in 1861 that it would not place itself “in the position of the private capitalist, cultivator, or speculator.”¹⁴⁴ But despite this “policy of studied inaction” in India, it continued to engage in bouts of “discriminatory interventionism.”¹⁴⁵ In the course of the mid-century debates, two major solutions to boost the cash crop export had emerged: agricultural science and legislative anti-adulteration measures. Whereas reformers had hitherto called on the Company to renovate its capricious tax system and emulate the statecraft of pre-colonial rulers through infrastructural investment, they were hesitant to embrace these new proposals, which called for a potentially needless expansion of the state’s powers.

Prior to the cotton panics of the 1840s, the Company had made some limited attempts to sponsor cotton cultivation. In addition to offering monetary rewards for crops of superior quality and sending out both Whitney gins and Egyptian cleaning machinery,¹⁴⁶ it had signed off on two experimental farms in Broach and the Southern Mahratta country in 1829. These persisted until 1836, at which point Bombay authorities determined that both had consumed large amounts of capital without altering Indian practices. Many *ryots* looked upon the farms as a governmental speculation rather than “a means of holding out inducements to the natives to follow the example set there.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ Edmund Ashworth to Richard Bourke, Lord Mayo, February 5, 1869, CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490 12/2.

¹⁴⁴ Harnetty, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” 72.

¹⁴⁵ Sabayaschi Bhattacharya, *The Financial Foundations of the British Raj: Ideas and Interests in the Reconstruction of Indian Public Finance, 1858-1872* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2005), li.

¹⁴⁶ Beckert, 125.

¹⁴⁷ Bombay Revenue Department to the Court of Directors, August 25, 1836, BL, IOR/F/4/1635/65503, f. 2

Under pressure from both the MCC and CoD, Governor-General Auckland brought in ten American planters in 1839 to introduce further improvements on a five-year plan. In his minute on the subject, Auckland was careful to distinguish his support for removing “all the obstacles from the free employment of capital” from any “artificial fosterings of the devotion of capital to particular employments by systems of bounties.”¹⁴⁸ He also conveniently ignored petitioners’ demands for a general reduction of the land tax and a return to payment of the revenue in kind. According to Francis Carnac Brown, the Liverpool and Manchester interests who had agitated for these improvements primarily feared for their own financial interests, as they had caught wind of a scheme by the Bank of the United States to monopolize the whole American cotton crop and sell it to Europeans at the bank’s own prices.¹⁴⁹ Dismissing Auckland’s venture as a political palliation, Brown compared it to “sending for 10 Belgian farmers to teach English farmers to grow wheat.”¹⁵⁰

By 1843, the long-term prospects of these cotton schemes were looking dim. Dr. Wight, a botanist and overseer of the Coimbatore plantation, reported native cotton grown by the American method had failed to flourish on account of the shallow black soil, drying winds, and insect-born pestilence.¹⁵¹ Challenges to the take-up of ill-suited American varieties also abounded due to the high rate of water retention and absence of silex in the Indian soil.¹⁵² Experiments conducted by the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India demonstrated that an overly moist soil was also injurious to the imported

¹⁴⁸ “Cultivation of Cotton in India,” *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, August 26, 1840, 212.

¹⁴⁹ Francis Carnac Brown, *The Supply of Cotton from India*, ed. John Dickinson (London: P. S. King, 1863), 8.

¹⁵⁰ *Growth of Cotton In India*, 234.

¹⁵¹ “The American Cotton Experiment at Coimbatore,” *East India Magazine* (May, 1842): 363-66.

¹⁵² Anonymous, *The Cotton Trade of India. Quære: Can India Not Supply England with Cotton?* (London: A. Spottiswoode, 1839), 10. The American “Sea Island” cotton varietal, per its name, was typically grown on islands or coastal shores.

New Orleans varieties; a composition of three quarters sand and one quarter clay was essential for proper drainage.¹⁵³ The imported American planters eventually surmised that foreign cotton required a “sweltering heat” instead of the “shriveling heat” that was characteristic of the western Indian climate.¹⁵⁴ Reflecting on their failure to implement plantation-style growing techniques, they concurred that the land cultivated under the native system was “made to yield as large an annual increase as it is capable of doing, unassisted by the chemical, mechanical, and other scientific appliances” commonly employed in the “highly-tilled districts of the United Kingdom.”¹⁵⁵ Upon reading this statement in the Bombay Cotton Committee’s report of 1846, George Thompson made a telling note in the margins: while far from perfect, “native industry and native science are not so sorry in their way as many people are led to suppose in this country.”

While Brown, Thompson, and their British India Society associates put great stock in the *ryots*’ capabilities, dwindling demand for indigenous varieties of Indian cotton in the aftermath of the Civil War prompted members of the East India Association (EIA) to lend renewed support to the experimental farms. Rowland Hamilton, a statistician and currency expert, looked upon these establishments as governmental-sponsored data banks that would boost entrepreneurial confidence and spur the “organization of public companies,” much as sanitary regulations ensured the longevity of a planter’s native workforce. Naoroji concurred. A centralized Department of Agriculture, he posited, could coordinate the distribution of this information, thus

¹⁵³ “On the Agriculture of Hindostan,” *Colonial Magazine and East India Review* 2 (1844): 406. Even after the Bourbon varieties were established, the Company remained the sole purchaser until 1847.

¹⁵⁴ D. C. Aylwin, *A Letter on Cotton Cultivation in India: as Affected by the East India Company’s Salt Monopoly* (London: James Madden, 1847), 6.

¹⁵⁵ *Report of the Bombay Cotton Committee*, f. 45.

opening India to “more capital, and more science and European enterprise.”¹⁵⁶ By the late 1860s, seed farms were experimenting with deep-ploughing techniques, plant hybridization, and varied modes of fertilization.¹⁵⁷ Rivett-Carnac reported that one farm fully intended to utilize an array of manures that the Cotton Supply Association (CSA) had sent over, ranging from Australian bat guano to jail “poudrette.”¹⁵⁸ Each establishment functioned as “an al-fresco agricultural school” that employed “the sons of some of the principal cultivators.” Their trials also dealt with tobacco and Carolina paddy, the results of which were readily explained to interested villagers.

The records of farms elsewhere were decidedly mixed.¹⁵⁹ A season of intense winter rains, such as occurred in early 1870, could wipe out an entire crop. Additionally, the fate of the farms was often inextricably tied to the fortunes and careers of their enthusiastic supervisors. The Bombay government, for instance, reduced support for the Dharwar Gin Factory following the retirement of director John Forbes in 1872 and soon after abandoned other experimental farms under its jurisdiction.¹⁶⁰ Colonial observers also recognized that the new methods of cultivation that the “experts” endorsed were not always uniformly adopted.¹⁶¹ The *ryot* persistently believed he “knew rather more about his crop than did even the expert Scotch gardeners...and he was therefore not over-

¹⁵⁶ Response of Dadabhai Naoroji, “The Production of Cotton in India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (1870): 199.

¹⁵⁷ These were located in Sheogaon, Oomraotee, Hingunghat, and Boolundshuhur.

¹⁵⁸ Harry Rivett-Carnac, *Memorandum of the chief measures which, under the orders of His Excellency the Viceroy, have been adopted, since March last, in the Central Provinces and the Berars, to promote the interests of the Cotton Trade*, in CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490 12/7.

¹⁵⁹ Satya denounced similar farms in Berar as “a mockery in a country of poverty and indebtedness,” speculating that the utilization of advanced technologies compelled the *ryots* to take on additional loans. See Sayta, 155.

¹⁶⁰ Peter Harnetty, “The Cotton Improvement Program in India, 1865-1875,” *Agricultural History* 44, no. 4 (1970): 383, 389.

¹⁶¹ Lyall noted the *ryots*’ preference for a lightweight scraper called a *wakhar* that would penetrate only about three inches into the ground, as a hard plough would expose the lower soil to the harsh sun and rob it of its nutrients. See *Gazetteer for the Haidarabad Assigned Districts*, 70.

anxious to be taught.”¹⁶² Late in life, Rivett-Carnac himself doubted whether his own efforts to improve agricultural methods had proved efficacious; the high prices generated by the Union’s blockade of the Southern states “had more influence than would have had ten thousand Cotton Commissioners in extending the cultivation.” Officials testifying before the Famine Commission of 1880 similarly concluded that a rise in prices for clean Wurdha cotton spurred growth to a far greater extent than any administrative intervention.¹⁶³

While reformers’ stance on the experimental farms evolved, they were generally less inclined to favor harsh anti-adulteration legislation. The issue of quality control had perplexed the Company since the 1780s, when it relied on intermediary Bombay merchants to procure and sell raw cotton in China. These licensed traders deposited their profits in the Canton treasury and received certificates that could be redeemed in India or England; Company agents then used this specie to purchase tea for export.¹⁶⁴ Merchants based in Surat,¹⁶⁵ however, regularly adulterated their produce by adding twigs to the bales and soaking them to increase their weight. While Regulation III of 1829 imposed severe fines and prison sentences for the sale of impure cotton, it yielded little practical effect due to the fact that prosecution rested with the cheated consumers.¹⁶⁶ The

¹⁶² Rivett-Carnac, *Many Memories*, 167.

¹⁶³ Tomlinson, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Bowen observes that the Bombay-Canton trade was less than stable due to both fickle Indian weather patterns and the merchants’ inability to gauge Chinese consumption. After annexing cotton-growing districts in Awadh, the Company began to export its crops through Calcutta. See H. V. Bowen, “British Exports of Raw Cotton from India to China during the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries,” in *How India Clothed the World: the World of South Asian Textiles, 1500-1850*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 122, 129-132.

¹⁶⁵ As late as the 1860s, British consumers apparently affixed the descriptor of “Surat” to diverse items of inferior manufacture. James Watts, the chronicler of the Lancashire cotton famine, reported that one Staleybridge brewing firm had suffered ruin as a result of drinkers rebranding their product as “Surat ale.” See James Watts, *The Facts of the Cotton Famine* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1866), 147.

¹⁶⁶ *Appendix to the Report from the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the Affairs of the East-India Company*, vol. I (London: J. L. Cox, 1833), 36.

discovery of “uniform” adulteration in Broach twenty years later led collector J. M. Davies to suspect that a plot was afoot that involved the community of dealers at large. According to one colonial gazetteer, this fraud resulted from their habit of over-speculating and accruing cotton stocks that they could not profitably sell; to recoup these losses, they added seed in amounts ranging from 25% to 46% of the bale weight.¹⁶⁷ Subsequent legislation set up a system of examining and stamping the packaged cotton at Surat and Broach, which for a time seemed to resolve the problem at some governmental expense. Yet the cotton originating from Central India continued to arrive to Bombay in a sorry state, as it was often stored in underground holes and only half-pressed before its journey to the Indian ports. As a later article put it, a cotton bale had “as many enemies as the flying fish” during its 412-mile journey from Amravati to Bombay, ranging from the voracious cattle and ponies that carried it to human thieves.¹⁶⁸

The invidious Cotton Frauds Act of 1863 brought renewed attention to the issue of mixing, but its overall efficacy was disputed. While the Indian government and the CSA were largely satisfied by its operation,¹⁶⁹ the Bombay Chamber of Commerce (BCC) opined that adulteration had mainly arisen from the commercial frenzy triggered by the Civil War. By the time the act went into effect in January 1864, the practice had largely declined. When experimental farm director John Forbes insisted on a vigorous enforcement of the Act to reduce cross contamination of American and indigenous varieties, the BCC dismissed his demands as “outrageously arbitrary and tyrannical.” The provincial government, too, clarified that the act would not penalize accidental mixing;

¹⁶⁷ *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*, vol. 2, *Gujarat, Surat and Broach* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1877), 402.

¹⁶⁸ “The Resources of India and its Colonization, Part II,” *Universal Review* (June 1859): 547.

¹⁶⁹ Rekha Ranade, *Sir Bartle Frere and his Times: a Study of His Bombay Years, 1862-1867* (New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1990), 71.

its agents generally avoided prosecution unless irrefutable evidence of fraud was found.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, cotton inspectors in districts like Sholapore were struggling to find any evidence of contamination, as the native merchants were “so alive to the advantages of purchasing and pressing good cotton [and] so careful for their own sakes and credit to exclude all dirty cotton from the presses.”¹⁷¹ The BCC further cited the government’s own reports that testified to the “utter inefficiency of the penal provisions of the Act.” As the legislation levied an additional export duty to subsidize the salaries of the cotton commissioners, its continuance would only prohibit merchants from selling the cotton at competitive rates in the European markets.

After a close examination of public debates and private correspondence, the notion that a homogenous phalanx of Manchester lobbyists and reformers cajoled the Indian government into sanctioning forms of labor coercion seems to unravel. The EIA came out strongly against a proposed Bombay Cotton Act of 1869, which threatened to ramp up the penalties for adulteration.¹⁷² While Naoroji noted that it was “the fashion” to make Manchester “the scapegoat of many sins,” he clarified that the blame for this bill did not lie at its feet.¹⁷³ Neither the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce nor its East India and China Association had pushed for a new act; the MCC had not petitioned the government on the matter at any point between 1860 and 1869. In fact, one member of

¹⁷⁰ Sandip Hazareesingh, “Cotton, Climate and Colonialism in Dharwar, western India, 1840-1880,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 38 (2012): 12. Curiously, Satya argues that the BCC pursued a different course in Berar, actively suppressing the cultivation of the native *khandeshi* variety that had limited export value but could be used in the Bombay mills. He does not, however, specify the extent of these mills’ demand. See Satya, 113-114.

¹⁷¹ *Report of the Bombay Chamber of Commerce for the year 1870-71* (Bombay: ‘Bombay Gazette’ Steam Press, 1872), 82.

¹⁷² The Bombay Association, which was in direct collaboration with the EIA, vociferously opposed the bill and drew up a memorial that garnered 600 signatures. See Jim Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974), 71.

¹⁷³ Dadabhai Naoroji, “The Bombay Cotton Act of 1869,” *Journal of the East India Association* 3 (1869): 193.

the MCC had recently informed Naoroji that the “provisions of the Bill” would be “tyrannical, oppressive, contradictory, and practically unworkable.”¹⁷⁴ Members of the EIA further denounced the Bombay government’s backroom dealing, noting that any market interference would necessitate “the unanimous approval of all parties concerned in the trade.” The following year, leading manufacturer Edmund Ashworth personally wrote to Viceroy Mayo thanking him for quashing the “vexatious” legislation, which very well could have led “to the abandoning of cultivation altogether.”¹⁷⁵

The Manchester Problem

Despite an initial frostiness, the free trade and India reform communities increasingly merged in the early 1840s following George Thompson’s transfer to the ACLL. Reformers began to anticipate that the cotton-hungry towns of northern England would furnish a solid base of support for their agitation. Arthur Cotton, for one, celebrated Manchester’s apparent interest in colonial affairs and suspected that it might soon emerge “as the proper substitute for a free and powerful Public voice in India itself.”¹⁷⁶ Unfortunately, the MCC failed to meet Cotton’s expectations in 1855 when it declined to support his IRS-sanctioned scheme to render the Godavery River navigable to the cotton fields of Berar. According to the manufacturers, transport costs to Britain were simply too high for the Indian cotton to compete with American produce.¹⁷⁷ This

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 222, 228.

¹⁷⁵ Ashworth deduced that self-interested Bombay merchants had cajoled Governor Seymour Fitzgerald into sponsoring the legislation. See Edmund Ashworth to Richard Bourke, Lord Mayo, July 15, 1870, CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490 12/11.

¹⁷⁶ Cotton, Public Works, 32.

¹⁷⁷ James Laverne Sturgis, *John Bright and Empire* (London: Althone Press, 1968), 29. Bright was also put off by the MCC’s bottom line logic and later claimed that the outbreak of the Crimean War stifled overseas investment. See *British India. Speeches of the Right Hon. John Bright, M.P., and Sir Arthur Cotton* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Co., 1877), 30.

lukewarmness was typical. Although mill owners rallied behind the reformers in periods of economic distress, few took up Indian governance as a political question or committed themselves to long-term reform initiatives.

Challenging the misleading concept of a cohesive “Manchester School,” some historians have distinguished the city’s mercantile community from its radical element. According to D. A. Farnie’s telling, Manchester’s high level of participation in ACLL was actually an aberration, as many middle-class supporters retreated from the public sphere after 1846.¹⁷⁸ A number of manufacturers abstained from free-trade agitation altogether, forming the break-off MCA in 1845 as a non-political alternative to the MCC. Anthony Howe concurs that Manchester’s notables were generally a complacent bunch. So long as their workers were fed and their import quotas of cotton were met, the “degree to which [they] were prepared to undermine the aristocratic constitution was essentially limited.”¹⁷⁹

According to Dickinson, Bright only managed to wrangle his select committee on cotton through the intervention of former Tory Prime Minister Robert Peel, who had become interested in Indian affairs shortly before his death.¹⁸⁰ In 1850, Hobhouse rejected Bright’s calls for a follow-up royal commission to examine cotton-growing conditions, noting the redundancy of such an enterprise when each governor was effectively a Royal Commissioner “sent out to his government by the Crown.”¹⁸¹ He further speculated on the futility of a non-official delegation, as the reformers’ inquiries

¹⁷⁸ D. A. Farnie, *The English Cotton Industry and the World Market, 1815-1896* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 39.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony Howe, *The Cotton Masters, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 235.

¹⁸⁰ Dickinson, *India: its Government under a Bureaucracy*, 150.

¹⁸¹ John Hobhouse, Speech to House of Commons, June 18, 1850, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 112 (1850), col. 49.

would likely be addressed to the same Company personnel that they had hitherto maligned. Aside from Hobhouse's skepticism, Bright also contended with defections from Manchester. Before the parliamentary debate began, James Aspinall Turner's MCA had informed the CoD that it was against his "wild Commission," as the Company had already "done everything that was practicable" to improve the cotton trade.¹⁸² Despite this detraction, Bright continued to insist that the need for widespread economic reform in a naturally fertile country could only be attributed to colonial malfeasance. The question of cotton production, he privately reminded Hobhouse, was "connected with Indian industry in general" and thus "inseparably connected with Indian government." He could not "touch one branch without getting involved in the other."¹⁸³

On the eve of the 1853 charter renewal, Bright repeated the charge that the despotic nature of Company governance rendered India an unattractive location for the investment of English capital.¹⁸⁴ The amount of land revenue extracted to fund the government's expansive military apparatus was wholly unsustainable. And yet, the general public blindly associated the success of the colonial enterprise in India with the needless and costly expansion of its borders. While Bright's political effrontery found favor with the conservationist reform community, it ostracized establishment interests who may very well have sanctioned the construction of a simple canal or model farm. Official mouthpieces like John Marshman, the editor of the *Friend of India*, accused Bright and the IRS of parroting the "inflammatory charges" of native groups like the

¹⁸² James Hogg, Speech to House of Commons, June 18, 1850, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 112 (1850), col. 59.

¹⁸³ John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, November 18, 1850, BL, Broughton Papers, Mss Eur F213/27, f. 346.

¹⁸⁴ Bright, Speech to House of Commons, June 3, 1853, col. 1183

British Indian Association of Calcutta.¹⁸⁵ To suggest, as Bright had done, that the Company ought wait two years to acquire additional information before approving the charter would merely raise a spirit of disaffection amongst the Indian intelligentsia. Even after Bright lost his Manchester seat to his nemesis Turner, he continued to advocate for boundary-pushing reforms. In the aftermath of the 1857 Uprising, he declared that the inhabitants of the former princely state of Awadh should be classified as enemies rather than rebels; as such, they were protected from colonial reprisals by the civilized laws of war.¹⁸⁶ To prevent similar disturbances from arising, he demanded a transition to a system of accountable governance that would require the (eventual) abolition of the governor-generalship and the conversion of Indian presidencies into a federal union of at least five semi-independent states. Emerging from the deadening thrall of the central government, these provincial administrations would partake in “a constant rivalry for good,” expanding public works and fostering industry in place of war making.¹⁸⁷

The blockade of the American South in 1861 widened the ideological gulf between India reformers and the sub-group of manufacturers who predominantly focused their attentions on Manchester’s material relief. Some historians have characterized the provincial cotton famine of the early 1860s as an inflated panic, noting that the lull in production allowed mill owners to rid themselves of an accumulating back stock.¹⁸⁸ Farnie even posited that it was a ruse designed by the Conservatives to further attach

¹⁸⁵ John Clark Marshman, *Letter to John Bright, Esq., M. P. Relative to the Recent Debates in Parliament on the India Question* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1853), 47.

¹⁸⁶ John Bright, “The Vote of Censure – Government of India,” in *Speeches on the Public Affairs of the Past Twenty Years by the Rt. Hon. John Bright* (London: James Camden Hotten, 1869), 60.

¹⁸⁷ John Bright, “On the Second Reading of the India Bill, no. 3” in *Speeches on the Public Affairs of the Past Twenty Years*, 97. The transfer to Crown rule failed to enliven this municipal spirit, as the 1858 Government of India Act invested the new Secretary of State with a level of arbitrary authority comparable to that previously exercised by the governor-general and the Board of Control.

¹⁸⁸ Silver, 159.

Manchester's representatives to their camp.¹⁸⁹ The long-term significance of the event is still a matter of some conjecture. Farnie determined that the famine shattered the “hypnotic hold [of cotton] on the national imagination,” while Beckert conversely argues that the shortage “opened new vistas on colonial raw material produce.”¹⁹⁰ At the time, a wide range of onlookers viewed the cotton shortage as a national crisis that threatened to eclipse the Irish Famine.¹⁹¹ Addressing the Commons in June 1862, MP J. B. Smith bemoaned the fact that only 22,000 bales of American cotton had arrived in Liverpool so far that year; meanwhile, Manchester's supply had depleted by nearly 800,000 bales. At this point, Smith attempted to resurrect Cotton's scheme to link the fields of Berar with the coast by means of the Godavery River canal. But Turner sought to indefinitely table this discussion of improving Indian communications. The House's attentions, he argued, should instead be directed to the increased Indian import tariffs on British yarns and textiles that threatened Manchester's wellbeing and artificially propped up competing mills in Bombay. Turner himself led numerous deputations of starving and tearful cotton operatives to the India Office. “It was impossible,” he prophesized, “that peace and tranquility could be preserved through another winter, if some assistance were not rendered to obtain the means of employing the people in the staple manufacture of this country.”¹⁹² Tensions burst the following spring in places like Staleybridge, where the relief committee's ploy to discourage alcohol purchases by giving out redeemable tickets instead of money precipitated a riot that ended in eighty arrests.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Farnie, 156.

¹⁹⁰ Beckert, 254.

¹⁹¹ James Caird, Speech to House of Commons, June 19, 1862, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 167, col. 790.

¹⁹² James Aspinall Turner, Speech to House of Commons, June 19, 1862, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 167, col. 776.

¹⁹³ James Watts, *The Facts of the Cotton Famine* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, & Co., 1866), 263.

As social frictions in Lancashire mounted, politicians increasingly took their frustrations out on Charles Wood, the Secretary of State for India, rather than seeking a long-term catalyst for Indian economic growth. In 1862, MCC members lavished praise on Samuel Laing, the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council, who assured them that they were not morally bound to purchase Indian cotton if it hurt their bottom line. Disparaging all "artificial expedients" for expanding the trade, Laing and his acolytes hoped that the home government would soon recognize the Confederacy as a legitimate state.¹⁹⁴ Following the consequent normalization of prices, "the question of whether cotton could be grown in India to a large extent" could finally be settled. Laing proceeded to malign Wood for vetoing Viceroy Canning's resolution that expanded the sale of wastelands in fee simple to British planters. This was no mere policy dispute; Laing believed that Wood had gone rogue, overruling his council and rejecting public opinion. He further implied that a constitutional crisis was brewing. "Canada, the Cape, and the Australian colonies had all been driven to the verge of insurrection...by the worry of official priggishness and in the incessant interference of the old colonial office." If Wood persisted in his meddling, it was likely that the Indian government might follow suit.

Later the same year, the inhabitants of Birmingham gathered to hear John Bright speak at a very different kind of meeting. Whereas Laing had specifically targeted Wood, Bright heaped opprobrium upon the entire Indian government. For many years, the growth of cotton in India had "been systematically injured, strangled, and destroyed by

¹⁹⁴ Among these expedients was a proposal for revenue collectors to receive a personal commission from the cotton grown in their districts; Laing deemed this to be an utter violation of the "rules of political economy." See "Mr. Laing on India," *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, September 20, 1862, 9.

the stupid and wicked policy” of the colonial state.¹⁹⁵ If policymakers had heeded Bright’s proposal to restructure British India into five distinct states and granted the five-year tax exemptions that so many reformers demanded, India would have experienced “the most extraordinary increase in the growth of that article which has ever been seen in regard to any branch of agriculture in the world.”¹⁹⁶ Contrary to Laing, Bright insisted that Manchester should not be guided by its self-interest when it came to Anglo-American relations. There was little political precedent for recognizing the sovereignty of insurrectionary states so soon after an initial conflagration; Britain, after all, had waited six years to acknowledge Greece’s autonomy from the Ottoman Empire. And moral reasons for rejecting the South’s self-determinism abounded, as the Confederacy had purposefully “set itself up on the sole basis of slavery” as its *raison d’etre*. Offering his own variation on the India reformers’ “virtual slavery” rhetoric, Bright hoped that the “unenfranchised, but not hopeless millions of this country” would “never sympathise with a revolt which is intended to destroy the liberty of a continent, and to build on its ruins a mighty fabric of human bondage.”¹⁹⁷

Given that Bright and Laing represented two polar ideological extremes, it is likely that a notable percentage of Manchester’s lobbyists fell somewhere in between. The Cotton Supply Association, which formed in 1857 as a scientific analogue to the MCC, boasted a broad membership; it is therefore difficult to generalize about its animating motivations beyond a simple yearning for cheap raw cotton. Some participants like Henry Ashworth held staunchly to the belief that “India is everything,” for the

¹⁹⁵ John Bright, *Speech of Mr. Bright, M.P., in the Town Hall, Birmingham* (Birmingham: Joseph Allen and Son, 1862), 5.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

manufacturing “towns and populous places [were] becoming more and more exclusively dependent upon India” as both an exporter of raw produce and a consumer of English textiles.¹⁹⁸ Yet few Britons, Ashworth concluded, would invest in Indian agriculture without an enhanced security of property in the form of freeholds or contract laws. Viewing cash cropping from a native perspective, Henry’s brother Edmund called upon the state to invest in cheap transit, initialize a division of labor, and assure the cultivators of a competitive market for their goods. Following this transformation, an enriched peasantry would be able to purchase not only “the necessaries of life, but even luxuries previously unknown to them.”¹⁹⁹ Edmund was willing to accept any strain the *ryots* might deign to grow, as Lancashire’s deficient supply had brought manufacturing to a near-halt in the summer of 1870. He further clarified that he did “not ask for an increase of breadth but an improved culture whereby we may see both a better quality and an increased quantity produced from the same area.” In a separate memo, the CSA reiterated this desire to provide “the *ryot* the option of growing cotton or any other produce that may pay him best.”²⁰⁰

Other CSA personnel cast their sights far wider, nursing hopes that cotton cultivation in Africa, Anatolia, and even Australia could be developed. In 1859, a former consul notified the CSA that the “King of the Feejees” was “desirous of encouraging intercourse with Europe, or promoting Commerce, Civilisation, and Christianity.”²⁰¹

Fearing American and French aggrandizement in the region, he was even considering

¹⁹⁸ Cotton Supply Association, *The Second Report of the Executive Committee* (Manchester: Cave & Sever, 1859), 32. Ashworth had supported abolitionist North Central British India Society twenty years prior.

¹⁹⁹ Edmund Ashworth to Richard Bourke, Lord Mayo, April 28, 1870, CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490 12/9.

²⁰⁰ Government of India, Memorandum on the Memorial of the Cotton Supply Association, June 8, 1870, in CUL, Mayo Papers, ADD MSS 7490 12/10, f. 7. The CSA speculated that more *ryots* would turn to cotton cultivation if import duties on imperial foodstuffs like Australian wheat and flour were abolished.

²⁰¹ Cotton Supply Association, *The Second Report of the Executive Committee*, 11.

ceding his sovereignty to the Crown so long as he could retain a right to his private property. John Cheetham, the president of the CSA, wasted little time in declaring that the Australians' outright confiscation of the island would accelerate cotton production and lobbied the Conservative ministry to consider the matter. Bazley, too, conceded that Fiji offered a far more promising source of the cotton than the West Indies, where "the spirit of humanity...has rather retarded the development of the industrial and material prosperity of those islands through the want of labour."²⁰² The Fijians, Bazley continued, were naturally more "energetic" than those liberated slaves and had already converted to Christianity in numbers nearing forty thousand. Clearly, his correlation of annexation and conversion with economic productivity diverged significantly from the reformers' conservationist ideals.

Although the CSA developed a far-flung informational web by transmitting thousands of letters annually and distributing its *Cotton Supply Register* to the ends of the empire,²⁰³ its material successes were limited. In 1865, the organization gleefully reported that the vice-president of the Imperial Cotton Commission of Anatolia had credited the CSA with "restoring Turkey as a cotton-growing country."²⁰⁴ But only three years later, the association was lamenting that the "earnestness of the [Ottoman] government does not appear to have been sustained by its officers."²⁰⁵ The CSA's efforts, in the words of its chronicler, to initiate "a complete revolution in the modes of

²⁰² Ibid., 25.

²⁰³ The CSA had forwarded photographs of American cotton varieties and samples to two hundred colonial personnel so that they might exhibit them in bazaars as guides for cultivation. See "Cotton, as an Element of Industry," *London Review* 15 (January 1861): 505.

²⁰⁴ Cotton Supply Association, *The Eighth Report of the Executive Committee* (Manchester: Garidan Steam Printing, 1865), 5.

²⁰⁵ Cotton Supply Association, *The Eleventh Report of the Executive Committee* (Manchester: Garidan Steam Printing, 1868), 10.

cultivation and the means of transport” in India were similarly foiled.²⁰⁶ Haste, miscommunication, and uncertainty doomed the Manchester Cotton Company, a short-lived enterprise that drew much of its support from the MCC and CSA. Its backers aimed to transport Dharwar cotton to a new port at Karwar; the Madras administration would finance the connecting road, while the port itself would fall under the purview of Bombay. The over-eager MCC dispatched former CSA secretary G. A. Haywood to Dharwar with heavy processing equipment in tow before either of these works had been completed.²⁰⁷ Although government engineers managed to unload the machinery, it languished on the shores. One EIA member later claimed that the MCC was forced to sell the remaining pieces on the spot for 18,000 pounds, a loss of 52,000 pounds on the investment.

Demanding ever-more governmental support, the CSA inveighed that the India Office’s chronic apathy had rendered colonial development a perennial topic of “mortification and disappointment.”²⁰⁸ At one contentious Commons session, Bazley heaped encomium on the French government in Algeria, which was fostering cotton cultivation by “draining the land and establishing reservoirs for purposes of irrigation.”²⁰⁹ Demanding state sponsorship of public works and agricultural science, the CSA contended that it was merely challenging an anomalous, almost deranged, system of neglect. Far from being overly interventionist, its principles had “contravened no law of

²⁰⁶ Isaac Watts, *The Cotton Supply Association: its Origin and Progress* (Manchester: Tubbs & Brooke, 1871), 38.

²⁰⁷ Arthur Silver, *Manchester Men and Indian Cotton, 1847-1872* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 188; Peter Harnetty, *Imperialism and Free Trade: Lancashire and India in the mid-Nineteenth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1872), 65.

²⁰⁸ Cotton Supply Association, *The Seventh Report of the Executive Committee* (Manchester: Garidan Steam Printing, 1864), 8.

²⁰⁹ Thomas Bazley, Speech to House of Commons, July 3, 1863, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 172, col. 191.

political economy,” but instead struck “at the very root of many obstacles to the free operation of that great commercial law, the law of supply and demand.”²¹⁰ Bazley insisted that the CSA “had never desired Governmental favours,” for their object was simply to “promote the removal of repressing obstacles.”²¹¹ Wood retorted that he was more than willing to provide assistance and interpreters if Manchester sent buyers into the interior. As of 1863, no manufacturer had taken him up on the offer.²¹² Yet Wood was not insensitive to the fact that the government’s public work expenditure was chronically lackluster. In 1863, he had reserved 3 million pounds for remunerative works to further stimulate cotton production and transit, only to learn that the Government of India had failed to make use of this allocation and had actually reduced its expenditure from the previous year.²¹³

Once Indian cotton prices bottomed out in 1866, it became clear that Manchester’s lobbying had failed to put cash crop agriculture on a stable footing. At the annual meeting of the MCC, Bazley once more accused the Indian government of culpable negligence. During the past five years, Lancashire had imported native cotton at the stunning cost of 100,000,000 pounds sterling; in recognition of the manufacturers’ largesse, the imperial state ought to have taken additional measures to ensure the quality of these exports. A critical editorial in *The Times* challenged this reasoning, noting that the government could hardly dictate where the *ryots* invested their scanty surplus capital.

²¹⁰ Cotton Supply Association, *The Fourth Report of the Executive Committee* (Manchester: John J. Sale, 1861), 5.

²¹¹ *The Cotton Question: Some Remarks, with Extracts from Pamphlets on the Subject*, ed. John Smedley (London: Job Caudwell, 1861), 12.

²¹² Wood nonetheless recognized that the wheels of supply and demand occasionally needed oiling; the increased demand for Indian cotton during the Civil Wars years actually triggered a decline in quality, thus hindering its future marketability. See Silver, 234.

²¹³ “Financial Despatch to India,” in *Selections from Despatches Addressed to the Several Governments in India by the Secretary of State in Council* (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1864), 12.

It was also unclear if the *ryots* themselves had materially profited from the cotton boom, as a large share of the windfall was likely “appropriated by European merchants and speculators.”²¹⁴ In response, other contributors questioned *The Times*’ presumption that Manchester alone could secure improved cotton by directly overseeing its preparation and assuring cultivators of a future demand. The *Morning Star* noted that *ryots* rarely required goading to enter the cotton trade. Cotton had “so largely displaced the ordinary cultivation of cereals and other food crops as to create almost a famine in Western India.” But despite this three-fold increase in production, the quality remained inferior. The *ryot* would therefore “persist in his old-world routine” until the government intervened through the dissemination of technical and chemical knowledge. The public debates over state intervention thus entered into a conceptual cul-de-sac, as parties failed to concur whether a supply in this case should anticipate its demand.

Whereas Bright diplomatically applauded past and present presidents of the MCC like Bazley, Ashworth, and Smith for their attention to Indian affairs,²¹⁵ other reformers grew weary of Manchester’s refusal to interrogate the core structures of colonial governance. Advocate-General John Bruce Norton mocked the CSA in its early days for purposefully exhibiting “a timid dislike of being thought to aim at any reform in India.”²¹⁶ European cotton planters, he reasoned, were deterred from investing in the country by the prospect of lengthy labor disputes in the dilatory court system. This obstruction could only be removed by augmenting native employment in the judiciary – a

²¹⁴ “The Manchester Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Cotton Trade,” in *Public Opinion*, vol. 9 (London, 1866), 105-06.

²¹⁵ Once Bright’s plans for a royal commission imploded, Bazley helped him raise 2000 pounds to fund an independent fact-finding expedition helmed by Alexander Mackay.

²¹⁶ John Bruce Norton, *The Rebellion in India: How to Prevent Another* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1857), 186.

contentious political issue if ever there was one. The CSA's motto that "cotton knows no politics" rang also hollow for Dickinson, as the *ryots'* fate remained tethered to the government's land revenue demands and fiscal imposts. A vocal advocate of cheap canal construction and irrigation, he maligned manufacturers who were exclusively concerned with transporting their textiles into the Indian interior. This "pre-occupation about their own interest [had] so contracted their views" that they had neglected to consider the use-value of the costly rails as an Indian public utility. Most solely regarded Indian cotton "as an article invented to keep the price of American within bounds."²¹⁷

Speaking before the MCC in 1866, Dickinson reminded listeners that India reformers affiliated with the BIS and IRS had been at the forefront of agitation on economic matters for the past twenty-five years. Works ranging from Briggs' 1839 pamphlet on Indian cotton cultivation, to Brown's free-trade treatise, to the 1846 report of the BCC had made some headway in directing metropolitan attention to India's development. The IRS had picked up this gauntlet, multiplying the available information on India a "thousand times over" to correct popular misconceptions. The organization had not developed a mass backing, Dickinson reasoned, because the "only class in the nation that [had] a direct personal interest in the good administration of India" had remained largely quiescent.²¹⁸ This class was, of course, the complacent, upwardly mobile Manchester manufacturers, whose prior participation in the ACLL had apparently consumed their entire lifetime supply of reformist fervor. Dickinson therefore demanded a revival of the confrontational strain of radicalism that Thompson and Bright

²¹⁷ John Dickinson, *Remarks on the Indian Railway Reports Published by the Government* (London: P. S. King, 1862), 23-24.

²¹⁸ John Dickinson, *Speech of Mr. Dickinson, late President of the India Reform Association, at a Meeting of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce* (1866), 8.

personified. The “spirit of the old monopolist Company,” he declared, survived in the reconfigured imperial government. The MCC was compelled to “exorcise that ghost, as it once excommunicated the corn-law monopoly.”²¹⁹ Several years later, Frederick Chesson echoed Dickinson’s complaint before the EIA. While Lancashire’s lobbyists took a keen interest in any issue which directly affected “that busiest of all hives of English industry,” they clearly failed to discern the link between “commercial prosperity and good government in India.” If they had understood this connection, their chambers of commerce would have promptly established a branch of the EIA to expand the general public’s knowledge of Indian affairs and scrutinize the actions of the colonial state.²²⁰

Cash Crops without Coercion?

Abolitionists and India reformers had long argued that the *ryots* possessed an adequate work ethic and technological awareness to produce high quality cotton for the global markets. All they required was a supervisory presence on the spot to boost agricultural efficiency and oversee packaging. European buyers would ideally venture upcountry to ensure *ryots* of a reliable demand for their produce. By the late 1840s, this halcyon vision of capitalistic camaraderie had yet to materialize; one Bombay-based merchant estimated that only two or three Europeans had permanently settled in the interior.²²¹ Reformers who feared the growing isolation of Company officialdom extolled the benefits of enhanced interracial collaboration, but were leery of granting planters undue advantages. To guard against the subjugation of the *ryots*, Norton determined that

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²²⁰ Frederick Chesson, “The Best Means of Educating English Opinion on Indian Affairs,” *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 183.

²²¹ *Growth of Cotton In India*, vol. 9 of *Reports from Committees*, 100

Europeans settlers in Madras should occupy land on the same terms as the native cultivators. Any move to create an “artificial class of middlemen” would “throw back the cause of progress fifty years.”²²² For Dickinson, the whole question was moot, as the absence of good roads and the lack of sufficient legal protection for property would doom any inland venture that Manchester’s brokers attempted.²²³

Despite these drawbacks, various commentators continued to put forth schemes for wholesale European colonization in the public press. Shortly before the Mutiny, railway enthusiast Hyde Clarke proposed a revival of the Wakefieldian system of assisted emigration to secure the annual influx of fifty thousand souls to India.²²⁴ Skilled, working-class Britons residing in the hills would oversee fledging commercial projects and develop “the machinery of civilization” using local materials. Incidentally, these representatives of the “English race” could also furnish a relief force to defend India’s borders “with English arms [and] with English hearts” in the event of Russian aggression. One contemporary article similarly depicted the influx of British cotton-growers into India, Africa, and other fertile regions as a triumphant, patriotic endeavor. These planters “did not require Government patronage or extraneous aid,” but rather desired that “official red tape shall not mar or delay their efforts.”²²⁵ If the colonial governments simply expedited their entry into the interior, it would emancipate “the nation from political and commercial bondage” in a manner befitting Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Brougham.

²²² John Bruce Norton, *A Letter to Robert Lowe, Esq. on the Condition and Requirements of the Presidency of Madras* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1854), 195.

²²³ Dickinson, *India: its Government under a Bureaucracy*, 103.

²²⁴ Hyde Clarke, *Colonization, Defence, and Railways in our Indian Empire* (London: John Weale, 1857), 125-27.

²²⁵ “Cotton, as an Element of Industry,” *London Review*, 518-19.

In another oft-cited tract, Bengal administrator George Campbell outlined a plan to construct a permanent capital in the salubrious hills between Mussoorie and Deyrah that would do away with the necessity of winter relocations. This climate could tolerate the growth of tea, sugar, hops and oats; “schools of art, and model cotton-mills, and iron-foundries” would replicate metropolitan society in miniature.²²⁶ As inhabitants of a colder climate, the British could hardly be expected to flourish in the heat of the miasmatic plains. These medical strictures, however, did not apply to the “Southern Christians” of the Mediterranean and Levant who could readily supervise cash crop cultivation.²²⁷ Together with “the mixed and native Christian population,” this new wave of colonists would “form the nucleus of change” as agents of social amalgamation and agricultural innovation. So long as these intermediaries offered the *ryots* advances at a “fixed and profitable rate,” potatoes, grapes, and olives would soon flood the bazaars. To usher in this bountiful future, Campbell advanced the idea that the imperial state should shoulder all the costs of grand trunk rail construction, even beyond what the annual revenues could support.

While vocal Manchester representatives like Bazley and Smith insisted that the colonial state should induce European settlement by ensuring the security of property, other manufacturers were less sanguine. John Smedley, the owner of the Lea Mills in Derbyshire, claimed that the CSA had received little from the government but “civil speeches, and sometimes irony and ridicule.”²²⁸ The organization had failed to recognize that open European settlement was fundamentally unpalatable to an autocratic entity like

²²⁶ George Campbell, *India as it may be; an Outline of a Proposed Government and Policy* (London: John Murray, 1853), 123.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 423-29.

²²⁸ *The Cotton Question: Some Remarks*, ed. John Smedley, 7.

the Government of India. Quite simply, if “English mercantile men” were granted “free liberty to operate in India, the opium monopoly and the Government jobbery and patronage could not long stand.” Smedley offered a smattering of reasons why the fuss over Indian cotton exportation was ill informed. Schemes to purchase 500,000 acres of wastelands directly from the state enjoyed great popularity amongst Manchester men who had never encountered “primitive and almost savage races of men” or contended with “a numerous population of tigers, jaguars, and serpents.”²²⁹ Unlike Anglo stock in the American South, settlers and their families could rarely acclimatize to the Indian environment; caste barriers and social frictions with the native community further impeded permanent residence. This racialism revealed Smedley’s anxiety over the colonizers’ own state of dependence. Quoting Irish war correspondent W. H. Russell, he concluded that the British could neither destroy nor drive out the Indians as they had other races. If they did, “Hindustan would at once become a desert” and the victors “would miserably perish in the first generation.”²³⁰

In listing his various criticisms of the Manchester lobby, Smedley touched upon two existential issues that India reformers routinely neglected. Firstly, the British economy was overly dependent on the textile trade to an unhealthy degree, as evidenced by the recent “cotton famine.” Secondly, cotton cultivation in any climate could only sustain an export trade by means of coercion — in other words, Beckert’s “war capitalism.” Smedley was pointedly skeptical of the long-term efficacy of the 1833 Slavery Abolition Act. To recoup its twenty million pound payoff to the slaveholders and maintain its economic hegemony, Britain had simply diverted its attention to other

²²⁹ Ibid., 28.

²³⁰ Ibid., 49.

profitably oppressive pursuits elsewhere in the world. The “poor, oppressed, and even tortured ryots and natives of India” were “compelled to grow opium for the most iniquitous purpose of poisoning the Chinese”²³¹; the escalating violence perpetrated by the indigo planters indicated that this industry also rested on unstable foundations. For all of the CSA’s talk of supporting Indian free labor, there was little evidence that an independent yeomanry class would furnish sufficient crops to meet metropolitan consumption. After all, the liberated communities in the West Indies had failed to keep sugar production at pre-Emancipation levels, much to the dismay of the Baptist missionaries who had hoped to convert them into globally oriented capitalists. Based on this “evidence,” Smedley advanced his own climatic thesis. The heat of cotton-growing regions automatically “disable[d] the working population from doing any but absolutely necessary labour.” Only “the lash, or the terrible oppression of the ryot and the labourer on our Indian soil” would lead them to “produce more than a little in excess of their own wants.”²³²

The indigo disturbances that broke out in March 1860 also forced reformers to confront the inconvenient truth of settler violence. Like the cotton lobbyists who called for an ironclad contract law, indigo planters insisted that *ryots* were taking their advances without meeting crop quotas. In response, the Bengal government passed the temporary Act XI of 1860, which severely penalized contract breaking for a period of six months. Upon its expiration, apologists portrayed the despairing planters as ideal imperial subjects who exacted labor through their moral influence alone. After “curing the sick, relieving the starving, upholding the falling, and accustoming the suspicious native to associate all

²³¹ Ibid., 3.

²³² Ibid., 30.

these blessings with employment under a European,”²³³ these emissaries had been deserted by their government and “thrown into the power of a hostile race, who hate civilian, missionary, and planter in an equal degree.”

Questioning how the planters could be simultaneously revered and despised, India reformers challenged these logical inconsistencies. In 1861, Dickinson issued a scathing critique of labor practices in Lower Bengal using evidence furnished by the Indigo Commission. It was common knowledge that the planters benefited from “an organized system of oppression” that compelled the *ryots* to “work for them like slaves, without payment for the labour, by such means of compulsion as imprisonment, flogging, [and] pulling down or burning their houses.”²³⁴ The planters portrayed themselves as welcome harbingers of civilization, but “these hard, unrefined Scotchmen” presented “about as strong a contrast to the imaginative Bengalees as nature can furnish.” Dickinson also scrutinized the notion of the indigo planters’ civic engagement and found it wanting. While his IRS had forged link-ups with the native associations of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay and circulated their petitions during the 1853 charter debates, the planter community had remained aloof. Indeed, their celebratory address to Governor-General Dalhousie upon his departure in 1856 seemed to invalidate the very concerns that these native groups had raised. Dickinson himself had solicited the cooperation of the Indigo Planters’ Association in 1859 to jointly lobby for the reform of the Indian judicial system, but was rebuffed.²³⁵ Ironically, the colonial magistrates’ handling of the contract breaches in 1860 demonstrated the magnitude of these administrative shortcomings, as “loathsome

²³³ John Dickinson, *Reply to the Indigo Planters’ Pamphlet, entitled “Brahmins & Pariahs”* (London: P. S. King, 1861), 12-14.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 15.

²³⁵ Blair Kling, *The Blue Mutiny: the Indigo Disturbances in Bengal, 1859-1862* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 115.

lepers, infants, [and] men so bedridden with age or disease as to be unable to walk” were “brought up in carts” to the courts as suspected recipients of the planters’ advances.²³⁶

Despite Dickinson’s excoriation of this particular group of indigo planters, he refused to revise his hypothesis that English superintendence and cheap transit would spur the takeoff of Indian cotton production. Addressing the MCC, he recounted the technology transfers that had enabled the growth of cash crop export markets. The Bengal indigo industry had emerged once planters from the Spanish settlements in South America educated the *ryots* on its manufacture; Indian rice became a commodity only after it was cultivated on American soil. Citing an editorial in the *Indu Prakash*, Dickinson further predicted that “the wedded union of English capital and skill with native labour and land” would bring forth a glorious economic transformation.²³⁷ But this process would be obstructed so long as the “Russian serf” continued to have “more security than a planter or cultivator in the British possessions in India, where every man in the interior was subject to the mercy of a boyish magistrate.” Dickinson was not being inconsistent. In his earlier pamphlet, he had clarified that an English settler could easily be a “blessing to the natives” provided that he was “an enlightened, liberal, humane man.”²³⁸ His qualified pro-planter position nonetheless threw him into a feud with the eminent Anglo-Indian newspaper editor Robert Knight, who happened to be attending the same MCC meeting.

At first glance, Knight seems an odd adversary for Dickinson and his reformist colleagues, given their ideological similarities. An opponent of annexations and

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

²³⁷ *Speech of Mr. Dickinson, late President of the India Reform Association, at a Meeting at the Manchester Chamber of Commerce* (London: J. Kenny, 1866), 3, 5.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12. Given the frequency of their correspondence at this time, Dickinson may have been using Francis Carnac Brown as a template for this idealized planter.

warmongering, Knight had remonstrated against the dethronement of native sovereigns in the 1850s and later advocated for a federal state system in India helmed by an imperial diet. Biographer Edwin Hirschmann suggests that this position led Knight to cultivate a friendship with Thomas Evans Bell, Dickinson's close comrade throughout the 1860s.²³⁹ Like Dickinson, Knight had at one point championed the entry of English capital and skill into India, though he advanced the heterodox opinion that Manchester interests should directly loan money to the Indian government to secure access to the cotton districts. The indigo disturbances, however, seem to have shaken his faith in European settlement. Liberal economic values could hardly take root in India if the planters "virtually enslaved the ryot[s]" and forced them to sell their produce below market value. Extending this critique, Knight alleged that the Manchester lobbyists had been deluded into supporting settlement policies that would only inhibit cotton growth. If the government were to widely approve the sale of wastelands, planters would naturally gravitate to the hills to establish coffee and tea plantations; this movement would attract Indian labor away from the plains, thereby raising the cost of cotton cultivation.²⁴⁰ Schemes for extending the permanent settlement, a favorite hobbyhorse of reformers, were similarly ill advised, as they would rob the debt-saddled state of much needed revenue and necessitate imperious measures like the income tax. The crux of India's financial problem, Knight reasoned, lay in the common belief that England proper "never had any interest in the acquisition of its rule" over India "and has none whatever in its maintenance."²⁴¹

²³⁹ Edwin Hirschmann, *Robert Knight: Reforming Editor in Victorian India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 41-48,

²⁴⁰ Knight, *Speech on Indian Affairs*, 20.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

In challenging Dickinson before the MCC, Knight contended that the veteran reformer's knowledge of India was thoroughly out of date. Dickinson's allegations of governmental malfeasance, which drew from the writings of Francis Carnac Brown and whistleblowing indigo planter A. G. Wilson, merely repeated the ramblings of "interlopers" who were "in nineteen cases out of twenty" absentee landlords.²⁴² Knight's rebuke soon precipitated an outright pamphlet war that hinged on key questions of authenticity and representation. Joined by Ludlow, Dickinson quoted native papers to evidence a demand for an intermediary class between the Supreme Government and its subjects. The imperial state was accustomed to secrecy; it dreaded the advent of a non-bureaucratic sector that could "destroy official despotism and exposes abuses" through parliamentary enquiries.²⁴³ Anecdotal evidence provided by Arthur Cotton further suggested that the inhabitants of South India looked upon the government as a leveling force that stifled all competition. The entry of independent capitalists therefore threatened to "ruffle the smooth slavery of [the state's] ryot tenant."²⁴⁴ Ludlow, meanwhile, took Knight's aspersions on the planter class as a personal slight, given his uncle's long residence in Malabar and his services overseeing revenue collection and judicial arbitration in five districts. Rather than letting the matter die, Knight revived the conflict and alleged that the articles in the *Indu Prakash* paper which Dickinson cited were in fact written by truculent Englishmen in the Education Department with an axe to grind. The Indian Civil Service, with its competitive exams, was simply too modern for these low-level bureaucrats who preferred their patronage networks. Knight further cautioned that

²⁴² John Dickinson and John Malcolm Ludlow, *Letters to Malcolm Ross, Esq., President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce* (London: Trubner & Co., 1866), 4.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

the English public, as a matter of routine, should “trust neither the lawyer, nor the educationist, nor the planter, when the Government of India is the matter dealt with.”²⁴⁵ Such a sweeping statement was particularly rich coming from Knight, given his personal investment in a 50,000 acre coffee plantation in Wynaad.

The Abuse of Free Trade and the Rise of Nativist Thought

Much to the reformers’ disappointment, Manchester was unable to overcome its reputation for cabalistic self-interestedness. Following the post-Civil War collapse of the over-expanded cotton export sector, mill owners shifted their attentions toward increasing their share in the Indian market by abrogating the import duties on British yarns and textiles. Tensions had been brewing since 1860, when James Wilson (the former editor of the laissez-faire *Economist*) was appointed as India’s first Finance Member of the Viceroy’s Council. Eager to recoup the losses that the imperial state incurred in quashing the 1857 Uprising, he implemented a 10% tariff on almost all goods entering the country. Manchester’s manufacturers wildly protested this measure and accused the government of giving an undue advantage to Bombay’s fledgling mills. Under immense pressure, Wilson’s successor, Samuel Laing, reduced the duties on textiles and yarns to 5% and 3.5% respectively. The issue of cotton tariffs took on an overtly political character in the mid-1870s during the term of Secretary of State Salisbury, a leading Conservative politician who desperately wanted to bolster Manchester’s support for his party. According to Paul Brumpton, Salisbury actually doubted the efficacy of reducing the

²⁴⁵ Robert Knight, *Reply to a Letter Addressed to Malcolm Ross, President of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce*, by John Dickinson (London: William John Johnson, 1866), 14.

import duties, but predicted that a collision with the Bombay mills was eminent. It was therefore best to strike the tariffs before Indian public opinion had fully formed.²⁴⁶

With the secretary of state as their avatar, the manufacturers hoisted the banner of free trade for profit-minded rather than strictly principled reasons.²⁴⁷ Viceroy Northbrook, however, resisted abolition, for he suspected that India's prosperity rested with the rebirth of its manufacturing sector rather than the export of raw produce alone. The country's finances, moreover, could hardly endure the loss of the 900,000-pound revenue stream that the cotton duties annually furnished. Northbrook had already allowed the license tax on native commercial enterprises to lapse, suspended the income tax, and abolished the 800-mile Southern Customs Line running through Central India. The salt tax could not be increased without imposing a cumbersome burden on the lower classes; the long-term prospects for the opium revenue were even dimmer, as China was beginning to grow its own supply.²⁴⁸ Northbrook also dissented on logistical grounds, as further tariff reduction would compel the government to let loose an "army of tax-gatherers on low pay...over the country to collect a new excise" at great expense.²⁴⁹ After negotiations with Salisbury's agents foundered, the job of hacking away the cotton duties fell to Northbrook's successor, the laissez-faire dogmatist Edward Lytton.²⁵⁰

As recently as 1870, speakers before the EIA had optimistically reflected that Britain need only assist in "developing the vast natural riches" of India to "secure a

²⁴⁶ Paul R. Brumpton, *Security and Progress: Lord Salisbury at the India Office* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 49.

²⁴⁷ Ambirajan, 201-02.

²⁴⁸ George Campbell, "The Finances of India," *Fortnightly Review* 19 [new series] (1876): 527-29.

²⁴⁹ Arthur Knatchbull Connell, *Discontent and Danger in India* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1880), 87. The subsequent establishment of a Famine Insurance Fund necessitated the levying of additional license taxes and local cesses.

²⁵⁰ Ira Klein, "English Free Traders and Indian Tariffs, 1874-96," *Modern Asian Studies* 5, no. 3 (1971): 259.

firmer hold upon [the natives'] loyalty than we can attain by treaties and manifestoes."²⁵¹ But only two years later, some members were beginning to question if the cotton boom had materially improved the condition of the masses. At one contentious meeting, these critics alleged that the colonial state, under Manchester's guidance, had frittered away India's revenue on experimental farms and cotton commissioners. Moreover, the provincial manufacturers were "notoriously jealous" of the application of new weaving technologies in India, and had "selfishly desired to keep entirely to [themselves] the benefits which they had derived from the inventive skill of others."²⁵² Paradoxically, Manchester's calls for free trade actually constituted a crude type of protectionism inimical to India's material progress; the destruction of a budding native industry (epitomized by the Bombay mills) was "a permanent evil" that could not be reversed. This "bill of indictment" raised the ire of J. B. Smith, who was presiding over the EIA meeting in question. Although attendees urged him to desist with his protests, he retorted that he "was not going to show the white feather" and proceeded to argue that the *ryots'* acquisition of silver ornaments adequately testified to their increased material comfort as a result of cash cropping.

The EIA soon found itself engulfed in the cotton duties debacle, an ordeal that tested its allegiance to the dictates of English political economy. According to the BCC and Bombay branch of the EIA, the Government of India had already widely departed from a system of *laissez-faire*. The "revenue-raising" 3.5% import taxes on yarn, which Manchester interests complained about so loudly, disadvantaged the native manufacturers as well, for their textiles made with this yarn were saddled with an additional 3% levy

²⁵¹ Fitzwilliam, "On the Present and Future Product of Cotton," 184.

²⁵² "What the True Interests of Manchester Really Are," *Times of India*, June 10, 1872, 3.

upon export.²⁵³ After the passage of Tariff Act XVI of 1875, which abolished this duty on Indian textiles, the EIA faced a theoretical conundrum that resulted in internal divisions. In one memorial to the secretary of state, its leadership claimed that the persisting import duty on British cotton pieces was “an inevitable evil” that “must act in some degree as a protection of Indian manufactures.” And yet, they remonstrated against the government’s imposition of a countervailing 5% import duty on raw cotton originating outside of continental Asia or Ceylon, which was stifling production in the Bombay presidency’s rapidly-expanding manufacturing sector.²⁵⁴ Other prominent EIA members contended that the duties on foreign goods should be retained, as the half a million pounds sterling they generated was essential to the government’s public works budget. Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, a key link between the EIA and its Bombay affiliate, refused to classify them as protective, as the coarse piece-goods produced in Bombay hardly competed in the Indian markets with the finely woven textiles of Manchester.²⁵⁵ In determining whether excise duties were inherently protectionist to one party or another, opinions seemed to differ based on one’s involvement in the city’s textile sector. Metropolitan reformers and non-commercial men like Furdoonjee were inclined to see the matter as one of fiscal prudence, as a modern, developmental state required a cash flow beyond the largely-stationary land revenues.

²⁵³ East India Association Meeting Book, January-March 1875, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, ff. 114-30.

²⁵⁴ George Wingfield and the East India Association Council to the Secretary of State for India, August 1875, East India Association Minute Book, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 164. According to *The Times of India*, the number of mills in the presidency had increased from 22 at the end of 1875 to 40 the following year. See “India and Lancashire,” *Fortnightly Review* 19 [new series] (1876): 879.

²⁵⁵ East India Association Minute Book, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 241. A large proportion of Indian twists and yarns were produced for the Chinese and Japanese export markets rather than for native consumption. See *General Report on the Administration of the Bombay Presidency* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1876), lxxx.

Outside of Bombay city, native informants critiqued laissez-faire policy as ill suited to India's proto-industrial economy. In 1874, the council of the EIA dispatched Colonel E. B. Eastwick to western India to secure funding from princes and local notables; throughout his travels, he kept the Association well informed of his interactions with the locale populace. On one occasion, he received a letter from residents of Nashik in the interior of the presidency that questioned whether "the financial policy of the Indian Government – avowedly based as it is on the principles of Free Trade – [was] well fitted to the character and conditions of an agricultural country like ours" that lacked competition and industrial enterprise "in the European sense of the terms."²⁵⁶ Perhaps the Indian mills, whose labor force operated in some transitional stage between custom and contract, required a degree of protection? These remarks were not as fringe as they might appear. By the summer of 1876, Naoroji, who had hitherto affirmed the salience of classical political economy, concluded that "free trade between England and India" had become "something like a race between a starving, exhausting invalid and a strong man with a horse to ride on."²⁵⁷ But for a certain class of overt imperialists, any discussion of protection would have been anathema. That same year, Naoroji was made aware of articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* contending that India was "only of use to us as an outlet for Manchester goods." As soon as Bombay established industrial autonomy, it would behoove Britain to "cut the cable & sever all connection."²⁵⁸

Much as the Agra famine of 1837 had precipitated a metropolitan interrogation of Indian policy, subsequent dearth forced many colonial operatives to rethink their dearly

²⁵⁶ Ganesh Venkatesh Joshi to Edward Eastwick, September 16, 1875, East India Association Minute Book, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 205.

²⁵⁷ Dadabhai Naoroji, "The Poverty of India," *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1876): 286.

²⁵⁸ Erskine Perry to Dadabhai Naoroji, May 7, 1876, in *Dadabhai Naoroji: Selected Private Papers*, ed. Dinyar Patel and S. R. Mehrotra (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 490.

held economic principles. Secretary of State Cranborne (later Salisbury) famously cast doubts on the feasibility of laissez-faire governance in light of the enormous death toll of the 1865-66 Orissa famine. The event also disturbed Bengal official George Campbell and informed his later recognition of custom as a key regulatory component of Irish landlord-tenant relations.²⁵⁹ Inheriting this disaster, Secretary of State Stafford Northcote credited the famine with exposing a deleterious breakdown of communication between local officers and the central administration. The unfortunate Collector Barlow, who warned his superiors of impending doom, was “stifled by the mass of authority brought to bear against him, well adorned too with maxims of political economy.” He was the “victim of the official demon who is the parent of so much evil among us.”²⁶⁰ Years later, the trauma of the Orissa famine was still palpable within the reform associations years later; in 1871, Arthur Cotton suggested that the government ought to have forced England-bound ships to discharge their 50,000 tons of rice in the suffering districts.²⁶¹

The famine that swept through India between 1876 and 1878 presented a broader existential crisis for reformers, as the introduction of cash cropping had clearly failed to raise the *ryots* above the subsistence level in many regions. Annual net exports of raw cotton precipitously dropped by about 8.5 million pounds sterling between 1869 and 1877, while the aggregated exports of rice, wheat, and grain had nearly doubled in the same period.²⁶² Commentators in the Anglo-Indian press doubted this surge in food-grain exports could be attributed to an agricultural surplus; “were the people able to afford it,

²⁵⁹ Peter Gray, “Famine and Land in Ireland and India, 1845-1880: James Caird and the Political Economy of Hunger,” *Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006): 199.

²⁶⁰ Stafford Northcote to John Lawrence, May 15, 1867, BL, John Lawrence Papers, Mss Eur. F90/28, f. 90

²⁶¹ Reply of Arthur Cotton to Dadabhai Naoroji, “On the Commerce of India,” 102.

²⁶² Romesh Chunder Dutt, *Indian Trade, Manufactures & Finance* (Calcutta: Elm Press, 1905), 141.

every pound of grain produced would be eaten.”²⁶³ Rajah Sivaprasad, a joint-inspector in the Department of Public Education, put forth a similar hypothesis in a curious memo that recounted his semi-fictional exchange with a European on the topic of famine relief. According to Sivaprasad’s character, grain prices were simply too high for domestic consumption. If they exceeded ten seers per rupee, the government ought to raise rail freight rates to the ports and lower rates to famine-stricken districts. He thus advised his European interlocutor to “keep [his] political economy,” as he would “sooner burn such a political economy than die of hunger.”²⁶⁴

While he did not attempt any theoretical arson as such, the Irish reformist politician James Caird also broke ranks with the proponents of *laissez-faire*. Appointed as the token Liberal member of the 1878-80 Famine Commission, he interpreted the lackluster export of common food grains (exclusive of rice and wheat) as evidence that India did not generate a surplus large enough to tide the *ryots* over in famine years.²⁶⁵ A new system of rural granaries and village-based relief works was therefore required “in localities where trade cannot operate freely.” Caird suspected that these food shortages were symptoms of far more insidious causes of rural impoverishment. He had come into possession of Sivaprasad’s 1878 memo, which revealed the “instances of mischief” resulting from the Legislative Council’s overly hasty “Acts and Regulations which now-a-days do more harm than good.” Caird had also received some candid intelligence from

²⁶³ “Mr. Caird, C. B., on Indian Agriculture,” *Madras Times Overland Mail*, BL, Correspondence of Sir James Caird, IOR/H/796.

²⁶⁴ S. P., “Answers of an Indian Rajah to European Enquiries on Famine Relief and Native Cultivators,” BL, Correspondence of Sir James Caird, IOR/H/796, f. 846. Ironically, Sivaprasad joined the Bengal Legislative Council in 1883. For additional Indian critiques of *laissez-faire* policy in famine times, see C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), 179

²⁶⁵ James Caird and Henry Sullivan, “Dissent on Certain Points from the Report of the Indian Famine Commission,” BL, Correspondence of Sir James Caird, IOR/H/796, f. 858.

a Colonel J. Puckle, who observed that the Mysoreans under his jurisdiction were “somewhat discouraged with the cold patronage, and standoffishness...of ordinary officialdom.”²⁶⁶ Based partially on this evidence, Caird concluded in his own report that the bureaucratic colonial state had “drifted away from the patriarchal method of rule common in the East...under which the management of the people is left to the natural leaders.”²⁶⁷ Headmen who had been converted into low-ranking government agents forfeited their social capital; costly colonial courts were superseding the native panchayats, or village councils. Over-legislation not only atomized the native social body, but also undermined the position of the British district officer. Once the “ma-bap” (parental figure) of the inhabitants under his purview, he had retreated into his *cutcherry* to confront the mounds of foolscap paperwork awaiting his limited attentions. The effects of famines, then, were not only compounded by laissez-faire policies, but also by forces of “moral disorganization” that were rotting away the roots of village life and inhibiting traditional forms of charity.²⁶⁸

In tracing the origins of these early nativist critiques, the influence of Henry Maine (the Law Member of the Viceroy’s Council) cannot be overstated.²⁶⁹ Utilizing the “historical method,” his 1871 treatise famously characterized India’s village communities as apolitical, self-sufficient republics with a hereditary division of labor and joint property ownership that had prematurely entered an age of contract. Modern legislation and institutions had thrown these communities into crisis; colonial administrators were

²⁶⁶ J. Puckle to James Caird, August 7, 1878, BL, Correspondence of Sir James Caird, IOR/H/796, f. 57.

²⁶⁷ James Caird, *Report to Her Majesty’s Secretary of State on the Condition of India* (London, 1879), 6.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 4. As economic historian Karl Polanyi once noted, it was “the absence of the threat of individual starvation which makes primitive society, in a sense, more humane than market economy, and at the same time less economic.” See Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 172.

²⁶⁹ For a theoretical explanation of this nativism and its connection to Maine, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 6-42.

duty bound to deter further degradation.²⁷⁰ Echoing Maine's findings, leading theorists like Walter Bagehot (the son-in-law of James Wilson) suggested that the stipulations of English political economy only applied to societies "of grown-up competitive commerce." Numerous criteria had to be satisfied before these theoretical works could elucidate the path to national wealth: societies would need to possess a high mobility of labor, a stable government to maintain tranquility during employment transitions, and a non-localized military force. A nation could prioritize an "absorbing and self-selecting life of trade" once involuntary or coerced labor practices were banned.²⁷¹ It was therefore as foolhardy to apply political economy to "a great military nation, based on slavery, like the Romans" as it was to "a nation bound by fixed customs like so many Oriental nations."²⁷² By setting the bar so high, Bagehot hoped to re-tool political economy as a modern, testable science premised on "working out abstract speculations." His views found favor with an emergent group of radical reformers who wished to put the breaks on India's so-called modernization.

By the early 1880s, the EIA's consensus on the merits of cash crop cultivation had largely unraveled. Merging Bagehot's limitations on political economy with Caird's rhetoric of decentralization, polemicists like the Irish radical Arthur Knatchbull Connell provocatively argued that the implementation of total free trade was inimical to India's evolutionary trajectory. Alluding to Maine's concept of village autarky, Connell claimed that caste customs operated as "social dams" that preserved Hindu society from "the

²⁷⁰ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 151.

²⁷¹ Walter Bagehot, "Economic Studies," in *The Works and Life of Walter Bagehot*, vol. 7, ed. Mrs. Russell Barrington (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1915), 167.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 163.

inroads of Christian vigour as well as Mahomedan violence.”²⁷³ The colonial state threatened this equanimity by flooding the land with civil laws that few natives had asked for or understood. Such legislation had been thrust upon a “people whose conception of right is collective rather than personal, and who have till recently been content with the simple coercion of village customs, tempered by occasional anarchy and continual apathy.”²⁷⁴ Moneylenders, for instance, were historically kept in check by the fear of violent reprisals that might result from charging exacting rates of interest. An annuity bestowed by the community further placated the *bania* and kept him in line. But the advent of “transferable rights in land,” coupled with the “costliness and technicalities of our law courts” had “sharpened his claws” under British rule.²⁷⁵ Plans to hastily fashion a new Code of Civil Procedure for India threatened to produce similar aberrations.

Free trade, too, had been introduced to India with scant local input. Although reformers had once called upon Manchester to investigate and publicize the dealings of the colonial state, a less savory outcome had come to pass. By warming up to Conservative ministers in high places, “an energetic minority of manufacturers, merchants, capitalists and planters” conspired to appropriate “the profits of the internal and external trade” of India in the name of development.²⁷⁶ Manchester lobbyists had thus effectively “taken the bread out of the mouths of native weavers” and thrown “them back on the land for a livelihood.”²⁷⁷ Railways guaranteed with revenue raised through increased taxation exacerbated this deindustrialization and spirited away India’s wealth to

²⁷³ Connell, *Discontent and Danger*, 14.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁷⁶ Arthur Knatchbull Connell, *The Economic Revolution of India and the Public Works Policy* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883), 79.

²⁷⁷ Connell, *Discontent and Danger*, 46-48.

metropolitan shareholders. This “scientific bloodsucking,” Connell declared, had “taken the place of the promiscuous plunder” of India under Company rule. But Manchester was not solely to blame for straining the carrying capacity of the Indian soil. In the name of pacification, the colonial state had also toppled native dynasties, disbanded their armies, and threw their courtiers out of employ. If native rulers in past times taxed their subjects at a higher rate than the British, they did so to subsidize a variety of arts and industries; the colonial state had failed to redistribute its resources in a comparable fashion. This leveling had forced an unsustainable percentage of the Indian workforce upon the land as petit agriculturists and accelerated the subdivision of property; few cultivators were inclined to follow the dictates of political economy and emigrate, thus relieving pressure on the wage fund. So long as the government unilaterally adjusted rents and instituted local cesses, it could maintain a virtual monopoly over land and fix “the reward of labour.”²⁷⁸ Surely, Connell surmised, “no Government, since history began, ever held such awful powers of life and death.”

The kind of radical nativism that Connell espoused was ideologically distinct from the “conservationist” rhetoric favored by the early India reformers in the late 1830s. The abolitionists and free traders within George Thompson’s network had looked up India as an untapped source of free labor and urged the colonial state to work through its extant political structures. Connell, too, reckoned that the British should preserve the integrity of the village communities, but his rationale was rather more pessimistic. English-style legislation and judicial systems, he determined, were positively disruptive to India’s societal evolution. One could not “place one animal organism in the

²⁷⁸ Arthur Knatchbull Connell, “Indian Pauperism, Free Trade, and Railways,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1884): 19.

surroundings adapted to another of a whole different species without endangering its life.”²⁷⁹ Bagehot had neared the truth when he claimed that “a highly civilised race” like the British was simply “too good and too excellent” to be “a model for the lower.” Fearing that India would continue to “sink into the condition of a gigantic pauper-warren,” Connell pressured the colonial state to assume a Malthusian role and call “into existence any self-acting checks on the population.”²⁸⁰ This could be accomplished by “encouraging the self-help and self-restraint of the better class of peasantry” rather than by relying on foreign capital and a bloated Public Works Department for all material improvements. The extremism of Connell’s vision was likely jarring to leading members of the EIA like Dadabhai Naoroji, who tirelessly agitated for the inclusion of western-educated natives into the colonial bureaucracy. And yet, the Association itself purchased a copy of Connell’s enlarged manifesto for its library in 1884.²⁸¹ Clearly, Connell’s push for decentralization, his valorization of village as a social organism, and his trenchant gloss of the drain theory held some appeal for those who dreaded India’s imminent financial collapse.

By the early 1880s, it had become apparent to many reformers and officials that laissez-faire doctrine would not provide a blueprint for India’s economic evolution. The colonial state had set in a motion a disjointed process of uneven development by fostering some elements of bourgeois capitalism while suppressing others. A free market in land had failed to arise, as municipal and joint-family collectives continued to arbitrate property transfers. Furthermore, the prospect “of an active Indian capitalism, gnawing at the bases of the agrarian order” disturbed the conservative minds of the Indian Civil

²⁷⁹ Connell, *Discontent and Danger*, 77.

²⁸⁰ Connell, *The Economic Revolution of India*, 149-150.

²⁸¹ East India Association Minute Book, no. 3, BL, Mss Eur F147/28, f. 218.

Service.²⁸² Moneylenders who augmented their holdings through litigation were ultimately penalized for exploiting the colonial judicial system. The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act (1879), which curbed the sale of land for debt, and the Punjab Land Alienation Act (1900), which barred non-agriculturist castes from land acquisition, were designed to clip the *baniyas'* wings. Increasingly eager to arbitrate “fairness,” the colonial state justified its position as a trustee overseeing a societal transition from status to contract. Consequently, its ameliorative legislation thrust the urban moneylenders into collaboration with promoters of the Indian National Congress, who had come to see the state’s “protection” of native labor as a strategy of obstructing the country’s “economic and industrial modernization.”²⁸³

Tracing the reformers’ engagement with the promises and pitfalls of cash crop cultivation suggests that the conversion of India into an agricultural frontier was a convoluted, conflicted affair. The imperial government had no master plan. At the same time, simply characterizing the rise of an export-based agricultural sector as a distortion of a natural equilibrium or a detour from a presumptive road to industrialization overshadows a rich intellectual history of aspirational developmental thought. Without ignoring the exploitative effects of certain policy decisions, we may constructively explore how various parties conceptualized cash crop production as a mode of economic uplift that would be facilitated by long-leases, cheap transit, and tax reductions. Humanitarian motives often proved as influential as economic self-interest and laissez-faire doctrine in shaping the trajectory of these debates. Proprietors in the mid-1830s looked upon sugar

²⁸² David Washbrook, “Law, State, and Agrarian Society in Colonial India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 690.

²⁸³ Sanjay Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: the Politics of ‘Moderate Nationalism’ in India, 1870-1905,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 105.

and cotton cultivation as a substitute occupation for native artisans who had been thrown out of work by prejudicial tariffs sanctioned by the home government. Reformers also took the Company to task for wrongfully assuming the mantle of universal landlord, a title that was at odds with both native precedent and political economy. At the same time, many concluded that a strictly laissez-faire approach to governance was insufficient in India, as the interior remained isolated from global market forces. Provincial manufacturers concurred that the colonial state must take the lead in agricultural production, but they ultimately refrained from embracing the politicized agenda of the more radical India reformers. The issue of European settlement proved to be equally divisive; reformers believed that British oversight would ensure the production and distribution of high quality cotton, but the specter of planter violence could not be ignored. At the heart of these contestations was the question of whether the “opening of India” was best approached as a political or an economic issue. Reformist polemicists and politicians publicized the government’s unequal tariffs, neglect of public works, and pretensions to sole proprietorship as part of a broader effort to illustrate the shortcomings of imperial rule. But for Manchester interest groups, cotton, and cotton alone, was king.

Law of Nations Theory and the Native Sovereignty Debates in Colonial India

Perhaps few topics are more invidious in colonial legal history than the definition of “paramountcy” in British India. Alternatively cast as a feudal compact with subordinate native princely states, a non-interventionist policy supportive of semi-sovereignty, and a doctrine invented to justify colonial “earth hunger,”¹ the concept elicited significant debate in the mid-Victorian era. But epistemological and practical issues bedeviled any comprehensive understanding of the term. Did the colonial government inherit its legal purview over the states as rightful successor to the Mughal throne, or did its strategic resurrection of principalities in the aftermath of the Anglo-Mysorean and Mahratta wars entail their thralldom? These abstract concerns acquired a tangible reality in the 1840s, as John Hobhouse, the President of the Board of Control, conspired with Governor-General Dalhousie to annex heir-less Hindu states through the doctrine of lapse and dethrone the Mughal emperor.² Claiming authority for the East India Company (EIC) as a “successor by conquest,” Dalhousie had hoped that his acquisition of the Mahratta state of Satara in 1849 would establish a precedent for the absorption of “petty intervening principalities.”³ This scheme, however, was frustrated by the Court of Directors’ (CoD) refusal to annex the “ancient” Rajput kingdom of Karauli

¹ F. W. Chesson, *The Princes of India; their Rights and our Duties* (London: William Tweedie, 1872), 21. Chesson was the son-in-law of prominent India reformer George Thompson and the secretary of the Aborigines’ Protection Society.

² Dalhousie’s scheme to unseat the Mughal emperor encountered stiff resistance from eighteen of the Company’s directors. See John Hobhouse to James Broun-Ramsay, Marquess of Dalhousie, December 6 1849, British Library (BL), Mss Eur F213/27, f. 241.

³ “Minute of the Governor-General of India, 30th Aug. 1848,” in *Papers Relating to the Question of the Disposal of the Sattara State, in consequence of the Death of the Late Rajah* (London: J. & H. Cox, 1849), 104.

in 1853, which led annexationists to dabble in law of nations theorization to justify subsequent dispossessions.

From the late 1830s to the 1870s, the conservation of native states remained a cornerstone of India reformers' political platform. Abolitionists, Quakers, and retired Company officials affiliated with the British India Society (BIS) engaged in early defenses of princely sovereignty by denouncing the extra-legal dethronement of Pratap Singh, the Raja of Satara. In the lead up to the charter renewal of 1853, the newly established India Reform Society (IRS)⁴ published numerous pamphlets that exposed the Company's coercive attempts to undermine the pre-colonial system of layered sovereignty. The 1857 Uprising further confirmed reformers' suspicions that the colonial state, as a foreign entity, could administer India but could not effectively *govern* its people, as the British lacked "a hold on their affections and passions."⁵ By representing native sovereigns as "natural leaders" and decoupling the institution of the state from the personality of the individual ruler, reformers hoped to precipitate the principalities' natural evolution into constitutional monarchies. While the metropole "drained" much of the revenue collected in the Indians territories under British rule, princes recirculated the resources they had gathered within their immediate communities.⁶ Their administrations also offered ample employment opportunities and made "use of the much neglected and almost forgotten agency of Native diplomatists."⁷ Reformers therefore demanded a "golden bull" that would outline both the princes' obligations to the Indian government

⁴ John Dickinson, the son of a wealthy paper manufacturer, and Quaker MP John Bright helmed this London-based organization, which was eventually overshadowed by Dadabhai Naoroji's East India Association in the late 1860s.

⁵ John Dickinson, "Last Words on an Imperial Policy," in *Last Counsels of an Unknown Counsellor*, ed. Evans Bell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1877), 182.

⁶ Thomas Evans Bell, "*Our Great Vassal Empire*" (London: Trübner & Co., 1870), 54.

⁷ Thomas Evans Bell, *Retrospects and Prospects of Indian Policy* (London: Trübner & Co., 1868), 335.

and the reciprocal duty of the British to maintain these rulers' internal sovereignty. In the meantime, classical law of nations theories, with their recognition of unequal alliances and unequal treaties, offered a template for equitably adjudicating interstate relations.

The topic of paramountcy lies at the intersection of several strands of historiography, yet few scholars have linked its conceptualization to political agitation in an imperial public sphere. Michael Fisher and Matthew Stubbings compellingly describe the activities of princely deputations in London and note Britons' reactions to these "exotic" specimens, but neither focuses on reformers' legalistic defenses of Indian sovereignty.⁸ Other historians have given the topic even shorter shrift; Thomas Metcalf went so far as to attribute the restoration of Mysore to native rule entirely to the appointment of a new Tory secretary of state for India.⁹ Foregrounding party politics, however, grants limited insight into the legal frameworks that shaped the contentious and prolonged sovereignty debates both at home and abroad. Colonial administrators stationed in anomalous zones like the Indian hill regions and the native states routinely engaged in what Lauren Benton has termed "creative legal posturing."¹⁰ Rather than imposing a "state of exception," officials called for a pragmatic kind of imperial law predicated on "usage" and divisible sovereignty to fill the grey area between international and municipal law.¹¹ Not all agents took kindly to this murky process, which could perpetuate a state of legal "indeterminacy." In one famous instance, the British resident at

⁸ Michael Fisher, *Counterflows to Colonialism: Indian Travellers and Settlers in Britain, 1600-1857* (Delhi: Permanent Black Delhi, 2004), 243-298; idem., "Being Indian in Britain during 1857," in *Mutiny at the Margins*, vol. 2, eds. Crispin Bates and Andrea Major (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2013), 134-152; Matthew Stubbings, "Subverting Company Raj: Dispossessed Indian Princes' Wealth and Loyalty in 1850s Britain," *Immigrants & Minorities* 35, no. 2 (2017): 108-128.

⁹ Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of the Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 232.

¹⁰ Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 290.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 244, 258.

Baroda aggressively attempted to extend colonial jurisdiction over criminal cases in the princely state and was targeted for poisoning as a result.

In more recent work, Benton and Ford have shelved the opinions of professional international lawyers and focused their attentions on “recover[ing] the juridical thought of low- and mid-level bureaucrats and their antagonists and allies.”¹² These actors were often at the epicenter of jurisdictional strife; their actions resulted in the extension of Crown authority over unchecked petty despotisms in the colonies through the appointment of a loyalist “middle power.” One of Benton and Ford’s principal aims is to emphasize how practical realities of “empire framed visions of global order” in the early nineteenth century to a greater extent than legal naturalism or any standard of civilization.¹³ While they acknowledge that “colonial schemes and local debates” drew on “often vague and occasionally precise understandings” of the law of nations, they conclude that the “dry speculations of Vattel and his confreres” were often less central to imperial legal change than the reports of commissions of inquiry and the judgments of admiralty courts. This chapter, however, contends that any analysis of colonial sovereignty in India necessitates sustained attention to the public consumption of early international law. Admittedly dusty law of nations theories were regularly re-forged as polemical tools by reformist critics operating in and outside of officialdom.

In emphasizing the use-value of legal texts in particular debates, I am taking a somewhat different tack from scholars who have charted the transition from a universal “naturalist international law” to an exclusive “positivist international law” shaped by

¹² Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: the British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800-1850* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016), 10. Colonial India largely remains outside the scope of this study.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

colonial encounters with cultural difference.¹⁴ The early nineteenth century saw a new empiricist focus on extant treaties, as historicist jurists began to emphasize the European origins of international law and circumscribe its boundaries.¹⁵ Late-Victorian legal positivists further located international law in the regulations and norms to which independent states had assented. With a sociological sensibility, they taxonomically ranked societies on a continuum of civilization to determine their admittance to international society. Clarifying this membership, however, could be a fraught process. The fact that native powers had brokered treaties with Europeans in the past or continued to exercise forms of sovereignty did not necessarily ensure their inclusion into the family of nations (which itself was no guarantee of equitable treatment). Reflecting on this ambiguity, Antony Anghie concludes that positivism's "failure to coherently place and incorporate the non-European entity into its overall scheme" exposed its profound limitations.¹⁶

An analysis of the India reformers' eclectic polemic clarifies the practical ramifications of this conceptual muddle and reveals how naturalist and historicist legal texts alike could be instrumentally interpreted in a "counter-imperial" manner.¹⁷ Crucially, the restrictions that professional lawyers placed on the application of international law were routinely contested. Shirking "standard of civilization" arguments that ostracized non-western actors, defenders of native rule continued to use analogies

¹⁴ Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty, and the Making of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 37, 50-52. More recently, scholars have challenged the notion of a firm break between legal naturalism and positivism in the nineteenth century. See Casper Sylvest, *British Liberal Internationalism, 1880-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 62; Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 17, 119.

¹⁵ In search of rules of conduct, some positivists were concerned that an excessively historicist understanding of international law would produce a "debilitating awareness of flux and contingency." See Anghie, *Imperialism*, 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁷ Pitts, *Boundaries of the International*, 3.

and amalgamate disparate theories to assert the “independence and equal standing of small and weak States in their intercourse with the most powerful.”¹⁸ Contemporary jurists like Henry Wheaton and Travers Twiss did not simply replace early-modern authorities like Vattel and Grotius -- in many cases, reformers cited their texts concurrently. This article will first provide an overview of the various legal concepts in play and speak to the opaque nature of paramountcy in the period; it will then probe the reformers’ legalistic opposition to colonial expansionism in Awadh, the Carnatic, and Mysore and detail their schemes for an international tribunal that could function as a court of appeal.

Microcosmic and Macrocosmic Approaches to the Law of Nations

Scholars have vehemently debated whether the extra-European extension of *jus gentium* theory supported equal treaty partnerships,¹⁹ provided conceptual scaffolding for European dominion,²⁰ or was ever intended to furnish a “global principle of justice” in the first place.²¹ In particular, Edmund Burke’s citation of the law of nations during the trial of former Governor-General Warren Hastings (1788-1795) continues to generate a fair amount of controversy. For Mithi Mukherjee, Burke pushed the limits of law of nations theory by endowing Hastings’ oppressed native subjects with a “natural right of resistance” to his unjust warring. It was therefore incumbent on the House of Lords to

¹⁸ Thomas Evans Bell, “Is India a Conquered Country? and If so, What then?” *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (1870): 202.

¹⁹ C. H. Alexandrowicz, *An Introduction to the History of the Law of Nations in the East: 16th, 17th and 18th centuries* (London: Clarendon Press, 1967), 144.

²⁰ Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, 22; Pitts, *Boundaries of the International*, 9.

²¹ Ian Hunter, “Global Justice and Regional Metaphysics: on the Critical History of the Law of Nature and Nations,” in *Law and Politics in British Colonial Thought: Transpositions of Empire*, ed. Shaunnagh Dorsett and Ian Hunter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 12.

engage in a “supranational and deterritorialized discourse of justice” and quell this resistance before it developed into a full-blown civil war.²² Jennifer Pitts, too, notes that Burke extended the law of nations to non-European societies, though she clarifies that he primarily assumed a “posture of auto-critique” to “chasten European power” and ward against geographical morality.²³ Mid-century reformers valorized Burke as a staunch defender of princely interests and represented the recent annexations as a return to the Company’s unscrupulous practices of yesteryear. In dealing with the native states as unequal treaty partners, the Indian government had effectively taken “the mutual relations between the two parties out of the realm of politics and brought them into that of law.”²⁴ This shift presented a methodological quandary: were the treaties to be interpreted in conformity with the classical law of nations, Victorian legal theory, or indigenous practice? Some princes had provided valuable assistance to the British in the eighteenth century and had gained recognition as sovereign allies in global conflicts. Later treaties with “resurrected” states, however, were framed as instrumentalist compacts between paramount and subordinate powers.

Approaching a number of cases simultaneously, reformers dissected and sutured together classical and contemporary juridical theories to delegitimize colonial annexations. Many cited Swiss theorist Emmerich de Vattel’s eighteenth-century treatise, which characterized each nation as analogous to an individual in a state of nature with an innate right to self-preservation. This general position may be termed “microcosmic,” in

²² Mithi Mukherjee, “Justice, War, and the Imperium: India and Britain in Edmund Burke’s Prosecutorial Speeches in the Impeachment Trial of Warren Hastings,” *Law and History Review* 23, no. 3 (Fall, 2005): 617, 619.

²³ Jennifer Pitts, “Empire and Legal Universalisms in the Eighteenth Century,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (Feb., 2012): 106.

²⁴ John Malcolm Ludlow, *Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown towards India* (London: James Ridgway, 1859), 177.

the sense that it was most concerned for the longevity of independent political bodies in a society of nations.²⁵ Whereas earlier theorists like Grotius had tentatively approved of intervention in a non-European state's affairs if a visible injustice was being perpetrated that "no good man living [could] approve of,"²⁶ Vattel demurred that this justification would open a door to fanatical excess: "every mad man [would] fancy that he is fighting in the cause of God."²⁷ Nations possessed only an "imperfect right" to "the offices of humanity" and could not "compel another nation to the performance of them."²⁸

As Vattel deemed self-preservation to be a hallmark of natural law, he determined that states could enter into unequal alliances by way of a treaty of protection. A weaker party, like his native Neuchâtel, could thus "lawfully subject itself to a more powerful nation on certain conditions agreed to by both parties" without suffering a full loss of sovereignty.²⁹ Acknowledging that these associations could lead to coercion, Vattel clarified that any form of future aggrandizement on the part of the superior party would have repercussions. Each nation invested its prince with sovereign powers in the interest of the *salus populi*; a ruler who violated his state's constitution was therefore subject to lawful deposition. Similarly, a protecting power that abused its position could be justly resisted by a subordinated state. Burke notably cited this clause in his defense of Benares

²⁵ I am not disputing Vattel's advocacy of an *economic* balance of power rooted in the belief that inter-state commerce contributed to a nation's self-perfection. Vattel sought to guarantee access to "necessities" at a "reasonable price"; if these conditions were not met, disadvantaged consumers would be justified in taking retaliatory action. See Isaac Nakhimovsky, "Vattel's Theory of the International Order: Commerce and the Balance of Power in the Law of Nations," *History of European Ideas* 33, no. 2 (2007): 169-70.

²⁶ Hugo Grotius, *Of the Rights of War and Peace*, vol. 2 (London: D. Brown, 1715), 632. The Persians' persecution of Christians on account of their religion constituted such an offense and warranted Roman sanctions.

²⁷ Emmerich de Vattel, *The Law of Nations, or, Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797), 158.

²⁸ Vattel affirmed the legitimacy of conventions with non-Christian powers, noting that "the law of nature alone regulates the treaties of nations: the difference of religion is a thing absolutely foreign to them." See Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 195. For a critical analysis of Vattel's universalism, see Pitts, *Boundaries of the International*, 68-91.

²⁹ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 94.

ruler Chait Singh, who refused to furnish the exorbitant tribute and military forces that Hastings demanded. Still, Vattel acknowledged that an “inferior ally” would suffer a diminution of sovereignty if the dominant partner assumed authority over its war making and foreign policy.³⁰ The Company’s subsidiary treaties were certainly unequal: they permitted the princes internal autonomy under the supervision of a British resident so long as they maintained a military contingent and refrained from unapproved communications with foreign powers. Reformers, however, did not perceive the imposition of these restrictions as an indication of outright conquest.³¹ Rather, they declared that semi-sovereign powers and protectorates retained a degree of independence and insisted that the unequal treaties should remain in force so long as a native ruler fulfilled their conditions.

The geographical circumscriptions that some jurists placed on early international law were often contested, if not blatantly ignored, by reformers and annexationists alike. More crucially, positivists exhibited a “macrocosmic” concern for the formation and sustenance of a European balance of power; they thereby placed an emphasis on “usage” and contingency over contractualist treaty interpretation. Whereas Vattel had looked to original circumstances to indicate the proper terms in which treaties should be read, the American diplomat Henry Wheaton contended that agreements were only viable if the “mutual relations” between contracting parties remained unchanged.³² This vague phrasing was subject to contrary interpretations in the native sovereignty debates. As reformers determined that the continuance of a ruling dynasty was sufficient to perpetuate

³⁰ Ibid., 203.

³¹ Thomas Evans Bell, *The Rajah and Principality of Mysore: with a Letter to the Right Hon. Lord Stanley, M.P.* (London: Thomas Richards, 1865), 13.

³² Henry Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 8th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1866), 30.

any treaty,³³ the authorization of princely successions by the paramount power took on a critical character.

In the hands of macrocosmic theorists, the concept of semi-sovereignty allowed for the recognition of the varying power differentials that were obscured in Vattel's unequal alliances. It also offered a legal basis for the protectorates and federal arrangements that had arisen from both the American Revolution and the post-Napoleonic establishment of a Concert of Europe. Wheaton's treatment of semi-sovereignty was most often cited in the colonial debates due to his shifting application of the concept.³⁴ He had initially declared this his law of nations theory only pertained to "civilized" and "Christian" nations, but by 1855 was willing to accept non-European states into the fold so long as they "renounce[d] their peculiar international usages and adopt[ed] those of Christendom."³⁵ In other works, Wheaton recognized that certain situations could necessitate legal flexibility. European states interacting with Muslim powers were occasionally "content to take the law from the Mohammedan, and in others to modify the international law of Christendom in its application to them."³⁶ Subsequent editions of Wheaton's *Elements of International Law* further acknowledged the conclusion of extensive treaties with non-Western powers in recent decades. The Barbary States, for instance, were of an "anomalous character" on account of the fact that they paid tribute to the Ottoman Porte but were still generally regarded as independent sovereignties. Wheaton also offered the case of the Cherokee Nation vs. Georgia, in

³³ Bell, *Retrospects*, 314.

³⁴ Wheaton had initially characterized semi-sovereignty as a self-contradictory "solecism in terms," though this warning was removed in later editions.

³⁵ Arnulf Becker Lorca, *Mestizo International Law: a Global Intellectual History, 1842-1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131-32. Wheaton died in 1848 and the 6th edition of *Elements* (1855) was the last to feature his personal revisions.

³⁶ Henry Wheaton, *History of the Law of Nations in Europe and America* (New York: Gould, Banks, and Co., 1845), 555.

which the Supreme Court in 1831 had ruled that the Native Americans, as a weaker power, did not surrender their “independence and right to self-government by associating with a stronger and taking its protection.”³⁷ Justice Smith Thompson (in a dissenting opinion) even represented the Cherokee as a sovereign power that retained a “separate national existence” as a partner in a Vattelian unequal alliance with the American government.³⁸

While jurist Travers Twiss also referenced the American federal system³⁹ as evidence that states could possess a degree of independence while lacking international personality, he found semi-sovereignty to be an overly capacious term that required conceptual refinement. Unfortunately, his move to lump all Indian princely states under the category of “protected dependent states,” which seemingly approached a state of vassalage, only created more of a muddle due to the notable variations in the language of their treaties. His claim that the colonial government exercised virtual sovereignty also failed to clarify whether the inhabitants in the native states qualified as *de facto* British subjects. Twiss clearly put more stock in his notion of “protected independent states,” which he framed as a terminological correction to past misuses of semi-sovereignty in European diplomacy. The case of the Ionian Islands, which had been under British protection since 1815, afforded a compelling instance of such confusion. During the

³⁷ Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 38.

³⁸ Richard Peters, *The Case of the Cherokee Nation Against the State of Georgia; Argued and Determined at the Supreme Court of the United States, January Term 1831*. (Philadelphia: John Grigg, 1831), 197. Justice Marshall ruled that the Cherokee, as a “domestic dependent nation,” lacked the legal standing to sue a state of the Union.

³⁹ Some reformist commentators also looked to the American system as a template for a princely federation in India. See “The Foreign Policy of the Future,” *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, September 1 1859, 551.

Crimean War, the Crown initially refused to recognize the islands' claims to neutrality.⁴⁰ Russia similarly presumed it could capture Ionian sea crafts until the British Court of Admiralty ruled that the sailors, as Ionian subjects, were not in fact combatants. Whereas Wheaton asserted that the dependent Ionian Islands were "not only constantly obedient to the commands of a protecting power, but...governed as a British colony,"⁴¹ Twiss concluded that the states retained their independence due to the fact that third-party European powers had jointly ratified the treaty that established the protectorate.

Wheaton and Twiss' articulations of semi-sovereignty led reformers and Indian lawyers to favor the use of legal analogy. This tendency was especially evident in the 1891 trial of the Manipur princes, who had been charged with "waging war against the Queen" after a British effort to reinstate an ousted ruler went awry. Before an extra-legal commission, attorney Mano Mohun Ghose portrayed the principality as a partner in an unequal alliance that had never expressly pledged its allegiance to the British Crown. Per Vattel, neither defensive arrangements with the colonial government nor the occasional mediation of dynastic successions impinged upon its autonomy.⁴² If the Ionian Islands retained a degree of sovereignty under a protectorate (as the British Court of Admiralty had ruled), Manipur's statehood was also worthy of recognition. The Manipuri guards were therefore fully justified by the law of nations in rebuffing the British contingent's "sudden armed invasion of the Palace" to depose the leading prince Tikendrajit Bir Singh.⁴³ Most provocatively, Ghose claimed that Manipur's royals were not in fact

⁴⁰ Travers Twiss, *The Law of Nations Considered as Independent Political Communities* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861), 35.

⁴¹ Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 36.

⁴² Mano Mohun Ghose, *Manipur. Did the Manipur Princes obtain a Fair Trial?* (London: William Hutchinson & Co., 1891), 16.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 24.

British subjects and as such could not be tried by the special tribunal. Though these jurisdictional claims were unsuccessful,⁴⁴ the trial illustrated the perpetual colonial failure to adumbrate a comprehensive system of paramountcy that could encompass the great variety of Indian treaty relations. It was a further irony that colonial official William Lee-Warner, who refused to grant the native states a “shred” of international personality in his 1894 text on the subject, nonetheless acknowledged that the “resemblance between the position” of the Ionian Islands and princely states was “very striking.”⁴⁵

“Paramountcy” and its Detractors

By affirming the emperor’s nominal power and entertaining the conceit of “double government,”⁴⁶ the Company maintained a simulacrum of what Bernard Cohn termed the Mughal “cultural-symbolic constitution.” Authorities participated in the ritual ceremonies of conferring *nazar* (coins) and receiving *khelat* (robes) that traditionally marked a lesser ruler’s “incorporation” into the royal body, though they deprived these acts of symbolic significance by viewing them solely as reciprocal economic exchanges.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, some colonial agents attempted to disturb the Mughal system of nested sovereignty by encouraging the aspirations of princely

⁴⁴ Queen Victoria doubted that the government’s ploy to seize Tikendrajit in his own durbar was legally justifiable and unsuccessfully urged Viceroy Lansdowne to commute his death sentence. Referencing Manipur, Lansdowne ruled that international law had no bearing on the relations between the Government of India and the native states. See John Parratt and Saroj N. Arambam Parratt, *Queen Empress vs. Tikendrajit Prince of Manipur: The Anglo-Manipuri Conflict of 1891* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1992), 168; Benton and Ford, *Rage for Order*, 187.

⁴⁵ William Lee-Warner, *The Protected Princes of India* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1894), 380.

⁴⁶ Echoing Mutiny chronicler John William Kaye, Dirks disparages this concept as a “rhetorical sham of Company political theory.” See Nicholas B. Dirks, *Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 187.

⁴⁷ Bernard S. Cohn, “Representing Authority in Victorian India,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 169-173.

subordinates.⁴⁸ Soon after his arrival to India in 1814, Governor-General Lord Hastings began to chaff at the emperor's ostensible supremacy and accelerated the colonial acquisition of paramount power. Entertaining a scheme of creating a "Company dominated coalition" of Indian feudatories,⁴⁹ he encouraged Ghazi al-Din Haydar, the Nawab of Awadh, to mint his own coins and anoint himself the true Shi'a king of his domain. This arrogation of authority incensed other prominent Indian rulers; even the Company eventually took the king to task for the audacious titles he had selected. Despite these machinations, it remained unclear how the colonial practice of making treaties with the emperor's underlings effaced the Great Mogul's sovereignty. Reformers therefore testified that the Company's "shadowy succession" to power rested "upon no basis either of inheritance or of testament, of ancient forms or of modern compact."⁵⁰

Though the Company maintained the illusion of continuity with Mughal forms, its legal jurisdiction over the princes and their subjects was often determined on a case-by-case basis. Flustered officials turned to law of nations theories to resolve a host of practical issues.⁵¹ In 1832, Richard Cavendish, the resident at Gwalior, wrote to the central government for clarification. A native servant employed in the residency's postal office had recently been apprehended for theft. Cavendish noted that the regular punishment meted out to such offenders was flogging followed by dismissal from

⁴⁸ As Bayly notes, the Mughal emperor was effectively the "kings of kings" rather than king of India"; he martialled resources through ceremonial exchanges and distributing royal honors, but quotidian attributes of sovereignty like the collection of revenue lay with the local Hindu rajas. See C. A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 13-14.

⁴⁹ Michael Fisher, "The Imperial Coronation of 1819: Awadh, the British, and the Mughals," *Modern Asian Studies* 19, no. 2 (1985): 253.

⁵⁰ Thomas Evans Bell, *The Mysore Reversion, "An Exceptional Case,"* 2nd ed. (London: Trübner and Co., 1866), 134.

⁵¹ Fisher, in contrast, has claimed that international law was primarily referenced to justify "the right of conquest by force of arms." See Michael H. Fisher, "Introduction: the History and Historiography of Annexations," in *The Politics of the British Annexation of India, 1757-1857*, ed. Michael H. Fisher (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27.

service, but he personally rejected corporal punishment as ineffective. Moreover, he was not properly vested with any judicial powers and very well could be prosecuted in the Supreme Court for such action.⁵² The following month, Cavendish received Governor-General Bentinck's reply that he was well within his right to punish petty transgressions by the residency staff. If the employee, however, committed an "atrocious" crime, his prosecution was best left to the native government. This jurisdictional transfer, Bentinck specified, was fully in accord with Vattel's stipulations, which held that a native-born member of a foreign ambassador's staff should be delivered up to the local authorities.⁵³

It was this sort of legal ambiguity that necessitated the addition of a fourth member trained in English law to the Council of India. But the Charter Act of 1833, which created the position, decreed that this councilor could only attend meetings that were of a legislative or regulatory nature. Bentinck took issue with this circumscription, as it hindered the legal member's ability to accrue a practical knowledge of Indian society and the functions of government. Moreover, issues "appertaining to international law, reciprocal jurisdiction, claims for fugitives, &c," arose in the course of many departments' daily business. Logic dictated that the fourth member would offer his opinions in these cases, even if they did not necessarily fall under the (admittedly hazy) province of "legislation."⁵⁴

The colonial government's legal capabilities as paramount power were subjected to sustained debate prior to its controversial absorption of the princely state of Satara in 1849. The matter hinged on a question of whether two treaties convened with the state's rulers had any bearing on their successions. The original 1819 treaty signed by Raja

⁵² Richard Cavendish to William Macnaghten, September 21 1832, BL, IOR/F/4/1511/59553, f. 8.

⁵³ William Macnaghten to Chief Secretary Swinton, October 2 1832, BL, IOR/F/4/1511/59553, f. 6.

⁵⁴ *First Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories* [HC 426] (1853), 523.

Pratap Singh had guaranteed the transfer of sovereignty to his “heirs and successors.” After he was deposed on dubious pretenses in 1839, the Company brokered a new treaty with his brother, Appa Sahib, who ruled until his death in 1848. Prior to his demise, the raja had adopted an heir from among the eleven Bhonsle families who traced their lineage to Shivaji, the founder of the Mahratta Empire. Per Hindu custom, this boy was entitled the full privileges afforded to an offspring by blood.⁵⁵ Appa Sahib and his reformist allies also believed that the terms of the 1819 treaty still applied to the succession. Redoubtable *vakeel* Rungo Bapojee was insistent that Satara was not a mere fief that the Company could dispose of at will; the treaty, like similar arrangements with Awadh and Hyderabad, had curtailed the rulers’ “rights as independent princes, but none of them lost the character of sovereigns.”⁵⁶ The Bombay government, however, dismissed this reasoning as specious. Governor-General Dalhousie concurred and issued a minute in August 1848 identifying Company self-interest as a legitimate pretext for the annexation of heirless states.⁵⁷

Although the CoD confirmed that a common lineage in this case did not entitle any relatives, adopted or otherwise, to acquire the state, their decision did not meet with universal approval. Sir George Clerk, the former Governor of Bombay, inveighed that the administration’s policy on adoptions had hitherto been “inconsistent and capricious.” Only the “incorrigible misconduct of allies,” he concluded, furnished just grounds for the escheat of sovereignty.⁵⁸ And yet, the colonial government had recently praised Appa

⁵⁵“Letter from H. B. E. Frere,” in *Papers Relating to the Disposal of the Sattara State, in Consequence of the Death of the Late Raja* (London, 1849), 149-150.

⁵⁶ Rungo Bapojee, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Sir John Cam Hobhouse* (1848), 9.

⁵⁷ Dalhousie later acknowledged that this formative articulation of the doctrine of lapse was “scandalously expressed”; he had only meant to refer to the rare phenomenon of “incomplete” adoptions. See James Broun-Ramsay to John Hobhouse, February 9 1850 and March 25 1850, BL, Add MS 36477, ff. 163, 182.

⁵⁸ “Minute by G. R. Clerk,” in *Papers Relating to the Disposal of the Sattara State*, 81.

Sahib's "efficient and mild rule" and lauded his patronage of schools, hospitals, and vaccination programs.⁵⁹ For former Satara resident John Briggs, the non-recognition of an adoption obstructed a Hindu religious rite and very well might sap "the foundation of that attachment which the native soldiers have hitherto evinced towards the British government."⁶⁰ Other critics took umbrage with the Company's warped reading of its own treaties and declared that the terms of these arrangements ought to be equitably interpreted in accordance with the law of nations.⁶¹

After the CoD declared a default of heirs, the India reform community continued to proclaim the significance of the incident beyond the borders of Satara. In the period between 1826 and 1846, the Government of India had dealt with sixteen cases regarding the exercise of native sovereignty and had violated the princes' rights on fifteen occasions.⁶² Commenting on this dismal record, John Sullivan, an IRS polemicist and former member of the Madras Council, contended that the annexation of states like Satara and Sind neither yielded remunerative nor political benefits. These dispossessions destabilized local economies by throwing the rulers' soldiers and courtiers out of employ, casting them upon the land, and distressing the agrarian labor market. Nevertheless, the colonial state's "settled purpose" was "to extirpate the ancient aristocracy from the land - an aristocracy in comparison of which, in the point of antiquity, every family in England is modern."⁶³

⁵⁹ "1847. General Administration," in *Papers Relating to the Disposal of the Sattara State*, 65.

⁶⁰ John Briggs, "The Debate at the India House," *Daily News*, April 28 1849. Briggs was treasurer of the BIS and a staunch defender of Pratap Singh.

⁶¹ "Dissent by the Hon. W. L. Melville," in *Papers Relating to the Question of the Disposal of the Sattara State*, 172-75.

⁶² "East India House," *Morning Chronicle*, April 18 1850.

⁶³ John Sullivan, *Are We Bound by our Treaties? a Plea for the Princes of India* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1853), 28.

Sullivan also took issue with the fact that vocal allies of the princes in both the metropole and colonial administration were quickly stifled. One unfortunate captain had recently been dismissed from his post for insinuating that the Sikhs, “according to the law of nations...had a fair pretext for war” against the Company.⁶⁴ For the sake of transparency, Sullivan suggested that an independent tribunal modeled on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council or the General Diet of the German states should arbitrate disputes between the Company and the native rulers. At the very least, the Court of Proprietors ought pass a resolution insisting that the Company maintain its treaty obligations and engage with the native states in conformity with “the general law of nations.”⁶⁵ But Company directors were hostile to this proposal, which they believed would produce “universal anarchy and confusion throughout India.” Numerous proprietors, moreover, had long rejected the notion that their assembly should “become a court of review of judicial proceedings,” as it was simply “not fit for it.”⁶⁶

As the Company’s applications of the doctrine of lapse accelerated, the IRS increasingly found supporters amongst disaffected political agents in India. During the Uprising, Thomas Evans Bell had been stationed at the court of the recently annexed state of Nagpur and tasked with interrogating the claims of approximately 340 palace stipendiaries.⁶⁷ These duties put him in close contact with the widows of the deceased raja, who urged him to secure a title and allowance for their adopted son. But Bell’s pleas to the local commissioner, George Plowden, went unanswered, forcing him to threaten

⁶⁴ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁵ “East India House,” *Morning Chronicle*, April 18 1850.

⁶⁶ “Debate at the India House,” February 8 1843, BL, Mss Eur 932/282, f. 650.

⁶⁷ When the Raja of Nagpur “abdicated very *mal a propos*” by dying without an heir in late 1853, Dalhousie rejected the notion of the “divine right of Rajahs” and predicted that the question of annexation would “turn on policy not on right.” See James Broun-Ramsay to F. Courtenay, January 4 1854, BL, Mss Eur C204.

resignation and notify Calcutta of Plowden's dereliction of duty. Bell's trials as intermediary between the royal family and the hapless colonial regime shaped his evolving political critiques.⁶⁸ In one memo, he proclaimed that "the British Govt had not, either by ancient custom and precedent, or by the test of treaties, any right to interfere with the Hindoo law of inheritance and the family arrangements on the death of the late Rajah of Nagpore."⁶⁹ Similar instances of confiscations in Europe, namely the "medisation" of minor German principalities "commenced by the Emperor Napoleon and continued by the Congress of Vienna, were entirely violent and arbitrary, and were only justified on account of the existing previous state of war." The ranees, however, were not state prisoners and were thus fully entitled to the property that they stood to inherit. Much to Plowden's disdain, Bell began to articulate his theories of treaty right in the Anglo-Indian press, noting that both the Nagpur and Awadh annexations were "in flagrant defiance of the general law of nations."⁷⁰ Plowden maligned Bell for his "contumacious spirit" and his "perverted notions" of his "positions and duties," but these protestations hardly improved his standing.⁷¹ In the fall of 1859, he was transferred to Midnapore while a special commission investigated the charges that Bell had levied against him.

Despite the founding of the Star of India order of knighthood in 1861, the late 1850s and 1860s should not simply be seen as a prelude to the colonial state's medievalist, bedazzling celebration of "feudal India" in later decades.⁷² Rather, this era was a transitional period in which various administrations continued to deal with the

⁶⁸ Bell credited Ranee Banka Bae with preventing local brahmin notables from colluding in the Uprising.

⁶⁹ "Memo 2," Thomas Evans Bell to G. F. Edmonstone, September 14 1858, BL, IOR L/PS/6/477 Coll 36/2, f. 265.

⁷⁰ George Plowden to Cecil Beadon, February 16 1859, BL, IOR L/PS/6/477 Coll 36/2, f. 286.

⁷¹ George Plowden to Thomas Evans Bell, February 15 1859, BL, IOR L/PS/6/477 Coll 36/2, f. 289.

⁷² Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75-79. Victoria was anointed Empress of India at the Imperial Assemblage of 1877.

fallout of the Uprising. Reformers regaled Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation, which reprobated any further territorial seizures, as "British India's Magna Charta."⁷³ And yet, some prominent princes like Tukoji Rao Holkar II, the ruler of Indore, were still kept at arms length on account of their alleged complicity in anti-colonial violence.⁷⁴ Other rebellious states like Dhar had been confiscated outright after the tumult, though the India Office eventually recognized that certain rajas could not be held legally responsible for the actions of their soldiery.⁷⁵ Reformers operated as key conduits for the transmission of princely grievances, creating feedback loops in the process; the young ruler of Dhar himself petitioned the India Office in 1864 after reading John Dickinson's *Dhar Not Restored* pamphlet. While Dickinson's supporters in India commended him for his "disinterested and unusual public spirit," his detractors in the Calcutta press chastised him for the "mawkishness of [his] sentimentality." The spirit of his agitation was the same one that inspired petitions "to relieve assassins and poisoners from the penalty of the gallows and would deprecate the application of the lash to the backs of garrotteers and pickpockets."⁷⁶ While these critics could mock reformers for their misplaced sympathies, they had a rather more challenging time rebutting their legalistic rhetoric that legitimized the princes' semi-sovereignty and endowed them with actionable rights in conformity with both the law of nations and more recent legal tracts.

⁷³ John Dickinson, *Dhar Not Restored; in Spite of the House of Commons, and of Public Opinion* (London: P. S. King, 1864), 95.

⁷⁴ Reformers suspected that Henry Marion Durand, the acting resident at Indore, exaggerated Holkar's disloyalty to distract from his mismanagement of the chaotic situation. Holkar also earned the disfavor of Calcutta authorities for supporting the restoration of Dhar. See *Last Counsels of an Unknown Counsellor*, 106-7, 137-47.

⁷⁵ "The Principality of Dhar," *Bombay Times and Journal of Commerce*, July 16 1859, 455.

⁷⁶ "Editorial," *The Times of India*, August 17 1865, 2; *Review of Mr. John Dickinson's "Dhar Not Restored," from the Calcutta "Englishman," July 7, 1864* (Calcutta: Englishman Press, 1864), 17.

Contested Annexations: Awadh, the Carnatic, Mysore

From the mid-1850s onwards, references to the classical law of nations and international law pervaded the debates over the legitimacy of past annexations and the justice of future restorations. In defending the durability of treaties convened with the rulers of Awadh, Tanjore, the Carnatic, and Mysore, India reformers latched onto Vattel, who had insisted that unilateral treaty violations would trigger a domino effect and inflict “a wound on the great society of mankind.”⁷⁷ Unless distinctly odious to a contracting party, treaties in dispute were to be construed as permanent (or “real”) with advantage to the weaker power; these arrangements were contrasted with “personal” treaties, which expired upon the death of the signatory. According to reformers, agreements between the Company and native princes resembled “the most modern form of treaty among civilized powers” that pertained to the sovereigns’ successors. These treaties, then, were accorded a higher status than “the slave-trade suppression treaties with African or Arabian chiefs,” which were implicitly personal.⁷⁸ Shortly after the Civil War, reformers were warning that any denial of the native princes’ legal rights on the basis of race or “civilization” would prove calamitous and signal “the introduction of the Dred Scott doctrine into the region of International Law.”⁷⁹

The colonial absorption of the north Indian state of Awadh was long in the making. As early as 1847, Hobhouse had prophesied that the kingdom would never “be in a satisfactory condition until merged in the great empire.”⁸⁰ But cooler heads prevailed; Governor-General Hardinge noted the strategic necessity of Awadh and Hyderabad,

⁷⁷ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 229.

⁷⁸ Ludlow, *Thoughts on the Policy of the Crown*, 44.

⁷⁹ Bell, *Retrospects*, 318.

⁸⁰ John Hobhouse to Henry Hardinge, August 7 1847, BL, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 26.

which offered “vents for the employment of native men of talent, who cannot be employed under our system.”⁸¹ Moreover, two treaties convened with Awadh in 1801 and 1837 hampered outright annexation. While the 1801 treaty compelled the nawab to practice good government and cede a portion of his territory to pay for the upkeep of a subsidiary force,⁸² it implicitly disallowed the employment of Europeans in the native administration. The 1837 agreement, in contrast, permitted the EIC to temporarily confiscate the state to promote enlightened governance and balance the accounts. Complications arose when the CoD vetoed at least one clause of the 1837 treaty, but failed to inform reigning nawab Muhammad Ali Shah of the cancellation.⁸³ More awkwardly still, the abrogated treaty was published in official volumes in both 1845 and 1853; Hardinge even made reference to it when he granted the new nawab, Wajid Ali Shah, a two-year probationary period in 1847.⁸⁴

British residents at the Muslim courts of Awadh and Hyderabad had long called for temporary confiscations to stabilize the administrations’ flailing finances.⁸⁵ Yet Dalhousie, in the case of Hyderabad, had claimed that any such interference would signal a complete disregard for “the positive obligations of international contracts.”⁸⁶ It was not the mission of the colonial government “to regenerate independent Indian States, merely

⁸¹ Henry Hardinge to John Hobhouse, October 4 1847, BL, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 182.

⁸² Michael Fisher, *Indirect Rule in India: Residents and the Residency System, 1764-1858* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 382.

⁸³ William Lee-Warner, *The Life of the Marquis of Dalhousie*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and Co, 1904), 310.

⁸⁴ Bell, *Retrospects*, 63.

⁸⁵ Governor-General Hardinge suggested that the Company might suspend its treaty with the nizam to prevent a financial meltdown, nothing that it was “ridiculous to permit our ally to be getting into debt, to maintain nearly sixty thousand men.” See Henry Hardinge to John Hobhouse, June 23 1847, BL, Mss Eur F213/22, f. 48.

⁸⁶ Lee-Warner, *The Life of the Marquis Dalhousie*, 114.

because they are misgoverned.”⁸⁷ To justify his non-intervention in Awadh, Dalhousie reasoned that attaching British officers to the native bureaucracy (as the 1837 treaty had intended) would constitute a breach of the treaty of 1801. Confirming the independence of Awadh in this case was very much a chess move: if the nawab could not follow treaty stipulations, the subsidiary alliance would cease and Dalhousie would withdraw the loaned regiments. Chaos would ensue, thereby furnishing grounds for the British to intervene and assume control in the name of border security. This plot to await Awadh’s self-implosion was controversial; Barnes Peacock, the legal member of the Council of India, even cited Vattel in his argument against it. By his understanding, the Company, as an injured nation, could legitimately compel Wajid Ali Shah to adhere to the treaty by seizing control of his civil administration and retaining him as a figurehead.⁸⁸

Despite the governor-general’s attempt to cloak his policy in the garb of international law, his annexation of Awadh in 1856 prompted reformers to marshal their own legal theories that favored the retention of native sovereignty in the event of princely misrule. Referencing the law of nations and formulating legal analogies was quite strategic, as the seemingly frivolous habits of the kite-flying, poetry-composing Wajid Ali Shah were difficult to defend. Even George Thompson, the former BIS lecturer and erstwhile champion of the Raja of Satara, depicted the monarch as “a man of naturally weak understanding – now greatly impaired by sensual indulgence.”⁸⁹ He further predicted that the nawab’s search for an appeal in London would prove “a foolish

⁸⁷ Quoted in Sarojini Regani, *Nizam-British Relations, 1724-1857* (Hyderabad: Swaarajya Printing Works, 1963), 281.

⁸⁸ Charles Lewis Tupper, *Our Indian Protectorate* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1893), 77. Ultimately, the CoD pressured Dalhousie to maintain the British troops in Awadh and offer the nawab a new treaty; Wajid Ali Shah declined to jointly administer his state and was deposed.

⁸⁹ George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, September 19 1856, John Rylands Library, REAS2/2, f. 58.

mission” in which “vast sums of money...[would] be devoured by human sharks of all kinds.” Such caution was prescient, as scurrilous operators falsely claimed to represent the deposed king in the metropolitan press.⁹⁰

In protesting the injustice of the annexation, metropolitan critics contended that the Company’s official narrative detailing Awadh’s dwindling revenues, disorganized army, and general anarchical condition was largely a fabricated “Oriental romance.”⁹¹ Even if there had been a hint of truth in these allegations, the partially annulled treaty of 1837 - which authorized a *temporary* confiscation - was still in effect at the time. Citing Grotius, Travers Twiss had reflected on the case and challenged Dalhousie’s reasoning: a treaty ratified by a subordinate sovereign agent like the governor-general only required confirmation from the home government if it contained provisions for the making of war or the guaranteeing of possessions. Once the Uprising broke out, reformers like the Christian Socialist John Malcolm Ludlow⁹² derided the official line that Awadh’s “oppressed” and “helpless” inhabitants had cried out for relief at the cost of their “national life.” As Company officials cited an apparent exodus from the kingdom as evidence of tyranny, Ludlow wryly remarked that “Louis Napoleon might as easily establish the fact of British misgovernment by the number of English emigrants to Boulogne.”⁹³ It logically followed that the Awadhi participants in the Uprising were fully justified in repelling the British in the interest of national self-preservation. Their

⁹⁰ “Agents of the King of Oude,” *Daily News*, November 19 1857.

⁹¹ Samuel Lucas, *Dacoitree in Excelsis; or, The Spoilation of Oude, by the East India Company* (London: J. R. Taylor, 1857), v, 196. Famed archaeologist and MP Austen Henry Layard also regarded the justice of the Awadh annexation as a matter for “those best versed in the law of nations,” referring his readers to the “professional opinion of Dr. Travers Twiss.” See Austen Henry Layard, “The Indian Rebellion, its Causes and Results,” *Quarterly Review* 104, no. 207 (1858): 262.

⁹² Ludlow was an associate of Dickinson’s and the nephew of Francis Carnac Brown, the former secretary of the BIS.

⁹³ John Malcolm Ludlow, *The War in Oude* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1858), 20.

apparent insurrection was “really a *conservative* proceeding, - an attempt to defend old usages, old rights, old privileges, against foreign innovation.”⁹⁴

In May 1858, the issue of Awadh’s combatant status was thrust into the parliamentary spotlight by a question of etiquette. Lord Ellenborough, the conservative President of the Board of Control, had recently transmitted a dispatch to Governor-General Canning repudiating his seizure of landed magnates’ property in Awadh. Once the censorious content of the memo came to light, MP Edward Cardwell attempted to arouse indignation in the House of Commons by claiming that Ellenborough had undermined colonial prestige. Whig statesman Charles Wood took the bait: Indians, he warned, looked “upon the Governor General as the king of kings” and would misconstrue the imposition of metropolitan oversight over his actions. By undermining colonial supremacy in Awadh, Ellenborough had cast a pall over prior annexations and “declared to England, to India, and to the world, that our steps in India ought to be retraced.”⁹⁵

Cardwell’s partisan maneuver prompted a debate on the application of the international laws of war to colonial conflicts. Solicitor-General Earl Cairns led the charge to classify Awadh as a combatant nation engaged in a “just war” rather than as a participant in a mutinous military rebellion. As the general native population had not, in fact, pledged fidelity to the Crown, it was doubtful whether they could properly be regarded as British subjects in revolt. Citing Wheaton, Cairns also claimed that the British victors in the Uprising could only alienate “property belonging to the Government

⁹⁴ Ibid., 54-56. Ludlow believed that the Company should henceforth set up a “Hindoo confederacy” in the region rather than dealing with “an effete and do-nothing royal race of Mussulmans.”

⁹⁵ Charles Wood, Speech to House of Commons, May 17 1858, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 150 (1858), col. 784.

of the vanquished nation,” as “private rights are unaffected by conquest.”⁹⁶ Vattel had also refuted similar instances of absolute conquest by challenging “such writers, who reduce men to the state of transferable goods or beasts of burden.”⁹⁷ By staging a defense of universal property rights, Cairns thereby convinced critics that Canning’s confiscation was historically unparalleled. Having read his Vattel, a writer for the radical *Westminster Review* concurred that the Company could not disregard the laws of war simply by “invoking a bad name” like rebel or mutineer.⁹⁸ Even Karl Marx observed a certain amount of hypocrisy in the proceedings, as British commentators had vigorously repudiated the seizure of estates by the Russian, Austrian, and French governments in the recent past.⁹⁹ By approving of Canning’s conduct, prominent Whigs had signaled their intention “of upsetting the existing law of nations.”

As with the case of Awadh, governmental disdain for the “stipendary princes” of South India had been festering for some time. The *Friend of India*, which was commonly regarded as the mouthpiece of the Calcutta Foreign Office, regularly denounced both the Nawab of the Carnatic and the Raja of Tanjore as idiots and bigots who squandered their money, only to receive the support of sentimentalist reformers in the metropole.¹⁰⁰ The annexation of Tanjore, however, clearly evidenced the limitations of the Company’s imperial judicial apparatus. After the colonial government declared the state’s princely line to be extinct in 1856, a British agent “desecrated the sanctity of the Palace itself” to

⁹⁶ Hugh Cairns, *Speech of the Solicitor General, delivered in the House of Commons, May 14 1858, in Opposition to Mr. Cardwell’s Motion* (London: I. R. Taylor, 1858), 9. Ellenborough’s defenders in the London press denounced the confiscation of proprietary rights as an aberration that had not occurred in the recent annexations of Sind and Punjab. See G. B. M., “Our Policy in India,” *Daily News*, May 12 1858.

⁹⁷ Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 388.

⁹⁸ “Our Relation to the Princes of India,” *Westminster Review* (1858): 469. See also “Response of I. T. Prichard,” in Bell, “Is India a Conquered Country?” 211.

⁹⁹ Karl Marx, “The Annexation of Oude,” *New York Daily-Tribune*, May 28 1858. Marx also challenged Dalhousie’s dismissal of the 1837 treaty.

¹⁰⁰ “The Carnatic and Tanjore Incubus on the Revenues of the Deccan,” *Friend of India*, April 2 1840, 210.

compile a registry of all royal goods and treasures. Many assets were subsequently auctioned off; the senior widow of the late raja proceeded to sue the Company for the return of this property and received a favorable ruling before the Madras Supreme Court. The Company appealed the decision and referred the case to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. In representing the ranees before this forum, Attorney-General Richard Bethell rejected the notion that all private and public property “falls into this universal drag-net of this all grasping Company.”¹⁰¹ The Committee sympathized with the ranees’ plight, but nonetheless determined that the lower court could not employ municipal law to reverse an act of state. Leading members of the Madras intelligentsia bristled at this apparent miscarriage of justice and continued to challenge the annexation in the following years. One pleader at the Sadr Adalat invited his fellow members of the Madras Native Association to imagine an analogous, albeit inconceivable, scenario in which the Prussian government would absorb a minor German state upon a default of heirs.¹⁰² If anything, declarations of lapse in India were appallingly reminiscent of the “Decrees of the first Napoleon,” which had casually announced “that a kingdom had ceased to exist, or that a Royal Family had ceased to reign.”

A number of reformers associated with the Tanjore case were at the same time advocating on behalf of aspiring ruler Azeem Jah, the uncle of the recently deceased Nawab of the Carnatic, who claimed the right of succession by Muslim law. The Company had first solicited an alliance with the nawab in the mid-eighteenth century to counter French aggrandizement and had recognized him as an independent sovereign in

¹⁰¹ William Hickey, *The Tanjore Mahratta Principality in Southern India: the Land of the Chola; the Eden of the South*, 2nd ed. (Madras: C. Foster and Co., 1874), 160.

¹⁰² Madras Native Association, *Report of the Proceedings at the Presentation of an Address to John Bruce Norton* (Madras: Scottish Press, 1860), 4, 44.

the 1763 Treaty of Paris; the British subsequently renewed a treaty of perpetual friendship with the nawab in 1792 that was binding on his “heirs and successors.” Several years later, tensions arose when the nawab was accused (on questionable evidence) of supporting his co-religionist Tipu Sultan, the Company’s longstanding adversary in Mysore. In response, Governor-General Richard Wellesley declared that the nawab had violated the law of nations and placed himself “in the light of a public enemy” by undermining his alliance with the British.¹⁰³ Brokering a new treaty during a contentious succession in 1801, the Company seized control of the state’s civil and military administration while allowing the new nawab to maintain his title and one fifth of the net revenues of the state. This arrangement remained in force over the course of multiple successions until 1855, when the Governor of Madras Lord Harris refused to recognize Azeem Jah as a collateral heir to the throne. In the aftermath of the Uprising, reformers connected with the IRS took up the case and declared that Jah’s influence had quelled fanatical discontent in the region. Bell noted that Madras-based Muslims looked upon the nawab as a spiritual chief and “attribute[d] the repudiation and degradation of...the patron and guardian of their religious rites, to deliberate persecution.”¹⁰⁴ Indeed, an estimated 15,000 residents of Madras had signed a petition in 1861 opposing the confiscation, though annexationists cast aspersions on the legitimacy of the signatures.¹⁰⁵

While Harris appropriated tropes of oriental debauchery in his attack on “mock pageantry,” he also invoked international law in a rambling 75-point dispatch. Citing Wheaton, he decreed that treaties dissolved when “either of the contracting parties loses

¹⁰³ C. S. Srinivasachari, “The Nawabs of the Carnatic,” in *The Politics of the British Annexation of India, 1757-1857*, ed. Michael H. Fisher (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), 115.

¹⁰⁴ *Times of India*, August 17 1861, 2.

¹⁰⁵ C. Poorooshattum Moodelliar, *The Carnatic Case in a Nutshell* (London: 1861), 4.

its existence as an independent state” or “the internal constitution of Government of either State” changed dramatically.¹⁰⁶ Harris thus concluded that the “rank, consequence, and reputation of the Arcot family [had] sunk by the conduct of its representatives,” thereby rendering the treaty void. On the other hand, if the legitimacy of the 1801 treaty was admitted, it was surely a personal agreement with a “public enemy” that had been tacitly renewed with each succession. It was Vattel, after all, who had decreed that “real,” or permanent, treaties could only be contracted with independent states.

Once Dalhousie confirmed the governor’s ruling, the nawab’s attorney, Adam Burn, drafted a petition protesting the holes in Harris’ logic. As the 1792 treaty failed to specify any ramifications in the event of transgression, “the right of the parties fell to be regulated by the general law of nations.”¹⁰⁷ Somewhat audaciously, Burn claimed that the Company in 1801 had falsely assumed sovereign powers that the reigning nawab never expressly bestowed. Even if the Company had somehow obtained full sovereignty, it had not adjusted the 1801 treaty in fifty years; any claims it might have possessed “must be held to be lost or abandoned by the operation of the law of prescription.”¹⁰⁸ In the case of doubt, a reading of the venerable Vattel would suggest that “presumption is in favour of the possessor” of historic proprietary rights. Given that the Company had derived historical benefits from the treaty, its arbitrary termination would be a most dishonorable act.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ East India. 1860. *Copies of letters from the Governor General of India and from the Madras Government, in the months of October, November, and December 1855* (HC, 219), 12-13.

¹⁰⁷ East India. 1861. *Papers Relating to the Nawaubs of the Carnatic* (HC, 283), 134.

¹⁰⁸ Vattel declared that “there would be no stability in the affairs of men, and especially in those of nations, if long possession, accompanied by the silence of the persons concerned, did not produce a degree of right.” See Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 96.

¹⁰⁹ East India. 1861. *Papers Relating to the Nawaubs of the Carnatic*, 141.

Observing the reanimation of an annexationist spirit in the Carnatic case, reformers asserted that the India Office's move to dissolve the nawab's title in exchange for a limited annuity was thoroughly improvisational and at variance with the law of nations.¹¹⁰ In one tract, Advocate-General John Bruce Norton¹¹¹ invoked Grotius to establish the permanence of the 1801 Carnatic treaty. Although it had mentioned the reigning nawab by name, this inclusion merely indicated the identity of the signatory rather than the period of operation; one ought presume the treaty to be permanent, as it had alluded to "perpetual friendship" and was designed "for the good of the kingdom."¹¹² This reading corroborated Twiss' argument that an ambiguous treaty could only be regarded as personal if its terms were distinctly odious to one party.¹¹³ The Queen's Counsel further concurred that the terms of the treaty were binding so long as a member of the nawab's family sat on the throne.¹¹⁴ These various legal opinions enabled advocates in the House of Commons to motion for a select committee of inquiry and repeatedly cropped up in subsequent reform literature. MP Patrick Smollett, for instance, made use of Vattel and Wheaton to censure Lord Harris, who had claimed that the 1801 treaty was void simply because he deemed the perpetuation of mock royalism in the Carnatic to be immoral.¹¹⁵ Even opponents of "sham sovereignties" conceded the case to

¹¹⁰ Thomas Evans Bell, "A Privy Council for India," *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1876): 295. Through his agitation, Azeem Jah secured a 30,000-pound annuity, a permanent endowment for his family, a large grant for debt repayment, and even a new title as "Prince of Arcot" in 1867.

¹¹¹ As editor of the *Madras Athenaeum*, Norton introduced contributor Thomas Evans Bell to John Dickinson in the early 1860s. Norton himself served as the Tanjore ranees' metropolitan agent. See Madras Native Association to John Bruce Norton, February 1860, BL, Mss Eur 422.

¹¹² John Bruce Norton, *The Rebellion in India: How to Prevent Another* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1857), 105.

¹¹³ Twiss, *The Law of Nations Considered*, 328.

¹¹⁴ Bell, *Retrospects*, 261.

¹¹⁵ Patrick Smollett, Speech to House of Commons, June 13 1864, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 175 (1864), col. 1651.

be “one of those cruel ones in which all the legal right is on one side, and all the moral expediency on the other.”¹¹⁶

An ardent advocate of native sovereignty, the prolific Major Thomas Evans Bell was surely among the reformers’ greatest assets. In place of a costly, European-staffed bureaucracy ignorant of native custom and devoid of affection, he favored regenerating the princes as constitutional monarchs endowed with domestic autonomy. Although Bell acquired a reputation as an advocate for the Wadiyars of Mysore,¹¹⁷ who sought the restoration of rule after a thirty-odd year period of suspension, he had previously honed his legalistic argumentation in the case of Azeem Jah. Echoing Burn’s protests, he referenced Grotius’ theory of “usucaption,” which held that “Possession, Time out of Mind, without Interruption or Appeal, should absolutely transfer a Property.”¹¹⁸ But more provocatively, he posited that subsequent conflicts between France and Britain had not in fact overridden the 1763 Treaty of Paris, which acknowledged the nawab’s sovereignty.

Legal commentaries on the case of the Newfoundland fisheries provided a precedent for Bell’s analysis. In negotiating the 1814 Treaty of Ghent, Britain had claimed that the War of 1812 abrogated the terms of the 1783 Treaty of Paris that guaranteed American fishing rights in the area. Jurists, however, soon realized that disregarding the 1783 compact would technically rescind American independence in its entirety. Reflecting on the case, Wheaton introduced the “transitory convention” as a permanent contract (usually involving boundary demarcation, territory cession, or a

¹¹⁶ “Notices of Books,” in *The Contemporary Review*, vol. 10 (London: Strahan & Co., 1869), 467.

¹¹⁷ Bell was never an official agent for Mysore, but the royal family periodically expressed its gratitude for his support. Following his death in 1887, the rajah approved a 100-pound annuity for his daughter, Tina, and provided a dowry of 200 pounds upon her marriage in 1898. See *Dadabhai Naoroji: Selected Private Papers*, eds. Dinyar Patel and S. R. Mehrotra (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), 45, 51

¹¹⁸ Thomas Evans Bell, *The Empire in India: Letters from Madras and other Places* (London: Trübner and Co., 1864), 105; Grotius, *Of the Rights of War and Peace*, 86.

recognition of titles) that could not be annulled by the outbreak of war. He thereby broke with Vattel, who preferred to read treaties as unitary documents, and concluded that articles should be interpreted separately as either transitory conventions or standard arrangements subject to revision.¹¹⁹ As Article I of the 1783 treaty had survived subsequent conflicts, Bell suspected that Article XI of the 1763 treaty (which recognized the Nawab of the Carnatic as an independent sovereign) could be classified as a perpetual transitory convention pertaining to land cession and the “acknowledgements of title.”¹²⁰ Despite its global purview, the 1763 Treaty of Paris was “as much part of the public law of Europe as the Treaty of Vienna” and could not be disregarded simply on account of the nawab’s declining position. The notion that a treaty of such vintage would remain in effect nearly a century later was not beyond the pale, for European diplomats continued to make use of Charlemagne’s decrees in their effort to determine the sovereignty of Schleswig Holstein.

As reformers popularized these findings in the defense of Azeem Jah, Indian officials began to militate against the use of international legal terminology in the adjudication of paramountcy. Foreign Secretary Henry Marion Durand surmised that Twiss “might have chosen far more promising grievances for a Quixotic support” than the claims of the nawab.¹²¹ Seeking to banish “the empty phantoms of departed greatness” once and for all, he chastised Indian officers and the home government for routinely misapplying the vocabulary of European international law to power relations in

¹¹⁹ Wheaton, *Elements of International Law*, 268.

¹²⁰ Bell, *Empire in India*, 359.

¹²¹ Henry Marion Durand, “Indian Treaties,” *Calcutta Review* 40, no. 80, (1864): 388. For insight into Twiss’ inconsistencies, see Andrew Fitzmaurice, “The Justification of King Leopold II’s Congo Enterprise by Sir Travers Twiss,” in *Law and Politics in British Colonial Thought: Transpositions of Empire*, eds. Shaunnagh Dorsett and Ian Hunter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 109-14.

India. One recent and acclaimed compilation of Indian treaties, for example, recorded *sanads* that supposedly endowed protected Sikh rulers with “full sovereignty” over their territories. Such casual utterances resulted in the “inflation of native chiefs, due to the inspiration of false ideas, and the tendency to foster notions of independence pretty certain to encourage a willful opposition.”¹²² Officials continued to note this difficulty thirty years later: it was the rare policymaker who would cite abstruse Indian political law rather than boilerplate law of nations theory to justify his conduct before a non-specialist parliamentary audience.¹²³

If the reformers’ defense of native sovereignty in Awadh, Tanjore, and the Carnatic incensed annexationist officials, their successful campaign to restore the Wadiyars of Mysore to power brought the matter to a head. Upon besting Tipu Sultan, Wellesley had brokered a partition treaty in 1799 that divided the conquered territory into three quadrants to be occupied by the British, their ally the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the recently liberated Krishnaraja III of the ancient Wadiyar dynasty. A subsidiary treaty subsequently stipulated that the raja should pay seven lakhs of pagodas annually to British coffers for a subsidiary force and contribute to the “extraordinary expenses of war.” In 1807, the Company annulled this latter clause and mandated instead that the raja perpetually maintain a body of 4000 horse.¹²⁴ Per articles 4 and 5 of the original treaty, the Company was authorized to assume management of the native administration to ensure the payment of the subsidy or establish a European agency in its stead. As Mysore’s finances continue to flail amidst armed risings and conflicts with the *polygar*

¹²² Ibid., 406.

¹²³ Tupper, *Our Indian Protectorate*, 80.

¹²⁴ *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. 8, ed. C. U. Aitchison (Calcutta: Foreign Office Press, 1892), 433.

chiefs, Bentinck “confiscated” the state and installed a two-man British commission to put the government on a firmer fiscal footing.¹²⁵

This wholesale diminution of the raja’s sovereignty was not strictly legal. Wadiyar’s payments to his own irregular horse contingent were in arrears, but the original treaty only permitted the British to directly administer *particular* districts for the explicit purpose of settling this debt. Bentinck soon realized that the alienation would be anything but temporary; in 1834, he confessed that “the assumption was actually made on account of the Rajah’s misgovernment” and urged the CoD to restore three quarters of Mysore to Wadiyar’s control.¹²⁶ As the issue festered, a string of governor-generals concurred that Wadiyar’s “supersession was inconsiderate, unduly severe, and of doubtful legality.”¹²⁷ The “provisional arrangement” also found scant favor with expansionists, who claimed that it “would have been quite consistent with our treaty obligations and with the law of nations to have annexed the conquered province” outright when the situation first became untenable.¹²⁸

Following the death of long-serving Commissioner Cubbon in 1861, Wadiyar began to brand himself as a reformed ruler who regretted his youthful impertinence. As a teenager, he had been “encouraged by the Madras Government to resent the Resident’s close and strict supervision,” but he now vowed to uphold “the great method of established law and order, in financial, judicial, and administrative affairs.”¹²⁹ This

¹²⁵ William Bentinck to S. R. Lushington, 6 September 1831, Bodleian Library, John Briggs Papers, MSS.Eng.hist.C334, f. 6. Ironically, Bentinck pointed to Satara as a “very successful model” for a native government.

¹²⁶ Bell, *The Mysore Reversion*, 22.

¹²⁷ “From the *Morning Standard*, November 22, 1865,” in *Opinions of the Press on the Annexation of Mysore* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), 49.

¹²⁸ Samuel Laing, Speech to House of Commons, May 24 1867, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser, vol. 187 (1867), col. 1052.

¹²⁹ Krishnaraja Wadiyar III to John Lawrence, July 4 1866, BL, MSS Mysore R/2/1/165.

persistence was likely financially motivated, as his limited access to the state's treasury inhibited his patronage and frustrated his efforts to cultivate *rajdharmā* in a state of virtual captivity.¹³⁰ In the spring of 1865 he was pleading with the commissioner to repair water tanks to mitigate the effects of a drought; the next summer, he unsuccessfully petitioned the viceroy for four lakhs of rupees to provide famine relief for government employees.¹³¹ Sensing his own mortality, he had attempted to secure the transfer of his annual stipend to his extensive royal family, only to be informed that these benefits expired upon his death. Though Wadiyar technically had access to savings accrued by Cubbon in the Mysore Deposit Fund, he refused to draw from this account, reserving it for the future support of his relatives.¹³²

Although Viceroy Canning had distributed *sanads* in the aftermath of the Uprising that guaranteed the government's recognition of rulers' adoptions, he had refrained from granting one to the aging Wadiyar. Quite simply, he considered the Company's original investiture of sovereignty in 1799 as a "free gift" that would be resumed in the near future. Reformers had long bemoaned Canning's haphazard confirmation of honors and titles.¹³³ The minor rajas of Kolapore and Sawunt Waree, whose territories had similarly been confiscated "after a period of disorder and rebellion," nonetheless received *sanads* as mediatized political stipendiaries.¹³⁴ One reader of Bell's

¹³⁰ The raja's debts were estimated at 40 lakhs in 1864. Ikegame further suggests that the maharajah accumulated 12 lakhs of debt in the period between 1864 and 1868. Even on a fixed income, Wadiyar continued to bestow *inams* and support a palace staff of nearly 10,000. See Aya Ikegame, *Princely India Re-imagined: a historical anthropology of Mysore from 1799 to the present* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 24.

¹³¹ Krishnaraja Wadiyar to John Lawrence, July 1866, BL, MSS Mysore R/2/1/165.

¹³² George Robinson, Earl of Ripon to John Lawrence, February 8 1866, BL, MSS Mysore R/2/1/165.

¹³³ Canning may have been influenced by Dalhousie's 1856 minute, in which he signaled his intent of annexing Mysore upon Krishnaraja's death. See Bell, *The Rajah and Principality*, 29.

¹³⁴ Thomas Evans Bell, *The Bengal Reversion, Another 'Exceptional Case'* (London: Trübner & Co., 1872), 6.

Mysore Reversion publicly marveled at the viceroy's transmutation "into an Indian politician fancying figments and adducing reasons" for his selections that "would damage the reputation of a village attorney."¹³⁵ While Canning withheld any clear directives regarding the transfer of Mysorean sovereignty, his successor John Lawrence explicitly blocked the restoration in 1865. Categorizing Wadiyar as a "chief" rather than a monarch, the viceroy determined that the "principles of the Hindoo Law of Inheritance" did not apply to his situation.¹³⁶ But this preemptory discouragement only forced the issue; Wadiyar adopted an unsanctioned heir two months later. While the reformers had found the initial 1831 confiscation to be grasping, they judged any obstruction to this succession to be a "breach of religious toleration and an invasion of personal liberty, without any attempt at justification, and in ostentatious defiance of the law of the land."¹³⁷ As a test of the government's good faith, the restoration precipitated a heated debate in the metropolitan press and granted polemicists a platform on which to enunciate their conservationist principles.

Utilizing legalistic rhetoric, reformers and Wadiyar himself critiqued both the grounds of the 1831 confiscation and the government's intentional misreading of the partition and subsidiary treaties of 1799 that bound Mysore to Britain as a semi-sovereign power. The maharaja thus adopted a dual rhetorical register that exposed the discontinuity between Mughal and British forms of paramountcy, while also casting the resurrection of ruling dynasties as a quotidian act of European statecraft. The British, Wadiyar explained to Canning, misread turbulence in Indian politics as a sign of

¹³⁵ "Indian Annexation," *Examiner*, April 1 1865.

¹³⁶ John Lawrence to Krishnaraja Wadiyar, May 5 1865, BL, MSS Mysore R/2/1/164.

¹³⁷ "From the *Morning Standard*, January 4, 1866," in *Opinions of the Press on the Annexation of Mysore*, 51.

oppression. In reality, insurrection was “the chronic state of India, and may be compared with the cholera, as an epidemic from which the best governed states, as well as the best ordered constitutions, are never safe.”¹³⁸ The raja’s diminished financial state in 1830, which allegedly prompted the *polygar* risings, was the result of its treaty obligations. Historically a plundering state, Mysore had run out of revenue streams amidst colonial pacification.¹³⁹

While Wadiyar critiqued the efficacy of the Anglo-Mysorean treaties, he also normalized the restoration of his royal line as a legitimate act of state that could not be rescinded. The Wadiyars had remained the objects of popular affection even as nominal sovereigns in a state of captivity. Moreover, Wellesley’s installation of Wadiyar in 1799 was a strategic maneuver, as the complete annexation would have overextended British resources. Krishnaraja’s position was thus comparable to that of Louis XVIII, who “was placed upon the throne of France by the allies after the downfall of Napoleon.” By conferring sovereignty in this case, Britain did not retain a right to sequester French land or assets ad infinitum. High-ranking officials like Henry Rawlinson also took umbrage with this circumscription of sovereignty in the acrimonious parliamentary debates over the fate of Mysore. A “personal” partition treaty, he declared, would create a “life king -- a thing monstrous and anomalous, and without parallel in our rule or in the history of the East.”¹⁴⁰

Wadiyar recognized that the subsidiary alliance granted the British a limited right to intervention in Mysore’s affairs, but declared that its “protective power” had been

¹³⁸ “An Exceptional Case,” *Madras Times*, February 17 1865.

¹³⁹ Krishnaraja Wadiyar to John Lawrence, January 25 1865, BL, MSS Mysore R/2/1/164.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Rawlinson, Speech to House of Commons, May 24 1867, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 187 (1867), col. 1046.

“strained beyond all limits.” All jurists, he reminded the viceroy, had concurred that international treaties were “to be equitably and not technically constructed.” Had the articles of the subsidiary alliance allotted for a permanent seizure of Mysorean territory, their wording would have indicated as much. In an analogous case, Britain had significantly diminished the independence of the Ionian Islands by establishing its protectorate in 1815, “yet it was never supposed that, in respect of those islands, any period of protection and government could merge into sovereignty.”¹⁴¹ Responding to these missives, Lawrence disavowed Wadiyar’s attempts to liken the 1799 partition treaty to the Treaty of Vienna. The Nizam of Hyderabad, he opined, was not an equal partner to this agreement comparable to Austria or Russia in 1815 and therefore could not have contributed to the creation of a protectorate.¹⁴² Lawrence, like Twiss, thereby implied that “protected states” only retained their (suspended) independence through a joint accord between equal *European* powers.

As Wadiyar and Lawrence clashed over whether Mysore could legally be categorized as a semi-sovereign state, the viceroy’s decision to block the succession of any adopted heir catapulted the case into the public limelight. In building a case for the restoration, reformers circulated the dissenting opinions of India Council members who declared that the entire affair recalled the “barefaced appropriation of Sattara” and exposed a gross discontinuity with historical forms of paramountcy that had permitted succession by adoption.¹⁴³ Other officials confirmed Wadiyar’s French analogy, noting that Britain’s allies in the Napoleonic Wars “had no more right to eject the restored

¹⁴¹ Krishnaraja Wadiyar to John Lawrence, January 25 1865, BL, MSS Mysore R/2/1/164.

¹⁴² John Lawrence to Sir Charles Wood, May 5 1865, East India. 1867. *Copies of Correspondence between the Maharajah of Mysore and the Government of India* (HC 112), 57.

¹⁴³ “Dissent of Sir George Clerk, 24 July 1865,” in *Copies of Correspondence between the Maharajah of Mysore and the Government of India*, 72.

Bourbons than we have to eject the restored Hindoo sovereign” of a native state.¹⁴⁴ Yet the precise nature of Anglo-Mysorean treaty obligations remained uncertain, as annexationists and reformers interminably squabbled over whether the treaties of 1799 were real or personal. Although the initial partition treaty was clearly binding on the raja’s “heirs and successors,” the subsequent subsidiary treaty omitted these terms; in their place, Wellesley had vowed to maintain amicable relations with Mysore “as long as the sun and moon shall endure.” Annexationists contended that this particular wording did not indicate perpetuity, but was merely indicative of “oriental phraseology.”¹⁴⁵ Matters worsened following the discovery of treaty drafts in the British Museum in which the phrase “heirs and successors” had been crossed out, allegedly by Wellesley’s hand. The reform camp, however, retorted that the terms of the subsidiary treaty were irrelevant, as the prior partition treaty had created a state that was not tied to a particular prince’s rule. The raja’s adoption thereby allowed his supporters to decouple the figure of the individual prince from the institution of the state and put the question of personal “fitness to rule” to rest.

As reformers ramped up their agitation, leading liberals began to protest the duplicity of the colonial regime in the metropolitan press. In one notable article, John Morley railed against the “personal treaty argument” and took issue with authorities’ “hair-splitting” over the fact that Canning had not named Wadiyar in his Adoption Despatch of 1860. According to Lauren Goodlad, Morley was attempting to reconcile the reality of formal empire with his liberal principles. While the government rejected an

¹⁴⁴ “Dissent of Mr. Eastwick, 25 July 1865,” in *Copies of Correspondence between the Maharajah of Mysore and the Government of India*, 80.

¹⁴⁵ “Petition presented to the House of Commons on Friday 10th August, 1866, by J. S. Mill, Esq., M.P. for Westminster,” in *Opinions of the Press on the Annexation of Mysore*, 4.

overt civilizing mission in the post-Uprising era, it could still “diffuse British principles” through “the indirect rule of well-trained sovereigns.”¹⁴⁶ Morley’s support certainly drew public attention to the restoration, but his rationale was essentially derivative; his article drew heavily from a petition that prominent India reformers drafted in the summer of 1866. This document not only emphasized the fiscal imprudence of annexation, but also established the permanence of the Mysore treaties by invoking “the great authorities on International Law.”¹⁴⁷

Despite the reformers’ legalistic attempts to defend the sanctity of treaties, which they saw as the potential basis for a federal system, their adversaries did not always endow the documents with such importance. According to the expansionist *Friend of India*, treaties merely indicated “what claim a native state has...to be exempt from interference in any particular case.”¹⁴⁸ Per this logic, the unilateral extension of colonial paramount power was the rule rather than the exception. Annexationists also cast aspersions on treaties as vehicles of institutionalized injustice. Reanimating the motif of Oriental despotism, they alleged the princes’ interests to be inconsistent with the *salus populi*; as “slaves of the most abandoned forms of sensualism,” the restored chiefs “would grind millions of Her Majesty’s subjects into the dust.”¹⁴⁹ Nefarious practices like the hookswinging of accused witches had diminished under the political agents’ purview, but a transfer of sovereignty would usher in a return to social atavism.¹⁵⁰ Members of the

¹⁴⁶ Lauren Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 42-49.

¹⁴⁷ “Petition presented to the House of Commons on Friday 10th August, 1866,” 3, 11-12. Signatories included Briggs, Dickinson, Ludlow, Bell, and Chesson, as well as notable intellectuals like Goldwin Smith and the Positivist Frederic Harrison.

¹⁴⁸ “The Proposed Mysore Crime – III,” *Friend of India*, June 15 1865, 685.

¹⁴⁹ “The Mysore Blue-Book,” *Friend of India*, May 24 1866, 606.

¹⁵⁰ Samuel Laing, Speech to House of Commons, May 24 1867, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 187 (1867), col. 1055.

metropolitan Council of India further speculated that the long minority of Wadiyar's young heir would result in a weak regency. Given the number of strong-willed, non-official Britons who had settled in the region, spells of labor unrest similar to the recent indigo disturbances in Bengal were likely to occur. In this event, the colonial government "would be utterly unable to control the English planters, otherwise than by acts of despotic violence, which would as surely provoke equally violent resistance."¹⁵¹

Incidentally, clashes over the Wadiyar restoration also brought the source of the raja's sovereign authority into question. As Mysoreans gradually attained the *de facto* rights of British subjects, the state had practically melded into British India. Severing a sector of the population from the body politic would constitute a direct violation of both natural law and modern legal theory.¹⁵² Some dissident voices within the newly formed East India Association (EIA) even suggested that sovereign powers in the princely states were conferred by the will of the people. To "deliver hundreds of thousands of people from one possessor to another, without their consent" was an act incommensurate with the practices of contemporary Europe.¹⁵³ Although Secretary of State Cranborne had dismissed the prospect of annexation in February 1867, he later took issue with the reformers' treaty analysis, which reduced the four million Mysoreans to "so many sheep

¹⁵¹ "Dissent by Sir. E. Perry, concurred in by Mr. Mangles," East India. 1867. *Copy of the Minutes of the Members of the Council of India, and of other Papers or Proceedings relative to the Despatch conveying the Instructions of the Secretary of State for India to the Government of India, respecting the Claims of the Maharajah of Mysore* (HC, 271), 13.

¹⁵² Vattel prohibited any nation from transferring a portion of its population to a foreign power unless "indispensably obliged to it by the strongest reasons founded on the public safety." See Vattel, *The Law of Nations*, 6. Colonial officers in the early 1830s also cited this finding to challenge Wadiyar's allocation of state property in grants to "unworthy persons" of his kin. See Ikegame, *Princely India Re-Imagined*, 21.

¹⁵³ "Response of Mr. Bonnerjee" in Dadabhai Naoroji, "Mysore," *Journal of the East India Association* 1, no. 2 (July, 1867): 146.

or stock” under princely proprietorship.¹⁵⁴ Even if Cranborne had favored a plebiscite, which he surely did not,¹⁵⁵ gauging public opinion in Mysore was hardly a straightforward affair. When Wadiyar produced a petition of 7,347 signatures in favor of the restoration, colonial officials immediately discountenanced the document as the work of courtiers and merchants who fed on the raja’s “lavish and unprofitable expenditure.”¹⁵⁶

There are many reasons, both documented and conjectural, why the India Office acceded to the reformers’ demands. Certainly, authorities recognized after 1857 that princes had served as breakwaters against rebellion and could continue to subvert their subjects’ anti-British tendencies. There is also the possibility that Cranborne favored the restoration as a way of exerting executive dominance over his annexationist India Council, which he disparaged as an “incubus upon the Minister.”¹⁵⁷ Inheriting the matter, Secretary of State Stafford Northcote was still mired in the fallout from the Orissa famine and informed Lawrence in late March of 1867 that he was overworked, feverish, and unable to give the Mysore question due consideration.¹⁵⁸ The following month, he collected his thoughts and resolved that the “Partition Treaty sets up a separate state that we have no right...to destroy or absorb.”¹⁵⁹ In a minute that left the details of the “model state” experiment to other parties,¹⁶⁰ Northcote observed that the government could either

¹⁵⁴ Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, Viscount Cranborne, Speech to House of Commons, May 24 1867, Parliamentary Debates, Commons, 3rd series, vol. 187 (1867), col. 1073.

¹⁵⁵ Cranborne dismissed the notion that native public opinion should have any bearing on the restoration of the cotton-rich Berar districts to the Nizam of Hyderabad. See Bharati Ray, *Hyderabad and British Paramountcy, 1858-1883* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 121-22.

¹⁵⁶ “Minute of Mr. R. D. Mangles,” in *Copies of Correspondence between the Maharajah of Mysore and the Government of India*, 87; “The Mysore Blue-Book,” *Friend of India*, 606.

¹⁵⁷ Paul R. Brumpton, *Security and Progress: Lord Salisbury at the India Office* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 33.

¹⁵⁸ Stafford Northcote to John Lawrence, March 26 1867, BL, Mss Eur. F90/28, f. 13.

¹⁵⁹ Stafford Northcote to John Lawrence, April 20 1867, BL, Mss Eur. F90/28, f. 68.

¹⁶⁰ While the colonial state often intervened during minority administrations, educational institutions like the Rajkumar and Mayo Colleges were also established to cater to young princes and the sons of the gentry.

invest Chamarajendra with “full sovereignty” when he reached his majority, or else parcel out sovereign powers piecemeal.¹⁶¹ In the meantime, it would be prudent “to establish something like a constitution for Mysore, and to bring up the young prince with reference to it.”¹⁶² This was a desirable outcome for the reformers, who had previously recommended that the colonial state become the guardian of young princes and temporarily administer their countries to instill the principles of good governance.¹⁶³

Appealing to International Law

While conservationist reformers and India Office luminaries were debating the validity of unequal treaties and semi-sovereignty in the metropolitan public sphere, colonial agents employed similar legal casuistry to resolve inter-state jurisdictional disputes. Henry Maine’s affirmation of divisible sovereignty in an 1864 dispatch proved particularly influential,¹⁶⁴ as it provided an open-ended blueprint for interference in princely affairs. Determining the 188 or so disputed Kathiawar chieftainships in western India to be foreign territory, Maine nonetheless reserved the colonial regime the right to prevent the states from “hastening to utter anarchy.”¹⁶⁵ As Benton notes, Maine’s phrasing suggested that the paramount power “permitted” the chiefs’ “exercise of sovereign rights,” thereby re-situating the colonial regime as the unitary source of

See Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and their States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 108-111.

¹⁶¹ Stafford Northcote, “Paper recorded by the Secretary of State,” in East India. 1867. *Copy of the Minutes of the Members of the Council of India*, 6.

¹⁶² Stafford Northcote to John Lawrence, May 23 1867, BL, Mss Eur F90/28, f. 98.

¹⁶³ John Briggs, *India & Europe Compared* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1857), 249.

¹⁶⁴ Maine served as Law Member of the Viceroy’s Council from 1863 to 1869.

¹⁶⁵ Sir M. E. Grant Duff, *Henry Maine: a Brief Memoir of his Life* (London: John Murray, 1892), 324.

political power.¹⁶⁶ Although Maine danced around the application of international law to colonial relations, his non-theoretical emphasis on *de facto* relations inspired a later generation of officials to innovate a system of positivist Indian political law located in the aggregated acts and legislation of the colonial government.¹⁶⁷

Significantly, Maine's ruling did not banish law of nations theory from colonial sovereignty disputes, nor did it effectively resolve the Kathiawar debacle. Though the British government had acquired purview over the chieftainships in 1815, the character of its paramountcy had never been specified. This uncertainty prompted a flurry of debate between Bombay, Calcutta, and London as to whether Kathiawar technically remained independent or had been lawfully ceded to Britain by the 1803 Treaty of Bassein and subsequent arrangements with the Gaekwar of Baroda. Officials in the Bombay government contended that the states' lack of external sovereignty entailed their absolute subordination to the paramount power; their chiefs ruled merely as hereditary *jagirdars*. Secretary of State Wood, who had little interest in involving the India Office in petty princely disputes, retorted that the Indian government could not claim full sovereignty over the region, as the states' inhabitants did not have access to colonial courts.¹⁶⁸

The Government of India's gradual restoration of "scheduled villages" to the Thakur of Bhavnagar further complicated matters, as cases that were ongoing in the colonial judicial system fell into a void. In September 1864, Deroam Kanji had filed suit against Damodhar Gordhan for non-payment on a mortgaged parcel of land near the village of Gangli, which was subsequently transferred to the thakur in 1866. As the case

¹⁶⁶ Lauren Benton, "From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty, 1870-1900," *Law and History Review* 26, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): 604.

¹⁶⁷ Lee-Warner, *The Protected Princes*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Ian Copland, *The British Raj and the Indian Princes: Paramountcy in Western India, 1857-1930* (London: Sangam Books, 1982), 118.

lingered in legal purgatory, Gordhan claimed the Kanji no longer possessed sufficient standing to pursue his claims before the Bombay courts. The case ultimately reached the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 1875, where it attained the character of a disquisition on the prerogatives of paramount power. While the Indian government was entitled to acquire territory through a parliamentary delegation of power, the process of “dismemberment” remained rather opaque. William Forsyth, on the side of Kanji, determined that the case remained active as no legal cession had in fact occurred. Citing Vattel, Puffendorf, Twiss, and Wheaton, he claimed that the British nation, barring “necessity,” was obliged to “preserve all its members” during a time of peace.¹⁶⁹ Aside from Charles II’s sale of Dunkirk to the French, history offered few precedents for the legitimate conferral of British land to a foreign power. The defense team, which included such imposing figures as James Fitzjames Stephen and William Harcourt, contended that the transfer was of a “constitutional and not international nature.” The Government of India had merely granted sovereign powers to the thakur as a subordinate feudatory “in the manner which was common to the earlier history of England.” Paramountcy in India was not derived from parliamentary acts, nor was it established by Victoria’s proclamation of Crown rule in 1858.

In 1876, the Judicial Committee determined that the cession was fictitious, even though the Viceroy had issued a notification of its occurrence in the *Government Gazette*. The scheduled villages had simply been relocated “from a regulation province to an extraordinary jurisdiction” under the Kathiawar Political Agency.¹⁷⁰ While this ruling affirmed Forsyth’s law of nations reasoning, it sat rather uneasily with members of the

¹⁶⁹ *The Law Reports. Indian Appeals: being Cases in the Privy Council on Appeal from the East Indies*, vol. 3 (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1876), 118-123.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

Viceroy's Council. T. C. Hope, who had personally negotiated the restoration of the villages in 1860, confirmed that the Bombay government had indeed intended "a complete and effectual cession of territory to a Foreign Power" and had purposefully referred to the thakur as an independent sovereign.¹⁷¹ He further undercut British pretensions to paramountcy in the region by suggesting that neither the gaekwar nor the Mahratta peshwa "ever had any definite power other than that of levying tribute or blackmail" from the bulk of the Kathiawar villages.¹⁷² The British had inherited this "rent-charge," but it hardly corroborated their claims to territorial sovereignty; in several cases, chiefs continued to pay tribute to *both* the colonial government and the gaekwar. If a state's annual contributions to a foreign power were indicative of its sovereign status, Hope speculated that the German government could boast ownership of France from its collection of reparations following the recent Franco-Prussian war.

Because Kanji and Gordhan were technically British subjects, their case could be directed to the Judicial Committee on appeal. In contrast, it was the political agents under the Foreign Department who were tasked with resolving disputes between princes or between a native ruler and the colonial state; more often than not, these were military men who were "mere amateurs in the law of nations."¹⁷³ Dogged princes seeking an appeal could then dispatch agents to the metropole to petition the secretary of state and curry favor with the political elite to bring about a parliamentary vote on their case. For the reformers attached to the EIA, there were ample reasons why this costly and opaque system of redress was untenable. Some of the more savvy princes were able to

¹⁷¹ *Abstract of the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General, Assembled for the Purpose of Making Laws and Regulations. 1876*, vol. 15 (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government, 1877), 364.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 369.

¹⁷³ Bell, "Is India a Conquered Country?" 202.

manipulate official sentiment; an agent of the Raja of Kapurthala brought attention to his appeal by laying flowers at the tomb of Viceroy Canning and earning a mention in the *Daily Telegraph*.¹⁷⁴ But other aspirants were less fortunate. Sakharam Sahib,¹⁷⁵ who was married to a member of the “extinct” royal house of Tanjore, sought to elevate his wife to her former station and was swindled by “clumsy forgers” who promised him an easy victory. Reformers like Bell noted an alarming trend wherein native emissaries in London were hiring “parliamentary agencies” that produced petitions of dubious legitimacy. These slipups allowed annexationists to represent every Indian political case as a scam conjured up by a professional “grievance-monger.”¹⁷⁶

To publicize the obscure operations of the Foreign Department and India Office, reformers called for the establishment of an “international tribunal” of the type that Sullivan and Norton had previously recommended. Speeches delivered before the EIA suggested that this body could come into being as an extension of the Privy Council, a sub-agency of the London-based Council of India, or a select committee composed of parliamentarians from both houses. Iltudus Prichard, who led the charge, was convinced that “no code of laws, no books of common law or equity, would be necessary” for its operations; it would simply function as a court of arbitration that relied upon the “common sense” of its constituent members.¹⁷⁷ Bell, however, suggested that such a tribunal should “pronounce its decrees in the language of our great publicists, in the

¹⁷⁴ William Taylor, “Publicity the Guarantee for Justice; or, ‘the Silent Chamber’ at Whitehall,” *Journal of the East India Association* 7 (1873): 58, 63.

¹⁷⁵ Sakharam Sahib expressed interest in becoming a member of the EIA in 1878. See East India Association Minute Book, no. 2, July 1878, BL, F147/27, f. 300.

¹⁷⁶ Bell, “A Privy Council for India,” 296-299.

¹⁷⁷ Iltudus Prichard, “On the Relations between the Native States and the British Government,” *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (1870): 48.

language of international law.”¹⁷⁸ Even if many of the princely states were no longer technically “independent,” they still survived as “distinct nations” with specific languages and customs. Yet some native attendees at the EIA discounted this scheme. In a rebuke of moral universalism, Hormusjee Pestonjee reasoned that international law would be an insufficient guide, for “different principles of natural justice” prevailed in different countries. Other skeptics were more concerned over the composition of the tribunal itself. If the Government of India exclusively nominated its own members, few “sovereign” princes would consent to its deliberations; doing so would be an implicit acknowledgement of their subject status.¹⁷⁹ On account of this ambiguity, prominent members of the EIA lamented that they had fallen into a warren of “abstract proposition” and could not present parliamentarians with any concrete proposal.

Well into the 1870s, reformers charged the colonial government with exercising arbitrary power over the principalities despite the fact that sovereignty had never passed to it “by cession, by escheat or lapse, by Imperial act and proclamation, or by any process known to international law.”¹⁸⁰ Seeking to clarify the basis of this paramountcy, high-ranking officials and agitators alike strategically manipulated various forms of legal thought. Classical law of nations theory, with its elucidation of unequal alliances and treaty obligations, allowed reformers to represent the perpetuation of native dynasties as an act of justice rooted in natural law. Legal literature on semi-sovereignty also invited princes and their representatives to identify analogies with European precedents. “Microcosmic” theories of sovereignty in the Vattelian tradition were thereby fused with

¹⁷⁸ “Meeting for the Further Discussion of Mr. Iltudus Prichard’s Paper ‘On the Relations between the Native States and the British Government,’” *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (1870): 168-72.

¹⁷⁹ Bell, “A Privy Council for India,” 321.

¹⁸⁰ Bell, “Is India a Conquered Country?” 206.

contemporary “macrocosmic” guidelines for maintaining a European balance of power. In practice, such amalgamation blurred the boundaries between legal naturalist and positivist thought while frustrating the circumscription of the so-called “family of nations.” By redirecting our attention to the pamphlet literature, petitions, and parliamentary debates that propelled these cases, we may elucidate the ways in which the creative interpretation of international law offered native rulers and their advocates “limited, though important avenues for resistance” against direct colonial occupation.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Lorca, *Mestizo International Law*, 19.

Reformist Collaboration and the Formation of Imperial Civil Society

“Civil society” is an ever-evolving concept, its particular contours changing in accordance with its contemporary use-value. Thomas Hobbes considered the state to be the product of civic association: a “collective-rational achievement,” its establishment extricated individuals from an anarchical state of nature.¹ This meaning of civil society retained its relevance in certain British circles into the early nineteenth century. Radicals like William Cobbett claimed that the English poor were entitled to communal protections and upkeep, as their estrangement from natural society limited their means of self-preservation.² But the more mainstream theory of civil society, which informed liberal agitation throughout the Victoria era, was the Lockean paradigm born out of contract theory. Locke posited that individuals who formed a civil society had allocated the state a monopoly of violence in order to secure their private property through the enforcement of laws. Though he elevated the “settled legislative” over the executive, he still recognized that the people ran the risk of creating an absolutist behemoth that they could not control. Locke therefore specified that the dissolution of an oppressive government need not result in the dissolution of civil society, as any state that violated its subjects’ property rights was effectively rebelling against the political order established by popular consent.³ The protection of civil society did not necessarily require an armed

¹ Sudipta Kaviraj, “In Search of Civil Society,” in *Civil Society: History and Possibilities*, ed. Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 290.

² Jose Harris, “From Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: Changing Perceptions of Civil Society in British Political Thought, Late Sixteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 26.

³ John Locke, *Two Treatises on Civil Government* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884), 309.

civilian militia, but rather could depend upon “a structure of secure and reliable legality which [left] citizens free to pursue other vocations.”⁴

Chief amongst these vocations was commerce. As Jurgen Habermas famously observed, “the traffic in commodities and news created by early capitalist long-distance networks” necessitated an unprecedented “continuity of contact” between the agents involved.⁵ Economic arrangements that had once been relegated to the private sphere of civil society, which was centered on the household, rapidly became matters of public concern. Once these networks solidified, governments responded by actively promoting commodity production and adopting a new regulatory, bureaucratic apparatus that “depersonalized state authority.” This continuous contact between the state and its subjects prompted the formation of a bourgeois public constituted by “private people” who “readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion.”⁶ Civil society remained a realm of private transactions, but it also developed a public face as the bourgeoisie set the terms on which it would be regulated.

Amidst the popularization of laissez-faire doctrine in the nineteenth century, the notion of civil society as a zone of unbridled economic interaction attained irenic connotations. Governed by the natural “laws of the free market,” civil society “presented itself not only as a sphere free from domination but as one free from any kind of coercion.”⁷ The incongruities of this utopian vision were apparent to contemporary critics like Karl Marx, who believed that the reification of civil society ignored class conflict

⁴ Kaviraj, “In Search of Civil Society,” 296.

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 15-18.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷ Habermas, 79.

and facilitated the “pathological institutionalization of greed and acquisitiveness.”⁸ Disparities of power were also reflected in the structure of the public sphere itself. Theoretically it was open to all, though admission was typically limited to educated property owners who had a direct stake in “the preservation of civil society as a private sphere.”⁹ Habermas therefore postulates that this hegemonic public sphere catalyzed the formation of a separate, distinctly “plebian public sphere” in which the “culturally and politically mobilized lower strata” participated. More recently, Craig Calhoun has argued that the eighteenth-century public sphere was in fact quite capacious, but experienced an enclosure in the 1790s that rendered it the domain of the emerging middle classes.¹⁰

According to Habermas, the rising bourgeoisie aspired to disempower the executive branch and convert it into an instrument for enacting a popular will (seemingly in line with Locke’s admonitions). Free trade was one “general norm” to which the state was now obligated to adhere, but others would be clarified through critical public debate. While European monarchs increasingly paid lip service to the value of publicity in the hope of conciliating the bourgeoisie, their bureaucratic sub-agencies often resisted this paradigm shift. The delegation of administrative power on an imperial scale further devalued public opinion in distant climes. In the early nineteenth century, disaffected subjects throughout the Crown colonies called upon the Colonial Office to reign in its proconsuls, who had degenerated into “petit despots” through their exercise of arbitrary power.¹¹ The path to redress was rather less clear for the India reformers, who not only

⁸ Gellner, 53.

⁹ Habermas, 87.

¹⁰ Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 130-31.

¹¹ Lauren Benton and Lisa Ford, *Rage for Order: the British Empire and the Origins of International Law, 1800-1850* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016).

struggled to penetrate the East India Company's exclusive hierarchy, but also contended with the opaque system of "double government" that deflected their scrutiny. Petitioning bodies were left to wonder whether their grievances should be directed to the Company directors, the Indian government, Parliament, or the Queen.

Maligned and silenced by establishment interests, India reformers were sensitive to the vicissitudes of the public sphere and its susceptibility to enclosure. Their ability to stimulate public opinion was largely contingent on their ability to produce authentic native testimonies. But Indians themselves would only be able to compile this crucial information if they formed modular associations with broad-based support. Reformers therefore aspired to forge link-ups between the metropolitan and native voluntarist organizations in order to catalyze an entirely new social formation: what I term an *imperial civil society*. This was a protean configuration that took multiple shapes over the course of the nineteenth century. In the 1840s, George Thompson encouraged political societies in the presidency towns to operate as informational feeder cells; metropolitan reformers would then collate the data, disseminate it publicly, and alert the relevant authorities. A decade later, railway promoter-turned reformer John Chapman was engineering an alternative model by helping the newly formed Bombay Association (BA) undertake direct agitation. His lengthy exchange with its co-founder, Jagannath Sunkersett, provides key insight into this transfer of knowledge and its attendant frustrations. Reacting to burgeoning racial tensions in post-Uprising era, members of the East India Association (EIA) discussed the decline of affective relations extensively. Reformers were acutely aware that any imperial civil society would be anemic so long as the colonial government continued to exclude Indians from positions of power and

disregard — or even deter — the expression of public opinion. Under direct rule, governance by expert, albeit despotic, administrators was a poor substitute for the representative institutions that other colonies enjoyed.

Civil Society in a South Asian Context

Writing amidst the fall of the Soviet Union, Ernest Gellner emphasized the anti-authoritarian potentiality of a civil society while downplaying its historical relationship with the preservation of the propertied order. Civil society, in his analysis, referred to the “set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state.”¹² Building upon Habermas, he noted that the maintenance of civil society necessitated “constant communication in an anonymous mass society between individuals unfamiliar with each other.”¹³ This type of engagement produced a standardized “conceptual currency.” Once it was in circulation, a literate “High Culture” could become “the pervasive and operational culture of an entire society, rather than being at most the privilege and badge of a restricted social stratum.” At the same time, Gellner recognized that the archetypal “inhabitant of Civil Society,” who was “unhampered by social or theological bonds” was very much the exception in recent human history. Consequently, he was not to be treated as “man-as-such.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, postcolonial scholars inspired by Gellner’s insights have determined that the forms of civil society that emerged in nineteenth century India were either incomplete or poor facsimiles of European models.

¹² Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 5

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105-07.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

Given the tendency of voluntarist associations like the Bombay Association, British Indian Association, and Madras Native Association to hold the state to account, one may wonder why the colonial regime in India tolerated their existence in the first place. Kaviraj attributes this concession to strategic necessity. “Orientalist knowledge systems” revealed the durability of native institutions and encouraged the British to recognize the inherent distinction “between the true province of state control and a province of society that could be left unregulated.”¹⁵ Exiting the stage, so to speak, the government made room for an “inchoate civil society” from which the associations arose. The maturation of this civil society, however, was inhibited by the colonizers’ own peculiar form of modern governmentality. Pre-colonial states had largely sustained their authority over local, “fuzzy” communities through ritualistic ceremonialism and occasional tax collection. As a rule, they were not terribly concerned with “the slovenly and malodorous business of the everyday use of power.”¹⁶ The British fixation on territorial sovereignty put this decentralized system under severe strain. What was once fuzzy and fluid was now rigidly defined, as the “colonial apparatus undertook an enormous and unprecedented enumeration of everything in Indian society.” Educated Indians who drank from the cup of “imperial rationalist discourse” gradually learned to play this numbers game; some, like Dadabhai Naoroji, favored a kind of “statistical liberalism” that cloaked their critiques in a veil of empirical objectivity.¹⁷ Yet this quantitative reorientation did not extend past the colonial cities, as rural Indians belonging to subaltern cultures maintained their fuzzy communities through “a defensive

¹⁵ Kaviraj, “In Search of Civil Society,” 309.

¹⁶ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 14-17.

¹⁷ C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 177-78.

use of illiteracy and strategic incomprehension.”¹⁸ These “techniques of confidentiality” clearly mitigated against the establishment of a Gellner-style civil society, in which a literate, rule-bound High Culture became the *de facto* culture of an entire population.

Opting for a more Marxian reading, Ranajit Guha attributed this civic underdevelopment to the fact that the “classical bourgeois culture of the West” failed to take root in Indian soil. The native elite simply paid lip service to “a mediocre liberalism” in order to shore up their economic power. When it suited their purposes, they were perfectly willing to accommodate the “semi-feudal values and institutions entrenched in Indian society.”¹⁹ Probing this failing, Guha concluded that capitalism’s “universalist project” of endless self-expansion “hurtled itself against an insuperable barrier in colonialism.”²⁰ Neither the state nor its bourgeois collaborators could effectively stymie the “reproduction of old ways of life” and thoroughly rationalize economic relations.²¹ In Britain, capitalism had provided the standardized conceptual currency in which most subjects traded. The middle classes were convinced that their commercial success would have a cascading effect, ultimately resulting in the nation’s material uplift. Free-traders denounced the Corn Laws as a feudalistic atavism that protected the aristocratic landholder at the expense of the industrial worker. Even the long-suffering Chartists, who bemoaned their disenfranchisement and general lack of political rights, did not reject the

¹⁸ Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, 50.

¹⁹ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

²¹ This cultural resistance was reflected in colonial legal codification, as attempts to fashion a new public law based on “possessive individualism” ran up against Hindu and Muslim systems of personal law that regarded property-holding as a joint trust. Eventually, the courts came to recognize two forms of private property: individual and ancestral, the latter of which was “subject to encumbrance and the claims of the family.” See D. A. Washbrook, “Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15, no. 3 (1981): 657.

capitalist world-view in its entirety.²² But in India, the native bourgeoisie found themselves social adrift, unable to speak on behalf of fuzzy communities that had not acclimated to new capitalistic modalities. This hindrance imploded the central fiction of civil society - that a limited, propertied, educated class could identify and defend the interests of an extended public.

Guha further suggested that the colonial state's assumption of autocratic power at an early date frustrated the emergence of a functional civil society.²³ Opting for coercion over persuasion, the British couched their policies in the "idiom of Order," forcibly exerting their authority over labor markets and public health in a manner that would have been unthinkable in the metropole. Although the Hindu concept of *danda* naturalized "force and fear as the fundamental principles of politics," such aggrandizement of power by a centralized state was hitherto unknown.²⁴ Indians had few tools at their disposal to check this rampaging behemoth. Traditionally, peasants engaged in "dharmic protests" to challenge kings who neglected their "obligation to protect, foster, support, and promote the subordinate."²⁵ These collective actions, which held clear religious overtones, could consist of a *hartal* (strike) or sitting *dharna* in the presence of the delinquent ruler. Significantly, these forms of resistance were not rooted in any secular social compact theory; in fact, the notion of civil society as the sphere of "Rightful Dissent" was alien to India altogether. Kaviraj concurs that "threats to the well-being of society" arose from the pre-colonial state's "non-observance of social norms" rather than from its violation of

²² Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 57.

²³ For an explanation of the colonial regime's "double alienation" from Indian civil society, see Guha, 65.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 35. Owen similarly concludes that the "idea of a modern state, licensed through consent of the governed to intervene in many areas of social life," would have been perfectly "alien" to most Indians. See Nicholas Owen, "British Progressive and Civil Society in India, 1905-1914," in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 151

individual liberties.²⁶ Ultimately, the government's reliance on coercion rendered a liberal, "night watchman" ideal impracticable, as it refused to be "part of a complex domain of dense, opaque, and autonomous interests that it only harmonized and secured with law and liberty."²⁷

The colonial state's reluctant toleration of a limited civil society is somewhat ironic, given that two British imports — the English language and printing technologies — facilitated the formation of transregional Indian publics through the growth of the press. In the 1840s, these new links primarily reinforced extant "cultural and social bonds," as Hindus in various parts of India jointly sought redress against Christian proselytizing and the Lexi Loci Bill, which threatened to introduce English common law as the law of the land.²⁸ Adopting metropolitan, voluntarist tactics, these associations held public meetings and transmitted petitions without displaying a semblance of the modularity that Gellner held so dear. The curious phenomenon of the religious or caste organization that was western in structure but thoroughly communalist in spirit persisted throughout the century. At the same time, more secular, open-access native political associations sprung up in the presidency towns in anticipation of the 1853 charter renewal. Because these societies adopted constitutionalist methods and solicited link-ups on an all-India scale, scholars have concluded that they provided an organizational framework for the Indian National Congress (est. 1885).

So long as these associations are plotted within a nationalist, teleological narrative that culminates in independence, they will continue to be regarded as "less than." In an

²⁶ Kaviraj, "In Search of Civil Society," 308.

²⁷ Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 126.

²⁸ S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1971), 37.

early work, Anil Seal lauded their formation as “the first overt sign of a social and political revolution in the sub-continent.”²⁹ Yet he walked back this claim in later scholarship by critiquing associationalism as a fad that played into the government’s grander strategy of divide and rule. Adopting the bureaucracy’s artificial spatial categories, societies established at the provincial level were simply “vying for the favour of the Raj by playing politics couched in its own formula.”³⁰ Their members soon realized that they lacked an organic constituency and struggled to prove that their views were in any way representative of a broader public.³¹ The Moderate politicians who emerged from these associations were therefore obligated to speak in two disparate registers and vary their “tunes between bucolic patter and urban suavity.”³²

While Seal somewhat sympathized with the Moderates and their forbearers as men of limited options forced to navigate an institutional maze they did not design, Guha maligns the bourgeoisie’s voluntarism as unabashedly collaborationist. Their so-called agitation was simply “a matter of playing cricket,” which more often than not culminated in support for the government’s heel-dragging stabs at partial reform.³³ Even Kaviraj, who elsewhere applauds the early nationalists for their atypical political civility, wonders how the Moderates could have effectively operated within a gradualist, liberal

²⁹ Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 202.

³⁰ Idem., “Imperialism and Nationalism in India,” in *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870 to 1940*, ed. John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 21.

³¹ The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (PSS) was one of the few societies that deflected this criticism; in a novel arrangement, each member was obliged to produce a document authorizing him to speak on behalf of at least fifty adults in his locality. Bayly notes that this system of representation was rooted in the traditional idea of *vakalat*, or advocacy. Generally speaking, the ideological orientation of the PSS had “powerful resonances in the old Maratha patriotism.” See Mehrotra, 192; C. A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 106.

³² Seal, “Imperialism and Nationalism in India,” 25.

³³ Guha, 4.

framework. Perhaps constitutionalists like Naoroji knew full well that the colonial administration would never remodel Indian society in the image of a Western “universal suffrage democracy.” And perhaps they were “pretending to be trapped” within liberal ideology “in order to stretch it to its limits, bring it to a crisis, and reveal itself.”³⁴ It is more likely, however, that the timetable for this remodel was simply unclear. For Naoroji and the Moderates, entry into the new public, political spaces was contingent on a level of education that the masses presently did not possess; any talk of enfranchisement at this stage would have been overly precipitant and potentially destructive. Sanjay Seth therefore suggests that they embraced the paradoxical belief that “the *continuation* of British rule was necessary for its eventual supersession.”³⁵

It is not the goal of this chapter to critique the Moderates’ strategies or elucidate the origins of the Indian National Congress. Rather than interpreting associationalism as either a stepping-stone on the path to self-rule or an expression of bourgeois complacency, we will take India reformers at their word: they understood the liberating potential of inclusion in a constitutionalist system, and sought to realize this goal by maximizing the influence of a permanent interracial opposition. With each structural alteration of the governmental apparatus, the reformers’ transregional mobilization of people, resources, and ideas to construct an equitable imperial union began anew.

Thompson’s Calcutta Lectures: an Alternative Reading

Efforts to establish an imperial civil society had been under way since the 1820s, when non-official associations formed in Calcutta to wean the government from its

³⁴ Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, 21

³⁵ Sanjay Seth, “Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: the Politics of ‘Moderate Nationalism’ in India, 1870-1905,” *American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 115.

monopolism. Given the strict controls that the regime maintained over the press, public sphere agitation was a fraught battle; the deportation of irascible free-trader James Silk Buckingham in 1823 vividly demonstrated the need for freer communication. Analyzing the reformers' interlocking campaigns for European colonization, steam navigation, and mass education, Josh Ehrlich posits that they were attempting to bridge the physical and cognitive gulf that had long separated British and Indian political communities.³⁶ The passage of the Charter Act of 1833, which dramatically augmented the power of the governor-general and centralized administrative functions, was therefore a profound disappointment. The minds behind this legislation were reluctant to bring public opinion to bear upon Indian governance; British dominion, as the saying went, had been won "by the Sword" and could only be maintained thusly. Cognizant of these growing pains, liberal stalwart Thomas Babington Macaulay positioned the colonial regime as a trustee benevolently protecting Indians against the depredations of European interlopers. In this classical iteration of causative liberalism, a period of tutelage would engender the gradual growth of an Indian "public mind," which could lead the state to loosen its reigns in the distant future.

Although the passage of the authoritarian charter act temporarily frustrated the growth of Calcutta's civil society, an interracial rebuke of the Company's despotism continued sporadically in the following decades. George Thompson's somewhat haphazard journey in 1843 at the invitation of leading plutocrat Dwarkanath Tagore has received the most attention as an episode in a broader history of associationalism fostered by the Bengal Renaissance. Charged with rejuvenating the moribund Landholders'

³⁶ Joshua Ehrlich, "The Crisis of Liberal Reform in India: Public Opinion, Pyrotechnics, and the Charter Act of 1833," *Modern Asian Studies* 52, no 6 (2018): 40.

Society, he faced the lofty task of reconciling the interests of the propertied *zamindars* with those of the western-educated intelligentsia hailing from Hindoo College. To this end, Thompson helped facilitate the establishment of the Bengal British India Society, an experimental effort to create a public inclusive of all classes “without respect of Caste, Creed, Place of Birth, or Rank in Society.”³⁷ The results of this modular venture are open to interpretation. S. R. Mehrotra characterized Thompson’s visit as a “landmark in the political history in India” that made a formative “impression on the native mind.”³⁸ Jon Wilson, in contrast, castigates Thompson for over-valuing “political participation [as] the very essence of civilised human existence” and an “end in itself.”³⁹ Indeed, he diagnoses Thompson with “a peculiarly British form of shortsightedness,” as the lecturer could not comprehend that his audience was “more interested in asserting the autonomy of indigenous practices through a programme of social reform.” This myopia rendered his mission futile and the impact of his lectures “negligible.”

To understand Wilson’s hostility, we must engage with his treatment of the famed reformer Raja Rammohun Roy, whose activism he favorably contrasts with Thompson’s Whiggish radicalism. Truly, there is a “long tradition of finding in Rammohun whatever one happens to be looking for.”⁴⁰ For Wilson, he was a peculiar kind of liberal who observed the distinction between the autonomous *samaj* (social community) and *sarkar* (government). Seeking to controvert allegations of India’s cultural disorder, Rammohun claimed that his efforts to abolish sati and permit widows’ property inheritance were fully

³⁷ George Thompson, *Addresses Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta* (Calcutta: Thacker and Co., 1843), 125-29.

³⁸ Mehrotra, 25.

³⁹ Jon Wilson, *Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in Eastern India, 1780-1835* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 179.

⁴⁰ Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 77.

in line with the stipulations laid out in an ancient Hindu constitution.⁴¹ Before the brahmins were corrupted by the attainment of political office (around 300 CE), they had roamed about in a state of “uncoerced sociability,” engaging with various communities and generating rules of social conduct based on their findings. These human encounters were a far cry from the colonial system of mechanical governance, which intervened in the affairs of the *samaj* with scant input from its members. According to Wilson, Rammohun sought to prevent over-legislation by establishing social consensus through non-political means.⁴² Thompson, unfortunately, could not conceive of the *samaj* (or any form of civil society for that matter) as existing on a plane of negative liberty, as he was intent on advancing human progress “along a predetermined path.”⁴³

Wilson’s account of Rammohun’s reformism is couched in the language of insularity: working through the *samaj*, he staged an exegesis of Hindu scriptures to “unfetter property” and defend the exercise of “independent reason.” Andrew Sartori, however, posits that Rammohun was also making use of liberal concepts that had begun to permeate Bengali intellectual culture as a result of interracial commercial transactions. Along with industrialists like Tagore, he was eager to open up Bengal to foreign investment and even advocated for the settlement of European indigo planters who could introduce the oppressed *ryots* to the benefits of stable wage labor. These collaborations promoted the internalization of certain liberal mantras, including but not limited to “the security of property, the rule of law, and the freedom of public communication.”⁴⁴ It was

⁴¹ Wilson, 164.

⁴² Zastoupil notes that Roy altered this stance and publicly congratulated Bentinck for his abolition of sati in 1830 when conservative Hindus continued to oppose it. See Lynn Zastoupil, *Rammohun Roy and the Making of Victorian Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010), 74.

⁴³ Wilson, 178.

⁴⁴ Sartori, 87.

therefore no surprise that Rammohun and Tagore, along with future BIS co-founder William Adam, vocally opposed the Company's press restrictions throughout the 1820s.⁴⁵ Sartori further notes that Rammohun's conceptual horizons extended far beyond Bengal; understanding "himself to be part of a cosmopolitan liberal moment," he desired nothing less than the recognition of a "natural law of liberty." His efforts to link the rational pursuit of self-interest with the general betterment of society opened up an "entirely new discursive universe in a new Bengal public sphere."⁴⁶

The incompatibility of Wilson and Sartori's arguments can be traced to a dissimilar understanding of the components of civil society. Rammohun, in Wilson's reading, appears as a stalwart defender of the traditional *samaj* warding off an interventionist government and protecting the autonomy of the self from encroachment.⁴⁷ In contrast, the kind of Lockean "colonial civil society" to which Sartori and C. A. Bayly refer was much more of a primordial formation. Before it could really get off the ground, Indians would have to ensure that the colonial state was committed to advancing their interests; this security could only be attained through an extensive reworking of governing structures. Rammohun therefore advocated for native participation on juries and the inclusion of Indians in the colonial bureaucracy. Thinking on an imperial scale, he imagined a scenario in which the British Parliament "would act as the legislative guardian of India," while the Company would simply administrate and consult local notables in its policy decisions.⁴⁸ Rammohun's design for a new kind of civil society, which he was arguably attempting to build "from the ground up," required a

⁴⁵ Brijendra Mohan Sankhdher, *Press, Politics and Public Opinion in India: Dynamics of Modernization and Social Transformation* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publications, 1984), 138.

⁴⁶ Sartori, 88.

⁴⁷ Wilson, 163.

⁴⁸ Bayly, 56-57.

sufficient amount of camaraderie and common interest between races. His utopic scheme would only come to fruition once the British saw themselves as compatriots of the Indians rather than their conquerors.

Roy, to borrow Kaviraj's phrasing, might be accurately classified as one of those "elite inhabitants of colonial Calcutta [who] led a culturally amphibian existence."⁴⁹ As a Bengali social reformer and an agent of the Mughal emperor deputed to Britain, he was clearly navigating multiple publics. In light of this juggling act, we need not assume that he was entertaining a single concept of civil society. To reduce the occurrence of *sati*, Roy needed to alter the behavior of his fellow Hindu Bengalis; a convincing reinterpretation of religious texts would hold the most sway within the *samaj*. These sources, however, would hardly enable one to make a compelling case for abolishing restrictions on the press or soliciting the settlement of indigo planters. Roy would have been well aware that the *sarkar* was in fact a divided entity, with founts of power existing in both London and Calcutta under the much-maligned double government. If he occasionally resented the meddling of the Indian *sarkar* (the Government of India) in Bengalis' social and religious affairs, he nonetheless depended on the British *sarkar* (Parliament) to keep the imperial government in constitutional alignment. To fruitfully engage with this metropolitan *sarkar*, the proper handling of Indian affairs would have to be hashed out using Britons' own conceptual vocabulary. Inhabiting the role of a "Greater British citizen," Roy did not hesitate to publicly shame the English government when it appeared to be shirking its vaunted liberal principles.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Kaviraj, "In Search of Civil Society," 311.

⁵⁰ When the success of the 1832 reform bill was in doubt, Roy threatened to transfer his "moral allegiance" to the United States. See Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 95.

To suggest that Thompson was vainly foisting his own political principles upon unwilling listeners is somewhat grasping, given the recent episodes of associationalism in Calcutta prior to his journey. In October 1842, a “numerously and respectably attended” meeting of Bengali intellectuals had established the Native Society for the Amelioration of India with the express intent of uniting with the metropolitan BIS. An address delivered by Kashiprasad Ghosh, a notable poet and future editor of the *Hindu Intelligencer*, ruminated on the Indians’ “political degradation” and perennial exclusion from the legislative process. As an initial step, the organization encouraged members of the native press to “write continually on political subjects, pointing out the evils of the Government, together with the means by which those evils can be remedied.”⁵¹ The Society further vowed to establish an English-language journal, regularly petition Parliament, and admit “all men, without distinction of colour, creed, or sect,” into the society.⁵² While the *Friend of India* disparaged Ghose’s address on the grounds that it featured thirty-eight lines of English poetry, the reformist *British Indian Advocate* applauded the Bengalis’ efforts to liberate themselves from their longstanding “political slavery.” Though the society itself seems to have failed to take off in any substantive way, its eagerness to emulate the metropolitan BIS in both internal structure and tactics illustrates that Bengalis in the early 1840s were not only thinking within the conceptual confines of an autonomous social *samaj*.

Much has been made of Thompson’s apparently condescending observation that the educated Bengalis were “not yet prepared...for the work of agitation and petitioning, as carried on in England.” Having long been “shut out, almost entirely, from every office

⁵¹ “Calcutta: Miscellaneous,” in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, vol. 36 (London: W. H Allen & Co., 1841), 333.

⁵² “Native Society for the Amelioration of India,” *British Indian Advocate*, no. 15 (January 1, 1842): 182.

of trust, honour, or emolument” they languished in a state of “perfect political bondage” and had yet to develop a “representative body” or “*public*, in the English sense of the word.”⁵³ In these comments, Thompson was clearly trying to explain the undervaluation and underdevelopment of public opinion in colonial India; with few outlets for their political energies, many Bengalis had become quiescent. But his participation in transatlantic anti-slavery networks may also have colored his perceptions. Lacking any institutionalized means of redress, these Indians were not terribly unlike the American abolitionists who had been muzzled by Congress’ 1836 gag-act. Speaking in a tenor that would have made Garrison proud, Thompson lauded associationalism in India as a grand moral operation rather than a short term expedient. New organizations, he warned, could not rely long on the momentum generated by an initial burst of enthusiasm. To persist, they required the dedication of selfless individuals who would bear the burden of the establishment’s scorn and boldly expose “the wrongs done to mankind by the violation of the sacred duties which man everywhere owes to his fellow man.”⁵⁴

In urging the formation of the BBIS, Thompson was primarily interested in creating a kind of publicity-generating machine. The Company regularly brushed aside criticisms by claiming ignorance of the native state of mind, while the metropolitan public received limited secondhand accounts of India written from thoroughly parochial perspectives. Thompson anticipated that the transmission of “authentic” native testimonies would soon end this drought, as freed slaves and princely emissaries on the British lecture circuit already wielded a formative influence on the popular consciousness. The development of steam communication promised to further “bring

⁵³ Thompson, *Addresses Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta*, 100.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

together, and link together, the natives of the two countries” in ways hitherto unimagined.⁵⁵ “No geographical boundaries,” Thompson held, “should be permitted to sever those ties of sympathy, which should bind the children of one family, and the inheritors of the same common nature together.”⁵⁶

If Thompson urged his Bengali listeners to exercise caution during their political awakening, it was because he was also conscious of his own limitations on enemy soil. Prior to his departure, Thompson urged the Irish publisher Richard Webb (a fellow Garrisonian) not to suppose him “corrupt because silent – or timid because you hear not the roar of menace or defiance.”⁵⁷ Indeed, Thompson’s self-imposed equanimity seems to have paid off at first, as he was lavishly received by the governor-general at Calcutta and encouraged to access administrative papers.⁵⁸ Despite his “unflinching opposition to the measures of Leadenhall Street,” Thompson reported in late February 1843 that he had “not had four vacant evenings” since his arrival. This absence of rancor suited his purposes admirably, as it remained his object “to see every thing and as far as possible know every body.”⁵⁹ But despite his attempts at self-moderation, Thompson still managed to antagonize segments of the Anglo-Indian press, who suspected that he had arrived in India as a “factious demagogue.”⁶⁰ To ruminate on “the social and political regeneration of India,” as Thompson had done before the Hindoo Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge, entailed the “mischievous misdirection of the

⁵⁵ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁵⁷ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, October 18, 1842, Boston Public Library (BPL), Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v12.2, 97.

⁵⁸ Thompson’s critics later charged that he had made insufficient use of the Judicial and Revenue Department’s papers that were exclusively available to him. See *Second Report from the Select Committee on Indian Territories* [c. 479] (1853), 60.

⁵⁹ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, February 24, 1843, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v13, 11.

⁶⁰ Thompson, *Addresses Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta*, 96-98.

energies of the half-emancipated, half-enlightened native mind.”⁶¹ The fact that Thompson had offended an American merchant at a meeting of Calcutta’s Agricultural and Horticultural Society with an anti-slavery invective did not help his cause.⁶² In true Burkean form, he reminded his detractors that “the principles of equity and good government may be learnt quite as well in England as in India” and did not “change their nature with time, or distance, or climate.”⁶³ Riddled with favoritism and exclusion, the Company had failed to transform into a functional state that drew its legitimacy from a social compact; it was “omnipotent to coerce, but too feeble to defend” the interests of the population under its sway. Encouraging an early form of counter-preaching, Thompson urged his Indian acolytes to bring “the conduct of Christian rulers to the standard of Christian morality.”

Given that Thompson’s activity in India approached a kind of trickle-down reformism that was dependent on prior education, it is hardly surprising that his efforts mainly produced effects amongst the Bengali elite. Despite his having “lived wholly in the native town” and having “won the confidence and affection of the people,” he bemoaned his inability to reach the non-English-speaking lower classes. Even if the language barrier were overcome, the masses’ spiritual fatalism and political apathy would preclude them from inquiring into “who rules, or how.”⁶⁴ Although Thompson held the 230 or so *babus* who thronged about him in high regard, he was less sanguine about the prospect of reform emanating from inland cities like Delhi. There, things remained “as

⁶¹ “Scene in the Government Hindoo College at Calcutta,” in *The Protestant Magazine*, vol. 4 (London: Francis Baisler, 1843), 221.

⁶² Blair Kling, *Partner in Empire: Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 176.

⁶³ Thompson, *Addresses Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta*, 181-183.

⁶⁴ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, February 24, 1843, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection MS.A.1.2.v13, 11.

they have been for centuries” with very little alteration to the “ignorance and prejudices of the people.” Thompson observed that the hangers-on at the Mughal court excelled in diplomacy and displayed “extraordinary subtlety and talents” in their quotidian affairs, but were “purely Asiatic” in their un-elevated “propensities, principles, and actions.”⁶⁵ His expedition to Delhi, however, was still productive, as it had placed him “in a position for gaining more accurate knowledge of the habits and feelings of the natives of the interior.” Ever the populist, he assured Webb that his new (and short-lived) association with the Mughal emperor had not led him to forsake “the cause of the people at large, or impeded [his] ability to save them.”

Thompson’s perennial and perhaps unavoidable error as an advocate of universal reform lay in overextending himself. By the mid-1840s, he was devoting his energies to the simultaneous prosecution of the Raja of Satara’s case, free-trade agitation, and the Garrisonians’ assault against the Free Church of Scotland and the Evangelical Alliance. As a result of this schedule, he failed to nurture the seed he had planted in Bengal; the fortunes of the BBIS terminally declined with Tagore’s death in 1846.⁶⁶ Although native associations assembled in the presidency town in anticipation of the 1853 Charter debates, Thompson by that time had given up brokering transregional alliances. His faith in the *babu* as an agent of change had similarly diminished. Letters to his daughter Amelia Chesson penned during his second Indian residence from 1856-1868 dwelt on the “illogical and self-contradictory nonsense” of one Young Bengal operative. In a speech, this offender had declared that his movement had “gained universal admiration and

⁶⁵ George Thompson to Richard Davis Webb, October 15, 1843, BPL, Anti-slavery Collection, MS.A.1.2.v13, 64.

⁶⁶ Prabha Ravi Shankar, *The British Committee of the Indian National Congress, 1889-1921* (New Delhi: Promila & Co., 2011), 19.

riveted the gaze of all civilized nations” for having “besieged the citadel of old prejudice – the Sebastopol of antiquated superstitions.”⁶⁷ As Thompson, in true Garrisonian fashion, had long branded himself as a humble advocate of a supreme moral code, he resented the author’s self-association with “Wallace, Bruce, Hampden, Penn, Washington, Jefferson, and Luther” as a kind of showboating.⁶⁸

Despite the admonitions of the reform community, the colonial government remained unwilling or unable to foster affective relations with the natives under its sway. Thompson perceived this tension acutely. While he celebrated Muharram with the leading Muslims of Calcutta and relished his tours of Hindu temples, his fellow Englishmen “never even by accident evince[d] the slightest curiosity respecting the manners, habits, customs, or peculiarities of the children of the soil.”⁶⁹ Public opinion remained undeveloped even amongst the Anglo-Indian newspaper editors, who had “no grasp of the wants or destinies of this vast empire” and “no real interest in the welfare of their adopted country.”⁷⁰ These observations led Thompson to privately acknowledge British culpability in the Sepoy Uprising of 1857. Although he conceded that “the most sanguinary, lustful, and atrocious criminals” in the conflict “have been Mahomedans,” he nonetheless castigated the British for their “practical repudiation of divine commands” and their “foolish and fond attachment to the miscalled honor, glory and patriotism by which the diabolism of carnage and murder are covered up.”⁷¹ At this late stage, reform

⁶⁷ George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, September 19, 1856, JRL, REAS2/2, f. 58.

⁶⁸ Ironically, Thompson had previously compared the native reformers of the BBIS to historical figures like Luther, Mohammed, and Copernicus, who pursued their own truths amidst persecution. See Thompson, *Addresses Delivered at Meetings of the Native Community of Calcutta*, 74

⁶⁹ George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, June 2, 1856, JRL, REAS4/3.

⁷⁰ George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, November 8, 1856, JRL, REAS2/2, f. 60. Thompson further lamented that the editors seem to “pander to the depraved taste of the idlers in the...billiards room of the stations in the interior.”

⁷¹ George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, January 9, 1858, JRL, REAS2/2, f. 67.

could scarcely resolve a century's worth of unprincipled conquest or extricate the British from a cyclical pattern of oppression and revolt. The "foundations of our Empire here have been cemented with blood," Thompson surmised, and "our supremacy must be again asserted and reestablished in blood."⁷² And yet, when the remnants of Havelock's Lucknow relief force entered Calcutta, he attended the spectacle and found it "extremely affecting to behold the children – many of them orphans," who seemed "as though they had just awakened from a dream." Thompson was thus thrust into solidarity with a population whose behavior he had long reprobated. As he lingered in Calcutta, he witnessed his vision of an integrated empire founded on interracial camaraderie seemingly implode before his very eyes.

Chapman, Sunkersett, and the Bombay Association

If there was an analogue to the Bengali *samaj* in Bombay, it was likely the Parsi *panchayat*. Gaining influence throughout the eighteenth century, this body settled the community's "petty disputes, framed the equivalent of by-laws and generally maintained the identity of the caste through enforcing outward manifestations of behavior which characterised it."⁷³ Since forcing the *panchayat* to adopt a system of elections in 1787, the colonial government had taken pains to maintain the organization's smooth functioning and autonomy; an 1827 regulation even forbid the Bombay High Court from involving itself in caste matters. By this time, the *shetias* (prominent urban notables) had usurped the leading roles in the *panchayat* once held by Parsi priests. Regarded as ideal intermediaries by the British, they attempted to "establish an advantageous place within

⁷² George Thompson to Amelia Chesson, June 1857, JRL, REAS2/2, f. 62.

⁷³ Jim Masselos, *Towards Nationalism: Group Affiliations and the Politics of Public Associations in Nineteenth Century Western India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1974), 9-10.

the unequal power system of colonialism.”⁷⁴ Merchant princes like Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, who made his fortunes through up-country trade and tapping into the Chinese opium market, subsidized benevolent associations and public works. And in recognition of his loyalist largesse, the government offered Jejeebhoy and his relatives the use of the garrison’s marching band for wedding celebrations.⁷⁵

As Jesse Palsetia makes clear, leading *shetias* sponsored projects that were thoroughly collaborative affairs and quite at odds with a rigid *sarkar-samaj* bifurcation. Jejeebhoy’s decades-long scheme for a *dharamsalla* (guesthouse) was contingent upon substantial governmental support. Although he purchased the land on Bellasis Road for the building and financed its construction, he fully expected that the state would take over maintenance costs upon its completion. The Bombay government initially failed to honor this part of the agreement, but eventually received the deed to the property in 1848. The parsimonious Court of Directors, however, attempted to override the deal and transfer the building back to the District Benevolent Society.⁷⁶ In other instances, Jejeebhoy challenged the state’s approach to urban development. In his mind, the government’s plans to bring water to the city from Vehar were impractical, as its denizens more urgently required improved storage facilities. But Jejeebhoy also took issue with the idea that any engineer should have the “almost unlimited power of expending the public money, subject only to the general control of Government, and without any control whatever on the part of those who have to pay for the works.”⁷⁷ His civic engagement in

⁷⁴ Jesse S. Palsetia, “Partner in Empire: Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy and the Public Culture of nineteenth-century Bombay,” in *Parsis in India and the Diaspora*, eds. John H. Hinnells and Alan Williams (New York: Routledge, 2007), 82.

⁷⁵ Cursetjee Jamsetjee to Lord Elphinstone, April 5, 1855, BL, Mss Eur F87/163, f. 35

⁷⁶ *Correspondence relative to the ‘Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy Durrumsalla,’ built by Sir Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy, Knight* (Bombay: The Times’ Press, 1851), 7, 29, 52.

⁷⁷ Jamsetjee Jejeebhoy to Lord Elphinstone, October 28, 1856, BL, Mss Eur F87/163, f. 7.

Bombay and its hinterland won him praise from India reformers.⁷⁸ In 1854, John Chapman encouraged the chairman of the EIC to bestow a higher title upon the already-knighted Jeejeebhoy, as it would “serve as encouragement to our Indian fellow subjects to follow in his footsteps.”⁷⁹

Growing conservatism in the *panchayat*, coupled with its inability to fashion a clear civil code, generated a radical backlash from the 1830s onwards.⁸⁰ As Bayly notes, the contestations over representation within the *panchayat* echoed “on a small scale every major theme of the contemporary British debate about the reform of Parliament.”⁸¹ Rebuking the *shetias*, a younger generation of Parsis educated and employed at Elphinstone College began to call for social and legal reform using the tools of metropolitan civil society. Led by Dadabhai Naoroji and Nowrojee Furdoonjee, organizations like the Rahanumae Mazdiashna Sabha (1851) and the Parsi Law Association (1855) sponsored essay competitions and held discussions on topics ranging from the simplification of religious rituals to the legal definition of marital rights.⁸² Naoroji and Furdoonjee couched their activism in a liberal framework in order to fashion a new type of Parsi citizen who was capable of self-regulation. This type of transformation would render the traditional, gate-keeping Parsi elites of the *panchayat* obsolete. According to Vikram Visana, Naoroji’s exertions in Bombay formatively

⁷⁸ Bayly suggests that Jeejeebhoy was trying to emulate “progressive Mahratta rulers” with his choice of infrastructure improvement projects and in some cases actually restored the public works that they had erected. See C. A. Bayly, “Bombay’s ‘Intertwined Modernities,’ 1780-1880,” in *Trans-colonial Modernities in South Asia*, ed. Michael S. Dodson and Brian A. Hatcher (New York: Routledge, 2012), 242.

⁷⁹ John Chapman to Major Oliphant, May 1854, BL, John Chapman Papers (JCP), Mss Eur E234/103, f. 35.

⁸⁰ The inability of the *panchayat* to adequately respond to the threat of conversion also validated calls for institutional modernization

⁸¹ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 119.

⁸² Masselos, 37.

influenced his later economic critiques of British rule. Linking consumption with character development, he would champion participation in industrial capitalism as a means of creating “virtuous citizens” who could then participate in a “global civil society of independent, equal and freely contracting market agents.”⁸³

In contrast to the western-educated reformers of Young Bengal, who generally subscribed to similar liberal ideologies, the *shetias* were not a homogenous bloc. They were not all Parsis, nor did they all aspire to work exclusively through the *panchayat*. The Hindu merchant prince Jagannath Sunkersett had been involved in educational reform since the 1820s, assisting in the formation of the Bombay Native School Book and School Society; he was also instrumental in petitioning the House of Commons in 1829 to allow for the inclusion of leading natives on European benches of justice.⁸⁴ Aware that the colonial state would be most effectively reformed through metropolitan agitation, he established a link-up with the British India Society in 1840 that resulted in a short-lived Bombay branch. As the 1853 charter renewal drew near, Sunkersett adopted this strategy anew and collaborated with Naoroji and Furdoonjee in the establishment of the Bombay Association (BA).

This organization, like parallel societies that had arisen in Calcutta and Madras, was designed in conformity with a western model of associationalism. Cast in a loyalist mold, it proceeded on the presumption that the colonial government would naturally act in the public interest if it were supplied with “full and correct information of all subjects

⁸³ Vikram Visana, “Vernacular Liberalism, Capitalism, and Anti-Imperialism in the Political Thought of Dadabhai Naoroji,” *Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (2016): 11, 23.

⁸⁴ Masselos, 18.

connected with the welfare of the people.”⁸⁵ Here, the BA was reiterating an established critique of colonial aloofness: the social and cultural alienation of officials from the native population prevented the state from performing its basic functions. Several years prior, Shahamat Ali had informed metropolitan readers that very few Britons “availed themselves of the means of knowing the character and feelings of the people, by mixing with them beyond their sphere of duty.”⁸⁶ As soon as a new governor-general acquired any practical knowledge of India, he was instantly dispatched home; this was a species of the “moral drain” that Naoroji would popularize later in the century. A prevailing state of colonial ignorance therefore necessitated the formation of groups like BA as substitute conduits for the expression of public opinion. In its first memorials to Parliament, the BA hewed closely to the metropolitan reformers’ platform and called for the abandonment of double government, increased employment of natives in the colonial bureaucracy, and additional investment in public works.

To date, the operations of the cosmopolitan Bombay Association, the zamindar-dominated British Indian Association, and the religiously conservative Madras Native Association have been plotted in a fairly functionalist narrative of group formation. Their lists of demands were essentially similar, despite minor differences that reflected the priorities of their particular membership. Mehrotra ascribes this parallelism to the “development of English education and the English language press,” which had “given rise to a small nucleus of men...who had a common stock of ideas and aspirations.”⁸⁷ Equipped with the proper conceptual tools, these elites took advantage of the unique

⁸⁵ *Minutes of Proceedings of the Bombay Association, established 26 August 1852* (Bombay: Bombay Gazette Press, 1852), 21. See also Mehrotra, 60.

⁸⁶ Shahamat Ali, *Notes and Opinions of a Native on the Present State of India and the Feelings of its People* (Isle of Wight: George Butler, 1848), 6.

⁸⁷ Mehrotra, 68.

opportunities afforded by their urban environments and began to demarcate a new kind of public sphere.⁸⁸ Historians have naturalized this process as a kind of structural evolution driven, as Kaviraj puts it, by “imitative enthusiasm.” In so doing, they have improperly classified a learnt skill as mimicry. By reconstructing the informational exchanges between Sunkersett and Chapman, we may better understand how agitators navigated the obstacles that arose in their attempt to fashion an imperial civil society.

After Chapman first wrote to George Thompson in 1842, he continued to weigh various schemes to resolve India’s anomalous lack of political representation. Early on, he had called for a reconstitution of the EIC’s Court of Proprietors: six representatives from India’s most populous cities or districts would be granted admittance, while each prince engaged in a subsidiary alliance would also delegate a representative. Chapman conceived of this inclusion as a kind of tutelary process.⁸⁹ As “India, like all other countries,” must in time govern itself, the leading men of its various communities would benefit from experience with constitutionalist processes. Incidentally, the natives’ new “feeling of weight in the settling of their own destinies would rouse the intellectual and moral energies of India” and gradually weaken Hindus’ adherence to the caste system.⁹⁰ A decade later, Chapman’s hopes of augmenting native participation in the CoP had yet to be fulfilled. For all intents and purposes the colonial state remained “an Oriental despotism” operating with a scant degree of public accountability.⁹¹ Only tumultuous events like the imminent passage of a new charter bill or a contested annexation of a

⁸⁸ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 142.

⁸⁹ John Chapman to George Thompson, October 1842, BL, Mss Eur E234/91, ff. 63-66.

⁹⁰ One might consider Chapman’s comment here to be an affirmation of what Julia Stephens terms “secular conversion.” See Julia Stephens, *Governing Islam: Law, Empire, and Secularism in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 46.

⁹¹ John Chapman, *Principles of Indian Reform: being Brief Hints*, 2nd ed. (London: John Chapman, 1853), 16.

princely state stoked metropolitan interest in its actions. Indians, meanwhile, lacked sufficient channels to air their grievances, as they had “neither the Durbar of their own land, nor the parliament of ours.”⁹² Without native input, the government was bound to formulate laws and regulations based on imported, abstract principles. These “unmixed plans,” Chapman predicted, would be its undoing.

Chapman therefore jumped at the chance to assist Sunkersett, who contacted him in November of 1852 and offered him a salary of 1000 rupees to serve as the BA’s metropolitan agent.⁹³ Initially, he was tasked with forwarding the BA’s petition to former Company officials residing in England; this list soon grew to include reformist parliamentarians like Richard Cobden, John Bright, and Lord Jocelyn (the dogged supporter of the deposed Amirs of Sind). In January, Chapman reached out to Mountstuart Elphinstone, the lionized former governor of Bombay. Enclosing the petition, he hoped that Elphinstone would “recognize the moderation and good sense” of the document and regard it as “an indication of the dawn and advance of that general intelligence” which he had sought to inculcate among the people.⁹⁴ But Elphinstone informed Chapman that he had largely withdrawn from Indian affairs after declining the post of governor-general on two occasions. He further noted that there were “important particulars” in the petition with which he could not concur, and which he believed “would lead to consequence little favorable to the native community.”⁹⁵ On other occasions, Chapman’s liaising proved more fruitful. Speaking before the House of

⁹² Ibid., 31.

⁹³ The BA also earmarked 4000 rupees for the upkeep of the IRS. See Bimanbehari Majumdar, *Indian Political Associations and Reform of Legislature, 1818-1917* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965), 56

⁹⁴ John Chapman to Mountstuart Elphinstone, January 3, 1853, BL, Mss Eur F88/441, f. 37.

⁹⁵ Mountstuart Elphinstone to John Chapman, January 16, 1853, BL, Mss Eur F88/441, f. 38; Mountstuart Elphinstone to Jagannath Sunkersett, January 16, 1853, BL, Mss Eur F88/441, f. 40.

Commons, Bright cited extracts from the *Bombay Gazette* and *Bombay Times* that Chapman had forwarded.⁹⁶ These articles testified to the “measures taken by the officers of the Government to prevent their native servants from giving any information to the British public” or communicating intelligence on “the actual condition of the *ryots*.”⁹⁷ Bright therefore seconded the BA’s request to table charter act deliberations for a year while additional information on Indian governance from “trustworthy, competent, and disinterested sources” was compiled.

Aside from disseminating its petition among select individuals, the BA also hoped to influence the stance of the metropolitan press organs on colonial issues. From the outset, Sunkersett desired “to know what the *London Times*, the *Daily News*, the *Examiner*, and other papers say regarding us and the Bengal Association.”⁹⁸ Later that winter, he admitted that he found it “very strange that the English newspapers generally do not so much as allude to the charter discussions.”⁹⁹ Chapman was rather less shocked by this omission, noting that *The Times* was “not to be moved to take up any question except by shewing that the question itself is taking hold of the public mind.”¹⁰⁰ At present, however, there was “a general want of an adequate public opinion both in India and in this country.” With a 100-pound subsidy from the BA, Chapman printed at least 1000 copies of its petition for mass distribution. He also sent abstracts to a range of provincial newspapers, anticipating that the London press would soon take note of this regional interest in Indian governance. In circulating these petitions, Chapman was keen

⁹⁶ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, March 25, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

⁹⁷ John Bright, Speech to House of Commons, March 11, 1853, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd ser., vol. 125 (1853), col. 43.

⁹⁸ Jagannath Sunkersett to John Chapman, December 29, 1852, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

⁹⁹ Jagannath Sunkersett to John Chapman, January 29, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

¹⁰⁰ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, January 24, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

to offer remarks on their composition. The BA, he advised, ought avoid referring to colonial governance as “despotic,” unless it was using the word in a “technical” rather than “opprobrious” manner.¹⁰¹ Opting for the carrot over the stick, he informed Sunkersett that his censures of officials would “have five fold force” if he could “willingly support and approve them where you can.” Maintaining amicable relations with the colonial establishment would be key to the BA’s success, as Indians required “not a single stroke of legislation but a multifarious and gradual reform.” The association therefore could not be compared to metropolitan organizations like the Anti-Corn Law League, whose anti-monopolist principles were “easily comprehended by the masses once pointed out.”¹⁰²

Chapman’s decision to focus on petitioning was a strategic one, given the administration’s attempts to check the nascent spirit of Indian associationalism. A year before the establishment of the BA, a cadre of sirdars and native civil servants had established a society in Poona to identify and publicize the needs of the Deccan in anticipation of the charter renewal. Their demands paralleled those of the metropolitan reformers, including the protection of *inam* lands, the disavowal of the doctrine of lapse, and the equalization of customs duties. Anticipating Naoroji, the Deccan Association lamented that the country was annually drained of capital, which was “transferred to England in the shape of dividends on the Company’s capital stock and the savings of European functionaries.”¹⁰³ Sunkersett had high hopes of receiving a petition from Poona, along with similar testimonies from Surat and Ahmedabad, but eventually

¹⁰¹ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, January 7, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

¹⁰² John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, December, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 293.

¹⁰³ “The Deccan Association,” BL, Mss Eur E293/295, f. 35

realized that there was “no probability of any coming from these places.”¹⁰⁴ The government had begun to censure and even dismiss personnel who attended associational meetings; as a result there was a “strong belief that persons so petitioning would incur the displeasure of the authorities.” Chapman had little tolerance for such intimidation, and sought to make a public issue of this obstruction. “The right of petition,” he assured Sunkersett, “was one of the first amongst our own constitutional rights which was established by our own ancestors beyond contestation.”¹⁰⁵ If evidence came to light that the Government of India was infringing upon these rights, the British public would surely denounce its turn toward despotism.

By foregrounding the importance of petitioning, Chapman was able to diffuse potential critiques pertaining to representation. In January, he informed Sunkersett of MP Joseph Hume’s proposal to send two native witnesses from each presidency to deliver testimonies before the House of Commons’ select committee. Yet Chapman discouraged such action, as these emissaries would have to convincingly vocalize the feelings of the Indian people at large, lest they be accused of communal insularity. Petitions, in contrast, were visual markers of their associations’ diversity. As Chapman informed Lord Elphinstone, the BA’s original petition boasted nearly 3000 signatures in English, Gujarati, Marathi, Persian, Portuguese, and even Arabic scripts.¹⁰⁶ Sunkersett, too, was eager to emphasize that his organization was composed of “men of all castes and creeds”; prominent Parsi merchants, landed Hindu magnates, Muslim judges, and representatives of the native bank had all signed the petition. Such broad support effectively distinguished the BA from Calcutta’s British Indian Association (BIA), whose petition

¹⁰⁴ Jagannath Sunkersett to John Chapman, February 12, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

¹⁰⁵ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, January 7, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

¹⁰⁶ John Chapman to Lord Elphinstone, January 25, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

had met with a less than favorable response in the metropole. As the Hindu zamindars who dominated this society had viscerally opposed the Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850, which secured the inheritance of property to converted Christians, they were liable to be stereotyped as “intolerant, ignorant barbarians” and promptly disregarded.¹⁰⁷ Sunkersett’s analysis proved accurate. The following month, Lord Monteagle confirmed that the BA’s petition was the genuine article, prepared by British Indian subjects at a public meeting in the hopes of appealing to the British legislature. Rather than dismissing Indian petitions as the work of professional grievance-mongers, it was the duty of Parliament to treat such documents “with as much deference, as if [they] had been pressed upon the House by the inhabitants of this vast metropolis.”¹⁰⁸ It seems that Monteagle’s impassioned elevation of the BA managed to convince some skeptics of the organization’s merit. Several days after his speech before the House of Lords, the *Telegraph and Overland Mail* admitted that it had “greatly wronged the Bombay Association when it first started into existence,” as it had “confounded the clear sightedness and sound sense of the members of this body, with the ‘Chuckerbuttyism’ of Calcutta.”¹⁰⁹

The BA’s self-comparison with the BIA spoke to a curious conundrum that hindered the formation of an imperial civil society: disunity amongst reformist organizations. As recently as 1851, the BIA had been welcoming link-ups for the sake of efficiency and economy. The Madras Native Association had even begun as a branch society before splintering off in July of 1852 at the instigation of its metropolitan agent,

¹⁰⁷ Jagannath Sunkersett to John Chapman, February 12, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/100.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Spring Rice, Lord Monteagle, Speech to House of Lords, March 4, 1853, *Parliamentary Debates*, Lords, 3rd ser., vol. 124 (1852), col. 1067.

¹⁰⁹ *Telegraph and Overland Mail*, March 14, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 141.

former judge Malcolm Lewin. Chapman eschewed this infighting and did not remain silent. He had no love for Lewin, who was also serving on the IRS's committee, and raised concerns that the society "produced no talking points of their own for the future."¹¹⁰ Chapman was personally reluctant to follow John Dickinson and his associates in demanding direct Crown rule of India. If the Court of Directors, as an "intervening independent body," was abolished, the colonial state might very well devolve into a "pure official despotism."¹¹¹ But despite this difference of opinion, Chapman shared the IRS's desire for public works investment and the conservation of native states. To this end, he transmitted Dickinson's tracts to Sunkersett for distribution in Bombay; occasionally, Sunkersett confused his addresses and mistakenly sent Indian newspaper clippings to Dickinson that were intended for Chapman.¹¹² Informational networks, then, could expand in a roundabout fashion when direct circuits between their nodes failed to form.

Chapman was aware that the boundaries of the public sphere would need to be forcibly expanded before any imperial civil society could flourish. Association members would have to broadcast their virtuous subjecthood if they wished to obtain an initial hearing. Managing municipal corporations and forming successful joint stock associations would evidence Indians' powers of combination; disavowing Russian designs in Crimea might also speak to their patriotism. On the face of it, Chapman was introducing members of the BA to "a new game of politics" that Indians would "be obliged to play if they were to be counted as political."¹¹³ David Scott argues that this game privileged the "public circulation of reason" to "disqualify" indigenous forms of

¹¹⁰ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, July 8, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 194.

¹¹¹ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, July 25, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 199.

¹¹² Sunkersett initially confused John Dickinson with his uncle Thomas, a reformist voice in the Court of Proprietors.

¹¹³ David Scott, "Colonial Governmentality," *Social Text*, no. 43 (1995): 208.

knowledge. It also necessitated “the construction of a legally instituted space where legally defined subjects could exercise rights, however limited those rights may have been.” By this logic, the colonial administration in 1853 should have affirmed the associations’ new political rationality so as to empower the *sarkar* at the expense of the *samaj*. This it did not do. In fact, Company personnel who partook in the charter debates actively pitted members of Bombay’s intelligentsia against each other to delegitimize their mobilization.

Officials seeking to discredit the BA did not have to look far for incriminating material. In the fall of 1852, Manockjee Cursetjee, a disgruntled civil servant who had forsaken the association, was transmitting a censorious pamphlet to prominent colonial statesmen in the metropole. Well-known and frequently lampooned for his Anglophilic tendencies, Cursetjee had been cultivating relationships with Britain’s elite for decades. Appointed the first non-resident fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society in 1835, he soon after gained membership into the Royal Geographical Society and even the Masonic Lodge (after a couple of failed attempts). In the early 1840s, Thomas Hodgkin, the secretary of the Aborigines’ Protection Society, was applying to Cursetjee for information pertaining to “Asia’s peoples and natural history.”¹¹⁴

For all his intra-imperial networking, Cursetjee took issue with educated Indians adopting constitutionalist forms of agitation and soliciting link-ups with London-based organizations. He suspected that the passionate rabble-rousers of Young-Bombay were being manipulated. “Rapacious rupee-seekers” in the community had preyed upon their naiveté and convinced them to “form associations, depute persons to England, raise

¹¹⁴ Zoe Laidlaw, “‘Justice to India – Prosperity to England – Freedom to the Slave!’ Humanitarian and Moral Reform Campaigns on India, Aborigines and American Slavery,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 22, no. 2 (2012): 319 .

grievances and complaints in and out of Parliament, and last, though not least, raise subscriptions to bear the expenses of such commissions.”¹¹⁵ Metropolitan reformers, meanwhile, were hardly the disinterested philanthropists they purported to be. The progress of many righteous Indian causes had been retarded “simply from the fact of their being known to have been advocated by parties for a pecuniary or personal consideration.” The BA, which Curstjee mockingly refereed to as the “Bombay Schoolboy Association,” simply regurgitated the speaking points of these hired guns and was subsequently “infected with the Manchester jaundice against the Company’s rule.”¹¹⁶

Manna from heaven for reactionary officials, Cursetjee’s pamphlets alleged that the BA could not in any way claim to speak for the entirety of western India. While the association sought to dismantle the system of double government that invested power in both the Board of Control and the Court of Directors, Cursetjee speculated that the concerns of rural Indians were far more parochial. “Two in a thousand,” he estimated, would “comprehend the machinery that sets the working of their Government into motion, or care what effect any change in its construction would have for their country or their fellow subjects.”¹¹⁷ The BA’s petition did not even represent the feelings of Bombay’s leading classes, for prominent *shetias* like Jejeebhoy had parted ways with the association after its drafting. These dissenters had supported the BA when it appeared to be an exercise in information gathering and were supposedly put off by its assumption of political overtones.

¹¹⁵ *Memorial of Manockjee Cursetjee to the Chairman of the Select Committee Inquiring into the Operation of the East India Company Act 1833*, BL, Mss Eur E293/295, 11-14.

¹¹⁶ *First Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, Appointed to Inquire into the Operation of the Act 3 & 4 Will. 4, c. 85 for the Better Government of Her Majesty’s Indian Territories* (1853), 331, 338.

¹¹⁷ Manockjee Cursetjee, *A Few Passing Ideas for the Benefit of India and Indians*, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, 19.

The source of Cursetjee's discomfiture with associationalism was also personal. The holder of many minority views, including his heterodox support for female, English-language education, he could not abide the *panchayat's* enforcement of social conformity.¹¹⁸ In the late 1830s, he was already fuming about the Parsis' hegemony in Bombay and trivializing petitioning as the latest fashion amongst the "setts" and "jees."¹¹⁹ In his mind, the metropolitan reformers were similarly domineering; the BA's insistence on "consulting several European gentleman" before taking any direct action "was a candid acknowledgement...that the Natives of Bombay are not yet in a position to think for themselves."¹²⁰ Cursetjee was also convinced that reformers in England were often led astray by their poor choice in source material. Agitators had relied heavily on Shahamat Ali's 1848 tract for evidence of colonial misrule; Chapman had printed 100 copies per Sunkersett's instructions and likely sent one to Bright, who made use of it in the Commons. Cursetjee fully anticipated Ali's argument that *ryots* thrived in the Nizam of Hyderabad's districts but were prostrated under British rule. After all, both he and the nizam were Muslims, and were therefore bent on "running down the raj of the common enemy of their religion."¹²¹

Sunkersett was extremely concerned that witnesses were making use of this inflammatory pamphlet in the parliamentary charter debates. His fears were certainly warranted. Cursetjee had sent Elphinstone a copy; J. P. Willoughby, the former secretary to the Bombay government, received another and quoted it at length in his testimony

¹¹⁸ In later pamphlets, Cursetjee recommended that children of all races in India be sent to boarding schools from infancy; Indians could avoid the "polluting effects of home life," while Europeans would be "inoculate[d]" against the development of a "moral tone and high feeling." See Manockjee Cursetjee, *A Few Passing Ideas for the Benefit of India and Indians* (London: Victoria Press, 1862), 40.

¹¹⁹ Cursetjee, *A Few Passing Ideas for the Benefit of India and Indians*, 1853, appendix.

¹²⁰ *First Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, 327.

¹²¹ *Memorial of Manockjee Cursetjee to the Chairman of the Select Committee*, 20.

before the House of Lords in March 1853. His damning recitation essentially justified colonial obfuscation and non-action. Cursetjee disavowed the royal commission of inquiry that Bright had been seeking since 1850 and suggested that Manchester's mill owners should simply send out private individuals to collect information on the country's resources without the government's aid. He also rationalized the administration's paltry investment in agricultural initiatives. The promise of fortunes to be made from cash crop production would not seduce Hindu cultivators from their age-old routines; it was "hardly to be expected that the people of India, if left to themselves...would bestir themselves in any national undertaking."¹²² Most upsettingly, Willoughby seized upon Cursetjee's allegation that the BA's petition was "more European than Native." Its Indian signatures were likely a ruse, as the heads of castes could easily coerce their communities into signing it. Willoughby further speculated that the drafters of the BA and BIA petitions had relied upon the "professional assistance of Europeans" and even hazarded that the MNA's petition had been drawn up in London. These allegations quickly gained traction within the political establishment.¹²³ Charles Wood, the newly appointed President of the BoC, defamed the Madras petition months later as a "tissue of exaggeration and misrepresentation" that was neither "prepared or knowingly sanctioned by intelligent natives of Madras."¹²⁴ Shortly thereafter, the BA took countermeasures to reassert its credentials. Operating through Chapman, it forwarded a written denunciation of Cursetjee

¹²² *First Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords*, 333.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 323.

¹²⁴ Charles Wood, Speech to House of Commons, June 3, 1853, *Parliamentary Debates*, Commons, 3rd ser., vol. 127, col. 1102.

to Thomas Baring, the chair of the House of Commons' select committee, and filed a libel suit in Bombay against Cursetjee later that fall.¹²⁵

Despite his eagerness to assist with the BA's publicity campaign, Chapman was liable to error on the side of caution and downplay certain "authentic" revelations that he deemed overly controversial. On one occasion, his attempt to tone down one of Nowrojee Furdoonjee's pamphlets through the insertion of a critical preface landed him in some hot water. Lauded by historians as one of India's first "public men," Furdoonjee worked alongside Naoroji at Elphinstone College before taking up a position as translator and interpreter for the Bombay High Court.¹²⁶ His tract reflected this experience and enumerated the many miscarriages of justice under colonial rule. From the outset, British magistrates in India labored at a disadvantage. Despite their cursory language training at the East India College, most officials were woefully unprepared to conduct court proceedings in the vernacular and fell "into the hands of the clever, unscrupulous, native officials of [their] court."¹²⁷ Decades earlier, the liberal imperialist Governor-General William Bentinck had expressed a similar concern that the Company's boys came out at "too early an age to have acquired any practical experience in any branch of business, science, or knowledge."¹²⁸ But youth was not the only explanation for this incompetence. Elder administrators who failed to distinguish themselves were still able to obtain a judicial posting through a system of seniority-based promotions. Citing reformers like John Bruce Norton, Furdoonjee lamented that there was "no bar to watch the bench" and

¹²⁵ Masselos, 50.

¹²⁶ Majumdar, 58.

¹²⁷ Nowrojee Furdoonjee, *On the Civil Administration of the Bombay Presidency* (London: John Chapman, 1853), 20.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

“no press to give voice to grievances.”¹²⁹ This enfeeblement of the judiciary had clear societal consequences, for lying and litigation palpably increased in districts that had been under direct British rule for some time. Officials like the Thug-hunting William Sleeman concurred that falsehoods preponderated in colonial “courts of justice,” but were rarely uttered in the villages themselves.¹³⁰ For Furdoonjee, the solution was clear: opening the civil service to competition and abolishing the distinction between the covenanted and uncovenanted services would allow accomplished native judges to rid the courtroom of corruption and abuses.

As Chapman neither demanded nor anticipated the destruction of the Company, he was unwilling to adopt contentious reformist stances that might rile up officialdom. Augmenting native postings in the administration was a laudable goal, but he hesitated to recommend the wholesale Indianization of the bureaucracy. Part of his reasoning was strategic, as he doubted that the subject of employment disabilities would excite much outrage in England unless the BA could directly link it to tyrannical rule. After all, religious dissenters in the metropole had been excluded from government service between 1673 and 1828.¹³¹ Chapman’s preface, however, suggested that his concern with abrupt adulterations to the colonial system of government ran deeper. Although he lauded Furdoonjee’s attainments and his engagement with metropolitan reformist literature, he noted that “the educated natives of a few great cities” were “specimens and

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁰ Elsewhere, Sleeman attributed natives’ mendacity in court to the example set by violent Britons who routinely protected one another and contributed to “culture of falsehood.” See Jordanna Bailkin, “The Boot and the Spleen: When Was Murder Possible in British India?” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 48, no. 2 (2006): 477

¹³¹ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, December 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 293. The summer prior, Chapman had lamented that there was “little sale for Indian pamphlets” and reaffirmed his commitment to annual petitioning. See John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, June 8, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 179.

representatives of classes” that were still forming; their numbers were therefore insufficient “to supply the official service which their country requires.”¹³² More controversially, Chapman argued that the imperfections of the colonial judiciary were simply growing pains. In introducing the rule of law to India, the British were forced to haphazardly design a system from the ground up for its enforcement. Apart from the village *panchayats*, there was no judicial apparatus under native rule that “secured individual life and property against either the strong-handed chief or bandit, or the unscrupulous power of the Government of the day.”

Furdoonjee did not take kindly to these apologetics. In an editorial for the *Bombay Gazette*, he rejected the assertion that there “was no system of government before in India, and anarchy reigned supreme” under the despotic Mughals.¹³³ Privately, Sunkersett concurred that the objectionable portions of the preface “were at all events unnecessary.”¹³⁴ Chapman subsequently clarified that he was not attempting a put-down of native rule, but was simply reminding readers that the Company had established a foothold in India at a particularly chaotic moment. If the British were presently wary of delegating power to Indians, it was because they were aware of the “failures which have occurred wherever the attempt has been made to introduce constitutional government by any other means than the slow and gradual adaptation of the mass of the people to its duties.”¹³⁵ The problem with this gradualism, however, was that it did not account for calamitous events. After the Uprising, a so-called “rule of colonial difference” impeded bureaucratic modernization and rationalization by limiting Indians’ access to positions of

¹³² Furdoonjee, Iv.

¹³³ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, September 8, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 235.

¹³⁴ Jagannath Sunkersett to John Chapman, July 20, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 197.

¹³⁵ John Chapman to Jagannath Sunkersett, September 8, 1853, BL, JCP, Mss Eur E234/101, f. 240.

power. Native political organizations struggled to address this exclusion as they were increasingly relegated to what Partha Chatterjee terms a “second-rate” civil society.¹³⁶ The only public opinion that the colonial state heeded was that of the boisterous, non-official community who were eager to maintain their racial privileges.

Whereas Thompson’s model of an imperial civil society privileged metropolitan agitation and Chapman’s allowed for direct action by the native political associations, Dadabhai Naoroji offered a third alternative in 1868. He envisioned his East India Association (EIA) and the local associations on the subcontinent operating in separate spheres, though their labor would be mutually supportive. It was the duty of groups like the BA to not only cater to the urban elite, but also educate the masses in the hinterland. Once rural Indians were informed of their rights as British subjects and acted upon them, the colonial state would no longer be able to discountenance the resultant petitions as the work of professional grievance mongers. Aside from engaging in public outreach, these associations would also keep tabs on the operations of the recently restored local legislative councils and communicate this intelligence to the EIA. Naoroji, however, was insistent that the EIA take the lead in approaching the government, as any campaign initiated by the native societies would necessarily have a limiting, provincial character. Moreover, the distance between metropole and colony precluded these groups from furnishing any “ready on-the-spot” follow up to the memorials they had submitted. From his reference to the “Hyde Park railings” incident of 1866, in which a meeting of the Reform League had devolved into a raucous riot, it was clear that Naoroji was intent on

¹³⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 26.

emphasizing his organization's respectability.¹³⁷ Unlike the BIS or the IRS, the EIA would not partake in any out-of-doors agitation or countenance the publication of fiery tracts. Rather, it would seek to provide the English public with "digested information, derived from different sources, on each subject laid before them" in the hope of appealing to their consciences. Undoubtedly this would be an uphill battle, as a recent Commons debate over a monument for Sir Robert Peel had "created far greater interest, and more lively discussion" than the entire Indian budget.¹³⁸

Mobilizing Public Opinion

For many reformers – especially those affiliated with the IRS – the Uprising of 1857 provided ample proof that natives had lost all faith in the Company's rule. It was the system of "double government," John Bruce Norton surmised, that had "endangered our Indian Empire, and [would] eventually destroy it, if permitted to continue its career."¹³⁹ Were the British to remain in India, it was essential that their government be "carried on directly, and ostensibly, and avowedly in the name of the Queen." Sketching out a new system of organization, Norton called for a single governmental chamber that would "include all elements of theoretical statesmanship and practical experience," conduct its proceedings openly, and communicate its activities to the press. Under this body's helm, the colonial state would renounce expansionism and focus its attentions on reducing taxation, sponsoring public works, and paving "the way to representative institutions." The following year, the Government of India Act and Victoria's subsequent

¹³⁷ Dadabhai Naoroji, *On the Duties of the Local Indian Associations in Connection with the London Association* (London: W. Clowes & Sons, 1868), 5.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³⁹ John Bruce Norton, *The Rebellion in India: How to Prevent Another* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1857), 237.

Proclamation ushered in an era of direct rule and pledged to address a number of the concerns that Norton and his reformist allies had long harbored. This was a moment of vindication for the somewhat dormant IRS, whose polemical output had diminished precipitously after the heady days of 1853.

A decade on, however, it was still unclear as to whether the “1858 constitution” had materially altered the framework of colonial rule. In one of the first lectures before the EIA, Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee observed that the transition to direct rule had failed to make much of an impact on the public mind. Reasons for this apathy were not difficult to discern. For a century, the British approach to colonial statecraft had been highly experimental and speculative; every twenty years, Parliament had born witness to the “internal decay” of the Company’s governing structures and devised new measures accordingly through the charter renewal debates.¹⁴⁰ The 1858 Act, Bonnerjee clarified, attempted to break this cycle by devising a *permanent* system, but the ensuing alterations were largely superficial. A secretary of state for India had simply replaced the president of the Board of Control and wielded a similar amount of arbitrary power. Parliament, meanwhile, had not significantly expanded its oversight of Indian affairs. Cursetjee’s observation that Indians had little concern for bureaucratic restructuring was apparently close to the mark. Bonnerjee confirmed that the native population generally did “not understand anything as to what is going on” and continued to believe that “the causes...which led to the failure of the former government are still in operation, and may undermine the present one.”

¹⁴⁰ W. C. Bonnerjee, “Representative and Responsible Government for India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 1, no. 1 (1867): 160-62.

Reformers within the EIA were not merely quibbling over administrative details, but were touching upon deep-seated anxieties that afflicted leading Liberals as well. Company rule, Lauren Goodlad argues, provided “a structure of informal empire” in which discordant and divergent modes of liberal thought could coexist. Articulators of reflexive liberalism – like the members of the BIS – could challenge the Company’s monopolism and autocracy, while proponents of causative liberalism might gravitate towards “sanctimonious paternalism [or] Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism.”¹⁴¹ Direct rule, however, forced prominent thinkers like John Stuart Mill and John Morley to produce a “coherent image of an imperial state” that somehow reconciled a commitment to (limited) democracy at home with the exclusion of Indians from representative institutions.¹⁴² Like Bonnerjee, they were particularly concerned that the new secretary of state was endowed with overly expansive powers; there was no longer a Court of Directors or even a Court of Proprietors capable of interceding. Echoing the India reformers, Morley declared that the enlivenment of an informed English public opinion would promote accountability. Mill dissented completely and called for the erection of a permanent, extra-parliamentary body of trained professional (like the existing Council of India) that would be accorded a right of inspection and veto power.

Mill’s effort to insulate imperial statecraft from the influence of public opinion threatened to sabotage a germinating imperial civil society and inhibit any auto-critique. This position also reflected Mill’s personal leanings as a longtime Company man who defended his organization to the last. A reading of his *Few Thoughts on Non-Intervention* (1859) suggests that the India reformers were particular targets of his ire. In this text, he

¹⁴¹ Lauren M. E. Goodlad, *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty and Transnational Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 59.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 42.

had declared that law of nations theory did not apply to European relations with barbarous nations like the native states of India. Antagonized by the existence of these fractious powers on its borders, the Company had attempted to pacify them by brokering subsidiary alliances. But the resultant treaties had an unfortunate side effect: they safeguarded these despots from internal revolt while allowing them to degenerate into a state of “nerveless imbecility.”¹⁴³ Far from being a “political crime,” Dalhousie’s annexation of Awadh in 1856 was actually a cure for this festering geo-political malady. Yet the governor-general’s critics at home did not see it as such. Their unbridled outrage reflected “the predisposition of English public opinion to look unfavourably upon every act by which territory or revenue are acquired from foreign States, and to take part with any government...which can make out the merest semblance of a case of injustice against our own country. ”In his *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), Mill once more took aim at the disgruntled princes who brought their grievances before a metropolitan audience. While these oppressors and enslavers of their own people possessed “the means of access to the English public,” the “silent myriads” in India languished without redress.¹⁴⁴ This argument was an appealing one for the annexationist camp, who would employ it several years later when contesting the Mysore restoration (see Chapter 5).

In *Considerations*, Mill’s list of offenders notably expanded. English public opinion, he opined, could not be trusted because it disproportionately amplified the complaints of proselytizers and planters who seldom held the “rights of the natives” in

¹⁴³ John Stuart Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical*, vol. 3 (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 169-71.

¹⁴⁴ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 2nd ed. (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), 337-38.

high regard. Unlike the Council of India, or an equivalent clerisy, the religious public in England was oblivious to “the real causes which determine the prosperity or wretchedness, the improvement or deterioration, of the Hindoos.”¹⁴⁵ Their recent campaign for an opt-in system wherein the government schools would provide bibles to native children and parents testified to this lack of cultural sensitivity. Like these religious enthusiasts, the rough planters who were “armed with the prestige and filled with scornful overbearingness of the conquering nation” also had the ear of the metropolitan press.¹⁴⁶ By castings aspersions on these communities, Mill was attempting to pivot the discourse and make the case for colonial rule by qualified specialists. Whereas the India reformers continued to denounce the illiberal conduct of the imperial state, Mill capitalized on the recent indigo disturbances and positioned the government as a humanitarian protector of the *ryots*. It was the non-official settlers’ propensity for violence that justified the state’s paternal and despotic existence. The fact that the planters’ racial animus was perfectly *natural* and perhaps irresolvable suggested that the Government of India would persist in its current form for some time to come.

Whether the princes, zealots, and planters successfully manipulated public opinion and drowned out the voices of the Indian masses was by no means certain. Native rulers and their emissaries were certainly visible presences in the metropole, and their exploits very well might have captured the imaginations of popular writers like Anthony Trollope.¹⁴⁷ On the other hand, reformers who advocated on behalf of these sovereigns

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 33-35.

¹⁴⁶ Historians continue to suspect that the “larger flow of news and information back to Britain” in the later nineteenth century entrenched a “negative view of Indian political aspirations” and reflected the sentiments of the “British settler community writ large.” See John Darwin, *The Empire Project: the Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 186

¹⁴⁷ Goodlad, 96-97.

were just as likely to denounce the *ryotwari* land taxation system and the government's neglect of public works. Norton, for his part, was convinced the Company was behind its own disinformation campaigns; whenever a princely grievance came before Parliament, "the India House hacks, and the journals which they can influence, have been industriously spreading reports of the utter untenableness of the claim."¹⁴⁸ Bonnerjee also suspected that the London presses were wont to "trust more to what emanates from the India Office than from private individuals."¹⁴⁹ The only time misdeeds truly came to light was when the government's own dispatches revealed them.

Despite their innate differences, the more radical India reformers did agree with Mill on one issue, namely the precipitous decline of interracial affective relations. In *Considerations*, Mill declared that "foreigners do not feel with the people" they had conquered and had little instinctive sense as to the needs and wants of the subject population. It was therefore necessary to employ the best and brightest officials of the highest "capacity" who could most efficiently direct the labor of native intermediaries.¹⁵⁰ For India reformers, however, the issue was not one of resource management. Regardless of its bureaucratic acumen, the colonial state would be unable to improve "the mental, moral, and material condition of the people" so long as its agents exhibited an "utter want of sympathy" with the natives.¹⁵¹ Citing several notable officials, Bonnerjee concluded that the British remained "strangers in the land." Even the most learned Orientalists were "but partially acquainted with the thoughts of the many millions who are living under

¹⁴⁸ Norton, *The Rebellion in India*, 232. Norton also took issue with the colonial administration's attempts to muzzle the Anglo-Indian press. He suspected that the "Civilians who form the Government" were really behind Lord Canning's wartime Gagging Act and had used the Uprising as a pretext to curb press freedoms. See John Bruce Norton, *Topics for Indian Statesmen* (London: Richardson Brothers, 1858), 326.

¹⁴⁹ Bonnerjee, "Representative and Responsible Government for India," 165.

¹⁵⁰ Mill, *Considerations*, 331-32.

¹⁵¹ Bonnerjee, "Representative and Responsible Government for India," 162.

British rule.”¹⁵² This lack of understanding cut both ways. Indians were “like fish out of water” and did “not understand the instincts of their rulers” or grasp the rationale behind their policy decisions.

Early reformers like John Briggs had clung to the idea that the caste system imposed a “great gulf” between nations that could only be traversed through language study and tolerance for cultural dissimilarity. By the 1860s, it seemed that officials and civilians alike were increasingly unwilling to bridge this divide. J. M. Ludlow linked the decay of affective relations with the enhanced frequency and rapidity of communications between England and India, which had made the colonial bureaucrat “more and more a mere bird of passage.”¹⁵³ Still, this insight only partially explained why the native elite were being barred from government balls and turned away from local exhibitions. This shift towards exclusivity was perhaps the culmination of a long-running effort to “seal” colonial bodies against the environment, segregate European communities, and assert the “depersonalized authority” of the state.¹⁵⁴ But reformers were also alarmed that incoming Britons were continually re-enacting a fictionalized conquest of India and prolonging a state of occupation. G. W. Leitner, a noted Orientalist and founder of the Anjuman-i-Punjab, declaimed that the “youngest British official in India...treats every Native, of whatever rank, with whom he may come in contact as if he had personally conquered him.”¹⁵⁵ In his plea for the restoration of Mysore, journalist and historian Goldwin Smith also observed that colonial agents routinely exhibited an unremitting “pride of conquest”

¹⁵² Ibid., 168.

¹⁵³ John Malcolm Ludlow, *British India, its Races and its History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1858), 351.

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Collingham, *Imperial Bodies: The Physical Experience of the Raj, 1800-1947* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 141.

¹⁵⁵ Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, *The Personal Bearing of Europeans in India Towards the Natives* (London: Trübner and Co., 1874), 26.

that justified “the humiliation of the conquered.” Such antagonism would surely persist in Indian territories under direct rule, thereby normalizing a “social estrangement with which real political union cannot coexist.”¹⁵⁶

With his years of service at the Bombay High Court, Nowrozjee Furdoonjee was perfectly aware that the colonial legal system was not blind to racial distinctions. Speaking before the London branch of the National Indian Association in Aid of Social Progress – an organization that shared many members with the EIA – he explained how a pervasive “insolence of race over race” undermined the principles laid out in Victoria’s Proclamation. An anomalous allocation of judicial authority was largely to blame for the poorly balanced scales of justice. Legal cases involving European defendants did not fall under the jurisdiction of the local magistrate, but were referred to British judges on the High Courts in the presidency towns. These tribunals were hardly impartial. In one instance, a Mr. Bullock had fatally shot a native servant whom he accused of stealing brandy; he received a thirty-pound fine and a mere four month’s imprisonment. On another occasion, a European who shot an Indian toddy-collector in a tree claimed he had mistaken the man for a monkey.¹⁵⁷ Furdoonjee’s assertion that the law dealt lightly with white offenders was not an exaggeration. Indeed, the Indian Penal Code distinguished between murder and what Jordanna Bailkin terms “culpable homicide,” which carried a much lighter sentence. A defendant could be convicted of the latter offense if he was unduly provoked or committed a violent crime during the discharge of his official duties.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Goldwin Smith, “Mr. Goldwin Smith on the Annexation of Mysore,” in *Opinions of the Press on the Annexation of Mysore* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1866), 16.

¹⁵⁷ Furdoonjee, *The Personal Bearing of Europeans*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ Bailkin, 476.

Outside of the courts, Britons' belief in their racial superiority led them to condone forms of virtual slavery by "forcing men to work without pay or with insufficient pay." As Francis Carnac Brown had previously observed, personnel involved in administrative tours were often the worst offenders; aside from confiscating natives' livestock and supplies, they also forced village artisans to labor in the camps without remuneration. Furdoonjee took aim at officials like Mr. Gosling of the Great Trigonometrical Survey, who had actually "entered the houses of the villagers, and forced the women to spin cotton for his use."¹⁵⁹ Furdoonjee's willingness to name names defied convention and perhaps accounts for his speech's wide distribution. His retelling of one inflammatory incident, in which the collector of Khaira ordered a mass killing of stray dogs against the wishes of the local Hindu community, was picked up by the *Toronto Nation* and subsequently appeared in an anti-vivisection article in the *Canadian Monthly*.¹⁶⁰

Tracing the rise of this racial animus, Furdoonjee reflected upon the newfound ease with which middle and lower class Europeans accessed the Indian interior. His assessment confirmed the fears of the Select Committee on Colonization and Settlement (SCCS), which had convened in 1858 to discuss ways of facilitating large scale, non-official immigration into India. While advocates of white settlement and believers in boundless "Saxon energy" had put forth schemes for permanent military and agricultural colonies, the SCCS's report threw cold water on their enthusiasm. Its drafters concluded that Britons would only be able to maintain their peculiar racial prestige in India if this

¹⁵⁹ Furdoonjee, *The Personal Bearing of Europeans*, 12.

¹⁶⁰ "The Ethics of Vivisection," in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review*, vol. 12 (Toronto: Hart and Rawlinson, 1878). 74.

new wave of colonists hailed from the “respectable” and professional classes.¹⁶¹ What the committee did not seem to account for was a particularly insidious threat, one that had preoccupied eighteenth-century imperial critics like Burke and Diderot: distance from the civilizing influences of the metropole could trigger the moral degeneration of the colonizers themselves.¹⁶² Residing in London, Furdoonjee was alive to this concern and linked the lower-class settler’s rapacity with his total emancipation “from all the salutary restraints which are imposed upon him by the usages of this excellent and highly refined society and the influence of public opinion which prevail in this land of freedom.”¹⁶³

Furdoonejee’s desire to mobilize British public opinion as a counterweight against arbitrary and coercive governance was hardly novel. Indeed, the BIS and IRS had pursued this same goal throughout their respective periods of existence. The outstanding issue, as Thomas Macaulay noted in 1840, was that the “great actions of our countrymen in the East...excite little interest.”¹⁶⁴ Reformers incessantly lamented that Parliament failed to direct its attentions to Indian affairs apart from the charter renewal debates. Lord Monteaule, the ally of the BA, pithily remarked that the introduction of any Indian question served as the veritable “dinner bell” for both houses.¹⁶⁵ Discussions pertaining to the annual Indian budget were regularly shunted off to the end of the Commons session, at which point there were rarely more than forty members in attendance. It was a commonly held opinion that India was a bore and that “any parish dispute, or a licence for a beer-shop, attracts more attention in Parliament than a question affecting the vital

¹⁶¹ Satoshi Mizutani, *The Meaning of White: Class and the ‘Domiciled Community’ in British India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21.

¹⁶² Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 86.

¹⁶³ Furdoonjee, *The Personal Bearing of Europeans*, 18.

¹⁶⁴ Goodlad, 87-109.

¹⁶⁵ Norton, *The Rebellion in India*, 2.

interest of that large country.”¹⁶⁶ This impression was not inaccurate. In 1873, several key backers of the EIA-sponsored Indian Finance Committee had lost their parliamentary seats after Gladstone called for a snap election. Voters were lashing out against the Liberals’ unpopular licensing acts and clearly “cared more about keeping a beer-shop open for an additional half-hour than for the whole Indian Empire.”¹⁶⁷ E. B. Eastwick, the chairman of the Council of the EIA and – until recently – a Conservative MP for Penryn and Falmouth, suspected that he had lost his own seat due to his constituents’ mistaken belief that he was overly concerned with Indian issues.¹⁶⁸

Speaking before the EIA in 1872, Aborigines’ Protection Society secretary Frederick Chesson attributed Britons’ apparent disinterest in Indian governance to a lack of knowledge on the subject. With the exception of his father-in-law, George Thompson, who dwelt on colonial issues during his 1847 campaign, most politicians reasoned that India was just “too distant for its affairs to be studied or comprehended.”¹⁶⁹ Ironically, members of the Council of India who boasted the most personal experience with the region were prohibited from standing for election. The metropolitan papers, meanwhile, were embracing a sensationalist kind of yellow journalism and were content “to follow, instead of to lead, public opinion.”¹⁷⁰ It was a good bet that swashbuckling accounts of exploration in deepest, darkest Africa sold more copy than drier summaries of Indian finance debates. If politicians and newspapermen would not devote their attentions to

¹⁶⁶ “Response William Tayler,” in E. B. Eastwick, “The Representation of India in the Imperial Parliament,” *Journal of the East India Association* 2 (1868): 196.

¹⁶⁷ E. B. Eastwick, “India and England,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1875): 152. Smarting from this defeat, Gladstone concurred this his party had been “born down in a torrent of gin and beer.”

¹⁶⁸ Born in Bombay, Eastwick was a Professor of Oriental Languages at Haileybury during the 1840s; he left that position to take up a diplomatic appointment to Persia. From 1866-67, he served as private secretary for Lord Cranborne, the secretary of state for India.

¹⁶⁹ Frederick Chesson, “The Best Means of Educating English Opinion on Indian Affairs,” *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 179.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 182-84.

India, it fell to the civic associations to shoulder the burden. Mutual improvement societies, for instance, could study the history of British India rather than engaging in “unprofitable discussions about the character of May Queen of Scots, or the lawfulness of regicide.” Chesson also lavished praise on the Anglo-Oriental Society that had recently been established to promote “a free interchange of ideas” with the Indians and Japanese who were coming to London for their education. Some meeting attendees, however, doubted the efficacy of this venture, noting that a similar club had been set up in Calcutta in 1859 and had failed to diffuse racial tensions.¹⁷¹ For Thomas Evans Bell, this outcome was simply the result of the civil servant’s taxing routine; after being surrounded by native subordinates in his cutcherry all the day long, he naturally sought respite in the exclusive company of his countrymen. This was hardly proof, though, that an interracial club would necessarily fail in London as well.¹⁷²

While reformers affiliated with the EIA were devising ways to enlighten their low-information countrymen in the metropole, they were also committed to facilitating the expression of native public opinion. At the same time, they recognized that even the most-liberal minded civil servant would struggle to correctly grasp Indians’ wants and needs through casual encounters. Indians were sensitive to the “politics of racial prestige” and anticipated abuse; officials in the East were therefore surrounded by “a sort of sacred glare” that “dazzles, if it does not scare, those who approach them.”¹⁷³ The few times the government had attempted to glean Indian public opinion, the results had been less than

¹⁷¹ See also Benjamin B. Cohen, *In the Club: Associational Life in Colonial South Asia* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 10.

¹⁷² “Response of Evans Bell,” in Chesson, “The Best Means of Educating English Opinion on Indian Affairs,” 195.

¹⁷³ Eastwick, “India and England,” 141. Members of the Bombay Branch of the EIA confirmed that Indians refrained from sharing their feelings openly due to “an utter impatience on the part of the Sirkar’s representative to listen to an opposite view.” See Javerilal Umiashankar Yajnik, “Indian Bureaucracy: its Features or Secrecy in Officialism,” *Journal of the East India Association* 8 (1874): 54.

encouraging. In 1861, Bengal governor Peter Grant had famously commissioned the Anglican reverend James Long to translate the Bengali play *Nil Darpan*, which cast the European indigo planters in a rather unfavorable light. For his assistance, Long was brought before the court on the charge of libel and received a fine of 1000 rupees along with one month's imprisonment. As Chatterjee explains, the play itself was largely immaterial to the planters; its original author, Radhakanta Deb, was not even named in the suit. Rather, the disgruntled non-official community was seeking retribution against the government itself for giving excessive credence to native accounts and disturbing a racially coded hierarchy of knowledge.¹⁷⁴

Despite this blowback, certain high-ranking officials continued to express alarm that the colonial state was growing ever more estranged from the native population and suffering from recurrent information panics. In a lengthy presentation before the EIA, former Bombay governor Bartle Frere identified this aloofness as a security concern. Like the India reformers, he glorified officials like Malcolm, Munro, and Elphinstone who had acquired vernacular language skills and recognized the strategic advantage that came from an understanding of native mentalities. John Stuart Mill's implication that "a despotic government [had] no need of consulting public opinion" was not born out by historical evidence; indeed, Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh and Afghan emir Dost Mohamed had maintained their dominion by deftly feeling the pulse of the people.¹⁷⁵ Given that the colonial government was facing a two million pound deficit, Frere advised that it "take warning from the example of our own Charles I" before levying additional taxes without

¹⁷⁴ Chatterjee, 24.

¹⁷⁵ Bartle Frere, "The Means of Ascertaining Public Opinion in India," *Journal of the East India Association* 5 (1871): 116.

public consent.¹⁷⁶ The imposition of an income tax in 1869 and its subsequent increase had already bred much resentment in both the native and Anglo-Indian communities. Reflecting on the “indignation meetings” that were spreading from city to city, the *Englishman* newspaper predicted in 1870 that historians would one day credit this unpopular tax with “the formation of a genuine Public Opinion in India.”¹⁷⁷

Like the conservationist reformers, Frere lauded the ancient village councils and outlined a pyramidal scheme to integrate them into the colonial edifice. Though these bodies would retain a degree of elasticity in their local operations, they would now annually send two representatives to a new district council that exercised authority over the roads, schools, and police. These boards would then elect their own representatives to sit on the provincial councils; these bodies, in turn, would each manage the affairs of several million people and appoint members with full deliberative powers to the presidencies’ restored legislative councils. Frere was insistent that he was not seeking to introduce any new-fangled innovations with his village-district-province-presidency chain of connectivity. Rather, he was advocating for nothing more than “a development of the old Indian system of open durbars and open cutcherry.”¹⁷⁸ Representation here was not comparable to the domestic system of direct election that continued to perplex metropolitan elites after the passage of the Second Reform Act. Frere instead portrayed native society as a congeries of collectivities and sought to reserve a place at the proverbial table to all “castes, and trades, and professions.” Reacting to skepticism that Indians were not yet prepared for this level of political responsibility, Frere took aim at the conceptual pillars of causative liberalism. If native public opinion was in fact “an

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 107.

¹⁷⁷ Mehrotra, 260.

¹⁷⁸ Frere, 112-15.

uneducated one,” it was “so much the more dangerous for you to delay in learning all you can about it.”¹⁷⁹

While the speeches and reports of the EIA reflected the diversity of its membership, a growing intolerance for the “paternal despotism” of the colonial state was certainly evident from the early 1870s onwards. William Tayler, the former Commissioner of Patna, equated the present relations between Britain and India to those of a “rather rough and careless parent, and an unruly, sharp, but somewhat rickety boy.”¹⁸⁰ The child, however, had “learned to think, and with thought has learned to criticise his father’s actions and scrutinize his commands.” Reformers alternately described this education as a “weapon” or a “powerful instrument” that that Indians would understandably seek to make use of. If the government was to avoid becoming a target itself, it ought direct native energies towards salutary ends and increase Indian employment in its bureaucracy. Ever since 1833, various charter acts and proclamations had insisted that the service was open to all regardless of race. But under the old patronage system, the Court of Directors had even denied the adopted son of Rammohun Roy a writership. The introduction of competitive exams in 1853 did little to stimulate native participation; the fact that Indians were required to take the civil service tests in London severely limited the pool of applicants. The reduction of the maximum age of testing to 19 and the abolition of state-scholarships in the 1870s reduced Indians’ opportunities even further.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁸⁰ “Response of W. Tayler,” in Frere, “The Means of Ascertaining Public Opinion in India,” 119.

¹⁸¹ J. M. Compton, “Indians and the Indian Civil Service, 1853-1879: a Study in National Agitation and Imperial Embarrassment,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 3 (1967): 107.

Dadabhai Naoroji had forcefully attempted to remove these disabilities in the early days of the EIA, as he had acted as a sort of guardian for upwards of twenty Indian students in London over the course of twelve years. At his insistence, the EIA drafted a memorial urging Secretary of State Northcote to adopt “the liberal policy that was pursued by men like Akbar, availing themselves of Hindu talent and assistance, and identifying themselves as far as possible with the people of the country.”¹⁸² The Association’s proposal for two tests to be held successively in India and Britain was effectively a compromise with skeptics in the organization who believed that Indians had demonstrated “great receptive power,” but had “not shown the love of learning and independence of thought that it was expected the universities would develop.”¹⁸³ Northcote was receptive to the deputation’s concerns and shortly thereafter admitted before Parliament that the colonial government had largely shirked its past “promises and engagements” relating to native employment in the covenanted service.¹⁸⁴ The most recent scheme to provide nine scholarships for elite Indians to relocate to London and compete in the exams was wholly insufficient. Northcote therefore included a clause in his bill that granted the Viceroy significant leeway to alter the system of qualification for government service. Three years, the EIA was lamenting that the Government of India’s unwillingness to take any action had rendered Northcote’s legislation a “dead-letter” law.

Although reformers by and large denounced the “official Calvinism which predestines the Orientals to a fate not reserved for the elect,” there was some speculation

¹⁸² Dadabhai Naoroji, “The Indian Civil Service,” *Journal of the East India Association* 1 (1867): 253. In the spring of 1868, the recently rejuvenated Bombay Association drew up a petition that favored Naoroji’s scheme and amassed approximately 5,000 signatures. See Masselos, 65.

¹⁸³ “Deputation to the Secretary of State for India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 1 (1867): 256.

¹⁸⁴ “Annual Meeting: Appendix A,” *Journal of the East India Association* 8 (1874): 167-68. “Covenanted” refers to the approximately 1,000 elite civil servants who had “signed the ‘covenant’ of faithful service.” See Darwin, 187

that Indian civil servants would become a socially deracinated class incapable of either shaping or articulating native public opinion.¹⁸⁵ In his various publications, Thomas Evans Bell disparaged the notion that “the great places must be allotted to British officials because they belong to the dominant race” and fallaciously claimed “some alleged superiority, inherent or acquired.”¹⁸⁶ In fact, he went so far as to proclaim that “a native should always be preferred to a European” when it came to filling administrative positions.¹⁸⁷ He therefore took issue with the establishment of the new Forest Conservancy Department, which principally recruited “pupils trained in Europe at the expense of India,” as well the Royal Indian Engineering College at Cooper’s Hill in Egham, which had already consumed 120,000 pounds out of the Indian revenue.¹⁸⁸

But Bell, being a chief proponent of indirect rule, was also adamantly opposed to the further expansion of the colonial state’s already vast and cumbersome administrative machine. Dependent on “foreign imported agency and foreign imported material,” the colonial bureaucracy was an artificial contrivance that amounted to “little more than a show.”¹⁸⁹ Bell therefore worried that low-ranking, western-educated natives were similarly unsuited to their environment; as cultural hybrids, they had “loosened their root in the soil, and [had] become parasites planted in our hot-houses.” Certainly they would never command the respect from the native community that princes, chiefs, and brahmins continued to enjoy. The notion that the erudite Parsis and Bengalis might be granted

¹⁸⁵ Chesson, “The Best Means of Educating English Opinion on Indian Affairs,” 181.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Evans Bell, “Is India a Conquered Country? and If so, What then?” *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (July, 1870): 208.

¹⁸⁷ Thomas Evans Bell, *The Empire in India: Letters from Madras and other Places* (London: Trübner and Co., 1864), 408.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Evans Bell, “Trust as the Basis of Imperial Policy,” *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 149. Before his death, the cost-cutting Lord Mayo also questioned the necessity of the Cooper’s Hill scheme.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas Evans Bell, “*Our Great Vassal Empire*” (London: Trübner & Co., 1870), 43-49.

authority over districts heavily populated by the martial Mahrattas, Sikhs, and Rajpoots was also disconcerting.¹⁹⁰ With this ambiguous portrayal of the covenanted Indian bureaucrat as the lesser of two evils, Bell had approached the limits of reflexive liberalism and was facing an ideological conundrum. For decades, conservationist reformers had been insisting that India's indigenous political institutions could function perfectly well with slight modulation. But the restoration of Mysore had put embattled reformers on the offensive – a thoroughly unfamiliar position indeed. Both Naoroji and Bell were adamant that additional political power should now be placed in Indian hands, but they could not agree as to whether the colonial administration or the native states should take the lead.

By the 1870s, it was clear to many reformers that an imperial civil society would struggle to deter despotism so long as the government turned a deaf ear to English and native public opinion. Still, associational agitation was necessary for the foreseeable future. In 1875, Eastwick applauded the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha's recent monster petition and called for an additional "1,000 petitions, by Europeans as well as Indians, and signed not by 20,000 persons only, but by twenty hundred thousand, by twenty million, if necessary."¹⁹¹ And yet, the formation of modular political societies was no longer seen as an end in itself, as it had been in the days of Thompson and Chapman. After the transition to direct rule, securing Indians' access to governmental power was the presiding issue; the anomaly that India – unlike the settler colonies – lacked both a local parliament and a voice in the House of Commons was more keenly felt. Even Eastwick, a former Conservative MP, conceded that India would "have no representation worthy of

¹⁹⁰ At the same time, Bell found the government's decision to bar the Bengalis from forming a Volunteer battalion to be wholly inexplicable. See Bell, "Trust as the Basis of Imperial Policy," 151.

¹⁹¹ Eastwick, "India and England," 152.

the name” unless she had “representatives of her own in Parliament.” Addressing this political exclusion would strain the integrity of the EIA and expose cleavages between its radical, reformist members and establishment personnel who were wary of precipitant change.

— Epilogue —

“Parliament, the great *Punchayat* of the empire”¹

In a speech delivered before the House of Commons in 1833, Whig politician Thomas Babington Macaulay famously observed that the East India Company was “the strangest of all governments” and “designed for the strangest of all empires.”² The Company’s rise to power had not proceeded along any rational trajectory; the colonial state itself was a perfect anomaly that resembled “no other in history.” This ad-hoc development frustrated policymakers, for whom the “destines of our Indian Empire [were] covered with a thick darkness.” Despite this opacity, Macaulay reckoned that there was “universal acknowledgment” by eminent authorities like James Mill that the British could not simply replicate the representative political institutions that facilitated good and ethical governance in Europe. Rather, it was incumbent upon the colonizers to “engraft on despotism those blessings which are the natural fruit of liberty” by devising a code of laws for India, ridding it of religious tyranny, and gradually opening up the government service to native employ. Despite its occasional defects, the Company’s necessarily despotic system of rule was a fairly excellent one compared to historical instances of absolutist governance elsewhere. Points of contention were sure to arise, as no nation could “be perfectly well governed till it is competent to govern itself.”³ In keeping with the fundamental conceit of causative liberalism, Macaulay left this timeline ambiguous; by the late 1860s, however, India reformers had grown weary of the delay. Excerpting

¹ Ittodus Prichard, “The Representation of India in Parliament,” *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 13.

² Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Government of India,” in *The Works of Lord Macaulay*, vol. 8, ed. Lady Trevelyan (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1873), 120-22.

³ *Ibid.*, 129.

Macaulay in their speeches, they charged the colonial regime with the “non-fulfillment of solemn promises” and began to stake out a claim for native political representation.⁴

The publication of John Stuart Mill’s *Considerations on Representative Government* in 1861, which followed the appearance of his collected essays in 1859, prompted reformers to weigh the question of representation anew. As these texts reflected Mill’s evolving views across a wide span of time, they were susceptible to contrary readings. Speaking at one of the EIA’s first meetings, W. C. Bonnerjee drew upon a fairly radical article that Mill had submitted to the *London Review* in 1835. While this piece reflected Mill’s early interest in a governmental clerisy, it also featured prominent Lockean overtones. Any “governing class not accountable to the people,” Mill posited, was bound to “sacrifice the people to the pursuit of separate interests and inclinations.”⁵ Even the most benevolent expert administrators were unable to escape their *habitus*; their “noblest acts of patriotism” did not benefit the nation at large, but rather served “the interests of their class.” Mill therefore classified the bureaucratic elite as servants who should be selected on account of their particular skills – the ultimate sanction of the government lay with the people. But applying these Lockean precepts to the colonial situation presented obvious hurdles. In *Considerations*, Mill was adamant that a state composed of different nationalities would remain perennially unripe for free institutions. Ensnared in distinct cultural and intellectual environments, these communities would be

⁴ Dadabhai Naoroji, “The Poverty of India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1876): 375.

⁵ “Appendix,” in John Stuart Mill, *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical*, vol. 1 (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1859), 471.

unable to overcome “their mutual antipathies” and operate as a counterweight to the government.⁶

Rebutting Mill on logical and historicist grounds, Bonnerjee challenged the doctrine “that all nations are not made for representative government.”⁷ Ripeness for such institutions was in the eye of the beholder. Recent domestic opposition to the Second Reform Bill suggested that the British nation was not fully prepared for universal household suffrage, but this measure had nonetheless passed into law. While Mill was awaiting the formation of a homogenous public opinion, Bonnerjee rejected this pursuit as futile: there was simply “no country where there is one unanimous feeling among the people on any one subject.” India had its fair share of religious divisions, but its inhabitants were free agents and not the absolute slaves of their priests or chiefs. If there was any demographic that was enflaming religious tensions and rigidifying communal boundaries, it was surely the British missionaries.

Citing Henry Maine, the eminent jurist and Legal Member of the Viceroy’s Council, Bonnerjee also emphasized India’s rich history of local self-government through its *panchayats*, or village councils, which also served as extra-governmental courts of arbitration.⁸ Over the last half century, the colonial state had intermittently attempted to integrate these judicial forums into its bureaucratic apparatus with limited success. Some native critics resented the fact that the headmen positions had become hereditary and that the council wielded near autocratic control over the local police. Despite these occasional protests against “unaccountable social hierarchies” in the villages, proto-nationalist

⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 2nd ed. (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), 296.

⁷ W. C. Bonnerjee, “Representative and Responsible Government for India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 1, no. 1 (1867): 170-73.

⁸ *Ibid*, 171.

commentators latched onto the *panchayats* as “part of a package of liberal ideas that could be situated historically to argue for past, and future, liberties.”⁹ Articles in *Native Opinion*, a paper founded by a prominent member of the Bombay Association, lauded the existence “in every city and every village [of] a sort of self-government to which the Western boroughs and free cities are merely children of yesterday.”¹⁰ Bonnerjee, however, was not content to merely establish Indians’ political capacities. Before the EIA, he proposed establishing a dual representative assembly and senate in India that would possess veto power over the executive.¹¹ Only the Crown – which incidentally retained control over the military – would be able to overrule this constitutionalist body.

Like Bonnerjee, other members of the EIA expressed discomfiture with Mill’s approbation of despotism, the very name of which was “so odious to Englishmen.”¹² E. B. Eastwick, the former secretary to arch-Tory Lord Cranborne, implied that Mill had gone too far in representing “the state of Oriental nations generally with reference to free institutions, as in some respects less hopeful than that of the rudest tribes.”¹³ At the same time, he averred that Bonnerjee was off the mark with his boundary-pushing demand for an American-style political system. Revisiting the same texts that Bonnerjee had cited, Eastwick noted two key issues that brought the feasibility of an Indian parliament into question. Representative governance, he argued, could not be established through half-measures; granting the Crown ultimate veto powers would render the whole scheme a farce and breed further dissension. But Eastwick also employed a sociological argument

⁹ Leigh Denault, “Little Republics or Petty Republics? The Panchayat, Imperial Sovereignty, and Discourses of Self-Government in British India, ca. 1870-1917,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 38, no. 3 (2018): 408.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹¹ Bonnerjee, 176.

¹² E. B. Eastwick, “The Representation of India in the Imperial Parliament,” *Journal of the East India Association* 2 (1868): 172.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 176.

to substantiate his views. Linguistic evidence suggested that the Hindus and inhabitants of the present-day Balkans had been “one nation in pre-historic terms.”¹⁴ The villages in these regions shared a common trait: to quote Maine, each was “at once an organized patriarchal society and an assemblage of co-proprietors.” And yet, Eastwick argued that these communities “in the remotest regions and under the most varying circumstances, [have] never given birth to representative government.” In fact, Mill supposed their attachment to locality to be disqualifying, as “strong prejudices of any kind” would impede the smooth functioning of a representative system. This question of whether the village *panchayats*, as a common feature of Aryan civilization, were properly representative or not would remain a topic of heated debate within EIA circles.¹⁵

Rather than advocating for the immediate introduction of representative institutions and effectively “handing the keys of [Britain’s] Eastern house to the Indian Parliament,” Eastwick identified alternative modes of political union with the Raj.¹⁶ In so doing, he was tapping into a burgeoning debate on the prospect of a “Greater Britain” and the allocation of resources between the metropolitan state and the largely self-governing Crown colonies. Mill was wary of any grand system of imperial delegation, lest Britain be unceremoniously reduced to a “single member of an American, African and Australian confederation.”¹⁷ For Eastwick, however, these questions of precedence were overshadowing a more pressing issue: taxation without representation. At present, India was obligated to send troops to fight in foreign wars despite the fact that the country had

¹⁴ Ibid., 178.

¹⁵ Prichard, “The Representation of India in Parliament,” 12-13.

¹⁶ Eastwick, “The Representation of India,” 181.

¹⁷ Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, 325.

“no voice as to the disposal of her vast revenues.”¹⁸ In the past, EIA reformers had objected to the government’s misappropriation of these funds, noting that the public expenditure had increased by nearly twenty million pounds since the transition to direct rule. Prominent members like Badruddin Tyabji, the first Indian barrister to the High Court of Bombay, found it “somewhat monstrous that the Sultan of Turkey was entertained in London on the Indian revenues.”¹⁹ Reformers also fulminated against the use of Indian troops in foreign theaters of war like China, Ethiopia, Malaya, and Egypt – the results of which had little bearing on the defense of the subcontinent. Naoroji was particularly adamant that India should not foot the bill to maintain British prestige. It was the duty of the secretary of state to closely the guard India’s “trust-money” rather than effusively relinquishing it to rapacious Cabinet ministers.²⁰

For Eastwick, there were multiple ways of correcting this particularly unseemly anomaly that reduced India to the unenviable position of pre-revolutionary America. Bodies of twenty thousand electors (12,000 native and 8,000 British) could be set up in each presidency town and return one MP apiece to the House of Commons.²¹ If the French States General had been admitting deputies from Santo Domingo since 1789, surely Britain could rise to the occasion. In the age of the telegraph, moreover, any fear of a debilitating estrangement between these delegates and their constituencies was outmoded. Additionally, Eastwick suggested that the metropolitan Council of India could be expanded to include at least five Indian members, with one rotating delegate chosen annually by a major native prince. Seven years later, Eastwick once more trumpeted

¹⁸ Eastwick, “The Representation of India,” 188.

¹⁹ “Response of Badruddin Tyabji,” in Bonnerjee, “Representative and Responsible Government for India,” 190.

²⁰ Dadabhai Naoroji, “Expenses of the Abyssinian War,” *Journal of the East India Association* 2 (1868): 51

²¹ Eastwick, “The Representation of India,” 188-191.

parliamentary representation as a means of integrating India within an imperial confederation. This proposition, he emphasized, was hardly radical; it was none other than Adam Smith who had determined that “the Assembly which deliberates and decides concerning the affairs of every part of the Empire...ought certainly to have representatives from every part of it.”²² Drawing attention again to European precedents, Eastwick and other reformers noted that French India – totaling a scant 188 square miles of territory – dispatched agents to the metropole while the much larger British presidencies were deprived of any means of redress.

Despite their relative moderation, Eastwick’s proposals exposed cleavages within the EIA relating to longstanding ambiguities over its proper sphere of action. In February 1874, a subcommittee of the Association helmed by luminaries like Eastwick, Furdoonjee, and John Dickinson drew up a petition that decried the “constitutional anomaly” that denied Indians “the right to representation where representation is possible.”²³ Addressing this exclusion would effectively weld India “to Great Britain, so as to form one homogenous State.” In preparing this document, Dickinson had solicited opinions from Bombay by telegraph; his informants responded that they wished to be represented in Parliament by educated natives hailing from their city and Calcutta. But other EIA personnel were reluctant to “proceed further in the matter,” which they considered “a revolutionary measure.” William Tayler questioned the utility of endorsing such “utopian” schemes and advised the EIA to refrain from presenting memorials unless there was either “a very strong pressure from India – or reasonable ground for expectation that the relief or reform asked for will be granted.” This preoccupation with

²² E. B. Eastwick, “India and England,” *Journal of the East India Association* 9 (1875): 151.

²³ *East India Association Minute Book*, 1873, no. 2, BL, Papers of the Royal Society for India, Pakistan and Ceylon and its Antecedent Organizations, Mss Eur F147/27, ff. 34-40.

pragmatism was typical of Tayler, who had previously attempted to dissuade the EIA from entering “into the wild regions of speculation”²⁴ and had hoped for the admittance of “more English gentlemen” to Parliament “who are acquainted with the affairs of India.”²⁵

Although Tayler’s cautions seem to have temporarily tabled the matter, Furdoonjee soon after received a memorial from the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (PSS) pertaining to the issue of direct representation and encouraged the secretary of the EIA to distribute it widely.²⁶ Signed by over 20,000 inhabitants of the Deccan, this document noted the irony that Britain, as “the cradle of liberty,” barred Indian delegates from its parliament while the rather more despotic powers on the Continent readily admitted colonial representatives. Employing its own rhetoric of virtual slavery, the PSS observed that the freed American slaves had been afforded “the full privilege of citizenship” after the Civil War with felicitous results. Indians simply wished to partake in an equivalent “experiment of liberty” and transform their “mere conquered dependency into a component part of the great British Empire.” Furdoonjee was also hopeful that Henry Fawcett, the much-acclaimed “Member for India,” would present this petition to the Commons, but Fawcett declined on account of its provocative nature. Upon his return to India, Furdoonjee continued to use Fawcett as a channel through which to circulate the memorials of aggrieved native groups. In the event that Fawcett dissented, as he did when

²⁴ “Response of William Tayler,” in Frederick Chesson, “The Best Means of Educating English Opinion on Indian Affairs,” *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 193.

²⁵ “Response of William Tayler,” in Prichard, “The Representation of India in Parliament,” 20.

²⁶ The petition also called for an end to arbitrary revenue enhancements and the use of forced labor in western India – an issue that Furdoonjee had previously popularized. See *East India Association Minute Book*, 1873, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, ff. 77-80.

a group of Bombay landholders challenged the provisions of the recent Forest Act, he would simply transmit the materials to the Council of the EIA for further deliberation.²⁷

The Network Unravels

In the early days of the Association, Naoroji had made it clear that the organization would be to a large extent financially reliant on contributions from the local branches and affiliated societies in India. By 1872, however, its fiscal prospects were already looking dim.²⁸ To raise additional funds and gather data for the select committee on East Indian Finance, Naoroji embarked on an expansive tour of western India. His hobnobbing with prominent princes and petty chieftains yielded dividends, as the Rao of Cutch and Maharaja Holkar of Indore contributed 50,000 and 25,000 rupees each. These sums were deposited in Indian banks, with members of the EIA serving as trustees; the Association thereafter received annual interest payments from these accounts.²⁹ Although Naoroji's windfall provided some relief for the EIA, this type of funding stream was highly irregular. When Eastwick conducted his own tour in 1875, he discovered that the coffers had run dry; the Prince of Wales' upcoming visit to India had already put the

²⁷ *East India Association Minute Book*, 1879, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 318.

²⁸ In 1873, the EIA appointed a subcommittee to inquire into bookkeeping irregularities; it determined that the proceeds from a number of life memberships had not been invested. Concerns were also raised that the Council was providing its secretary, W. C. Palmer, with both an annual honorarium and a travelling allowance – this expenditure exceeded budgetary allotments by four hundred pounds. See *East India Association Minute Book*, 1881, no. 3, BL, Mss Eur F147/28, f. 67.

²⁹ This investment system was ultimately the source of many headaches, as the EIA routinely misplaced its trust-deeds and struggled to legally exert its claims to the money when the appointed trustees died. See K. T. Telang to Mr. Burn, December 23, 1884, *Financial Correspondence, Bombay Branch, East India Association*, BL, Mss Eur F147/41; *Correspondence and Related Material Concerning the Donation Made to the East India Association by H. H. Maharaja Holkar of Indore in 1872*, 1899, BL, Mss Eur F147/42.

princes to much expense.³⁰ Two years later, he once more failed to solicit donations from native rulers who were sponsoring the Imperial Assemblage at Delhi.

Princely donations came with a catch, as they exposed the reformers to charges of mercenary opportunism.³¹ In 1873, Naoroji felt compelled to clarify that “there was absolutely no condition, no promise, no hope held out that the donors should have any personal interest or benefit from the efforts made by the Association in England.”³² Emphasizing his own propriety, he recounted his attempt to solicit funds from the embattled Gaekwar of Baroda. Although the gaekwar had decline to contribute, he soon after enlisted Naoroji’s assistance in resolving certain “private affairs”; Naoroji received 50,000 rupees in compensation, which he reserved for the upkeep of his children. Authorities in Bombay and England misinterpreted this transaction and presumed that Naoroji had taken up an agency on the gaekwar’s behalf. These insinuations were galling to Naoroji, who had taken great pains to situate the EIA as a non-partisan resource of the colonial state. Yet officials remained skeptical of its motivations. Whenever members of the EIA or its Bombay branch (BBEIA) convened public meetings in India, the government was likely to denounce them as paid agitators and defame their organizations as “seditious and disaffected bodies.”³³ Speaking in Bombay in 1875, Iltudus Prichard identified this paranoia as a “purely Anglo-Indian” affliction that “could only enter the

³⁰ *East India Association Minute Book*, 1876, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 171.

³¹ The bugbear of “private litigation” continued to perplex reformers into the 1890s. Representing the INC though his work on its Indian Political and General Agency, William Digby pressured MP Charles Bradlaugh to present native petitions calling for the restoration of the Maharaja of Kashmir. Embarrassment ensued after official papers revealing the extent of misgovernment in the state came to light. For an overview of this affair, see Nicholas Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33-35.

³² “Annual Meeting,” *Journal of the East India Association* 7 (1873): 122-23.

³³ Iltudus Prichard, “The Right of India to Representation in Government, the Work of the East India Association, the Duty of Indian Political Associations, and their Relation toward the Government,” *Journal of the East India Association* 7 (1873): 189.

minds of men who live in a charmed circle, out of which they never venture to mingle with the outside world.” BBEIA members like Javerilal Umiashankar Yajnik – a journalist and frequent critic of colonial taxation schemes – concurred that the Indian Civil Service (ICS) suffered from an “incurable optimism” that led them to disregard any outside objections to their policies.³⁴

Looming penury eroded the connection between the EIA and the BBEIA that was fundamental to reformist conceptualizations of an imperial civil society. As early as 1874, the BBEIA was beginning to receive complaints from its life members in Kathiawar, who alleged that the EIA’s journal was not being translated in Gujarati (as Naoroji had promised).³⁵ Several years later, Naoroji himself complained that members of the BBEIA were no longer receiving the copies of the journal to which they were entitled. By 1881, he was lamenting that the EIA was forced to abstain from printing pamphlets on subjects of discussion at its meetings. Raising public awareness of Indian affairs, which was “the very *raison d’etre* of the institution,” had “been sacrificed to the necessities of their financial position.”³⁶ The EIA’s attempts to reduce printing costs by omitting overviews of BBEIA meetings from its publication further incensed Naoroji, as they gave the impression that the EIA was purposefully refusing to identify itself with the proposals that the BBEIA put forward.

It was the fallout from the Ilbert Bill, however, that exposed the burgeoning rift between the parent and branch organizations. Naoroji was adamant that the Council of the EIA should publish the proceedings of a public meeting at Bombay that had produced

³⁴ Javerilal Umiashankar Yajnik, “Bureaucracy: its Features or Secrecy in Officialism, *Journal of the East India Association* 8 (1874): 63.

³⁵ *East India Association Minute Book*, 1874, no. 2, BL, Mss Eur F147/27, f. 84.

³⁶ *East India Association Minute Book*, 1881, no. 3, BL, Mss Eur F147/28, f. 60.

a memorial to the Queen requesting an extension of Viceroy Ripon's term of office. But the Council, which was largely dominated by retired ICS personnel at this point, refused to do so. The EIA's aversion to broaching any sensitive issues put Naoroji in awkward position. Fundraising abroad, he was frequently approached by Indians who questioned whether the EIA would take the side of the natives or the Anglo-Indians in cases where the groups' interests were opposed.³⁷ Others complained that the Association was "doing no practical good toward the advancement of the just rights and claims of India," as native perspectives were insufficiently "studied, considered, and acted upon" in the metropole. Naoroji therefore acknowledged that the "connection and contribution of natives must cease" if the EIA continued its descent into complacency.

To assert the respectability of their organization and implicitly distinguish it from earlier antagonistic pressure groups like the BIS and IRS, Naoroji and the managing council of the EIA had initially cozied up to establishment interests. The Liberal politician Lord Lyveden, who was selected as the organization's first president, had served on the Board of Control during the Uprising and remained active in the House of Lords. Years later, Eastwick declared that the Association would "not have been able to go on so successfully" had it not been for Lyveden's influential support.³⁸ Encouraging the participation of colonial officials, however, could be counterproductive and even detrimental to the Association's goals. In 1871, one meeting attendee challenged Bartle Frere's scheme to bring the Indian village councils into closer connection with the colonial apparatus: rural natives, he claimed, were insufficiently educated or prepared to

³⁷ Dadabhai Naoroji to Mr. Burn, October 23, 1884 and December 11, 1885, *Financial Correspondence, Bombay Branch, East India Association*, BL, Mss Eur F147/41.

³⁸ "Annual Meeting," *Journal of the East India Association* 6 (1872): 237.

oversee municipal governance and taxation.³⁹ This naysayer was none other than Mourdant Wells, the judge in the *Nil Darpan* case who had pressured the jury to find Reverend James Long guilty of libel a decade earlier.⁴⁰ When Wells retired in 1863, numerous Indian publications welcomed his departure; the *Indian Field* denounced him as “the bitterest calumniator of his race and the staunchest supporter of unequal laws and race prejudice.”⁴¹ Even in retirement, Wells struggled to shake this reputation for bigotry. In his 1874 pamphlet on the *Personal Bearing of Europeans*, Furdoonjee called him out by name for having “denounced the Natives of India as a nation of liars, perjurers, and cheats, incapable of telling the truth.”⁴²

Members of the BBEIA grew increasingly concerned that officials like Wells, who truly embodied a “rule of colonial difference,” were swamping the EIA. In 1881, Naoroji reported from Bombay that the appointment of Richard Temple to the position of EIA president “had produced a bad effect here,” for Indians “feared the Association would then sink into an India office organ.”⁴³ This concern was warranted, given Temple’s role in designing the opprobrious 1870 income tax and his draconian implementation of limited famine relief in 1877. But rather than shilling for the Indian government, Temple turned out to be a non-entity, rarely attending deputations or contributing papers. Still, the EIA refused to take a firm stance on the nascent Indian nationalist movement throughout the 1880s; it would only accept papers on the subject

³⁹ “Response of Mourdant Wells,” in Bartle Frere, “The Means of Ascertaining Public Opinion in India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 5 (1871): 148.

⁴⁰ Wells apparently believed that Reverend Long “should have torn the address presented to him by the Native community into pieces and thrown them to the winds.” See “From the *Ryot’s Friend*, 29th July, 1863,” in *Sir Mourdant Wells and Public Opinion in India* (Calcutta: C. H. Manuel, 1863), 15.

⁴¹ “From the *Indian Field*, 2nd August, 1863,” in *Sir Mourdant Wells and Public Opinion*, 10.

⁴² Nowrozjee Furdoonjee, *The Personal Bearing of Europeans in India Towards the Natives* (London: Trübner and Co., 1874), 4.

⁴³ Dadabhai Naoroji to W. C. Palmer, December 1881, in *East India Association Minute Book*, 1881, no. 3, BL, Mss Eur F147/28, f. 74.

for publication so long as they omitted “any passages committing the Association to any particular action.”⁴⁴ Amidst this fence-sitting, the BBEIA declined precipitously, numbering only 33 subscribing members in 1894. Naoroji, meanwhile, had turned his sights to acquiring a parliamentary seat and was eventually elected the Liberal MP for Central Finsbury in 1892 after an initial defeat six years prior. Both of these efforts proved invidious and revealed festering racial tensions within metropolitan political society. Lord Salisbury (formerly Cranborne), who had previously served as a vice-president of the EIA, infamously doubted whether *any* constituency was prepared to elect a “black man” to Parliament. In 1892, retired colonial official Lepel Griffin proclaimed that Naoroji had only one qualification for the office he was seeking: a superficial “gift of fluency common to all Orientals.”⁴⁵ Two years later, Griffin became president of the EIA. When the managing council shortly thereafter offered Naoroji a position as a vice-president, he understandably declined.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Focusing on the reformers’ cognitive investment in reflexive liberal imperialism demonstrates the limits of the classic, triadic conceptualization of liberalism (free trade, Evangelicalism, and Utilitarianism) that scholars like Stokes, Metcalf, and Mantena have routinely favored. The reformers under examination affirmed the value of an “empire of opinion” that drew its strength from the consent of the colonized. By rejecting coercive governance and addressing the anomalies that privileged British interests and supported a

⁴⁴ *East India Association Minute Book*, March 7, 1889, no. 4, BL, Mss Eur F147/29, f. 22.

⁴⁵ Antoinette Burton, “Tongues United: Lord Salisbury’s ‘Black Man’ and the Boundaries of Imperial Democracy,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 3 (2000): 648.

⁴⁶ *East India Association Minute Book*, 1895, no. 4, BL, Mss Eur F147/29, f. 126.

rule of colonial difference, they aimed to establish an enduring Indo-British political union. Achieving this irenic outcome required them to expose the inconsistencies within the causative liberal thought of Macaulay and the Mills. Reprobating the colonial state's centralization of political power and its penchant for annexation, reformers sought to safeguard the integrity of the (idealized) village communities and princely states alike. In violating the treaties it had brokered, or at least interpreting them in an inequitable fashion, the government was undermining native confidence in the rule of the law that it purportedly sought to impose.

Reformers also recognized that bureaucratic secrecy and obfuscation bred autocracy. Without a thorough knowledge of India and its governing structures, the British public could not help but be apathetic about its future. By elucidating the various forms of virtual slavery suffered by *ryots* and princes alike, reformers hoped to provoke public indignation. Stoking investors' interest in Indian public works offered another strategy of drawing their attention to colonial affairs. If the British were to secure Indians' consent for their lingering presence, they would need to exceed the accomplishments of past rulers rather than allowing the extant infrastructure to further collapse. But reformers' attempts to form an imperial civil society through inter-associational linkages were repeatedly frustrated, as governmental authorities dismissed their testimonies, accused them of sordid motives, and demonstrated a general unwillingness to facilitate the expression of public opinion on Indian issues.

Mantena is quite right to assert that the rise of indirect rule in the 1870s – which owed much to Henry Maine's culturalist and historicist sociology – was a “reaction to,

and critique of, liberal models of empire.”⁴⁷ Like the reformers, Maine himself was “both a defender and prominent critic” of liberalism. He believed that the introduction of a western-style legal system was unsettling customary norms, while the Anglicizing “civilizing mission” had bred a culture of competition and corrupted the natives’ character. Observing these deleterious effects of over-hasty modernization, he positioned India’s “traditional societies [as] inherently fragile” entities that paradoxically required governmental protection.⁴⁸ But whereas Maine conceptualized traditional society as inherently “apolitical,” reformers attempted to reinforce existing political institutions to provide a foundation for an enduring imperial union. Allowing Indians to fully participate in local self-government, helm the protected princely states, and perhaps even debate in the House of Commons would foster an uplifting spirit of virtuous civic republicanism.

Conservationism did not entail stasis, but rather reflected a concern for India’s natural political evolution. John Malcolm Ludlow, for instance, was convinced that constitutionalist, representative governance could be introduced throughout the subcontinent without causing any dislocation. During the heyday of the Satara agitation in the 1840s, MP Joseph Hume had provided *vakeel* Rungo Bapojee with access to the foreign ministers’ gallery in the House of Commons. Bapojee had taken a shine to this system of spirited debate and exhibited an interest in erecting a parliament in Satara if and when the raja was restored to power. With this anecdote, Ludlow positioned Bapojee as a stand-in for the native population at large; he had little formal education and “kept his caste to the last,” but was still aware of the manifold advantages of political

⁴⁷ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 180-81.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 165.

representation.⁴⁹ Other reformers like Thomas Evans Bell, who was wary of representative government in India proper, nevertheless affirmed that natives were “British subjects” entitled to “all those privileges which are ours by birthright, and as citizens of the Empire.”⁵⁰ To his mind, expanding opportunities for talented natives in the princely administrations could engender India’s uplift without the need for foreign, cumbersome systems that had arisen under the “Civilian Raj.”

In a sense, the story of reformist agitation is both tragic and ironic. The “liberal disappointment” that officials like Maine experienced in the latter half of the century was the product of Indians’ “political rebellion and resistance.”⁵¹ For reformers, however, the Uprising – and the forensic analysis of colonial rule that followed it – justified their enduring opposition to any invasive civilizing mission. When Prichard accepted his chairmanship of the London branch of the National Association in Aid of Social Progress in India in 1870, he specified the proper manner in which the organization should go about pursuing its objective. It was essential that “all English efforts after social progress in India should be distinctly confined to aiding as opposed to initiating any movement.”⁵² In sponsoring female education, the Association ought avoid adopting a savior complex; Indian women did not require liberation from their culture and were “certainly not the nonentities that they are generally represented to be by Western writers.” Recognizing that many Indians linked conversion with social ostracism, Prichard declared that the “objects and purposes” of the Association must be “as purely secular as those of the

⁴⁹ “Response of J. M. Ludlow,” in Bartle Frere, “The Means of Ascertaining Public Opinion in India,” *Journal of the East India Association* 5 (1871): 165.

⁵⁰ Thomas Evans Bell, “Is India a Conquered Country? and If so, What then?” *Journal of the East India Association* 4 (July, 1870): 208.

⁵¹ Mantena, 186.

⁵² Iltudus T. Prichard, *The Inaugural Lecture of the London Association in Aid of Social Progress in India* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1871), 13.

Statistical Society or the Geographical Society.”⁵³ Whereas the advocates of causative liberalism were willing to suspend the recognition of individuals’ rights until they had reached a certain level of civilization, Prichard positioned Indians as free agents capable of rationally pursuing their self-betterment.

Conservationism also won over agitators on the far fringes of reform networks like the inimitable Scot, Agnes Craig. From the early 1860s to the 1880s, Frederick Chesson sent free tracts and pamphlets to Craig, who made her thoughts on current colonial issues readily known. Apart from her APS membership, Craig was actively involved in her local anti-slavery society, condemned vivisection as an unchristian practice, and opposed the re-imposition of the Contagious Disease Acts, which allowed authorities to confine women afflicted with venereal disease in lock hospitals. Occasionally her causes overlapped. In 1877, Craig drew Chesson’s attention to an article in the *Home Chronicle* advertising a scheme for a Home for Female Inebriates, which would allow doctors to detain drunken women against their will. One of the promoters for this venture was a Dr. Carpenter, who had recently assisted a Professor Ferrier with vivisectioning a group of monkeys at the Wakefield Lunatic Asylum.⁵⁴

The quintessentially modular reformer, Craig was also a keen observer of Indian affairs. In 1861, she warned Chesson of the deteriorating conditions suffered by the aborigines of the Andaman Islands. Apparently, the native superintendent of the British penal colony on Ross Island was giving “visitors permission to ‘bag’ as many ‘specimens’ as they chose.”⁵⁵ She was also upset that Bahadur Shah II, the deposed

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, October 31, 1877, Bodleian Library (BOD), MSS.Brit.Emp.s18, C/129, f. 164.

⁵⁵ Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, April 24, 1861, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.s18, C/129, f. 147

Mughal emperor, was being denied mutton by his jailers at Rangoon. But she was perhaps most disconcerted by the “pernicious arrogant superstition” that was “usurping the guise of Christianity among the British” in the post-Uprising era.⁵⁶ One article in the *Homeward Mail*, for instance, had claimed that a recent famine in India was a divine judgment, as it began at a location where the late Company “had dismissed a Christian sepoy.” On another occasion, the *Mail* interpreted an old Englishman’s charitable donations to the starving poor of Delhi as “proof of his Christian forgiveness.”⁵⁷ Craig had a limited tolerance for this providentialist self-adulation. The alms distributed were surely “taken from the Indians first” and were but a fraction of “the sums extorted from the natives” to date. And for all of the state’s rapacity, there was not even one “respectable road to show for it” in the country.

The problem, Craig reported from Edinburgh, was that “almost everybody in Scotland has near relations plundering the natives in different parts of the world; which unconsciously helps to foster the painful neglect of common honesty in the national ‘thinking’ on the subject.”⁵⁸ If any reformer expressed their disapprobation in polite company, they were met with “contemptuous indifference” or else “referred to the ‘noble Christian missionaries.’” More than a decade later, Craig reminded Chesson of the sad truth that “Scotch sympathy begins and ends in sending missionaries to teach the doctrines of Christianity without interfering with their countrymen’s practice.”⁵⁹ In this instance, she was not being hyperbolic; members of the India Reform Society had also

⁵⁶ Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, 1861, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.S18, C/129, f. 143

⁵⁷ Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, April 21, 1861, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.S18, C/129, f. 145.

⁵⁸ Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, December 30, 1869, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.S18, C/129, f. 148.

⁵⁹ Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, October 22 1877, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.S18, C/129, f. 169. Craig later surmised that it was likely the lack of “fixed principles in ‘Constitutionalism’” that led Britons to accept the Bible as “the secret of England’s greatness.” See Agnes Craig to F. W. Chesson, February 25 1881, BOD, MSS.Brit.Emp.S18, C/129, f. 182.

observed a similar kind of permissiveness amongst their countrymen abroad. Planters and manufacturers enthusiastically agitated for reform when it suited their purposes, but refused to subject the colonial regime to constant oversight. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, an imperial civil society capable of checking the state's arbitrary power was at best half-formed. Without any institutionalized safeguards against its own excesses, benevolent "trusteeship" could readily degenerate into coercion.

The extent to which one regards the India reformers as humanitarians exposing colonial abuses or aiders and abettors of a system of imperial domination will likely depend on the reader's own sensibilities. In much the same way, historians for generations have debated whether the early Moderates of the Indian National Congress were "mere mendicant office-seekers or inauthentic 'mimic men'" laboring within the intellectual confines of a derivative discourse.⁶⁰ In an illuminating article, Sanjay Seth claims that the meta-narrative in nationalist historiography has a trajectory that is already plotted; the "ambiguity" of the Moderates' activism is therefore "interpreted as a lack, an incompleteness that is later overcome."⁶¹ Avoiding this tendency, he recasts the Moderates' apparent failures as strategic pivots. Rather than courting the rural masses, from whom they were socially isolated, early nationalists called for the devolution of political power to a circumscribed, educated Indian "public." Although the members of the Congress did not proportionally represent India's diverse religious and linguistic demographics, they were still better attuned to native sentiments than any European

⁶⁰ For a rejection of this view, see C. A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

⁶¹ Sanjay Seth, "Rewriting Histories of Nationalism: the Politics of 'Moderate Nationalism' in India, 1870-1905," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (1999): 98.

district officer could hope to be.⁶² Seth thereby asserts that the notion of a single Indian nationalism with varying “moments” is an unconvincing fabrication. The Moderates’ loyalism and aversion to populism were not indicative of any conceptual shortcomings, but were foundational to their “rhetorical and political strategy.”

If we follow Seth and entertain the legitimacy of multiple national imaginings, we can surely isolate distinct, coexisting strains of liberal imperialist thought as well. For the reformers enmeshed in the networks of the British India Society, India Reform Society, and (for a time) the East India Association, “cementing the union” between Britain and India required the resolution of anomalies that normalized Europeans’ geographical morality. Instead of analyzing the career of liberal imperialism simply in terms of distinct universalist and culturalist stages, we must further identify the potential, alternative futures that it offered to produce if we are to understand its contemporary allure.

⁶² Ibid., 109-111.

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