

## The man who put the ‘the jewel’ in the crown: How far was Robert Clive responsible for the East India Company’s success on the subcontinent?

Hidden among the rolling hills and valleys of the Welsh marches lies a collection of artefacts as out of place as it is dazzling. Collected by the son of one of the most recognized and venerated “heaven-born” generals of British history, ‘The Clive Collection’ is an unashamed exercise in colonial looting from the most famous province of the largest empire the world has ever seen.<sup>1</sup> Treasures transported halfway around the world from sophisticated, artisan-filled and refined states have made their way to a new, sleepy Welsh home. Glistening in splendour, such artefacts recall the British *Raj* – a time and place that has always fascinated, so far removed as it is from our western experience. But that Britain should ever come to rule what was arguably the richest, most metropolitan and most populous place on earth was scarcely imaginable, and indeed India slipped, almost unintentionally, into British hands.<sup>2</sup> Its conquest was a piecemeal alteration of what was at first a trading monopoly into undisputed sovereignty over the subcontinent. Such an operation, lasting for over two and a half centuries, was overseen by the most powerful corporation the world has ever seen – the British East India Company (EIC). Foremost among this company and the many heroes born out of the subcontinent is Robert, Lord Clive. A man of unchallenged “bravery, power or pluck”, he nevertheless since his death in 1774, divided opinion between those who see Clive as India’s “plunderer [or] its founder”.<sup>3</sup> Clive and his victory at Plassey (Palashi) was once common knowledge to every English schoolboy, a hero as described by Orme, Malcom and Forest. Pitted against this is the Indian narrative and the post-colonial backlash, where Clive is perceived as the epitome of what Nehru called “the corruption, venality, nepotism, violence and greed of money of these early generations of British rule in India”.<sup>4</sup> Yet however he is perceived, Clive of India was unequivocally vital in the tapestry of the East India Company. His arrival occurred just in time to save the company from unravelling by the French in the 1740s, and with his energy, daring and ingenuity he was able to reverse the situation almost entirely, leaving the EIC as the pre-eminent power on the subcontinent. His return to India in 1756 wove new threads when he was able to advance the company’s situation beyond their wildest dreams. With the acquisition of Bengal, “a brilliant feat”, he set the company and Britain almost inexorably on a course for Indian domination.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, he undoubtedly soiled the British name and yet one must ask the question, without Clive, would British India even have existed? It is unlikely. British domination of India, whilst never a thought entertained by Clive himself, was facilitated because of him. Clive, whilst flawed, left an impression on India that, whether despised or adored, was vast. It leaves him inseparable from British, Indian and global history.

The company that Clive would join had been founded by Elizabeth I on the last day of 1600 as a joint stock company to protect investment in the “dangerous trade” with India.<sup>6</sup> By granting a monopoly Elizabeth hoped to increase the chance of national trading success in a lucrative, but ruthlessly competitive region. India in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was a daunting prospect, a place of “religions infinite, [but] laws none” according to one western contemporary. Yet in its first century the company was able to establish itself at three major bases – small towns that would eventually become sprawling metropolitan presidencies: Madras (1630), Bombay (1661) and Calcutta (1690).<sup>7</sup> Initially successful, providing returns of 250%, the company soon struggled against determined foreign opposition – most notably the Dutch *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC). So extreme was the issue that Ferguson argues that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was motivated not by the high-minded ideals of parliamentary democracy or radical anti-Catholicism, but by the desire to increase company profitability, and as such the revolution “had the character of an Anglo-Dutch business merger”.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, the English initially appeared to have lost out, consigned to the paltry Bengali textile trade whilst the VOC was allowed exclusive access to the far more lucrative spice trade. However, soon Bengali silks began to account for “more than half of Britain’s imports from the east”,<sup>9</sup> and by the 1720s the EIC had overtaken the VOC in value.<sup>10</sup> It was the Bengali trade that

<sup>1</sup> Attributed to Pitt the Elder (1757). Quotation cited from: National Army Museum: *Robert Clive: The Heaven Born General*. Accessed 14:12 BST 21/7/2019 via <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/robert-clive>

<sup>2</sup> This view was first propagated by Robert Seeley, who proffered in his *The Expansion of England* (1883) that the British Empire had been acquired in a ‘fit of absence of mind’

<sup>3</sup> Olmert, M. ‘With Clive in India.’ *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>4</sup> The quote is from the former Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Robins, N. ‘The World’s first Multinational’ *The New Statesman*, (13/12/2004). P.31 Accessed via: <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/politics/2014/04/worlds-first-multinational>

<sup>5</sup> Spear, P. ‘Robert, Lord Clive and India’ *History Today*, Vol.4, Iss.1 (Jan. 1954). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>6</sup> A direct quote from Linda Colley, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Ferguson, N. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin Books, London, 2004). P.27

<sup>8</sup> An especially astounding feat, considering that in 1688 the EIC had a value only 1/3 of the VOC in 1688. The growing demand for Bengali fabrics was mostly the reason for this, however the EIC was also involved in trading: “saltpetre [...] and indigo [...] diamond [sic] and jewellery” and of course, tea. Maria Misra, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Frankopan, P. *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World* (Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2016). p. 277

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

had committed Britain to the east coast of India, and this would prove fortunate as the declining Mughal Empire came under increasing threat from Persia to the north-west, its capital, Delhi, even sacked in 1739. The position of the company however, so glowing with potential in the 1720s and 1730s, would rapidly become fragile.

It was, unsurprisingly, the French who were to pose the EIC the greatest danger. The 1<sup>st</sup> Carnatic war, coinciding with the war of Austrian succession (1740-48) in Europe, had cost the company dear. As the Mughal Empire splintered, “650 princely kingdoms” competed for successorship, and the “company traded protection for money and influence” with many.<sup>11</sup> The French and British engaged in open and proxy warfare with each other and this myriad of states, yet by 1746 the British had been driven out of Madras by the capable French commander Labourdonnais.<sup>12</sup> At the battle Adyar, where a French force defeated an army ten times its size, the British-backed claimant for rulership of the Carnatic was defeated. This victory was followed up in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Carnatic war, when the Nawab Anwar-ud-Din was killed and replaced by a French backed candidate. Similar French success after the death of Asaf Jah I, Nizam of Hyderabad, in installing Muzafar Jung left the EIC in a dire situation, deprived of their main trading centre in a region now firmly in French hands. The situation by 1750 was catastrophic. A once powerful company seemed on the verge of collapse, its influence lost to the French all along the Coromandel Coast, and the concept of a ‘British India’, had such a concept existed in 1750, would have seemed impossible. To bring the Company back from the brink would require a man with both luck and skill, who would “render great and meritorious services to his country”, a man who would, in British eyes at least, ‘found’ India.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Clive, a “pushy upstart” had arrived in Madras in 1744, eldest son of a minor gentry family from Shropshire that had always faced trouble with money.<sup>14</sup> He had become rapidly disillusioned with the stiff company hierarchy and, never academically successful, he despised his job as a ‘writer’ (the name given to company clerks). Instead, Clive was “made for war”<sup>15</sup>; his uncle writing, when Clive was aged only 6, that he was “out of Measure addicted” to fighting.<sup>16</sup> Depressed, he failed to commit suicide, and in a duel behaved with such disregard for his own life that his opponent stormed out declaring him mad. But when in 1751 the company’s position was again threatened (this time by a siege on Trichinopoly), Clive’s careless audacity would serve him well. Already having proved his mettle in a daring escape from Madras in 1746, he led just 210 men to capture Arcot, the ‘Capital of Southern India’ and the seat of the Nawabs of the Carnatic. He withstood a 50 day siege, diverting pressure from Trichinopoly, and in 1752 compelled the surrender of Dupleix “a leader of the first magnitude” who in the late 1740s had had all the Company’s possessions in India at his feet.<sup>17</sup> Clive returned home between 1753-55, but an unsuccessful parliamentary campaign returned him to India, now a lieutenant colonel. Having previously merely preserved company interests in India, Clive was now about to change irrevocably the British relationship with the subcontinent.

Clive arrived in Madras in 1756, expecting to continue his exploits against the French, perhaps seizing Pondicherry – the centre of French commerce and governance in India. Yet the restless Seraja Daula, the new Nawab of Bengal<sup>18</sup> soon saw reason to quarrel with EIC merchants in Calcutta over the fortification of their ‘factory’.<sup>19</sup> He captured Calcutta after a three-day siege on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1756, before throwing 146 prisoners into a tiny cell in Fort William. The details of the ‘Black Hole of Calcutta’ are contested, but the most outraged western accounts argue only 23 survived the experience, and this incident has been regarded as one of the great justifications for the British Empire in India ever since. It was certainly justification enough for the company to head north and recapture its trading station. With 2,400 troops (only 900 of whom were European) Clive headed north. Conspiring with Mir Jafar and the Jagat Seth banking family, Clive organised the

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<sup>11</sup> Patel, M., *Muslims in India: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the nations of Asia & Central Asia* (Mason Crest Publishers, Pennsylvania, 2007). p.2 Accessed via: <https://search.ebscohost.com>

<sup>12</sup> The company was known as the ‘British East India Company’ after 1709, the Act of Union (1707) making it no longer permissible to call it the English East India Company, especially considering the large Scottish contingent (more than half of staff in some areas).

<sup>13</sup> Olmert, M. ‘With Clive in India.’ *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.1 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>14</sup> Marr, A. *A History of the World* (Macmillan Pan Books, London, 2012). p.337

<sup>15</sup> This was the verdict from the trial of Clive. Despite his acquittal, within 18 months Clive was dead, most likely from an intentional drug overdose. As cited in: Olmert, M. ‘With Clive in India.’ *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.3 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>16</sup> This quote comes from Daniel Bayley, Clive’s uncle in a letter dated June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1732. As cited in: Olmert, M. ‘With Clive in India.’ *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.3 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>17</sup> Spear, P. ‘Robert, Lord Clive and India’ *History Today*, Vol.4, Iss.1 (Jan. 1954). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>18</sup> The Nawab’s of Bengal (ruling over Bengal-Bihar-Orissa) had been virtually independent of the Mughal’s since the 1720s

<sup>19</sup> A ‘factory’ was the company term for what were effectively warehouses, used for the collection and preparation of goods to ship to Europe.

defection of Jafar's forces<sup>20</sup> in the ensuing Battle of Plassey (23<sup>rd</sup> June 1757). The victory was significant (a crushing victory at the cost of only 22 men). However, it had illustrated Clive's darker side – in his unscrupulous treatment of Ominchund, a Hindu merchant and go-between, who had been promised a vast sum of money by a duplicitous treaty. The historiography of the past has often interpreted Clive "solely in terms of genius and patriotism", yet the events of Plassey show that whatever his bravery and military genius, he was not the paragon of virtue or the embodiment of an apotheotic British ideal he was portrayed as.<sup>21</sup> Mir Jafar was subsequently installed as the Nawab of Bengal, and Clive's profits were enormous – he returned to England in 1760 as the richest self-made man in the world, with a personal fortune of £300,000.<sup>22</sup> Previously "Indian feuds [had been] exploited for European ends" yet when Mir Qasim, Jafar's successor, turned against the company, it forced a policy change. Clearly no candidate was sufficiently malleable to British influence, and so after routing a coalition of Mughal and Bengali forces at Buxar (1764), Clive and the Mughal Shah Alam II signed the treaty of Allahabad (1765). The treaty gave the company sovereign *Diwani* rights (the right to rule and collect taxes) over Bengal-Bihar-Orissa, an area comprising of some 20,000,000 people. The first step had been taken on the road to territorial domination; the British now officially ruled a province. It was the zenith, and the end, of Clive's achievements. He would return home to a painful and protracted trial in the wake of the disastrous Bengali famine, breaking his spirit and driving him to his death. Poor treatment for the man who had saved southern India, restoring British fortunes in the early 1750s and winning sovereignty over one of the most populous and profitable regions of the subcontinent. Clive had laid a foundation stone upon which the British Raj, for better or worse, would be built.

It is essential to quantify and assess Clive's exploits. Whilst those less hagiographical in their accounts of Clive focus on his corruption and amassing of a personal fortune, or his poor treatment of Ominchund, it is important to realise what Clive had achieved. In a time when we generally despise and distrust empires, holding since 1919 national self-determination dear, Clive's actions seem immoral. Yet the sheer capability and achievement of Clive in his furtherment of company influence and power was vast. However immoral the Empire was, its ascertainment was a story of tremendous odds overcome, and those responsible for its creation were clearly gifted. Looking beyond individuals such as Clive, historians point to three broad reasons for the success of the British in India: the weakness of other colonial rivals; the decline of the Mughal Empire; and the efficiency of the company itself. In assessing the importance of Clive, we must assess to what extent he was aided by these factors and therefore how much he personally was responsible for company success. The first of these can be rapidly discounted. The very reason Clive was required to launch such spectacular campaigns in the early 1750s was due to the dangerous French encroachment in Southern India in the 1740s. Whilst admittedly other powers were almost inactive in the subcontinent by this point, the power of the French and capabilities of the talented Dupleix, as illustrated during the 1740s at battles such as Adyar more than compensated for this. In his second Indian expedition, it is true, Clive faced weak foreign opposition however this was only as a result of his astounding successes between 1750 and 1753. A lack of colonial opposition therefore was certainly not a factor in Clive's success.

To historians such as Marr however, the second factor is key in the British expansion in India. The belief that it was the internal weakness of India that allowed the English to establish such power in India is an attractive one, however it fails to recognize the strength of the states that had fragmented from the Empire. Since the death of the Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707, the Mughal Empire was in a state of decline. Powerful and sprawling, a "strong, serious state"<sup>23</sup>, though it was, this Islamic empire was continually under threat externally from Persia and internally from "militant Hindu revivalism".<sup>24</sup> Various "virtually independent dynasts" were able to establish themselves on the fringes of the Empire under powerful rulers, such as the Nawab of Bengal Murshid Quli Khan.<sup>25</sup> In order to make a profit, the "state licensed monopoly" of the East India Company required Mughal co-operation and favour in the form of tax-exemptions and trade access.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, before the breakaway the takeover of Bengal would have been irreconcilable with the company's main aim (to increase trade and offer a profit to shareholders). To an extent therefore, the breakdown of the Mughal Empire was at least necessary in facilitating Clive's actions. However, with 'the great Mughal' still ruling a vast empire of an estimated 158,000,000 subjects and an income 10x that of the French state, the empire was hardly the "rotten door" that Marr suggests.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the company and Clive still had to work hard – if only to defeat the breakaway states. Regional

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<sup>20</sup> In the event, it was only the noncombatance of Jafar's forces that was secured.

<sup>21</sup> Spear, P. 'Robert, Lord Clive and India' *History Today*, Vol.4, Iss.1 (Jan. 1954). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>22</sup> The new Nawab had gifted him some £234,000 of this figure, as well as a 'jaghir' (the grant of the income of an area of land) worth £25,000 per annum.

<sup>23</sup> A direct quote from Maria Misra, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Lenman, B. 'The East India Company and the Emperor Aurangzeb' *History Today*, Vol. 37, Iss. 2 (Feb. 1987)

<sup>25</sup> Bayly, C. *The New Cambridge History of India: Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010). p.50

<sup>26</sup> Ferguson, N. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin Books, London, 2004). P.19

<sup>27</sup> Marr, A. *A History of the World* (Macmillan Pan Books, London, 2012). p.337

magnates, such as Siraj, controlled vast populations that were heavily taxed and well organised. More to the point, they had adopted western tactics and technology on the battlefield, meaning they were more than a match for their European counterparts. To defeat them, European firepower was not enough. Clive instead adeptly negotiated with disillusioned parties (such as Mir Jafar and the Jagat Seth), always manipulating the power struggle in the vacuum left by the Mughals. Yet even in these new states, the native forces were still too powerful to allow direct European colonization – the Carnatic wars were only ever a proxy war between the British and French, both trying to lever their own candidates into power in Hyderabad and the Carnatic. This was partially because the company mantra was “trade not conquest”, but also because conquest was impossible.<sup>28</sup> Only later, after the British had achieved vast influence in Bengal by backing successfully multiple claimants (and gaining the trust of local elites), could the company rule. Even then at Buxar, on the eve of takeover, the British were outnumbered 4-to-1. Only a spectacular victory, at which the now shadowy Mughal Shah Alam II<sup>29</sup> was present, could force Indian hands into signing the treaty of Allahabad. As such, it is clear internal weakness was not a significant factor in the success of Clive’s expansion, because although it did facilitate it, the strength of the new internal factions was incredibly significant. To argue, as Marr does that “under the Mughal cloak, the East India Company grew” is sheer folly, as it ignores the strong native opposition Clive faced from the fragmented states of the now-shattered Mughal Empire.<sup>30</sup>

The strength of the Company – its organization, values and structure – has often been stated as a key reason for its success, and this would seem a self-proving theory: the more efficient and effective the company, the greater its success. Yet the dire state of the company by the 1740s compared to its rival, the *Compagnie des Indes* suggests that the health of the company was in decline. However, the EIC was still able to maintain some key features that aided Clive in his conquest. Firstly, the corporate nature of the company was useful, as it was dynamic and able to adapt to changing conditions. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the company had been “beggars at the feast” of India, and the spirit of ingenuity it had required to overcome this still pervaded in the company.<sup>31</sup> This was aided by what would later be considered a hindrance, the “cesspool of profit-taking”<sup>32</sup>, namely the company practice of staff at all levels engaging in trade and making “a lot of money on the side”.<sup>33</sup> Clive himself would later attempt (somewhat hypocritically) a task that he described as “cleansing the Augean stable”, a task only truly accomplished later.<sup>34</sup> In the 1740s however, the personal investment of the company’s representatives in the companies trading interests was paramount. A reason such practices flourished, and that was in itself significant, was the distance between the Company headquarters at Leadenhall Street, London and the subcontinent. Stretched communication lines, and investors more motivated by profit than conscience, gave company officials in India effective *carte blanche*. Before the Regulating Act (1773) and Pitt’s India Act (1784) the company was effectively free of government control or scrutiny. Indeed, these acts were orchestrated by the old elites of Westminster, jealous at the rise of the new ‘nabobs’, who’s vast (and dubiously obtained) wealth was facilitated by the distance between them and ‘the old country’. The trials of Clive and Hastings, the latter arguably a trial for “the whole basis of the company’s rule in India” are perfect examples of the enmity that was felt by the old aristocracy.<sup>35</sup> In the protracted trials both were eventually acquitted. Yet still Pitt criticised those ‘new men’ whose wealth was buying up Whitehall and Westminster – somewhat hypocritically considering his own grandfather had, with proceeds of his governorship of Madras, purchased a country estate and the parliamentary seat to go with it.<sup>36</sup> Most importantly however, the company was “institutionally advanced” and thus able to deal with the intrinsically linked political, economic and social affairs of the subcontinent with a startling adeptness.<sup>37</sup> Clive, therefore, was aided by the apparatus of the East India Company – indeed without it he may never have come to prominence. In the 1740s, the company’s position had been in a state of decline. However he was able to haul it forward and, in his “meddling in Indian politics”, able to stamp its presence, to a point that was inerasable, on the surface of India.

It is clear therefore that company success in the 1750s and 1760s was the result not of fortunate circumstances, but Clive’s own capabilities. Driven perhaps by mercenary desires, Clive’s recklessness and scant disregard for his own life were clearly

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<sup>28</sup> A direct quote from Huw Bowen, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

<sup>29</sup> It is fair to say at this point that the Mughal Empire was devoid of any power in India, even the Shah forced to admit that he ruled only “from Delhi to Palam” (an outskirt of Delhi).

<sup>30</sup> Marr, A. *A History of the World* (Macmillan Pan Books, London, 2012). p.337

<sup>31</sup> A direct quote from Melvyn Bragg, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Olmert, M. ‘With Clive in India.’ *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.6 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>33</sup> A direct quote from Maria Misra, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Olmert, M. ‘With Clive in India.’ *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.6 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>35</sup> Ferguson, N. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin Books, London, 2004). P.49

<sup>36</sup> Thomas ‘Diamond’ Pitt had profited greatly from his sojourn in India, returning the vast and extravagant ‘Pitt Diamond’ weighing a huge 82g. The rotten borough accompanying his manor of Stratford was that of Old Sarum, which William Pitt’s own father, Pitt the Elder, had occupied during the 1730s and 1740s.

<sup>37</sup> A direct quote from Maria Misra, as featured in: BBC Radio 4. *In Our Time: The East India Company*. 26th June 2003.

advantageous. His boldness may have emerged from suicidal tendencies (his personality was, at best, erratic) rather than any great love of valour yet this did not debar him from feats of personal bravery. What led to Clive's success, was his "genius for improvisation and personal leadership", and a "vigour, firmness and clarity of mind".<sup>38</sup> However the most successful, "most mercurial of all company men" was also one of the most mercenary.<sup>39</sup> Yet, he was not without some degree of restraint, as he himself declared during his trial. After Plassey, when he could have embezzled and stolen a fortune, he was "astonished at my own moderation".<sup>40</sup> His tendencies, born perhaps out of his family's own financial difficulties, also did not make him culturally ignorant and willing to ruthlessly squeeze capital from India (as his opponents claimed). He was responsive to India, revelled in its exoticism, and was even on occasion able to reconcile the needs of the population with his own lavish desires, for example founding a charity for Sepoy veterans with £70,000 bequeathed to him in Mir Jafar's will. True, Clive was perhaps not quite as culturally sensitive as his successor, Warren Hastings – a "serene, even-tempered intellectual" who "created a new British dominion" (in terms of good governance), by his powers of organization and attentiveness.<sup>41</sup> Yet Hasting's achievements in governorship would have been impossible without Clive's achievements in company resurrection and conquest.

Yet whilst by conquest Clive "laid the foundation for the vast British empire", he did not create it.<sup>42</sup> Colley suggests that wars in India were only imperially motivated from the 1770s – certainly Plassey was not the "beginning of the British Raj".<sup>43</sup> Empire however only truly began when the Marquess Wellesley and his "magnificent dynasty of administrators" were installed.<sup>44</sup> Only after the Parliamentary Acts of 1773 and 1884 had given the monarch significant control and when Wellesley as governor-general (1796-1805) felt he answered to the king not the company, was there then any sense of an Imperial project and the company becoming a "semi-privatised wing of the Hanoverian state".<sup>45</sup> Clive was not an empire-builder, but his legacy was imperial. His battle at Plassey created "the legend of English courage and invincibility which was to carry English arms in India from one success to another".<sup>46</sup> True, Clive also smeared the British name with his deception of Ominchund, yet on this deception lay the wealth of Bengal. Whilst the British name would as a result never quite be dissociated with duplicity and mercenary trickery, the rewards were astonishing. And it was this capture of Bengal that was Clive's greatest achievement. The greatest reason for sustained company takeover and success in India over the next century was its native assets. The *dāiwanī* produced a vast income as taxation in India was high by European standards.<sup>47</sup> British domination was "built on Indian foundations, taking Indian forms and making use of Indian personnel at every level".<sup>48</sup> Only therefore with the conquest of Bengal, which afforded the company a vast and secure income, would Indian bankers lend to the company "because of their well founded belief that the efficiency of its taxation system ensured that they would be repaid".<sup>49</sup> These bankers became the lifeblood of the company, able to advance to the company money that would fund armies that could stretch out and conquer all India. As Darwin argues: "Without the resources it had seized in Bengal, with which it built up its armies [...] and without the loans advanced by Indian bankers, it is doubtful whether the Company would have retained its power" let alone expanded.<sup>50</sup> This was Clive's greatest legacy to Britain and India: a strategic and financial base from which an imperial tide could sweep across the subcontinent.

In conclusion therefore, Clive did more than any other man to transform the company from "trader to sovereign". His achievements outlasted his lifetime, and in his conquest of Bengal he gave the company a position of power that would lead to its becoming "the most illustrious and most flourishing commercial association that ever existed in any age or

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<sup>38</sup> Spear, P. 'Robert, Lord Clive and India' *History Today*, Vol.4, Iss.1 (Jan. 1954). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>39</sup> Ferguson, N. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin Books, London, 2004). P.36

<sup>40</sup> Clive speaking in the House of Commons during his trial in 1773. As cited in: Olmert, M. 'With Clive in India.' *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.1 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>41</sup> Spear, P. 'Robert, Lord Clive and India' *History Today*, Vol.4, Iss.1 (Jan. 1954). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>42</sup> Olmert, M. 'With Clive in India.' *Smithsonian*, Vol.31, No.11. P.122-131 (Feb. 2001). p.7 Accessed from EBSCOHOST (2/7/2019)

<sup>43</sup> Patel, M., *Muslims in India: The Growth and Influence of Islam in the nations of Asia & Central Asia* (Mason Crest Publishers, Pennsylvania, 2007). p.4 Accessed via: <https://search.ebscohost.com>

<sup>44</sup> The quote is attributed Keith Feiling as cited in: Bennell, A. 'Governors General of India, Part I: Wellesley' *History Today*, Vol. 9, Iss. 2 (Feb. 1959). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>45</sup> Bowen, H. '400 years of the East India Company', *History Today*, Vol. 50, Iss. 7 (Jul. 2000). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>46</sup> Bence-Jones, M. *Clive of India* (London, Constable & Robinson Ltd., 1974). p.48

<sup>47</sup> Standard Indian tax rates were roughly one third of total agricultural output (often paid in cash – a sign of an advanced economy), significantly higher than their European counterparts.

<sup>48</sup> Marshall, P. 'The Making of the Hybrid Raj, 1700-1857' *History Today*, Vol. 47, Iss. 9 (Sep. 1997). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Darwin, J. *After Tamerlane: The Rise & Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000* (Penguin Books, London, 2008). p.178

country”.<sup>51</sup> Such factors as the decline of the Mughal Empire aided his project to a certain extent, but he is almost solely responsible for his own personal, and the company’s wider, success. “Current interpretations”, writes Marshall, “see British conquest [...] as a response to opportunities”, and Clive was the ultimate opportunist.<sup>52</sup> He was “reckless and unruly”<sup>53</sup>, a self-professed scoundrel who used and loved what he described as “fighting, tricks, chicanery, intrigues, politics and Lord knows what”.<sup>54</sup> But this does not diminish the vast scale of his astonishing achievements. What makes them more impressive is that he achieved them with minimal help from others, and that they were so permanent – laying foundation for an empire. That empire would not be, as John Stuart Mill claimed, “the purest in intention” and “the most beneficent act known to mankind”.<sup>55</sup> Yet to deny Clive’s importance in forging the British Empire, however morally wrong it was, is folly. He, with an “elemental force and a tireless energy”, was, almost alone, responsible for the redemption and meteoric rise of the East India Company in his lifetime, and indeed far beyond it.<sup>56</sup> The epitaph of his tomb is simple, yet it rings true. He was ‘*primus in Indus*’, both because he was the establisher, the first to appear in a new, British, chapter of India and because he was the greatest of all British heroes of the subcontinent.

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<sup>51</sup> As stated by David Macpherson in a dedication to the directors of the EIC, dated 1805.

<sup>52</sup> Marshall, P. ‘The Making of the Hybrid Raj, 1700-1857’ *History Today*, Vol. 47, Iss. 9 (Sep. 1997). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>

<sup>53</sup> French, P. ‘A reckless and unruly ruler’ *The Telegraph*. Last edited: BST: 12:00AM 11/7/2019 Accessed via: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4714792/A-reckless-and-unruly-ruler.html>

<sup>54</sup> As Clive himself professed to his friend and colleague, Robert Orme.

<sup>55</sup> The quote is from John Stuart Mill, as cited in: Ferguson, N. *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (Penguin Books, London, 2004). P. xxi.

<sup>56</sup> The quotation is attributed to P.E. Roberts, as cited in: Spear, P. ‘Robert, Lord Clive and India’ *History Today*, Vol.4, Iss.1 (Jan. 1954). Accessed via: <https://www.historytoday.com>



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