

Contested Statues: The Clive Memorial Fund, Imperial Heroes, and the Reimaginings of Indian History

James Watts 

Abstract This article considers the Clive Memorial Fund and the campaigns surrounding proposed statues to Robert Clive in London and Calcutta between 1907 and 1912. The author argues that this campaign was an attempt to glorify Clive's actions, focused on the battle of Plassey and its aftermath, as foundation stones for the Indian Empire. The statues were an anxious attempt to situate Britain as a natural part of Indian history, but the campaign instead provoked a developing Indian counternarrative around resistance to colonial rule, particularly from newspapers in Bengal. Although the fund garnered support in Britain, it was greeted in India with official irritation and widespread Indian opposition, highlighting the importance of considering imperial statues in their imperial frame. This reaction, demonizing Clive's treachery and praising his opponent, Siraj-ud-Daula, the nawab of Bengal, was indicative of the place of history in both Bengali nationalism and imperial self-identity. Using newspapers in Britain and Bengal and the correspondence of the Clive Memorial Committee, the author examines the competing narratives of history that emerged in the campaigns around the fund.

Lord Curzon, aided by Perceval Landon as secretary to the Clive Memorial Fund, led a fund-raising campaign in 1907–08 for statues to Robert Clive in London and Calcutta.¹ The monuments were intended to commemorate the victory of Plassey in 1757 and to correct the apparent neglect of Clive in the public memory.² Clive, as a lieutenant-colonel, won the battle of Plassey by bribing Mir Jafar, the nawab's commander, to defect. In the aftermath, an era often known in Indian history as the “post-Plassey plunder,” Bengal was rife with chaos and mistrust.³ The British victory at the Battle of Bhaksar led to the Treaty of Allahabad of 1765 in which the Mughal emperor granted the East

James Watts is lecturer in public and creative histories at the University of Bristol, Department of History School of Arts. He thanks Sumita Mukherjee, Richard Sheldon, and James Thompson as well as the anonymous reviewers for their thoughts and critiques of earlier versions of this article. Please address any correspondence to james.watts@bristol.ac.uk

¹ For the sake of consistency, the contemporary spellings of South Asian place names have been retained; hence Calcutta rather than Kolkata.

² William Forwood and Curzon made the original call, then organized the committee. William B. Forwood, “Lord Clive,” *Times* (London), 30 March 1907; George Curzon, “The Commemoration of Lord Clive,” *Times* (London), 8 April 1907. All newspapers cited hereafter are published in London unless otherwise indicated.

³ Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge, 2007), 34.

India Company the *diwani*, formally acknowledging the company's right to collect revenue in Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa.⁴ This new regime, with Clive as governor of Bengal, was one of the main foundations of the British Empire in India and led to both serious trouble for the company and a major famine in Bengal in 1769–70 that caused as many as ten million deaths.⁵ Clive returned from India fabulously rich, but he was hounded by his political enemies for his actions in India. William Dalrymple has argued that Clive was in fact a “violent, utterly ruthless and intermittently mentally unstable corporate predator,” and this history had been progressively erased in the later nineteenth century.⁶

The campaign for the Clive Memorial Fund began in April 1907, and fund-raising lasted fifteen months. It raised £5,000—£3,500 from Britain and £1,500 from India. The aim was to construct two statues, one in London and one in Calcutta, “worthy both of Clive and of ourselves,” as Perceval Landon put it in a letter to *The Englishman* newspaper in India in September 1907.⁷ Statues were eventually erected inside the Victoria Memorial Hall in Calcutta and in the garden outside Gwydyr House in Whitehall in 1912. The statue in London was subsequently moved to King Charles Street in 1916, where it still stands outside the Foreign Office, overlooking St. James' Park.⁸ In India, Clive's statue was displayed at the Belvedere in Calcutta as part of the Victoria Memorial Exhibition until the Victoria Memorial Hall opened in 1921.⁹

For the British Raj, 1907 was a notable year. It marked the 150th anniversary of the battle of Plassey and the fiftieth anniversary of the Great Rebellion of 1857. Both anniversaries were marked by commemorative events in both Britain and India.¹⁰ Perceval Landon, who was then foreign correspondent at the *Daily Telegraph* in addition to working for the Clive Memorial Fund, conducted a campaign to record the surviving British veterans of 1857 and brought them to London for a parade and a dinner at the Albert Hall.¹¹

⁴ H. V. Bowen, *The Business of Empire: The East India Company and Imperial Britain, 1756–1833* (Cambridge, 2005), 3.

⁵ For an overview of this, see P. J. Marshall, introduction to *The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: Evolution or Revolution?*, ed. P. J. Marshall (Oxford, 2005), 1–53; Vinita Damodaran, “The East India Company, Famine, and Ecological Conditions in Eighteenth-Century Bengal,” in *The East India Company and the Natural World*, ed. Vinita Damodaran, Anna Winterbottom, and Alan Lester (Basingstoke, 2014), 80–101; Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, 53.

⁶ William Dalrymple, *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company* (London, 2019), xxxi.

⁷ Perceval Landon, “The Clive Memorial,” *Englishman*, 2 September 1907.

⁸ William Dalrymple has called for this statue to be removed; see William Dalrymple, “Robert Clive Was a Vicious Asset-Stripper: His Statue Has No Place on Whitehall,” *Guardian*, 11 June 2020.

⁹ “Unveiling of Clive Statue,” *Englishman's Overland Mail*, 18 December 1913.

¹⁰ Sebastian Raj Pender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the Politics of Commemoration* (Cambridge, 2022), 106–30.

¹¹ The dinner was on 23 December 1907. Edward Frederick Lawson Burnham, *Peterborough Court: The Story of the Daily Telegraph* (London, 1955), 134, 140; Perceval Landon, “1857”: *In Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Indian Mutiny: With an Appendix Containing the Names of the Survivors of the Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men who Fought in India in 1857* (London, 1907). There are three annotated copies in the British Library, evidently kept by soldiers, former or current, particularly interested in the appendices listing the surviving veterans; see “1857,” MS Eur A59/4, British Library, London (hereafter this repository is abbreviated as BL); MS Eur A180, BL; Asia, Pacific, and Africa RL 109, BL. MS Eur A59/4 was kept by a brigade surgeon in Madras, Henry Elmsley Busted, who served during 1857 and criticized the list as “very incomplete.”

In India, reaction to the proposed commemorative statue in particular marked an attempt to define public space and history in an increasingly nationalist way. Bengali nationalist newspapers argued for a variety of different commemorations, such as a festival or a statue to Clive's opponent at Plassey, Siraj-ud-Daula, the nawab of Bengal, and for contextualizing Clive's statue by recognizing his duplicity as a part of the statue.¹² The Indian newspapers, which were an essential part of this public campaign, were concentrated in Calcutta and became increasingly strident in the years following the partition of Bengal in 1905. The partition, carried out in the face of widespread opposition while Lord Curzon was viceroy of India, although framed as a purely administrative act, was aimed at disrupting the nationalist community. It sparked the *swadeshi* movement that focused on economic, intellectual, and historical Indian identities.¹³

Nationalist newspapers were at that time operating in an increasingly difficult legal situation. The trials of the *Bangavasi* newspaper in 1891 and the nationalist Bal Gangadhar Tilak and his Marathi-language newspaper, *Kesari*, in 1897, as well as others under Section 124A of the Penal Code, were making the atmosphere more hostile. Nevertheless, there was a pugnacious press in Bengal that was critical of the British government, often using language of veiled loyalty to avoid prosecution. Indeed, Kamra has argued that the threats and practices of prosecution created a "culture of defiance" out of one of complaint.¹⁴ This radical press mainly pushed an aggressively Hindu culture and interpretation of history that helped shape nationalist rhetoric in India and came under direct attack in the British Raj's attempt to maintain colonial rule.¹⁵ Prosecutions proliferated after 1905. The partition, alongside the later shift of the capital from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911, took aim at the growing strength of the newspaper and radical public culture of Bengal.¹⁶ Resistance in the face of British actions was crucial to how this anti-partition movement became increasingly national in its focus.

Definition of public spaces through monuments and statues is a key strategy in presenting a nation's identity and creating an imagined community.¹⁷ The debates following the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol in June 2020 have demonstrated that statues are powerful focal points in discourse around identity and history. Add to this the Rhodes Must Fall campaigns in Oxford and Cape Town and the controversy around the Mahatma Gandhi statue in Parliament Square and

¹² *Jasohar*, 8 July 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/36/913/70, BL.

¹³ Semanti Ghosh, *Different Nationalisms: Bengal, 1905–1947* (Delhi, 2016), 29; D. K. L. Choudhury, "Sinews of Panic and the Nerves of Empire: The Imagined State's Entanglement with Information Panic, India, c. 1880–1912," *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2004): 965–1002.

¹⁴ Sukeshi Kamra, *The Indian Periodical Press and the Production of Nationalist Rhetoric* (Basingstoke, 2011), 128.

¹⁵ Kamra, *Indian Periodical Press*, 150; Shukla Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets, Propaganda, and Political Culture in Colonial Bengal* (Cambridge, 2014), 23.

¹⁶ Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, 27.

¹⁷ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); Annie E. Coombes, "Monumental Histories: Commemorating Mau Mau with the Statue of Dedan Kimathi," *African Studies* 70, no. 2 (2011): 202–23; Max Jones et al., "Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Britain and France," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 5 (2014): 787–825; Berny Sèbe, "From Post-colonialism to Cosmopolitan Nation-Building? British and French Imperial Heroes in Twenty-First Century Africa," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 42, no. 5 (2014): 936–68.

monuments to Confederate generals and others in the United States, and it becomes clear that statues have a global potential for catalyzing debates. Indeed, the successful legal defense of the Colston Four, with historian David Olusoga serving as an expert witness, was built upon an argument that the statue of Colston constituted an offense in itself in its continued public display.¹⁸ These cases demonstrate the continued power and international ramifications of statues, which their definition of public spaces can create.¹⁹ Deciding whom to honor in bronze and marble is a strong statement of what is considered to be of national, imperial, and international importance.

In Britain before the First World War, the widespread erection of statues was an aspect of the naturalization, to use a Barthesian concept of mythology, of an imperially imagined world order. Statues of exemplary heroes brought images of masculine duty, valor, and respectability to the fore and marginalized notions of the disorderly and immoral. The transcultural dimensions of reactions to the Clive statues, as figures like Curzon and Landon campaigned in Britain and India, and Indian students and activists in Britain staged their own commemorations of 1857, points to the “microcosms of a transnational order” that the British Empire embodied.²⁰ In particular, the transnational debate emphasizes what Grant, Levine, and Trentmann have called the “multi-local sets of identities and memories” in which statues and the history surrounding them are placed for various audiences.²¹ This imperial imagery created a backdrop and a mood in cities of empire like London and Calcutta. Katrina Navickas has similarly emphasized the context of politics and the physical space in which it is conducted and how this contributes to defining that politics.²² Opponents of dominant narratives have to define their own spaces or attempt to conduct politics in landscapes defined by those opponents.

The parallel statues erected in London and Calcutta must be considered across cultures. The statues of Clive gave rise to “complex works of unresolved and unfinished possible meanings” in both Britain and India as the intended meanings were contested.²³ The statues precipitated an articulation of chosen narratives of Britain’s imperial history. To British imperialists like Lord Curzon, Clive represented imperial expansion, governing genius, and energetic vision. The statue was also a claim, physically, for those in Britain to be more mindful of the British Empire and India. But as Jason Edwards observes in discussing Field Marshal Frederick Roberts, statues allow “almost endless contextualization, decontextualization and recontextualization by

¹⁸ “Do the Verdicts in the Trial of the Colston 4 Signal Something Wrong with Our Jury System? 10 Things You Should Know,” *The Secret Barrister* (blog), 6 January 2022, <https://thesecretbarrister.com/2022/01/06/do-the-verdicts-in-the-trial-of-the-colston-4-signal-something-wrong-with-our-jury-system-10-things-you-should-know/>.

¹⁹ Jessica Elgot, “‘Take It Down!’ Rhodes Must Fall Campaign Marches through Oxford,” *Guardian*, 9 March 2016; “Edward Colston: Bristol Slave Trader Statue ‘Was an Affront,’” *BBC*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-52962356>; Prasun Sonwalkar, “Row over New Gandhi Statue in London,” *Hindustan Times*, 29 October 2014.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, rev. ed. (1972; repr., London, 2009), 10, 121–24, at 3.

²¹ Kevin Grant, Phillipa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, introduction to *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire, and Transnationalism, c. 1880–1950*, ed. Kevin Grant, Phillipa Levine, and Frank Trentmann (London, 1997), 1–15, at 2.

²² Katrina Navickas, introduction to *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789–1848* (Oxford, 2016), 1–20.

²³ Julie Codell, “The Art of Transculturation,” in *Transculturation in British Art, 1770–1930*, ed. Julie Codell (Abingdon, 2012), 1–18, at 11.

spectators” from multiple perspectives.²⁴ Recontextualization was central to many of the Indian critiques of Clive that characterized him as a violent trickster. For some, Clive was an embarrassing reminder of brutality, mismanagement, and the spilled blood by which the empire was gained. Thus, the Clive statues in London and Calcutta did not achieve their aim of raising Clive onto an uncontested pedestal. The project was redefined in India by opposition to the statue’s meaning. In Britain, issues around the statue’s placing, lackluster support, and the interruption of the First World War meant that the project failed to have the hoped-for effect or prominence.

The statues spoke to several memory communities in Britain and India. There were imperialists, especially those who had formerly worked in India, who promoted the statue. There were Britons who saw in Clive an example of British energy and courage on the world stage, and there were anti-imperialists, both British and Indian, who viewed Clive’s legacy in very different terms. Indian opposition to the Clive statue and British rule more widely also extended from India to Britain as Indian students and migrants there opposed the campaigns of commemoration of 1907.²⁵ An imperial elite was attempting to create narratives of empire that, although differing in their choices of imperial development, maintained the inviolability of the beneficent progress of empire.²⁶ But the cohesion of these narratives was a difficult if not impossible thing for Curzon and his fellow imperialists to maintain in a public forum.²⁷ The statues for Clive were intended to remind both Britain and India of the history of British power, military prowess, and unique ability to govern. Instead, these *lieux de mémoire* allowed a wider articulation of Indian nationalism, inflamed colonial tensions, and revealed reluctance to honor Clive in some British circles.²⁸

The early twentieth century was an age of commemoration in Britain, one that was particularly focused on individual and imperial heroes. The commemorations, fueled in part by anxieties over imperial and national identity sparked by the rise of socialist agitation in Britain and by colonial independence movements, were used to champion contemporary causes and arguments.²⁹ History and societal change and progress were becoming ever more focused on the actions of individuals. The presence of statues can, in the modern world, look established and uncontested,

²⁴ Jason Edwards, “War and Peace: Harry Bates’s Lord Roberts Memorial in London, Calcutta, and Glasgow,” in Codell, *Transculturation in British Art*, 199–220, at 201.

²⁵ Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities: The England-Returned* (London, 2011), 97.

²⁶ Andrew S. Thompson, “The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895–1914,” *Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (1997): 147–77.

²⁷ Dominic Geppert and Frank Lorenz Muller, “Beyond National Memory: Nora’s *Lieux de Mémoire* across an Imperial World,” in *Sites of Imperial Memory: Commemorating Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Dominic Geppert and Frank Lorenz Muller (Manchester, 2015), 1–18, at 10; Martin Thomas and Richard Toye, *Arguing about Empire: Imperial Rhetoric in Britain and France, 1882–1956* (Oxford, 2017), 7–8.

²⁸ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24; For a French comparison, see Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789–1880* (Cambridge, 1977), 3.

²⁹ T. G. Otte, “Centenaries, Self-Historicization and the Mobilization of the Masses,” in *The Age of Anniversaries: The Cult of Commemoration, 1895–1925*, ed. T. G. Otte (London, 2017), 1–35, at 2; Ronald Quinault, “Political Centenary Commemorations in the Early Twentieth-Century Britain,” in Otte, *Age of Anniversaries*, 184–94, at 193.

but the histories of statues like Clive's emphasize that there was disagreement about whether these figures should be honored so publicly. In his classic Victorian work on heroes, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, regularly reprinted throughout the century, Thomas Carlyle argued that "society is founded on hero-worship." This text was influential, and the central place of heroic individuals in the story of empire was still being taken to heart sixty-five years after its initial publication.³⁰ Nevertheless, its vision of heroes was being remolded. As Berny Sèbe notes, the combination of the extension of the franchise in 1884, the rise of New Imperialism, and the power of the press shifted the notions of heroes in society as they became ever more mythologized.³¹ Heroes were figures in an endlessly reworked pantheon intended to give the masses figures to emulate, especially in their energetic devotion to the British Empire.³² But conversely, concerns over imperial decline and morality, highlighted by the South African War, also came to the fore in the exaggerated praise of historical heroes like Clive. There were dissenting voices in both Britain and India, and an apathy that many imperial campaigns foundered on.

Although for many Indian nationalists, Clive represented trickery and loss of independence, for imperialists like Lord Curzon he was a founding imperial figure and an argument for taking greater pride in the Indian Empire. Historical work on sculpture, the urban landscape, and the planning of public parks has revealed how closely the narrative and power to exhort and commend was expressed in landscape.³³ Statuary acted as a demand to others to follow virtuous examples and to strive for excellence. Inventing this unblemished history for Clive places this statue firmly in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's *Invention of Tradition*. The "masses of masonry" that brought the "statuomania" across Europe in the period of 1880 to 1914 was part of what Hobsbawm has called the "idiom of symbolic discourse." These were part of the mania for mass-producing the traditions and honor for public men that was such a feature of the period 1870–1914.³⁴ This movement was a continent-wide effort to shape perceptions of imperial actions for both domestic and colonial populations and was replicated in colonial spaces by imperial powers such as Britain in India and France in North Africa.³⁵ There are parallels with the

³⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship* (London, 1869), 15.

³¹ Berny Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa: The Promotion of British and French Colonial Heroes, 1870–1939* (Manchester, 2013), 27–28.

³² Michael Lieven, "Heroism, Heroics, and the Making of Heroes: The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879," *Albion* 30, no. 3 (1998): 419–38; Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (Oxford, 1994); Max Jones et al., eds., *Decolonising Imperial Heroes: Cultural Legacies of the British and French Empires* (London, 2016); Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren, eds., *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives* (Manchester, 2000).

³³ Terry Wykes, "Marginal Figures? Public Statues and Public Parks in the Manchester Region, 1840–1914," in *Sculpture and the Garden*, ed. Patrick Eyres and Fiona Russell (Aldershot, 2006), 85–98, at 87; David Lambert, "The Meaning and Re-meaning of Sculpture in Victorian Public Parks," in Eyres and Russell, *Sculpture and the Garden*, 99–110, at 99; Benedict Read, *Victorian Sculpture* (London, 1982), 352.

³⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London, 1987), 222. Maurice Agulhon, in "La Statuomanie et l'histoire," *Ethnologie Française* 8, no. 2 (1978): 145–72, coined the word *statuomania*. See also Eric Hobsbawm, introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983), 1–14, at 6; Eric Hobsbawm, "Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 263–308, at 304.

³⁵ Berny Sèbe, "From the Penny Press to the Plinth: British and French 'Heroic Imperialists' as Sites of Memory," in Geppert and Muller, *Sites of Imperial Memory*, 95–114; Victor Enthoven, "Jan Pietersz Coen:

statues put up in the period following reconstruction in the United States that emphasized and sanitized certain heroes, although this example had the more specific purpose of cementing the myth of the Lost Cause.³⁶

Imperializing figures from British history through ignoring their defects and focusing on their work in the empire was, as John Mackenzie has put it, “the cult of personality which was an inseparable part of imperialism.”³⁷ This focus on heroic individuals was pursued through military heroes like Lord Kitchener, explorers like Robert Scott, and religious evangelists such as David Livingstone.³⁸ British India, especially with the terrors of 1857, provided its own examples in the figures of Henry Havelock and John Nicholson—and Clive. If Clive lacked the saintly overtones of David Livingstone or the self-sacrifice of Captain Robert Scott for those in Britain, he did have an obvious imperial legacy.

The debate around the Clive statue was also indicative of the anxieties about decline that haunted many imperialists in the two decades before the First World War.³⁹ International competition was invoked by countries supposedly better placed to exploit their advantages, such as the United States, Germany, and Russia. Although Curzon was less prone to believe in this declining British and imperial state than others such as Joseph Chamberlain, much imperial propaganda reflected fears that there was insufficient enthusiasm for empire, and often had a self-reassuring air.⁴⁰ History was called upon to reaffirm British strength and virtues. This call was heightened after the unrest in Bengal resulting from the partition in 1905. Mass protest, strikes, and famines in the final years of the nineteenth century starkly called into question the beneficence of the Raj. This opposition intensified with the assassination of Curzon Wyllie in London in 1909 and an attempted assassination of the viceroy of India, Lord Hardinge, in 1912. In the minds of many imperialists, all this indicated the need for a heroic reimagining of the Raj. The Clive campaign was intended to tap into patriotic feeling about imperial heroes and a heroic history for the empire, yet it is hard to escape the impression that it was working too hard to convince others of the continued greatness of Clive’s legacy.

The controversy around the Clive Memorial Fund extended along two main and contested themes: Clive’s position as an imperial hero, and the historical place of Plassey and its aftermath in defining the character of the British Empire. Clive became a catalyst for debates over the historical character of the empire. Narratives

A Man They Love to Hate, The First Governor General of the Dutch East Indies as an Imperial Site of Memory,” in Geppert and Muller, *Sites of Imperial Memory*, 115–35; Zeynep Celik, “Colonial Statues and Their Afterlives,” *Journal of North African Studies* 25, no. 5 (2020): 711–26.

³⁶ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton, 1997), 129–61.

³⁷ John M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960* (Manchester, 1984), 18.

³⁸ Max Jones, “‘Our King upon His Knees’: The Public Commemoration of Captain Scott’s Last Antarctic Expedition,” in Cubitt and Warren, *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, 105–22; John M. Mackenzie, “The Iconography of the Exemplary Life: The Case of David Livingstone,” in Cubitt and Warren, *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, 84–105; Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists in Africa*, 10–11.

³⁹ David Cannadine, *In Churchill’s Shadow: Confronting the Past in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 2003), 26.

⁴⁰ Bernard Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), 172. For Curzon’s optimistic view of future imperialism, see “Lord Curzon on the True Imperialism,” *Times*, 12 December 1907.

were put forward by Curzon and other ultra-imperialists, but these were opposed by different groups of Indian nationalists and some in Britain uncomfortable with the history of Clive's violence and exploitation in India. In each area, the contested narratives of history in Britain and India expressed by these campaigns were crucial to the imperial and nationalist definition of identities.

THE BRITISH AND INDIAN HISTORICAL IMAGINATIONS

Historical narratives of Indian development and the British place within it were integral to the way in which British imperialists imagined India should be ruled.⁴¹ In the aftermath of 1857, British interest in their own history in India and that of their imperial predecessors, the Mughals, returned to the fore as the British linked themselves to an older India.⁴² Viceroys such as Lord Lansdowne speaking on the Age of Consent Bill in 1891 presented themselves as guardians of a purer Hinduism and its "great fundamental principles."⁴³ This imagining of India and its history was crucial to colonialism. Simultaneously, Indian nationalists propagated their own versions of history to empower resistance and a national consciousness. In newspapers, journals, and histories, they opposed the Clive Memorial Fund and its readings of history. At the same time these writers undertook to emphasize the place of Siraj-ud-Daula as a figure of anti-British resistance and to work out their own narratives of Indian history, focusing on Indian resistance and British perfidy.⁴⁴

During his viceroyalty, Lord Curzon cultivated and extended the British interest in the relationship with historical India, especially the Mughals. Curzon used this interest to reinforce the idea of Britain as an impartial arbiter between warring and superstitious Indian factions. His historical argument placed the British within the long history of India, not as an aberration that would ultimately end but as the culmination of all that went before. As he put it in a speech to the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1900, enumerating the invasions that India had experienced, the British were only "borne to India on the crest of a later but similar wave."⁴⁵ During his viceroyalty, Curzon practically enacted this portrayal of British history in India, unveiling a memorial to the Black Hole of Calcutta, and changing the uniform of the guardians at the Taj Mahal to "the traditional garb of Mogul days" and installing a lamp from Cairo over the tomb chamber. Medievalizing with Indian imagery was, as Metcalf has argued, not only a way of maintaining a certain image and governing practice in

⁴¹ J. W. Burrows, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), 2; Catherine Hall, *Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain* (New Haven, 2012); Peter Mandler, *History and National Identity* (London, 2002), 7; Bernard Cohn, "Representing Authority in Victorian India," in Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition*, 165–210, at 189–207.

⁴² Thomas R. Metcalf, *Forging the Raj: Essays on British India in the Heyday of Empire* (Oxford, 2005), 153.

⁴³ Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, 100.

⁴⁴ Richard Goebelt, "The Memory of Lord Clive in Britain and Beyond: Imperial Hero and Villain," in *Sites of Imperial Memory: Commemorating Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Dominik Geppert and Frank Lorenz Muller (Manchester, 2015), 136–52, at 146; [Untitled article], *Soltan*, 3 May 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/393/58, BL.

⁴⁵ Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, 175, 152; Alex Padamsee, *The Return of the Mughal: Historical Fiction and Despotism in Colonial India, 1863–1908* (Basingstoke, 2018), 97.

India but part of the ideology that informed the Raj. Notions of feudal chivalry and medieval ways of ruling over less-developed people were an integral part of the official mind.⁴⁶ In the British imperial histories of the late nineteenth century, such as Alfred Lyall's *The Rise and Expansion of the British Dominion in India*, the Mughal Empire fell with a definitive crash in the eighteenth century, and it was Britain that rescued India from the ensuing anarchy.⁴⁷ A Whiggish narrative was thus established that justified the necessity of British rule. This imagining claimed Britain's place within a lineage of Indian rulers and empires and as a guardian of that history. The Mughals, too, were foreign conquerors of India, and so the British could assume their mantle based on the military efforts of Clive at Plassey.

The great rebellion of 1857 was focus for the memorialization of British India and for tours of sites by British tourists. Different viceroys had incorporated prominent aspects of commemoration for 1857 in their imperial durbars or receptions; Curzon included a march of British veterans of 1857 in the 1903 durbar.⁴⁸ In Britain, the drama and violence of 1857 had a strong morbid fascination;⁴⁹ public commemoration of the anniversary there included parades and speeches. Here again, the same actors as those at work in the Clive Memorial Fund, Perceval Landon and Lord Curzon, were involved, and the focus was similarly on the valorization and militarization of the British presence in India. Landon organized events that took place in December 1907 in London and, in his capacity at the *Daily Telegraph*, collected the names of the veterans in part of an account of 1857. Curzon gave "one of the greatest speeches of his life" at the dinner at the Albert Hall, according to the recollections of the later newspaper proprietor Lord Burnham.⁵⁰ In both Britain and India, Indians held martyrs' days on which they commemorated their own veterans.⁵¹ The development of an opposing Indian narrative to this rebellion had been gathering pace in the 1890s and early 1900s; controversy over the naming of the events of 1857 and whether they constituted mutiny, rebellion, or a war for independence continues to this day.⁵² The British attempted to diminish the episode's importance as arising solely from disaffected soldiers, emphasizing instead the enduring support from much of the Indian population.

Indian memories of 1857 were also building around the anniversary and were being used to create a wider interpretation of Indian nationalism.⁵³ With his 1909 *The Indian War of Independence of 1857*, V. D. Savarkar attempted to shift notions of the struggle from a mutiny to something broader fitting into a narrative of national and religiously unified resistance. Savarkar has become notorious for his later sectarian views and Hindu nationalism, but in this work he presented the

⁴⁶ Metcalf, *Forging the Raj*, 154; Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 196–97.

⁴⁷ Alfred Lyall, *The Rise and Expansion of the British Dominion in India* (London, 1894), 63–64, 89.

⁴⁸ Sonakshi Goyle, "Tracing a Cultural Memory: Commemoration of 1857 in the Delhi Durbars, 1877, 1903, and 1911," *Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (2016): 799–815, at 805.

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Perceval Landon, *Under the Sun: Impressions of Indian Cities* (London, 1906); Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination* (Cambridge, 2005), 3–4.

⁵⁰ Burnham, *Peterborough Court*, 140; Landon, 1857.

⁵¹ Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities*, 97.

⁵² Biswamoy Pati, ed., *The 1857 Rebellion* (Oxford, 2007), xiii–xliii.

⁵³ Biswamoy Pati, *The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India: Exploring Transgressions, Contests, and Diversities* (Oxford, 2010), 3–5.

resistance to the British as cross-religious.⁵⁴ Similarly, Romesh Dutt in his 1908 economic history of India emphasized how the rebellion that began as “a mere mutiny of soldiers” spread “among large classes of people in Northern and Central India, and converted it into a political insurrection.”⁵⁵ These increasingly national interpretations of the 1857 rebellion fed into the arguments of Indian newspapers around the dual anniversary year of 1907. The two anniversaries coincided to bring this history to a prominent position in British and Indian imaginations during 1907–08.⁵⁶

“HIS SPLENDID QUALITIES SHONE FORTH”: CLIVE AS IMPERIAL HERO

The end of the nineteenth century had seen a resurgence of Clive’s reputation. Colonel Malleon lauded him in 1893 in Oxford’s *Rulers of India* series as a man who “revelled in danger,” which meant that “his splendid qualities shone forth with a brilliancy which has never been surpassed.”⁵⁷ An earlier book by Malleon, *The Founders of the Indian Empire*, was cited by G. A. Henty in the preface of *With Clive in India* as a source for his own narration of the “wonderful events” that “ended in the final triumph of the English both in Bengal and Madras.”⁵⁸ But Malleon had his critics. A review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1894 called his new biography “scarcely satisfactory” and claimed that he wrote about Clive with “sloppy vehemence.”⁵⁹ Thomas Babington Macaulay’s essay on Clive had begun a reevaluation of his legacy when it was published in 1840, and it would be reissued by both Macmillan and Longmans in 1905 and 1907 in New York and London.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, Clive’s role at Plassey remained a difficult subject for his supporters. As a largely positive review of Malleon’s biography of Clive in the *Glasgow Herald* remarked, “Macaulay was much more severe on the fictitious treaty and forged signature incident . . . than is Colonel Malleon.” The reviewer ultimately viewed Macaulay as having “a wider and juster” view of the incident, although only as far as calling it “an error of judgment rather than a deliberate sacrifice of honor.”⁶¹ Clive also appears in Rudyard Kipling and Charles Fletcher’s 1911 *A School History of England*, which presents him as the “real founder of our Indian Empire.”⁶² In

⁵⁴ V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence of 1857* (London, 1909); Pati, *Great Rebellion of 1857 in India*, xvi.

⁵⁵ Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India in the Victorian Age* (London, 1908), 223.

⁵⁶ Narayani Gupta, “Pictorialising the ‘Mutiny’ of 1857,” in *Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850–1900*, ed. Maria Antonella Pelizzari (Montreal, 2003), 216–39, at 227–28; Chakravarty, *Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, 3.

⁵⁷ G. B. Malleon, *Rulers of India: Lord Clive* (Oxford, 1893), 126–27.

⁵⁸ G. B. Malleon, *The Founders of the Indian Empire: Clive, Warren Hastings, and Wellesley: Lord Clive* (London, 1882); G. A. Henty, preface to *With Clive in India: Or, the Beginnings of an Empire* (London, 1884), iii.

⁵⁹ “Reviews,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 17 January 1894.

⁶⁰ Macmillan sold nine thousand copies of this essay between 1905 and 1908 alone. See Berny Sèbe, “Exhibiting the Empire in Print: The Press, the Publishing World, and the Promotion of ‘Greater Britain,’” in *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire*, ed. John McAleer and John M. MacKenzie (Manchester, 2015), 168–93, at 183.

⁶¹ “Literature,” *Glasgow Herald*, 10 August 1893.

⁶² Charles Robert Fletcher and Rudyard Kipling, *A School History of England* (Oxford, 1911), 193.

this glorification of Clive's adventures, there is an attempt, albeit unevenly successful, to induct him as a canonical British imperial hero.⁶³

William Forwood, a merchant and Conservative politician, wrote an initial appeal for a statue to Clive from the Grand Hotel in Calcutta on 8 February 1907 to the *Times* in London. Published on 30 March, it praised the man who "made India" and lauded Curzon's "preservation of her [India's] ancient monuments and historical records."⁶⁴ Foxwood's call was echoed by the *Spectator* a week later. The *Spectator* thought Clive "in every sense worthy of commemoration" and devoted considerable space in the article to combating the aspersions cast against his character.⁶⁵ On 22 June 1907, it ran "The Anniversary of Plassey," quoting Robert Orme's account of the battle and presenting Clive as a wise and fair general in contrast to the "Oriental Despot," Siraj-ud-Daula. The article made use of earlier historians like Orme to argue that Clive had "suffered wrong" in the "moral judgment of the world." Clive, it claimed, was more than the "rough-and-ready soldier" of popular belief and was instead an "intellectual statesman" and a "political philosopher" who offered wise advice to all tasked with governing the British Empire. The writer concluded with Clive's suicide, denying that it was due to his Indian career: his death was due "not to remorse or opium, but to the depression caused by some obscure nervous or dyspeptic complaint."⁶⁶

Imperial hero worship was a favorite tactic of Conservative commentators and politicians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁷ Although there was a strong Conservative interest in the Clive Memorial Fund and in Clive as an imperial hero, the appeal of the fund in Britain was bipartisan. With the rise of Liberal imperialism, from the 1890s onward there was a marked attempt within the party to contest the Conservative monopoly over imperial fervor.⁶⁸ The Clive Memorial Fund had numerous Liberal members on its committee, including Lord Morley and Lord Rosebery. Although it was Curzon who took the lead as a Conservative and ultra-imperial politician, as Nicholas B. Dirks has argued, colonial events, arguments, and theories, crucial for "securing the nation-state itself," rebounded upon the metropole, and the Clive Memorial Fund was an example of this.⁶⁹ In some ways, this campaign and its associated notions of imperialism were successful. The campaign raised enough money for the two statues, and although especially in India there was considerable opposition to the campaign, in Britain it managed to appear to be above politics and aimed simply at honoring an imperial hero.

Nevertheless, support in Britain was not unanimous. The fund deliberately appealed to an imperialist section of British society, particularly those with former

⁶³ Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers, and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain, 1870–1918* (Oxford, 2006), 68–71; Malleon, *Lord Clive*.

⁶⁴ William Forwood, "Lord Clive," *Times*, 30 March 1907.

⁶⁵ "Lord Clive," *Spectator*, 6 April 1907.

⁶⁶ "The Anniversary of Plassey," *Spectator*, 22 June 1907; see also Sinharaja Tammita Delgoda, "'Nabob, Historian, and Orientalist' Robert Orme: The Life and Career of an East India Company Servant (1728–1801)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2, no. 3 (1992): 363–76.

⁶⁷ Sèbe, *Heroic Imperialists*, 155.

⁶⁸ Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton, 2010), 21–22.

⁶⁹ Nicholas B. Dirks, introduction to *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor, 1992), 1–26, at 4.

experience in India. A month after Curzon's initial call which he considered to have been obscured by the parliamentary budget, he felt it necessary to relaunch the appeal.⁷⁰ Some of the fund's supporters also recognized its limitations. As Reginald Clayton, secretary of the Old Standians, an association of a school that Clive had attended, wrote, the funds that included the support of thirty-one Old Standians were enough "to provide, *if not amply*, at least respectably, for the two memorials."⁷¹

In launching the appeal in the *Times* in April 1907, Curzon went beyond the praises of Forwood or the *Spectator*.⁷² By his assessment, Clive had laid the foundations for the glorious and immortal empire to come of which all patriotic Englishmen were inheritors: "At the age of 31 [Clive] planted the foundations of an Empire more enduring than Alexander's, more splendid than Caesar's. Nor for half a century after his death was even meagre justice done to him in the avenging page of history."⁷³

In a speech to Merchant Taylors School, which Clive attended between 1737 and 1739, Lord Curzon expanded upon this theme.⁷⁴ Clive was an imperial and racial hero and one of the "master spirits of the English race." Alongside Julius Caesar and Napoleon, he was a force seemingly "put into the world to shape the destinies of mankind," one of the great men of British history for schoolboys to emulate. Curzon charted Clive's meteoric rise from a "poor and unknown clerk" in Madras to a great military captain in India "loved by the native troops who served him."⁷⁵ As Curzon made clear in a speech "on the True Imperialism" to the Birmingham and Midland Institute, both Clive and Warren Hastings, the first (and later impeached) British governor-general of India, "had been men with clean hands and a high moral purpose." Preferring to deal in generalities rather than specifics such as Clive's deal with Mir Jafar, the loot that he gained from Plassey, or his links with the 1770 famine, Curzon's speech outlined Clive's faith in the "secular religion" of imperialism. The "True" form of this was animated by a spirit and morality that were "not merely the key to glory and wealth, but the call to duty." The origins of empire that Clive represented demonstrated the English "instinct," an "ineradicable and divinely implanted impulse which had sent the Englishman forth into the uttermost parts of the earth and made him the parents of new societies and the architect of unpremeditated creations."⁷⁶

Yet despite Curzon's rhetoric, Clive was an awkward character for imperialists devoted to portraying morality, selfless service, duty, and the idea of the benevolent

⁷⁰ Curzon, "Clive Memorial Fund," *Times*, 27 May 1907. The fund was closed in July 1908. Curzon of Kedleston, "The Clive Memorial Fund," *Times*, 15 July 1908. Comparison with campaigns for statues such as Edith Cavell's are revealing of the mass support statue campaigns could raise. See Sue Malvern, "'For King and Country': Frampton's Edith Cavell (1915–1920) and the Writing of Gender in Memorials to the Great War," in *Sculpture and the Pursuit of a Modern Ideal in Britain, c. 1880–1930*, ed. David J. Getsey (London, 2004), 219–44, at 219.

⁷¹ "The Clive Memorial Fund," *Manchester Guardian*, 14 March 1908 (my italics).

⁷² Curzon, "The Commemoration of Lord Clive," *Times*, 8 April 1907. This appeal was widened in subsequent letters in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Telegraph*; see Curzon, "A Clive Statue," *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1907; Curzon, "Lord Clive Memorial," *Daily Telegraph*, 19 April 1907.

⁷³ Curzon, "The Commemoration of Lord Clive," *Times*, 8 April 1907.

⁷⁴ This was quoted at length in "Memorial to Lord Clive," *Daily Telegraph*, December 14, 1907; "Lord Curzon on Clive," *Times*, 14 December 1907.

⁷⁵ "Lord Curzon on Clive," *Times*, 14 December 1907.

⁷⁶ "Lord Curzon on the True Imperialism," *Times*, 12 December 1907.

British Empire. The statue in London was initially exhibited at the British Academy and then “sprung upon the public without fuss or ceremony” at Gwydyr House in August 1912 due to building works on King Charles Street and despite press reports that King George V would unveil it.⁷⁷ Wilmot Corfield commented in a letter to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* that “no site in London is too good for the victor of Plassey and saviour of Calcutta” and bemoaned its “relegation to comparative obscurity in what is little short of a blind alley.”⁷⁸ There was also little public acknowledgment of the statue’s move to King Charles Street in 1916, although *Punch* commented that it had been “removed from Whitehall” and denied that Clive’s “rough-and-ready methods were in any sense representative of the best British diplomacy.”⁷⁹ Even many like the novelist and imperialist Flora Annie Steel, who praised the role played by Clive, criticized this period in Indian colonial history as rapacious. Wrote Steel, “England had not yet grasped the significance of the White Man’s burden; she wanted to be paid for carrying it. That is the bitter truth.”⁸⁰ Reimagining India’s place in the British Empire had a concomitant effect in reimagining Britain’s imperial purpose, but this was aimed and received by a particular section of society and overshadowed by later priorities. The afterlife of Robert Clive was thus a refashioning of a more imperial narrative and architecture for a more completely imperial metropolis.

The atrocities in which Clive was involved were attacked by the Indian newspaper *Soltan*: “[H]is Lordship may not feel shame in showing his own misdeeds to the world, but what has Clive done to him that he must expose his misdeeds also?”⁸¹ The brutalities of Clive’s period of empire, marked by force, chaotic reverses, trickery, and outright theft, were ill-fitted to the benevolent vision idealized at this point of imperialism. Clive had more than his share in this; returning to Britain as the archetypal nabob, he was attacked as such by many inside and outside of Parliament.⁸² But Curzon argued in this speech that Clive merely outplayed the nawab and was “no self-seeker.” Acknowledging that Clive had “amassed great wealth,” Curzon dismissed this as something which was “easy in those days in India”: Clive “might easily have been a hundred times richer than he was.” He never had “mean or petty” motives and was “never guilty of a harsh or cruel deed.” The only word against him that Curzon allowed—although given Curzon’s taste for autocracy, this was perhaps praise—was that he was “somewhat intolerant of opposition.”⁸³

Nevertheless, Peter Yeandle has argued, there is a question over the purpose of this canonization.⁸⁴ This hero worship was not solely intended to create men like Clive.

⁷⁷ “The Clive Statue,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 29 August 1912; see also “The Statue to Lord Clive,” *Leicester Daily Post*, 17 July 1911.

⁷⁸ “London Statues,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 February 1912.

⁷⁹ “Charivaria,” *Punch*, 6 December 1916. See also *Times*, 14 August 1912.

⁸⁰ Flora Annie Steel, *India through the Ages: A Popular and Picturesque History of Hindustan* (London, 1908), 282, 307.

⁸¹ *Soltan*, 25 May 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, BL IOR/L/R/5/33/464–66/84.

⁸² Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Clive of India: A Political and Psychological Essay* (London, 1975), 278; James P. Lawford, *Clive, Proconsul of India: A Biography* (London, 1976), 375; Burton Stein and David Arnold, *A History of India* (London, 2010), 202–3.

⁸³ “Lord Curzon On Clive,” *Times*, 14 December 1907.

⁸⁴ Peter Yeandle, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire: The Politics of History Teaching in England, 1870–1930* (Manchester, 2015), 124–26.

The observers of these histories and statues were not meant to emulate but to idolize these heroes—to look up them and recognize their virtues in the current “master spirits of the English race.”⁸⁵ Clive was an embodiment of English adventurous striving. For Curzon, Clive’s actions were “for the good of England, for the good of India,” and this was a truth that “no one can reasonably doubt[,] and posterity, correcting the errors and atoning for the injustice of his contemporaries, has rightly assigned to him an imperishable niche in the temple of fame.”⁸⁶

This vision of Clive’s achievements in India and the autocracy and interference that it recommended for the future governance of India collided with the priorities of the new viceroy. Having been left to deal with the fallout from Curzon’s own autocracy as viceroy, Lord Minto deemed the memorialization provocative while he attempted to create a slightly more cooperative mode of governance. He wrote in a letter to the secretary of state for India, Lord Morley,

If a true history of Curzon’s rule is ever written, it will make the world wonder. Few people at home know the legacy of bitter discontent he left for his successor. It is only this morning that I heard of a recent conversation with Scindia in which the latter got very excited, and said that the tyranny of Curzon’s rule towards the Native Chiefs had been so unbearable that nothing would have induced them to continue to put up with it, and they would have united together without regard to religion or caste to throw it off. And yet Curzon always posed as a great friend of the Native Chiefs.⁸⁷

Both Morley and Minto, irritated by Curzon’s continued interference in Indian matters and his fondness in correspondence for the advising phrase “when I left India,” were attempting to take a more conciliatory approach to Indian rule.⁸⁸ Minto and his successor as viceroy, Lord Hardinge, were part of a raj with a changing official narrative. Although the years before 1914 marked the “high point of official racism” in terms of medical and scientific theories of white racial superiority, they were also less totalizing and autocratic in terms of the power the viceroy attempted to embody.⁸⁹ The signals that a memorial to the wars that founded the British Empire in India sent ran counter to the reform and limited cooperation the new viceroy had been trying to promote since 1905. In India, and particularly Bengal, the campaigns of *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) and *hartals* (strikes) were gathering pace. These were accompanied for many Bengalis and others across India by an increased awareness of recent Indian history as one of resistance to British oppression.⁹⁰ Minto, and many of the British in India, were aware of this and were cautious after Curzon’s high-handedness about appearing triumphal or autocratic.

⁸⁵ “Lord Curzon on Clive,” *Times*, 14 December 1907.

⁸⁶ “Lord Curzon on Clive,” *Times*, 14 December 1907.

⁸⁷ Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 12 September 1907, BL Mss Eur D573/12, fol. 86.

⁸⁸ Lord Curzon to Lord Morley, [n.d.], MS. Eng. D3568, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

⁸⁹ Jon Wilson, *India Conquered: Britain’s Raj and the Chaos of Empire* (London, 2016), 389; see also Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 223.

⁹⁰ Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990): 383–408; Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Birth of Academic Historical Writing in India,” in *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, vol. 4, 1800–1945, ed. Stuart Macintyre, Juan Maiguashca, and Attila Pók (Oxford, 2011), 520–36, at 521–23;

Minto was incensed by Curzon's interference in Indian politics. In turn, Curzon accused Minto of organizing a "conspiracy" to undermine the fund in India. Curzon wrote to Morley arguing that the fund was beneficial and supported by many Indians. He also stated that, despite Minto's claim to the contrary, he had consulted the viceroy about the fund. He asked Minto to circulate this fact to his colleagues in India, to vindicate his position.⁹¹ Although Minto was supportive of a memorial to Clive in Britain, he believed that it would not be accepted in India. As he wrote to Morley, it was a "most ill-advised movement." He was worried about its effect upon Indian opinion: "[E]veryone, without a single exception, whom I have talked to about it here has been strongly opposed to any Memorial in India at the present time."⁹² He continued this position in a later letter: "[M]uch as I would like to honour Clive's memory, the present moment in my opinion was most inopportune to start anything of the sort . . . The Anglo-Indian newspapers, with the exception of the *Times of India* and the *Rangoon Gazette*, either opposed the proposal, or gave no support to it, and the native press strongly disapproved it."⁹³

Curzon's appeal for contributions in India represented just the provocation that Minto was anxious to avoid, especially in Bengal. In particular, the linked memorial at Plassey that Curzon had begun while he was viceroy was provocative to Indian opinion. Minto remarked to Morley that "the historical inexactitude and the reference to the strength of the opposing armies should be erased from the other tablet. If these can be erased so much the better, otherwise a new tablet will be necessary. Home Department noted strongly against them as vain-glorious and likely to provoke criticism, and I don't think the inscription should be retained in its present shape."⁹⁴ Curzon was attempting to build a new interpretation of official history. Minto, though hardly an anti-imperial radical, was uncomfortable with the provocative glorification of British historical figures.

Criticism of Curzon's initiative from the Indian press was quick to appear. *Bangavasi*, a conservative Hindu Bengali weekly with nine thousand subscribers in June 1907, was a prominent exponent of a view that argued that Curzon, and the British government in India more widely, were attempting to manipulate history.⁹⁵ Although Sumit Sarkar has argued that the paper was "consistently loyal and very critical of all forms of anti-colonial politics," it was building a historical argument of British trickery under Clive.⁹⁶ It saw ultra-imperialists like Curzon as trying to repair the reputation of Clive, a figure whom, it argued, all right-thinking Indians would despise. However, citing the historical work of Curzon, it argued that by focusing on the battle and Clive's duplicity, the episode was helping Indians to

Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960* (New York, 2007), 94–125.

⁹¹ Lord Curzon to Lord Morley, 25 September 1907, MSS Eur F111/449/58–64, BL.

⁹² Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 14 August 1907, MSS Eur D573/12, fol. 67, BL.

⁹³ Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 29 August 1907, MSS Eur D573/12, fol. 72, BL.

⁹⁴ Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 14 September 1908, MSS Eur D573/17, fol. 65, BL.

⁹⁵ Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33, BL; The *Bangavasi* had been prosecuted in 1891 during the agitation over the Age of Consent Bill; see Kamra, *Indian Periodical Press*, 99–126; Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Postmodernism, Hindu Fundamentalism, History* (Delhi, 2005), 115.

⁹⁶ Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames*, 115.

recover their own memories of the methods of the East India Company in the eighteenth century.⁹⁷ The newspaper accentuated Clive's immorality by presenting the example of an honest Englishman, Admiral Charles Watson.

Building on this, *Hindi Bangavasi* produced an illustrated article two days later on the main characters at the battle of Plassey:

Clive is represented as having deprived Serajuddaulah of his throne by forgery and fraud; Admiral Watson as a high-minded and heroic naval commander who declined to sign the document forged by Clive to defraud Umichand; Mohan Lal as a brave and patriotic soldier, who, disregarding the command of his faithless and disloyal superior Mirjafar, fought on the side of his master, and whose holding on a little longer would have changed the course of Indian history; Serajuddaulah as the last independent but unfortunate ruler of Bengal, who in going to save the independence of his country, lost both his life and kingdom, being a victim to the machinations of his wicked ministers and the roguery of the English, and lastly, Mirjafar as the traitor, the ungrateful, the disloyal, and the enemy of his country.⁹⁸

Other Bengali newspapers were equally clear about who were the heroes of Plassey and who were the villains. *Soltan*, a vociferous weekly paper with five hundred subscribers, argued that, on the anniversary of Plassey, the most appropriate thing for Indians would be "to hold an annual Seraj-ud-Dawla festival on the 23rd June."⁹⁹

Nationalist arguments developed a narrative of British duplicity in which Bengal, as a foothold for India more widely, was won by deceit and not in fair combat. In response, and to cement Clive's martial reputation, this trickery was painted by his supporters as a necessary tactic in a chaotic India. But by emphasizing Clive's violence, the memorialization of Plassey also acted as a reminder. Violence was the power that underlay the Raj, and Curzon's planned memorials were a none-too-subtle reminder of it. Curzon admired Clive for the energy of his violence and for its use. As Jon Wilson has noted, the Clive statue in both London and Calcutta—with cannons blazing around its base from the siege of Arcot in 1751—was the first to depict Clive's violence and Clive receiving the grant of Bengal from the rajah in 1765.¹⁰⁰ This depiction was a deliberate choice; Curzon was closely involved with both the design of the statue and the selection of the sculptor John Tweed, a man with strong imperialist credentials.¹⁰¹

The focus on Clive and his actions in India raised the question of which British leaders should be commemorated and what they said about governance. This

⁹⁷ [Untitled article], *Hindi Bangavasi*, 6 July 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/658/40–42, BL.

⁹⁸ [Untitled article], *Hindi Bangavasi*, 8 July 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/658/42, BL.

⁹⁹ [Untitled article], *Soltan*, 3 May 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/393/58, BL.

¹⁰⁰ Jon Wilson, "The Silence of Empire: Imperialism and India," in *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. David M. Craig and James Thompson (Basingstoke, 2013), 218–41, at 225.

¹⁰¹ Jason Edwards, "Introduction: From the East India Company to the West Indies and Beyond: The World of British Sculpture, c. 1757–1947," special issue, "British Sculpture c. 1757–1947: Global Contexts," *Visual Culture in Britain* 11, no. 2 (2010): 147–72, at 163; Nicola Capon, "Exhibiting Victorian Sculpture in Context: Display, Narrative, and Conversation in 'John Tweed: Empire Sculptor, Rodin's Friend,'" *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 22 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.16995/nm.739>.

history was used by Bengali newspapers to oppose the autocratic approach to governing India, as opposed to the Liberal inclusion of Indians within politics. *Sonar Bharat* in December 1907 questioned what heroism Clive possessed, as the British knew “that he was a past master in forgery and cheating” but nothing praiseworthy of him. The newspaper argued that commemorating Clive was evidence of British “degeneration.” Considering that “they have erected a memorial to Lord Dalhousie instead of doing the same to Lord Ripon, it is no wonder that they will thus show honour to the memory of Lord Clive.”¹⁰² Ripon, the viceroy of India from 1880 to 1884, was often held up by Bengali writers as an example of a more inclusive approach to the Indian empire in contrast to the strident and exclusionary imperialism that had followed.¹⁰³

The focus on Clive thus allowed the personal details of his life to become a commentary on wider British morality. Newspapers such as *Daily Hitavadi*, with two thousand subscribers, flipped the usual English narrative concerning their own pre-eminent moral superiority.¹⁰⁴ A memorial to Clive commemorated an individual who destroyed the “independence and the glory of the Moguls by means of forgery, deceit and treachery.”¹⁰⁵ *Sandhya*, a radical Hindu newspaper whose editor, Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay, was put on trial for sedition in 1907 and died in the course of the trial, homed in on Clive’s disreputable aspects.¹⁰⁶ One article argued that to “perpetuate the memory of Clive by a statue will be a disgrace to the British name.” Clive, it claimed, was “a suicide, disowned by his countrymen, a bad character from his early boyhood, accustomed to all sorts of vicious practices” who, it was recommended by a Parliamentary committee of enquiry, “should be handed over to a court of justice as a criminal.”¹⁰⁷ The British justification for empire by the early 1900s was based on their supreme virtues as a governing race. Commemorating someone who represented the antithesis to this was, in the eyes of many of these Bengali writers, nonsensical.

CLIVE AND HIS LEGACIES FOR INDIA IN 1907: AN EMPIRE “MORE SPLENDID THAN CAESAR’S” OR ONE “FOUNDED ON DECEIT”?

The questions of whether to put up a statue to Clive or Siraj-ud-Daula, to commemorate Clive for his victory, or to remind viewers of his duplicity were all commentaries on the definition of imperial India. For Minto, there was no ideal statue, with the controversy about India’s past weighing down attempts at reform. The debate over a statue of a historical figure reflected the desire to further mold India’s future.

Yet Clive was integral to inaugurating the British Empire in India and laying the foundations of Britain’s power, which was why Curzon considered him worthy of

¹⁰² [Untitled article], *Sonar Bharat*, 21 December 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/1539/99, BL.

¹⁰³ [Untitled article], *Marwari*, 16 July 1909, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/36/956/58, BL.

¹⁰⁴ [Untitled article], *Daily Hitavadi*, 30 June 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/634–65/62, BL.

¹⁰⁵ [Untitled article], *Soltan*, 20 December 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/1536/90, BL.

¹⁰⁶ Sanyal, *Revolutionary Pamphlets*, 34.

¹⁰⁷ [Untitled article], *Sandhya*, 29 June 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/61, BL.

remembrance. In a letter to the *Times* in May 1907, Curzon made a particular call to retired members of the Indian Civil Service. He hoped that they would “not forget the man who not only gave to our country an empire, but also was the founder of that unequalled reputation by which they and their successors have since held and are holding it to the honour of Great Britain and the good of all mankind.”¹⁰⁸ The Clive Memorial Fund targeted sections of British society strongly associated with the Indian Empire, doing so by imagining them as protectors of a continuous legacy. From Clive down to retired civil service district officers, uninterrupted by 1857 or the passage of time, India represented the basis of British Empire and the ideal of its practice.

Aside from what they considered inevitable opposition from radicals, the Clive Memorial Fund's supporters argued that Clive was honored among right-thinking Indians. Perceval Landon wrote in *The Englishman*, “A portion of the native press may be relied on to make political capital out of anything. But even plausibility has dropped out of this factious opposition since it became known that the proposal to commemorate Clive receives the cordial approval of the very native Princes—Hindu and Mahomedan alike—whose fortunes might be thought to have been chiefly affected by Clive's conquests.”¹⁰⁹ Quoting a supportive letter from the nawab of Murshidabad, Landon argued that Clive's victories had brought peace and unity to a war-torn country.

This attempt to make it appear that support for the Clive Memorial Fund was above any reasonable objection, the only opposition being the political agitation of radicals, extended from the imperial view of Indian attitudes to those in Britain. Support for imperialism, and its heroes, was being increasingly promoted as beyond reasonable debate. Curzon and Landon vocally publicized the backing and donations of key figures like Edward VII and the Prince of Wales to raise the fund above mere politics.¹¹⁰

Curzon principally idolized Clive for his legacies. His time as “an administrator, a reformer, a man of affairs” was crucial to the lasting influence of his victory at Plassey. It was in this selfless reform, the establishment of the administrative basis for the subsequent empire, that Clive shone. Ignoring the famine that had followed in Bengal as a result of the East India Company's and Clive's administration, Curzon fashioned Clive as the hero facing immoral opposition. His fall came about because he stamped out too much “cupidity and peculation,” the authors of which followed him to England and pursued him to an early grave. Clive's administration had laid the foundation of the empire that Curzon was so honored to have worked for. Plassey, as even the most ardent imperialists had to admit, was not a great and glorious battle, despite Curzon's attempt to exaggerate the size of Siraj-ud-daula's forces in his obelisk on the site;¹¹¹ instead, the emphasis was placed on the subsequent transformation of this victory into something more permanent. The key aspect of Clive's greatness lay in his genius for administration and governance.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Curzon, “Clive Memorial Fund,” 8.

¹⁰⁹ See Minto to Morley, 4 September 1907, MS Eur D573/12, fol. 81, BL.

¹¹⁰ Curzon, “Clive Memorial Fund,” 7; *Englishman*, 4 September 1907.

¹¹¹ Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 14 September 1908, MS Eur D573/17, fol. 65, BL.

¹¹² Malleeson, *Lord Clive*, 107–37; “Lord Curzon on Clive,” *Times*, 14 December 1907.

The Indian responses to the fund, and the attached interpretations of history, were as vociferous as Minto had feared. Both British and Indian historians were placing increasing emphasis on the events of 1857. In Britain, nearly one hundred Indian students and nationalists, the *Times* reported with concern, gathered at India House in London in May 1908 to commemorate their martyrs of the war of 1857.¹¹³ Savarkar, in Britain during the controversies over 1907, was influential in organizing an Indian commemoration of heroes of 1857.¹¹⁴ He emphasized the unity of Hindus and Muslims in the war, a unity that he attributed to the atrocities of the British, not the greased cartridges that British historians focused on to the exclusion of other factors.¹¹⁵ Much of his introduction to his *Indian War of Independence* was given over to disputing what he considered the “misleading and unjust ideas” that English authors disseminated about 1857.¹¹⁶ Savarkar linked rebellion with broader themes of *swadharma* and *swaraj*, duty and self-rule. He built a narrative among those, particularly in Bengal, who were writing to oppose partition and the rewriting of history that they saw in the Clive Memorial Fund.¹¹⁷ When his history was published in 1909, it was promptly banned by the British, and Savarkar was arrested in 1910 and extradited back to India for his activities at India House.

Other nationalist writing about 1857, often focusing on figures such as Lakshmi-bai, the rani of Jhansi, had developed from the 1880s. This writing formed a counterpoint to the British heroic canon built up around Nicholson and others.¹¹⁸ Instead of solely opposing the campaign for building a statue to the conqueror of India, Indian nationalists now developed a separate narrative of Indian resistance. Indian narratives of 1857, although they often disagreed over the religious dimensions to the revolt and its aims, emphasized the role of the Sepoy as a peasant in uniform and the colonial exploitation of India in which British atrocities reveal them as violent trespassers in India.¹¹⁹

Coupled with this rethinking of 1857, Bengali newspapers developed their own narratives concerning Clive's victories. These narratives criticized Clive's duplicity, his forgery of documents for Amit Chand, and the treachery of Mirjafar. The *Bangavasi* argued, “No one can deny that the British Indian Empire is founded on deceit practised by Lord Clive a hundred and fifty years back, and that this is the reason why the English nation has so long refrained from perpetuating his memory. The *Englishman* newspaper now tries to defend Lord Clive on the ground that he cheated Umichand [Amit Chan] not for his own sake but for his country. . . This clearly indicates the moral tendency of the *Englishman*. It is, however, not strange, for the cup of iniquities is full.”¹²⁰

¹¹³ Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities*, 97.

¹¹⁴ Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar* (Bombay, 1966), 35.

¹¹⁵ Savarkar, *Indian War of Independence of 1857*, 3–7; Vikram Visana, “Savarkar before Hindutva: Sovereignty, Republicanism, and Populism in India, c. 1900–1920,” *Modern Intellectual History* 18, no. 4 (2021): 1106–29.

¹¹⁶ Savarkar, *Indian War of Independence of 1857*, 5.

¹¹⁷ Savarkar, 7–8.

¹¹⁸ Prachi Deshpande, “The Making of an Indian Nationalist Archive: Lakshmibai, Jhansi, and 1857,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 67, no. 3 (2008): 855–79, at 857, 862.

¹¹⁹ Biswamoy Pati, *The Great Rebellion of 1857 in India: Exploring Transgressions, Contests, and Diversities* (Oxford, 2010), 4.

¹²⁰ [Untitled article,] *Bangavasi*, 18 May 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/466/85, BL.

A year after the Clive Memorial Fund was launched, *Bharat Mitra*, a Calcutta-based weekly with 3,200 subscribers, once again criticized Curzon's versions of history. Remarking on Curzon's awarding an Eton scholar a gold medal of the Royal Asiatic Society, the paper argued, "[t]he histories are written by Englishmen. What truths about India could be learnt from such works?" *Basumati*, another Calcutta-based weekly, with a circulation of 15,000, argued that Curzon was himself singularly ignorant of Indian history. Had he been "in touch with the disposition of the Bengalis and their communal system of life, [he] would never have partitioned Bengal."¹²¹ Offering a different interpretation and commenting on the success of the fund in 1909, another Bengal paper, *Jasohar*, argued that the Clive statues should reflect a truer history. The one erected in Whitehall should "have engraved on its pedestal Burke's remarks . . . and the Calcutta image should show Umichand's forged agreement hanging round the neck."¹²² Recalling the opprobrium heaped on Clive by Edmund Burke, *Jasohar* attempted to bring contemporary opposing views of Clive to the fore. This commentary showed an increasing willingness to historically contextualize the statue in India according to nationalist ideas of the past and use them to unite Indian opposition to British wrongs.

Unrest and strikes formed the principal topic throughout the Bengal newspaper reports of 1907. These actions protested partition, the deportation of Lajpat Rai, British autocracy, and imperialist readings of Plassey, Clive, and 1857.¹²³ The articles indicate that an increasing Indian campaign, violent and nonviolent, aimed at resistance to colonial pressure and drew on historical narratives to bolster its case. That resistance was articulated against the Clive Memorial Fund and against previous actions such as Curzon's attempt to take greater control of university curricula through the Indian Universities Commission in 1902. As Richard Goebelt has noted, Nabinchandra Sen's poem "Palashir Yuddha" (1875) was banned by the British after the partition of Bengal and the unrest in 1905–06.¹²⁴ Sen, a Bengali poet based in Calcutta, described the battle of Plassey and the arrival of the British as the beginning of "a night of eternal gloom." Similarly, in the literary magazine *Bharati*, the Bengali poet Rabindranath publicized his strong support for the increased "enthusiasm for History" that he saw emerging among many Indians in the country.¹²⁵ The elaboration of this historical narrative, asserting itself against the imperial one, allowed for the better articulation of Indian opposition to the British.

In Britain, Indian nationalists often had to confront the British argument that India had degenerated from a glorious past but enjoyed respect because of this past.¹²⁶ The inaccuracies and blatant prejudice of British accounts of historical India offered scope for groups within India to emphasize the continued strength of Indian civilization as modern and rational. Nationalist histories were beginning

¹²¹ [Untitled article,] *Basumati* and *Bharat Mitra*, 29 May 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/36/708/76, BL.

¹²² [Untitled article,] *Jasohar*, 8 July 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/36/913/70, BL.

¹²³ Bengal Newspaper Reports, 1907, IOR/L/R/5/33, BL.

¹²⁴ Goebelt, "Memory of Lord Clive," 146.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Chakrabarty, "Birth of Academic Historical Writing," 524–25.

¹²⁶ Theodore Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination: Nineteenth-Century Visions of a Greater Britain* (Cambridge, 2011), 311–13.

to reach beyond the position of liberal imperialism articulated by some earlier historians in praise of British liberal progress.¹²⁷ Instead, Indian critics flipped British critiques of tyranny and liberal progress into an Indian context. They criticized British autocracy and emphasized the enlightened and responsive rule of Mughal emperors like Akbar, who adapted to the local Indian context.¹²⁸ History was a battleground in determining the identity and position of the country, and one that many Indians could see repeating itself in British imperialism in the 1900s. Jnanendra Nath Gupta, in his biography of Romesh Dutt, remarked on the similarity of Cecil Rhodes's founding of Rhodesia to "the method of Clive and Hastings," and on Rhodes's appearance as the "modern hero" in Britain.¹²⁹ To those on the sharper end of colonialism, the methods of Clive were not always as much in the past as many in Britain claimed.

For the British, legitimate Indian opinion was filtered through the maharajas, so the Bengali newspapers and their growing influence were an abiding worry.¹³⁰ Minto warned Morley on numerous occasions about the effect of sedition in India and the necessity of the Press and Regulations Act.¹³¹ Some Indian writers were portraying Clive as a forger, deceiving Amit Chand and Siraj-ud-Daula to drain India of its wealth. This immoral origin for British India was then used to criticize Lord Curzon and his legacy of autocracy.

Curzon's reputation for arrogance gave rise to unconcealed glee in the Indian press whenever the fund seemed to run into difficulty. There were rumors that the king-emperor Edward VII had initially been unwilling to contribute, and that he had been forced to subscribe by Curzon. *Hindi Bangavasi* refused to believe in the king's change of heart, again attributing it to the duplicity of the British government, but pointedly asked "whether this Royal contribution will increase or decrease the popular love for the emperor."¹³² The announcement of the king's support, much paraded by Curzon and Landon, was intended to cut through doubts over British support for the fund. Indians would, the British expected, follow the king-emperor's lead.

Curzon used his hierarchical interpretation of the history of British India in making his appeal in India, and he directed it at Indian princes. These princes, as the expression of that hierarchy, were assumed to be the gracious benefactors of the legacy of Clive's rule. But some were responding to the reaction that the fund caused in the Indian press. *Soltan* published a list of "sycophants" who contributed to the fund, and the *Daily Hitavadi* argued that while the maharaja of Burdwan could spend his fortune however he liked, "when he presumes to teach people

¹²⁷ Koditschek, *Liberalism, Imperialism, and the Historical Imagination*, 311.

¹²⁸ Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 100; H. G. Keene, *The Fall of the Moghul Empire: An Historical Essay: Being a New Edition of the Moghul Empire from the Death of Aurungzeb* (London, 1876); C. A. Bayly, "Religion, Liberalism, and Empires: British Historians and Their Indian Critics in the Nineteenth Century," in *Tributary Empires in Global History*, ed. Peter Bang and C. A. Bayly (Basingstoke, 2011), 21–47, at 31–33.

¹²⁹ Jnanendra Nath Gupta, *Life and Work of Romesh Chunder Dutt*, C.I.E (London, 1911), 240.

¹³⁰ Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 188.

¹³¹ Minto to Morley, 26 April 1907, MS Eur D573/12, fol. 28, BL; telegram from Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 26 April 1907, F111/449/19–20, BL.

¹³² [Untitled article,] *Hindi Bangavasi*, 19 August [1907?], Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/855/61–62, BL.

lessons of history, he proves himself a nuisance.”¹³³ The contributions to the fund that Curzon did manage to elicit from the princes, Minto claimed, were given only under “most undue” pressure from Curzon and the fund.¹³⁴

The letters to the Clive Memorial Fund committee from the Indian princes are revealing of the delicate position they were in. For instance, Curzon, in a private letter to Morley, noted the support of Maharaja Jatindramohan Tagore,¹³⁵ but the maharaja’s actual letter was far more equivocal. He flattered Curzon’s “unquestioned abilities” but argued that he was constrained by his position: “As to your suggestions of contribution to the Lord Clive Indian Memorial I would take the liberty to state that the feeling among the majority of my countrymen is still very strong against the movement and it would perhaps, not be the right course for me to adopt . . . Since the receipt of your letter, however, I have asked my son—The Maharaj-Kumar to contribute to the fund, in his own name and this he has already done.”¹³⁶ Maharaja Jatindramohan Tagore was toeing a very difficult line. The hostility to the fund of the current viceroy was well known and in Calcutta and Bengal was vociferous. But Curzon still had considerable influence in India, and his fund was presented as a patriotic duty.

The maharajah of Jaipur, Madho Singh II, also refused to contribute to it. Singh began his reply by professing that it would “give me great pleasure to subscribe to the Clive Memorial Fund or anything in which your Lordship was interested,” but “it would be in direct opposition to the expressed wishes of the Government of India and that I am quite sure you would not wish me do.”¹³⁷ Singh did not wish to be caught between Curzon and Minto. More pressingly for him, the harvest had failed for the third time since 1899. His reply was a deeply polite protest about money being raised in India for a memorial to its invader and subsequent British rule when his own people were dying.

These responses point to the delicate power balance on which the Raj relied. The position of the maharajas was tied to British approval as the long history of the British manipulation of succession attests, but the maharajas were intended to appear at least partially independent. The British could present them as key markers of Indian opinion and use their support to legitimate the British narrative of history, as Landon and Curzon did. Nevertheless, these figures were bound to their people. As markers of Indian opinion, they could, and did, voice opposition to British national narratives.

CONCLUSION

In focusing on a statue and the campaign to fund it, I have considered the glorification of historical imperial heroes, the resistance to that history, and its public

¹³³ [Untitled article,] *Daily Hitavadi*, 12 October 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/1177/38, BL; [Untitled article,] *Soltan*, 20 December 1907, Indian Newspaper Reports, IOR/L/R/5/33/1536/90, BL.

¹³⁴ Minto to Morley, 29 August 1907, MS Eur D573/12, fol. 72, BL.

¹³⁵ Lord Curzon to Lord Morley, 25 July 1907, MS. Eng. D3567/148, Bodleian Library.

¹³⁶ Maharaja [Jatindramohan Tagore] of Bahadur to Lord Curzon, 19 December 1907, MS Eur F112/513, BL.

¹³⁷ Maharaja of Jaipur to Lord Curzon, 14 November 1907, MS Eur F112/513, BL.

expression in Britain and India. The campaign for the Clive Memorial Fund represented an attempt to inscribe just such a glorification, but the development of the campaign revealed a far more contested vision in Britain and India. By juxtaposing the reactions to the fund, I have shown how Curzon and his fellow imperialists promoted a version of history and how many Indians, particularly in Bengal, wrote back their own narratives for a very different purpose. During these years, history was crucial both to Indian nation-building and to burnishing British imperial narratives. This clash is testament to such a strategy.

Clive's legacies in India and what they meant for India 130 years after his death were profoundly disputed. Clive's memorial and its interpretation of Plassey provided a flashpoint for articulating narratives of historical and contemporary India. If Plassey was won by deception, and Siraj-ud-Daula was its true hero, then Indian history could be configured as one of resistance to foreign imperialists. If Clive's administrative ability in the aftermath of the battle created a more just and stable foundation that was built upon in the ensuing years of the Indian Raj, then Indian history could instead be imagined as one of just government and uplift.

The statues of Clive erected in London and Calcutta in 1912 were a part of this attempt to define public space and public memory in the imperial tradition. Public space and the commemoration of any group of "heroes" has, as Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell have noted, occurred across the political spectrum.¹³⁸ Statues and those they commemorate help form the critical public space of national discourse. The campaign that Lord Curzon and Perceval Landon led was an attempt at defining one narrative for the imagined community of a united British Empire with a recognized pantheon of great men." But doing so required a redrawing of the virtues that most contemporary imperial heroes were held to embody; Clive's rapacity and violence were airbrushed. Nevertheless, Curzon was advancing a version of history that he believed united Britain and India. The response to the campaign demonstrated that this narrative was defined in an unequal interchange between Britain and India. Curzon's imperial project aimed to cement a historical interpretation of noble, virtuous Britons always one step ahead of their cunning, degenerate enemy. But this narrative did not supersede all others; many Indian writers responded by creating heroic histories of Siraj-ud-Daula and opposition to British trickery and imperialism.

In Britain, the main response to the Clive Memorial Fund was apathy. The campaign appealed to an imperial community interested in Clive and to those with a stake in his legacy; it did not receive enthusiastic public support. Both in print and privately, many did not subscribe to Curzon's hegemonic narrative of British imperial history.

Opposition to the lionization of Clive and the memorialization of Plassey and 1857 continued to bring forth interpretations of history that were crucial for the development of the campaigns for Indian nationalism. In 2007, a statue was raised to Siraj-ud-Daula at Plassey alongside the British memorial there as a reminder of both aspects of the battle, and the statue at the Victoria Memorial Hall begun by Curzon and finished in 1921 is now part of a far different place in Kolkata. In

¹³⁸ Paul A. Pickering and Alex Tyrrell, *Contested Sites: Commemoration, Memorial, and Popular Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot, 2004), 1.

considering statues today, it is vital to recognize the mix of opposition and support that surrounded their erection rather than simply accepting their apparently hegemonic and uncontested physical reality.