

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: TYRANT! TIPU SULTAN AND THE RECONCEPTION
OF BRITISH IMPERIAL IDENTITY, 1780-1800

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This dissertation argues that the figure of Tipu Sultan and the spectacle of the Mysore Wars were a key contributor to shifting British attitudes about empire in the late eighteenth century. Tipu was the ruler of the Indian state of Mysore, acknowledged by contemporaries to be a powerful ruler, a military commander of great distinction – and a hated foe of the British East India Company. Tipu fought three separate wars against the Company; during the course of these conflicts, he was portrayed by the British as a cruel and tyrannical despot, a fanatical Muslim who forced his subjects to convert to Islam and tortured captured British soldiers in his foul dungeons. The widespread presence of this negative "Tipu Legend" testified to the impact that empire and imperial themes exhibited on British popular culture of the era.

Tyrant! explores two key research questions. First of all, how did the Tipu Legend originate, and why was it so successful at replacing alternate representations of Tipu? Secondly, what can this story tell us about how the British came to terms with empire – despite initial reluctance – and forged a new imperial identity between 1780 and 1800? Using archival records, newspaper print culture, and popular art and theatre sources, I

argue that the vilification of Tipu was linked to the development of an imperial culture. Expansionist Governor-Generals consciously blackened the character of Tipu to make their own aggressive actions more palatable to British audiences at home. Through a process of reversal, preventive war came to be justified as defensive in nature, protecting the native inhabitants of Mysore from the depredations of an unspeakable despot. The increasingly vilified and caricatured representations of Tipu allowed the East India Company to portray itself as fighting as moral crusade to liberate southern India from the depredations of a savage ruler. Company servants were recast in the British popular imagination from unscrupulous nabobs into virtuous soldier-heroes that embodied the finest qualities of the British nation. The study of the faithless and violent character of "Tippoo the Tyrant" ultimately reveals much about how empire is constructed at home and abroad.

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OF BRITISH IMPERIAL IDENTITY, 1780-1800

by

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Introduction

Tippoo's Tiger

In the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, there is a mechanical pipe organ known as "Tippoo's Tiger".¹ Captured and brought back from India by the East India Company's soldiers, the apparatus consists of a huge tiger lying atop a prostrate man, the tiger sinking its fangs and claws into the helpless individual who, with his pale skin, red coat, and military attire, is easily identifiable as a British soldier. The tiger is also an organ, however, which when wound up would growl and roar menacingly to all nearby, although the passage of time has today robbed this fierce customer of his prior voice.² Created by local artisans on the specific order of the Indian ruler Tipu Sultan during the 1790s, Tippoo's Tiger was designed to encapsulate the fear and terror that the Sultan inspired in Europeans, the savagery of the tiger goring its unfortunate victim a reflection of Tipu's own military prowess. The mechanical pipe organ represented the threat posed by Tipu, the mastery that he wielded over the bodies of Europeans who fell into his power, and the dread that the Sultan inspired in the contemporary East India Company.

Tipu Sultan (1750-1799) was the ruler of the Indian state of Mysore during the final two decades of the eighteenth century. He was known by the name of Tipu Sahib until succeeding his father, Haider Ali, to the throne of Mysore at the end of 1782, and thereafter claimed the Islamic title of Sultan as a means of legitimizing his own rule.³

Tipu (often spelled phonetically by contemporary British writers as "Tippoo") was

¹ "Tippoo's Tiger." Collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

² Mildred Archer. *Tippoo's Tiger* (London: H.M. Stationery Off, 1959)

³ Kate Brittlebank. *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)

acknowledged by contemporaries to be a powerful ruler, a military commander of great distinction – and a hated foe of the British East India Company. Tipu fought three separate wars against the Company in the last two decades of the eighteenth century; during the course of these conflicts, he was portrayed by the British as a cruel and tyrannical despot, a fanatical Muslim who forced his subjects to convert to Islam and tortured captured British soldiers in his foul dungeons. This villainous caricature of Tipu proved to be extremely influential in the British metropole, and it would endure long after his death as a popular subject in imperial literature, still appearing today occasionally in works of historical fiction.⁴ The creation, dissemination, and ultimate widespread acceptance of this negative representation of the Sultan, referenced in this study as the "Tipu Legend", played an important role in reshaping contemporary British imperialism and is the subject of this dissertation.

Some of the most frequent imagery associated with Tipu Sultan was based around the use of the tiger symbol, as demonstrated by the mechanical pipe organ. Tipu actively cultivated the nickname, originally used by the British, of "The Tiger of Mysore". He used the animal as his own personal symbol. Tipu kept a number of tigers as pets in his palace at Seringapatam, and tiger stripes adorned the uniforms of his elite soldiers. The tiger itself was a symbol of extreme, savage ferocity to the British, and Tipu Sultan was often characterized as a "wild beast", possessed with "inordinate passion", who threatened the peace and security of southern India.⁵ Tipu was portrayed by Britons living in India as a monster, "seeking whom he may devour", prowling about "in savage

⁴ G. A. Henty. *The Tiger of Mysore: A Story of the War with Tippoo Saib* (London: Blackie & Son, 2001, 1896); Bernard Cornwell. *Sharpe's Tiger* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997)

⁵ Resident at Poonah [Pune] to Bengal Government 28 October 1787 (p. 327-28) IOR/H/248

barbarity, and wanton cruelty."⁶ Tipu was represented as a savage animal, just like his pipe organ, waiting to pounce on and devour unwary Europeans. There was also an undeniable element of sexual conquest to the tiger organ as well, straddling atop the British soldier in a position of masculine dominance, which reflected back on British anxieties about how their prisoners captured in battle by Tipu were being treated in his dungeons. War stories such as these, especially ones that took place in imperial settings, played a crucial role in the creation of British masculinity.⁷

As a result of the Anglo-Mysore Wars fought against Tipu, the image of the tiger took on a distinctly oriental context for the British, specifically as something imagined as ferocious and in need of taming by means justifiably violent.⁸ Tippoo's Tiger symbolized the fear that Europeans traveling overseas would be swallowed up and devoured, their British morals and identity lost forever, their attempts at building empire abroad doomed to failure. And it was in the Company's military triumph over Tipu, the capture of his fortresses and the subjugation of his tigers, that helped the British public shift away from earlier anxieties about imperialism and embrace the project of overseas colonization in a way that had been unthinkable a few decades earlier.

Historiographical Background

British fears about empire were not uniquely applied to Tipu Sultan in the second half of the eighteenth century, but were felt broadly across political and class divisions throughout the British nation. The eighteenth century was the first period in which a truly "British" identity was in the process of construction for the peoples of England, Scotland,

⁶ Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser (Calcutta, India) 28 May 1789, Issue 175

⁷ Graham Dawson. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994)

⁸ John Barrell. *The Infections of Thomas De Quincey: A Psychopathology of Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991): 49-50

and Wales.⁹ Driven on by the tremendous growth in print media, Britons increasingly began to perceive themselves as one cultural entity, a people that defined itself as Protestant, maritime, commercial, and free.¹⁰ This was an era of constant warfare against France, and the emerging British nation defined itself in contrast to an imagined French "other" which was the antithesis of British values.¹¹ While the French were perceived as Catholic and despotic, the British believed themselves to stand for commerce and liberty; Britain's possession of a maritime empire based on trade would allow them to avoid falling into the tyrannical rule associated with prior land-based empires of the past.¹²

However, the growing acquisition of overseas territory by the East India Company in the second half of the eighteenth century began to undermine and call into question this understanding of what it meant to be British. Company rule over tens of millions of Indian subjects were difficult to reconcile with the popular belief that Britain stood for a commercial and maritime empire of liberty, or at best only with extreme difficulty, giving rise to various scandals of empire.¹³ Company soldiers and administrators in India during the second half of the eighteenth century were increasingly known as "nabobs", as dubbed by a contemporary satirical play on the subject, accused of ruling India in despotic fashion before returning home to the metropole with vast sums of ill-gained wealth.¹⁴ Domestic critics viewed the nabobs as dangerous threats to the British

⁹ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Kathleen Wilson. *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003)

¹⁰ David Armitage. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

¹¹ Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)

¹² David Armitage. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000): 8

¹³ Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

¹⁴ Samuel Foote. *The Nabob* (London: Printed by T. Sherlock, 1773, 1778); Tillman Nechtman. *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

nation, interlopers of low birth who had been infected with the luxury and vice of the Orient, and now threatened to corrupt the metropole upon their return home.¹⁵ The most conspicuous of the nabobs engaged in profligate and highly visible spending, purchasing luxurious country estates and buying their way into Parliament through the exploitation of corrupt boroughs. The nabobs enjoyed decorating their new estates with Indian-themed art, which only emphasized their apparent alienation from the rest of the British public.¹⁶ It appeared to contemporaries that the nabobs had brought with them all the vices of the East, and threatened to destroy the fabric of the British nation.¹⁷

These profound anxieties about the dangers of overseas empire were commonplace in the second half of the eighteenth century, and manifested themselves frequently in the print culture of the period. Satirical cartoons and metropolitan plays criticized the nabobs, and the East India Company more generally, providing a source of contested ideologies, and a public space in which imperialism could be undermined.¹⁸ The popular belief that the Company was governing in reckless and tyrannical fashion in India led to increasing calls for Parliament to oversee and regulate its actions in the 1760s and 1770s.¹⁹ Although the Company had been a political actor as well as a commercial one from its origin in the seventeenth century, it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that Parliament began to regulate its activities on a regular basis and

¹⁵ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 225-41

¹⁶ Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia. *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India 1757-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986)

¹⁷ Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire* (2006): 12-13

¹⁸ Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, Vol. 5-7*. (London: British Museum Publications, 1978); David Worrall. *Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity, and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007)

¹⁹ H. V. Bowen. *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics 1757-1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

intervene more directly in Indian affairs, eventually creating a Board of Control to provide the government with direct input into the Company's affairs.²⁰ Perhaps the most visible demonstration of the popular fears surrounding overseas empire during this period was the trial of Warren Hastings, who as the former Governor General of India was publicly called to stand to account for his supposed crimes. In the dramatic opening speech to the trial in 1788, Edmund Burke accused Hastings of crimes against humanity and against natural law, for enriching himself while ruling India in despotic fashion.²¹ While Hastings was eventually acquitted of all charges, the immense public spectacle of the trial testified to the popularity of imperial, and specifically Indian, subject matter amongst contemporaries.

For Company administrators who traveled to India during the eighteenth century, there was a real fear that the Britons under their authority living in the subcontinent would be swallowed up and made to disappear, their European identity consumed by the ancient civilization of India. In contrast to the later Victorian stereotype of Britons and Indians living in strictly separate worlds that did not meet, there were no such rigid cultural divisions in the eighteenth century, and a great many Europeans responded to India by crossing over from one culture to another.²² This was a period of surprisingly widespread cultural assimilation and hybridity, with virtually all Europeans in the subcontinent Indianizing themselves to some extent. Britons were able to self-fashion their own fluid identities, moving back and forth between European and Indian identities

²⁰ Philip Stern. *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Lucy Stuart Sutherland. *The East India Company in Eighteenth-Century Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952)

²¹ Edmund Burke. "Speech on Opening of Impeachment 15, 16, 18, 19 February 1788" in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6*. Peter Marshall (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981)

²² William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (New York: Viking, 2003)

as the needs of the moment dictated.²³ This posed a terrifying threat to the Company's policymakers, who feared that the traders and soldiers under their command would cease to follow orders and divest themselves of loyalty to their mother country in favor of their new Indian identities.

It was very common in the eighteenth century for Europeans to serve in the armies of native Indian rulers, particularly as technical experts for use in servicing artillery and designing fortifications.²⁴ This was aided and abetted by a widespread Enlightenment respect of Asian civilizations up until the close of the eighteenth century, without the presence of the highly racialized worldview which would come to characterize the nineteenth century.²⁵ Many European political thinkers of this period attacked the very foundations of imperialism, arguing passionately that empire-building was not only unworkable, costly, and dangerous, but manifestly unjust. They held that moral judgments of cultural superiority could not be made about entire peoples, nor many of their cultural practices.²⁶

The situation of Europeans in other parts of the world was also far from secure. Britons overseas were often captured, subjected to alien laws and customs, forced to live in conditions of terror and vulnerability; these uncomfortable situations were also an important part of the early imperial project which would later be written out of the British historical memory.²⁷ The task of governing and policing the territories conquered by the East India Company was constantly undermined by these anxieties, the fear that Britons

²³ Maya Jasanoff. *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Knopf, 2005)

²⁴ Pradeep Barua. "Military Developments in India, 1750-1850" in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (1994): 599-616

²⁵ Holden Furber. *Rival Empires of Trade in the Orient*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976): 338

²⁶ Sankar Muthu. *Enlightenment Against Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

²⁷ Linda Colley. *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World 1600-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002)

would be allured by the temptations of India into "going native", and would renounce their European identity in favor of a new Indian one. It was this very belief that sons of Britain had been seduced and corrupted by the luxuries of the east which was responsible for the consternation over the nabobs in the metropole.²⁸

The growing British empire in India therefore existed in an ideological quandary. The "Protestant, maritime, commercial, and free" empire as conceived by the British clearly did not describe the Company's military dominion in India, and the type of rule being practiced by the Company appeared to be despotic in nature, due to the way in which it ignored private property and had no representative assemblies.²⁹ As the eighteenth century drew to a close, therefore, there was a growing need for a new legitimation of empire. Thus, for example, in the immediate aftermath of the Company's conquest of Bengal, policymakers sought to justify their actions by referencing India's Mughal past, in particular through the claim that they were working in accordance with the region's own "ancient constitution." According to this frame of thought, the Company was merely reestablishing Bengal's old system of government, which had fallen into disuse.³⁰ However, the attempt to rehabilitate the ancient constitution of Bengal and represent the Mughal Empire as a state that respected law and property was ultimately too restricting and confusing to gain popular acceptance.

Instead, during a transitional period between roughly 1780-1830, the British nation came to embrace a new despotism of law underpinned by racial segregation and

²⁸ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "Our Execrable Banditti" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 226

²⁹ Richard Koebner. "Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 1951 14 (3/4): 275-302; Franco Venturi. "Oriental Despotism" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1963 24 (1): 133-42

³⁰ Robert Travers. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

rule of force, which was increasingly justified by Europe's supposedly higher place on the ladder of civilization.³¹ The earlier scandals of empire were erased from the British historical memory and became remembered as a natural stage in the colonization process; the scandals associated with the nabobs allowed empire to be reformed, its problems "solved", and its structure institutionalized.³² At its most basic level, empire was justified to the British public through shifting the burden of culpability for any wrongdoings from unscrupulous British actors, such as the nabobs, onto immoral and savage Indian actors, such as Tipu Sultan. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Enlightenment approval for the stability of Asian civilizations began to be replaced by a chorus of vilification of Indians for their supposed corruption. It was the immoral and tyrannical actions of Indian merchants and princes who were undermining the Company's rule overseas, not the servants of the Company themselves.³³ These claims had begun earlier, when Company merchants had portrayed the rule of Bengal's nawabs as a ruthless despotism moved by the will of an irresponsible tyrant, and would only grow in intensity towards the close of the eighteenth century.³⁴

The Second British Empire that was under construction beginning in this period was characterized by increasingly aristocratic and autocratic forms of rule, in which hierarchy and racial subordination were stressed.³⁵ Within the East India Company's administrative structure, the creation of the Board of Control and Governor Generalship

³¹ *Ibid*, 29-30

³² Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire* (2006): 26-31

³³ C. A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 77-78

³⁴ Peter Marshall. *Bengal: The British Bridgehead. Eastern India 1740-1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 67

³⁵ Vincent Harlow. *The Founding of the Second British Empire* (London, New York: Longmans and Green, 1952); C.A. Bayly. *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989)

centralized power, shifting authority away from councils of merchants and towards hereditary aristocrats with military backgrounds appointed by the government.³⁶ As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, formerly loose attitudes about Europeans crossing over and adopting Indian customs came under increasing official criticism, due to pressure from Christian missionary groups and new ideas of racial and ethnic hierarchies.³⁷ Britain's turn to empire in this period was characterized by a vastly increased sense of cultural or civilizational confidence, in contrast to earlier thinkers who had been doubtful of their country's achievements and showed greater respect for other non-European peoples.³⁸ The rise of empire was linked together with the rise of liberalism; the universalist tendencies inherent in political liberalism lent themselves towards viewing history and civilizations as moving forward through progressive stages of development. Britons infantilized Indians and other colonial peoples by putting them at an earlier stage of development, in need of tutoring by paternalistic British parents.³⁹

The growth of this liberal imperialism, which began at the end of the eighteenth century, coincided with increasingly exclusive conceptions of the national community and political capacity, frequently based on biological difference, along with the widespread use of crude dichotomies between barbarity and civilization.⁴⁰ Humanitarian movements designed to help colonial peoples declined during the nineteenth century, due to a growing belief in polygenesis and separate unrelated racial stocks.⁴¹ Imperialism was

³⁶ Philip Lawson. *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993): 141-42

³⁷ William Dalrymple. *White Mughals* (2003): 36-41

³⁸ Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)

³⁹ Uday Singh Mehta. *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999)

⁴⁰ Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire* (2005): 2

⁴¹ Catherine Hall. *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

also tied to the growth of Romanticism, which made frequent use of colonial peoples and themes as subject matter, with one historian suggesting that the two subjects were linked too closely to be understood in isolation from one another.⁴² Early Romantic writers addressing the subject of the Orient were full of deep anxieties about the building of empire; later Victorians misread these fears as mere masquerade over imperial support.⁴³ In this fashion, early Romantic writings which had been skeptical of overseas colonization were reinterpreted as advocates for the civilizing mission. Even the performances on the London stage in this period shifted from a focus on inward-looking critiques of the nation to forms of spectacle that emphasized cultural and racial supremacy. Audiences were encouraged to shed distinct ethnic and political affiliations in favor of militaristic, heterosexual, and white definitions of national unity.⁴⁴

Within this transitional period of shifting popular opinions about empire, the decade of the 1790s was perhaps the most important in changing British perceptions of overseas rule. In earlier decades, there was little sign that opinion in the metropole regarded Britain's role in India as anything other than commercial, nor was there much coherent drive for empire by Company servants on the subcontinent.⁴⁵ However, by the last decade of the eighteenth century, "a real transformation of attitudes had taken place", with empire viewed no longer as a source of contamination for the body politic, but an

⁴² Saree Makdisi. *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

⁴³ Nigel Leask. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

⁴⁴ Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007)

⁴⁵ Peter Marshall. "British Expansion in India in the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Revision", *History* 1975 60 (198): 37

opportunity to do good overseas.⁴⁶ Company servants were no longer viewed by the public as avaricious nabobs, but as long-serving experts and administrators, often with some kind of military background. Company soldiers were embraced by the public as patriotic heroes, with Lord Cornwallis' reception in the metropole during the 1790s serving as one particularly choice example. The Governor General was greeted as a conquering hero, feted with lavish celebrations, and showered with honors from all sides. The shift in public perception compared to the earlier scorn and condemnation faced by Clive and Hastings indicated the changing mood regarding imperial exploits in the British metropole.

The effusions provoked by the Mysore Wars against Tipu Sultan suggest that the British were coming to see themselves not only as a great military power, but as a people of justice and moderation. Thus the British invaded Mysore not as conquerors but as liberators of the mass of the population from the tyranny of Tipu Sultan.⁴⁷ This was a decisive shift in public opinion, one that rejected earlier criticisms of the nabobs. Pride in British rule in India as well as pride in British military successes there had become widely accepted elements of British nationalism. These changes were never to be reversed, and British activities in India were never again to be subjected to prolonged hostile scrutiny from mainstream public opinion until the twentieth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ P. J. Marshall. *A Free though Conquering People: Eighteenth Century Britain and its Empire* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003)

⁴⁷ Peter Marshall. "Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century" in *War, Strategy, and International Politics*. Lawrence Freeman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 71-72

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 73

Tyrant: Tipu Sultan and the Reconceptation of British Imperial Identity

This study builds off of the work of Peter Marshall in arguing that the figure of Tipu Sultan and the spectacle of the Mysore Wars were key contributors to shifting British attitudes about the East India Company, and empire more generally, in the last decades of the eighteenth century. *Tyrant!* explores two key research questions. First of all, how did the negative Tipu Legend originate, and why was it so successful at replacing alternate representations of Tipu? Secondly, what can this story tell us about how the British came to terms with empire – despite initial reluctance – and forged a new imperial identity during this transitional period between 1780 and 1800? Using archival records, newspaper print culture, and popular art and theatre sources, this study argues that the vilification of Tipu was linked to the development of an imperial culture in Britain. Expansionist Governor-Generals consciously blackened the character of Tipu to make their own aggressive actions more palatable to British audiences at home. Through a process of reversal, preventive war came to be justified as defensive in nature, protecting the native inhabitants of Mysore from the depredations of an unspeakable despot. The increasingly vilified and caricatured representations of Tipu allowed the East India Company to portray itself as fighting a moral crusade to liberate southern India from the depredations of a savage ruler. Company servants were recast in the British popular imagination from unscrupulous nabobs into virtuous soldier-heroes that embodied the finest qualities of the British nation. The study of the faithless and violent character of "Tippoo the Tyrant" ultimately reveals much about how empire is constructed at home and abroad.

This study is organized thematically into five chapters. The first chapter examines the chronology of the Mysore Wars, providing an overview of the important individuals and events that took place in southern India during the period 1780-1800. This chapter is designed to provide the non-specialist in this area with a suitable background and familiarity to engage with the discussion in the remaining sections.

The second chapter, "British Prisoners and European Musselmen", examines the situation of the British captives taken and held by Tipu, which was the primary reason why the Sultan initially gained so much notoriety in the metropole. This chapter investigates the numerous and popular captive accounts written about Tipu's prisoners, and the stories of forced religious conversion in which Tipu was accused of turning his prisoners into Muslims against their will. As these ceremonies were said to include the practice of circumcision, they were also attacks on the masculinity and sexuality of the prisoners. Tipu's power to transform the religious and cultural identity of his captives demonstrated the deep anxieties that lurked beneath the imperial project, and the fear that Europeans would be devoured by the wild and exotic Orient. The presence of the British prisoners and the captive narratives that they generated were viewed both within India and in the metropole as deeply shaming, creating a ready-made narrative of redemption whereby the Company could remove the stain on the national honor by returning to war and defeating Tipu Sultan. The eventual defeat of Tipu and conquest of his kingdom in 1799 served as a repudiation of earlier British weakness, lending confidence to nineteenth century claims of racial superiority over Indians.

The third chapter, "Tippoo the Tyrant", addresses the political language of tyranny and despotism which came to be associated with Tipu Sultan in the minds of the

British public. The pejorative label of "tyrant" became inextricably linked with Tipu over time, most likely due to the easy alliterative association between the words, and belief in Tippoo the Tyrant became the defining image of the Sultan for the British populace. This chapter traces the development of Tipu's association with tyranny and despotism, beginning with its origin upon the capture of the first British prisoners, and tracks the alterations throughout the rest of the Mysore Wars. The chapter argues that the claims of Tipu's tyrannical rule emerged in response to criticism that the Company's own policymakers had been acting as tyrannical nabobs; much of the public discussion on this subject in the 1780s and 1790s focused upon who were the true tyrants, Indian rulers or Company nabobs? Expanding upon the belief that Tipu was an Oriental despot, he was also accused of being faithless and untrustworthy, failing to adhere to past treaties, which served to justify the Company's own aggressive dealings. Tipu's supposed brutalization of his own populace in Mysore led to claims that the Company's invasions of the region were undertaken as acts of liberation, designed to safeguard the local population from the depredations of a mad tyrant in true paternalistic fashion. By fighting against an imagined despotism in southern India, the Company rehabilitated its own reputation in the realm of British popular opinion.

The fourth chapter, "Tippoo in Company and Party Politics", investigates the role that Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars played in the contemporary politics of the British metropole. Representations of Tipu reflected wider disagreements about the role of overseas imperialism, and public opinion on the subject was far from unified until the very end of the period under study. This chapter discusses the public disdain in the mid eighteenth century for the nabobs, who were perceived as a stain upon the national honor,

having been corrupted by the vices of the Orient. These popular perceptions were then reversed in the final two decades of the eighteenth century, as the struggle against Tipu Sultan during the Mysore Wars allowed for the rehabilitation of the East India Company, its nabobs reconceived as patriotic soldier heroes. These decades were a transitional period for popular attitudes about empire, and change did not take place overnight. Throughout the 1780s and 1790s, there were lengthy debates about Tipu and the Mysore Wars within Parliament and the print culture of the day, with a minority political Opposition heavily criticizing the conduct of the government and the Company overseas. These voices argued that the wars of conquest in India were immoral and antithetical to British liberty, calling upon the same political language which had been used to villainize the nabobs in earlier decades. However, the eventual crushing victories won by the Company's military served to stifle debate, making it politically untenable to criticize its actions overseas. Tipu Sultan was effectively depoliticized as an issue over time. The earlier representations of the Company and its servants as nabobs eventually faded away from view, as they became reimagined by the British public as virtuous defenders of the national honor.

The fifth chapter, "The French Alliance and the Storming of Seringapatam" looks more closely at Tipu's connections to the French. Tipu's tumultuous relationship with France helped to cement his status as an inveterate foe of the British nation, a figure who could never be trusted due to his ties with Britain's longtime enemy. These ties attracted even more public attention in the 1790s due to the revolutionary situation taking place within France, with Tipu's willingness to adopt a liberty cap and style himself as "Citizen Tippoo" in the hopes of attracting further French support only serving to fan the flames.

This chapter details Tipu's uneven relationship with France over the course of two decades, with particular attention given to his final attempts to secure an alliance in 1798 and 1799. Tipu's misguided efforts to secure French assistance served as a *carte blanche* for the new Governor General of India, Richard Wellesley, to invade Mysore once again and eliminate Tipu. The chapter argues that Wellesley consciously played up the threat posed by France to serve as a justification for his preemptive war of conquest, despite knowing that British India was in no actual danger. Wellesley's shrewd use of Tipu's "alliance" with France (and his quick and overwhelming victory) served to insulate him from any criticism in the British metropole. The final defeat and death of Tipu in 1799 provided the breaking point at which alternate, competing viewpoints of Tipu Sultan, and more broadly the East India Company's role in empire building, were pushed aside from the mainstream of public opinion. There no longer existed a political space in which Tipu could be defended, or the actions of the Company criticized as immoral.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the historical memory of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars had effectively been fixed and ceased to change further. Tipu became remembered by the British as a tyrannical Oriental despot in league with the French, and the Mysore Wars as a moral stand against Tipu's tyrannical rule. The conclusion of the study, "Remembering Tipu", provides a short overview of how Tipu was portrayed within the British historical memory of the period, typically as a caricatured stock villain for imperially-themed subject matter. It was not until the twentieth century that historians began to rehabilitate the image of Tipu, led by the work of South Asian historians in particular, and rediscover the earlier contested period of the Mysore Wars at the end of the eighteenth century.

Tyrant! provides an understanding of how the British public eventually resolved the tension between their belief that they were a people of liberty and the problem of ruling over tens of millions of Indians on the other side of the world in what was unquestionably an unfree system of government. By imagining themselves to be fighting against vicious Oriental despots like Tippoo the Tyrant, the British could convince themselves that they were serving as a moral force for progress and civilization. The rulers of India were mere savages, and the people of the subcontinent were locked into a hopelessly backwards state of stagnation and superstition. To remedy the problems, India and its wild tigers needed to be hunted down and brought under control:

India, symbolized by the tigers of Mysore that the British had vanquished at Seringapatam in 1799, was a murky, violent, dangerous place filled with ferocious animals... The carefully cultivated reputation for savagery and sexual prowess of Tipu's Mysore translated ready-made into the propaganda of imperialists seeking to demonize and possess India as a whole. India would have to be ridden of its violent energies in the years to come: its tigers had to be corralled and killed, its inhabitants and their rampant sexuality had to be tamed, and its terrifyingly beautiful landscapes... had to be domesticated to the nice forms of an English suburban garden.⁴⁹

When the British captured Tipu's capital of Seringapatam at the end of the last Mysore War, they symbolically shot all of Tipu's pet tigers and carted Tipu's mechanical tiger organ back to London as a trophy prize. The Tiger of Mysore was no more; imperialism had been made safe for the British public to embrace.

⁴⁹ Hermione De Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 38-39

Chapter One

Chronology: The Mysore Wars

Introduction

Three separate wars took place between the East India Company and the kingdom of Mysore ruled by Tipu Sultan during the 1780s and 1790s, known collectively as the Anglo-Mysore Wars or more briefly as simply the Mysore Wars. There had been an earlier conflict between the two in the 1760s known as the First Mysore War, resulting in the wars against Tipu becoming known to history as the Second, Third, and Fourth Mysore Wars. This introductory chapter is designed to familiarize the reader with these events taking place in southern India at the close of the eighteenth century. The Mysore Wars are not generally well known today outside of specialist fields, and their events provide the necessary context for the subject matter of this study.

These conflicts had sharply different styles, and took place under very different circumstances for the British Company. The Second Mysore War (1780-84) was a desperate struggle for the Company, initiated by Tipu and his father Haider Ali, one which caught the British completely off guard and unprepared. A series of military disasters resulted in thousands of Company soldiers being taken prisoner by Tipu, held for the remainder of the war and not released until the signing of peace in 1784. The conflict was unpopular in the British metropole, and viewed by many as a sign that the Company was out of control, plagued by poor leadership and avaricious nabobery. The Company was very fortunate to escape the war with a return to the status quo antebellum.

The subsequent Third Mysore War (1790-92) was contested in a situation far more auspicious for the Company. Governor General Charles Cornwallis was able to

secure alliances with the other principal states in southern India, the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad, which joined together with the Company to combat the rising power of Mysore. Tipu's French allies from the previous war also made no appearance in this conflict, due to their preoccupation with the nascent French Revolution. Despite occasional military setbacks, over the course of three years of campaigning Cornwallis was able to carry out a systematic reduction of the fortified positions across Tipu's kingdom, and carry the war into the heart of Mysore. When his capital of Seringapatam was on the verge of capture, Tipu was forced to sue for an unhappy peace. The 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam stripped Tipu of much of his territory, forced him to pay a large indemnity, and insisted on the surrender of two of his sons over to Cornwallis as hostages to guarantee the peace. This was the decisive breakthrough that the Company had been so desperate to achieve, enormously strengthening its position in the Carnatic and minimizing the danger posed by Tipu, if not removing it entirely. The Third Mysore War was politically controversial in the British metropole throughout its duration, but quickly became wildly popular after victory had been achieved, and served as a turning point of sorts in the public support of overseas empire.¹

The Fourth and final Mysore War (1799) arose from Tipu's desperate search for allies to offset his crushing losses in the previous engagement. The Sultan was drawn into a confusing series of negotiations with the French, with Tipu hoping for military assistance from the revolutionary republic, but instead receiving virtually nothing beyond vague promises of future succor. Tipu's dalliance with the French was used as a pretext for a new war of conquest by the new Governor General Richard Wellesley, who

¹ Peter Marshall. "Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century" in *War, Strategy, and International Politics*. Lawrence Freeman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

methodically built up the Company's military resources for six months before invading Mysore in the spring of 1799. Tipu's kingdom was quickly overrun, Seringapatam was first put under siege and later stormed by the Company's soldiers, and Tipu Sultan himself was killed in the fighting. In the aftermath of the campaign, Mysore was further partitioned and the remaining rump state became a subsidiary ally of the Company, with a British resident controlling revenue collection and military affairs in the name of an adolescent puppet ruler.

Tipu's defeat and death were symbolic of the ascension of the Company to the status of dominant power in southern India. The popular perception in the metropole was that British prisoners would never again be terrorized and placed at the mercy of a foreign ruler. In the span of two decades, the Company had gone from one political entity among many, struggling to avoid being swept away, to a near-hegemonic actor able to do as it pleased in southern India. British representations of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars were responsible for helping to shift attitudes about empire in these final decades of the eighteenth century, with the events of these conflicts providing the context for a newfound support of the imperial project.

The First (1767-69) and Second (1780-84) Mysore Wars

The East India Company at the time of the Mysore Wars was a complicated entity with a long prior history, and care must be taken not to view it as a monolithic body. The Company in the late eighteenth century was going through a series of structural changes, many of them forced by acts of Parliament in the British metropole, as it adapted to its new role as a territorial sovereign. The Company had traditionally been headed by a group known as the Council of Directors, a mercantile body based in London appointed

by the proprietors who owned East India Company stock. Administration of Indian territory was divided into the three Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay, each of which possessed its own Governor and Council. In addition, there was also a small British community living in each of the Presidency towns, referred to today as the Anglo-Indian community, which published their own English-language newspapers and engaged in the print culture debates of the period. The governors and their councils of these Presidency towns suffered from chronic disagreements, and their inability to work together often proved to be a major drain on the Company's military resources, as would again be the case during the wars against Tipu Sultan.

In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, this loose and decentralized administrative structure was replaced with a much more authoritarian system of rule, to be exercised by hereditary aristocrats appointed by the British government. The Regulating Act of 1773 established that Parliament had the right to sovereignty over the Company and its territory, as well as the ability to pass legislation overseeing its actions. It also created the office of a Governor General who would have priority and administrative power over the rest of British India. A further India Bill passed in 1784 created the Board of Control, a political body that included the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State, and four Privy Councilors, establishing that the Company was under the direct control of the British government. Future Governor Generals would be appointed directly by the Crown. The boundaries between the East India Company and the British government were highly nebulous and ill-defined during this period, and led to frequent disagreements between the Directors, the Board of Control, the Governor General, and the individual Governors and Councils of the

Presidency towns. The disputes between these groups are important to keep in mind in order to understand the chronology of the Mysore Wars.²

Conflict between the Company and the kingdom of Mysore took place in southern India over the course of four wars in the second half of the eighteenth century. This period of struggle began in the 1760s and was not resolved until culminating in the complete defeat of Mysore, including the death of its ruler Tipu Sultan, in 1799. The source of the dispute concerned the territory surrounding the presidency town of Madras, known as the Carnatic. This region was the source of contention between four competing powers in this period: the British Company, the kingdom of Mysore, the Maratha polity, and the Nizam of Hyderabad. These were the major territorial powers in southern India during the second half of the eighteenth century; the French also intervened at times to undermine the British, but no longer possessed significant territory of their own in India.

The state of Mysore was ruled at this time by Haider Ali, a Muslim soldier who rose to power from humble origins by overthrowing the previous Hindu ruling dynasty in 1760 through a successful coup d'état. Haider proved to be a skilled and ruthless military leader, acquitting himself well in a series of wars against the other powers in the region and expanding Mysore's territory. The rising power of Haider's state of Mysore inevitably drew it into conflict with the other regional powers in southern India. The First Mysore War (1767-69) was a confusing and indecisive series of campaigns, in which both the Marathas and the Nizam switched sides at various points in time, fighting for or against Mysore depending on the circumstances of the moment. In the end, Haider fought the Company to a stalemate that eventually restored the status quo antebellum. The

² This summary adapted from Philip Lawson. *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993)

primary result of the war was the signing of a treaty of mutual defense between the Company and Haider in Madras on 29 March 1769, in which both sides agreed to support the other if attacked. Haider had sought an alliance with the Company to protect Mysore from the Marathas, against whom he would end up fighting in a series of conflicts that lasted throughout the 1770s. Despite the terms of the 1769 peace agreement, the Company failed to honor its pledge to assist Haider against the Marathas in these wars. The result was a grudge that Haider would hold for the rest of his life, and which would be passed on to his son Tipu Sahib. Haider awaited a chance to renew the struggle with the British Company, and found his opportunity in 1780.³

Unlike the other Mysore Wars, the Second Mysore War (1780-84) was a defensive war for the British Company, one in which it faced a coalition of the other powers in southern India. The war was initiated by Haider Ali, with the assistance of the Marathas, the Nizam, and the French, and can be seen as part of the worldwide conflict generated by the American Revolution. It was a war which the East India Company had no intention of fighting, and was ill-prepared to contest in its opening stages. The conflict grew out of the larger worldwide war taking place between Britain and France; earlier, in 1778, the British Company had initiated hostilities against the remaining French possessions in India. Company forces captured Pondicherry with relative ease, then proceeded to attack the French port of Mahé on the Malabar coast the following year in 1779. This was a contentious location, however, as Mahé was located within Mysorean territory and Company soldiers had to march through Mysore in order to reach the port. Furthermore, Haider Ali had explicitly told the British that the city was under his

³ H.H. Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, 1929) Chapter 15, "The Carnatic 1761-84" p. 273-92

protection, and sent forces to contribute to its defense. When the Company attacked and captured Mahé despite this warning, Haider began preparations to enter the war against the British, along with the two other great powers in southern India, the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad. The East India Company would soon find itself in dire straights, at war with the French and all three Indian powers together in confederation.⁴

Despite this dangerous predicament, the Madras government in charge of the Company's possessions in southern India remained unconcerned about potential attack from Haider Ali, and took no precautionary steps against the threat of impending attack. A military observer in Madras wrote in May 1780 that widespread rumors existed of imminent attack from Haider, but considered the reports to be without foundation, due to the "unsuspicious tranquility" of the Madras governing council.⁵ When word did arrive that Haider had descended the mountainous Ghats from his own kingdom and invaded the Carnatic with an army, "no attention was paid by the people in power to this intelligence, which they treated with contempt."⁶ Sir Eyre Coote, who was later appointed to command the Company forces in southern India after a series of military disasters, blamed the situation on poor policy, and rued the folly of unnecessarily creating an enemy of Haider, which was the fault of Company administrators in Madras.⁷ This combination of Indian powers was extremely dangerous to the Company's tenuous holdings in the south, and the very poor military performance of the Company's forces would bear witness to this difficult situation.

Haider and Tipu brought the Mysorean army into the Carnatic during the summer

⁴ *Ibid*, Chapter 15, "The Carnatic 1761-84" p. 273-92

⁵ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 97

⁶ Norman Macleod to Charles Jenkinson [Madras] 13 October 1780 (p. 543-49) IOR/H/150 p. 545

⁷ Eyre Coote to Directors 30 November 1780 (p. 571-600) IOR/H/150

of 1780, and had little difficulty overrunning the territory claimed by the Madras Presidency. Accounts differ on their treatment of the Indian populace during this campaign, with initial sources reporting widespread clemency and leniency, but later British sources accusing the Mysoreans of mass slaughter and cruelty.⁸ Company forces under the command of General Hector Munro moved to oppose the passage of Haider's army. On 10 September 1780, Haider managed to isolate and surround a group of 3800 British reinforcements under the command of Colonel William Baillie near the village of Pollilur. According to descriptions of the battle, the grossly outnumbered Company soldiers formed into squares, which were successful at repelling the attacks of Haider's mostly cavalry force, although they took heavy fire from Haider's siege guns. At the climax of the engagement, two tumbrils (ammunition carts) were hit by artillery shells and exploded, tearing open huge gaps in the Company squares which the Mysorean cavalry poured through and ended the battle.⁹ While there is some dispute over whether the tumbrils actually exploded, or if this was simply a convenient excuse for Baillie's defeat, the facts of the battle are relatively clear, with a smaller Company force overwhelmed and defeated by a much larger Mysorean one.¹⁰ In the aftermath of the battle, hundreds of Company soldiers were taken prisoner by Haider and Tipu, where they would spend the remainder of the war in captivity.

The British defeat at Pollilur forced the Company into a defensive struggle in the Carnatic, primarily centered on the capture and investiture of various fortified locations by each side. Haider wisely kept his army out of pitched battles, in which the Company

⁸ See for example Mark Wilks. *Historical Sketches of the South of India, in an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysoor, Volume 3* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810-1817): 2

⁹ M. Woods, Narrative of Hyder Ally and Baillie 10 September 1780 (p. 245-48) IOR/H/211

¹⁰ Francis Gowdie to his brother Dr. Gowdie 31 October 1783 (p. 79-89) IOR/H/223

had a major advantage, and concentrated on using his advantage in cavalry to raid and pillage throughout the region. This was a very successful strategy of asymmetrical warfare, but for the same reason Haider was unable to consolidate his conquest of the Carnatic, leading to an indecisive conflict.¹¹ Two events of interest took place during 1782, the first involving another military victory by Tipu over a detachment of Company soldiers. In an engagement near Annagudi on February 18, Tipu surrounded a force of about 1500 soldiers led by Colonel Braithwaite; after heavy shelling by Tipu's cannon and rockets, Braithwaite gave the order to surrender his entire force.¹² While Annagudi never achieved the same fame or notoriety as the earlier battle at Pollilur, it was nevertheless reported upon in the London newspapers and added to the growing reputation of Tipu as a skillful military commander.¹³

Another incident which would arouse a disproportionate amount of controversy took place on the Malabar Coast in 1782. As part of the ongoing Anglo-French conflict, the French Admiral Suffrein captured several British ships, most notably the man of war known as the *Hannibal*. Suffrein was unable to provision the sailors he had taken as prisoners, and after failing to work out a captive exchange with the Madras government, he turned them over to France's Mysorean allies.¹⁴ This situation was an embarrassment for the East India Company that reflected poorly on its reputation and claims to territorial governance in India, inciting criticisms of its servants as corrupt and inept nabobs. Unfortunately for the Company, worse military disasters were soon to follow.

¹¹ G.J. Bryant. "Asymmetric Warfare: The British Experience in Eighteenth-Century India" in *The Journal of Military History* 2004 68(2): 456-57

¹² Lieutenant Charles Salmon to unknown, 19 February 1782 (p.251-59) IOR/H/177

¹³ London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England): 22 July 1782, Issue 1889

¹⁴ Captain Innes Munro. *Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 277-78

Perhaps the most dramatic controversy of the war took place in the early months of 1783, involving the British General Mathews and the unlawful conduct of his forces. According to the report of two Company officers published in the *New Annual Register* for the year 1784, Mathews began his campaign on 5 January 1783 by capturing the city of Onore and putting every inhabitant to the sword. One of the officers wrote, “The carnage was great; we trampled thick on the dead bodies that were strewed in the way. It was rather shocking to humanity, but such are only secondary considerations, and to a soldier whose bosom glows with heroic glory, they are thought accidents of course.”¹⁵ The Register’s account claims that Mathews privately plundered a significant amount of jewels and diamonds from Onore, which the rest of the soldiery protested should have been divided evenly amongst the whole force.¹⁶ Mathews then secured an even larger share of Indian treasure for himself at Hydernagur, the next city successfully invested, to an estimated sum of £1.2 million. This bit of nabobery proved so unpopular that a subordinate officer named Colonel Macleod led a group of virtual deserters back to Bombay, where they attempted to relieve Mathews of his command of the expeditionary force.¹⁷

Worse accusations against Mathews were yet to come. The Register’s account charged Mathews with a wholesale slaughter of the defending populace in the city of Annanpur, including many defenseless women, worth quoting at length:

When a practical breach was effected, orders were issued for a storm, and no quarter: they were received with alacrity, and put in execution without delay. Every man in the place was put to the sword, except one horseman, who made his

¹⁵ *New Annual Register* 1784, p. 96. Quoted in *A Vindication of the Conduct of the English Forces, Employed in the Late War, Under the Command of Brigadier General Mathews, against the Nabob Tippoo Sultan* (London: Logographic Press, 1787): 18-19

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 96 in the original, p. 19-20 as quoted here

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 97 in the original, p. 22-26 quoted here

escape after being wounded in three different places. The women, unwilling to be separated from their relations, or exposed to the brutal licentiousness of the soldiery, threw themselves in multitudes, into the moats with which the fort was surrounded. Four hundred beautiful women, pierced with the bayonet, and expiring in one another's arms, were in this situation treated by the British with every kind of outrage: for this conduct the troops, however, we are told, afterwards received a reprimand.¹⁸

This series of circumstances would have been extraordinary enough; however, the campaign of Mathews had drawn the attention of Tipu, who marched to meet Mathews with a much larger army. Mathews found himself besieged inside the city of Bednur, and after a siege lasting seventeen days, agreed to surrender the fort to Tipu on 28 April 1783. The terms of the surrender were that the British defenders would march out with all the honors of war, laying down their arms in the process, and leaving inside Bednur the various wealth that had been looted during the course of the campaign.¹⁹ Accounts differ on what transpired when Mathews and the Company soldiers exited the city; some versions claim that Tipu discovered Mathews attempting to make off with the Bednur treasury by hiding it inside the baggage train, while others argued that Tipu simply surrounded and seized the Company soldiers due to his duplicitous character. All accounts agree that Mathews and his men spent the remainder of the war as prisoners deep inside Mysore, where many of them, including Mathews himself, perished before the end of the conflict.

Haider Ali passed away suddenly and with little warning in his military camp on 6 December 1782 due to a cancerous growth on his back, leaving the rulership of Mysore and command of the war to his son Tipu. Upon taking control of the kingdom, Tipu Sahib changed his title to Tipu Sultan, the new position claiming religious as well as political

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 97 in the original, p. 27-29 quoted here

¹⁹ Captain Henry Oakes. *An Authentic Narrative of the Treatment of the English who were Taken Prisoners... by Tippoo Sahib* (London: Printed for G. Kearsley, 1785): 2

authority over his domains. Like his father Haider before him, who had also claimed the title of sultan, Tipu was employing Islamic symbols designed to contribute to the legitimacy of his rule, always a potential issue due to Haider's low birth and rise to power through the overthrow of Mysore's previous rajah.²⁰ From this point forward, Tipu became the main subject of attention for British observers of the Mysore Wars in India and in London.

As the Second Mysore War began to wind down in 1783, the major scene of military action centered around the city of Mangalore, on the western Malabar coast of Tipu's domains. Mangalore had earlier been captured by Company forces, and a small garrison of British soldiers and sepoys were trying to hold the city's fort against a vastly larger Mysorean army.²¹ Tipu was frustrated by the desertion of his French allies during the siege, as word had arrived from Europe of the peace treaty signed in Paris ending the war generated by the American Revolution. The French commander General Bussy and Tipu were both thoroughly disillusioned with one another by the end of the war for failing to support one another properly.²² As one anonymous member of the Company wrote at the time, "Tippoo, who was angry with the French for having forsaken him, made large demands upon them on account of supplies afforded by him during the War and in consequence of their non-compliance, is said to have threatened to march an Army to Pondicherry."²³ This was far from the last time that Tipu would be let down by his French allies, with whom he entertained a complicated and strained relationship.

²⁰ Kate Brittlebank. *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 151

²¹ H.H. Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5* (1963, 1929): 273-92

²² Mohibbul Hasan, "The French in the Second Anglo-Mysore War" in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan*. Irfan Habib (ed.) (London: Anthem, 2002): 44-45

²³ Anonymous author [1798?] Notes on Tipu Sultan (p. 281-470) IOR/H/609 p. 289

Similar frustrations of anger and resentment were expressed by the outnumbered defenders of Mangalore, in this case towards the East India Company for not sending a relief force to the assistance of the starving garrison. John Wolseley kept a diary of the events unfolding at Mangalore, which he published after the war's end, one which is full of the privations that he and his fellow soldiers suffered through as they slowly starved to death. Wolseley had nothing but scorn for the Company after it failed to provide more supplies by sea, with the soldiers threatening mutiny and dying in large numbers in deplorable conditions, cursing the Company with their last breaths.²⁴ Eventually, reduced to eating "horses, frogs, dogs, crows, cat-fish, black gram, etc. in the utmost distress for every necessity of life," the Mangalore garrison was forced to surrender to Tipu.²⁵ The commanding officer at Mangalore, Major Campbell, negotiated the official terms of the capitulation with Tipu in person.

British sources disagreed on how the surrender of Mangalore took place, with some accusing Tipu of violating the terms of the agreement and others insisting that Tipu treated the surviving garrison with honor and lenity.²⁶ The Company sent a group of peace commissioners to meet with Tipu during this period of truce, hoping that the exit of France from the war would incline Tipu to end hostilities. The result was the signing of the Treaty of Mangalore and an official end to the war in March 1784, in which both sides agreed to return to the status quo ante bellum.²⁷ The Company placed an extremely high priority on securing the release of the prisoners captured during the course of the

²⁴ John Rogerson Wolseley. *An Account of the Gallant Defence made at Mangalore in the East Indies; Against the United Efforts of the French and the Nabob Tippu Sultan...* (London: Printed for C. Bathurst, 1786): 130

²⁵ *Ibid*, 136-37

²⁶ See for example Charles Crommelin to Governor-General and Council 4 October 1783 (p.53-68) IOR/H/187 for charges leveled against the Sultan, and an eyewitness account published in the General Evening Post (London, England) 12 February 1784, Issue 7796 for the opposite viewpoint.

²⁷ Treaty with Tipu Sultan 11 March 1784 (p.1011-14) IOR/H/178

war, the ones lost in battle and taken from captured ships, which was written into the second article of the treaty. Tipu did in fact release thousands of prisoners after the signing of the treaty, including large numbers of sepoys serving in the Company's military.²⁸ However, a dispute soon arose over the status of a small number of "European Musselmen", who were not released from Mysore and continued to remain under the control of Tipu. The subject of these men, who were believed by the Company to be British soldiers forcibly converted to Islam against their will, would remain a major issue of dispute throughout the next decade.²⁹

The Second Mysore War had been an ill-planned disaster for the British Company from start to finish. It enjoyed no military victories of note and failed to acquire any new territory, while running up large debts that were politically unpopular in the metropole.³⁰ The Company was very fortunate simply to achieve a return to the status quo, largely due to the weakness of Haider and Tipu's forces in set piece battles and siege warfare. The humiliating capture of British prisoners, many of whom spent long years languishing in Tipu's dungeons, led to charges of corruption and incompetence from critics in Britain. The Company needed an opportunity to change its image in southern India, and found it in the form of new political leadership.

The Third Mysore War (1790-92)

After the furor surrounding the Second Mysore War came to a close in 1784, there was little mention of Tipu Sultan in Britain during the next few years. Tipu's war against the Marathas in 1787 received only passing interest in the London newspapers,

²⁸ John Baillie to his Father 14 June 1784 (p. 153-79) Account of his capture and captivity. IOR/H/223 p. 178-79

²⁹ See Chapter 2

³⁰ See for example: Public Advertiser (London, England) 16 January 1790, Issue 17315

and what few mentions there were tended to concentrate on lingering issues from the previous war, such as the British prisoners remaining in captivity or an editorial supporting or condemning the behavior of General Mathews.³¹ Although Britons remained more interested in Tipu than in any other Indian prince, and East India hands continued to worry about Tipu's commitment to the peace, public interest had clearly shifted to other subjects for the moment.

Following the conclusion of his war with the Marathas, Tipu spent much of 1788 putting down a rebellion in the coastal Malabar region of his domains, suppressing the high-caste Hindu Nairs of the region.³² This provoked the fears of the neighboring Rajah of Travancore, who worried that Tipu would advance across the border and attack his kingdom next. Travancore was protected along its northern border with Mysore by a system of defenses known as the Travancore Lines, a series of ditches and ramparts running between the coast and the mountains that protected Travancore from the east. Just beyond these lines were two ancient Dutch forts, Jaikottai and Kranganur, which had been captured from the Portuguese back in the 17th century. The Rajah of Travancore purchased these two forts from the Dutch in 1789, and incorporated them into his defensive system, initiating a diplomatic controversy.

John Holland, the Governor of Madras, was not at all pleased with the purchase of these forts, which was done without consulting the East India Company. Holland rightly feared that the purchase would provoke Tipu into military action, and since Travancore

³¹ Tipu's kingdom of Mysore went to war with the Marathas in 1786-87, with Tipu faring quite poorly. The Marathas gained back a number of disputed border forts, and Tipu was forced to pay them an indemnity. See M. S. Naravane. *Battles of the Honourable East India Company: Making of the Raj* (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing, 2006): 175

³² Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 248-49

had signed a subsidiary alliance with the Company, would lead to a general engagement in southern India. Under the terms of the subsidiary alliance, the Company was obligated to come to the assistance of Travancore if it were attacked, but the Rajah was also forbidden from entering into alliance with other European powers, or instigating a conflict for his own purposes. As Holland had anticipated, Tipu Sultan was indeed enraged by the transfer of the two forts. Tipu argued that the forts belonged to his own tributary ruler, the Rajah of Cochin, and that the Dutch had only leased the forts from him, and could not sell them to another state. The legality of the sale remains a disputed topic amongst modern scholars.³³

Regardless of the debate surrounding the sale's validity, Tipu responded by bringing a large military force to the Travancore Lines. Tipu demanded the evacuation of the forts and the surrender of his rebellious subjects, many of whom had fled Malabar and found asylum in Travancore. When the Rajah of Travancore refused these demands, Tipu ordered the attack in December of 1789. The military assault itself was a surprising failure, with the Mysorean soldiers repulsed and Tipu himself suffering a minor injury in the fighting. As Tipu paused to bring up more of his army and prepare his siege train for a more proper assault, the East India Company began to intervene in the conflict for the first time.³⁴

The Governor General of India at the time of the dispute was Charles Cornwallis, a military man of long experience best remembered today for his surrender at Yorktown

³³ Sir Penderel Moon, for example, argues that Tipu's claim was invalid (*Ibid*, 249). However, Ibrahim Kunju counters that the Rajah of Travancore was actively inciting the rebellions in Malabar, and that the Dutch had no legal claim for the sale of the forts. See Ibrahim Kunju, "Relations Between Travancore and Mysore in the 18th Century" in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan*. Irfan Habib (ed.) (London: Anthem, 2002): 84-85

³⁴ For details of the attack on the Travancore Lines, see Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (1989): 248-250 and also W. H. Hutton, "Tipu Sultan" in H.H Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (1963, 1929): 335

during the American Revolution. Cornwallis had traveled to India to replace the outgoing Governor General Warren Hastings in 1786, with the Company hoping that Cornwallis would restore integrity to its administration and improve its military standing. Cornwallis chose to overrule Governor Holland of Madras in this dispute, charging Tipu with breaking the previous Treaty of Mangalore by his actions in Travancore, and he began to prepare the Company for a new conflict. Tipu had hoped to avoid another war with the Company, but he soon found himself forced to respond to the actions of Cornwallis, leading to the onset of the Third Mysore War (1790-92).

During the first year of the war in 1790, the East India Company enjoyed few military successes. Cornwallis' great triumph was to secure treaties of alliance with the other two great powers in southern India, with the Marathas on 1 June 1790 and the Nizam of Hyderabad on 4 July.³⁵ Both Indian states were concerned by the growing power of Tipu's Mysore, and agreed to enter into the war on the side of the Company and share in an equitable division of territorial conquests. The Whig opposition in London objected to these alliances as antithetical to the dictates of Parliament, which forbade the East India Company from engaging in wars of conquest, since the treaties bound Cornwallis into a war of territorial annexation against Tipu's Mysore. Their objections caused a great deal of political debate in the metropole, but had no effect on the operations taking place in India.³⁶ Militarily, Cornwallis had secured an enormous advantage for the Company's side, adding some 20,000 Indian cavalry to make up for the Company's deficiency in horse, and reversing the situation from the Second Mysore War.

³⁵ W. H. Hutton, "Tipu Sultan" in H.H. Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (1963, 1929): 335

³⁶ See Chapter 4

Instead of a military coalition of native princes formed against the East India Company, the Third Mysore War would instead consist of a general alliance against Tipu Sultan.

The kingdom of Mysore itself presented formidable natural barriers to invasion; a pair of mountain ranges known as the Eastern and Western Ghats defended the entrances to the central Mysore plateau wherein the capital of Seringapatam was located. In order to reach the heart of Tipu's domain, the Company's forces would have to ascend the steep passes through the Ghats, with all of their heavy guns and equipment, and then continue to supply themselves in hostile territory [Figure 1].³⁷ This would prove to be no easy task. General Medows attempted to pass through the Ghats during the summer and fall of 1790, but proved completely unable to do so, and nearly saw the complete destruction of one of his detachments under the command of Colonel Floyd.³⁸ Tipu's superior mobility and excellent use of his forces had prevented Medows from making any gains at all during the first year of the war. Company soldiers were unable to reach Mysore, and Tipu had been able to descend the mountain passes and invade the Carnatic once again.

Given the lack of success enjoyed by the Company forces under the command of Medows, Cornwallis decided to travel to Madras and assume personal control of the war at the beginning of 1791. In many ways this was intended as a political gesture, designed to shore up the alliances with the Marathas and the Nizam, both of whom had been slow to provide support for the war effort. Instead of pursuing Tipu's mobile army throughout the Carnatic, Cornwallis moved instead to invade Mysore via the most direct route straight up and through the Eastern Ghats. Catching Tipu by surprise, Cornwallis successfully scaled the mountain passes and entered the kingdom of Mysore, placing the

³⁷ James Rennell. *The Marches of the British Armies in the Peninsula of India, during the Campaigns of 1790 and 1791* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer, 1792): plate engraving

³⁸ Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (1989): 251-52

important city of Bangalore under siege and eventually capturing it at the end of March.³⁹ The fall of the city had important political ramifications, reinvigorating the Company's Indian allies and prompting them to launch their own invasions of Mysore. There was a general expectation that Cornwallis would advance on Seringapatam and capture Tipu's capital, putting a speedy end to the war.

After the fall of Bangalore, Cornwallis was forced to pause briefly to restore his food and ammunition supplies. Once reinforcements arrived in May of 1791, Cornwallis pushed on towards Seringapatam with the intention of placing the city under siege. Unfortunately for the Company forces, the monsoon season began early and played havoc with the advancing army, exhausting and killing the draft cattle that served as the logistical lifeblood of all armies in India. Cornwallis had no choice but to order a retreat to Bangalore, due to lack of supplies, destroying the same siege guns which had been laboriously hauled up the Eastern Ghats. Tipu celebrated the retreat as a major victory, believing that this had proved the futility of an attack against his capital. In the British metropole, doom and gloom once more descended upon the public perception of the war effort.⁴⁰

Cornwallis used the rest of 1791 to make preparations for another campaign against Seringapatam. His first task was to ensure his supply routes from the Carnatic up through the Ghats to Bangalore, which were defended by a number of mountainous forts. The Company's military forces succeeded in capturing nearly all of these locations through a series of small engagements, many of which were recorded in sketches or

³⁹ *Ibid*, 253

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 254-55

paintings.⁴¹ These rocky hill forts had been considered to be impregnable by the Indian armies, and their fall seemed to reinforce the belief in the invincibility of the Company's white soldiers. Although the taking of the hill forts largely passed without undue attention, a great deal of notoriety eventually came to surround the capture of Ossure, which fell in July of 1791. It appeared that Tipu had ordered the execution of several European captives at Ossure shortly before it was evacuated, thereby reinforcing all of the long-standing beliefs about prisoner atrocities from the previous war. Accounts of the prisoner killings at Ossure would appear in virtually all of the later literature about Tipu, as an example of his cruelty and savagery.⁴²

The preparations of Cornwallis were completed shortly after the beginning of the new year, and his forces set out again for Seringapatam in February 1792. The reduction of Tipu's hill forts ensured a steady flow of supplies for the Company's army, eliminating the logistical problems which had crippled the previous campaign. Tipu decided not to challenge Cornwallis in a set piece battle, which was probably the correct decision given the superiority of the Company's infantry, and chose instead to rely on the formidable natural defenses of Seringapatam [Figure 2].⁴³ The city itself was located on an island in the middle of the river Cauvery, and Tipu had constructed a series of strong fortifications on the island itself and the terrain to its north. The Sultan hoped to defend his capital against a siege until the seasons turned, bringing back the monsoon rains and forcing another retreat of the Company forces due to lack of provisions. The strategy itself was

⁴¹ See Robert Home. *Select Views in Mysore, the Country of Tippoo Sultan* (London: Published by Mr. Bowyer, 1794) and Lieutenant R.H. Colebrooke. *Twelve Views of Places in the Kingdom of Mysore* (London, 1794)

⁴² See Chapter 2 for more details.

⁴³ James Rennell. *The Marches of the British Armies in the Peninsula of India* (1792): plate engraving

sound, and similar tactics had previously defeated many European armies in India, but it would not prove effective on this occasion.⁴⁴

Cornwallis arrived at Seringapatam on 5 February 1792, and immediately launched a daring midnight assault on Tipu's fortifications on the night of 6 February. Tipu's soldiers were caught completely by surprise, having expected that the Company army would wait to bring its siege guns into position before challenging the defenses, and soon fled back to the island itself. Cornwallis was now able to move up his siege guns and begin reducing the fortifications of Seringapatam; after two weeks of bombardment the walls were almost completely destroyed, and it was apparent to all that an attack would soon commence and capture the city. Tipu had no choice but to sue for peace terms with the invading armies.⁴⁵

Tipu had in fact been trying to negotiate a separate peace with Cornwallis for some time. Unfortunately for the Sultan, Cornwallis had stipulated earlier that peace could only arrive as part of a general agreement with the Company's allies, the Marathas and Nizam.⁴⁶ The Opposition politicians and newspapers in London charged that these alliances were being cynically manipulated to justify the continuation of an expansionistic war of conquest, an accusation which seems rather accurate. Cornwallis himself wrote repeatedly that Tipu's duplicitous character made it impossible to trust him during negotiations, exaggerating Tipu's negative qualities as a means to extract harsher concessions: "But with what confidence can a negotiation be carried on with a man, who not only violates treaties of peace, but also disregards the faith of Capitulation during

⁴⁴ Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (1989): 256

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 256-57

⁴⁶ See the correspondences between Cornwallis and Tipu in the India Office Records, such as Cornwallis to Tippoo Sultaun 23 February 1791, p. 17-20 IOR/H/252 for one such example.

war."⁴⁷ Cornwallis also made frequent mention of the prisoners issue from the previous conflict in his correspondences, using it as a sign of the faithless character of the Sultan. By playing up the cruelty and violence of Tipu's character, Cornwallis was able to justify a series of very harsh peace terms, as necessary to reign in the "tyrant" that threatened all of southern India. At the same time, Cornwallis himself could appear magnanimous in victory, and claim to be disinterested in the spoils of war - even as the Company received enormous sums of money and vast tracts of land as part of the treaty.

After several weeks of negotiation, the Treaty of Seringapatam was concluded on 17 March 1792. Tipu was forced to surrender half of his dominions, pay an indemnity of 6 crore rupees (60 million rupees, an astronomically high sum at the time), and release all prisoners still held in his territory.⁴⁸ The lands surrendered by Tipu were to be split between the East India Company, the Marathas, and the Nizam, with each party receiving territory that bordered areas already under their control. After the initial terms of peace had been agreed upon, Cornwallis pulled a diplomatic sleight-of-hand and added into the final treaty that Tipu would have to surrender the lands of the Rajah of Coorg as well, one of his rebellious subjects whose territory did not border any of the attackers. This diplomatic trickery nearly reignited the conflict and infuriated Tipu, but ultimately the Sultan was left with no choice but to sign the treaty.

The most controversial aspect of the treaty was the way in which Cornwallis sought to guarantee the peace. Written into the treaty was the following clause: "Until the due performance of the three foregoing articles [territorial exchange, indemnity payment, and prisoner release] two of the sons of the said Tippoo Sultaun shall be detained as

⁴⁷ Cornwallis to Tippoo Sultaun 16 January 1792 (p. 289-90) IOR/H/252

⁴⁸ Cornwallis to Tippoo Sultaun, Definitive Treaty of Peace 17 March 1792 (p.312-25) IOR/H/252

hostages."⁴⁹ The use of hostages during diplomatic negotiations was common during the eighteenth century, but the taking of young children certainly was not, nor was it at all ordinary to hold the family members of heads of state in virtual captivity for years after the signing of peace. During the negotiations that led up to the treaty, this was the term to which Tipu objected the most strenuously, even more so than surrendering Mysorean territory. Tipu's emissary Ghulam Ali related how "Tipu from a sense of shame at being reduced to so low an ebb, would be extremely loath to part with them [his sons]", and a few days later his negotiators "demanded if two or three of Tippoo's principal and most confidential Officers would not be taken," instead of Tipu's sons, which Cornwallis rejected.⁵⁰

The insistence of Cornwallis on taking Tipu's young sons as hostages, rather than some other members of Tipu's court, remains a mystery. The best explanation is that Cornwallis and the rest of the British community living in India saw this as an opportunity to humiliate the Sultan on a personal level, paying him back in some sense for the captivity of the British soldiers by taking his own sons prisoner. Given the "revenge" motifs that surrounded so much of the Anglo-Indian writing about the Third Mysore War, it was quite likely that the captivity of Tipu's own children was demanded as a symbolic response to Tipu's imprisonment of the sons of Britain.⁵¹ Cornwallis may also have perceived Tipu as a savage, as suggested by the frequent disparaging remarks about the Sultan contained in his correspondences, and thus believed that only "savage"

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, Definitive Treaty of Peace Article 2, 17 March 1792 (p.312-25) IOR/H/252

⁵⁰ John Kennaway to Cornwallis 24 May 1792, Negotiations with Tipu Sultan IOR/H/254 First citation 20 February 1792 Remarks on Article 5 p.40-41, Second citation 22 February 1792 p. 55-56

⁵¹ The sentiments in the Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser (Calcutta, India) 2 October 1788, Issue 141 are typical of the period.

measures would serve to contain him.⁵² The hostage princes were held by the Company in Madras for the next two years, and only returned to Tipu when the massive indemnity specified in the treaty was paid in full. The spectacle of the princes also aroused considerable interest from the British public in the metropole, and was commemorated in the popular art and theatre of the day.⁵³

Cornwallis himself received universal accolade for his military victory in India. The public uncertainty and unpopularity that had existed during the course of the war evaporated immediately upon its successful conclusion. Cornwallis had always remained a popular figure in the public eye, even when the war against Tipu was faring poorly, and his triumph over Tipu ensured that he would be celebrated as a hero throughout the British Empire. He was awarded the Freedom of the City of London, voted the official congratulations of both the Lords and Commons, promoted to the peerage, and feted with a massive celebration on his return to the capital in 1794.⁵⁴ The peace treaty itself was not quite so universally popular as Cornwallis himself, although a strong majority of the public gave their approval. The general consensus was that the war had been extremely well prosecuted, and the treaty itself an example of Cornwallis' fairness and moderation in victory, but opinion was split as to whether the conflict should have been prosecuted to Tipu's final defeat and destruction. Nonetheless, it was difficult for even the harshest critics of the East India Company to object to the results of the conflict. The Third Mysore War reversed the Company's fortunes in southern India, greatly weakening the power of Tipu's Mysore while enriching the British in the process, and all without

⁵² Cornwallis to Directors, Conclusion of Treaty with Tipu Sultan 5 April 1792 (p. 91-107) IOR/H/251 p. 94, for one such example.

⁵³ See Chapter 3

⁵⁴ World (London, England) 5 October 1792, Issue 1800; World (London, England) 7 April 1794, Issue 2270

suffering any of the military disasters of the previous conflict. Desperately seeking a way to offset his losses, Tipu turned to the one power that could potentially oppose the rising strength of the British Company: an alliance with the French.

The Fourth Mysore War (1799)

The years following the return of the hostage princes to Tipu were once again tense and uncertain for the servants of Company in India. Lord Cornwallis returned home in 1793 and was replaced as Governor General by Sir John Shore, a longtime Company servant entirely lacking the forceful personality of his predecessors and successor. Shore did not come from an aristocratic family, and his administration was reminiscent of earlier periods when men from more humble and commercial backgrounds were in charge of the Company's Indian affairs. Shore was content to make few adjustments to the administrative systems put into place by Cornwallis, and had no interest in wars of conquest. His five years as Governor General (1793-98) were largely uneventful and unexciting, characterized by a policy of non-intervention into the affairs of other Indian states - a policy which would be thoroughly repudiated by Lord Wellesley, the man to follow him in office.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, there remained a great deal of uncertainty regarding Tipu Sultan, in particular whether he would choose to ally himself with the cause of the French. Without the benefit of hindsight, the policy-makers of the Company were never entirely sure whether or not Tipu was planning to initiate another round of warfare in southern India. The fear of Tipu joining with the French, at the time in the midst of their own turbulent revolutionary period, remained a bogeyman haunting the minds of Company servants.

⁵⁵ W. H. Hutton, "Tipu Sultan" in H.H Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5* (1963, 1929): 338 Pro-imperial historians have been highly critical of Shore's passivity; at the time, Wellesley treated him with thinly disguised contempt, due at least in part to Shore's family background.

Repeated false rumors of war with Tipu, always linked in some way to an alliance with France, permeated discussions of Indian affairs in 1797 and 1798, reflecting the overall uncertainty of the period.⁵⁶

Tipu was indeed considering the possibility of an alliance with France, in the hopes that it would allow him to restore the lost territory from the previous war. The path towards this French alliance began with an unlikely source. A French privateer and adventurer named Francois Ripaud landed at the port of Mangalore in 1797 seeking an audience with Tipu. Ripaud led Tipu to believe that he had been sent as an envoy from the French colony of Mauritius, on a small island in the Indian Ocean, promising the arrival of a large French contingent of soldiers which would join with the Sultan to expel the British from India. Tipu's ministers correctly deduced that Ripaud was a fraud who had no real backing from the French colonial government, which should have been the end of this escapade. Nevertheless, Tipu accepted the false promises of Ripaud and began planning his own embassy to Mauritius in response. Tipu's desire for revenge and desperate search for allies against the British Company appear to have overridden more sensible judgment and led him into this poor decision. The contemporary Indian historian Mir Hussain Kirmani wrote afterwards in 1802 that "the Sultan in certain matters frequently acted precipitately and without thought, and in these cases would attend to no representation, even from his most faithful servants," specifically referring to Tipu's unwise decision to trust Ripaud as an example of poor judgment.⁵⁷ Tipu chose to ignore

⁵⁶ General Evening Post (London, England) 23 December 1797, Issue 10177 & Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 25 December 1797, Issue 6294

⁵⁷ Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kirmani. *History of Tipu Sultan, Being a Continuation of the Neshani Hyduri* 1958 [2nd ed.] (London: Printed for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, first translated 1842, written 1802): 119

the advice of his advisors and actively pursue the assistance of this phantom force of French soldiers, which would have grave consequences for the Sultan.

Tipu sent a group of ambassadors to Mauritius in 1797 to negotiate the terms of this alliance with France, intending their mission to be kept strictly secret. Instead, the French Governor Malartic publicly welcomed the ambassadors with a great show of pageantry, and then foolishly issued a public proclamation calling for citizens to come and serve in Tipu's military.⁵⁸ In the end, the mission failed to provide anything more than token French support for Tipu's cause, while giving away his intentions of working closely together with Britain's most dire antagonist. Tipu's repeated requests for military assistance from the French would be in vain. His embassy to Mauritius gained him nothing, while simultaneously revealing all of his most secret negotiations. Tipu did not have an alliance with France, and did not have any substantial number of French soldiers, but had given ample justification to associate himself with Britain's military enemies. This would be used by the new Governor General as the pretext for the Fourth Mysore War.

Sir John Shore was replaced as Governor General in 1798 by Richard Wellesley, known at the time as Lord Mornington, who was the older brother of the future Duke of Wellington.⁵⁹ Wellesley had entered politics at a young age, taking a seat in the Irish House of Lords in 1781 at the tender age of 21. His ambitious personality and close friendship with William Pitt and Henry Dundas secured him first appointment to the East India Company's Board of Control in 1793, and later the Governor Generalship in 1798.

⁵⁸ Anne Joseph Hyppolite Malartic. *Proclamation at the Isle of France*. 30 January 1798

⁵⁹ Arthur Wellesley, the famed Duke of Wellington, came along with his brother to India as a military officer, staying overseas from 1797-1804. He commanded several battles in both the Fourth Mysore War and the Second Maratha War, and was present at Seringapatam when the city was captured.

A born autocrat who sharply disagreed with Shore's management of India, Wellesley had an aggressive, expansionistic view of what the Company's role in India should be, with the goal of extending British rule over as much of the subcontinent as possible. He did not subscribe to the older view of the Company as a trading entity which only possessed territory to facilitate commerce, but saw it instead as a sovereign power forming the basis of a new empire in the East.⁶⁰

Wellesley sought to solve the problem of India's chronic instability by outright annexing the weakest of the states allied with the Company, and warring against the remaining powerful independent states of Mysore and the Marathas. Wellesley was notorious for his arrogance and difficulty in dealing with others, and he made no attempt to follow the instructions of the Company's Directors, being contemptuous of the commercial elements within London's India House.⁶¹ The new Governor General had little interest in turning a profit or keeping military expenditures low, and instead was determined to eliminate all French influence from India to secure British rule. The increasingly imperial style of Wellesley's administration was another demonstration of the Company's changing role as the eighteenth century came to a close. The Company may have been a political entity from the very start, but the accession of men like Wellesley into positions of leadership demonstrated how the British state and the traditional landed elements within British society were in the process of conquering the Company.⁶²

⁶⁰ Edward Ingram (ed.) *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1969)

⁶¹ William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (New York: Viking, 2003): 45-46

⁶² Philip Stern. *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Although it has been argued by some historians that Wellesley simply reacted to events as they took place, a closer reading of the sources suggests that he already had a clear plan for India in mind before arriving, one which was bent on further expansion and conquest.⁶³ Henry Dundas and the Company's Board of Control in London were much more concerned than Wellesley about the threat posed by France; they were prepared to sanction Wellesley's wars in India, but only insofar as they achieved the goal of protecting British India from the French threat. These two motives overlapped at times, but they were not the same.⁶⁴ The Company's administration in London was not interested in further wars of conquest in India, and insisted that any military conflicts should be defensive in nature. Wellesley would have to be very careful about shaping the context of the Fourth Mysore War such that it would meet this requirement of defensive warfare. Adding urgency to the situation was the departure of a French naval expedition from Toulon in late May 1798. The result would be Napoleon's ill-fated Egyptian invasion, but the destination of this force was not immediately known at the time, and there was much anxiety that the French were planning to land in India. The context of this threat posed by France was crucial in understanding how Wellesley chose to approach his dealings with Tipu Sultan.

Wellesley's view of the situation in India was strikingly different from that of the Directors, and geared towards bringing about offensive operations as soon as possible. Wellesley first heard mention of the Malartic Proclamation in June 1798 and immediately determined to go to war with Tipu. In his letter of 21 November 1798 to the Court of Directors, Wellesley wrote that he issued "final orders" for war to the governments of

⁶³ See C. A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 81

⁶⁴ Edward Ingram (ed.) *Two Views of British India* (1969): 4

Madras and Bombay as far back as 20 June, calling their armies into the field against Tipu.⁶⁵ From this early date, Wellesley was committed to war against Tipu, long before he received any word of the French naval expedition. It did not factor into his decision to go to war with Tipu at all; the Malartic Proclamation alone was sufficient justification for Wellesley. During the following months, Wellesley engaged in a series of sham correspondences with Tipu, stringing along the Sultan to allow time for the Company's military to prepare an aggressive invasion. Wellesley also misled the Directors in London as well, suggesting that an attack on Mysore was necessary to ward off a potential French invasion of India, and making it appear that his actions were strictly defensive in nature. Knowing full well that Tipu had no plans for war, and that the French army was hopelessly mired in Egypt, posing no threat to British India, Wellesley carefully manipulated the image of Tipu as a tyrannical ruler and used it to justify his pre-emptive attack on Mysore. The result was the onset of the Fourth Mysore War in February 1799.⁶⁶

Wellesley had a far easier task in confronting Tipu at the tactical level compared to his predecessors in the previous Mysore Wars. The territorial losses suffered by Mysore in the previous conflict made it much easier for the Company's forces to penetrate into the heart of Tipu's domains, no longer needing to ascend the Ghats and go through the tedious reduction of the hill forts therein. This was a critical setback for Tipu's strategy, as his Indian soldiers fared poorly in pitched battles against the Company and relied instead on using high mobility to raid and pillage in a form of asymmetrical

⁶⁵ East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India, Relative to the Cause, Progress and Successful Termination of the War with the Late Tippoo Sultaun* (London: Printed for the Proprietors of East India Stock, 1777, 1800). Governor General to the Court of Directors, 21 November 1798: 6

⁶⁶ See Chapter 5

warfare.⁶⁷ Without the ability to descend from the high passes and plunder the Carnatic, Tipu was forced into a losing defensive strategy. Tipu's army had also been significantly reduced in size since the past war; after an estimated high of 130,000 soldiers in 1789, the Sultan had downsized to a mere 50,000 troops in 1798, although he began recruiting again when the rumors of war began to swirl. The best estimate suggests that Tipu had slightly over 60,000 soldiers at his disposal for the war, still less than half of what he marshaled in the Third Mysore War.⁶⁸

Wellesley had also used the months of military buildup to great success in the diplomatic realm, seeking to revive the triple alliance from the Third Mysore War and once again invade Mysore with the assistance of the Marathas and the Nizam of Hyderabad. In the latter case, Wellesley virtually engineered a palace coup, with Company soldiers moving into Hyderabad to forcibly disband the French officers who commanded the Nizam's forces. In place of these units, the Nizam agreed to sign a subsidiary alliance with the Company, creating six battalions of Company sepoy commanded by British officers.⁶⁹ Hyderabad would survive as a princely state under the British Raj for the next 150 years, with the Nizam effectively becoming a puppet ruler. As for the other power in southern India, the Marathas were too divided with their own internal disputes at this point to offer much assistance, with the Peshwa responding evasively to Wellesley's requests for assistance against Tipu. The Governor General charged the Marathas with exhibiting the same sort of behavior as Tipu Sultan, their

⁶⁷ G. J. Bryant. "Asymmetric Warfare: The British Experience in Eighteenth-Century India" in *The Journal of Military History* 2004 68(2): 431-469

⁶⁸ M H Gopal. *Tipu Sultan's Mysore; An Economic Study* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1971): 35-39

⁶⁹ H.H Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (1963, 1929): 328. For a more modern treatment of the subject, see William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (2003)

actions "betrayed a systematic jealousy, suspicion, and even insincerity," indicating the same mindset that he employed against Tipu.⁷⁰ Less than four years later, Wellesley would instigate a war against the Marathas in 1803 on similarly dubious pretexts of aggression, suggesting that his pattern of behavior with Tipu was not unique.⁷¹

Nevertheless, Wellesley had managed to ensure that the other major powers in southern India would either be allied with the Company or out of the conflict entirely. Outnumbered by the Company's armies and with no French aid forthcoming, Tipu had little choice but to retreat into the heart of Mysore and attempt the best military defense he could muster. His attempts at a scorched earth defense, which had succeeded in driving away Cornwallis' 1791 invasion, were undermined by Wellesley's careful preparations. The Madras government had amassed over 100,000 bullocks and massive stores of grain for supplying the soldiers. The Company armies wasted no time on the campaign, joining with the Nizam's subsidiary forces and marching to Seringapatam, which they reached in early April 1799. Tipu's best hope was to withstand a siege until the middle of May, when the monsoon season would cause the river to rise and postpone military operations for the next six months. This was not to be, as the Company set up its artillery train without opposition and began reducing the walls of the fortress. Within a few weeks, it was obvious to all parties that Seringapatam would not be able to withstand an assault for much longer.⁷²

⁷⁰ Lord Mornington to Colonel William Palmer 19 February 1799 (p. 257-63) IOR/H/574

⁷¹ Interestingly, Wellesley's war with the Marathas did come under Parliamentary scrutiny and led to his eventual recall from India in 1805, while his war against Tipu garnered nearly universal praise. See for example the *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 6 April 1805, Issue 11196. The reputation of Tipu and the ongoing war against France appear to be responsible for this difference.

⁷² Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (1989): 287-88

General Harris, the commanding officer of the Company's forces, sent Tipu a letter on 20 April proposing to hold a conference to discuss peace terms. The proposed treaty outlined what the Company hoped to gain from the war, if Tipu had agreed to the terms. Written in eleven articles, it required Tipu to accept an "ambassador" from each of the allies, in other words essentially turning Mysore into a client state of the Company, with the British resident controlling policy. Tipu was also asked to remove all Frenchmen from his domains (robbing Mysore of their technical expertise as military officers and designers of fortifications), renounce all connections with the French nation, pay an indemnity of 2 crore rupees, and further cede another half of his territory, not counting the domains already lost in the previous war. As security for the treaty, four of Tipu's principal officers and four of his sons (to be chosen by General Harris) were to be delivered into the Company's hands, and not to be relinquished until the exchange of territories and indemnity payment were received. Tipu was given 24 hours to respond, and the hostages were to arrive in the British camp within a further 24 hours.⁷³

Taken in full, these terms constituted an even more severe redux of the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam. Mysore would cease to be a significant power in southern India, and Tipu would become a puppet ruler, further humiliated by having to give up four more of his sons as hostages. Although this treaty was never signed, it is interesting to see what the Company valued, and in what order. Tipu's connection to the French had become the paramount issue, as symbolized by its inclusion in the opening treaty articles, while the subject of British prisoners had become little more than an afterthought, mentioned only in a single line in the seventh article of the treaty.⁷⁴

⁷³ General Harris to Tippoo Sultan, with Draft of Preliminaries, 22 April 1799

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

Tipu offered to send two of his vakils to Harris for negotiation, which was rejected by the general. Harris insisted that Tipu must accept the terms of the treaty as they were stated without any room for compromise.⁷⁵ There was no further response from the Sultan, and no records to indicate his thoughts in these final days. On 4 May, Harris judged that enough of a breach had been created in the walls to launch a full assault, and charged General Baird, who had been a captive of Tipu for several years during the Second Mysore War, to lead the attack. The subsequent "Storming of Seringapatam" would become one of the iconic images of the Mysore Wars, commemorated later in a series of dramatic paintings of the event.⁷⁶ In military terms the operation was a striking success; despite fierce fighting at the walls, within a few hours the city was in the hands of the Company, and resistance quickly subjugated.

The whereabouts of Tipu were a great mystery for several hours, leading to further anxiety that he may have escaped during the confusion, before the palace's killedar informed General Baird that Tipu had been wounded by a gateway on the north end of the fort. Upon reaching the scene, Baird found Tipu's body mixed in with a large group of dead and wounded men, the Sultan identifiable only due to his rich clothes. Tipu had received several wounds from a bayonet in his right side; during the hand to hand fighting, a British soldier tried to steal the gold buckle from his sword belt, and when Tipu responded by attacking with his saber, the British soldier shot him through the head a little above the right ear.⁷⁷ The Sultan looked so lifelike that many of the Company's

⁷⁵ General Harris to Tippoo Suldaun, 28 April 1799

⁷⁶ The most famous such example was Robert Ker Porter. *The Storming of Seringapatam* (1800). Private collection. See Chapter 5.

⁷⁷ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Suldaun* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co, 1800): 137

officers initially thought that he was still alive, but upon checking his pulse it was confirmed that Tipu had indeed perished, bringing the war to a decisive conclusion.

With Tipu dead and Seringapatam in their possession, the Company had won a complete and overwhelming victory. Losses for the Company were relatively light, the official lists published afterwards detailing 389 casualties sustained in the assault, and roughly 1500 for the campaign as a whole.⁷⁸ The city of Seringapatam was given over to the soldiers for looting and plundering that night, drawing uncomfortable parallels to the behavior of the Company's soldiers at Annanpur in the Second Mysore War, with order being restored the following day. The Company also captured vast stores of military equipment in the fortress, albeit much of it of inferior quality, and a king's ransom in treasure and jewels. Beatson valued the bullion at 2.5 million star pagodas, or £1.143 million.⁷⁹ Wellesley turned down his share of the prize money (although his other senior officers did very well for themselves), hoping for an English peerage and an invitation to the Order of the Garter; he would be bitterly disappointed to receive only an Irish lordship for his services.

The official treaty ending the war was not concluded until 13 July 1799, time having been taken to more fully divide up the spoils of war. Known as the Partition Treaty of Mysore, it devoted the overwhelming bulk of its length to the division of territory between the Company, the Nizam, the Marathas (who were granted minor districts despite not taking part in the war) and the remaining rump state of Mysore. However, the treaty did insist one final time that the blame for the war's outbreak rested upon the shoulders of the departed Sultan and his connection with the French:

⁷⁸ Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (1989): 289

⁷⁹ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (1800): 139

Whereas the deceased Tippoo Sultaun, unprovoked by any act of aggression on the part of the allies, entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with the French, and admitted a French force into his army... [the allied armies] proceeded to hostilities, in vindication of their rights, and for the preservation of their respective dominions from the perils of foreign invasion, and from the ravages of a cruel and relentless enemy.⁸⁰

Wellesley's fiction that it had been a "defensive" war was therefore written into the very treaty itself, intended to be preserved as the final capstone of the conflict for all time.

Regarding the future of the kingdom of Mysore, the greatly reduced state would not be ruled by Tipu's heirs, as it was believed by the Company that they could not be trusted to guarantee the peace. Beatson wrote that such an arrangement would have contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction, for with Tipu's heirs, "no sincere alliance, no concord of sentiments, nor union of views, could ever have been established."⁸¹ Instead, the throne of Mysore was restored to the Hindu Wodeyar dynasty unseated by Haider Ali in 1760, the new Rajah a young boy who was all of five years old and obviously intended to serve as a British puppet. The kingdom was controlled in practice by the British Resident, Mark Wilks, who spent much of the next decade using his new position to write a vehemently anti-Tipu history of the wars in southern India.⁸² Mysore was forcibly included into the Company's subsidiary alliance system, and as Beatson explained in his narrative, "his Lordship [Wellesley] resolved to reserve to the Company, the most extensive and indisputable powers of interposition in the internal affairs of Mysore, as well as an unlimited right of assuming the direct management of the

⁸⁰ Partition Treaty of Mysore, 13 July 1799

⁸¹ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (1800): 217

⁸² Mark Wilks. *Historical Sketches of the South of India* (1810-1817)

country."⁸³ Mysore had become a client state of the British Company, with the resident controlling all decisions and the new rajah an adolescent figurehead.

The military campaign of the Fourth Mysore War had been an unparalleled success, exceeding the wildest hopes of its supporters. Victory had been achieved quickly, at little cost in lives or military expenditures, and had resulted in the death of the fearsome Tipu Sultan, along with virtual annexation of his large and prosperous kingdom. Accolades for the victors began pouring in immediately, full of triumphant rhetoric and bombastic support for the growing British Empire in the East.⁸⁴ The public reaction was one of wild celebration and excitement, mixed with a heavy dose of cultural arrogance and feeling of British superiority over the Indian populace. The long anxiety over Tipu had finally been resolved, and the Company's territories were considered to be permanently secured. Lord Wellesley, the man who had done more than anyone else to engineer the war against Tipu, was granted an enthusiastic reception and showered with praises from all corners of the British domains. While Wellesley remained in India and did not return to Britain to bask in the spoils of victory, the reaction he received was similar to that garnered by Lord Cornwallis seven years earlier. He received the thanks of Parliament, widespread public accolade, and an Irish lordship for his services. Wellesley faced virtually no criticism or opposition at home for his decision to enter into the war, which was a marked contrast from the public reception surrounding the earlier Mysore Wars. Tipu's "alliance" with the hated and feared specter of revolutionary France appears to be the crucial factor responsible for this difference.

⁸³ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (1800): 244

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 139

Conclusion

Wellesley's victory over Tipu brought an end to the Company's wars against Mysore, although they were soon replaced by the Governor General's wars against the Marathas. Tipu's defeat represented the end of an era for the Company's role in southern India, as it had become the dominant power in the region instead of simply one power among many. This newfound position brought with it an increased confidence in the ability of Britons to rule over Indians. Earlier military setbacks had suggested that the Company's position in India was tentative, and potentially one step away from disaster. Tipu's dominance of the captured British prisoners similarly served to highlight some of the anxieties underlying the imperial project, the fear that Britons would be swallowed up and devoured by the wild and untamed Orient.

However, many of these worries were rapidly diminishing in the aftermath of victory over Mysore. Tipu's defeat suggested that British arms could overcome their rivals, and British virtues triumph over Indian vices. The cruel and despotic tyrant of Mysore had been cast down from power, and the Company's territories secured against every available contingency.⁸⁵ British paintings and dramatic productions in the metropole exhibited to the public the spectacle of the great victories that had been achieved by the heroic soldiers of the East India Company.⁸⁶ The Mysore Wars were therefore important not just politically and militarily for the strategic benefits gained by the Company in southern India, but at a cultural level as well, and it is the distinct way in which these conflicts resonated for the British public in the metropole that will be the

⁸⁵ General Evening Post (London, England) 12 December 1799, Issue 10485

⁸⁶ For example: Robert Ker Porter. *The Storming of Seringapatam* (1800). Private collection; Unknown author, "The Storming of Seringapatam, or The Death of Tippoo Saib" staged 30 September (1799) through 10 October (1799) at Astley's Royal Amphitheatre.

focus of the remainder of this study. The wars against Tipu Sultan played an important role in reshaping how Britons felt about their empire, and particularly in their growing acceptance of overseas conquests. In order to trace the development of this process, the next chapter begins with the origins of the negative Tipu Legend, in the capture of so many British prisoners during the Second Mysore War.

Chapter Two British Prisoners and European Musselmen

Introduction

The image of Tipu Sultan was first defined within the context of the British prisoners captured during the Mysore Wars. British servants of the East India Company and Britons in the metropole first came into contact with Tipu through the lurid descriptions found in prisoner accounts, detailing various atrocities committed against helpless captives. It was the presence of these British prisoners that set Tipu apart from any number of other Indian princes, and drew wider attention to the spectacle of the Mysore Wars. The prisoner experience came to define the early wars for the British, becoming part of the historical memory of the conflicts, later used as an exotic set piece for imperial adventures in fiction and drama.¹

Many of the prisoners wrote narratives of their period of captivity, which were widely published in popular print culture during the 1780s and 1790s. Captive narratives describing exotic locations overseas were commonplace in the eighteenth century, and their frequent reprinting in new editions testified to their popularity.² Accounts described the poor treatment and foul living conditions that captives faced in the dungeons of Mysore, where many of them remained for years at a time before their eventual release. Prisoners were often chained together, good food was scarce and disease commonplace, with many of the British soldiers failing to survive their period of captivity. Making matters more troubling still was the prospect of religious conversion; Tipu Sultan was

¹ For example, see Sir Walter Scott. *Count Robert of Paris and the Surgeon's Daughter*. (Boston and New York: Houghton Miffling Company, 1923, 1827) G. A. Henty. *The Tiger of Mysore: A Story of the War with Tippoo Saib* (London: Blackie & Son, 2001, 1896)

² Linda Colley. *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World 1600-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002)

said to have forced British captives to convert to Islam against their will, renouncing their European identity by adopting Indian dress and becoming soldiers in the armies of Mysore. These “European Musselmen” were symbolically emasculated through the process of circumcision, turned into the dependent tool of a tyrannical oriental despot. They were cut off from their former lives as members of the British nation, their identities remade against their will, potentially lost forever to families and loved ones at home. This was an often overlooked aspect of the British experience overseas: facing captivity, subjected to alien rule, forced to live in terror and vulnerability.³

At the same time, of course, this failed to tell the complete story of the prisoners. Troubling accounts from India suggested that many of the Company’s soldiers and even officers had been acting in unscrupulous fashion, failing to keep their word and making off with vast sums of money for their personal enrichment. Tipu’s imprisonment of these men was designed as a punishment for failing to adhere to signed agreements and for despoiling the landscape of his kingdom. Other prisoner accounts contradicted the sensationalist claims in the popular press, indicating that many of the captives were reasonably well treated during their time in Mysore. The supposedly forced conversions to Islam could equally have been a deliberate choice on the part of some captives, preferring to cross over into a self-fashioned Indian identity and take up service under Tipu rather than remain in a prison cell indefinitely.⁴ When weighed as a whole, the evidence behind the prisoner experience painted a much more complex picture than the rather simplistic narrative of a cruel Eastern tyrant lording over stalwart British captives.

The presence of the British prisoners and the captive narratives that they

³ *Ibid.*, 1-2

⁴ Maya Jasanoff. *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Knopf, 2005)

generated were nevertheless instrumental in shaping how the British public came to view Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars. The very existence of the prisoners was a symbol of shame and humiliation for the East India Company, one that it worked very hard to erase. The captive accounts greatly influenced the popular perceptions of Tipu, lending support to the belief that he was a capricious despot out to destroy the British presence in India. The prisoners issue was also ready-made for a narrative of redemption, suggesting that the Company could remove the stain on British honor by returning to war with Tipu and defeating him once and for all. Rhetoric of this sort was common in the years following the Second Mysore War (1780-84), both inside and outside of Company circles. The prisoner dilemma also served as a further way to spin their captivity into a morality play of empire. British captives were portrayed in song and on the stage as embodying the national honor, bravely refusing their blandishments of Tipu to convert to Islam and enter his service at great personal cost to themselves. This served as a means to transform weakness into strength, demonstrating the moral superiority of the British over the Indians, and provided further justification for the imperial project.⁵

It should be noted that the large majority of these prisoners were Indian sepoys employed in the Company's service, who were mostly ignored by the British both in India and in the metropole, in their fixation on the white captives taken. Both the Anglo-Indian community living in the subcontinent and the larger British public barely mentioned the sepoys at all, and an uninformed observer would have been led to believe from their writings that the Company's forces were composed entirely of Britons. The outpouring of literature about the captured prisoners also made little mention of the

⁵ Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007): 313-14

multinational character of the Company's armies, in which Scots, Irish, and other Europeans of Continental descent were commonplace. It was far easier to project a universal "Englishness" onto the bodies of the imprisoned soldiers, making their plight more sympathetic to British audiences in the metropole. Since a perceived threat to British identity was at the heart of the prisoner dilemma, it was best for the Company and its supporters not to dig too deeply into the actual "Britishness" of the captives themselves.

These (European) prisoners were the overriding focus of both the Company and the British public during the Second Mysore War, and therefore serve as the focus of this chapter as well. They represented the weakness of the Company's military and the serious threat posed by Tipu Sultan, the terrifying and savage Tiger of Mysore who held the power of life and death over his captives. However, with the passage of time, the prisoners became less and less important to the British, eventually disappearing almost entirely as a subject of discussion by the time of the Fourth Mysore War in 1799. With their growing strength in southern India, the British no longer experienced the same deep-rooted anxieties that they had felt in the early 1780s, when it appeared as though they might be forced from the region entirely. The Company and the British public no longer wanted to focus on the weakness and powerlessness that the prisoners had represented for an earlier generation. Popular discourse instead turned to triumphant and celebratory displays, especially after Tipu's final defeat and death in 1799. The dread that the Sultan used to inspire had been conquered, and the prisoners had been symbolically freed forever.⁶ This was an indication of the growing confidence in empire as the eighteenth

⁶ This was perhaps best symbolized by David Wilkie's painting of *Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tippoo* (1839). National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

century gave way to the nineteenth century, with the earlier gloom and uncertainty about the conquest of territory overseas replaced by an embrace of the Company's masculine soldier-heroes.⁷

The Shock of Captivity and Assigning Blame

The experience of captivity at the hands of Tipu Sultan and his father Haider Ali was unsettling and deeply humiliating for most of the Company's British soldiers. Accustomed to looking down at Indians as their racial and social inferiors, these men now found themselves at the mercy of these supposedly savage individuals. This first component of the captive experience necessarily involved a loss of freedom and the passing into the custody of the Sultan's men. In most cases, this took the form of defeat in battle, the transfer of custody from the French to the Mysoreans, or the overrunning of territory previously held by the British Company. The humiliating process through which Europeans were put under the control of Indians greatly shaped the way in which Tipu came to be viewed, as the prisoners invariably blamed Tipu for the sufferings that they endured during captivity. This was the genesis for the image of the tyrannical and cruel Oriental despot of the Tipu Legend, which would later come to characterize representations of the Sultan.⁸

It was perhaps inevitable that the process of capture also invariably turned into a search for scapegoats, both within the East India Company's ranks and amongst the wider British public. When disasters befell the Company's military and delivered British sons into the hands of its enemies, attention quickly shifted into a search to assign blame. One

⁷ Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Graham Dawson. *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994)

⁸ See Chapter 3

line of thinking suggested that incompetent nabobs were responsible for the British captives in India, men of low birth who were more interested in their own enrichment than safeguarding the interests of the British nation. This was a subject of great debate during the last few decades of the 18th century.⁹ However, it was far easier to place the blame for the Company's losses on its opponents, the Indian princes who had no ability to represent themselves within the sphere of British public discourse. Scapegoating Haider and Tipu into terrible monsters was the path of least resistance for the Company to take, and also worked in accordance with changing racial attitudes about the backwardness of Indian civilization at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ As a result, the process of capture for the British prisoners became interlinked with the villainization of Tipu Sultan. This was visible on multiple occasions during the Mysore Wars.

The first sizable group of British prisoners were taken directly at the start of the Second Mysore War in 1780, in the aftermath of their defeat at Pollilur. Reports from the battlefield immediately accused Haider and Tipu of massacring the Company soldiers after Colonel Baillie had issued an order of surrender. Soldier Francis Gowdie wrote to his brother after the war that Baillie had held up a white handkerchief and was instructed to lay down arms; when the Company soldiers did so, “the Horse immediately broke in amongst us, and a most Shocking Massacre issued.”¹¹ William Thomson, an officer in Baillie’s detachment, told a very similar account of the battle’s ending. After Baillie signaled for the surrender, “Our men received orders to lay down their arms, with intimation that quarter would be given. This order was scarcely complied with, when the

⁹ See Chapter 4

¹⁰ C. A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 77-78

¹¹ Francis Gowdie to his brother Dr. Gowdie 31 October 1783 (p. 79-89) IOR/H/223 p. 86

enemy rushed upon them in the most savage and brutal manner, sparing neither age nor infancy, nor any condition of life...”¹² Robert Latham, one of the prisoners taken after the battle, provided a lurid description of violence that verges on the point of hyperbole:

...we were at last ordered to throw down our Arms. At this Instant the Horse rushed in upon us. They killed or wounded most of us; few escaping except those who threw themselves amongst the Slain. The Cruelties exercised upon this occasion, and of which I was an unhappy witness, surpass all description. They were so enormous, that at this moment I can hardly help doubting my own Testimony of their evidence. Women and Children seemed particularly marked out as Objects of Vengeance. I saw a well dressed Woman, with an Infant in her Arms, implore the Mercy of a Man whose Sword was uplifted for her destruction: He paused and listened with a specious attention to her Prayers. The Barbarian then assumed an aspect expressive of his Diabolical Thoughts, and with one stroke cleaved the Infant to the waist. The Mother fondly endeavoring to avert the Blow, her left Breast was cut off. A Second Stroke put a period at once to her Misery and to her life. Many Officers were dragged from the crowd, with Promises of Protection, and after being stript to the Skin, were driven upon the Plain, and there massacred. All the sick and wounded were butchered in their Palanquins.¹³

These sorts of atrocities were commonly attributed to Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan by the prisoners afterwards, as a means of demonstrating the Indian “savages” against which the Company was fighting. The truth or fiction of these claims is less important for our purposes than their representation of Haider and Tipu before a public audience. The prisoners were predisposed to cast Tipu and his father in an unflattering light when they wrote on their experiences after the war.

After the slaughter on the battlefield had run its course, the victorious Mysorean army began the process of collecting hundreds of surviving prisoners, who would be taken back to Mysore and endure years of captivity. Many authors alleged that Haider showed further unnecessary cruelty to the prisoners after the battle was finished. One

¹² Officer of Colonel Baillie’s Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (London: Sold by J. Sewell, 1788, 1789): 161-62

¹³ Extract of a Letter from Mr. [Robert George] Latham, a Volunteer taken prisoner by Hyder Ally [at Pollilur] no date given (p. 63-123) IOR/H/250 p. 77-78

report claimed that Baillie was stripped naked and forced to appear in chains before Haider, who exulted in his power over the defeated British colonel.¹⁴ Another account insisted that wounded soldiers were left for dead on the battlefield, suffering from the attacks of wild animals and terrible thirst: “While the enemy’s horse and elephants marched again and again in barbarian triumph over the field of battle, the wounded and bleeding English, who were not instantly trodden to death by the feet of those animals, lingered out a miserable existence, exposed in the day to the burning rays of a vertical sun, and in the night to the ravages of foxes, jackalls, and tygers, allured to that horrid scene by the scent of human blood.”¹⁵ The repeated use of references to “savage” and “barbarous” behavior suggested that the actions of Indian rulers like Haider and Tipu were beyond the boundaries of decent, civilized behavior.

However, other sources from Pollilur argued exactly the opposite regarding the treatment of the prisoners, namely that Tipu Sultan had been kind and generous to the defeated. John Baillie, another captive from the unfortunate detachment, wrote that, “A great many Officers and Soldiers when taken were carried before Hyder in the condition they were in who looked at them with great unconcern and desired them to sit down. Many were also carried before Tippoo Saheb who treated them with great kindness,” although Baillie goes on to state that Tipu later acted much more cruelly towards the prisoners.¹⁶ William Thomson, whose account of the battle was not at all favorably inclined towards Haider and Tipu, nonetheless wrote that Tipu treated the British officers with great humanity, inviting them into his tent and providing them with biscuits and five

¹⁴ M. Woods, Narrative of Hyder Ally and Baillie 10 September 1780 (p. 245-48) IOR/H/211 p. 247-48

¹⁵ Officer of Colonel Baillie’s Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 1-2

¹⁶ John Baillie to his Father 14 June 1784 (p. 153-79) Account of his capture and captivity. IOR/H/223 p. 161

pagodas. Thomson related an anecdotal story of Tipu passing on a letter from Captain Monteith to his wife at Madras, as a further gesture of humanity.¹⁷

Early mentions of Pollilur in the newspaper press in London also had nothing negative to say about Tipu, instead praising his skill as a military commander. An early appearance from the *London Chronicle* in 1781 wrote how “Tippoo Saheb, with that Celerity which distinguishes every Operation of that gallant Prince, saw the Moment of Advantage, and without waiting for Orders, made a rapid Charge with the Mogul and Carnatic Horse, penetrated the broken Square, and... completed the Overthrow of that gallant Band.”¹⁸ The *Morning Herald and Public Advertiser* wrote of “the brave Prince Tippoo-Saib”, who saw an opportunity in battle and moved “with that promptitude and rapidity which characterizes all his actions”, leading the charge of cavalry at its head that broke the British ranks.¹⁹ There was genuine respect and admiration for Tipu's military abilities, even if he happened to be fighting for the opposing side. This praise for Tipu's clemency after Pollilur, and his representation as a “gallant prince” in his first appearances in public discourse, demonstrated how the later vilification of Tipu's image was yet to develop. If anything, most of the early impressions included favorable commentary on his abilities as a military commander.

In the case of both John Baillie's and William Thomson's accounts, a distinction was drawn between the generous conduct of Tipu towards the prisoners and the barbarous conduct of Haider towards the same. Yet when Tipu inherited the throne upon his father's passing at the end of 1782, the same sources insisted that Tipu's behavior had changed, and he became much crueler towards the captives. While it is possible that

¹⁷ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 5

¹⁸ *London Chronicle* (London, England): Thursday 11 October 1781, Issue 3880

¹⁹ *Morning Herald and Public Advertiser* (London, England): 8 January 1782, Issue 372

Tipu's demeanor changed during the intervening period, a more likely explanation is that those who wanted to defend the Company's record *required* their opponent to be a ruler with despotic qualities. So long as Haider was the head of Mysore, Tipu's character and abilities could be praised and contrasted to his father; once Tipu assumed power, however, he also had to become a stereotyped Oriental despot. It was necessary that the ruler of Mysore possess a villainous reputation, so that the war could be interpreted as a morality play highlighting the bravery and masculine qualities of the British soldier contrasted against the tyranny of his Indian opponents. Imagining the conflict in these simplistic terms was a way to divert attention away from the deeply unsettling and humiliating reality of British defeat and captivity. It is difficult otherwise to explain such a dramatic personality shift in Tipu Sultan over the span of a few months.

A similar process was in operation during the controversy surrounding the captured sailors on board the *Hannibal*. These British sailors had been taken prisoner by the French Admiral Suffrein in 1782, then transferred to Tipu's custody after failing to work out an exchange of captives with the Madras government.²⁰ These men would spend the remaining years of the war in prison, dealing another blow to the prestige of the Company, and a search was soon underway for new scapegoats to blame. The Madras Council came under scrutiny for not acting decisively to secure the release of the British sailors when it had the chance. In the words of one Company military officer, "It appeared, however, that the unanimity requisite to effect a business, even of this trivial importance, did not subsist between the members of the Council and Commander of the army at Madras; and it consequently became the fate of upwards of three hundred British

²⁰ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 277-78

subjects, like too many others before them, to be immured in the prisons of Bangalore, and other garrisons in the Misore country..."²¹ The Governor and Council of Madras, embroiled at this moment in controversy over a bribery scandal with the Nawab of Arcot, appeared more interested in their own enrichment than securing the release of Britain's native sons captured in war. Critics charged that it was another sign of corrupt nabobery.²²

But it was much easier to blame the military opponents of the Company for the imprisonment of the British sailors, and Admiral Suffrein and Tipu Sultan ended up receiving the lion's share of criticism on this subject. The *General Evening Post* of London detailed some of the pains suffered by these captives at the hands of Tipu: "Mons. Suffrein, who, under pretense of the British Commander in Chief not agreeing to a mutual exchange, delivered them over to Tippoo Saib's people, who treated them so barbarously, that most of them perished. Forty-three of these brave unhappy Britons died in one day from hunger and fatigue, and were buried in a hole in Travencore."²³ The *General Evening Post* was a newspaper that usually adopted a Tory stance in politics, and with the Pitt ministry actively supporting the East India Company, it should come as no surprise that the paper took this opinion. Note the "pretense" of not agreeing to an exchange of prisoners in this passage, with the wording removing culpability from the Company's administration. In this fashion, blame for the fate of the captives was shifted from the mismanagement of the Company's leadership onto the Indian prince that held the sailors in bondage. The supposedly cruel persona of Tipu Sultan here came to

²¹ *Ibid*, 277-78

²² See for example the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 4 February 1785, Issue 17520

²³ *General Evening Post* (London, England) 10 June 1784, Issue 7846

embody British anxieties over the exotic and savage customs of the East.

This mixture of shock at the military setbacks of the Company and subsequent process of debate over how to assign appropriate blame reached its apogee during the controversy surrounding General Mathews. This public outcry surrounded a series of events taking place in 1783, which culminated in Mathews and his entire army surrendering the city of Bednur and becoming the prisoners of Tipu for the remainder of the war.²⁴ The Mathews campaign was another embarrassment for the East India Company, and not simply because it ended in military disaster for the soldiers involved. Mathews embodied all of the qualities of the nabob that the Company was trying to shed in the process of reforming its negative image.²⁵ Mathews was greedy, unscrupulous, and accused of massacring the defenseless Indian population of Annanpur; in short, he had been acting in despotic fashion. Members of the British public reading about the plundering of Indian wealth at the hands of Mathews would have been unavoidably reminded of the nabob scandals of earlier decades, with Mathews appearing to confirm all of their worst qualities.²⁶

The solution that the Company's advocates seized upon was to flip the story around and respond to criticism surrounding the British prisoners by vilifying the character of Tipu. This would serve both to redirect attention away from the embarrassment of the Mathews disaster and to provide a justification for the Company's actions in the war. By making the argument that Tipu Sultan was an Oriental despot, the reputation of Mathews (and the East India Company more broadly) could be rehabilitated.

²⁴ See Chapter 1.

²⁵ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 225-41

²⁶ Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 55-56

If Tipu were an untrustworthy despot, then Mathews had done no wrong in trying to sneak away with the loot from the city of Bednur, since Tipu would only have cheated him and broken the deal anyway. Pre-emptive action was the only successful way to deal with such a ruler. The way in which the Mathews campaign played out in the popular press demonstrates how this process of reversal worked.

The initial news of the fall of Bednur contained few details of the events that transpired. Newspaper accounts based upon British correspondences from India reported that Mathews and his army had been captured, and there was little interest in the subject at first during the summer of 1783.²⁷ By November of the same year many of the particulars of the campaign began to emerge into the print culture of the day, and the fate of Mathews became a recurring subject of discussion in the newspaper press, spurred on by the simultaneous debate taking place on Charles Fox's India Bill in Parliament. Much of the early reaction was sympathetic to Mathews, as the full story of Annanpur and Bednur was not well known, and Mathews himself had already perished in captivity. Although this was an unfortunate result from the perspective of Mathews himself, it was a boon to his reputation in Britain, allowing Mathews to be portrayed as a martyr who had been terrorized by a cruel Oriental sultan. Widespread rumors sprang up in the press that Tipu had poisoned Mathews while he was imprisoned; he had been separated from his captive army and thrown into a filthy dungeon where he was forced to drink a lethal concoction.²⁸ The factual basis for these rumors was shaky at best; the original account had the news coming second hand by means of a "washerman" and some writing

²⁷ London Chronicle (London, England) 29 July 1783, Issue 4173

²⁸ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 140-43

supposedly found in Mathews' prison cell.²⁹ Whether Tipu actually ordered the execution of Mathews, or if he died of natural sickness from poor prison conditions, the fact remains that his death was widely believed both by Company servants and the public back home in Britain to have been an atrocity.

The initial rumors of Mathews' death by poison quickly mushroomed into more and more fantastic accounts of his demise, all of them casting Tipu in a sinister fashion. One story claimed that Mathews had been murdered as the result of a failed coup attempt to restore the former Hindu rajah to the throne of Mysore. In this account, Mathews fell as "a sacrifice to the suspicions of a tyrant" as Tipu enacted vengeance on any suspected targets.³⁰ Another report had a dramatic confrontation occur between Tipu and Mathews, wherein the latter "upbraided the Indian with his breach of faith, which so provoked Tippoo, that he is said to have instantly drawn his sabre, and cut the General to pieces."³¹ As spectacular as this rumor might appear, theatrical productions on the London stage a decade later would use very similar events as a morality play to showcase how Britons never surrendered to their foes.³² Even more outlandish was a rumor spread by the *Gazette and New Daily Advertiser*, which attributed Mathews' death to Tipu pouring boiling lead down his throat; the same piece speculated that there was strong reason to believe the other British prisoners "were all equally the victims of Asiatic barbarity."³³ These sort of cruelties, real or imagined, went a long way towards reshaping the image of Tipu Sultan in the popular consciousness, away from the spirited young prince of the

²⁹ *Ibid*, 143

³⁰ John Baillie to his Father 14 June 1784 (p. 153-79) Account of his capture and captivity. IOR/H/223 p. 176

³¹ Morning Post and Daily Advertiser (London, England) 1 October 1784, Issue 3631

³² Mark Lonsdale (lyrics) and William Reeve (music). "Buac'aill lion Deoc" in *The Overture Favorite Songs and Finale in the Musical Entertainment of Tippoo Saib* (London: Longman and Broderip, 1792)

³³ Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser (London, England) 24 November 1784, Issue 17458

initial war reports and towards the monstrous tyrant envisioned by the Company.

However, at this early period during the Second Mysore War, the image of both Tipu Sultan and the East India Company remained disputed subjects, with advocates supporting and demonizing each of the two competing powers. Unlike later periods, there were always commentators willing to defend the character of Tipu, and argue against the interpretation of events put forth by the Company and its servants. The ongoing debate surrounding Mathews served as an example of this process in action. Shortly after the London newspapers reported on the boiling lead rumors of Mathews' death, the *St. James Chronicle* backed away from hyperbole and placed the story in larger perspective:

General Mathews was undoubtedly destroyed, and it was universally supposed by Poison; the Field Officers, most of the Captains, and some of the Subalterns were also put to Death; but the Tortures of melted Lead and boiled Oil poured upon them seem to have been a mere Invention. What principally incited Tippoo-Saib to go beyond the native Ferocity of his Disposition, was the Circumstance of General Mathews having removed the greatest Part of the Treasures from Benamour [Bednur], before it was invested by the Nabob's Army.³⁴

Although this account was hardly a positive endorsement of Tipu's conduct, it provided a rational explanation for why Mathews had been put to death, and made Tipu appear less like a capricious Oriental despot. The same paper added further context to the situation a few days later, including the first details of the *Annual Register* account covering the actions of Mathews' army prior to its surrender:

The Cause of their deliberately murdering our People, while Prisoners, is reported to have arisen from the General [Mathews] having allowed his Troops, in the Sunshine of his Prosperity, to massacre all the Men they found in the Fortress of Oonore, on the Malabar Coast, which he took by Storm a short Time previous to his Defeat. The Women, in this Scene of Slaughter, were treated with the most horrid Indecency; and the eldest of the Brahmins, with two of his Priests, destroyed by the Fury of the Soldiers.³⁵

³⁴ St. James Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 4 December 1784, Issue 3705

³⁵ St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 9 December 1784, Issue 3707

With this additional context added, Mathews appeared more as a greedy status-seeker out for his own interests, and Tipu Sultan an opposing commander with at least probable cause for his actions.

London newspapers were not the only ones covering this story. The *Bath Chronicle* related the same information on Mathews' conduct at Onore, and went further in editorializing on the controversy. After criticizing Mathews for bringing back immense wealth and several children (of various hues and complexions) to Britain, the *Chronicle* detailed the slaughter of 500 Indians and concluded, "Who can say that Tippoo Saib was not justified even in the cruelty of his retaliation?"³⁶ The criticisms of Mathews listed by the *Bath Chronicle* were the same ongoing ones that had been directed at the nabobs for the past two decades: greed, cruelty, decadence, and corrupted morals.³⁷ These newspaper accounts therefore provided an alternate and competing narrative of the war. They argued that it was the East India Company who was to blame for the sufferings of the British prisoners, with its soldiers intent only on enriching themselves through Indian plunder, and its administrators too incompetent to carry out even something so simple as a proper prisoner exchange. In these accounts, the conduct of Tipu Sultan, barbarous or not, was no excuse for the poor example set by the Company overseas.

Throughout the Second Mysore War, attacks against the character of Tipu were therefore met with equal fervor by attacks against the conduct of the East India Company. A damning *Annual Register* report containing details of the alleged atrocities committed by Mathews' army broke in the London newspaper in January 1785, and much of the coverage which had been sympathetic to Mathews earlier now swung in the other

³⁶ Bath Chronicle (Bath, England) 16 December 1784, Issue 1260

³⁷ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 239-40

direction. The *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* detailed the purported massacre at Annanpur, and editorialized: "The barbarities committed by Tippoo Saib on General Matthews and his captive army, now seem to have been merely a retaliation for similar enormities committed by the troops of the Company."³⁸ The *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* related the same incident, and used it to attack the morality of the Company as a whole, claiming that the cruelties practiced upon Matthews and his captured men were a retaliation for injuries which had been committed on the natives of India: "It is the unprincipled oppression practiced by rapacious Governors and their dependants, which has made the very name of European detested in most parts of the Asiatic continent... The India powers will never be otherwise inclined till rapine ceases, which can never be expected while any degree of peculation remains."³⁹ These editorials were couched in the same language of moral tropes that had been employed for decades against the nabobs, charging the Company and its servants with endemic corruption and avarice. The actions of Matthews called to mind the actions of unsympathetic figures like Clive and Hastings, resulting in the same political language once again criticizing the Company in print culture.

Further information later seeped out concerning the violation of the treaty signed at Bednur, and which side was responsible. An account printed in the *General Evening Post* contended that the articles of surrender stipulated all public property should remain in the fort; however, Matthews held onto public treasure worth fifty thousand pagodas, and attempted to sneak it out by distributing it amongst his officers. The ruse was discovered when a bed belonging to one of the officers was dropped, and four hundred

³⁸ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 18 January 1785, Issue 3723

³⁹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 22 January 1785, Issue 17509

pagodas fell out, at which time Tipu had the remainder of the Company army searched and taken into captivity.⁴⁰ These sorts of stories cast doubt upon which force was truly acting despotically in India, the armies of Tipu Sultan or the armies of the Company, and did little to dispel the negative public perception that continued to dog the Company and its servants.

The defenders of the Company had to respond to these allegations, and their own account of the Mathews campaign appeared in a pamphlet entitled *A Vindication of the Conduct of the English Forces, Employed in the Late War, Under the Command of Brigadier General Mathews, Against the Nabob Tippoo Sultan*. This short publication went through the claims of the *Annual Register* report paragraph by paragraph, disputing each of them in full in order to defend the conduct of the soldiers and officers involved. There is no question that this pamphlet was produced as a direct response to the public criticism of General Mathews, and it demonstrated how the military officers and civilian administrators of the Company were active participants in the realm of late eighteenth century British print culture. Excerpts from *A Vindication of the Conduct of the English Forces* were printed in many of the popular metropolitan newspapers, ensuring its dissemination amongst a wide audience of readers.⁴¹

The authors denied that Mathews had taken any plunder at Onore, and the amount captured at Hydernagur was used only on pay for the soldiers that was in arrears.⁴² Their description of Annanpur charged the defending Indian garrison with violating two flags of truce, and imprisoning the officers sent to parlay. A storming of the fort then took

⁴⁰ General Evening Post (London, England) 19 December 1786, Issue 8278

⁴¹ See for example The Whitehall Evening Post (London, England) 3 January 1788, Issue 6341

⁴² East India Company. *A Vindication of the Conduct of the English Forces, Employed in the Late War, Under the Command of Brigadier General Mathews, Against the Nabob Tippoo Sultan* (London: Logographic Press, 1787): 20-23

place, but quarter was given and the enemy wounded were cared for in hospitals afterwards, while the story of the four hundred slaughtered women was “as false as it was infamous.”⁴³ The pamphlet ended with a seemingly random attack on Tipu’s character, which helped to reveal the connections between perceptions of the Company and perceptions of Tipu:

We were ordered into the Canara country to draw Tippoo Saib from the Carnatic, where he had been ravaging, with unrelenting barbarity, from the commencement of the war; reducing large and populous villages and cities to ashes, plundering the inhabitants, destroying the appearance of agriculture, and, to fill up the measure of his cruelty, driving the unfortunate wretches to distant and uncultivated parts of his own empire, there to toil under the heavy hand of power and oppression. Let his advocates among our countrymen contemplate this picture, and compare it with that we have impartially drawn of our conduct against his dominions – then let them blush at declaring the sufferings which we endured were “just and merited.”⁴⁴

This conclusion was an unabashed attempt to draw blame away from the Company soldiers in Mathews’ army, and project it onto the shoulders of Tipu. Despite the fact that the rest of the pamphlet had nothing to do with Tipu at all, the reader would be left with the image of heroic British soldiers resisting the advances of a cruel Asiatic despot. Playing up the image of “Tippoo the Tyrant” was one of the most effective ways of shifting attention away from the humiliating situation of the British prisoners, and recasting the East India Company in a more positive light.

The use of the negative characterization of Tipu Sultan in this pamphlet, which was a direct response to the criticism of the Company's military forces, suggests that the villainization of Tipu was not an unrelated byproduct of the Mysore Wars. It was instead deliberately crafted as a response to the negative perception of the Company in many segments of contemporary popular culture. The portrayal of Tipu as a tyrannical Asiatic

⁴³ *Ibid*, 30-33

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 35

despot distracted attention away from embarrassing conduct like that of Mathews, and provided a justification for the costly war effort. The Mysore Wars became recast as a righteous crusade to liberate the British prisoners languishing in Tipu's foul dungeons. Their unhappy experience in jail was one that became an enduring image in the minds of the British public.

The Prisoner Experience

The battles at Pollilur and Annagudi, the sailors of the *Hannibal* captured by Admiral Suffrein, and the disastrous aftermath to the Mathews campaign all had one feature in common: the survivors became prisoners who spent the rest of the war in captivity under Tipu. The captive narratives of these individuals drew widespread attention both in India and amongst Britons in the metropole, as well as from modern historians.⁴⁵ The prisoners were kept in captivity for years, during which time many of them converted to Islam and adopted service in the armies of Mysore, discussed in further detail in the next section. The adoption of this new Indian identity on the part of the captives, whether or not it was forced under duress, struck at the heart of British fears about empire. It suggested that these men could be induced to renounce their "Britishness", become corrupted by the decadent morals of the East, and could potentially be turned against their fellow countrymen in battle. During the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for Europeans in India to adopt local customs of dress and speech, sometimes even serving as high ranking Islamic noblemen in native courts.⁴⁶ This scenario was anathema to Britons at home in the metropole, and therefore the captives

⁴⁵ Linda Colley. *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World 1600-1850* (2002): 253

⁴⁶ The case of James Achilles Kirkpatrick, the British Resident at Hyderabad from 1798-1805, was one such example described in detail by William Dalrymple in *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (New York: Viking, 2003)

were instead portrayed as victims, forced against their will into religious conversion by the depredations of a cruel Oriental tyrant. The lengthy captive accounts detailing the great suffering endured by the British prisoners brought home feelings of national shame and humiliation to the metropole, and therefore furthered the growth of a negative perception of Tipu Sultan. As a result, the prisoner experience of these captives went a long way towards establishing the villainous Tipu Legend in the popular consciousness, as well as creating a rationale for future wars of revenge against Mysore to restore the honor of the British nation.

In each case, the prisoners were marched from their place of capture to one of the primary cities of Tipu's domains. Multiple accounts detail how the prisoners were marched through different villages in Mysore, where the inhabitants were gathered together to gaze at them as they passed through.⁴⁷ Innes Muro wrote that the captives were escorted around by a strong guard past every little village on the road, as a public testimony of the heroic exploits of the Mysorean soldiers.⁴⁸ William Thomson provided a vivid description of this phenomenon from his personal memory as a captive: "Whenever we approached near a village, tom-toms, a kind of drums, and winding collery horns, advanced in front, that the inhabitants might, by this discordant music, be assembled together to gaze at us, as we passed through."⁴⁹ This appears to have been a deliberate strategy on the part of Haider and Tipu, as a means of demonstrating their power and mastery over the British. The Company's claim to rule in India was based in large part

⁴⁷ Captain Henry Oakes. *An Authentic Narrative of the Treatment of the English who were Taken Prisoners... by Tippoo Sahib* (London: Printed for G. Kearsley, 1785): 15

⁴⁸ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 165

⁴⁹ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 38

upon a belief in the invincibility of white soldiers in battle. By parading about captured British soldiers from village to village in this fashion, Tipu posed a serious threat to the image of invulnerability that the Company tried to project.

Once brought to their place of confinement, the prisoners were put to work and subjected to a variety of humiliating conditions. Captain Henry Oakes wrote one of the earliest captivity narratives published in 1785, detailing how he and his fellow officers were imprisoned in one of Tipu's fortresses and put to work grinding rice. Although their situation was a miserable one, in which many officers perished due to exposure to the elements and poor medical treatment, they do not appear to have been the victims of deliberate cruelty or torture.⁵⁰

Other captive narratives accused their Mysorean overseers of much more brutal atrocities. Francis Gowdie claimed that the captured soldiers were forced to work as coolies, with irons on their legs, on an insufficient diet; anyone who made the least objection was beaten without mercy.⁵¹ The *London Chronicle* passed on a rumor to the effect that the prisoners were chained together without distinction (an affront to ingrained eighteenth century class divisions), and an officer was forced to remain chained to a common sailor for three days after the latter had died of dysentery.⁵² Another captive account contained some melancholy verses that the prisoners sang to one another while imprisoned in Bangalore:

VI. As famine approaches our gate,
More saving we grow in our fare;

⁵⁰ Captain Henry Oakes. *An Authentic Narrative of the Treatment of the English who were Taken Prisoners... by Tippoo Sahib* (1785): 20

⁵¹ Francis Gowdie to his brother Dr. Gowdie 31 October 1783 (p. 79-89) IOR/H/223 p. 79

⁵² *London Chronicle* (London, England) 20 November 1784, Issue 4379. One gets the impression that the outrage was almost as great because the officer was forced together with a low-class sailor as the fact that the sailor soon expired!

Resolv'd to encounter our fate,
We bury the thoughts of despair.
We feel with regret our decay,
So meagre, so lank, and so pale;
Like ghosts we are rang'd in array,
When muster'd in Bangalore jail.

VII. Then while the best days of our prime,
Walk slowly and wretchedly on;
We pass the dull hours of our time
With marbles, cards, dice, or a song;
While others sit mending their clothes,
Which long since began for to fail;
Amusements that lighten the woes
Of the captive in Bangalore jail.⁵³

The captive narratives abound with similar descriptions of days spent bound in chains, trying to stave off boredom and remain alive despite the unsanitary prison conditions. Their miserable fate was a constant reminder of British weakness and humiliation.

An unknown composer created a similar song entitled "Hyder Alley", which was published in 1800 but almost certainly originally written during the 1780s. "Hyder Alley" was a melancholy song about the British defeat and disaster at Pollilur, with the bitterest scorn in the song cast upon General Medows for failing to come to the aid of Baillie's doomed detachment:

The succour we expected from General Merow,
Which would have been a signal of a glorious victory,
But his laying at a distance off, all for a sum of gold,
So we marched back to Chingley Pot where poor Bayley he was sold.

Surrounded on all quarters, and from them cannot fly,
We hoisted out a flag of truce their mercy for to try.
But instantly on every side on us came marching down,
They stripped us naked to the skin and then they cut us down...

Now in Seringay in irons we do lay,
Great numbers of us wounded with sickness we do die,

⁵³ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 298-99

Here we are for to remain all in this prison strong.
When I get clear from all my foes then I'll conclude my song.⁵⁴

"Hyder Alley" touched upon the anxieties about overseas empire that were commonplace in the 1770s and 1780s. The song suggested that Medows was more interested in his own enrichment than ensuring the safety of British soldiers; as a result, the Company's troops were now languishing in captivity. In stark contrast to later representations of India, "Hyder Alley" depicted British soldiers who were weak and vulnerable, dying in captivity at the mercy of Indian rulers such as Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan.

Captive accounts detailing the horrors of the prisoner experience continued to appear during the Third Mysore War (1790-92), despite the far superior military fortunes of the Company. If anything, when they appeared, these accounts were distinguished from earlier captive narratives by alleging even worse treatment on the part of Tipu Sultan, with sheer boredom and neglect replaced by outright cruelty and execution. Captivity was no longer described as mere drudgery and boredom, but posing a dire peril to life itself due to the innate savagery of the Sultan. Although there was considerably less focus overall on the British prisoners during this conflict, when captive narratives did appear they were often filled with the most lurid details of abuse.

A letter from Madras dated from 1791 wrote on how "the Tyrant caused poor Captain Rutlidge of the Coast Artillery to be blewn from a Gun on the top of a Rock," after a captivity of ten years and when freedom was within reach.⁵⁵ Stories once again circulated regarding the fate of General Mathews from the previous war, although without the context and public debate explaining why he had become a captive in the first

⁵⁴ Composer unknown. "Hyder Alley." (London, 1800?) The Eighteenth Century [microfilm] reel 10868, no. 08.

⁵⁵ Extract of a Letter from Fort St. George (authored by Commissioner Edgar?) 20 September 1791 (p. 697-700) IOR/H/251 p. 699

place.⁵⁶ The Anglo-Indian newspapers continued to be the most concerned with the subject of British prisoners remaining in captivity, endlessly harping on about the topic. The *Madras Courier* wrote for example in August 1791 on the fate of the Company's sepoys: "In the heat of battle our Sepoys mixed with those of Tippoo's and were unavoidably made prisoners; they were immediately thrown into dungeons, and treated with every cruelty... such are the execrable effects of imported fury; such the traits that mark the conduct of a Russian; such the returns which a despotic barbarian makes for extended generously."⁵⁷ The treatment of these unfortunate individuals remained one of the principle justifications for the ongoing wars against Mysore.

A book of landscape art published in 1794 by Lieutenant R.H. Colebrooke, who had traveled with the army of Cornwallis during the Third Mysore War as a surveyor, continued to emphasize the continuing plight of the remaining British captives. Colebrooke took jabs at the character of Tipu throughout his publication, writing in the description for "East View of Bangalore" how Tipu built an extravagant palace as a sign of his despotism, and chained British soldiers in irons down in the dungeons of the city.⁵⁸ Colebrooke also painted the mausoleum of Haider Ali at Seringapatam, but unlike other British painters in India barely mentioned the building at all, instead commenting in the accompanying description how Tipu had ordered four British prisoners clubbed to death: "They were tied to stakes, affixed to the four corners of the tomb; and in order that a flow of their blood might not pollute the hallowed ground, the inhuman Tyrant caused them to

⁵⁶ See Abstract of the Narrative of Mons. Burette (a French surgeon in the English service) 1791 (p. 359-76) IOR/H/565 p. 367-68 for one such example.

⁵⁷ *Madras Courier* (Madras, India) 18 August 1791, Issue 306

⁵⁸ Lieutenant R.H. Colebrooke. *Twelve Views of Places in the Kingdom of Mysore* (London, 1794) "East View of Bangalore", accompanying text.

be beat to death with bludgeons.”⁵⁹ This account was based upon very dubious information, Colebrooke admitting he had the story from a Mr. Cadman who himself heard the story from an officer in Tipu’s service, and furthermore it had no bearing on the image that it accompanied. Nevertheless, it served as another example of the vilification of Tipu Sultan, helping to justify the war in which Colebrooke had served in the army of Cornwallis.

The greatest outcry from the conflict surrounded the alleged prisoner atrocities committed in the hill fortress of Ossure. Major Alexander Dirom's narrative of the campaign provided this description:

Some poor people, who remained in the pettah, said there had been three Europeans, one of them called Hamilton, prisoners at this place; who were all very much respected, and regretted by the inhabitants; that they were alive till after the capture of Bangalore, when Tippoo sent orders to put them to death... They shewed the place where the unfortunate men were beheaded and buried; and, on digging up the graves, the heads were found severed from the bodies, and, from the appearance of the hair, and some remnants of their clothes, no doubt remained of the truth of this murder; which is one of the many Tippoo appears to have committed, to prevent his false assertions being detected, of there having been no British subjects detained by force in his country, since the last war.⁶⁰

This story, or some variation of it, appeared in virtually all of the later Tipu literature. If true, it demonstrated exactly the sort of injustice the British imagined themselves to be fighting against in India. Tipu Sultan was a brutal and callous despot, as seen from this perspective, an Indian prince who had to be removed from power. Lieutenant Roderick Mackenzie's history of the war provided further information on Ossure, relating that the man Hamilton had been a British sailor who adopted an Indian identity, married a local woman, and had several mixed-race children. Mackenzie claimed that he had visited the

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, “The Mausoleum of Hyder Aly Khan at Laulbaug”, accompanying text.

⁶⁰ Major Alexander Dirom. *A Narrative of the Campaign in India, which Terminated the War with Tippoo Sultan in 1792* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer, 1793, 1794, 1985): 33-34

graves himself, and (somewhat morbidly) possessed a lock of hair from the severed heads of the three Europeans.⁶¹ The body of evidence for the prisoner massacre at Ossure is much stronger than most of the other atrocities allegedly committed by Tipu, and it is very likely he did order an execution of some kind. Whether or not these killings took place, the British believed that they did, and this shaped their opinions of Tipu accordingly.

Ossure caused the greatest reaction in the Anglo-Indian communities of Calcutta and Madras. Already the group that had most desired a vindictive war of retribution against Tipu, Anglo-Indians responded to Ossure by hurling more epithets against the name of the Sultan. The *Madras Courier* expressed hope that the stories were untrue, but in the event that they were correct, "Tippoo must indeed be the most depraved of mankind, a monster whose murderous deeds language would want force sufficiently to describe."⁶² The same paper lumped in Ossure with the prisoner cruelties from the past war, when discussing a possible peace settlement:

When the generous MacNamara interested himself with Tippoo to procure the Liberty of our Fellow Countrymen, who then groaned under the most Deplorable Captivity – the Despicable Despot flew to the meanest sophistry, and declared He has not a *british subject* in His domains *detained by force*; although He had at that time given orders to put every one To Death who should attempt to make their escape, and Which Orders were too often Carried Into Execution.

The murder of Mathews and Baillie, and their unhappy Fellow Prisoners, is deeply imprinted on the *minds* of their Fellow Soldiers, and the butchery of Lieu. Hamilton and two others, *the companions* of his miseries, is of very recent date [Ossure].

⁶¹ Lieutenant Roderick Mackenzie. *A Sketch of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* Vol. 2 (Calcutta: Unknown printer, 1793; London: Imported and sold by J. Sewell, 1799): 118-19

⁶² *Madras Courier* (Madras, India) 27 July 1791, Issue 303

And yet the Monster can presume to proceed in his course of *treachery* and *deceit*, and *dare* to violate the terms of a capitulation, and then *date* a falsehood in the hope of evading the consequences.⁶³

As the newspaper suggested, the Anglo-Indian community remained the group most consistently hostile to Tipu Sultan, with events like Ossure only adding fuel to the fire. They were the group most directly affected by the wars taking place in southern India, and consequently the ones who had the most impassioned opinions on the subject.

There was much less newspaper coverage of this prisoner massacre in the London newspapers, with only a few brief mentions of the Ossure controversy. The *St. James Chronicle* wrote that Tipu had been guilty of the greatest cruelties since the war began, and "puts to death every Englishman he can obtain possession of."⁶⁴ However, since the source for this information was a letter written by the printer of the same *Madras Courier*, the sentiments were more reflective of the Anglo-Indian community than the London one. The *Morning Herald* also wrote briefly on the surrender of the British garrison of Coimbatore, charging that Tipu violated the terms of their capitulation and suggesting that they might suffer the same fate as General Mathews.⁶⁵

For the most part, however, there was relatively little mention of British captives in the London press during the Third Mysore War. This was a direct contrast to the previous war against Tipu a decade earlier, in which the treatment of prisoners was overwhelmingly the most discussed subject. British newspapers were generally much less interested in these stories, no doubt due to the distances involved, but would on occasion reprint excerpts and editorials from the Anglo-Indian press. However, they failed to arouse the same public interest as the Mathews controversy from the previous war, and

⁶³ Madras Courier (Madras, India) 2 February 1792, Issue 330 Emphasis in the original.

⁶⁴ St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 3 April 1792, Issue 4841

⁶⁵ Morning Herald (London, England) 13 April 1792, Issue 4093

took a back seat to the debate about the morality of the conflict being played out in Parliament.⁶⁶ While captive accounts continued to be published, these stories had largely shifted away from the daily reporting of the newspaper press, and instead were increasingly fictionalized as a background setting for imperial adventure stories.

Religious Conversion and European Musselmen

Despite all of the brutal circumstances mentioned above, crude and unsanitary living conditions for captured soldiers were hardly unusual in the eighteenth century, especially outside of Europe. What made Tipu's captivity so intimidating to contemporaries was the threat that he posed to the very identity of his British subjects. Tipu Sultan sought to offset the technological and organizational advantages of his opponents by inducing Europeans of all nationalities to enter into his service, casting off their previous loyalties to become soldiers of Mysore. This process required a conversion to Islam and the renunciation of a European identity, complete with the process of circumcision, which accompanied the oath of loyalty to the Sultan. According to the contemporary British accounts, this was a mandatory ritual for all Europeans who intended to enter the service of Mysore. British captive accounts accused Tipu of forcing prisoners to convert to Islam against their will and become "European Musselmen", while Tipu insisted that he only held out encouragement for captives to join his forces, and that he kept no British prisoners after the signing of peace in 1784.

This crisis of identity lay at the heart of British anxieties and insecurities about overseas empire, the fear that the Company's servants would be enticed by the exotic Orient and "go native", turning their back on traditional British virtues. It was not uncommon for Europeans in India to take on a new Indian identity during the eighteenth

⁶⁶ See Chapter 4

century, crossing over and adopting the language, dress, and customs of a foreign culture that they found desirable.⁶⁷ Tipu's attempts to convert Company soldiers into his own service existed as part of this long continuity of past history, in which personal identities were fluid and self-fashioned, and individuals moved back and forth between different cultures as need suited them. However, increasingly in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the 19th century, this practice of self-fashioning multiple identities and living between two cultures became actively discouraged by the officials of the East India Company, due to growing cultural Anglicization and new theories of racial and ethnic hierarchies.⁶⁸ The inducements of Tipu Sultan therefore posed a threat to the very core of the imperial project, suggesting an alternate Indian identity for British soldiers outside the purvey of the Company's control. Instead of understanding the complicated cultural context in which Tipu offered service in his armies, captive accounts portrayed the Sultan as a monstrous figure that forced prisoners to convert to a new religion against their will. This image of the brave British soldier valiantly refusing the temptations of an Oriental despot could (and would) then be spun into a morality play of empire, with the heroic white Europeans triumphing over the corrupted and morally degenerate Indians.

There were many examples of these religious conversion stories. John Baillie's captive narrative covers the main features of these incidents:

When on the 19th [Sep 1781] we were struck with horror at hearing that Several of the poor Soldiers had been taken out of Prison, circumcised and forced into the Service of the Nabob... We dreaded his approach as much as Criminals the day of execution and determined to die rather than be slaves for life, for this these

⁶⁷ Maya Jasanoff. *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (2005)

⁶⁸ William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (2003)

unhappy men were told was to be their fate. They were called the Children of the Nabob and desired to think no more of their Native Country.⁶⁹

In each case, the religious conversion of the British soldiers to Islam was linked with the creation of a new Muslim identity for themselves; Baillie described how these men were to become known as “Children of the Nabob.” What remained controversial was whether these conversions were forced or voluntary; which interpretation one chose to believe had a great influence on how Tipu’s character was perceived. At least some of the British soldiers in the Company’s employ undoubtedly chose to switch over to Tipu’s side of their own free will. One Company report from 1784 writes of “many European Deserters from the Garrison of Mangalore... and other Garrisons, in his [Tipu’s] Army,” and includes these individuals separately from those who had been forced into Tipu’s service.⁷⁰ Another newspaper story detailed how six midshipmen captured by Admiral Suffrein from the *Hannibal* “have renounced both their country and religion, and voluntarily turned Mahometans; they have married Mahometan women.”⁷¹ It is important to recall here that many of the Company’s white soldiers were not English in origin, or even from the British Isles, and may not have felt any particular national loyalty to the British Company.

British commentators in the metropole, outside of the context of the cultural traditions of South Asia, were highly skeptical that some of the Company prisoners might have voluntarily decided to switch sides rather than sit out the rest of the war in captivity, or may simply have preferred an Indian lifestyle to their prior European one. Instead, the narrative of this experience as understood in London, and at times actively promulgated

⁶⁹ John Baillie to his Father 14 June 1784 (p. 153-79) Account of his capture and captivity. IOR/H/223 p. 171-72

⁷⁰ Prisoners in Mysore (p. 265-89), author and date unlisted. IOR/H/570 p. 267

⁷¹ General Evening Post (London, England) 21 April 1785, Issue 7981

by the East India Company, was that all religious conversions were forced upon the victims on threat of death. The General Evening Post related one account from a Company soldier, who was invited during his period of captivity to join in Tipu's service with the offer of handsome wages. However, according to this story, the British men "did not hesitate a moment to treat his offer with scorn" and upon being threatened with death for refusing to serve "some of our officers were taken out three times, and were mounted on a gallows, with the ropes about their necks, but they were firm in their behavior, and with manly fortitude resisted to the last." This was taken as a sign of the "cruelty, and arbitrary proceedings of a despotic Prince."⁷²

The ability to link these religious conversion episodes with commentary on the barbarous character of Tipu only made them more effective in shaping public opinion about the ongoing conflict. The Mysore Wars could then be transformed into the aforementioned morality play, with the virtuous British forces of the Company heroically resisting the temptation to join Tipu's forces, even on pain of death as detailed in another newspaper report:

It was much to the honour of the British soldiery in India that they rejected, surrounded with dangers, the temptations thrown out to them to enter into the Nabob's service. Some of Tippoo's head people promised them very handsome wages: "No!" said a young spirited officer, with the general consent, "No! we are Englishmen! we despise your offers!" Some of the officers were actually mounted on a gallows for having refused to enter into the service of the Nabob, and ropes were put round their necks. But this did not warp the virtue of their hearts! They were taken down; and Indian barbarity was relaxed by the all-glorious example of virtue in its fullest purity!⁷³

This reimagining of the events taking place in Tipu's dungeons could have been taken directly from the London stage; it served to demonstrate how the virtues of the British

⁷² General Evening Post (London, England) 4 December 1784, Issue 7921

⁷³ Whitehall Evening Post (London, England) 11 January 1785, Issue 5876

character would no longer be corrupted by their contact with decadent Asiatic luxury. The soldiers of the Company were explicitly linked to the broader nation (“we are Englishmen!”) in rejecting the offer of Tipu Sultan. This patriotic recasting of the Company’s image began to shift opinion away from the stereotyped nabobs of the preceding decades, by means of contrasting the actions of white Europeans to Indian “barbarity.”

More sympathy could be generated for the captives through lurid descriptions of the conversion ceremonies they were forced to endure. Innes Munro wrote of thirty “comely youths” who were selected out for Tipu’s service, stripped naked, and had every hair shaved from their bodies. They were then forced to swallow strong opiates before undergoing the process of circumcision; after thirty days of recovery, the youths were trained as Mysorean soldiers and said to exhibit great ferocity in Tipu’s service.⁷⁴

William Thomson’s account of the conversion process was nearly identical, including the description that after recovering from the treatment these men were dressed in Islamic garb and expected to lead soldiers in Tipu’s armies.⁷⁵ One wild rumor had Tipu delivering thirty young men, “whom he had made Musselmen,” to the Turkish court of the Grand Signor.⁷⁶ These boys were intended to serve as janissaries in the Ottoman Sultan’s court, and would presumably never return to Britain or reclaim their European identity.

According to the captive accounts, the converts felt a deep sense of depression and alienation due to their position standing between two cultures: “It was the horror that

⁷⁴ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 358-59

⁷⁵ Officer of Colonel Baillie’s Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 52-55

⁷⁶ Mr. Robert Church to Edward Hughes 18 November 1784 (p. 197-99) IOR/H/190 p. 197

the [European slave] boys felt at the thought of being for ever shut out from the society of their countrymen, and the hope of returning to their country, that wrung their souls with tender anguish."⁷⁷ Thomson indicated that the boys were experiencing great social anxiety, as a new identity was thrust upon them, but were not physically abused in any way. These individuals were in fact well-treated by all surviving accounts, educated in Persian and mathematics, intended to become part of the household of the Sultan. The symbolic message behind these actions was readily apparent: Tipu was demonstrating his absolute control over the British by remaking the identity of his captives, forcing Europeans to serve Indians instead of the opposite way around. Despite the attention and care lavished on Tipu's youthful converts, they were nonetheless a powerful ideological statement of the Sultan's opposition to British rule in India.

The new status of these boys was anathema to the reputation of the Company, and to British society more generally. The stories of the prisoners generated fear and anxiety not only from the actual conversion ceremonies themselves, but from the loss of identity that they entailed. By adopting (or being forced into) an Indian identity, the British individuals in question were cut off from their former lives. These accounts suggested that Tipu had power and mastery over Europeans, with the ability to call their very identity into question and remake it as he saw fit. This genuinely frightening prospect ensured that prisoner conversions would be represented in the worst possible light in British print culture, and depicted as acts of forced torture perpetrated by an Oriental tyrant.

⁷⁷ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 145-46

Examples of these stories from the period are easy to find. Perhaps the most famous and widely read captive account to emerge from the Mysore Wars was written by James Bristow, published as *A Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow*, at the conclusion of the Third Mysore War in 1793. It provides one of the best examples of a captive narrative, describing in great detail the prisoner experience of captivity under Tipu. Bristow's account details an imprisonment of over ten years, in which he found himself "in the clutches of barbarians" that treated him with cruelty and scorn.⁷⁸ He was captured in 1781, forcibly converted to Islam the following year, and spent the remainder of his imprisonment serving in a cheylah battalion, commanding soldiers in Tipu's service. Bristow's account invariably referred to Tipu as a "barbarian", "tyrant", "usurper", or some similar pejorative turn of phrase; he also attributed the death of not just General Mathews to Tipu's order, but also other captured officers named Rumley, Frazer, and Sampson.⁷⁹

Although Bristow claimed that he lived in constant terror for his life, and was imprisoned for most of the ten years, there are various inconsistencies in his sensationalistic account. Bristow boasted to have escaped certain death on multiple occasions through the performance of heroic personal actions, especially during his escape sequence in which he traveled extensively for five days with no food or water. The superhuman feats of endurance that Bristow claimed for himself cast doubt on the validity of his statements, and suggested that much of his narrative was designed to bolster sales through an exciting tale of adventure in exotic locales. Furthermore, during his captivity Bristow offhandedly mentioned that he was drawing a monthly salary as pay

⁷⁸ James Bristow. *Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow* (Calcutta: unknown publisher, 1792; London: Reprinted by J. Murray, 1793; 1794; 1801; 1828): 7

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 32

from Tipu, and went so far as to grumble at times about reductions in what he earned, all of which constituted rather strange behavior for a supposed prisoner!⁸⁰ Fellow captive Henry Becher wrote in similar fashion about his own not-so-rigorous imprisonment, noting that “I came out of Nagur (after being eighteen months prisoner there) richer than I went in,” due to the accumulation of many material possessions during his period of captivity.⁸¹ These accounts suggested that conditions were not nearly as bad as portrayed for at least some of the British captives.

A closer reading of the prisoner narratives also undermined many of the more sensationalistic claims. For example, William Thomson’s captive account grudgingly admits that the officers left wounded at Bednur received better treatment than some of Tipu’s other prisoners. They were allowed to keep many of their personal articles, have free use of pen and paper, allowed the attentions of a French surgeon, and given permission to keep their servants and have them shop daily in the bazaar for meals.⁸² Thomson would later complain that there was insufficient sympathy in Britain for those who had languished in Tipu’s dungeons, and many at home in Britain during the time of the Second Mysore War felt that their sufferings were well deserved.⁸³ Another correspondent argued that the character of Admiral Suffrein had unfairly come under attack for surrendering his captured sailors to Tipu. As for the prisoners themselves, this author stated that the accounts of Tipu’s cruelty towards the captives were so exaggerated “as to make the Whole appear a Fable”, and the fact of the matter was that “The Asiaticks

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 41-42

⁸¹ Henry Becher. *Remarks and Occurrences of Mr. Henry Becher, During his Imprisonment of Two Years and a Half in the Dominions of Tippoo Sultan, From Whence he Made his Escape*. (Bombay: unknown publisher, 1793): 100

⁸² Officer of Colonel Baillie’s Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 209-10

⁸³ *Ibid*, 424-25

are not yet sufficiently civilized to make War on European Principles, consequently they use their Prisoners roughly, but are not guilty of a fourth Part of the Barbarity ascribed to them."⁸⁴ These sources indicated once more that many of the captive accounts were exaggerated, designed to emphasize Tipu in the most unflattering light possible, as a means to disguise the much more complicated situation of newly created alternate and potentially subversive Indian identities for British prisoners.

Unraveling the mystery of the religious conversions is far from an easy task. The degree to which these conversions were genuine or compelled at the point of Tipu's sword remains the subject of dispute. As a way of cutting through the confusion surrounding this topic, Henry Becher provided what is likely the most accurate description of how European prisoners were treated by Tipu, worth quoting at length:

There were about thirty [prisoners] left: these men had been several times sent for to the Kudjaree, and asked, if they would take service, at their different occupations; which on their refusing, they were sent back to prison to live on their seir of rice, and single piece a day.... Some time being elapsed, they were again called to the Kudjaree by Adam Caun La Wannee killidaur, who instead of using the method Bahauder Jub Caun had done, reasoned with them: telling them they did not consider their own interest, and were very wrong to remain close prisoners, when they might by taking service, live comfortably [on] their pay: besides, having liberty of walking about, and taking fresh air, whenever they pleased within the pettah [fort]: That the Sultaun would never release them, and therefore advised them to take his pay: it would not prevent their going away, when God Almighty would please to release them; and by way of further encouragement, promised, if they wished to write to their families in Bombay, he would send [send] their letters, and they should receive the ansivers [answers]: good words had better effect than the chaubuck [chains], and they took service; amongst the rest several boys who had been servants to officers in camp, turned out to be made carpenters, and by the instruction of those who knew their trade managed very well.... they now enjoy fresh air and exercise, and did not die so fast as before.⁸⁵

This appears to be the most reasonable explanation of the actual treatment of the European prisoners. They were kept in confinement, in poor living conditions, and

⁸⁴ St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 7 December 1784, Issue 3706

⁸⁵ Henry Becher. *Remarks and Occurrences of Mr. Henry Becher.* (1793): 39-42

pressured to enter Tipu's service, in these cheylah battalions. Tipu's men held out all sorts of incentives to get them to do so: better food, freedom within the fort, a regular salary, and so on. Those that did convert were forced to adopt Islamic dress, were likely circumcised, and then worked for Tipu as officers and technical experts in his military.

These men likely still thought of themselves as prisoners, though they were not in the traditional sense. Due to the degree of pressure placed on these men, they could well argue that they were "forced" to convert to Islam, although that also falls short of the full story. The subtleties of their situation were generally lost on most British observers, and it was far easier to suggest that all of the prisoners were forced into conversion to Islam by a tyrannical and bigoted Oriental despot. It required only a little imagination to turn the narrative Becher provided into the cartoonish adventure story of James Bristow.

Becher's narrative of imprisonment ran through a limited printing in Bombay, attracting few readers and little attention. Meanwhile, Bristow's sensationalistic captive tale was a huge success and would go through five different printed editions, including an American edition published in Philadelphia in 1801. The public sphere in London was therefore permeated with stories about the villainous Tipu Sultan of Bristow's account, one who gave four European women over to black slaves for their entertainment, and who demolished Hindu temples and was detested by the majority of his subjects.⁸⁶ The long-running public interest in these captive narratives and the fierceness of the response that they generated towards Tipu indicated the depth of the fear and anxiety that the Sultan inspired. The incentives that he offered to switch sides and "go native" called into question the very foundations of the overseas imperial enterprise. It was far easier and more pleasant to imagine indomitable British soldiers who never bowed down to foreign

⁸⁶ James Bristow. *Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow* (1793): 30, 49

tyrants, rather than acknowledge the complex reality of eighteenth century South Asia, where both Europeans and Indians were able to construct alternate self-fashioned identities for themselves and move between two different cultures as need dictated.⁸⁷

The great majority of the Company forces held by Tipu were released from captivity upon the signing of the Treaty of Mangalore in early 1784, at the end of the Second Mysore War. John Baillie provided a list of the soldiers that returned into Company service, consisting of 1100 Europeans (198 officers and gentlemen) and upwards of 3000 sepoy.⁸⁸ The same numbers were reported in a short pamphlet entitled *Prisoners in Mysore*: "In conformity to the stipulations of the Treaty, 1200 Europeans and about 3000 Sepoys were sent home. This circumstance is incidentally mentioned in a letter from the Government of Madras to the Governor General dated 20th April [1784], at which time *they* supposed that all of the prisoners were released."⁸⁹ Taken together, these sources appear to provide a clear accounting of the number of prisoners released in the treaty.

However, Baillie's source also identified some 150 individuals referred to as "European Musselmen" or "circumcised Europeans" who did not return back to the Company's territory, and remained part of Tipu's service. The London newspapers soon picked up on this story, increasing the number of soldiers retained from 150 to 300 in the process. The *General Evening Post* made clear that these were the prisoners whom Tipu had "made Musselmen by force."⁹⁰ A certain Captain Dallas made a circuit of the

⁸⁷ Maya Jasanoff. *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (2005)

⁸⁸ John Baillie to his Father 14 June 1784 (p. 153-79) Account of his capture and captivity. IOR/H/223 p. 178-79. These numbers demonstrate again that the large majority of prisoners were Indian sepoy serving in the Company's military, which were ignored by nearly all British commentators.

⁸⁹ *Prisoners in Mysore* (p. 265-89), author and date unlisted. IOR/H/570 p. 266 Emphasis in the original.

⁹⁰ General Evening Post (London, England) 30 November 1784, Issue 7919

Mysorean prisons after the conclusion of the peace treaty, rounding up some 200 officers, 1100 European privates, and roughly 2000 sepoys, all in much better health than he expected due to the miserable conditions of their captivity. However, he also heard it alleged "that three Madras officers and five midshipmen, with about two hundred European privates, whom he had converted to Mahomedanism, were secreted by Tippoo Sahib for his own service, as no account could ever afterwards be got of them."⁹¹ These accounts suggest that roughly 200-300 individuals of European descent were not released by Tipu following the treaty, and those individuals were ones who had made the conversion to Islam in some form.

It was the status of these "European Musselmen" which continued to arouse anger and controversy. These appeared to be the prisoners who had converted to Islam during their period of captivity, and were therefore not released with the rest of the Company soldiers. Tipu Sultan, for his part, claimed that he no longer held any prisoners, only his own subjects who had taken up pay within his own armed forces. One of the London newspapers summarized this position:

There are six Midshipmen, and about one hundred and twenty British Seamen, now in the military service of Tippoo Saib. They were sent to that Prince by Monsieur Suffrein, as French prisoners; and, after enduring the severest hardships of a long captivity, they were liberated on condition of abjuring their religion, and entering the service of Tippoo Saib... They are now lost to their relatives, and to their country, beyond the probability of redemption; for if a formal application were made to Tippoo Saib for their delivery, his answer would be, that he had not any French prisoners in his dominions; by entering his service, they had become his subjects.⁹²

When the British prisoners agreed (or were compelled to agree) to enter Tipu's service, they gave up their right to be included in the prisoner exchange after the peace, since

⁹¹ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (1789): 351

⁹² Morning Post and Daily Advertiser (London, England) 27 July 1785, Issue 3889

technically they were no longer prisoners at all. Nor was this process of "crossing over" an unusual occurrence in 18th century India; Indian armies of the period were always multinational, and Europeans from many different countries, including Britain, frequently served as officers in the armies of native princes. Changing service from one ruler to another after imprisonment was also commonplace, and the Company made use of this itself on many occasions.⁹³ Tipu was acting in accordance with the tradition of other Islamic sovereigns, in similar fashion to the infamous janissaries of the Ottoman state.

Nevertheless, this was not an acceptable outcome in the eyes of the East India Company's officials, or within the British metropole. From the perspective of the British public, these captives had been forced to convert to Islam against their will, using cruel tortures and other threats, and Tipu's continued retention of these individuals was a shame upon the national honor. It never occurred to most British commentators that some of these prisoners may well have voluntarily chosen a new Islamic lifestyle as an officer commanding Tipu's forces, over that of languishing indefinitely in a rotting prison cell. Whether or not the conversions were forced upon threat of violence and death, the public perception was that of Britons being held against their will as slaves, in violation of the peace treaty that Tipu had signed. This served as a significant contributing factor for future conflict between Tipu Sultan and the East India Company, as well as doing much to paint Tipu as a cruel tyrant in the British popular imagination.

Prisoner Masculinity and Sexuality

The conversion stories of the prisoners were also rife with sexual anxieties, as Tipu demonstrated his mastery over the prisoners through a process of forced

⁹³ See for example William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (2003). After the Company engineered a coup at the court of the Nizam of Hyderabad, it had no objections to allowing former enemy soldiers to enter into the Company's own military.

emasculation. Tipu Sultan was portrayed as possessing an insatiable sexual appetite, one that demanded a constant stream of young women for his harem. Tipu's supposed voracious sexuality represented another way in which India stood for the wild and untamed lure of the exotic East. His control over the British prisoners was made manifest most starkly in the form of their religious conversion ceremonies, as they were quite literally emasculated through the process of circumcision. These very real fears about masculinity and sexuality were reflected in the captive accounts, which continued to respond to British insecurities by demonizing Tipu Sultan as a threat that had to be defeated.

The many references to circumcision as part of the conversion process serve as the best example of this process, but there were other such cases as well. William Drake, one of the midshipmen captured on the *Hannibal*, wrote of young European boys who were "taught dancing in the Country Stile and forced to dance in female dresses before Tippoo - it was said that of late as they grew up they were transferred to the Cheylas Battalions."⁹⁴ Henry Becher corroborates this story in his own captive narrative, writing about a European boy named Willie: "When it was the pleasure of Tippoo, Willie was dressed as a dancing girl, covered with joys – and in this manner danced before him. He was not the only boy who was under the necessity of submitting to this degrading method of amusing the tyrant: most of them were dead or sent to different places..."⁹⁵

These accounts help to demonstrate why Tipu prompted so much anxiety from British observers, quite aside from the military threat that he posed. Tipu's hold over British captives, and his ability to reshape their image into effeminate dancing girls, was

⁹⁴ Abstract of the Narrative of William Drake, Midshipman of the *Hannibal* September 1791 (p. 341-58) IOR/H/565 p.357

⁹⁵ Henry Becher. *Remarks and Occurrences of Mr. Henry Becher*. (1793): 55-56

a direct challenge to the widespread belief in the invincibility of white soldiers. His flaunting of power over Company prisoners was not only a means to force conversion into his military service, but also an effective propaganda tactic to inspire dread in the hearts of his opponents. Forcing captured British boys to dress in feminine clothing and dance for his amusement was another way for Tipu to exert his dominance over Europeans. It suggested that he was superior to his opponents not only militarily, but in terms of masculinity as well.

One of these additions to the characterization of Tipu during the Third Mysore War was his portrayal as a sex-crazed individual with an insatiable lust for women, playing upon the old trope of the East as the setting for harems and concubines. *Lloyd's Evening Post* related the standard criticisms of Tipu's personality, how he had "disgraced his personal prowess by an exemplified perfidity and cruelty towards his enemies," before moving on to a description of Tipu's lasciviousness towards women: "And yet, like other Monsters, *Tippoo* is not without his susceptibility, which is passion for the fair-sex fully evinces. Indeed his gallantries, like his warfares, have always been on the great scale; in proof of which, it need only be adduced, that the *Seraglio* of his present Camp exceeds 2000 women, selected for their superiority of personal attractions!"⁹⁶ Tipu was characterized in this source as a beast, wholly dominated by his base passions and instincts, the sort of savage animal that could only be tamed through the use of force. This was a new thread in the larger tapestry of the Tipu Legend, expanding Tipu's hotheaded or emotional character into an irresistible desire to chase after women.

In a similar account written by Company military officer John Murray, Tipu was accused of murdering the beautiful daughter of a chieftain for "attempting to resist his

⁹⁶ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 4 March 1791, Issue 5255

infamous Sensuality.”⁹⁷ British authors writing on the subject of the Mysore Wars in later decades also came to accept this characterization of Tipu. Sir Walter Scott used this setting in his 1827 short story *The Surgeon's Daughter*, depicting Tipu as a lustful tyrant obsessed with capturing white women for inclusion into his seraglio.⁹⁸ These portrayals of Tipu were likely a reaction to the sexual anxieties raised by the stories of prisoners forcibly being converted to Islam. British soldiers in India were afraid of losing their masculinity if they were captured by Tipu, forced to convert to an alternate native identity in which they would become emasculated. The response was the characterization of Tipu as hyper-masculine, *entirely* controlled through physical passions and desires, and unable to achieve the manners and proper restraint of a civilized gentleman. The supposed sensuality of Tipu became another example of his savagery, transforming his superior masculine potency from a virtue into a vice. Tipu’s sexual obsessions became in time another example of why the Company was ultimately more deserving of rule over the people of Mysore.

These same themes appeared in the dramatic productions of the London stage, which seized upon the popular enthusiasm for the Mysore Wars and used them as subject material for their shows. The Sadler’s Wells production entitled *Tippoo Sultan; or, East India Campaigning* was the first such show to enjoy widespread success, debuting on 25 July 1791. *East India Campaigning* promised in its advertisements to showcase a series of exotic Indian characters and scenes for its viewers, including The Friendly Brahmins (“With the attack and destruction of their Pagoda by Tippoo’s Soldiery”), Prisons At

⁹⁷ Col. John Murray, *Sketches of the Character of Tippoo Suldaun* (written April 1789, sent to Dundas 3 September 1792) (p.821-24) IOR/H/387

⁹⁸ Sir Walter Scott. *Count Robert of Paris and the Surgeon's Daughter*. (Boston and New York: Houghton Miffling Company, 1923, 1827)

Seringapatam (“The cruel treatment of the English Officers under General Mathews, when confined”), Tippoo Saib’s Camp (“with the Army in Motion, and an Eastern Divertisement with Parasols”) and even an Elephant.⁹⁹ The themes of the play were very much in accordance with contemporary pro-Company and pro-ministry opinion, portraying Tipu Sultan as a tyrannical despot who tortured British prisoners and oppressed his non-Islamic subjects. Company soldiers were represented heroically, as the liberators would who put an end to the dark rule of the Sultan. The Company servants were no longer the immoral banditti of previous decades, having become instead virtuous soldier-heroes that embodied the British nation.

The Sadler’s Wells production was a very elaborate affair, promoting itself with entirely new costumes and set designs, along with an elaborate musical score. *East India Campaigning* would prove popular enough that the music to the play was printed separately, as *The Overture, Favorite Songs, and Finale in the Musical Entertainment of Tippoo Saib*. These song lyrics contained a number of revealing passages, making frequent mention of Irish soldiers serving in the Company military (complete with brogue in the lyrics) and referencing longstanding fears of sexual dominance and forced effeminacy implicit in the prisoners controversy. The song “Buac’aill lion Deoc” sung by an Irish soldier demonstrated both of these traits, as the character Dennis O’Neal refuses the blandishments of Tipu and insists he will not lose his masculinity due to captivity:

(Verse) 1
Tippoo, your Highness, give over your fun,
By my Soul you have got the wrong Sow by the Tail;
I’m neither Widow nor Maid, but a Soldier by Trade,
And my Name, if you like it, is Dennis O’Neal:

⁹⁹ Diary or Woodfall’s Register (London, England) 25 July 1791, Issue 729

And a ranting, chaunting,
Drinking, fighting, capering, piperling,
Conjuring, blundering, skylarking, dram tipping,
Dev'l of a Fellow is Dennis O'Neal!
Arrah. Buac'aill lion deoc' for Dennis O'Neal...

(Verse) 4

Tippoo take it from Dennis, he speaks to your face,
Tis'n't in your Black looks to make him turn pale;
Put a Sword in his hand and he'll die like a Man,
But you won't make a Judy of Dennis O'Neal.
With your Jumping, Jungling, grinning, mouthing,
Clout headed, thick headed, brazen nos'd, copper fac'd,
Ill looking Thief! Who made you a Chief?
I wish, for your sake, I had an Oak Stake,
For a Dev'l of a Fellow is Dennis O'Neal.
Arrah. Buac'aill lion deoc' for Dennis O'Neal.¹⁰⁰

The notes to the production indicate that this was one of its most popular songs, most likely to a special degree for the poorer elements of the audience.

While there were indeed significant numbers of Irish soldiers serving in the Company's military forces, which perhaps the authors of the piece wished to recognize, the song was far more noteworthy for its bold assertions of masculinity, as a rejection of the threat posed by Tipu's captivity of British prisoners. Dennis O'Neal asserted not only that he was neither "Widow nor Maid", but also went on to insist that "you won't make a Judy of Dennis O'Neal", likely a reference to the stories of the "dancing boys" in Tipu's service that had filtered back to Britain. The song was also explicitly racist in its mention of Tipu's "Black looks", and it reflected deep-rooted anxieties of defeat and implied feminization at the hands of the Sultan, which were commonplace in 1791.¹⁰¹ This was mentioned again in the concluding Finale to the production, with the cast singing together

¹⁰⁰ Mark Lonsdale (lyrics) and William Reeve (music). "Buac'aill lion Deoc'" in *The Overture Favorite Songs and Finale in the Musical Entertainment of Tippoo Saib as Performed with Universal Applause at the Sadler Wells Theatre* (London: Longman and Broderip, 1792)

¹⁰¹ David Worrall. *Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity, and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007): 91

how with the danger now passed, and Tipu fled at last, “We are Britons once again.”¹⁰² This odd phrasing served as another indication of how Tipu “unmanned” his captives through forced conversions (including circumcisions), and the implied effeminacy that resulted. Only after being freed from captivity could these prisoners reclaim their identity and once again become part of the British nation.

There was no question that Sadler’s Wells had a hit production on its hands. The day after its debut performance, *Woodfall’s Register* wrote a glowing review of the production, praising *East India Campaigning* as “one of the most elegant exhibitions the town has witnessed for many years”, which produced universal calls for encore from all sections of the audience. The review lavished extra praise on the set design for portraying a series of different Indian scenes, and upon the Irish songs discussed above, which “gave the publick as much pleasure any actor has had an opportunity of effecting on stage for some time.”¹⁰³ *Woodfall’s Register* was far from the only newspaper to deliver a positive verdict on the show, with the *Public Advertiser* also following suit, and *World* going so far as to claim “we fairly predict Tippoo Saib will be the greatest favourite ever produced at Sadler’s Wells.”¹⁰⁴ Discussion of the play continued to appear in the London print culture throughout the following months, as it had clearly become a popular topic in public opinion. Newspapers mentioned how *East India Campaigning* filled the house every night, and was “undoubtedly the best Entertainment that Sadler’s Wells has ever yet set before the public.”¹⁰⁵ In an attempt to make the production even more exotic,

¹⁰² Mark Lonsdale (lyrics) and William Reeve (music). “Finale” in *The Overture Favorite Songs and Finale in the Musical Entertainment of Tippoo Saib* (1792)

¹⁰³ *Diary or Woodfall’s Register* (London, England) 26 July 1791, Issue 730

¹⁰⁴ *World* (London, England) 26 July 1791, Issue 1425

¹⁰⁵ *Public Advertiser* (London, England) 30 July 1791, Issue 17805; *Diary or Woodfall’s Register* (London, England) 2 August 1791, Issue 736

Sadler's Wells introduced a group of "black musicians" into the procession of Tipu, further reinforcing the growth of racial stereotypes in the metropole.¹⁰⁶ The London public reacted with great approval, continuing to sell out every performance and pack Sadler's Wells on a daily basis until the end of the theatre season.

On the one hand, *East India Campaigning* created a stereotyped and racialized portrayal of the Mysore Wars, focusing on creating an exotic spectacle of elephants, subterranean dungeons, Eastern grandeur and "the voluptuous amusements of the Tyrant's Seraglio."¹⁰⁷ In this sense, the production created a fantasy of native capitulation that mediated the threat posed by the capture and imprisonment of British soldiers.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the play constructed an idealized portrayal of the Company's military, creating morally upstanding soldier-heroes that the British public could embrace as representing the best aspects of the national character. Far from the embarrassment and potential for moral decay embodied by the nabobs, these new Company servants were both masculine and incorruptible. The *Public Advertiser* even suggested using the Company soldiers in *East India Campaigning* as an example for the rest of the British army to follow, a comparison which would have been unheard of a few decades earlier:

The sentiment of true bravery, so nobly displayed by the Tyrant Tippoo's English prisoners, in the representation at Sadler's Wells, is worthy of being deeply engraven on the mind of every British Officer who tries the chance of war in an East India Campaign:

Tyrant – behold the triumph of the brave,
Whom Death affrights not when disgrace would save.
Fain would we live, our country's foe to face;
Gladly we die, when Death prevents disgrace.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor (London, England) 7 August 1791, Issue 614

¹⁰⁷ Star (London, England) 26 August 1791, Issue 1039

¹⁰⁸ Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (2007): 325

¹⁰⁹ Public Advertiser (London, England) 24 August 1791, Issue 17826

This was a perfect example of how empire was constructed at home in the metropole through the use of popular culture.¹¹⁰

In practice, it was not uncommon for British soldiers in captivity to renounce their identity and enter into the service of Tipu, becoming the "European Musselmen" that aroused so much consternation, but the London stage refused to admit this possibility, and offered up instead a pleasant fantasy of British soldiers who would always choose death over disgrace. These sentiments help explain why *East India Campaigning* proved to be so successful; in addition to being an exciting spectacle, it showed Britons the way they would like to see themselves, with brave and defiant Company soldiers standing up against vicious and cruel eastern tyrants. British prisoners refused to bow before the caricatured despotic figure of Tipu Sultan, boldly asserting on the stage their own masculinity identity and freedom from imprisonment. This was the crux of the shift in popular perceptions of empire taking place at the close of the eighteenth century, and the Tipu plays of the 1790s like *East India Campaigning* were an important component of these larger changes.

Disappearance of the Prisoners Controversy

The subject of the British captives attracted the lion's share of the British public's attention when Tipu Sultan first appeared on the scene during the Second Mysore War. Nearly everything that was written by British onlookers at the time could be traced back to the fate of the captives in some way. It was the very presence of these prisoners that caused the East India Company and the wider British public to devote so much interest to one particular prince in southern India. Rumors that Tipu had failed to keep his word and

¹¹⁰ John Mackenzie. *Imperialism and Popular Culture*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986)

release all of the British soldiers in his prisons served as a rallying cry for future wars of aggression against Mysore, indicating the high valuation of this subject for the Company.

However, over the course of the following two decades, the importance of Tipu's captives gradually disappeared from view, until they had almost faded away completely by the year 1800. The withering away of interest in the prisoners partially reflected the smaller number of British soldiers held within Mysore; Tipu Sultan was forced to release all of his British captives in the 1784 Treaty of Mangalore, and the same demand was repeated in the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam. Tipu never again held as many European prisoners as he had possessed during the Second Mysore War. But this fact alone remains an incomplete explanation for the diminishing role played by the captives in the British popular imagination. With the growing power of the British Company in India during the last two decades of the eighteenth century, combined with the simultaneously dwindling power of Tipu Sultan, the British felt a newfound sense of confidence in the project of empire overseas.¹¹¹ Earlier fears and pessimism associated with the British presence in India increasingly gave way to triumphant and celebratory passages extolling the might of the Company's soldiers. The British prisoners were a reminder of earlier periods of weakness and humiliation, when white Europeans had been placed at the total mercy of dark-skinned Indian rulers. It was a historical memory that the British in the metropole were eager to forget. By the close of the Fourth Mysore War at the turn of the century, the subject of the earlier British captives was rarely mentioned, both within the Company and amongst the wider discourse of British print culture. The conquest of Tipu's kingdom

¹¹¹ Peter Marshall. "A Free Though Conquering People: Britain and Asia in the Eighteenth Century." Inaugural Lecture in the Rhodes Chair of Imperial History, Delivered 5 March 1981: 3

in 1799 had served to wipe away the earlier stain on the national honor, replacing uncomfortable anxieties with bombastic celebrations of imperial triumph.

In the early years of conflict with Tipu, obtaining the freedom of the British captives took precedence over everything else. The internal documents of the East India Company make it very clear that securing the release of the British prisoners taken during the Second Mysore War was the top priority. Even before the war's conclusion, the Madras government emphasized the importance of returning the captive officers: "That no Measure can be considered as a part of a cordial Disposition of Peace, until at least the English Officers now in the Hands of Tippoo shall be released on Parole, as many are detained contrary to the express words of the Capitulation."¹¹² During the peace negotiations with Tipu in 1784, Governor-General Warren Hastings sent the following instructions to the Madras government in charge of the treaty process:

On the 1st Article, If a mutual restitution of Territory shall be found Indispensably necessary to that which we feel as our principal object, namely, the recovery of the English Prisoners, and the Servants of the Nabob, who are also Prisoners in Tippoo's Hands, and who have an equal claim to our Interposition, *We* must consent, *but we have hopes* that you will not find it *difficult to effect this point*, by agreeing to a restitution of the Places taken... [list of disputed territories] But even these we are willing to surrender rather than Hazard the actual Peace and the lives of so many of our Countrymen who have lingered during 3 years of Imprisonment in his Hands whatever concessions are made are on our part are optional and ought to be so declared to him since he has no right to them by the Treaties existing... nevertheless we are willing to yield so much to the urging of the Commands of the Court of Directors, and your repeated requisitions, and *this Point we have intirely* to your discretion.¹¹³

The East India Company was therefore willing to sacrifice any potential gains made during the conflict in exchange for the guaranteed return of the British prisoners. The Madras government concurred, noting in their own minutes that the Company reverses in

¹¹² Madas Select Committee Proceedings 14th August 1783 (p.134) IOR/H/178

¹¹³ Governor-General and Council to Madras 14 November 1783 (p.939-54) IOR/H/186 p.946-48 Emphasis in the original.

the war made it impossible to gain territorial acquisitions, and therefore, "a pressing and principal object was the saving the lives and the speedy recovery of the Liberty of the numerous Prisoners of ours, in the hands of the Enemy. To that humane End, the Sacrifice of our late acquisitions on the Malabar Coast was admitted."¹¹⁴ Removing the embarrassment of having British prisoners under the control of Tipu was more important than any other goals to be achieved in the impending peace agreement.

When the Treaty of Mangalore officially ended the war in March 1784, both sides agreed to return to the status quo. The second article of the treaty, immediately after a standard eighteenth century invocation of the desire for universal peace on both sides, stipulated the return of the British prisoners: "Article 2.... The said Nabob [Tipu] shall also immediately after signing the Treaty, send orders for the release of all the Persons who were taken and made Prisoners in the late War, and now a Live, whether European or Native and for their being safely conducted to and delivered at such English Forts and Settlements as shall be nearest to the Places where they now are."¹¹⁵ The appearance of the prisoners in the first real article of the treaty again confirmed the importance attached to their release in the eyes of the East India Company.

When a small number of captives failed to be released from Mysore, accusations that Tipu continued to retain prisoners in violation of the treaty began appearing almost immediately. Lord Macartney, President of Madras, wrote to Tipu on the subject mere weeks after the conclusion of peace, on 20 May 1784, charging him with retaining a "*few people*" in breach of the treaty. Macartney asked Tipu to release these men without delay, and assured the Sultan that he had "numerous, absolute and undeniable Evidence" of their

¹¹⁴ Minutes of Madras Select Committee 8 December 1783 (p.117-23) IOR/H/189 p. 117

¹¹⁵ Treaty with Tipu Sultan 11 March 1784 (p.1011-14) IOR/H/178

continued captivity.¹¹⁶ Macartney would write to Tipu again on 21 July, insisting that "It is in vain for you to deny the existence of these people in your Country, for the Commissioners deputed by the Madras Government to negotiate the Peace, as well as other Englishmen, saw them; and Letters have been received from them; written since the conclusion of the Treaty."¹¹⁷ Tipu responded by writing back that he held no prisoners, only his own subjects, as part of the differing understanding of these individuals detailed above. This was clearly an insufficient response in the eyes of Lord Macartney, who continued to work to secure the release of those he believed to be prisoners.

The ongoing controversy surrounding these "European Musselmen" further colored Macartney's opinion of Tipu Sultan: "I must however observe that no Confidence can safely be placed in his professions. He [Tipu] is not likely, it is true, to break his Engagements for a trivial Consideration, but where any great Interest or Object can be promoted with a fair prospect of Success He is not to be restrained by any tie whatsoever."¹¹⁸ Macartney's choice of words here closely match the "faithless and violent" characterization of Tipu which would later be applied by Lord Cornwallis. Macartney was either unable or unwilling to see the situation from a perspective of shifting and intermingling cultural exchanges, in which individuals could pass between different self-fashioned identities at their leisure. It was simply not acceptable from the point of view of Macartney, and the East India Company in general, to have their soldiers accept service in the pay of an Indian prince. Therefore, from Macartney's perspective, the remaining Europeans in Tipu's service had to be seen as *prisoners*, which made Tipu

¹¹⁶ Lord Macartney's Letter to Tippoo Sultaun 20 May 1784. IOR/H/570 p. 270-71 Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁷ Lord Macartney's Letter to Tippoo Sultaun 21 July 1784. IOR/H/570 p. 274-75

¹¹⁸ Lord Macartney to the Secret Committee of the Directors 22 October 1784 (p. 353-55) IOR/H/247 p. 354

an untrustworthy and duplicitous individual in violation of the treaty. The ongoing unresolved situation of the "European Musselmen" therefore did much to contribute to the changing popular perception of Tipu.

In sharp contrast to the situation during the Second Mysore War, by the end of the 1790s the captives issue had disappeared almost completely. Cornwallis rarely mentioned the prisoners still believed to be held by Tipu in his correspondences with the Sultan, and although Tipu was again demanded to release all British subjects in his dungeons in the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam, there was far more attention paid to the territorial and monetary sums written into the agreement.¹¹⁹ Wellesley did not reference British prisoners even one time in his correspondences with Tipu during the final months of 1798, and instead based his case for war entirely on Tipu's connections with France.¹²⁰ In the final peace settlement after the Fourth Mysore War, the subject of prisoners held by Tipu, such a crucial element of earlier conflicts, did not make an appearance until Article Seven of the proposed treaty, and merited only a single line requesting, "All prisoners in the hands of the several powers to be fairly and unequivocally released."¹²¹ Wellesley's extremely lengthy letter to the Court of Directors explaining his reasons for going to war in 1799 made no mention of needing to secure the release of British prisoners; they no longer appeared to factor into the Company's decision-making process.¹²² Clearly, the captives issue was little more than an afterthought, no longer considered to be vital by this point, suggesting the superior strategic position and greater cultural confidence felt by the Company's military in this period.

¹¹⁹ Cornwallis to Tippoo Sulatun, Definitive Treaty of Peace 17 March 1792 (p.312-25) IOR/H/252

¹²⁰ See Chapter 5

¹²¹ General Harris to Tippoo Sultan, with Draft of Preliminaries, 22 April 1799

¹²² Governor General to Directors 20 March 1799 IOR/H/255 (p. 1-57)

The lack of attention placed on the British prisoners was equally reflected in the wider sphere of popular culture in the metropole. The most popular Tipu play during the early 1790s had been *East India Campaigning*, described earlier in this chapter as featuring captured British soldiers who refused to swear themselves into the Sultan's service. Productions of this type were a means to transform British weakness in India into a symbol of national virtue, through the brave resistance to the machinations of an Asiatic tyrant, but they were still an acknowledgement of the power that Tipu had over his European foes. By the late 1790s, this show had ended its run and been replaced with *The Storming of Seringapatam*, a production of Astley's Royal Saloon and Amphitheatre that depicted the military conquest of Tipu's capital, complete with acrobatics, large animals, and soldiers drilling in formation.¹²³ The focus was no longer on British prisoners at the mercy of Tipu, but instead British soldiers storming an Indian city and killing Tipu Sultan.

The same themes were on display in the largest and most popular piece of artwork from the Fourth Mysore War, Robert Ker Porter's *Storming of Seringapatam*.¹²⁴ Exhibited to the public on a massive canvas stretching over 120 feet long at a height of 21 feet, Porter's enormous work depicted the overthrow of Tipu by the force of the Company's arms. There was no mention of prisoners, and no implication that Britons had ever been subjugated by their Indian opponents. The earlier period of weakness and vulnerability had largely passed out of the British popular imagination, replaced with images of strength and martial masculinity.

Conclusion

¹²³ As advertised in E. Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor (London, England) 29 September 1799, Issue 1039

¹²⁴ Robert Ker Porter. *The Storming of Seringapatam* (1800). Private collection. This subject is considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

The controversy surrounding the prisoners served as an introduction to Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars for most of the British public. Captive accounts suggested that Tipu was a cruel tyrant, one who tortured the poor soldiers at his mercy and forced them to convert to his religion at the point of a sword. The existence of the prisoners was a great embarrassment for the Company, a living symbol of its failure to protect its own soldiers from falling into the hands of a foreign ruler. Much of the antipathy generated against Tipu was a reaction to his control of these prisoners, an objection to his total power of life and death over British subjects. Tipu seemingly had the ability to remake their identity as he willed, converting them into Muslims and unearthing all of the fears and anxieties associated with the project of overseas colonialism.

The villainous reputation ascribed to Tipu was both a reaction to this deep-rooted fear and a means of striking back against it. The Sultan's treatment of the prisoners became a rationale for further wars of revenge, designed to conquer Mysore and remove Tipu as a threat for good. British prisoners were transformed into living embodiments of the idealized qualities of the British nation, heroically refusing to bow before foreign tyrants. The wars against Mysore became reinterpreted as a struggle between freedom and despotism, between liberty and subjugation, with the British happily portraying themselves as a "free though conquering people."¹²⁵ The next chapter investigates more fully this connection between Tipu Sultan and the concepts of tyranny and despotism, the political systems that Britons believed were characteristic of his rule. Popular belief in "Tippoo the Tyrant" also became an important part of shifting attitudes about empire in the closing decades of the eighteenth century.

¹²⁵ P. J. Marshall. *A Free though Conquering People: Eighteenth Century Britain and its Empire* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003)

Chapter Three Tippoo the Tyrant

Introduction

While the British prisoners of the Second Mysore War had been responsible for the initial public interest in Tipu Sultan, it was his image as an Oriental despot that helped to keep Tipu in the public sphere for the better part of two decades. British representations of Tipu drew upon older, pre-existing political tropes about tyranny and despotism. According to these beliefs, Tipu was a tyrant who ruled in capricious fashion, granting no rights to the subjects in his domains and acting as he saw fit, holding the power of life and death over the poor souls living in Mysore, much as he had over the captives in his possession. These characterizations of the Sultan, which were initially rare but became increasingly commonplace during the 1790s, shifted Tipu's reputation for cruelty from the relatively small number of European prisoners onto a much larger group. All of the people of Mysore were effectively victims of Tippoo the Tyrant, subject to the mad whims of a savage monster.

This villainous reputation emerged in part as a response to earlier criticism of the East India Company. Identical charges centered upon the concepts of tyranny and despotism had been leveled against the Company and its servants in the years following Plassey.¹ The soldiers and administrators of the Company were accused of acting in unscrupulous fashion during their time overseas, ruling over their Indian subjects in despotic fashion, pillaging and plundering Bengal without a care for the destruction that they left in their wake. The increasing emphasis on Tipu's own supposed Oriental

¹ Tillman Nechtman. *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 11-12

despotism during the course of the Mysore Wars was a means to counter these charges. It was argued that vile Indian rulers like Tipu Sultan were the true tyrants, best demonstrated by his treatment of the captured British prisoners, while the Company was in fact a progressive force that embodied the best qualities of the British nation. This allowed the Third Mysore War to be portrayed not as an expansionist war undertaken to acquire more wealth and territory in southern India, but as a war of liberation designed to free British prisoners and unshackle the people of Mysore from their horrible ruler. It was a much more positive way of envisioning the rule of the East India Company overseas.

In addition to the endless association of tyranny and despotism with Tipu, the Sultan was also accused of being a faithless ruler who could not be trusted. Tipu was said to break treaties whenever it suited him, making it impossible to honor his word. This became a convenient rationale both for explaining away some of the military disasters of the Company, due to the "broken word" of the faithless Sultan, and the justification for imposing very severe and humiliating terms on Mysore after the war's conclusion. Governor General Charles Cornwallis argued that Tipu's lack of humanity forced him into taking Tipu's two sons as hostages to guarantee the peace in 1792, an otherwise extraordinary and morally dubious act. This explanation was widely accepted in the British metropole, and Cornwallis was held up as a paragon of justice and moderation. He became the anti-Tipu in the mind of the British public, an example of the superior British character, and all of the values that the depraved Tipu Sultan was lacking.²

Tipu was furthermore represented as a poor ruler in his own right. It was claimed that Tipu was a fanatical Islamic bigot, in another expansion of the conversion

² Peter Marshall. "Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century" in *War, Strategy, and International Politics*. Lawrence Freeman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992): 61-63

ceremonies associated with the British prisoners earlier. Tipu was said to persecute the mostly Hindu populace of his kingdom, by destroying their temples and forcing them to convert to Islam or face execution. Although these claims proved to be untrue, British commentators used the widespread belief that Tipu was a despotic ruler to suggest that Mysore would be better governed by the British Company, and the people would prefer the blessings of British rule to their current state. In similar fashion, just as Tipu was argued to be a poor ruler over Mysore, the great public interest surrounding the two hostage princes was employed to suggest that Tipu was a poor and uncaring father as well. Written accounts and formal paintings of the hostage princes implied that Cornwallis was a superior parent when compared to Tipu, and that he would do a much better job of instructing the young boys in the proper manly virtues.³ British written accounts of the hostage princes even suggested that the boys preferred their new living arrangements to their original home, due to the despotic nature of Tipu. The wildly popular images of the hostage princes therefore anticipated many of the paternalistic elements of the nineteenth century British Raj, with childlike and backwards Indians looking up to a kindly British parental figure.⁴

This broadening of the despotic aspects of Tipu's image, from tyranny over his captives to tyranny over his entire kingdom, did much to shift popular perceptions about the Mysore Wars, and overseas empire more broadly. Although the Second Mysore War (1780-84) had received a mixed reaction in the British metropole, victory in the Third Mysore War (1790-92) led to a much wider acceptance of the East India Company and its

³ Constance McPhee. "Tipu Sultan of Mysore and British Medievalism in the Paintings of Mather Brown" in *Orientalism Transposed : The Impact of the Colonies on British Culture*. Dianne Sachko MacLeod and Julie F. Codell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998): 202-03

⁴ Hermione De Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 149

servants in the British popular imagination. The conflicts against Tipu in the 1790s were frequently portrayed in the popular press as wars of liberation fought against a faithless and cruel Oriental despot. This allowed for a wider embrace of the Company and its military, who were increasingly represented as British patriots that embodied the national honor. Instead of the older fears and pessimism about the dangers that empire posed, the British public increasingly identified with imperial heroes like Cornwallis and Wellesley. By fighting against an imagined despotism in southern India, the Company salvaged and remade its own reputation.

Tyranny and Despotism

Out of all of the various pejorative terms attributed to Tipu Sultan, the epithet that was employed the most often by the British was that of "Tippoo the Tyrant". It was an association that almost seemed to flow off the tongue in a fit of alliteration, and innumerable British writers connected Tipu together with the concept of tyrannical rule over his subjects in India. In making this association, British authors were not only making a case for the Company's superior moral claim to rule over the Indian populace, they were also tapping into an established language about despotism and despotic rule. For centuries, Europeans had argued that what separated them from peoples in other parts of the world was their love of freedom and liberty, in comparison to the tyranny and Oriental despotism practiced by Asiatic monarchs.⁵ The representation of Tipu Sultan as a tyrannical ruler provided a means to tap into these long-standing tropes about despotism, arguing his own unfitness to rule and the superior claim of the East India Company to provide governance.

⁵ Richard Koebner. "Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 1951 14 (3/4): 300-01

The innumerable portrayals of Tippoo the Tyrant were also a means to reject the claim that the Company's own servants were acting in despotic fashion in India, and were guilty of practicing Warren Hastings' famous "geographical morality" when they traveled overseas. Many of the early anxieties associated with the Company's rule were bound up in these concepts of tyranny and despotism, the fear that the exercise of absolute power in the Orient was corrupting the native sons of Britain. Despotism had long been associated with Asiatic rulers by Europeans, but the assumption of Company rule over Bengal introduced a new urgency to the subject, in the form of the nabobs who threatened to bring back "Oriental despotism" with them from the East.⁶

The crux of the problem could be summed up in succinct fashion: who were the ones acting despotically in India? Was it the Company's own governors and administrators, the nabobs who immiserated the local populace in the process of enriching themselves? Or was it the Indian princes, rulers like Tipu Sultan, who were the true tyrants? During the course of the Mysore Wars at the end of the eighteenth century, popular representations of Tipu Sultan were responsible for shifting British public opinion towards the latter group, replacing the image of the greedy nabob with the heroic soldier and the incorrigible administrator. The label of "tyrant" would be increasingly applied to Indian rulers, their supposed crimes used as pretexts to invade and occupy more and more territory.⁷ Tipu Sultan served as perhaps the best such example of this process, with his vilification as a stereotypical Oriental despot providing the perfect foil

⁶ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 225-41

⁷ Wellesley made very similar claims to justify his later war against the Marathas, referring to the Peshwa in correspondences as treacherous, hostile, insincere, systematically jealous, and guilty of despicable policy. See for examples Lord Mornington to Colonel William Palmer 19 February 1799 (p. 257-63) IOR/H/574 and Lord Mornington to Colonel William Palmer 10 May 1799 (p. 455-60) IOR/H/574

for the military efforts of the Company. Through the spectacle of the Mysore Wars, the servants and soldiers of the Company came to embody the best qualities of the British nation, fighting a virtuous war of liberation to free southern India from the degradations of Tippoo the Tyrant. It was a vision of empire that the British public found easy to embrace.

The concept of "despotism" had its origins in ancient Greek, derived from the word *despotes* and referring to the relationship between master and slave. Aristotle made occasional remarks connecting arbitrary and tyrannical rulers with barbarian kingdoms; this was the original genesis of the phrase "Oriental despotism."⁸ However, it did not enter the political lexicon of Europe until a relatively late period, revived by the French pamphlet wars of the late seventeenth century and used in reference to Louis XIV's absolutism, which was said to remove political liberty and destroy private property. In particular, the reign of Louis was compared by his critics to the tyranny of the Turkish Sultan, demonstrating again how despotic rule was understood through reference to Asian political systems.⁹

The encounters between European travelers and powerful Indian rulers served to reinforce the concept of despotism as a mode of governance that characterized Eastern states. Visitors to the Mughal court during the seventeenth century such as Thomas Roe and Francois Bernier suggested that Indian rulers acted in despotic fashion, accruing vast sums of wealth while denying their subjects the right to own private property. Bernier wrote in 1671 that this system of "oriental despotism" resulted in tyrannical rulership, and brought about the destruction of the landscape: "Take away the right of private property

⁸ Koebner, Richard. "Despot and Despotism: Vicissitudes of a Political Term" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 1951 14 (3/4): 277-78

⁹ *Ibid*, 300-01

in land, and you introduce, as a sure and necessary consequence, tyranny, slavery, injustice, beggary, and barbarism: the ground will cease to be cultivated and become a dreary wilderness."¹⁰ The lack of property ownership and intermediary bodies between the absolute monarch and the individual (such as parliaments or juries) were seen as the chief characteristics of this system, which was how Europeans believed Asian states to be governed.

Although the usage of the term "despotism" had changed over time from its original usage in ancient Greek, by the middle of the eighteenth century it had come to embody a standard set of political tropes. A despotic system of government was characterized by an all-powerful sovereign, in which individuals were nothing more than instruments of the ruler's will. A despotic system not only denied personal liberties, but also abrogated private property and all corporate bodies. Laws did not exist under such a system, and trade and cultivation of land were believed to be heavily retarded due to the constraints of the sovereign.¹¹ Despotism was very frequently associated with non-European rulers, most often the Turkish Sultan, but increasingly with regards to Indian rulers as well. As the Mughal Empire continued to decline during the eighteenth century, the notion of "Oriental despotism" was increasingly invoked by Europeans as an explanation, arguing that this tyrannical system of rule had impoverished the peasantry and brought about the faltering state of affairs. It was only a short step from this position to advocating Company rule over India as a remedy, replacing the corrupt native political system with superior British institutions. These arguments would become a common refrain during the Third and Fourth Mysore Wars of the 1790s.

¹⁰ Francois Bernier. "Letter to Colbert" from *Travels in the Mogul Empire, Vol. 2* (Delhi: S. Chand, 1968; 1671): 238

¹¹ Franco Venturi. "Oriental Despotism" in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1963 24 (1): 133-42

One such example of the way in which this discourse on oriental despotism informed British understanding of India in this period can be seen in Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan* (1768). Dow was a disaffected former Company servant who wrote critically about its actions overseas in his history of the subcontinent. Nevertheless, he still viewed India through the framework of despotism, writing how "The [Mughal] Emperor is absolute and sole arbiter in every thing, and controlled by no law. The lives and properties of the greatest Omrahs are as much at his disposal, as those of the meanest subjects."¹² In the preface to his third volume, Dow wrote a "Dissertation on the Origins of Despotism in Indostan", in which he argued that the hot climate of the subcontinent predisposed its peoples towards despotic forms of rule.¹³ He also found that Islam as a religion was "peculiarly calculated for despotism", based on the life of Muhammad and the Muslim family structure.¹⁴

However, despite these conditions, Dow claimed that Bengal was prosperous under the Mughals and commerce flourished to a wide extent. It was only after they were replaced by the local nawabs that conditions began to deteriorate, a process which reached its nadir after the Company's administrators assumed control of the region:

The distemper of avarice, in the extreme, seemed to infect all... Nothing in the conquered provinces was premeditated but rapine. Every thing, but plunder, was left to chance and necessity, who impose their own laws. The farmers, having no certainty of holding the lands beyond the year, made no improvements. Their profit must be immediate, to satisfy the hand of Avarice, which was suspended over their heads... Year after year brought new tyrants, or confirmed thereof, in the practice of their former oppressors. The tenants, being, at length, ruined, the farmers were unable to make good their contracts with government...¹⁵

¹² Alexander Dow. *The History of Hindostan: Translated from the Persian, 3rd Edition, Vol. 1* (London: Printed by John Murray, 1792, 1770, 1768): xii

¹³ Mark Harrison. *Climates and Constitution: Health, Race, Environment, and British Imperialism in India, 1600-1850*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999)

¹⁴ Alexander Dow. *The History of Hindostan, Vol. 3* (1792): i-v

¹⁵ *Ibid*, lxvii-lxviii

Dow explicitly referred to the British servants of the East India Company as tyrants in this particular passage. When the peasants were unable to pay their taxes due to this exploitation, Dow wrote that the Company became more oppressive still, and turned to armed military force for collection. They brought terror and ruin throughout the Company's domains, ruling over an immiserated populace through military dictatorship.¹⁶ These descriptions of the sufferings of the Indian peasantry were not imaginary, as modern historians have estimated that the Bengal Famine of 1770 was responsible for the death of 10 million people, or roughly a third of the region's population.¹⁷ The system of Company rule in Bengal portrayed by Dow was unquestionably despotic in its own makeup, abrogating the right to private property from poor Indian farmers and exploiting them for revenue. At least under the Mughals there had not been such a destructive famine. The prevailing political philosophy of this period further suggested that empires of conquest were likely to bring enslavement eventually to both conquered and conqueror alike, which meant that the actions of the Company's servants overseas had potentially dire consequences for the British nation at home.¹⁸

This language of tyranny and despotism was explicitly referenced in British popular culture as a way to criticize the actions of the East India Company. For example, a simple cartoon designed to mock Robert Clive from 1772 played upon these political tropes. "The Madras Tyrant" depicts a British man in military uniform riding on horseback, with a haughty expression on his face and a riding crop in his hand ready to

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Vol. 3, lxviii

¹⁷ Romesh Chunder Dutt. *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1969, 1902): 52-53. More recently, see Sushil Chaudhuri. *From Prosperity to Decline: Eighteenth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995)

¹⁸ See P. J. Marshall. *A Free though Conquering People: Eighteenth Century Britain and its Empire* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003). This is also discussed further in Chapter 4.

spur on the animal to greater speed [Figure 1].¹⁹ The caption below the image reads "Jos. or the Father of Murder. Rapine etc." While this was indeed a very basic cartoon, it was useful nonetheless for its unequivocal evidence of negative popular perceptions of the Company, and in particular its leading figures. The association of tyranny with the governors and administrators of the East India Company in this period holds great significance in light of how the same political language would be later deployed against the Company's Indian opponents. In the 1770s there was public condemnation of the nabobs, as in this image of the "Madras Tyrant"; by the 1790s, the same epithets had been transferred successfully to the Indian prince Tipu Sultan, who became "Tippoo the Tyrant." The continued deployment of this language of tyranny was not a coincidence, and Enlightenment thinkers across Europe had used similar terminology to argue that overseas imperialism was inherently unjust.²⁰

References to the Company's overseas servants as tyrants had a long currency in popular opinion. A dozen years after the appearance of "The Madras Tyrant", satirist W.G. Phillips continued to use the same terminology to characterize the nabobs in his prints. His cartoon "The Mirror" shows Charles Fox addressing an election crowd in London, making the case for why Fox should be returned to his former post as prime minister. More importantly for this project, the image includes the presence of a well-dressed British man in the crowd labeled "Indian Tyrant", who stated: "Had he [Fox] passed the India Bill/ I could no more my Coffers fill/ With Rupees. Or in Blood have

¹⁹ J. S. "The Madras Tyrant, or the Director of Directors." Published by M. Darly, 16 March 1772. Image #5017 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, Vol. 5-7*. (London: British Museum Publications, 1978)

²⁰ Sankar Muthu. *Enlightenment Against Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

glutted/ Oh! I should like the Reformer gutted.”²¹ When Phillips created this cartoon in 1784, the notion of the "Indian Tyrant" still referred to the traders and soldiers of the East India Company, the British men who had traveled across the oceans and then been corrupted by the decadent morals of the East. While Asian rulers could also be associated with tyranny and despotic rule, prior to the Mysore Wars of the late eighteenth century they were no more likely to be portrayed as such than Europeans were. The rehabilitation of the Company's public image in the following decades was intimately connected with the redefinition of who and what constituted an "Indian Tyrant", which makes the use of this terminology of such interest.

This same language of tyranny and despotism was reinterpreted during the Mysore Wars, directed away from the Company's own servants and targeted at Tipu Sultan instead. This redeployment of which party was acting tyrannically in India played a crucial role in reshaping British popular attitudes about empire, and it began almost immediately when Tipu first appeared on the scene. When Tipu and his father Haider invaded the Carnatic at the start of the Second Mysore War in 1780, they were accused at once of acting in despotic fashion towards the populace of the region. A letter from the Madras council written in November 1780 gave evidence to the contrary, and stated that Haider “has conducted himself with a degree of Policy which was hardly to be expected from a Man of his tyrannical and sanguinary disposition. The Inhabitants of Arcot and other conquered Places have been treated with great lenity.”²² Similar arguments have been advanced by modern Indian historians, who view the destruction attributed to

²¹ W.G. Phillips. "The Mirror." Published by S. Fores, 17 May 1784. Image #6582 in Mary Dorothy George, *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

²² Madras President and Council to Directors 29 November 1780 (p. 683-89) IOR/H/150 p. 686

Haider's invasion as British exaggerations or fabrications.²³ However, other British writers publishing for a much larger public audience in the metropole associated the arrival of Haider and Tipu with mass slaughter and cruelty:

Mean-while, his [Haider's] numerous cavalry over-ran and ravaged the country. Numbers of inoffensive and unresisting people were sacrificed to a savage thirst of blood: some were cruelly tortured that they might be induced to give up treasures they were supposed to conceal; others were wantonly mutilated, and at this day, many wretched men, without their hands, or ears, or noses, record the inhumanity of a barbarous conqueror. Women were subjected to the brutality of lust, or forced to save their honour by the forfeit of their lives; a ransom which some had the fortitude to pay.²⁴

This description by William Thomson mirrored the situation laid out in Dow's history of Bengal above, with poor Indian peasants ravaged by a callous and unstoppable force. Notably, however, the subject of the despotic actors had changed. Thomson's atrocities were committed not by British nabobs acting out of control, but by savage Indian rulers whom the Company had to defeat to restore order.

This situation provided an early example of the divergence in how Haider and Tipu were portrayed by the British, between competing views of honorable and tyrannical behavior. This divergence in opinion was characteristic of the debate that surrounded the Indian prince during the early years of the Mysore Wars, before more negative characterizations eventually won out. With the passage of more time after Haider and Tipu's initial invasion of the Carnatic, the atrocity stories surrounding the events became more elaborate and fanciful. For example, Mark Wilks, author of one of the first formal histories of the Mysore Wars, wrote in 1817 that Haider "drew a line of merciless desolation, marked by the continuous blaze of flaming towns and villages. He

²³ B. Sheikh Ali. *Tipu Sultan : A Study in Diplomacy and Confrontation* (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1982) and Mohibbul Hasan. *History of Tipu Sultan, Second Edition*. (Calcutta: World Press, 1971)

²⁴ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (London: Sold by J. Sewell, 1788, 1789): 172

directed the indiscriminate mutilation of every human being who should linger near the ashes."²⁵ The original, alternative descriptions of Haider's invasion became lost as eyewitness accounts receded into historical memory. Although the 1780s was a period of competing viewpoints about Tipu, with the passage of time the supporters of the villainous Tipu Legend's interpretation of events gained more and more credibility amongst the general public.

There were many British authors who praised Tipu's character during the early period of the Second Mysore War, and offered a very different interpretation from later accounts. These characterizations frequently drew upon the same language of despotism to make their case, arguing that Tipu was not the monstrous figure that he was often portrayed. Lord Macartney of Madras provided this glowing opinion of his character in early 1783: "The youthful and spirited heir of Hyder without the odium of his Father's vices, or his tyranny, seems by some popular acts, and by the hopes which a new reign inspires and by the adoption of European discipline, likely to become a more formidable foe even than his father."²⁶ Perhaps holding this same impression in mind, Macartney encouraged a policy of diplomatic engagement with Tipu after the war's conclusion, believing that Tipu would hold to the terms of the treaty: "There seems a friendly, or rather a pacifistic Inclination on his part which is favourable to the public Tranquility, and I am inclined to think he will not break with this, unless some extraordinary, and certain Advantage should tempt him."²⁷ Macartney was far from the only individual

²⁵ Mark Wilks. *Historical Sketches of the South of India, in an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysoor, Vol. 3* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810-1817): 2

²⁶ Lord Macartney to Directors 22 January 1783 (p.147) IOR/H/176

²⁷ Lord Macartney to the Secret Committee of the Directors 30 January 1785 (p. 373-86) IOR/H/247 p. 379-80

within the Company who suggested a policy of engagement with Tipu, hoping to turn him into an ally against the Marathas.²⁸

Major Alexander Dirom's narrative of the Third Mysore War adopted a slightly different stance on this subject. It lauded the prosperity of Tipu's kingdom, stating that the countryside was full of inhabitants and the soil cultivated to its full extent. Although according to Dirom Tipu's government was strict and arbitrary, it was "the despotism of a politic and able sovereign, who nourishes, not oppresses, the subjects who are to be the means of his future aggrandizement: and his cruelties were, in general, only inflicted on those whom he considered as his enemies."²⁹ This representation suggested that Tipu's method of rule fell short of European standards of liberty, but was nonetheless effective and prosperous in its own right.

Others waxed poetically on the character of Tipu himself. The French author Maistre de la Tour compared Haider and Tipu to Philip and Alexander of Macedon: "The total defeat of a detachment commanded by Colonel Brawlie [Bailey] is likewise an exploit of Tippou Saeb; who having began, like Alexander, to gain battles at the age of eighteen, continues to march in the step of that Grecian hero, who he may one day resemble as well by the heroism of his actions as by the multiplicity of his conquests."³⁰ This was not an uncommon comparison, referencing Philip and Alexander, and was used by other authors in addition to de la Tour's translated account of the Second Mysore War. William Thomson praised Tipu's education, and compared his struggle to that of Hannibal's against Rome: "Both at once subtle and brave; studious of the knowledge of

²⁸ These divergent opinions regarding Tipu within the Company are discussed further in Chapter 4.

²⁹ Major Alexander Dirom. *A Narrative of the Campaign in India, which Terminated the War with Tippoo Sultan in 1792* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer, 1793, 1794, 1985): 249-50

³⁰ Maistre de la Tour. *The History of Ayder Ali Khan, Nabob-Bahader, Vol. 1-2*. (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1784) French original (Paris, 1783): 309

their times; trained by their fathers in hostility to the first power of the age; exciting the vengeance of all nations against that power; and in this career, taking a wider range than that which usually bounded their views."³¹ The comparison to Hannibal portrayed Tipu as an antagonist to the British power, but as an honorable one, not as the tyrannical figure of the Tipu Legend. Thomson's stress on the education of Tipu, who was instructed in multiple languages along with mathematics and military gunnery, undermined the accusations of other sources that Tipu was an ignorant savage.

Voices critical of the Company in the early 1780s made the case that its injustices were far worse than anything that Tipu Sultan had done during the Second Mysore War.

An editorial letter written in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* contended:

I defy any Asiatic cruelty to exceed the cruelties practiced by some of the English servants of the East India Company resident in Asia... Such as have been practiced, for example, may be practiced again; as blowing off gun powder in an Indian's ear, flicking an awl through an Indian's ear to peg him to the boarded side of a room, putting lengths of gun-match between another's fingers bound together and lighted, to bring them to confessions about treasures to be plundered. Oh! shameful, dishonourable, shocking to humanity – and this by the servants of the United Company of Merchants trading (monopolizing and plundering) to the East Indies.³²

This unnamed individual blamed the Company for inflicting the same kind of savage cruelties upon the Indian people as those alleged of Tipu. This was a direct reference to the controversy surrounding the captives taken by Tipu during the war; it was therefore no surprise that British prisoners received cruel treatment back in turn from the Sultan, due to the injustices committed by the British themselves. The anonymous open letter serves as an interesting reversal of the typical narrative of Asiatic despotism, charging that the East India Company was guilty of being the true tyrants in India.

³¹ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789)

³² *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 26 November 1784, Issue 17460

Innes Munro, despite being an officer in the Company's military, wrote to criticize how the Company combined war and commerce, and disgraced the British nation overseas: "They soon became so formidable and renowned in arms as to take the responsibility of invasion, conquest, and innocent bloodshed, upon themselves, attacking the powers of India upon selfish speculation as their avarice and ambition dictated, and continuing wantonly to sport away the lives of their countrymen, until they had, by the most dishonourable acts of injustice and oppression, rendered the British name odious in all the Indian courts, and usurped the immense territories now in their possession..."³³ Munro published his narrative of the war in 1789, and his critique was likely influenced by the proceedings of the Warren Hastings trial, as the wording in the passage above was very similar to many of the charges made by Edmund Burke a year earlier.³⁴ Munro's critical account further accused the Company of bringing about a mass famine in Madras during 1782, writing of the streets and roads strewn with bodies and the "frightful skeletons" supplicating for a morsel of rice to eat.³⁵ This was very much not the image of itself that the Company wanted to promote, and represented a direct attack upon its legitimacy as a territorial sovereign. All of these sources grounded their criticism of the Company in regard to its treatment of Indian subjects, often accusing the Company of the very same prisoner atrocities as Tipu Sultan had been charged. The implication was that the Company's servants were no better than Tipu, if not worse, and they were guilty of acting in despotic fashion towards the people of India.

³³ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 100-103

³⁴ Edmund Burke. "Speech on Opening of Impeachment 15, 16, 18, 19 February 1788" in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6*. Peter Marshall (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981): 294

³⁵ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (1789): 298-300

These competing claims that drew upon the language of tyranny to criticize the East India Company continued to appear into the early 1790s during the Third Mysore War. The *Bee or Literary Intelligencer* of London wrote in early 1792 about how the British people had been told that Tipu was one of “the most cruel despots that ever ruled over a nation,” detested by all his subjects, only to find that “all these assertions have been contradicted by the most undeniable facts” as his soldiers and subjects stood firm and resisted the Company’s military. The *Bee* then further compared the character of Tipu with the character of the East India Company: “It now appears that this ferocious monster... is a kind and affectionate son, and an indulgent master, that he has been busied during his whole reign in protecting the lower orders of his people from the ruinous grip of grandees... all this [the war] for what? To satisfy the caprice of banditti who are eager to share in the spoils.”³⁶ This journal made a strong case for defending Tipu, both in terms of his character and his military prowess. It charged that the British public had been lied to about the war, and for no reason other than the enrichment of individuals in the East India Company, specifically using the term “banditti” which had been popularized during the nabob controversies of the 1760s and 1770s.³⁷

This same line of reasoning was continued and expanded upon by the anonymous author Benevolus, writing in an editorial entitled “The Tyrant” for the *General Magazine* of 1792. In this lengthy diatribe against the Company, Benevolus turned the usage of the “tyrant” epithet on its head, directing it back against the merchants and administrators of Leadenhall Street. Benevolus wrote that the use of the word tyrant to describe Tipu was a particularly good choice, as he was convinced that “we could not have invented a title for

³⁶ *Bee or Literary Intelligencer* (London, England) 29 February 1792, Issue 63, p. xvii-xviii

³⁷ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. ““Our Execrable Banditti’: Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain” in *Albion XVI* (1984): 225-41

Tippoo that would more effectually have prejudiced the good people of this country against him,” as a means of duping the public into supporting a war carried out for the enrichment of a very few.³⁸ Benevolus asked the reader to suppose that the reverse had taken place, and imagine that Indian soldiers had invaded Britain: "Let us reverse it – suppose, then, *all* that we have done in *India*, realized by their troops here, our King called a tyrant, our country over run and laid waste, thousands of harmless people destroyed, our wives and daughters violated... would such circumstances excite our love and respect for them? Would we treat such visitors with hospitality and *lenity*?"³⁹

This justification provided for the behavior of Tipu, Benevolus concluded by predicting a pessimistic outcome for the future of British India, as the karmic just desserts for the actions of the Company’s servants overseas:

As an Englishman, I find my character degraded, my judgment insulted, and my humanity sported with by them; and in these sentiments, I am persuaded, I shall not stand alone; for he that can read the accounts from India without grief and concern for the wounded honour of his country, and the cause of humanity must possess feelings I do not covet. “The glorious peace” we have *made*, from its nature, we cannot expect will be lasting, as compulsive acts are never considered as binding on the party they are imposed on, of course they never outlive necessity; we must, therefore, not be surprised, if “the tyrant,” out of whose power, I fear, we have put it to forgive us, should ere long be able to form a league against us *in turn*, get hold of some of our people, and then retaliate on us what we have so fair a claim to... that India would, probably, at a period not very distant, become another America to us.⁴⁰

The editorial by Benevolus serves as an extremely important source, consisting of one of the most comprehensive denials and rejections of the negative Tipu Legend to be found anywhere in print during this period. The author denied the allegations of Tipu’s cruelty as exaggerations of the Company, and touched upon all of the major anti-Company

³⁸ "Benevolus". *Pigs' Meat or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude* (London, 1794) Vol. 1, Issue 1, p. 148-51 Reprinting of the General Magazine of Sept. 1792

³⁹ *Ibid*, emphasis in the original

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, emphasis in the original

themes of the late eighteenth century: greed and avarice amongst the Company's servants, cruelty towards Indians, irresponsible style of rule, and deception towards the British public. Benevolus also exhibited the spirit of pessimism regarding the future of India so common amongst the Opposition critics of the war, making an explicit comparison to the recent loss of the American colonies.⁴¹ Benevolus posed the by now familiar question of which party was acting tyrannically in India, and argued that the Company was much more guilty of that term than Tipu. The continued usage of this same language indicated how popular perceptions of Tipu Sultan were linked to the broader debate about the morality of overseas empire.

As a means of combating these claims, supporters of the East India Company also made use of despotism as a theme to contend that Company was engaged in a series of wars against Tippoo the Tyrant, a dangerous and fanatical ruler who represented the antithesis of British liberties. The struggle against Tipu was portrayed as a battle between British virtue and Indian vice, with the Company's soldiers and administrators embodying the British nation. Tipu Sultan was represented as a stereotypical Oriental despot, who exercised rule over his subjects and over the captured British prisoners in a master and slave relationship. The repeated and unending assertions of Tipu's tyrannical behavior in the sphere of British popular culture were responsible for helping to change the earlier skeptical attitudes towards the Company mentioned previously. Although these images of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars were far from the only factor contributing to shifting perceptions of empire, they nevertheless played an important role in this process.

Tipu's representation as a despotic figure in the British metropole began during the Second Mysore War of the early 1780s. In one early example, Tipu briefly appeared

⁴¹ See Chapter 4

during a speech in the House of Commons praising the conduct of Governor General Warren Hastings. In the words of Commodore Jobstone, "He [Hastings] had... signalized himself in those very fields on which the Macedonian Chief had been victorious, and he had completely overset all the powerful operations, and all the diabolical machinations of Tippoo Saib, that bold and formidable invader of British liberty."⁴² Even at this very early period in 1783, the speaker used Tipu as a villainous prop that threatened British freedoms in order to win support for the administrative leadership of the Company. It was noteworthy that an early appearance of Tipu in parliamentary politics was again linked to an explicit threat to British freedom.

The first clear association of Tipu together with the concept of tyranny appeared in the London newspapers in early 1784. Quoting an "anonymous officer" in the Company's service, the text stated: "Tippoo Saib is far from the character he has been represented to us; instead of being a friend to peace, he had proved himself a restless, treacherous, inhuman tyrant. He is entirely influenced by French politics, and has four battalions of Dutch, Portuguese, and French in his service... his army is well appointed, and more formidable than that of his father Hyder Ally."⁴³ This was one of the first associations of the word "tyrant" with Tipu, which in time was to become inextricably linked with his method of rule for the British public. The lack of sourcing for this account was also significant. Up to this point in time, no description of this sort about Tipu had appeared anywhere in British popular print culture, until it was supplied here by an anonymous Company officer. The officer notably failed to state *why* Tipu should be viewed as a treacherous tyrant, leaving this point unexamined. Although these assertions

⁴² Morning Post and Daily Advertiser (London, England) 12 November 1783, Issue 3357

⁴³ Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser (London, England) 21 January 1784, Issue 1009

were rare during the early 1780s, and contested by opposition figures who favored peaceful engagement with Tipu when they did appear, they would become enormously more influential during the following decade.

By the time of the Third Mysore War (1790-92), Tipu was much more frequently portrayed both within Company documents and in the British popular press as a ruthless Oriental despot. The *Public Advertiser* wrote during this period of shifting attitudes in 1791, suggesting that although the Sultan was an exceptionally talented individual, he was unfortunately twisted by cruelty:

That he is a Prince of uncommon ability; that he has a genius of vast extent, but a genius turned to ill, that he has a rapid succession of ideas, both as a Politician and as a General; that he has a bold and investigative mind in all his operations and pursuits; that the din of war, and the clangor of arms, are the music to which his ears are organized, must be readily admitted... But all the brilliancy of parts, all the elevation and splendor of talents which distinguish this Oriental Monarch, are shaded and degraded by a lust of ambition, a thirst for power, and an exercise of cruelty, which dishonour and debase the human character, be it in what sphere it may, or however signalized by nature abilities. This haughty tyrant, cultivated and educated as his mind is, follows, like a brute, the mere impression of passions, and, counteracting both reason and humanity, disgraces his species.⁴⁴

This summation of Tipu's character existed in a transitional state, bridging the earlier praise for Tipu the skilled general with the growing belief in Tipu the brutal despot. Viewed from this perspective, Tipu was all the more of a disappointing ruler, as he had the potential to rise above his station and instead succumbed to baser instincts, much in the same vein as other accounts charging him with excessive sensual lust. Despite all of his talents, Tipu still ultimately remained a tyrant and a brute.

The *World* newspaper echoed similar thoughts, suggesting that Tipu's education and military prowess were both compromised by his atrocities: "Tippoo Saib then is possessed of every qualification that can form the great warrior, but he is most defective

⁴⁴ *Public Advertiser* (London, England) 8 October 1791, Issue 17865

in that particular which can render the character most respected in the eyes of civilized society – he is without Humanity. His treatment of the British prisoners will mark him to all posterity as an unrelenting and sanguinary Tyrant, and the constitutional greatness of his mind, will be obscured by the ferocity and depravity of his heart.”⁴⁵ This criticism further implied that this was the difference between the “civilized society” of the British and the more “barbarous” Indian one encountered overseas, with the British possessing the superior quality of “Humanity.” This was the critical difference between Tipu and the British, best symbolized by Lord Cornwallis, as the latter's possession of civility and morality justified his superior right to rule over Mysore's Indian population.

Further sources from the early 1790s were yet more critical of Tipu, failing even to acknowledge that he was a capable ruler and skilled military leader. A minute drawn up by the Madras presidency charged that Tipu was abusive towards his subordinates, his words false and hypocritical, with his overall policy differing widely from his father Haider and contributing to the ruinous state of his revenues.⁴⁶ London's *Evening Mail* echoed these charges, stating that Tipu's disposition was “naturally cruel, passionate and revengeful,” his understanding and judgment much inferior to his father. The *Evening Mail* had no confidence in Tipu's military prowess either: “He is a good soldier but an unskillful General: he punishes more from the influence of passion and prejudice, than attention to justice; and sometimes retains the pay of his troops for several months, whilst his own Saucars lend money at an enormous interest, which is stopped when they pay is issued.”⁴⁷ Other newspapers leveled more fantastic claims about Tipu's character; the

⁴⁵ World (London, England) 9 July 1792, Issue 1724

⁴⁶ Some particulars relative to Tippoo Suldaun, taken from the Information of Mahomed Khoushro who left Tippoo May 1788, Madras December 1790 (p. 291-311) IOR/H/251 p. 292-93

⁴⁷ Evening Mail (London, England) 7 May 1792, Issue 500

Bath Chronicle reported that Tipu and his father Haider had a habit of cutting off the heads of captured foes, then preserving them in pickling barrels afterwards for sport.⁴⁸

These were the sort of capricious and cruel actions expected of Oriental despots.

This theme was one of many taken up by Col. John Murray in an extraordinary short account entitled “Sketches of the Character of Tippoo Sultaun.” Written shortly before the outbreak of the Third Mysore War in the hopes of encouraging the Company to begin another conflict, Murray’s hyperbolic tirade painted Tipu as an inhuman abomination, completely beyond redemption and without virtues. Describing Tipu’s interactions with the Nairs of the Malabar Coast, Murray wrote that Tipu “has tortured the Inhabitants, Violated and Plundered their Pagodas, Murdered every man of consequence who has not immediately shewn an example to his dependants by adopting the faith, and has at length thrown the Country into a Scene of Blood and Confusion, seldom to be equalled in the most inhuman actions of any Tyrant who ever existed.”⁴⁹ In summarizing Tipu’s deceptive nature, Murray stated:

If an agreeable demeanor be a Virtue, he is a man possessed of the most pleasing and courteous manners, under which he endeavors to conceal the most Blackest Crimes, and the most inexorable Cruelty of disposition to gratify his insatiable Avarice, and under the Mask of Religious enthusiasm, he drinks the Blood of his Subjects with a Savage Joy; and opens with his unrelenting Sword a Scene which plunges the Soul into the deepest emotions of Melancholy and Woe.⁵⁰

This particular account's vivid, colorful language illustrated the intense hatred that Tipu inspired within some factions of the East India Company. The Sultan was represented in these sketches as the worst sort of tyrant imaginable, given the most savage and demonic qualities that the author could call to mind.

⁴⁸ *Bath Chronicle* (Bath, England) 19 June 1788, Issue 1438

⁴⁹ Col. John Murray, "Sketches of the Character of Tippoo Sultaun" (written April 1789, sent to Dundas 3 September 1792) (p.821-24) IOR/H/387 p. 821

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 823-24

Murray's account provided one of the earliest examples of the fully developed, mature incarnation of the Tipu Legend. Tipu was represented as an inhuman monster, and his character employed as a means to persuade the reader in supporting the cause of the East India Company. When Murray wrote his Sketches in April 1789, it was done with the purpose of persuading Company officials to declare war on Tipu and intervene with the Nairs on the Malabar Coast. This was before Tipu's dispute with the Rajah of Travancore took place and drew the Company into another conflict in southern India.⁵¹ At the time, his characterization of Tipu represented the fringe element of extremist rhetoric, supported only by the Anglo-India community and their desire for a war of revenge. By the end of the Third Mysore War, however, this sort of polemicizing had become widespread, spurred on by the political debate between parties in Parliament, and the villainous incarnation of Tipu had become widely accepted in British popular culture. The sending of "Sketches of the Character of Tippoo Sultaun" back to London in September 1792 for publication after the war nicely symbolized this shift in Tipu's image that had taken place over the duration of the conflict.

The contemporary literature surrounding the Fourth Mysore War in 1798 and 1799 was noteworthy for the failure of any positive mentions of Tipu to appear in the British popular press. Following a long period of debate and competing representations of the Sultan during the previous wars, the Fourth Mysore War firmly established the image of Tipu as a tyrannical Oriental despot in public discourse. This is apparent both from the negative descriptions of his character published during and after the war, along with the complete lack of more positive representations that called to mind the "youthful and

⁵¹ See Chapter 1

spirited heir" of two decades earlier. The image of Tippoo the Tyrant became firmly crystallized afterward this point as the historical memory of the Mysore Wars.

One such example was the rapid publication of *Authentic Memoirs of Tippoo Sultan*, written by an anonymous "Officer in the East India Service." It was little more than a biographical sketch of Tipu, written to capitalize on the public fascination with the Sultan in the last months of 1799. The account was rushed to publication in order to capture this market, and therefore was far from the most reputable of sources, but nonetheless served as a barometer of the public sentiment of the moment. The memoirs referred to Haider Ali as the "great and despotic usurper", who instructed Tipu in the general qualifications of Indian rulers, ambition and ferocity: "The use of warlike instruments is there esteemed the first part of education; cruelty too often mistaken for heroism, and impetuosity for magnanimity. Tippoo gave early proofs of all these Indian virtues, and was always admitted to his father's councils..."⁵² As these opening lines to the memoirs indicate, they provided an extremely negative portrayal of Tipu's personality, one perfectly fitting with Wellesley's characterization during the final conflict. The authentic memoirs summarized their characterization of Tipu in the following manner:

From the example of his father he united all the qualities of a warrior and a statesman, but he inherited more of his turbulence and less of his policy. Young and enterprising, he was superior to his father in military talents, as he was inferior to him in the dissimulation of Indian politics... He was also more addicted to grandeur and pleasure, and discovered stronger traits of despotism and cruelty.⁵³

Tipu was portrayed as a capricious Asiatic tyrant, with his great military skill offset by his savagery and cruelty. There was also a reprisal of the claims of Tipu's sensuality and

⁵² Officer in the East India Service. *Authentic Memoirs of Tippoo Sultan* (London: Printed for the author by M. Allen, 1799): 1-3. Emphasis in the original.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 33-34

uncontrollable lust, which would also become incorporated into the historical memory of Tipu in later decades.⁵⁴ Like other Indians, Tipu had been a savage ruled entirely by his passions, lacking the civilized sophistication of the superior British character.

E. Johnson's British Gazette denounced Tipu as a restless tyrant whose "boundless cruelties excited the indignation of his own subjects, and aroused even the meek Hindoo from his habitual submission." The Sultan had advanced forward without pause, until finally he was brought to bay by the Company, putting an end to "his career of despotism, cruelty, and oppression."⁵⁵ This was a standard denunciation of Tipu's character, and can be taken as representative of the spectrum of public opinion on the subject, once again making explicit reference to despotism as a concept. Similar descriptions were commonplace in British print culture in the final months of 1799-1800. The *Whitehall Evening Post* claimed that Tipu had been a poor ruler in addition to a cruel depot, expressing surprise that such a "weak Potentate" had been able to maintain his position for so long. Instead, his absurd and unprovoked antipathy against the Company had resulted in his downfall.⁵⁶ This was a more subtle change from earlier accounts of the Sultan, where even Tipu's detractors who considered him a tyrant also conceded that he was a powerful and dangerous monarch. The reflections on Tipu written after the Fourth Mysore War's conclusion were not even willing to grant that he had been a capable ruler, as if to deny the fear and anxiety that Tipu had provoked for so long.

Alexander Beatson provided an extended sketch of Tipu's character at the end of his campaign narrative of the Fourth Mysore War, describing Tipu as a weak ruler

⁵⁴ See for example the fictional portrayal of Tipu in Sir Walter Scott's *The Surgeon's Daughter*. (Boston and New York: Houghton Miffling Company, 1923, 1827). This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

⁵⁵ *E. Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* (London, England) 22 September 1799, Issue 1038

⁵⁶ *Whitehall Evening Post* (London, England) 7 June 1800, Issue 8249

completely incapable of making decisions and untrustworthy due to the constant changing of his tyrannical whims. Tipu was "an awful example of the instability of human power, unsupported by justice or moderation", his conduct a continued scene of "folly, caprice, and weakness."⁵⁷ He paid no respect to rank or position, undermined the administration of Mysore, and was under a delusion that the walls of Seringapatam were impregnable. The whole of his conduct therefore "proves him to have been a weak, headstrong, and tyrannical prince... totally unequal to the government of a kingdom, which had been usurped by the hardiness, intrigue, and talents of his father."⁵⁸ Once again, Tipu was given no credit for being an effective ruler, and was instead characterized as a foppish prince, the very image of a dithering Oriental potentate who acted through the caprice of the moment. He was not only cruel and tyrannical, but also an usurper who was never qualified to govern at all. These attacks on Tipu's suitability as a monarch were new to the Fourth Mysore War, and would have made little sense in the previous conflicts, when Tipu ruled over a large and powerful state. In the aftermath of his death and the Company's occupation of Mysore, they were a means to further undermine Tipu's legacy.

Finally, the *General Evening Post* produced an extended characterization of the Sultan which demonstrated the mature Tipu Legend, worth quoting at length as a summation of how the Sultan came to be perceived. In a passage entitled "Biographical Anecdotes of the Late Tippoo Suldaun", the paper offered the following description:

His disposition is naturally cruel: his temper is passionate and revengeful; and he is prone to be abusive; and his words are false and hypocritical, as suit his purpose. His policy, thus far differing widely from his father, has been ruinous to his revenues, as well as hurtful to his government. He professes himself Naib to one of the *twelve prophets*, who, the Mahomedans believe, are yet to come; and he

⁵⁷ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Suldaun* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co, 1800):149

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 151

persecutes all other casts, forcing numbers to become Musselmen. He is jealous of, and prejudiced against, his father's favorites; most of whom he has removed from their offices, giving to some lesser appointments. When compared to his father, his understanding and judgment are supposed to be inferior: he is esteemed as good a soldier, but a less skillful general: and he is wanting in that great resource which his father so eminently displayed in all cases of danger. His father discriminated merit, rewarded it liberally, and punished guilt with the utmost rigor of a despot; he gives little encouragement or reward; and he punishes more from the influence of passion and prejudice than from any attention to justice.⁵⁹

This lengthy account encapsulated the negative imagery built up around Tipu Sultan, with Tipu deficient not only in character, but ineffective and clumsy as a leader as well, one who oppressed his subjects and destroyed his own kingdom through poorly chosen policies and religious bigotry. It was the completely caricatured vision of an Oriental and Islamic despot. With this description, public opinion had come full circle from the young and promising prince of twenty years earlier. The Sultan of these accounts was the sort of tyrannical ruler that the Company was fully justified in warring against to protect the people of southern India from violent depredations. This vision of Tipu - the one promoted by Cornwallis, Wellesley, and the East India Company in general - was the image which would establish itself in the British national consciousness and historical memory. The earlier, alternative representations of Tipu; the criticisms charging that it was the British Company that was truly acting despotically in India; both of these viewpoints died out during the Fourth Mysore War, and would largely be forgotten by future generations.

Faithless and Violent Character

Although much of the literature on Tipu Sultan directly referred to him as a tyrant, and used this as a means to undermine his rule and advance in the interests of the East India Company, other sources made similar charges that played upon his supposed role as

⁵⁹ General Evening Post (London, England) 20 March 1800, Issue 10528

an Oriental despot. One common argument was that Tipu was capricious and untrustworthy, an individual who could not be counted upon to keep his word when it came to treaties and prisoner exchanges. Like a true tyrant, Tipu was willing to break past agreements whenever it suited his needs, making it impossible for Company administrators to trust his word. In practice, this reputation served as an excuse for Company figures to act in aggressive and expansionist fashion in southern India, charging Tipu with breaking the peace and then going to war once again to acquire more territory. For example, as Cornwallis wrote during the negotiations surrounding the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam, "faithless and violent as Tippoo's character was known to be, I judged it incumbent upon me to be prepared to support by force if it should prove necessary the rights that we had acquired."⁶⁰ The supposedly untrustworthy nature of Tipu Sultan provided a convenient rationale for the Company to pursue its own invasive designs against Mysore, in this case swallowing up a sizable portion of territory.

The faithless character of Tipu was also employed by British writers through means of a comparison with the superior virtue of the British nation. During the 1790s, this most frequently took the form of a comparison with Lord Cornwallis, who was praised for his humanity and moderation by British observers. Tipu Sultan was portrayed as lacking all of the higher character traits that were present in his British counterpart. This was another means to justify the Company's invasion and annexation of Mysorean territory, through the symbolic suggestion that British men like Cornwallis were inherently better suited to rule over India than despotic figures like Tipu. The continuous usage of these unflattering comparisons with the Company's Governor Generals indicates

⁶⁰ Cornwallis to Directors, Conclusion of Treaty with Tipu Sultan 5 April 1792 (p. 91-107) IOR/H/251 p. 94

that this was another means by which the image of Tippoo the Tyrant helped to reshape popular perceptions of overseas empire.

The most common early form in which these claims of untrustworthy behavior manifested themselves was in the realm of surrender agreements, which Tipu was charged with breaking on multiple occasions. This initial focus on surrenders was likely a result of the attention that was placed on the British captives during the Second Mysore War and throughout the rest of the 1780s. It was also a way to divert some of the public's focus away from the military disasters suffered by the Company at the hands of Tipu, as some of the shock of defeat could be blamed on Tipu's failure to adhere to honorable surrender agreements. At the Battle of Pollilur, for example, William Thomson claimed that Haider and Tipu's soldiers had "rushed upon them in the most savage and brutal manner" once the Company forces had laid down their arms as part of a surrender agreement.⁶¹ General Mathews was also said to have been captured along with his army at Bednur after they agreed to surrender the city and leave with all of the honors of war.⁶² In both cases, the captivity of the British men in Tipu's dungeons for the remainder of the conflict was blamed at least in part upon Tipu's failure to adhere to a previously agreed upon battlefield arrangement. This suggested that it was Tipu's faithlessness, and not the military incompetence of the East India Company, which was responsible for the disasters suffered during the war.

Later in the Second Mysore War, Tipu was again charged with breaking the terms of the surrender of the British garrison in the city of Mangalore. Perhaps seeking a

⁶¹ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 161

⁶² Captain Henry Oakes. *An Authentic Narrative of the Treatment of the English who were Taken Prisoners... by Tippoo Sahib* (London: Printed for G. Kearsley, 1785)

rationale for yet another humiliating defeat, an official correspondence within the East India Company written by Charles Crommelin charged Tipu with failing to adhere to the cessation of hostilities. "I now enclose you Copies and Extracts of sundry Letters... wherein they set forth the Conduct of Tippoo's Officers towards them, since the Cessation of Arms... this Conduct plainly shews that the Enemy [Tipu] means to pay little or no regard to the Cessation."⁶³ Treachery on the part of Tipu made for a convenient excuse covering up the Company's own failures; the surrender of Mangalore could be portrayed as due to the machinations of a despotic ruler, rather than due to a failure of military logistics. Indeed, this same source described the exemplary conduct of the Company's officers and "the Bravery they have shewn on all Occasions", contrasting this behavior to the actions of Tipu.⁶⁴ This comparison between the virtues of the British and the vices of the Sultan would become much more common during the Third and Fourth Mysore Wars.

However, there was little factual evidence to support these claims of foul play on the part of Tipu. Eyewitness accounts of the surrender at Mangalore painted a very different picture of Tipu's behavior, just as the earlier circumstances surrounding the capture of General Mathews and his men indicated that Tipu was not a serial liar, as he was often portrayed.⁶⁵ Colonel Charles Morgan wrote, "After the Cessation Tippoo received Major Campbell very honorably and paid him and his Garrison many Compliments on their noble Defence. Tippoo it is said kept very much out of the way and the chief use he made of the French was in guarding the Trenches at Night when he could

⁶³ Charles Crommelin to Governor-General and Council 4 October 1783 (p.53-68) IOR/H/187

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 53-68

⁶⁵ New Annual Register 1784. Quoted in *A Vindication of the Conduct of the English Forces, Employed in the Late War, Under the Command of Brigadier General Mathews, Against the Nabob Tippoo Sultan* (London: Logographic Press, 1787) See Chapter 2.

not depend on his own Men."⁶⁶ John Wolseley's extensive diary of the siege speaks of Tipu in generally positive language, as the capitulation terms allowed the surviving soldiers to leave the fort unmolested, as well as provide ships and food for them to leave his territory. Wolseley also referred to Tipu as "His Highness" and used terms of respect in accordance with Tipu's status.⁶⁷ The *General Evening Post* of London relayed an account of the surrender at Mangalore from sources in India, one in which General Macleod was received by Tipu "with the utmost respect and attention." Tipu asked the general to travel with him to his capital, where they would enter into peace negotiations, and Tipu "gave him his most solemn assurances that it was the desire of his heart to have the friendship of the English. He engaged to release all the English officers, his prisoners." The article concluded by stating that Tipu showed "throughout the whole of the interview, and in his subsequent behavior, his disposition to peace, so that we may reasonably indulge the belief, that at this time we are entirely at peace in India."⁶⁸

The portrayal of Tipu in this account was completely different from the tone exhibited by Crommelin above. There existed no indication that Tipu was a faithless and despotic sovereign who had to be stopped, and nothing to suggest that Tipu was anything other than a typical Indian ruler. The descriptions of Tipu in the newspaper press covering the later Mysore Wars would have an entirely different viewpoint, inevitably mentioning the depredations of the Sultan together with his supposed untrustworthiness. This same account of the surrender terms at Mangalore was reprinted in many other

⁶⁶ Colonel Charles Morgan to Governor-General and Council 17 September 1783 (p.819-832) IOR/H/186 p. 825-26

⁶⁷ John Rogerson Wolseley. *An Account of the Gallant Defence made at Mangalore in the East Indies; Against the United Efforts of the French and the Nabob Tippu Sultan...* (London: Printed for C. Bathurst, 1786): 136-37

⁶⁸ General Evening Post (London, England) 12 February 1784, Issue 7796

newspapers, including provincial newspapers in Bath, Bristol, and Gloucester, indicating that this non-tyrannical perception of Tipu Sultan would have had wide currency at the time. At this point in 1784, the vilification of Tipu had only a limited sway over popular representations in print culture.

Much of the belief that Tipu was an untrustworthy ruler derived from the status of the British prisoners captured during the Second Mysore War. Although nearly all of the prisoners taken by Tipu during the war were released in 1784 after the signing of the Treaty of Mangalore, there were some 200-300 individuals of European descent who were not set free by Tipu. These were most likely the "European Musselmen" who had converted to Islam and entered into the military service of Tipu as officers and technical advisors for his army.⁶⁹ However, the popular perception of these individuals both within the Company and in the British metropole was that Tipu had broken his word and failed to release all of his European prisoners. Tipu was therefore guilty of violating the Treaty of Mangalore, proving his faithless and duplicitous character as a true Oriental despot.

This was a common refrain amongst the Anglo-Indian newspapers in the years leading up to the Third Mysore War, who saw the conflict when it did arrive as little more than payback for the treatment of British prisoners captured during the previous war. The *Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser* expounded at length on the horrible atrocities committed by Tipu, portraying him as "a tyrant, whose savage barbarity, shall for ever blazon on the records of history, and exhibit his name, as the first, the most odious, and the most detestable among mankind!"⁷⁰ With Tipu's character established, the paper then went on to proclaim that the moment had arrived for the Sultan to receive his

⁶⁹ John Baillie to his Father 14 June 1784 (p. 153-79) Account of his capture and captivity. IOR/H/223 p. 178-79. This is covered in more detail in Chapter 2.

⁷⁰ *Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser* (Calcutta, India) 4 February 1790, Issue 211

just desserts for his earlier treatment of the British prisoners: "The time is now at hand, when we hope to see the tyrant receiving the reward of his cruelties. Our most gracious sovereign, recovered and restored to his people. The British empire, great, powerful, authoritative, and at peace.... Officers and men, ardent to convince the world that the honor of Britons cannot be insulted with impunity."⁷¹ The duplicitous nature of the Sultan, and his failure to release *all* of the Europeans within his service, provided one of the strongest motivations for the Company's return to war in 1789.

Once the conflict had begun, Cornwallis made frequent mention of the untrustworthy nature of Tipu during his correspondences with the Sultan. Writing again in reference to a violated surrender agreement, Cornwallis charged, "But with what confidence can a negotiation be carried on with a man, who not only violates treaties of peace, but also disregards the faith of Capitulation during war."⁷² Cornwallis repeatedly insisted that Tipu was guilty of acting in despotic fashion, by refusing to adhere to terms of surrender. In this particular case at the city of Coimbatore, it was agreed that the British garrison would be allowed to march out with their private property unmolested, but instead Cornwallis claimed that they were "detained in the Pettah [jail] of Coimbatore, and after much correspondence had passed between you [Tipu], and Kummer ud Dien Khan, they were at the end of thirteen days, sent prisoners to Seringapatnam by your orders."⁷³ These were repetitions of the same claims made about Pollilur, Mangalore, and General Mathews in the previous war, once again suggesting the lack of trust that could be placed in Tipu. The presence of British captives in Tipu's hands remained a sign of the Sultan's faithless nature.

⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁷² Cornwallis to Tippoo Sulatun 16 January 1792 (p. 289-90) IOR/H/252 p. 289

⁷³ Cornwallis to Tippoo Sulatun 31 January 1792 (p. 290-92) IOR/H/252 p. 290-91

During the negotiations surrounding the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam, Cornwallis would make use of Tipu's duplicitous reputation to advance the Company's agenda. As part of the peace treaty to secure the peace, Cornwallis had written that Tipu must offer up two of his own sons as hostages to the Company. Having taken such a drastic and unorthodox means of securing the peace, Cornwallis had to justify his actions to the British public at home, if he were to avoid being labeled himself as a despotic nabob. The simplest means was to vilify the character of Tipu Sultan, shifting blame for the young hostage princes back onto their own father. John Kennaway, one of the British negotiators of the treaty, wrote about "how extremely repugnant it was to Lord Cornwallis' feelings as a father to be under the necessity of strictly adhering to it," referring to the treaty article about the hostage princes, however "he could not relax without wilfully sacrificing his duty to the Publick and the State he served."⁷⁴ In this particular incidence, Cornwallis appealed to the higher necessity of keeping the peace, as a means of shifting focus away from the actual event in question. Cornwallis suggested that he had been forced into the unorthodox measure of taking children as hostages due to the untrustworthy nature of Tipu. It was only the complete falsity of Tipu's nature, and his inability to adhere to past treaties, which had caused Cornwallis to adopt such an unusual measure.

In his lengthy letter to the Directors explaining the conclusion of the war, Cornwallis justified himself by again attacking Tipu's personality. He stated that he was in possession of Tipu's two sons as hostages as well as a great sum of money, which would have been sufficient pledge for any other man other than the Sultan. However,

⁷⁴ John Kennaway to Cornwallis 24 May 1792, Negotiations with Tipu Sultan IOR/H/254 22 February 1792 p. 53

"faithless and violent as Tippoo's character was known to be," Cornwallis judged the extraordinary measure of taking children hostage necessary to ensure the peace.⁷⁵ Tipu's nature as a despotic ruler, his reputation for constant lying and evasion, served as the rationale for Cornwallis' abduction of the Sultan's two young sons. The rest of the letter would go on to describe how this war "into which we were forced by every consideration of good faith and sound policy," had resulted in a series of financial and material benefits: "in securing [territorial] acquisitions to ourselves, which... add considerably to your revenues, and promise to open sources of commerce... that may be looked upon as of great importance both to the Company and to the nation."⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that Travancore, the supposed cause of the war, was never mentioned *even a single time* by Cornwallis in this very lengthy letter back to the Directors.

This provided a classic expression of the Tipu Legend, with Cornwallis first insisting that Tipu's character made him completely untrustworthy, then going on to discuss how the Company was "forced" into war against him, resulting in the gain of money and resources that just coincidentally happened to have been conquered from Mysore. Cornwallis knew well that playing up the tyrannical nature of Tipu would provide a *carte blanche* for the Company's expansionistic drive in southern India. Cornwallis was engaging in an eighteenth century version of victimization, transferring responsibility for guilt onto the body of the offended party. This allowed Cornwallis to keep his own reputation intact, continuing to be perceived in popular culture as an incorruptible and moral administrator, while shifting all of the blame for the war onto the increasingly villainized Tipu Sultan. This was not mere chance or happenstance; without

⁷⁵ Cornwallis to Directors, Conclusion of Treaty with Tipu Sultan 5 April 1792 (p. 91-107) IOR/H/251 p. 94

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

the presence of Tipu to serve as a foil for Cornwallis, the Governor General would have been hard pressed to avoid the charge of nabobery for his actions.

In the wider popular discourse surrounding the Third Mysore War, Cornwallis was commonly the subject of a direct comparison with Tipu Sultan, providing an example of the superior virtues of the British nation. Cornwallis received an outpouring of popular support when word reached Britain of his victory over Mysore. Soon after news of the peace treaty arrived, the City of London voted to award Cornwallis the Freedom of the City for his gallant conduct and essential service, along with the present of a golden box worth 100 guineas.⁷⁷ Ellis Cornelia Knight composed a song in honor of Cornwallis, a flowery panegyric thanking him for freeing India from "barbarous rapine" and defending the honor of the British nation.⁷⁸ The *Oracle* of London was one of many newspapers to print their official congratulations to the conquering general, praising his "firmness of resolution and promptness of action" in battle, as well as how "victory and humanity marked the progress of his arms." The *Oracle* concluded its praise for Cornwallis on a triumphant note: "Thus the Marquis of Cornwallis, having totally overthrown the only foe to the British dominions in *India*, extended our territories, confirmed by interest the attachment of our allies, and rendered our power, both Civil and Military, superior to all Oriental intrigue, may expect, on his return to *England*, the most cordial congratulations of his countrymen!"⁷⁹ The optimistic outlook of this commentary posed a stark contrast to the doom and gloom regarding India written earlier by the critics of the political opposition during the war. The authors of this piece celebrated the

⁷⁷ World (London, England) 5 October 1792, Issue 1800

⁷⁸ Ellis Cornelia Knight. "Lines address'd to victory in consequence of the success of Lord Cornwallis and his army against Tippoo Saib" (Parma, 1793)

⁷⁹ Oracle (London, England) 6 November 1792, Issue 1076 Emphasis in the original.

expansion of the British power in India, rather than worrying over fears of moral corruption due to Eastern luxury, as had been so common a generation earlier.⁸⁰

When Cornwallis returned to London in early 1794 after the conclusion of his Governor Generalship in India, he was greeted with a huge public celebration. According to the daily newspapers, "The triumphal entry of Lord Cornwallis on Saturday last into the City of London, bore a great analogy to that of the ceremonial of the Roman Emperor Trajan. All ranks have (without exception) borne testimony to the virtues of the gallant Marquis, and even the exalted approbation of the Sovereign has been added as the climax of applause."⁸¹ Cornwallis received the thanks of the East India Company, an annuity of £5000, promotion to the peerage, the aforementioned Freedom of the City, enthusiastic public receptions, and the composition of songs and paintings in his honor. He was the toast of the town, and continued to receive sumptuous dinners in his name weeks after returning to Britain.⁸² The overwhelming public support for Cornwallis indicated that his treatment of the hostage princes had not damaged his reputation in Britain. Cornwallis' claim that he had been forced into taking the hostage princes due to the faithless character of Tipu was widely accepted in the British metropole. Public commentary specifically praised Cornwallis for his morality and his moderation, traits that Tipu was said to be lacking. The rhetoric that Cornwallis used to justify the war, his argument that it had been fought as a war of liberation to defeat a tyrannical Oriental despot, was met with widespread approval, and became the generally accepted narrative of the conflict.

⁸⁰ Peter Marshall. "Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century" in *War, Strategy, and International Politics*. Lawrence Freeman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (ed.) (1992): 71-73

⁸¹ *World* (London, England) 7 April 1794, Issue 2270

⁸² *London Chronicle* (London, England) 20 May 1794, Issue 5899

Cornwallis was most often praised for his moderation and justice, which were qualities that were believed to embody the national character. The Governor General had become the anti-Tipu, the figure that represented the sterling morality of the British nation, and the antithesis of the Sultan's faithless and violent character. As Peter Marshall wrote in his article on the public reception shown to Cornwallis after the war:

The moderation and benevolence which Cornwallis had shown in war was thought to be characteristic of the qualities which he had instilled into British rule of the East India Company's provinces. Thus the British invaded Mysore, not as conquerors but as liberators of the mass of the population from the "tyranny" of Tipu. The annexation of new territories would be an act of benevolence, not of ambition.⁸³

The image of Cornwallis as the virtuous and patriotic soldier-hero could therefore replace that of the avaricious nabobs of the previous decades. The older pessimism and fears of moral corruption could give way to public enthusiasm about expansion of empire. The Mysore Wars and the image of Tipu Sultan were enormously important in providing a foundation for the creation of an imperial culture. This period in the early 1790s was the point at which wars of empire shifted from being perceived as wasteful and morally dubious enterprises carried out for self-enrichment to being perceived as missions of liberation, spreading the blessings of British rule to backwards subject races. Although it is possible to overstate the impact of these changes, this period was nonetheless a decisive breaking point with earlier understandings of overseas empire. The public reception of Cornwallis and the war's victory suggests that pride in Britain's Indian

⁸³ Peter Marshall. "Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century" in *War, Strategy, and International Politics*. Lawrence Freeman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (ed.) (1992): 72

empire and the military successes of the Company had become widely accepted elements of British nationalism in a way that had not existed even a decade earlier.⁸⁴

The War of Liberation against Religious Bigotry

Wrapped up in these claims about Tipu's role as an Oriental despot was the increasingly popular belief in the 1790s that Tipu was a poor ruler and a fanatical Muslim. Tipu was represented as an usurper, the illegitimate conqueror of Mysore who had come to power by following his father's takeover of the proper Hindu ruling family. Tipu's exercise of power took the form of religious bigotry, as he destroyed the Hindu places of worship across his kingdom and forced his predominantly Hindu populace to convert to Islam against their will. Tipu was in fact a weak ruler, it was argued, and the people of Mysore were crying out for the deposition of this tyrant. Tipu's repeated displays of religious prejudice were a sign that he was unfit to rule. This new theme was an expansion upon the earlier treatment of the captured British prisoners; it was suggested that Tipu was guilty of excessive cruelties against not only a small number of soldiers, but the entire populace of Mysore. In the same fashion that British captives had been forced to convert to Islam against their will, the whole kingdom was being terrorized by the religious obsessions of their Sultan, demanded to convert to his religion or face death and destruction.

These claims were almost nonexistent during the Second Mysore War of the 1780s, but became commonplace during the later Mysore Wars of the 1790s. They provided the justification for a war of liberation against Mysore, with the East India Company portraying itself as the protector of freedom and religious liberty. When viewed from this perspective, the Company's military was no longer fighting aggressive wars of

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 72-73

expansion overseas, but acting to protect the people of southern India from the religious excesses and cruel abuses of a fanatical Muslim tyrant. Tipu and his father Haider had furthermore been base upstarts of low birth to begin with, allowing the Company to portray itself as the champions of the traditional ruling family of Mysore. This liberation rhetoric, based upon "freeing" the people of southern India from Tipu's rule, became increasingly commonplace in the realm of British popular discourse in the last decade of the eighteenth century. It provided a much more positive lens through which the British public could view their overseas empire in India, one which did not conflict with British notions of liberty. Indeed, it could now be argued that the Company had shed its earlier role of avaricious nabobery and was working as a moral force for progress, trying its best to remove Islamic zealots like Tipu Sultan from power.

In the Third Mysore War (1790-92), Tipu Sultan was portrayed for the first time as a religious bigot and a fanatical Muslim, a characterization which had been absent from the previous conflict. This was an attractive claim for the East India Company to make as a means of driving a barrier between Tipu and the people of Mysore, a region with a Hindu population approaching 90% of the total.⁸⁵ The Malabar coastal region of Tipu's domains also had a sizeable Christian minority population (about 25%), which served as another potentially disaffected group. There was little doubt that Tipu himself was a devout practitioner of his Islamic faith; Alexander Dirom wrote in his history of the war that Tipu announced himself to be the restorer of the faith, and "sent forth proclamations inviting all true Mussulmen to join his standard," adding the enthusiasm of

⁸⁵ Kenneth Jones. *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 154

religion to traditional military discipline.⁸⁶ Modern historians have concurred with these sentiments, and Tipu has frequently been celebrated as a pan-Islamic hero.⁸⁷

However, British accounts supportive of the Company went a step further during the war, charging Tipu with being not just a faithful Muslim, but a fanatical one. Elaborating upon the conversion ceremonies faced by the captured British prisoners, writers portrayed Tipu as a bigoted ruler who forced his subjects to adopt his religion or perish by the sword. These measures were proof of Tipu's despotic nature, and his unpopularity with his own subjects. An early account from the *Calcutta Public Advertiser* in 1785 suggested that the “arbitrary and oppressive system of government adopted by the tyrant, more and more alienates the heart of his people,” while lamenting the unfortunate British captives who suffered under “cruelties daily exercised on them.”⁸⁸ This was an example of how the supposedly tyrannical behavior of Tipu towards the captured British prisoners was expanded in contemporary accounts to include the rest of the people of Mysore as well.

The Anglo-Indian newspapers anticipated these charges of religious bigotry before the Third Mysore War's outbreak, with the *Calcutta Gazette* writing as early as 1789 about Tipu, “whose barbarity in circumcising, and persecution of all casts to turn Proselytes to the Mahometan faith is well known, and who whilst professing the strongest attachment and friendship, is meditating Tortures, murders, oppression.”⁸⁹ The *Calcutta Chronicle* concurred in this characterization, describing Tipu at one point as driven into virtual insanity by the onset of religious fervor: “Extraordinary reports prevail of the

⁸⁶ Major Alexander Dirom. *A Narrative of the Campaign in India* (1793): 250

⁸⁷ See Fazl Ahmad. *Sultan Tippu* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1959, 1975) for one such hagiographic example.

⁸⁸ India Gazette or Calcutta Public Advertiser (Calcutta, India) 28 November 1785, Issue 263

⁸⁹ Calcutta Gazette or Oriental Advertiser (Calcutta, India) 8 October 1789, Issue 293

turbulent ambition of Tippoo being exalted into a sort of visionary madness; and of his assuming, in his holy paroxysms, more Mahometan merit than Mahomet himself.”⁹⁰ The same paper claimed that Tipu boasted of creating 40,000 Muslims in one day, in another reference to the conversion ceremonies that aroused so much anxiety.

A frequent charge leveled against Tipu (and occasionally his father Haider) was the claim that they destroyed Hindu temples and drove out or murdered the Brahmins who had presided over them. A Company minute from 1792 wrote how the feudal and Brahminical system of Malabar was destroyed, with the upper-caste Hindus driven from the region.⁹¹ Lt. Roderick Mackenzie’s history of the war included a scene describing the destruction of a Hindu temple:

Here, neither respect, for the grandeur and antiquity of their temples, nor veneration of the sacred rites of a religion whose origin no time records, proved any protection for the persons or property, even of the first Brahmins. Their pagodas, breached with sacrilegious cannon, were forcibly entered, their altars defiled, their valuables seized, their dwellings reduced to ashes, and the devastation was rendered still more horrible by the scattered remains of men, women, and children, mangled beneath a murderous sword, whetted on the bloody Koran. To contrast this scene of barbarism, even with the most detestable that ever disgraced protestant invasions, would stamp the cruelty of Mahomedan superstition and strongly mark the superior humanity of the christian persuasion.⁹²

Tipu's destruction of Hindu temples was another example of his tyrannical status as a ruler, and the cruelties that he practiced against his own subjects. Mackenzie suggested in the final lines that the Hindu population would be better ruled by the “superior humanity” of Christians, an obvious hint that he hoped Mysore would be placed under Company rule.

⁹⁰ Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser (Calcutta, India) 30 April 1789, Issue 171

⁹¹ Minute of Mr. Farmer 27 May 1792 "Account Current of the Vettate Naddo Country" (p. 43-55) IOR/H/585 p. 46-47

⁹² Lieutenant Roderick Mackenzie. *A Sketch of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* Vol. 2 (Calcutta: Unknown printer, 1793; London: Imported and sold by J. Sewell, 1799): 203-04

These stories provided an implicit justification for the war against Tipu, to remove the tyrant from power, and also for the annexation of territory afterwards, with the Company providing a superior and enlightened mode of governance. They expanded the cruel treatment of the British prisoners from the previous war, and applied the same kind of horrific description to an entire people under Tipu's rule. The *Public Advertiser* stated this explicitly in an article from 1791, writing how the amongst the high-caste Hindu Nairs of the Malabar Coast, "the most intelligent and best informed people think there can be no doubt of their continuing firm to their alliance [with Cornwallis] against the tyrant."⁹³ The *Oriental Repertory* took up the same argument, linking together persecution of the Nairs by Tipu with an extension of Company rule in India. The journal wrote that when Tipu took possession of the Malabar Coast, he ruled the area "with a Rod of Iron", the inhabitants finding themselves so oppressed that they fled into the jungle; the most unwarrantable act of tyranny was "forcing the Nairs and Tiers to embrace the Mahometan Religion, which exasperated them beyond every thing." However, since Company soldiers forced out Tipu and gained control of the region, "the Country has improved astonishingly, and, I make no doubt, in a few years, will turn out a most valuable acquisition to our Honourable Masters."⁹⁴ Roderick Mackenzie further linked together accusations of Tipu's religious cruelty with the expansion of Company territory by writing in his history of the war how the Hindu rajahs were "the original, genuine and true princes of Hindostan," which now looked to the British nation "for protection against the oppressive power of the Mysorean Prince."⁹⁵ These accounts representing Tipu as an Islamic fanatic were no accident, but a deliberate attempt to

⁹³ *Public Advertiser* (London, England) 31 December 1791, Issue 17937

⁹⁴ *Oriental Repertory* (London, England) Vol. 2, (1793) p. 167

⁹⁵ Lieutenant Roderick Mackenzie. *A Sketch of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* Vol. 1 (1793): 8-10

provide further justification for the ongoing war, and pave the way for annexation of Company territory afterwards.

Due to this portrayal of Tipu as a tyrannical Oriental despot, many British writers who sympathized with the East India Company argued that the people of Mysore would be eager to throw off Tipu's barbaric rule. These accounts supported the belief that the Third Mysore War would be a war of liberation to overthrow an unpopular monarch, and presumably pave the way for a smooth Company takeover thereafter. The *Calcutta Gazette* surmised as far back as 1786 that "the people on the Malabar Coast feel more than ever the oppressive tyranny that mark their government, and groan under the yoke with impatience to throw it off; they will certainly embrace the first favourable opportunity to effect this purpose."⁹⁶ The *Calcutta Chronicle* confidently predicted in 1790 that the war would be speedily won for the same reason, as Tipu's populace rose up against his rule: "It is well known that Tippoo is obeyed more through fear, than personal attachment, even by those near his person... many of his Mysorean subjects will shake off his yoke as soon as the British army approaches to his capital, and throw themselves on a power from whom they have every reason to expect lenity, protection, and justice."⁹⁷ This was another variation on the war of liberation ideal, with the Company soldiers enthusiastically welcomed by the people of Mysore, and Tipu's army disintegrating before them because he enforced his rule solely through fear. With the London newspapers carrying reports from India detailing how Tipu mutilated his subjects by cutting off their arms and legs, this did not appear to be an unreasonable conjecture.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Calcutta Gazette or Oriental Advertiser* (Calcutta, India) 8 June 1786, Issue 119

⁹⁷ *Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser* (Calcutta, India) 16 December 1790, Issue 256

⁹⁸ *London Chronicle* (London, England) 24 December 1789, Issue 5210

Another London newspaper editorialized in 1790 that it hoped Cornwallis "will not enter into any treaty or compromise with Tippoo Saib. The total extermination of this barbarous Usurper of the Throne of Mysore can alone secure permanent peace to the Carnatic." Afterwards, it continued, the restoration of the pre-Haider ruling family of Mysore would ensure the goodwill of the "oppressed and deluded people" towards the British.⁹⁹ This was one of the first appearances of Cornwallis' liberation rhetoric in metropolitan newspapers, used as a justification for the Company's decision to enter another Indian war.

The theme of Tipu as an usurper had rarely been used during the previous conflict, but it appeared more and more often during the Third Mysore War. These motifs of usurpation and restoration managed to turn the removal of Tipu into a defensive act carried out purely for the benefit of the native people. Kate Brittlebank has argued that British expansion in India was frequently justified by portraying Indian rulers as illegitimate and tyrannical usurpers of earlier dynasties. This characterization reached its apogee under Tipu Sultan.¹⁰⁰ The use of such language allowed the Company and its defenders to cast the extension of British rule as a benevolent act of protection, rather than a naked power grab. These representation of Tipu's rule had been noticeably lacking a decade earlier during the Second Mysore War, when the Company had been hard pressed merely to defend its own territory instead of making territorial annexations. Previous criticisms of the Sultan had focused on his treatment of British prisoners, and not been concerned with the governance of the natives of Mysore. The expanded focus of British public discourse on the territory of Mysore and its people indicated the greater

⁹⁹ English Chronicle or Universal Evening Post (London, England) 23 September 1790, Issue 1808

¹⁰⁰ Kate Brittlebank. *Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy: Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 5-6

optimism regarding empire overseas, and Company's growing territorial ambitions in southern India.

When Company forces entered into Tipu's domains during the military campaigns, the soldiers found no rebellious sentiment directed against the Sultan by the populace. Instead, the Company servants were surprised to find a high degree of loyalty exhibited towards Tipu, and no small measure of resistance directed against the invading armies. The *Morning Chronicle* printed a letter from India dated 12 July 1791, which was shocked to find “This Tyrant (as he was supposed) Tippoo Sultan, to our amazement is beloved by all his subjects; our army has learned, to their astonishment, that he had kept up the best government in his countries the people ever experienced; the inhabitants were free, protected, and affluent, speaking of him as their father – they wished not for a change; and not a real inhabitant would quit or desert him. These are undeniable facts, and not a trace of the smallest oppression seemed to exist.”¹⁰¹ The author went on to state that none of Tipu’s military officers had deserted his cause, and only a small handful of the rank and file had fled.

Roderick Mackenzie confirmed the same sentiments in his history, noting in passing “Whither the cruel treatment of inferiors attributed to the Sultaun, be real, or exaggerated, or altogether imaginary, it is certain that his subjects in this quarter yielded to a change of Government with a degree of reluctance, seldom exhibited by the inhabitants of Eastern countries.”¹⁰² Mackenzie would go on to write that “however bigoted the tenets of the Koran,” there were a vast number of decorated Hindu temples throughout Mysore which had not been plundered or torn down, and that the people

¹⁰¹ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 6 December 1791, Issue 7018

¹⁰² Lieutenant Roderick Mackenzie. *A Sketch of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* Vol. 1 (1793): 79

willingly laid waste their own domains and fled away rather than support the Company forces.¹⁰³ These unexpected accounts were particularly important, as one of the fundamental rationales for the war in India was the belief that Tipu oppressed his subjects, providing the justification for Tipu's removal by the morally superior Company. If Tipu happened to be a just ruler, or merely an ordinary one without the monstrous vices that had been charged, then much of the Company's rhetoric justifying the conflict stood on shaky ground. Firsthand accounts suggested that Tipu was not a horrific ruler to his people, and that the overwhelming majority of the populace had no desire to be "liberated" by Cornwallis.

After the Third Mysore War was over, the Company's annexation of territory was justified on the grounds that the British would provide superior administration and more humane rule compared to that of Tipu Sultan. The *Public Advertiser* was highly enthusiastic in explaining the benefits of the 1792 treaty, claiming that so much was never acquired by any peace in the history of British India. Not only was Tipu thoroughly humbled, so much that "it will be impossible for him ever to take the field again with any prospect of success," the Company would gain so much revenue from the new territory (and the savings on being able to reduce its own forces), that "the profits of the peace are equal to six times the expences of the war." This promised great benefits for the new subjects newly introduced to British rule: "The natives who have experienced the blessings of the British Government, prefer it to every old system of their own, and pay their taxes with promptness, in return for the benefits of protection against their ancient tyrants."¹⁰⁴ This was another deployment of Cornwallis' rhetoric interpreting the Third

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 72-73

¹⁰⁴ *Public Advertiser* (London, England) 10 July 1792, Issue 18100

Mysore War as one fought for the liberation of the people of Tipu's kingdom. Much like the coverage of the hostage princes, opinion pieces that supported the Company's peace contended that Indians in the annexed territories would prefer British rule to that of the tyrant Tipu. Victory over the Sultan was argued as means to spread the virtues of British administration; this was a much more attractive justification for expansion than the previous self-aggrandizing exploits of the past.

Similar lines of argumentation appeared after the conclusion of the Fourth Mysore War in 1799. Although there were few mentions of Tipu's supposed religious fanaticism, attention having shifted instead to his connections with France, the British popular press returned to the liberation rhetoric of the Third Mysore War as a justification for the invasion of Tipu's kingdom. *Lloyd's Evening Post* wrote that the future of the conquered territories was quickly settled in a manner "at the same time honourable to our political character, and advantageous to our interests", with the Company receiving ample compensation for the expenses incurred "in the War into which it was so unjustly forced to enter."¹⁰⁵ The restoration of the pre-Haider Wodeyar dynasty to power, through the placing of a child rajah on the throne of Mysore, was seen as a particularly shrewd move in Britain, forcing the puppet ruler into a state of complete dependence on the Company while avoiding the appearance of territorial aggrandizement through outright annexation. It also allowed much of the literature written on the war to portray Tipu Sultan as an unlawful "usurper", with Wellesley restoring the proper pre-Haider Hindu dynasty to the throne.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 9 December 1799, Issue 6598

¹⁰⁶ See for example: Officer in the East India Service. *Authentic Memoirs of Tippoo Sultan* (1799): 1-3

The *General Evening Post* wrote enthusiastically on how Wellesley's peace settlement demonstrated the greatness of the British character, that it demonstrated "the honour, the liberality, the wisdom, and the humanity" of the nation. The treaty was carried into effect "with the utmost tranquility, to the entire satisfaction of the native inhabitants; and by it our possessions in that part of the globe are secured against every contingency."¹⁰⁷ Much as Cornwallis had argued in the previous war, the conflict was interpreted as a war of liberation to free the people of Mysore from the tyrannous rule of Tipu. Seen from this perspective, the Fourth Mysore War became a morality play, in which the superior virtues of the British had defeated the vileness of an Asiatic despot, leading to the spread of the Company's beneficent and paternalistic rule across southern India. It was an attractive vision of the future which anticipated the nineteenth century British Raj.

James Salmond wrote one of the earliest histories of the Fourth Mysore War, published shortly after its conclusion in 1800. He wrote to contemporaries that the Fourth Mysore War was just and necessary, if ever there was a just and necessary war.¹⁰⁸ The restoration of the child rajah to rule in the aftermath of Tipu's defeat was spun as a family "rescued by our arms from the fury of relentless bigotry, insult, danger, and poverty", with the Company reserving the right to interfere in the administration of Mysore at any time, in order to preserve "the happiness of the people for whom we were now to legislate."¹⁰⁹ The invasion was therefore justified by Salmond on the grounds of protecting the people of Mysore from Tipu, which had been a common line of

¹⁰⁷ *General Evening Post* (London, England) 12 December 1799, Issue 10485

¹⁰⁸ James Salmond. *A Review of the Origin, Progress, and Result of the Decisive War with the Late Tippoo Suldaun, in Mysore* (London: Printed by Luke Hansard, 1800): 27

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 29

argumentation in the previous war under Cornwallis, but was rarely employed by Richard Wellesley. It was an after-the-fact justification for going to war, and not something that the Company's Indian servants and administrators considered at the time. Nevertheless, it too was incorporated into the larger fabric of the Tipu Legend, and would become part of the later historical memory for how and why the Mysore Wars had taken place. This was another way in which the wars against Tipu helped to form the basis of an imperial culture in the British metropole, providing an understanding and justification of empire that could exist in concert with British liberty.

All of these themes about Tipu, whether they focused upon his role as an usurper, his supposed religious fanaticism, or his cruelties towards his own populace, were attacks upon Tipu's legitimacy as a ruler. They suggested that Tipu was unfit to exercise dominion over Mysore, and that the superior humanity of the British provided the Company with a moral justification to exert its own stewardship over the people instead. Arguments of a similar nature were applied not only to Tipu's sovereignty towards the populace of Mysore, his symbolic children as a ruler, but towards his own flesh and blood children as well. These viewpoints appeared during the hostage princes controversy, in which the captivity of Tipu's children was employed as a means to argue for Tipu's despotic outlook regarding his own progeny.

The Hostages Princes: Tipu the Uncaring Father

One of the most famous and enduring images to emerge from the Mysore Wars was the spectacle of the hostage princes, the two young sons of Tipu Sultan who were delivered over to Cornwallis as part of the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam. The hostage princes were a subject of great discussion in the British metropole, appearing for many

months in the newspaper coverage of Indian affairs, and they were used as the subject matter for a series of popular paintings and plays. Although there were some British commentators who were uncomfortable with the abduction of these two young sons of Tipu, the majority of the discussion surrounding the hostage princes fell back upon the themes of tyranny and despotism that so often accompanied the Sultan. Tipu's apparent willingness to deliver up his sons for diplomatic purposes was another sign of his debased character, proof that he lacked the humanity of the British. It was an indication of his status as an Oriental despot: Tipu was an uncaring father who used his own children as pawns in realpolitik schemes.

This characterization was unkind to Tipu and not at all truthful, as he had pleaded with Cornwallis not to take away his beloved family members.¹¹⁰ This lack of factual veracity did nothing to prevent the despotic portrayal of Tipu from enjoying a great deal of popular success, however. Cornwallis again emerged as the virtuous counterexample to the supposed depravity of Tipu Sultan. British authors argued that the Governor General would provide a superior moral example to the young sons, who would benefit from their exposure to a more civilized upbringing. These sentiments were depicted and popularized in some of the artwork of the period, which spread the imagery of the Mysore Wars to a wider audience. This focus on the humanity of Cornwallis and his kind treatment of the hostage princes was a means of deflecting attention away from the uncomfortable fact that the East India Company was acting in a morally questionable manner. Under Cornwallis, the Company had initiated a war of conquest, annexed a great deal of territory, demanded a huge indemnity of Mysore, and taken two young boys as

¹¹⁰ John Kennaway to Cornwallis 24 May 1792, Negotiations with Tipu Sultan IOR/H/254 20 February 1792

hostages until the further terms of the treaty were carried out. The hostage princes, aged eight and five years old, would spend the next two years as the captives of the Company - honored and well treated captives, but still captives nonetheless. Only by pointing to the faithless and depraved character of Tipu Sultan could it be argued that the taking of the hostage princes was anything other than a petty measure of revenge, extracted from Tipu in return for the British prisoners that he had held a decade earlier. The spectacle of the hostage princes, and the need for the British public to depict their circumstances in a positive light, pointed at many of the anxieties about empire which were still lurking underneath the celebration of Cornwallis' military successes.

During the negotiations surrounding the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam, Cornwallis had taken the unorthodox measure of demanding two sons of Tipu Sultan as hostages to help guarantee the peace. Written into the treaty itself was the following clause: "Until the due performance of the three foregoing articles [territorial exchange, indemnity payment, and prisoner release] two of the sons of the said Tippoo Suldaun shall be detained as hostages."¹¹¹ This was a very unusual treaty article; although the taking of hostages to safeguard the peace was common during the eighteenth century, these individuals would typically constitute military or political advisors of a ruler, adults who were part of the administration of the polity in question. Tipu had asked in this circumstance, for example, that some of his vakils (advisors) take the place of the hostage princes, which was rejected by Cornwallis.¹¹² The best explanation for these unusual circumstances was the desire amongst the soldiers and administrators of the East India

¹¹¹ Cornwallis to Tippoo Suldaun, Definitive Treaty of Peace Article 2, 17 March 1792 (p.312-25) IOR/H/252. See Chapter 1.

¹¹² John Kennaway to Cornwallis 24 May 1792, Negotiations with Tipu Sultan IOR/H/254 22 February 1792 p. 55-56

Company to obtain a measure of revenge on Tipu for the British captives of the Second Mysore War. Since Tipu had taken the sons of Britain as prisoners in the previous decade, his own sons would be forfeit to the Company in the wake of its victory in the Third Mysore War. While this was never stated explicitly in the Company's records, it seems a reasonable interpretation of the events, given that much of the Anglo-Indian discussion surrounding Tipu focused on themes of vengeance for the humiliating losses of the Company a decade earlier.¹¹³

Cornwallis' decision to take the two sons of Tipu as hostages in the peace treaty generated a tremendous amount of public interest and commentary. The scene in which Tipu's ambassador delivered over the two princes to Cornwallis became one of the most iconic images of the Mysore Wars. Major Dirom was an eyewitness to the event, and recorded a lengthy description in his history of the conflict:

Lord Cornwallis, attended by his staff, and some of the principal officers of the army, met the Princes at the door of his large tent as they dismounted from the elephants; and, after embracing them, led them in, one in each hand, to the tent; the eldest, Abdul Kalick, was about ten, the youngest, Mooza-ud-Deen, about eight years of age. When they were seated on each side of Lord Cornwallis, Gullam Ally, the head vakeel, addressed his Lordship as follows. "These children were this morning the sons of the Sultan my master; their situation is now changed, and they must look up to your Lordship as their father."

Lord Cornwallis, who had received the boys as if they had been his own sons, anxiously assured the vakeel and the young Princes themselves, that every attention possible would be shewn to them, and the greatest care taken of their persons. Their little faces brightened up; the scene became highly interesting; and not only their attendants, but all the spectators were delighted to see that any fears they might have harboured were removed, and that they would soon be reconciled to their change of situation, and to their new friends.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ See for example the *Calcutta Chronicle and General Advertiser* (Calcutta, India) 2 October 1788, Issue 141, which called for this chance "to punish the Mysore tyrant" for the cruelties visited on the British prisoners in the Second Mysore War. It was far from the only such source with this theme.

¹¹⁴ Major Alexander Dirom. *A Narrative of the Campaign in India* (1793): 228-30

Dirom recorded a glowing account of the encounter, with Cornwallis' empathy overcoming the initial reluctance of the two young princes and relieving all fears over their treatment. Everything about this description was designed to reassure the reader that it was a tender scene, and not a hostage-taking ceremony. Note how happy the princes were made to seem about their captivity, and that they would be reconciled soon to their "new friends." Like most other British written accounts or painted portrayals of this scene, Dirom overestimated the age of the hostage princes by several years, which was likely an attempt to downplay the extremely young age of the actual boys (ages eight and five) and render the occasion more palatable to the wider British public.

The *General Evening Post* of London provided a slightly different version of the same event, in printing a letter from another anonymous eyewitness, one that captured the uncertainty of the moment: "The spectacle [of the princes] was grand and affecting, and impressed all present with feelings not easily delineated. It was a proud scene to the conquerors, and most humiliating to the vanquished. An awful silence for a moment prevailed; and every one seem absorbed in the tumult of ideas which the occasion naturally called forth."¹¹⁵ Afterwards, the newspaper related the same particulars involving Ghulam Ali and Cornwallis, but the mention of the "awful silence" that prevailed for a moment was nonetheless significant. The use of the word "awful" was intended here in its alternate eighteenth century connotation, meaning full of awe, but it also pointed to the anxiety and discomfort which surrounded this entire enterprise. Much as the Company would have liked to pretend that this was a happy scene, it was clearly designed by Cornwallis to be a humiliation for Tipu, the fulfillment of a revenge fantasy in retaliation for his treatment of British captives. Despite the effort made to present the

¹¹⁵ General Evening Post (London, England) 24 July 1792, Issue 9178

event in a positive light, it had the potential to undercut the civilized and reformed image that the Company was trying to promote about itself, suggesting that Cornwallis was himself capable of behaving like a capricious Oriental despot. This was the antithesis of the patriotic and virtuous imagining of Cornwallis that the East India Company wanted to advertise.

The result of this awkward situation was a continued series of paternalistic reports, detailing to the British public how merrily the hostage princes were fitting into their new surroundings as "guests" hosted by the Oakley family. Reports from the Anglo-Indian community of Madras made their way back to London and were printed publicly to satisfy curiosity about the princes. A letter from Madras dated 13 September 1792 described how the princes were being hosted by the high society of the city; taken to church, brought to a dinner hosted by the Oakleys, and so on. The readers were reassured how Lady Oakley "seems much pleased with the vivacity and pleasantry of the younger and fairer prince, who shews a great share of good humour, and a great disposition to please, being of a mild and gentle nature."¹¹⁶ Another report painted a congenial family portrait of the princes entering the house of the Oakley family: "His Lordship [Cornwallis] took each of the Princes by the hand upon entering the room, when Lady Oakley rose, and each of them made a low bow... When Sir Charles Oakley's infant son was brought into the room, they most tenderly embraced him, kissing him in the warmest raptures."¹¹⁷ These stories made it sound as though Tipu's sons were off visiting family friends; there was no mention of how the hostage princes had essentially been kidnapped and held for ransom money as part of the peace treaty.

¹¹⁶ Bee or Literary Intelligencer (London, England) 31 April 1793, Issue 126, p. 312-13

¹¹⁷ Diary or Woodfall's Register (London, England) 8 January 1793, Issue 1186

The princes continued to attract public interest for months and even years after the conclusion of the war itself, with further stories of their activities passing from India to Britain. A gentleman returning from India reassured the public that "the children of Tippoo who are hostages... have from acquaintance and kind treatment become extremely attached to the English."¹¹⁸ The tenor of these repeated messages, insisting again and again how pleased the hostage princes were with their situation, suggested that it was very important for the public both in India and in Britain to view the situation in the proper light of paternalistic benevolence. The messages also hinted at the psychology of empire, in which the act of hostage-taking became reimagined as a benevolent act. When viewed from this perspective, Cornwallis and the rest of the Anglo-Indian community hosting the two boys were doing them a favor, educating them to become proper gentlemen and removing them from the corrupting influence of their tyrannical father. In this fashion, the actions of Cornwallis anticipated nineteenth century justifications of empire that operated according to the ethos of the civilizing mission. The hostage princes symbolically stood for a childlike and backwards India, one which required the upbringing of a paternalistic British father. With the passage of time, it was argued, the young princes would come to prefer the benevolent rulership of Cornwallis to the "savagery" of their despotic father.

When it finally came time to return the princes back to their father, two years after the start of their captivity in 1794, the accounts from India made it seem as though they had little desire to leave British society. Captain Doveton was charged with the return of the princes, and provided this account of the ceremony:

¹¹⁸ St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 9 July 1793, Issue 5046

On their entrance into the pavilion, the young Princes sprang forward to the throne where their Royal Father sat, and prostrated themselves before it. And here the etiquette of Asiatic courts put nature completely to flight; for the father, instead of advancing to embrace his darling children, contented himself with coldly placing a hand on the neck of each; and on the instant the Princes arose, and respectfully retired. It is a remarkable fact, that not a syllable was exchanged at this extraordinary interview.¹¹⁹

Tipu was depicted as a cold and unloving parent, a portrait which contradicted his repeated requests not to give up his sons during the peace negotiations outside Seringapatam. While it is likely that this was due to cultural differences between British and European views of family relations, differences that Doveton was unable to perceive, the same depiction of Tipu as an uncaring parent appeared in much of the British artwork involving the hostage princes. More likely, accounts such as these were designed to contrast the stern and austere demeanor of Tipu to the warm and parental reception granted the young princes by Cornwallis.¹²⁰ The Governor General was used again in this case as the counterpart to the Sultan. While Cornwallis was kind, affectionate, and caring towards the young princes, Tipu was cold, aloof, and willing to sacrifice them for purposes of statecraft. Cornwallis served as the moral remedy for the corrupting despotism symbolized by the Sultan.

The rest of Doveton's description portrayed Tipu as a powerful, wealthy, and alien Eastern monarch – in short, very much the Oriental despot. These hostile portrayals sought to reverse the situation and place blame for the captivity of the princes on Tipu himself, once again resorting to victimization theory and suggesting that only a cruel monster like the Sultan would send his children away without a care for reasons of state. At the same time, the vengeful hostage-taking of Cornwallis could be reimagined as an

¹¹⁹ London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 12 January 1795, Issue 3965

¹²⁰ See Constance McPhee. "Tipu Sultan of Mysore and British Medievalism in the Paintings of Mather Brown" in *Orientalism Transposed*. Dianne Sachko MacLeod and Julie F. Codell (1998)

extension of the blessings of British culture and manners to the young princes, during the two full years that they were prevented from returning to their original home. The Tipu Legend of the savage Eastern tyrant could therefore provide justification even for Cornwallis' morally questionable act of taking children as hostages.

Due to the popularity of the subject matter, the Mysore Wars and Tipu Sultan attracted the attention of many of Britain's most famous artists at home, who competed to produce their own renditions of the latest scenes of imperial glory from overseas. Until Tipu's final defeat in 1799, paintings of scenes featuring the hostage princes were by far the most popular subject matter to be produced regarding the Mysore Wars. Unlike earlier satirical cartoons that largely mocked the Company, the history paintings produced in London were unabashed celebrations of the Company's conquests. The British public was captivated by many of these images, turning out in large numbers for public viewings, and eagerly sharing in the spectacle of empire. These visual arts went a long way towards changing popular opinion about the Company, and incorporating its servants into the patriotic fold of the British nation.

Formal "history paintings" were popular in the late eighteenth century, rendering scenes of national triumph available to a wider audience in an age without radio, television, or movies. Often of dubious authenticity to the events they depicted, these history paintings sanitized warfare to make it appear gentlemanly and non-violent. Battle paintings in particular focused on the valiant and the heroic; war was regarded as a glorious event, and painters created the sort of images that their patrons wished to see.¹²¹ The economics of creating this art were such that paintings would be commissioned

¹²¹ Peter Harrington. *British Artists and War: The Face of Battle in Paintings and Prints, 1700-1914* (London: Greenhill Books, 1993): 6-7

ahead of time, hopefully attracting a patron to support the expenses, and then shown to the public in the hopes of gaining subscriptions. Those who subscribed would receive engravings of the painting at a later date; virtually all of the history paintings about Tipu and the Mysore Wars functioned on this model, trying to sell to the wealthy classes. Because most of these paintings gained the patronage of the East India Company, it is also not surprising that the artists avoided criticism and portrayed the Company heroically in their works. Nevertheless, the subscription model upon which these paintings were produced ensured that they were very much a public phenomenon, advertised in the newspapers and viewed in London by large audiences. Even these examples of “high art” intended for the upper classes would have been disseminated amongst a broad spectrum of the populace through prints, engravings, and other reproductions.

Competition was fierce to be the first artist to render on canvas a dramatic event from the exotic imperial locales. Artists who worked quickly were more likely to attract attention and gain more subscriptions for their paintings. For example, Mather Brown began advertising for subscriptions to his forthcoming historical paintings on 27 July 1792, a mere three days after news of the hostage princes situation arrived in London.¹²² Robert Home’s brother similarly began taking out advertisements in the London newspapers for subscriptions of Home’s paintings of the hostage princes, a scene which “had such an effect on the spectators, as to make them all shed tears” and was promised to be “uncommonly magnificent” when captured in oils.¹²³ Neither Brown nor Home had produced the paintings in question when they began advertising for subscriptions, which

¹²² Public Advertiser (London, England) 27 July 1792, Issue 18115

¹²³ World (London, England) 27 September 1792, Issue 1793

again was common practice in the eighteenth century. Robert Home, Henry Singleton, and Mather Brown would all create paintings depicting the hostage princes in some way, helping to make the spectacle of the hostage princes one of the most memorable events of the Mysore Wars.

Robert Home was the only one of the formal history painters to be present at the actual ceremony in India where Cornwallis received the sons of Tipu Sultan, although his rendition of the scene would not be completed until 1794, and not exhibited in London until his return from India in 1797. Home had been invited specifically by Cornwallis to follow the progress of his army on campaign, and therefore it was no accident that he was present to record the dramatic scene of the hostage princes.¹²⁴ His eventual portrayal of the event was entitled *Lord Cornwallis Receiving Tipu Sahib's Sons as Hostages* and presents an excellent example of a staged spectacle of imperial triumph [Figure 2].¹²⁵ Home captured all of the familiar elements of the story associated with the hostage princes, verifying the accuracy of the written accounts by including Cornwallis and the other military officers of the Company, Tipu's *vakils* riding on elephants, and the two young princes in their white robes. The scene portrays an elegant Cornwallis kindly receiving the two sons of Tipu, the younger of whom holds out his hand for Cornwallis to grasp with a longing expression on his face. To the sides of the Governor General, the Company's military officers form a sharp contrast in their red uniforms to the medieval-appearing Indians with their spears, bucklers, and armor. In the background a British flag waves over the scene to remind the viewer of the triumph of the Company, as well as

¹²⁴ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 150-51

¹²⁵ Robert Home. *Lord Cornwallis Receiving Tipu Sahib's Sons as Hostages at Seringapatam* (1793-94). National Army Museum, London.

further associate the Company with the British nation. Home was so proud of his role in capturing the scene that he placed himself in the painting, on the far left side clutching his sketchbook. Home's rendition of the hostage princes would prove to be one of the least patronizing of the scene in question, but it still nonetheless was suffused with celebration of Cornwallis' military victory and sanitization of the act of hostage-taking itself.

Although Robert Home may have been the sole eyewitness to the actual transfer of the hostage princes, he was far from the only artist to render the scene on canvas. Henry Singleton was the first of the London painters to address the same subject matter, producing a companion pair of paintings which were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1793, and spread to a much larger audience through engravings done at the same time. Singleton's first painting was entitled *Lord Cornwallis Receiving the Sons of Tipu Sultan as Hostages*, portraying the same scene as Home but in a more intimate, smaller setting [Figure 3].¹²⁶ Located inside the Governor General's tent, Cornwallis appears as a wise and kindly figure, with arms outstretched on the verge of embracing the two young princes. The "lame wakil" and the other Indian attendants appear to be encouraging the princes to deliver themselves up to Cornwallis; the older boy looks up towards Cornwallis while the younger boy gazes out towards the audience with an adoring expression. In the background through the tent opening, the British flag once again proudly waves in the sky against the walls of Seringapatam.¹²⁷ Singleton's overall effect was to produce a tender scene overflowing with emotion, with the concerned and parental Cornwallis almost literally taking the young princes into his arms. British military victory

¹²⁶ Henry Singleton. *Lord Cornwallis Receiving the Sons of Tipu Sultan as Hostages* (1793). Private collection; sold at Sotheby's, 23 November 1977.

¹²⁷ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 149

and British paternalism in peace were on display together in this painting; Cornwallis embodied the British nation, a kindly but powerful father assuming charge of a childlike India.

Singleton's companion work, *The Sons of Tipu Sultan Leaving their Father*, was designed to form a contrast between the conduct of Cornwallis and the conduct of Tipu Sultan towards the hostage princes [Figure 4].¹²⁸ In a purely imagined scene for which there were no eyewitness descriptions, Singleton portrayed the departure of the two princes from their father. Tipu sits cross-legged on a throne, wearing very rich robes and an elaborate turban, staring off into the distance towards the flag of Mysore with an absent look on his face. All of the men appear in effeminate white robes with heavy jewelry, with the exception of the bored-looking soldier on the right side, there to escort away the two princes. Tipu appears oblivious to the presence of his two sons, who attempt in vain to catch their father's eye before their dismissal. Together, these paired representations presented a clear message: "Cornwallis was a better soldier and father than Tipu, and what's more, Cornwallis had might, manliness, and humanity on his side."¹²⁹ The two hostage princes served as a useful prop to demonstrate the superiority of the British character. Tipu Sultan, on the other hand, was inaccurately portrayed as a callous and uncaring father who was perfectly willing to sacrifice his own children for reasons of statecraft.

These themes would be elaborated upon and made further explicit in the paintings of Mather Brown, an American artist living in London who also produced a series of

¹²⁸ Henry Singleton. *The Sons of Tipu Sultan Leaving their Father* (1793). British Library, Office of Indian and Oriental Collections.

¹²⁹ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 149

works with the hostage princes as their featured subject matter. Brown's artwork was created with the full backing of the East India Company, with Henry Dundas of the Board of Control providing the needed funding along with additional information on all of the Company officers present to depict the scenes with maximum attention to military glory.¹³⁰ Brown's *Marquis Cornwallis Receiving the Sons of Tippoo Sultaun as Hostages* [Figure 5] included a brochure written by Daniel Orme, explaining to the audience how Cornwallis displayed to his captives "a generosity which would have done honour to the brightest hero of the classical pages of antiquity," and that the hostage princes looked up to the Governor General "as their only protector, father and friend."¹³¹

The visuals of the painting itself reflected the hyperbolic praise of the accompanying description, as Brown adopted a more imperialistic tone than the other artists in his portrayal of Cornwallis receiving the hostage princes. The young boys still look upon the Governor General with affection, but Cornwallis himself strikes a much more aggressive pose in Brown's scene, striding confidently, almost bombastically forward towards the viewer. Cornwallis is accompanied by his staff in full military dress standing in front of the British flag, suggesting the might and power of the Company's armed forces. The princes themselves appear several years older than their actual ages of five and eight, looking upwards with affection to the godlike Cornwallis as they clutch at his arms for support. To the left side of the painting, Indians appear in weak and servile positions, bowing and making themselves subservient to the radiant splendor of the

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 149

¹³¹ Mather Brown. *Marquis Cornwallis Receiving the Sons of Tippoo Sultaun as Hostages* (1793). Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, County Dublin. Quote from Daniel Orme, included in Mildred Archer. *India and British Portraiture, 1770-1825* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1979): 424

Governor General.¹³² The spectacle of the hostage princes was employed to celebrate British power and military achievement, while also suggesting that that power was tempered by compassion and benevolence. Brown's rendition of this scene is an unabashed celebration of British power; the fawning weakness of a backwards India gives way to the splendor of a rising British star.

Like Singleton, Mather Brown also painted an imaginary scene of Tipu's sons leaving their father, taking the opportunity again to apply the label of tyrant to the Sultan and depict him as a heartless parent. *The Departure of the Sons of Tipu from the Zenana* provided Brown's interpretation of the departure of Tipu's sons; Tipu bends towards the princes on the left side of the picture, gesturing as he attempts to persuade his sons to consign themselves willingly to British captivity [Figure 6].¹³³ Tipu is cast as an unalloyed villain, wearing dark robes and hunching over at the waist. The Sultan is further depicted as a master manipulator, appearing amongst women, children, and servants, all of whom the painting suggests that Tipu was willing to sacrifice for the sake of political gain. Constance McPhee has argued that this scene is in fact based on a famous painting of Richard III, designed to portray Tipu as a completely ruthless individual:

[Brown] modeled Tipu's pose and expression on a well-known representation of Richard III, and compared the plight of the sultan's sons to Richard's persecuted nephews, the Little Princes in the Tower. By equating Tipu with one of England's most venal kings, Brown shifted the implied blame for the captivity of the Indian princes onto their father's shoulders. As a result, Cornwallis, who actually instigated the hostage plan, could assume the role of beneficent liberator of Mysore.¹³⁴

¹³² Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 151

¹³³ Mather Brown, *Departure of the Sons of Tipu from the Zenana* (1793). Engraving, Walter Collection.

¹³⁴ Constance McPhee. "Tipu Sultan of Mysore and British Medievalism in the Paintings of Mather Brown" in *Orientalism Transposed*. Dianne Sachko MacLeod and Julie F. Codell (1998): 202

This opinion was supported by a pair of Indian art historians, who examined the same work and concluded that Brown had likely not seen drawings made in India, with Tipu's form and costume configuring much more to European ideals of Oriental subjects than what one would have actually encountered in Mysore.¹³⁵ When paired together with his companion painting of Cornwallis receiving the hostage princes, Brown's works persuasively shifted culpability for the harsh terms of the treaty onto the tyrant Tipu, allowing the Company to justify its Indian wars and carve out a new patriotic role for itself through the glorification of British military arms.

Brown's paintings proved to be popular and were widely viewed by the public through open exhibitions and cheap engraving reproductions. Advertisements in the *Morning Chronicle* and other contemporary newspapers called on the London public to view the standards captured from Tipu at Bangalore along with the works of Mather Brown for the price of one shilling.¹³⁶ Another newspaper praised the paintings on display, stating how Brown's reception of the princes did the artist "infinite credit", while the introduction of the lame wakil "in the true Olympiad Hero style, was a very favourable circumstance to the Composition."¹³⁷ Brown's paintings first went on display in March of 1793, and public viewings were still being held as late as February of 1794, attesting to the popularity of the subject matter, while advertisements continued to run in the newspapers for reproductions of the paintings of both Brown and Singleton.¹³⁸ Ads promoting engravings for scenes of the hostage princes continued to appear in the

¹³⁵ Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia. *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India 1757-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986): 52-53

¹³⁶ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 16 March 1793, Issue 7420

¹³⁷ *True Briton* (London, England) 16 March 1793, Issue 65

¹³⁸ See for example *World* (London, England) 10 February 1794, Issue 2222

London newspapers as late as 1798, and would only disappear when subsumed by further Tipu artwork after the Fourth Mysore War the following year.

These popular representations of India were unlike earlier historical paintings of the subcontinent, which had treated Indian potentates with far more dignity, most frequently as powerful figures worthy of respect. The historical paintings of the 1790s featuring Tipu Sultan and the hostage princes represented a break in continuity from earlier works, and a change in the presentation of the British presence in India. Artists began to celebrate the romance of a British empire in India, with the spectacle of the hostage princes perfectly capturing the new ideal of colonial relations: childlike Indians paternalistically entrusting their fate to mighty British fathers.¹³⁹ Indian rulers who refused to fit into this worldview, such as Tipu Sultan, were demonized as tyrants and marked for elimination by military means. The visual art of the formal history painters during the 1790s were instrumental in establishing the romance of overseas empire, and helping to change the popular perception of the East India Company from its low standing of the mid-eighteenth century.

Depictions of the hostage princes appeared not only in print culture and in history paintings, but also took place on the popular stage in London. Inspired by the lucrative success of the Tipu play *East India Campaigning* as performed at Sadler's Wells, Astley's Royal Saloon and Amphitheatre created its own production based upon the news of the hostage princes. Beginning its run on 20 August 1792, the new show was entitled *Tippoo Saib's Two Sons; or, An East-India Military Divertissement*, and promised in its advertisements to feature dance, song, and pantomime on the departure of the hostage

¹³⁹ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 153

princes from their father, and then their reception by Cornwallis, complete with an "Oriental military festival" which commemorated the occasion.¹⁴⁰ Astley's show was effectively a live action version of the same scenes portrayed in the artwork of the hostage princes by Home, Singleton, and Brown; once again, Cornwallis was envisioned as both triumphant commander and loving father. The Governor-General's affective sympathy for Tipu's sons emphasized the Sultan's defective paternal care, while also downplaying the Company's military aggression in southern India.¹⁴¹

Tippoo Saib's Two Sons proved to be a successful and well-regarded production in its own right, drawing huge crowds and widespread applause from the contemporary print culture. The *Public Advertiser* praised the choice of subject matter and noted the full house in attendance, while *World* echoed that a better subject could not have been hit on for stage representation.¹⁴² The continued praise for the costumes and set designs in the newspaper accounts suggest that it was the exotic Oriental spectacle of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars which attracted so much attention. The *Star* praised the show for successfully tugging at the emotions of the audience: "Tippoo's Sons is a fine subject for a picture; and indeed it is so heroically performed, that the tear of sympathy is often seen in the spectator's eye," indicating how the hostage princes were once again employed as a prop in the staged performance (literally, in this case) of empire.¹⁴³

One of the songs from the performance was published, sounding many of the same themes as the music employed in *East India Campaigning*. "From sweet Tipperary

¹⁴⁰ Diary or Woodfall's Register (London, England) 20 August 1792, Issue 1065

¹⁴¹ Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007): 330

¹⁴² Public Advertiser (London, England) 21 August 1792, Issue 18136; World (London, England) 22 August 1792, Issue 1762

¹⁴³ Star (London, England) 29 August 1792, Issue 1344

to pick up some Honor" was sung by another Irish character on stage, and contained further racially explicit lyrics designed to mock Tipu Sultan:

I.
From sweet Tipperary to pick up some Honor,
I'm here to be sure, little Patrick O'Connor,
With Dennis O'Neal, Teddy Blane and O'Carty,
By my soul we have routed the Blackamoor Party,
Och! rub a dub row de dow faith Mister Tippoo,
Rub a dub row de dow faith Mister Tippoo,
We have bother'd your Head, and we've made you to skip O!
Devil burn me, your quiet so goodbye Mister Tippoo.

III.
What good looking Creatures, these Lacks of Rupees Sir,
Then the two Lads, Great Tippoo's Sons if you please Sir,
To be sure Mister Sultan, with us they an't sleeping,
Nor you get them again, till you pay for their keeping,
Och! rub a dub row de dow, saith Mister Tippoo,
To be sure you won't pay us for taking a trip O!
Which we did just to say, "How d'ye do Mister Tippoo."¹⁴⁴

Other verses contained lines detailing how Tipu planned to kill and eat captured British soldiers, and in return the Company treated itself to half of his kingdom. The reappearance of Dennis O'Neal in the lyrics was likely both a reference to a common Irish name and also to the earlier Sadler's Wells production.

The song used highly racial terminology to describe Tipu, referring to his forces as the "Blackamoor Party", but unlike the music from *East India Campaigning*, there was much less anxiety about capture and forced emasculation while languishing in Tipu's dungeons. Instead, the song from *Tippoo Saib's Two Sons* concerned itself with the looting and plundering of Mysore, making multiple references to rupees and insisting that Tipu would not see the return of his sons until he paid the full indemnity owed by the peace treaty. The more confident and assertive tone of the second song was likely a result

¹⁴⁴ "A Favourite Song. In the New East-India Military Divertissement" printed in *Diary or Woodfall's Register* (London, England) 23 August 1792, Issue 1068

of the year that passed in between their respective compositions; the Tipu of 1792 had been defeated and humbled in battle, in contrast to the much more menacing Tipu of 1791. As the Company's military fortunes steadily improved over the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the visual representations of the Sultan (in artwork and on the stage) shifted to reflect less fear of the threat of captivity, and more confidence in the superiority of the British character. The hostage taking of Tipu's sons, rather than the Sultan's taking of British prisoners, indicated this growing confidence in the Company's power. This increasingly paternalistic tone of the discussion of the hostage princes anticipated the British Raj of the next century, as Indian rulers like Tipu were less likely to be viewed as dangerous military opponents, and more likely to be seen as backwards and childlike.

Conclusion

These shifts in British popular opinion reflected how a widespread belief in Tipu's tyrannical nature had taken hold by the end of the Third Mysore War. More and more people accepted the claim that the Company had shed its earlier period of nabobery, and had become a defender of the British nation and all of the liberties that it stood for. Cornwallis appeared to embody this reformed Company, as a gentleman from a properly aristocratic background who would be immune to the blandishments of avarice and Eastern luxury. His treatment of the hostage princes had demonstrated the superiority of British humanity over the callous and depraved Oriental despotism of Tipu Sultan. By the time that Wellesley won his final victory in 1799, it was almost universally accepted in Britain that the Mysore Wars had been just conflicts fought to put an end to the abuses of Tippoo the Tyrant.

This belief had not always been the case, however. Prior to the Company's victory in the Third Mysore War, popular opinion was much more divided on the subject of both how to view Tipu Sultan, and the proper way to view the East India Company. In the years following the Company's assumption of control over Bengal, there had been widespread anxiety about the threat posed by the nabobs, and the fear that they would contaminate the nation with their degenerate ways. Popular resentment of the nabobs continued into the early 1790s, and became tied up in some of the most fundamental questions about how to view Britain's empire overseas. Who was truly acting in despotic fashion overseas: the East India Company or Indian rulers like Tipu Sultan? This became a highly politicized subject, and the legality of the Mysore Wars was debated in the popular press and in the halls of Parliament. This leads next to the consideration of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars in Company and party politics.

Chapter Four Tipu in Company and Party Politics

Introduction

In addition to the popular discussion surrounding the captured British prisoners and the language of tyranny and despotism, Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars also figured prominently in parliamentary and East India Company politics during the final decades of the eighteenth century. Tipu played an important political role in these contemporary debates, as British representations of the Sultan touched upon many of the disagreements that lay at the heart of the whole imperial project. There was a sizable portion of both the British public and wider Enlightenment intellectual thought that remained profoundly skeptical of empire.¹ This was best symbolized by the nabobs, members of the East India Company who became subjects of public ridicule for their possession of supposedly ill-gained Indian wealth and unabashed social climbing.

The nabobs represented all of the worst fears associated with colonization; it was argued that they had been corrupted by Oriental vice and luxury, and would bring about the destruction of British liberties in the metropole.² The nabobs were the antithesis of proper virtuous behavior, and they existed in a state completely separate from the British national character. The widespread public condemnation of the nabobs in the years following the Company's conquest of Bengal attested to the anxieties associated with empire, and even led to widespread pessimism about the future of the Company's territorial possessions. Indian subjects who had been acquired in such immoral fashion would only be ruled by the Company in despotic fashion, which was doomed to a brief

¹ Sankar Muthu. *Enlightenment Against Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003)

² Tillman Nechtman. *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 12

and transient existence. The contemporary disaster unfolding in America in the 1780s indicated the inevitable destruction of all such imperial projects overseas.

In the British metropole, the image of Tipu and the legality of the Mysore Wars became caught up in the parliamentary politics of the day. There was a vigorous debate between a larger majority that supported both the Tory government and the East India Company, and a smaller but still sizable Whig Opposition that insisted on the immorality of the war undertaken against Tipu. This period of the early 1790s was a transitional moment for the wider popular attitudes about empire, as Indian princes like Tipu were increasingly castigated as cruel despots, but the public was somewhat slower to internalize the new discourse about the East India Company itself. During the Third Mysore War (1790-92), the print culture of the day produced seemingly endless references to the events taking place overseas, in the form of newspapers, cartoons, plays, and paintings, all signaling the important role that overseas empire played in constructing domestic popular culture. This print culture was also heavily politicized in nature, and the subject of Tipu was hotly debated both in the halls of Parliament and in the wider popular culture.

In the end, the crushing victories won by the Company in the Third (1790-92) and Fourth (1799) Mysore Wars resulted in a stifling of debate. The political opposition was undercut by the success of the Company's military, and the British public eagerly embraced the victories that had been won overseas. It became politically impossible for anyone to challenge the Mysore Wars in their aftermath of runaway military success under Cornwallis and Wellesley. This allowed for the earlier representations of the Company and its servants as nabobs to fade away from view, and a new reimagining of

these same individuals as patriotic soldier-heroes to take their place. Far from corrupting the British nation, the Company now stood for its defense, going to war to protect British prisoners from ever again falling into the clutches of Oriental despots like Tippoo the Tyrant. With the passage of time, this new understanding of the Mysore Wars established itself as the historical memory of the period, and the earlier era of contestation was largely forgotten.³

The Nabobs: Fears and Pessimism of Empire

The territorial conquests of the East India Company in the mid-eighteenth century were a source of both excitement and dread for the British public at home. They offered the prospect of further enriching the nation through greater access to the India trade, as well as potentially increasing the country's military might in its seemingly endless wars against its European rivals. However, at the same time the assumption of control over Bengal was fraught with its own perils. The East India Company was still widely regarded by the British public as a commercial entity, despite the governmental functions that it had assumed since its earliest days, and the British state was only just embarking on the slow process of conquering the Company's administrative structure.⁴ The responsibility for governing over an enormous foreign populace was a daunting prospect. During the 1760s and 1770s, the Company would have to weather the storms of repeated famines in Bengal and its own continuing insolvency at home, relying on loans from Parliament to stave off bankruptcy.⁵ At the same time, the conspicuous consumption of wealthy Company servants who had returned home to Britain gave rise to the popular

³ See Conclusion

⁴ Philip Stern. *The Company-State: Corporate Sovereignty and the Early Modern Foundation of the British Empire in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011)

⁵ H. V. Bowen. *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics 1757-1773* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 187-89

satire of the nabob, vilified in public opinion for his greed, corruption, and undignified status-climbing. The Company and its servants appeared to be out of control, governing in tyrannical fashion and exploiting Indians overseas with no thought other than personal enrichment. What was supposed to have been a monopoly trading company was widely viewed as a rogue state.⁶

Anxieties about the Company and its servants were linked to fears of corruption and moral decay, brought on by contact with the very different cultural systems that prevailed in India. Politics in this era were still heavily influenced by the language of virtues and manners, with topics such as moral degeneracy holding great sway over public opinion.⁷ The nabobs were viewed as a threat to the British nation due to the belief that they had been corrupted by Eastern vice and Oriental luxury. Company servants who had adopted Indian customs and mannerisms were satirized for their effeminacy, lacking the requisite masculinity and toughness that the nation demanded. Nabobs were the subjects of popular hostility because they were themselves the harbingers of a globalized and imperial sense of Britishness, one that the populace in the metropole was not fully ready to embrace just yet, which manifested itself as a consequence of the material culture they brought home with them from South Asia.⁸ Their profligate spending, through the purchase of country estates and corrupt parliamentary seats, served as a threat to undermine both the country's social order and its political system. The history of the nabobs, as a result, is also a history of the material culture of empire, and the panicked reactions of domestic observers when they found the footprints of empire in their

⁶ Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006): 13

⁷ Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007): 5

⁸ Tillman Nechtman. *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain* (2010): 16

metropolitan world.⁹ While these fears were exaggerated and eventually proved to be unfounded, contemporaries believed that the nabobs represented a serious danger to the established order of British society.¹⁰ Due in part to the reckless manner with which the Company was governing its new territories, this was a period of frequent pessimism about the future of the British possessions overseas, especially after the outbreak of the American Revolution. Without knowing what the future would hold, it was not uncommon for pamphleteers to speak of the impending end of the British Empire in the 1770s and 1780s.

The term "nabob" was an Anglicized corruption of the Bengali word "nawab" (নবাব), referring to the Indian rulers of various princely states, or more generally to any person of great wealth or status. The word had been in use since the early seventeenth century, but took on a new and more unsavory meaning in the middle of the eighteenth century. Popularized by Samuel Foote's play *The Nabob*, the word was used as a derogatory reference to the men who returned home from India, bringing with them vast sums of money and an ill-fated reputation. The nabobs induced widespread revulsion in Britain, from their acquired wealth and the means used to achieve it, which were usually attributed to exploiting the native peoples of India. Many of the nabobs engaged in unabashed status-climbing, using their newfound means to purchase large country estates, parliamentary seats in corrupt boroughs, and other signs of high social status. All of these actions were viewed as unseemly and in poor taste by Britain's traditional ruling class. Like the excessive Eastern luxury that they seemed to embody, the nabobs appeared to

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16

¹⁰ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 225

threaten established moral values, the security of imperial interests, and the sanctity of Britain's unwritten national constitution.¹¹

Although the nabobs came from diverse backgrounds, they nonetheless shared certain characteristics as a group. There was a popular misconception that everyone who traveled to India came back with fortunes in hand; in fact, the great majority of Europeans who went to India during the eighteenth century died overseas, or returned home with very modest sums.¹² The nabobs who came back with huge sums to their names were very much the exception and not the rule, but their prominence in the decades following the Company's conquest of Bengal gave them an outsized public presence. There were some 200-300 individuals in this period who could properly be called nabobs, Company servants who brought back enough wealth to entertain notions of climbing into the ranks of Britain's social elites. While only a few of them lived conspicuously, the ones who did so lived very conspicuously indeed. Thomas Rumbold, a former Governor of Madras, spent more than £100,000 on an estate in Essex, while Robert Clive, the most famous of all nabobs, used his Indian wealth to acquire the prestigious Claremont estate, an Irish peerage, and election to the Order of the Garter.¹³ Small wonder then that the nabobs were ripe for public satire, as former nonentities suddenly thrust into the company of the nation's political and social elites.

Some nabobs also sought election to political office, as another sign of their newfound social status. Due to the outdated and non-democratic electoral system that returned MPs to Parliament in the eighteenth century, it was relatively easy for men of great wealth to secure their election to the Commons through the manipulation of corrupt

¹¹ *Ibid*, 226

¹² *Ibid*, 226-27

¹³ *Ibid*, 227-28

boroughs, in which a tiny number of voters could be bribed to support the desired candidate. As a result, the number of nabobs in Parliament grew steadily during this period, starting with twelve in 1761, nineteen in 1768, twenty-two in 1774, and twenty-seven in 1780.¹⁴ Despite the growing number of MPs who had connections to the East India Company, the nabobs in Parliament never acted as a coherent political lobby, and preferred to stay out of politics whenever possible. However, the nabobs did use their political leverage very successfully when the subject of Indian affairs arose, protecting themselves from charges of corruption and influencing the government's policy towards the East India Company during debates on reform bills and charter renewal. Resentment of the nabobs therefore went beyond mere social snobbery, and touched upon fears that their ill-gotten wealth was subverting the entire political system. Many observers had the feeling that Britain's empire-building overseas had created a beast that was rapidly growing out of control. Unease at the Company's unique position of governance in India ran deep from the very beginning of territorial expansion.¹⁵

Nabobs were explicitly disassociated in this period from the rest of the British nation. They were viewed as a source of contamination to the rest of society, seen as having been cut off from the rest of the nation due to their adoption of enervating Oriental luxury. For example, during the trial of Warren Hastings, Edmund Burke clearly and directly separated the Company and its servants from Britain itself, declaring at one point: "The East India Company in India is not the British Nation."¹⁶ Indeed, this was part of the reason why Burke was putting Hastings on trial, as the Company's "state

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 228

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 232

¹⁶ Edmund Burke. "Speech on Opening of Impeachment 15, 16, 18, 19 February 1788" in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke, Vol. 6*. Peter Marshall (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981): 285

without a nation” had only officeholders, with no people to reign in abuses or curb corruption. Burke's statement was particularly noteworthy due to the way in which the two would become conflated together in later decades, as the Mysore Wars against Tipu Sultan allowed the servants and soldiers of the East India Company to rehabilitate their reputation in the eyes of the British public.

The conspicuous consumption and material culture of the nabobs was what opened them up to ridicule in popular culture, as they made an easy target for satirists and opinion pieces. These illustrations testified to the uneasy role that this group occupied within the British political sphere. The most famous such example was Samuel Foote's 1773 play *The Nabob*, which encapsulated the popular perception of the Company's servants at this particular historical moment. *The Nabob* tells the story of Sir Matthew Mite (widely known to be a caricature of Robert Clive), returned from India with a vast fortune, and his attempts to purchase his way into respectability and high society. Mite was repeatedly shown to be lacking the refined manners of the gentlemanly class, needing instruction from his butler in how to play games of chance and flaunting his wealth in an attempt to impress the Antiquarian Society.¹⁷ Mite runs his household in the fashion of a stereotyped oriental despot, holding court in Indian style, trying to buy off his opposition with the bestowment of a *jaghir*, and suggesting that he would like to found a seraglio in London.¹⁸ Mite is also in the process of purchasing a seat in Parliament, in the satirical borough of "Bribe'em"; he negotiates in the process to buy a second seat for his black slave from the Indies.¹⁹ These corrupt electoral practices were typical of the popular beliefs associated with the nabobs in the 1770s, illustrating the fear

¹⁷ Samuel Foote. *The Nabob* (London: Printed by T. Sherlock, 1773, 1778): 27-28, 51-56

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 9, 37

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 42-47

that their contact with the moral degeneration of the Orient would undermine the character of the British nation.

The central driving plot element of the play concerns Mite's relationship with the Oldham family, members of the gentry who have fallen on hard financial times. Mite demands that the Oldhams marry their young daughter Sophy to him in exchange for paying off their extensive debts. Mite makes it clear that love has nothing to do with this match, as he is only interested in obtaining further social status from the pairing; Sophy is compared to an adornment for the head of Mite's table, a fine piece of furniture, and an antique bust or picture.²⁰ At the conclusion of the play, the Oldham family bands together to reject Mite's imperious designs, sending him and his lawyer (named "Rapine") away for good. Thomas Oldham concludes the play with a statement repudiating the actions of the East India Company: "For, however praiseworthy the spirit of adventure may be, whoever keeps his post, and does his duty at home, will be found to render his country best service at last!"²¹ Foote's play therefore not only reinforced and popularized the image of the greedy and unrefined nabob, it also suggested that the East India Company and its servants were acting against the national interest. True Britons were those who did their duty at home, as represented by the traditional gentry of the Oldham family. The ill-reputed nabobs were a blight on society, corrupting the old pillars of the establishment through the temptation of their profligate spending. Foote suggested numerous times that the nabobs were not likely to last for long, as pleasures that derived from the ruin of others would soon be squandered away.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 36

²¹ *Ibid*, 71

Foote's satirical play was far from an isolated criticism of the nabob phenomenon; his character Lady Oldham, in disparaging Matthew Mite, even states plainly "I only echo the voice of the public", and Mite rejoins with "I am sorry, madam, to see one of your fashion, concur in the common cry of the times."²² There was a very real visceral reaction to the nabobs in this period, as the British public rejected their intrusion into polite society. One way to illustrate this reaction comes in the form of illustrations themselves, by looking at some of the cartoons and other satirical prints produced during the 1770s and 1780s to address the subject of the nabobs. The demand for caricatures of the nabobs was so great in this period that certain printing establishments, such as the one run by William Holland, specialized in turning out cartoons about the East India Company.²³ Principal themes of these caricatures included the venality, dishonesty, and corruption among Company servants, and the fashions and faux pas committed by the nabobs as social misanthropes. Many of these images made use of the political language of tyranny and despotism, suggesting that the Company and the nabobs that it generated were responsible for bringing Oriental despotism home with them to Britain.²⁴

An easy target for these prints was the wealth amassed by the nabobs in India, and the corrupt means with which they had obtained it. One such cartoon from 1773 was engraved for the Oxford Magazine, and entitled "The Nabobs Clive and Colebrooke Brought to Account" [Figure 1].²⁵ It depicted two well-known nabobs of the day (Clive

²² *Ibid*, 65-66

²³ Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia. *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India 1757-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986): 55-56

²⁴ See Chapter 3

²⁵ Author unknown. "The Present Times, or the Nabobs Clive and Colebrooke Brought to Account." Engraved for the Oxford Magazine, 1 May 1773. Image #5111 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires Preserved in the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, Vol. 5-7*. (London: British Museum Publications, 1978). I am indebted to George's guide for help in interpreting the satirical prints of the period.

and Colebrooke) kneeling before Lord North in supplication. They are both handing him bags of money; North states, "I know the vileness of your deeds! But I must have more hush Money." Colebrooke has a tag on him reading "Job in the Alley £30,000" while Clive entices with "You shall have the tenth of my Jaghire". Clive and Colebrooke are both chained to a demon in the foreground, while in the background, a blindfolded Justice tries to strike them down, but is held off by another member of the ministry, Lord Bute. The message of this cartoon was fairly obvious, charging nabobs like Clive with bribing the unpopular North ministry to avoid prosecution for their unethical acts in India. The demonic imagery associated with the two nabobs, and the figure of Justice poised to strike them down, together serve as good signs of the general scorn with which the popular press treated Company servants in this period.

A decade later in 1783, the cartoonist Gillray produced a similar print entitled "The Nabob Rumbled" [Figure 2], a play on words poking fun at the aforementioned Thomas Rumbold, who was under investigation by Parliament at the time for corruption charges related to his time as Governor of Madras.²⁶ The print depicted Rumbold vomiting a stream of guineas (golden coins) into a chamber pot held by Henry Dundas, soon to become the head of the East India Company's Board of Control. He is supported by a man in military dress, his son Captain Rumbold, who is saying "Ah! these damn'd Scotch Pills will kill poor Dad," the mention of Scottish nationality serving as another reference to Dundas. In the background, a man (Captain Rumbold again) sits atop a huge sack labeled Roupees while riding an elephant, attended by an Indian servant. This particular print visibly displayed the wealth that nabobs such as Rumbold had

²⁶ Gillray. "The Nabob Rumbled or a Lord Advocate's Amusement." Published by E. D'Achery, 21 January 1783. Image #6169 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

accumulated overseas, and hinted at the foul means used to obtain it by having the nabob expel it physically from the body through vomiting. The dialogue between Rumbold's son and his Indian servant suggested that their only decent course of action would be to quit Britain, which would be the best way for Rumbold to demonstrate good manners.

Other prints attacked the subject of electoral corruption, playing upon fears that the nabobs were subverting the British political system through the control of tainted parliamentary seats. The Shaftesbury election of 1774 became notorious as a particularly rotten piece of electoral fraud, as two different nabobs (Francis Sykes and Thomas Rumbold again) both competed to see who could successfully bribe the electorate. Not only were both men caught purchasing votes and called to appear before Parliament, but in addition the magistrates of the town were also implicated in the scheme.²⁷ The public outcry from this latest exercise in nabob corruption spawned further satirical prints. One anonymous author produced "The Shaftesbury Election or the Humors of Punch", a very large print showing several different rooms in a house, each room depicting a different type of electoral fraud, with an overall theme of bribing voters in the election.²⁸ The central room portayed an Indian scene: a corpulent man sits on a canopied howdah on an elephant; he is crowned and holds a sceptre; money-bags are piled on both sides of the howdah; a mahout sits on the animal's neck. The elephant appears to be picking up money-bags from the ground with its trunk; an Indian in a turban who lies across these bags is being beaten and kicked by a European.²⁹ The image suggested that the nabobs had themselves become Oriental despots, corrupted by their wealth and subverted by

²⁷ T.H.B. Oldfield. *The Representative History of Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Baldwin, Cradock & Joy, 1816)

²⁸ Author unknown. "The Shaftesbury Election or the Humors of Punch" Mezzotint, circa 1776. Image #5341 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

²⁹ Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires, Vol. 5* (1978): 224

foreign political systems. The use of the elephant imagery made clear that the nabobs had become part of an alien, non-British system of exercising authority. The assault on the Indian man also raised another long-standing criticism of the nabobs, reminding the viewer that they had obtained their fortunes through the exploitation of the Indian masses. Cruelty and even savage behavior were often attributed to the Company servants in this period, and was reflected in how they were represented in the popular media of the day.

This is not to suggest that all of the depictions of the nabobs were entirely negative; popular representations of any subject are notoriously difficult to categorize, and opinion on the Company and its servants was far from monolithic. Cartoons and satirical prints by their very nature were designed to poke fun at the popular subjects of the period, and the nabobs were an easy target for their mocking. For their part, the nabobs used their newfound wealth in an attempt to purchase respectability through the commissioning of Indian-themed works of art, which would decorate their expensive new country estates. The *nouveau riche* administrators, civil servants, and officers in the Company's armies frequently commissioned portraits or bought engravings to decorate their homes, creating a thriving new market in the late eighteenth century for Indian-themed art.³⁰ Regardless of their backgrounds prior to arriving in the subcontinent, these men desired paintings that could depict the place where they had achieved success or made their fortune. As a result, the nabobs often had their portraits painted in Indian attire or in Indian settings, such as the 1765 portrait of Captain John Foote by Joshua Reynolds [Figure 3].³¹ Not only does Foote appear in non-European dress, he stands in the regal

³⁰ Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia. *From Merchants to Emperors: British Artists and India 1757-1930* (1986): 24

³¹ Joshua Reynolds. *Captain John Foote* (1765). York City Art Gallery.

pose of an Indian nawab, with sword in hand and a jeweled turban on his head.³² Aside from his skin color and facial features, there is nothing to differentiate Foote in this painting from a wealthy Indian prince.

Foote's image appeared to be the very embodiment of the nabob stereotype, a Company servant who was corrupted by the wealth and luxury of the Orient, and he was far from the only individual to be portrayed in this manner. The nabob desire for landscapes depicting Indian scenery and trading posts was similarly an apparent rejection of the conventional neoclassical art favored by the British gentry, another way in which they stood out from conventional polite society. By having themselves painted in scenes of their Indian triumphs, the nabobs had hoped to impress upon others a sense of their moral responsibility; for the Company, commissioned artwork was "the purchased opportunity for good public relations."³³ But popular opinion remained skeptical about the nabobs prior to the 1790s, and about the East India Company more generally. Opinion differed on how to view the growing overseas empire; was it a threatening sign of moral corruption, or a valuable addition to the nation? The anxieties and opportunities of empire were both apparent in these nabob portraits, the rich wealth brought back from the East along with the potential for foreign contamination. These fears contributed to a number of serious critiques of the Company's overseas role during this period, and led to widespread feelings of pessimism about the future of the empire. It was entirely possible that the nabobs were laying the seeds for the imminent destruction of the British Empire, at the very same time that they were creating it.

³² Hermione De Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 104

³³ *Ibid*, 108

Criticisms of the East India Company for the threat that it posed to the nation were nothing new in the middle of the eighteenth century, and had long antecedents dating back to its founding in 1600. From an early date, the Company's servants had been willing to address these anxieties directly by engaging in print culture debates with their detractors. These exchanges made clear the fears and pessimism that were commonly associated with the Company's actions overseas. In particular, the doubts associated with empire that were exhibited by contemporaries are striking to modern observers. The poor track record of governance overseas in India and America during the 1770s and 1780s offered little confidence at that point that the British Empire would stand the test of time.

The East India Company had always been subject to criticism in the realm of print culture from its inception. During the early periods of its existence, the Company had often tried to use official censorship and regulation of print to eliminate its opposition; however, the continued proliferation of print culture made this tactic increasingly difficult to enforce during the seventeenth century, and essentially impossible by the middle of the eighteenth century. Instead, the Company responded by wading into the realm of popular discourse, printing its own counterarguments to defend against attacks on its profitable trade and chartered monopoly status.³⁴ Print produced by the Company was often created with a parliamentary audience in mind, and could be intensely political in nature. The Company's willingness to engage in the rough and tumble of popular discourse via print culture demonstrated the importance of maintaining a positive image in public opinion. From the early days of the Company, the Directors (and later the Board of Control) made the Company's image an important priority.

³⁴ Miles Ogborn. "The Discourse of Trade: Print, Politics, and the Company in England" in *Indian Ink: Script, Print, and the Making of the East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 105-06, 140-147

As far back as 1621, Thomas Mun had written *A Discourse of Trade from England unto the East Indies* to defend the Company from print culture attacks, insisting that the India trade enriched the nation rather than causing its poverty due to a drain of specie.³⁵ In the late seventeenth century, East India Company Director Josiah Child frequently wrote pamphlets under the pseudonym of Philopatris to defend the Company and its trade, arguing that the India trade was more valuable to the English nation than any other trade, that the Company was deserving of its official monopoly status, and so on.³⁶ As an influential Director who determined much of the Company's policy in this period, Child's engagement with print culture reinforced the notion that the Company's leaders believed in the importance of creating a positive public image. These authors and others like them were successful in maintaining political support for the Company's status quo, although skepticism about the accumulation of wealth and political influence amongst Company shareholders remained a longstanding criticism.

Old fears and anxieties associated with the Company received new life in the middle of the eighteenth century with the advent of the nabobs, and the widespread perception that the Company's acquisition of territory was leading to tyrannical and despotic rule in India. Fears and pessimism about the future of Britain's empire overseas were still commonplace during this period, prior to the military successes of the 1790s, and this pessimism was reflected in many of the writings from the period. The belief that the British Empire was on its last legs, and that the overseas colonial project was doomed to end in failure, was a widespread sentiment in the British metropole in the late

³⁵ Thomas Mun. *A Discourse of Trade from England unto the East Indies* (London: Printed by Nicholas Oakes, 1621)

³⁶ See for example Josiah Child [Philopatris]. *A Treatise Concerning the East India Trade*. (London: Printed by J.R. for the Honorable East India Company, 1681)

eighteenth century. Robert Orme, the official historiographer of the East India Company, chose to conclude his meticulous account of the trading corporation's history with the events transpiring in 1762, despite possessing copious materials with which to extend the narrative further in time.³⁷ Orme had serious misgivings about the level of corruption that existed in the Company's rule over Bengal, and had witnessed firsthand the graft and self-aggrandizement of Company servants during his own visit to Madras. Orme predicted in 1767, "Parliament in less than two years will ring with declamation against the Plunderers of the East... It is these cursed presents which stop my History. Why should I be doomed to commemorate the ignominy of my countrymen... which has accompanied every event since the first of April 1757 [since Plassey]."³⁸ Instead of continuing the history of the Company after its acquisition of the *diwani* for Bengal, Orme chose instead to write a history of the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, seeing no future in the current exploits of his countrymen.

Nor was Orme alone in his beliefs, as Alexander Dow and William Bolts, both disaffected Company servants, went on to write critical histories of the East India Company during the 1770s, singling out Robert Clive in particular for vilification.³⁹ These historical accounts provide a sharp contrast to the celebratory accounts of the Company's rise to power which would emerge in the early nineteenth century, penned by enthusiastic empire-builders such as John Malcolm and Mark Wilks.⁴⁰ Orme and Dow

³⁷ Robert Orme. *A History of Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan, from the Year 1745* (London: Printed for John Nourse, 1763, 1773, 1775, 1780, 1803)

³⁸ Robert Orme. Quoted in Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (2006): 247

³⁹ Alexander Dow. *The History of Hindostan: Translated from the Persian, 3rd Edition, Vol. 1* (London: Printed by John Murray, 1792, 1770, 1768). See Chapter 3 for further discussion of Dow.

⁴⁰ John Malcolm. *Sketch of the Political History of India from the Introduction of Mr. Pitt's Bill, A.D. 1784, to the Present Date* (London: W. Miller, 1811); Mark Wilks. *Historical Sketches of the South of India, in an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysoor* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810-1817)

believed that the Company's overseas empire was on the verge of disintegrating, not on the cusp of massive military and economic expansion. As referenced above, Samuel Foote's contemporary play *The Nabob* echoed the same ephemeral sentiments about the future, with the main character Mathew Mite told near the end of the play how "possessions arising from plunder very rarely are permanent; we every day see what has been treacherously and rapaciously gained, as profusely and full as rapidly squandered."⁴¹ This advice could have applied equally to the ill-gotten gains of the nabobs, or the stability of their overseas territorial conquests in India.

One of the best ways to demonstrate the skepticism of this period about the future of Britain's overseas holdings comes in the form of an extraordinary cartoon from 1783 by W.P. Carey. The satirical engraving, entitled "So fickle is the mind of Royalty!", depicts Charles Fox, Lord North, and Edmund Burke falling from a pedestal on which King George III sits; in other words, a literal falling from favor [Figure 4].⁴² Its nominal purpose was a commentary on the party politics of the day, with Carey suggesting that Fox would likely return to power again soon. However, the cartoon also drew a striking contrast between the reign of George II (pre-1760) on the left side of the image, with the reign of George III on the right side. Underneath a dignified bust of the previous king, crowned with a laurel wreath to signify victory, the text on George II's pedestal reads "The Father of his People. British Meridian A.D. 1760. Just & necessary wars with natural & perfidious enemies; crown'd with victory & success... Great Britain look'd up to as the Arbitress of Europe; fear'd by all the world; Sovereign of the Sea and possessed

⁴¹ Samuel Foote. *The Nabob* (1773). Quoted in Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 237-38

⁴² W. P. Carey. "To day disliked, and yet perhaps tomorrow again in favour. So fickle is the mind of R_y_l_ty!" [royalty] Published shortly after 18 December 1783. Image #6291 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

of a greater extent of Territory than Rome in the zenith of her glory!!!”⁴³ On the right side of the cartoon, George III cavalierly tips over the pedestal upon which Fox, North, and Burke had been standing, with a far less flattering inscription characterizing his reign:

The Father of his – Children! British Sunset 1783... Stamp Act. Boston Port Bill. American Remonstrance disregarded... Cornwallis taken. Drawn Battles at sea, in the East & West Indies, Europe & Am. Lose the Empire of the Sea... Hyder Ally defeats Col. Baily. Anarchy, Confusion & Destruction in East In[dies]. War concludes with an exhausted Treasury, distracted Councils, divided Senate decay'd Fleet, Enfeebled Army, discontented People & America not only for ever, ever lost to England, but thrown into the arms of our natural enemies!!! Oh!!! Oh!!! unhappy ___!!!⁴⁴

As if these obvious contrasts were not enough, Carey added a winged picture of Fame, who blows a trumpet with the word “Good” on it towards George II, and one proclaiming “disgrace!! How lost!!! How fallen!!” towards George III.

While Carey’s cartoon was of course satirical and not intended to be taken completely seriously, it nonetheless demonstrated how this was a period in which pessimism about the future of the British presence overseas was a very real phenomenon. The contrast between the reigns of the two monarchs suggested that many Britons had lost an earlier sense of cultural confidence, and believed that their role in the world was in decline. Indeed, many eighteenth century intellectuals remained doubtful about their country’s achievements, and skeptical of the European political and social order in general; it was not until the developments of the early nineteenth century (industrialization, the ending of the slave trade, the extension of the franchise, etc.) that

⁴³ Carey, “So fickle is the mind of Royalty!”

⁴⁴ Carey, “So fickle is the mind of Royalty!”

British thinkers would begin to feel confident that their political culture was superior to the rest of the world.⁴⁵

When Carey produced this cartoon in 1783, there was no way to know that the future would bring unparalleled successes for the Company, resulting in his gloomy depiction of imperial decay and the belief (sounding strange in retrospect) that Britain's empire had fallen past its "meridian" and had reached its "sunset". The mention of Haider Ali and the disastrous defeat of Colonel Baillie in Carey's cartoon anticipated the role that the Mysore Wars would later play in reshaping popular opinion of the East India Company's role overseas. The figure of Tipu Sultan was enormously important in shifting British attitudes about their empire; it was increasingly argued during the last two decades of the 18th century that the true tyrants were Indian princes like Tipu, and not the servants of the East India Company. British victories in the Mysore Wars replaced the cultural pessimism regarding empire with a newly strident celebration of imperial grandeur, one which the public was happy to embrace. The triumphs over Tipu opened up a path for the former nabobs to be reintegrated into the British nation, popularly embraced as heroic figures who embodied the finest qualities of humanity and virtue. This was a gradual process that took place over the course of the Mysore Wars, and even within the Company itself opinion was not always universal with regards to Tipu, but in the end it had a transformative effect on British perceptions of their empire, and established itself as the historical memory for future generations.

⁴⁵ Sankar Muthu. *Enlightenment Against Empire*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 14-15

Tipu's Role within Company Politics

Over the course of the last two decades of the eighteenth century, popular attitudes about the Company's overseas servants began to change. Increasingly there was less mention of the despotic actions of the nabobs, and more focus upon the supposed Oriental despotism of Indian rulers such as Tipu Sultan. This debate played out within the East India Company's own ranks, as well as amongst the broader British public. The competing tug of war between different elements within the Company, and their disagreements over how to view Tipu Sultan, indicated the shifting opinion about the role of the East India Company in these decades.

It is important to keep in mind that the East India Company itself was by no means a monolithic entity. There existed real disagreements between individuals and between the different presidencies over how to approach the 1784 Treaty of Mangalore, and how to view Tipu Sultan. In particular, the Governor General and Council in Bengal disagreed sharply with the conduct of the Second Mysore War carried out by the Madras Presidency, leading to a fascinating series of exchanges between the two groups which played out over the course of 1783 and 1784. The Bengal Council criticized the early peace feelers sent out by the Madras government to Tipu Sultan, stating in official correspondences, "It would be very painful to our feelings to give you our real Sentiments on the Propriety as well as Policy of the Steps you have taken to solicit Peace with Tippoo."⁴⁶ The Bengal Council found it unseemly that representatives of the Company sent to Tipu "should be directed to beg [their] Commiseration to our People who are Prisoners in his Hands."⁴⁷ The Madras Council shot back their own response,

⁴⁶ Bengal Council to Madras Council 11 March 1783 (p.811-22) IOR/H/179 p. 817

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 817

defending their actions on the grounds that their negotiations had been necessary to separate Tipu from his French allies.⁴⁸ The Madras Presidency had been coming under criticism for their handling of the war effort, due to the poor military record of the Company forces in southern India during the conflict. In the process of defending their own position, the Madras council would advocate a very different view of Tipu than that promoted by the Governor General in Bengal, one which reflected divergent strands of popular opinion within the East India Company's ranks.

General Norman Macleod wrote to the Bombay Council to argue against what he saw as an unseemly rush to make peace, believing that Tipu was hard pressed by the Marathas and would agree to handsome terms, if the Company was firm in its demands. The more dangerous figure in his view was Governor Macartney of Madras, "who grasps at all Authority and the management of all business, and would willingly reduce every man in India to Cinders, to swell his important figure", and who would conclude peace on any terms purely for the credit it would provide to his own reputation.⁴⁹ This sort of infighting between the three presidencies of the East India Company was quite common, as there was little agreement on how the war should be conducted, what sort of peace should be signed, and how Tipu Sultan should be perceived. The London newspapers picked up on these factional disputes from letters sent home from India, one noting that, "The greatest dissensions prevail betwixt the Supreme Council of Bengal and the Company's servants here [Madras]." The same author gloomily predicted, "if some vigorous steps are not taken at home immediately to restrain the party spirit, the ambition,

⁴⁸ Madras Council to Governor-General and Bengal Council 11 August 1783 (p.1-33) IOR/H/180 p. 2-3

⁴⁹ General Norman Macleod to Bombay Council 9 January 1784 (p.313-18) IOR/H/188 p. 317-18

the avarice, and the tyranny of the Company's servants here, Great Britain may bid adieu to her power in the East," in a reprise of the familiar nabob themes mentioned above.⁵⁰

The Bengal Council was highly dissatisfied with the peace treaty that ended the Second Mysore War, and argued for a more aggressive line to be taken towards Tipu, including the possibility of fomenting revolts within Mysore: "They animadverted[?] on the cruelty exercised by Tippoo towards his Prisoners, and his Subjects in general and were of opinion - that the latter were ripe for rebellion, a circumstance of which the Madras Government ought to have taken a due advantage and not manifested so much anxiety to conclude a Peace since Tippoo would not have dared to renew the contest."⁵¹ The opinion of the Bengal Council reflected their lack of familiarity with the situation in southern India, where there was little evidence to suggest that the people of Mysore were eager to rise up against Tipu. Lord Macartney meanwhile defended his record by writing to the Company's Directors in London, stating that nothing was more needed than peace in the area surrounding Madras, and that he could not subject the inhabitants of the country to the horrors of continued warfare.⁵² In response to the charges of the Governor General and the Bengal Council, Macartney shot back a completely different picture of the Second Mysore War and of the prisoners taken in battle:

With respect to General Mathews, the Madras Government were firmly persuaded that he was not murdered.... As to the other Officers, Government entertained suspicions respecting them, but were not in possession of any proof. The Bengal Government had censured the Government of Madras for the anxiety which they had manifested in their endeavors to procure Peace; alleging that Tippoo had no less cause to desire it than themselves. In reply to this insinuation the Letter

⁵⁰ *Extract of a letter from an Officer at Madras to his friend in Edinburgh...* Printed in the Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser (London, England) 10 May 1784, Issue 17288

⁵¹ Governor General and Council to Madras 2 September 1784. IOR/H/570 p. 275

⁵² Lord Macartney to the Secret Committee of the Directors 19 September 1784 (p. 267-77) IOR/H/247 p. 276

observed that Tippoo's country had been but very little ravaged, and that the expenses of his Army had not impoverished him.⁵³

While the main goal of these exchanges was defending the Madras Council against the charges of cowardice leveled against them, Macartney nonetheless also promoted an opposing characterization of Tipu Sultan, one in which he did not murder his prisoners and had equal cause to sign peace with the East India Company. Tipu's kingdom of Mysore was well-governed and flourishing, providing no support for the internal rebellions or war of liberation promoted by the Calcutta Presidency. These exchanges pointed to the existence of a more dovish "Madras" viewpoint which favored peaceful engagement with Tipu, opposed to a more hawkish "Bengal" viewpoint which saw the Indian prince only as a monstrous stain upon the national honor which had to be wiped out. Although these internal letters within the East India Company were not shared with the wider public, they were nonetheless significant at highlighting the divisions that existed within the Company itself. There was no clear consensus in the mid 1780s on how to represent Tipu, or how best to engage with him.

At the outbreak of the Third Mysore War in 1789, there was once again a split within the Company over how to react to the diplomatic crisis in Travancore.⁵⁴ The same fault lines emerged within the Company's ranks, with a split between the Madras and Calcutta governments over how to regard Tipu Sultan, but with a very different final result due to the newly increased authority possessed by Cornwallis as Governor General. The Madras Presidency, governed at this point by John Holland, favored a negotiated settlement of some kind with Tipu, one which would ensure the preservation of Travancore and maintain the status quo in southern India. The Calcutta government

⁵³ Madras Council to Governor General 29 October 1784. IOR/H/570 p. 276

⁵⁴ See Chapter 1 for more details on the circumstances surrounding the beginning of the conflict.

headed by Cornwallis was much more hawkish in its outlook, seeing the conflict along the Travancore Lines as the pretext for a general engagement with the purpose of reducing or eliminating Tipu's power as an independent ruler. This continuing split between opposing Madras and Calcutta viewpoints indicated the divergent opinions within the Company itself about Tipu Sultan, although it is telling that in the Third Mysore War, the growing influence of the Governor General allowed Cornwallis' viewpoint to win out completely over that of Holland. This served as another example of the growing embrace of the Tipu Legend, in this case within the East India Company's own ranks.

According to papers presented in the House of Commons, Holland remonstrated against the purchase of the two forts in his letters to the Rajah of Travancore, and viewed their transfer as a violation of the 1784 Treaty of Mangalore. Holland was not at all pleased with a subsidiary client state taking independent action that could pull the Company into a major war. After Tipu attacked the Travancore lines, Holland "desired the Rajah to restore Jacottah and Cranganore to the Dutch, of whom he had purchased them; that after Tippoo's attack on the lines of Travancore, he recommended settling the points in dispute by negotiation, to which Tippoo seemed willing to agree."⁵⁵ Tipu appears to have had no desire for a larger war with the Company, writing to Holland that his attack was an unintended skirmish, and that he would accept a mediated solution to the conflict if the Company would send him a diplomatic representative.⁵⁶ Holland agreed with this viewpoint; he made no preparations for war and wrote to Cornwallis that Tipu "had no intention to break with the Company, and would be prepared to enter into

⁵⁵ Whitehall Evening Post (London, England) 15 February 1791, Issue 6632 The newspaper was reporting on Parliamentary debates about the war, in which Holland's correspondences were introduced as evidence.

⁵⁶ Notes on the War with Tipu Sultan (p. 1-170), author and date unlisted. IOR/H/569 p. 5-6

negotiation for the adjustment of the points in dispute."⁵⁷ Tipu genuinely seemed to have believed that his conflict with Travancore was a private dispute, one in which the East India Company would not intervene despite the provisions of the subsidiary alliance. The Company almost certainly could have chosen to settle this dispute through diplomacy rather than warfare, and indeed the former was clearly the preference of Holland's Madras government.

However, Cornwallis' government in Calcutta viewed the situation in a very different light. Cornwallis took the view that by attacking the Travancore Lines, Tipu had entered into a state of war with the Company, and therefore was guilty of breaking the previous Treaty of Mangalore. Despite Tipu's letters to Cornwallis, in which he stated that he had no plans for war with the Company, and requested the sending of an envoy to negotiate the situation, Cornwallis insisted that the war was entirely the fault of the Sultan, quipping at one point: "That mad barbarian has forced us into war with him."⁵⁸ The rest of the Governor General's council in Calcutta supported this interpretation of events, and began preparations for a large-scale conflict in southern India. As for Holland's Madras government, they were roundly castigated for their inaction by the rest of the Company. A common line of argumentation was that Holland had been tricked by Tipu's untrustworthy nature, with one later analysis stating that Holland and the rest of the Madras Council "suffered themselves to be so far deceived by these professions, and explanations, as not to make the preparations they ought to have done" with regards to orders from Bengal, which had commanded them to assume a state of war with Tipu.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Quoted in Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 250

⁵⁸ Quoted in Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (1989): 250

⁵⁹ Notes on the War with Tipu Sultan (p. 1-170), author and date unlisted IOR/H/569 p. 5-6

This was one way to provide an excuse for the inaction of Madras, through heaping blame on the faithless character of Tipu, a view that was commonplace in British circles at the time of the Third Mysore War.⁶⁰

Cornwallis himself was more direct, criticizing the lack of military preparations in his letter to the Madras Council and asking why they seemed to have acted in "Disregard or Contradiction of our repeated Instructions" to regard Tipu as at war with the Company if he committed any hostilities against Travancore. Cornwallis chastised Holland's administration for its late public conduct, which "appeared to us in a disadvantageous Light ", and demanded the reason for the lack of military buildup.⁶¹ Cornwallis took it for granted at an early date that the Company would be returning to war with Tipu. In this respect, Cornwallis and the rest of the Calcutta administration were acting in accordance with Anglo-Indian public opinion, which was strongly in favor of another conflict with Mysore out of a desire for revenge due to the captured prisoners in the previous war. The possibility of a peaceful rapprochement to the incident at Travancore, the policy favored by Holland's Madras government, does not appear to have been considered in the other Presidencies of Calcutta and Bombay.

With disagreement between Calcutta and Madras over how to approach the situation, the reaction of the Directors in London would prove to be crucial. Upon reaching news of the diplomatic crisis months later, Leadenhall Street chose to support the aggressive pro-war policy of the Governor General, and chastised the Madras government for its lack of preparations. Their instructions to Holland mirrored those of Cornwallis:

⁶⁰ See Chapter 3

⁶¹ Governor General and Council to Madras 8 February 1790 (p. 435-36) IOR/H/248 p. 436

But the Instant you were acquainted, on the 8th [January 1790], that Tippoo had actually made a Breach in the Lines of Travancore, not a Moment ought to have been lost in preparing for the most vigorous Exertions, most especially with the Letter before you of the 8th December, from the Governor-General and Council, wherein they declared, that if Tippoo should invade the former Territories of the Rajah of Travancore, such an Invasion was to be deemed an Act of Hostility, and the Commencement of a War, which you was to prosecute with all possible Vigour and Decision. Under these Circumstances, we must express our Astonishment, that any Ideas of an injudicious and misapplied Economy should have induced you to refuse Compliance with Colonel Musgrave's Recommendation, in ordering the necessary Establishment of Draft and Carriage Bullocks for the several Corps that were to take the Field.⁶²

The Directors repeated the same criticisms made by the Governor General, chiding the failure to prepare a supply train for war and instructing Madras to regard any hostile action by Tipu as an immediate declaration of war. As for Holland, he was attacked on grounds of personal corruption, and in a strange reversal, blamed for the attack on Travancore due to his failure to take a hard line against Tipu: "The rupture now threatened, is perhaps, in part, chargeable on the indiscretion, venality, and corruption, of our own civil government in Madras. Mr. Holland is loudly condemned on that score; and perhaps a different conduct on his part might have healed the breach, or intercepted the violence of the India Powers, and intimidated Tippoo Saib from his late attack on the Rajah of Travencore."⁶³ It was now the *failure* to prosecute a war against an Indian state that was inspiring charges of nabobery against Holland from the Directors, precisely the opposite of the charges leveled against Warren Hastings during his contemporary trial.

Holland himself paid the price for his divergent views with his dismissal, as he was replaced by Major General Medows as Governor of Madras. Medows immediately set about preparing the logistics for a long campaign against Mysore, which he would

⁶² Letter to the President and Council at Fort St. George [Madras] 3 June 1790 IOR/H/248 p. 390-91

⁶³ Whitehall Evening Post (London, England) 27 May 1790, Issue 6493. Several pro-Company histories have charged that Holland was bribed by Tipu into his inaction, although there does not appear to be any clear evidence to support this charge.

command under the direction of Cornwallis. The replacement of the civilian Holland with the military officer Medows served as an excellent symbol of the victory of the hawkish Calcutta viewpoint over the more peaceful Madras one. The older governance of the Company by commercial figures such as Hastings and Holland was increasingly dying out, to be replaced by soldiers such as Cornwallis and Wellesley. Military men from the traditional landed aristocracy were perceived to be far less susceptible to moral corruption and nabobery, making them perfect choices as the figureheads of the post-Hastings reformed Company. The removal of Holland from Madras was also a symbol of the growing centralization of the East India Company's overseas administration, with the primacy of the Governor General exerting itself over the other two Presidency towns. Within the East India Company, and more generally amongst the British community in India, Cornwallis' aggressive viewpoint about Tipu was increasingly embraced: the Sultan was a cancer that had to be removed through martial means, with no room for negotiation or compromise.

The Third Mysore War (1790-92) was the turning point within the East India Company in terms of how Tipu Sultan was perceived. Although there had been real disagreement between the Calcutta and Madras Presidencies over whether to engage with Tipu peacefully or seek to prosecute another war, by the time of the Fourth Mysore War (1798-99), this debate had virtually disappeared. Wellesley wrote repeated letters in the autumn of 1798 attacking the Madras government for not acting swiftly enough in accumulating wartime supplies, but there was no further discussion on the actual decision

to renew another conflict with Tipu.⁶⁴ Wellesley made the decision to initiate the Fourth Mysore War at an early date, in June of 1798, and then spent the next eight months carrying out the planning behind the scenes and engaging in a duplicitous series of correspondences with Tipu Sultan to turn his initial vision into a reality.⁶⁵ There was no wider discussion within the Company about whether to engage with Tipu in more peaceful fashion, or to preserve Tipu's rulership over Mysore as a buffer state against the Marathas, as had been often debated in earlier periods. By the time of the Fourth Mysore War, the villainous reputation of Tipu had been accepted virtually wholesale within the Company's ranks, and Wellesley was able to lead the Company's military in a successful war of conquest with virtually no opposing voices. The earlier period of debate between the Madras and Calcutta Presidencies had disappeared entirely.

Tipu in Metropolitan Party Politics

At the same time that Tipu's image was being contested within the East India Company, the same discussion was taking place amongst the wider British public in the metropole. Britain's Parliament had specifically instructed the Company to refrain from engaging in wars of territorial conquest, which raised very real questions about the legality of the later conflicts initiated by Cornwallis and Wellesley against Tipu.⁶⁶ The period of the Third Mysore War during the early 1790s was the height of the debate regarding how Tipu was viewed, with a divided public quarreling back and forth over the true character of the Indian prince. The contested and unstable image of Tipu served as a proxy for the greater debate over the role of the East India Company in British society.

⁶⁴ Edward Ingram (ed.) *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1969) See Mornington to Dundas, 6 October 1798 (87-88) and Mornington to Dundas, 11 October 1789 (96-97) for examples.

⁶⁵ See Chapter 5

⁶⁶ Philip Lawson. *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993): 107-08

This topic became entwined within the factional politics of the day, with hotly contested parliamentary debates raging over the morality of the war taking place in India. A majority of the MPs supported the East India Company and William Pitt's Tory government, but a vocal Whig Opposition made it loudly known that they considered the war to be aggressive and unjust, with Tipu's reputation wrongly slandered by supporters of the Company. This debate further spilled out into the contemporary newspapers and journals, part of the vibrant print culture of the eighteenth century, where commentators and editorialists contested the image of Tipu. Generally speaking, those who supported the Company tended to vilify Tipu Sultan, and had an optimistic view of empire overseas that embraced military action and territorial conquest. Those who opposed the Company were much more likely to defend or make excuses for Tipu, and quite frequently exhibited the familiar pessimistic view of empire, full of fears of being corrupted by Eastern luxury and bringing military despotism back home to Britain. This politicized debate over Tipu Sultan was therefore intertwined with popular perceptions of the Company itself, and the dispute about whether the Company's servants were corrupt nabobs or British patriots.

The image of Tipu became intertwined with British parliamentary politics at an early date, almost as soon as he first appeared in public discourse at the beginning of the 1780s. While references to Tipu were much less common during the Second Mysore War than during the following conflict, the figure of the Sultan still made appearances in parliamentary debate. The figure of Tipu was employed by Pitt's government to justify support for the embattled reputation of the East India Company as it fought against the supposedly tyrannical character of the Sultan, or used alternately by the political

Opposition to point to Tipu's victories as further proof of the incompetence of the Company's overseas administration. For example, Charles Fox linked together the military successes of Tipu with his scorn for the current state of the Company's affairs when arguing for the passage of his India Bill in 1783:

But the great articles to which Mr. Fox objected were, the debts that the Company said were due to them from [Indian princes].... But how were those vast sums to be raised from those princes! By rapine, war, and horrible cruelties.... The only recourse the English had was to strike a terror into the country by making reprisals. They, accordingly, slaughtered the men of the villages and towns through which they passed, and took the women and children prisoners. [...] The victories of Tippoo Saib, the fallen reputation of the English, and in general, the European arms... These were circumstances which did not allow him [Fox] to indulge any sanguine hopes of a peace in India.⁶⁷

Fox joined together the fears of military defeat in India with an anxiety that the Company was ruling in a profoundly arbitrary and despotic fashion. He argued at one point that India was being misruled to so great an extent that Lord Macartney of Madras might already be a prisoner of Tipu.⁶⁸ Fox and his Whig supporters staked a great deal of political capital on this pessimistic view of empire, the belief that India was being poorly governed and existed in a constant state of crisis. This viewpoint employed the same political tropes that were in contemporary use regarding the nabob scandals, referring to corruption, avarice, and contamination of the body politic due to bringing back the worst excesses of the Orient from India.

Meanwhile, the pro-Company Pitt ministry was asserting the opposite, that India was in excellent shape and that peace had been signed with Tipu some time ago. The constant fear of disaster in India, as promoted by the political opposition, was satirized by papers that supported the Tory majority, such as the *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*:

⁶⁷ Universal Evening Post (London, England) 27 November 1783, Issue 770

⁶⁸ Public Advertiser (London, England) 17 December 1783, Issue 15462

"It is necessary to the well-doing of Opposition, that the country should be kept in alarm, and that war, or at least rumour of war, be propagated from one end of our island to the other, to excite jealousies among the people, and lessen the credit of the Administration." This was where Tipu entered into the realm of party politics, as "that terrible hero Tippoo Saib is now said to have taken up arms, which are never to be laid down till he has driven the English, root and branch, from the East-Indies."⁶⁹ The terrible nature of Tipu was employed in this case as a means to drum up support for both the Company and its Tory supporters in Parliament. It was Tippoo the Tyrant who was at fault for the various problems in Indian administration, not the East India Company.

The pro-Company *Whitehall Evening Post* used the threat posed by Tipu as a means of attacking Fox's India Bill, which proposed to remove much of the independence the Company's agents: "The late fatal news from the East Indies [Mathews' surrender] exhibits a striking proof of the extreme futility of parchment regulations [Fox's India Bill], formed by economical projectors, for the *better* government of Asiatic affairs." The *Whitehall Evening Post* mocked the notion of governing India from "the office of a Paymaster" and suggested that "every particle of Asiatic common sense" had been transferred to Edmund Burke, one of the bill's chief supporters.⁷⁰ The paper argued that important decisions about India should be made on the spot by the governors, not legislated by ministers in London, thus preserving the Company's traditional independent role. The particular example chosen by the *Whitehall Evening Post* to demonstrate this claim was the personality of Tipu, initially seen as "favourably disposed to the English interest," but in light of more recent results, the paper was forced to conclude that either

⁶⁹ Morning Post and Daily Advertiser (London, England) 17 October 1785, Issue 3965

⁷⁰ Whitehall Evening Post (London, England) 22 November 1783, Issue 5692 Emphasis in the original.

public opinion at home had been in error or "the Asiatic Prince [was] a dissembler."⁷¹ In either case, the situation reflected poorly on Tipu Sultan and on the Foxite supporters of the reforming India Bill.

Both ministry and opposition sought to make use of the popular interest in the Mysore Wars for their own political ends, with varying degrees of success. Initial reports from India were also not always reliable; many of the rumors of disaster and defeat in India would later prove untrue when the official dispatches from the Company arrived in Britain. When news arrived by ship in 1784 that a cease-fire had indeed been concluded with Mysore, just as the government had earlier claimed, it came as a source of some political embarrassment to Fox.⁷² Tipu's involvement with the party politics of the day was relatively minor during the Second Mysore War, but would become paramount in the debates surrounding the next war, beginning with the controversy surrounding the attack on Travancore.

When news of this new conflict in southern India reached Britain and the rest of the empire in 1790, it generated a sizable debate about the legality and morality of the war against Tipu Sultan. In a reflection of the arguments within the East India Company, the majority of commentators supported Cornwallis and believed in the justness of the war effort, while a vocal minority contested the actions of the Company as aggressive and antithetical to British liberty. These debates ran their course for the next three years without a clear conclusion until the end of the war, although the general sentiment of public opinion continued a gradual shift towards the villainous characterization of Tipu, and a reimagining of the Company's servants as patriotic soldier-heroes.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, Whitehall Evening Post 5692

⁷² St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 8 January 1784, Issue 3564

Much of the initial coverage of the war was favorable, as newspapers expounded upon the benefits to be gained from a swift and decisive victory. Many of the sentiments expressed in the print culture of the British metropole reflected those of the Anglo-Indian community, albeit with less focus on the theme of revenge against Tipu. The *St. James Chronicle* printed a letter from Madras reassuring its readers that "nothing prejudicial to the interests of the nation" was to be dreaded from the outbreak of war. The fighting would instead be "the most probable means of establishing the British interests in India... beyond the probability of all injury" since Tipu's cruelty would turn his subjects against him.⁷³ The *Public Advertiser* believed that this war would demonstrate the good name of the British in India, through the Company's support of the Rajah of Travancore, thereby gaining the friendship and good wishes of the native princes. The newspaper also pointed out other benefits which would accrue to the Company, in the form of "immense wealth" to be gained through "ensuring a permanent peace, in the destruction of Tippoo Saib."⁷⁴ This writer appeared to have been unaware of the irony in writing about the establishment of permanent peace through warfare. This was an argument that was increasingly made by those who supported the East India Company in the 1790s, the notion that Tipu was a threat to the peace who had to be eliminated, which would be achieved through by going to war and conquering his kingdom. It conveniently transferred the burden of aggression onto the Sultan, allowing the reputation of the British to remain unblemished, and would be employed by both Cornwallis and later Richard Wellesley in their wars against Mysore.

⁷³ *St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London, England) 3 July 1790, Issue 4557

⁷⁴ *Public Advertiser* (London, England) 26 July 1790, Issue 17488

Due to the confusing circumstances of the Travancore incident, it was important for supporters of the Company to establish that Tipu had been the aggressor in the conflict. The *Attic Miscellany* described the outbreak of the war in these terms for its British readers:

In India, the torch of war is already lighted. Tippoo Saib, (the son of and successor of Hyder Ally) by an unprovoked act on the territories of our ally, the king of Travancore, has compelled us to take up arms... Fortified by alliances with the native Princes, happy in a military commander of approved excellence, and in a governor general of solid talents and unshaken integrity, we may reasonably hope to subdue this unprincipled tyrant of the East, whose happiness consists in spreading devastation around him. But whatever be the *event* of the war, we have the satisfaction to know that our adversary was the aggressor, and that the necessity of preserving inviolate the national faith rendered it unavoidable.⁷⁵

This passage reassured the public that the Company was in no way responsible for the fighting, and was instead acting to protect the national honor from the tyrannical aggression of an Oriental despot. The authors also insisted that the war was unavoidable, again removing any burden of guilt from the Company and transferring it onto the person of Tipu.

These reassuring assumptions about how the war had begun were soon challenged by a series of revealing debates in the House of Commons. The topic of the Third Mysore War was also taken up in Parliament, spawning a series of contentious exchanges which were widely reported upon in the print media of the day. Prime Minister William Pitt's Tory ministry supported the cause of the East India Company, which was vigorously contested by a vocal Whig opposition. These MPs charged that the war against Tipu was an unjust act of aggression, and one that did not deserve to receive the official support of Parliament and the rest of the British nation. The Whigs were never able to succeed in passing their motions regarding the war, but the sustained debate in both the Commons

⁷⁵ *Attic Miscellany* (London, England) Vol. 2, Issue 18, p. 231 (1790) Emphasis in the original.

and the Lords on this subject reflected the divided attitude of the public with regards to both Tipu Sultan and the East India Company itself.

Foremost among these critics was John Hipplesley (also spelled Hippisley), a former East India Company servant who had resigned from the Company in 1787 and was returned to Parliament as an MP from Sudbury in 1790. Hipplesley raised the subject of the legality of the Company's war against Tipu in a House of Commons debate on 21 December 1790. As *Lloyd's Evening Post* reported, "He could not forbear to state, that in the present instance Tippoo Saib did not seem to act so as to provoke hostility from us, and that the present was a war of injustice." When the initial purchase of the forts took place and Tipu advanced against Travancore, Sir Archibald Campbell had been averse to offering Travancore any assistance, but since then, "opinions were changed, and the British Government were about to be involved in war."⁷⁶

Hipplesley's personal experience as a former paymaster for the Madras government gave his objections to the war additional weight and meaning. He was joined in his criticisms by Philip Francis, the longtime antagonist of Warren Hastings both in Calcutta and in London, now newly returned to Parliament as an MP from Bletchingley. Speaking in the same debate, Francis outlined a vision of British India sharply different from that being advocated by the Company's supporters. Francis contended that the goal of policy should be "the general preservation of peace throughout India... a particular attention to the peace and security of Bengal in particular; and avoiding, above all things, the endeavor to make any further acquisition of territory. Next to these, our policy... should be to have no alliance what ever with any of the Native Princes, but to cultivate

⁷⁶ *Lloyd's Evening Post* (London, England) 20 December 1790, Issue 5223 I am uncertain how the paper could be printed the day *before* the debate, however that was what the dating of the source claimed.

the friendship of all, and preserve by all possible means the balance of power among them."⁷⁷ Judged on these grounds, the war against Tipu was a misuse of the Company's resources, and more likely to cause harm than good. Francis doubted that the Company would be successful at all militarily, given the advantage in cavalry posed by Tipu.⁷⁸ The objections raised by Hipplesley and Francis were typical of the overall Whig opposition during the Third Mysore War: they argued that the Company was carrying out an unjust war of aggression, that it would be too costly, that the motives behind the war involved more nabob plundering of Indian wealth, and that they were pessimistic as to whether victory over Tipu could be achieved at all.

Hipplesley continued to defend the position of Tipu and argue against the decision to go to war. In a Commons debate the following week on 27 December 1790, Hipplesley pointed out that Tipu wrote an apology for his conduct to the Madras government, declaring his wish to continue in friendship with the English, and to avoid any cause of offense towards them. That led to the following conclusion:

From this statement, Mr. H. conceived that it was probable Tippoo Sultan might be less blameable than were aware of, if not strictly justifiable; and consequently that our hostile *interference* might not be so well adapted to conciliate and illustrate the *system* laid down by Parliament for the *better* governance of *India*. Mr. H. hoped he should not be considered as undertaking the *general defense* of Tippoo Sultan. He considered himself rather as an advocate for the *honour* and *justice* of the British nation. He admitted the claim of Tippoo to the epithet of a *merciless tyrant*; the tyrant nevertheless had his *rights*, and consequently his *wrongs*, in common with other men!⁷⁹

Hipplesley adopted an unusual position in this speech, accepting the claims of Tipu's brutality and yet nonetheless criticizing the Company for its actions against the Sultan.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*

⁷⁸ For more information on this concern, see G. J. Bryant, "Asymmetric Warfare: The British Experience in Eighteenth-Century India" in *The Journal of Military History* 2004 68(2): 431-469

⁷⁹ Diary or Woodfall's Register (London, England) 27 December 1790, Issue 547 Emphasis in the original.

Regardless of the character of Tipu, Hipplesley argued, that did not justify the Company in violating the instructions of Parliament to refrain from campaigns of conquest in India.

This appears to have been a transitional period in terms of attitudes towards Tipu and the East India Company. Hipplesley had internalized the tyrannical discourse about Tipu but was not willing to accept a positive reimagining of the Company itself. The wider public also appeared to share in this transitional moment, with shifting and contested narratives regarding the outbreak of the war. The *Morning Chronicle* concurred with Hipplesley in its assessment of the situation: "The origin of the war in India, as opened by Mr. Hipplesley... deserves the most serious attention of the public. The peace of India is of too much importance for us to be duped into a war... or for the unguarded ferocity of Tippoo Sultan, to be made a pretext for departing from the system of moderation prescribed by Parliament for the Government of India."⁸⁰ The *Morning Chronicle* went on to state a few days later, "The public is under great obligation to Mr. Hipplesley for explaining the origin of that war, in which it appears that Tippoo Saib was not the aggressor till he had reason to believe that he himself was in danger of being attacked," providing further support for this interpretation of events.⁸¹ The notion that the public was being "duped" into supporting an unnecessary war of conquest, in violation of the dictates laid down by Parliament, recalled the old charges of nabobery that the Company was trying to shed.

In opposing this viewpoint, and defending the justness of the war, Henry Dundas pointed to the aggressive and untrustworthy nature of Tipu Sultan: "Respecting the forts of Tranganore, and Jachotto... the Rajah of Travancore had as good a right to get a

⁸⁰ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 30 December 1790, Issue 6728

⁸¹ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 1 January 1791, Issue 6730

transfer of them as any other person. But the principal reason why he got them into his hand, was owing to the constant alarm he was under of an invasion by Tippoo Sultan into his kingdom..."⁸² Dundas was essentially outlining a doctrine of pre-emption:

Travancore's actions were justified because they were necessary to protect the kingdom against attack by Tipu, and that explained why the Company also had to take part in the war. This was the same logic that Cornwallis would later use in defending the war in his letters back to the Directors of the Company: Tipu's character was faithless and violent, which necessitated taking decisive military action against him.⁸³ Pre-emptive warfare was the only just course of action when faced with a tyrant such as Tipu.

As these exchanges suggested, the debate over Tipu had become a stand-in for a wider political argument between the leading figures of the Whig and Tory parties. Men like Hipplesley and Francis stood for an older version of overseas empire, one that conceptualized British power as fundamentally maritime, commercial, Protestant, and free.⁸⁴ They believed that any territorial empire in India could only be despotic in nature, and feared the moral consequences of the Company's military conquests on the British metropole. In contrast, the Pitt ministry represented the new ethos of the growing Second British Empire, one that was far more militaristic and autocratic in nature.⁸⁵ They justified overseas imperialism by placing Indian subjects at a lower place on a hierarchy of civilizations, and by vilifying Indian rulers for their supposed moral corruption and

⁸² General Evening Post (London, England) 26 February 1791, Issue 8958

⁸³ Cornwallis to Directors, Conclusion of Treaty with Tipu Sultan 5 April 1792 (p. 91-107) IOR/H/251 p. 94

⁸⁴ David Armitage. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

⁸⁵ C.A. Bayly. *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989)

savagery.⁸⁶ The Third Mysore War served as a collision point for these alternate and competing views of overseas empire, with the newer perspective of the pro-Company Pitt ministry gradually establishing their dominance.

Ultimately the views of the Opposition were those of a minority, and they were unable to secure passage of motions condemning the war. In a Commons debate on 2 March 1791, Dundas secured the passage of three resolutions by the House:

That it is the opinion of this House, that the several attacks made by Tippoo Sultan on the lines of Travancore, the 29th of December, 1789, and the 6th of March, 1790, were infractions in the treaty of Mangalore, made in 1784.

That the conduct of the Governor General of Bengal [Cornwallis], in determining to prosecute with vigour the war against Tippoo Sultan, in consequence of his attack on the territories of the Rajah of Travancore, was highly meritorious.

That the treaties entered into with the Nizam on the 1st of June, and with the Mahrattas on the 7th of July, 1790, are wisely calculated to add vigour to the operations of war, and to promote the future tranquility of India; and that the faith of the British nation is pledged for the due performance of the engagements contained in the said treaties.⁸⁷

All of these passed without a division (after some angry comments from the Opposition), indicating that the general mood was in favor of the war. Fox remonstrated loudly against these measures, decrying how the signing of treaties of alliance against Tipu "put it out of our power to make any moderate terms with *Tippoo*, and must pursue him to destruction under the specious and delusive pretence of keeping faith with our Allies."⁸⁸ The majority opinion, however, did not agree and supported both the ministry and the East India Company.

⁸⁶ C. A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 77-78

⁸⁷ General Evening Post (London, England) 1 March 1791, Issue 8959

⁸⁸ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 2 March 1791, Issue 5254 Emphasis in the original.

The situation was much the same in the House of Lords, where Lord Portchester gave a speech on 11 April 1791 attacking the situation in India:

It was a war founded in injustice, in violation of the most sacred treaties, and in direct contempt of the recorded policy of the Court of Directors, and of both Houses of Parliament. These, he said, were strong assertions, but they were true... He contended that the war was planned in this country long before the attack of Tippoo Sultan, in the year 1789. It was a war of conquest, a principle which had ever been reprobated by every enlightened nation... he therefore considered the bargain about the forts [at Travancore] as a mere pretence for entering into a war, which he had no hesitation in saying, was dictated by the Board of Control in this country. It was, surely, a shameful misapplication of the revenue of the East India-Company, to embark them in a war of conquest for the acquisition of territories, which, after the expiration of their charter, they could never enjoy.⁸⁹

After making this attack against the Company, Portchester attempted to pass three anti-war resolutions, stating that "schemes of conquests and extension of dominion in India" were repugnant to the national honor, there was no just cause for a war with Tipu Sultan, and that the Directors of the East India Company should issue orders for a speedy resolution of peace with Tipu, on moderate and equitable terms. These resolutions failed by a wide margin, the Lords voting against 96 to 19. Lord Grenville then advanced two pro-war resolutions that were nearly identical to those passed in the Commons, which passed easily on a vote of 62 to 12.⁹⁰ This exchange demonstrated that the Lords reflected the sentiment of the Commons, with a large majority supporting the war against Tipu, but a stubborn Opposition making noise by insisting that the Company was pursuing an unjust war of conquest.

These criticisms of the Company and the ongoing follies of the war effort inspired popular cartoonists of the day as well, who made use of the themes of the Mysore Wars to provide their own critique of empire. Cornwallis' retreat from Seringapatam in 1791,

⁸⁹ General Evening Post (London, England) 9 April 1791, Issue 8976

⁹⁰ *Ibid*

when the onset of the monsoon season forced a retreat of the Company's armies before a successful siege of the city could be prosecuted, proved to be an especially popular subject for their work. This was a topic ripe for satire, and the cartoonists of the day wasted no opportunity. W. Dent was the first printer to take up the subject, publishing "Rare News from India, or, Things going on swimmingly in the East" on 5 December 1791.⁹¹ His caricature depicted British soldiers floating downhill in a river, which originated from the urination of a rearing horse labeled "Tippoo's Horse." The soldiers (one carrying a royal standard) are swept away by the raging waters, which are entitled "Heavy Rains or Monsoon Tip! O!" An officer in the foreground of the print has a speech bubble mocking the retreat, stating "They cant call the being driven thus a defeat – its only a retreat to return with more vigour – or, why not a compleat Victory – for they don't follow us...." The message of the print was an obvious satire on the military setbacks encountered by the Company's armies. Dent was also mocking the Company's attempts to claim that the retreat from Seringapatam was a victory of some kind, which had been advanced by some of the conservative London newspapers.⁹² Dent's print indicated how some segments of popular opinion continued to be skeptical of the Company's claims, reflecting the same currents of thought that backed the political Opposition and criticized the conduct of the war.

Dent's cartoon was popular enough to spawn immediate imitators, as was common in eighteenth century print culture. Rival cartoonist Gillray printed "The Coming-On of the Monsoons; or, The Retreat from Seringapatam" the very next day on 6

⁹¹ W. Dent. "Rare News from India, or, Things going on swimmingly in the East." Published by W. Dent, 5 December 1791. Image #7928 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

⁹² See for example the St. James' Chronicle and the British Evening Post (London, England) 1 December 1791, Issue 4788

December 1791 [Figure 5].⁹³ The print shows Cornwallis retreating backwards, riding an ass, with an expression of sheer terror on his face. Tipu Sultan stands on top of a fortress, grinning maniacally, as cannons fire and he urinates onto the retreating British soldiers. A long reference to Falstaff is printed beneath the action, further satirizing Cornwallis. A similar caricature was printed by I. Cruikshank a little over a week later, depicting Tipu on the back of a horse galloping past Cornwallis on elephant-back, with Tipu and his horse launching a spray of excretion onto Cornwallis.⁹⁴

Although this was a very crudely drawn print, it demonstrates the popularity of Tipu in public discourse at this point in time, with three different cartoonists creating different renditions of the same event; their repeated use of the urination motif also shows how the artists were in communication with one another as part of a larger print culture. The cartoons from Gillray and Cruikshank demonstrated the same themes as the one published by Dent, mocking the retreat from Seringapatam and serving as much harsher attacks on the person of Cornwallis. These criticisms of the Governor General would later disappear in the wake of Cornwallis' triumphant victory, but during the course of the war itself, popular opinion was still very much divided on the Third Mysore War, and dubious about the morality of the Company engaging in Indian wars of conquest. Tipu Sultan was not seen in a particularly negative light in these representations of the conflict, and if anything appeared as a rather jovial figure, laughing at the incompetence of his Company opponents.

⁹³ Gillray. "The Coming-On of the Monsoons; or, The Retreat from Seringapatam." Published by H. Humphrey, 6 December 1791. Image #7929 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

⁹⁴ I. Cruikshank. "How to Gain a Compleat Victory, and Say, You got Safe out of the Enemy's Reach." Published by S.W. Fores, 15 December 1791. Image #7932 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

The retreat from Seringapatam in 1791 was the low point of the war for the Company's military fortunes, and as such produced the most critical response from contemporary print culture. In addition to the cartoons mocking the onset of the monsoon with urination references, this period also produced an extraordinary companion piece to an earlier cartoon entitled "Good News from Madras." Once again bearing the same title, this time the cartoonist's print shows not a Company victory, but a British observer gazing on the triumph of Tipu Sultan over the British in India [Figure 6].⁹⁵ Tipu sits atop an elephant, receiving the sword of Cornwallis as part of an official surrender. British corpses, broken cannons, and dead oxen lay strewn about the ground next to the Sultan's elephant. On the fortress in the background, the British flag is being lowered to the ground, with Tipu's own flag flying atop it. Beneath the scene, the caption for the print reads "Lord Cornwallis defeated, Tippoo Sultan Triumphant, and the British Oppressors extirpated from India."

This was a truly extraordinary cartoon, especially when compared to its companion piece from earlier in the war, which predicted an easy victory for the Company over Tipu. While the print may possibly have been intended as a satire against the political Opposition (hinting that they wanted the Company to lose the war), it could just as easily be argued that the cartoon's message was intended as written, showing a realistic depiction of a British defeat. Tipu is not caricatured in the print, and he and his men appear in rather dignified positions. If anything, H.W.'s print was created in support of the war's critics, flipping the script around to argue that it was the Company who was acting tyrannically in India, much as John Hipplesley and Philip Francis had been arguing

⁹⁵ H.W. "Good News from Madras." Unknown printer, December 1791. Image #7939 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

in Parliament. The print from W.H. served as a plebian strand of protest against the East India Company, mocking their claims by styling the British themselves as "oppressors." While the outcome of the war was in doubt, this was a very real current of public opinion.

The subject of the war's morality continued to be raised in Parliament fully two years after the war's outbreak, with the same Opposition figures insisting that the East India Company and its servants were acting in despotic fashion in India. During a meeting of Parliament on 9 February 1792, Major Thomas Maitland once again reopened the question of how the conflict had begun, drawing the conclusion that "Tippoo had committed no offense, by breach of existing treaties, to justify an offensive alliance." Maitland then turned the standard narrative of Tipu and Cornwallis on its head by reversing their roles: "It had been much the fashion of late to launch forth into praises of Lord Cornwallis, and reprobation of his antagonist.. he could not but think that the one [Cornwallis] had acted with all the rashness and precipitancy of an Eastern tyrant; the native Prince had assumed the moderation of a British Governor."⁹⁶ Maitland's speech helped make explicit the way in which image of Cornwallis was deployed as a shining contrast to the image of the Sultan. His line of criticism undercut the stainless reputation of Cornwallis that the East India Company tried to promote, and called to mind the old nabob imagery of the British as "Eastern tyrants" once again. This would have been a cutting remark because of the underlying fear of Britons being morally compromised by Indian luxury, which played such a major role in the reaction against the nabobs.⁹⁷ The notion that Cornwallis had been corrupted by exercise of absolute power, and was acting

⁹⁶ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 8 February 1792, Issue 5401

⁹⁷ Tillman Nechtman. *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain* (2010): 16

in the fashion of an Oriental despot, touched on a number of subjects that made Britons very uncomfortable about their growing empire.

In a further Commons debate held on 15 March, Maitland once again argued that the war "was directly contrary to every principle of policy; that it was carried out on the principle of robbery, and that it would be attended with the ruin of our settlements in India."⁹⁸ Maitland charged the Company with plundering the territory of the Nawab of Arcot (Britain's longtime ally in the Carnatic) in order to pay for the war's expenses, and went on to propose a resolution of censure against Cornwallis. In Cornwallis' defense, Richard Wellesley, MP for Windsor, stated that Cornwallis sought to act through pacific measures, but was prevented from doing so by the "violent conduct of Tippoo Sultan," and "his cruelties and enmity to the English nation."⁹⁹ Wellesley further argued that Maitland's resolutions would have a pernicious effect on the war in India, undermining the confidence of the Company soldiers and elevating the fortunes of Tipu. Wellesley also wanted the debate itself to remain secret, to avoid affecting morale in India. When Maitland's resolution was put to a vote, it was soundly defeated by a margin of 159 to 43, indicating once again that the opinions of Maitland were not those of the majority. Nevertheless, the war itself remained a controversial and even unpopular subject in public opinion; a letter printed in *Woodfall's Register* from the same period mentioned in passing how "the war in India appears to be condemned in England."¹⁰⁰ It is important to establish this more nuanced perspective of the Mysore Wars in the realm of popular discourse, in light of how they were portrayed in later decades.

⁹⁸ Evening Mail (London, England) 14 March 1792, Issue 477

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Wellesley would later become Governor General of India from 1798-1805, and led the final Mysore War against Tipu Sultan. This is discussed further in Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁰ Diary or Woodfall's Register (London, England) 4 February 1792, Issue 896

All of this earlier debate vanished overnight in the aftermath of Cornwallis' victory, and the arrival in the metropole of news regarding the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam. Cornwallis immediately became a national hero, receiving the thanks of the East India Company, an annuity of £5000, promotion to the peerage, the Freedom of the City of London, enthusiastic public receptions, and the composition of songs and paintings in his honor.¹⁰¹ The House of Commons voted on 19 December 1792 to offer its official congratulations to Cornwallis, the resolution stating: "That the thanks of this House be given to the most Noble Charles Marquis Cornwallis, Knight of the most Noble Order of the Garter, for his able, gallant, and meritorious conduct during the late war in India, by which an honourable and advantageous peace has been obtained."¹⁰² It is perhaps noteworthy that the Commons felt compelled to add that the war had resulted in an "honorable peace", which remained in dispute by certain members of the Opposition. Philip Francis spoke on the proposed resolution, and was effusive in his praise for Cornwallis, but Francis indicated his continued disapproval for the treaty itself, which he thought "inconsistent with the principles of the war." Francis also condemned the acquisition of further territory for the Company, which he did not feel was consistent with the original stated goals of the war.¹⁰³ His objections were brushed aside, and the vote of thanks passed without a division, indicating overwhelming approval. This exchange demonstrated how noted Opposition figures like Francis were forced to tiptoe around the subject of the war, as Francis carefully stated that he supported Cornwallis but

¹⁰¹ Peter Marshall. "Cornwallis Triumphant: War in India and the British Public in the Late Eighteenth Century" in *War, Strategy, and International Politics*. Lawrence Freeman, Paul Hayes, and Robert O'Neill (ed.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992)

¹⁰² Evening Mail (London, England) 19 December 1792, Issue 597

¹⁰³ *Ibid*

didn't feel that the peace concluded was a just one. Cornwallis himself was untouchably popular, leaving critics of the Company in a very weak political position at this juncture.

The peace treaty itself was not quite so universally popular as Cornwallis himself, although a strong majority of the public gave their approval. Most of the debate surrounding the treaty questioned whether or not Cornwallis should have continued the war until he achieved the complete destruction of Tipu; hardly anyone outside of Francis and a few extremists felt that the treaty itself had been unjust. This shift in the locus of debate - no longer about the war itself, but about how far it should have been prosecuted - indicated how successful the Company had been in persuading popular opinion onto its side. The Company's Indian wars were no longer considered beyond the pale of morality, and it was rather a question of how successful and profitable they could be.

The conservative London newspapers certainly had no issues with the peace settlement, with the *Public Advertiser* writing on how "the brilliant success of the gallant *Cornwallis*, has so completely *dazzled* and confused the *false Prophets*, that all is at present silence in their discomfited corps." The mention of false prophets was a swipe at the Whig Opposition, who were now ripe for mocking over their earlier criticism of the fighting: "Those who condemned the War last year, who said it could not be so speedily ended, and who at the same time urged the impolicy of annihilating Tippoo, will surely be unable to open their *patriotic* mouths against Lord Cornwallis – for he has, to indulge them, speedily ended the war, and he had not annihilated, but contented himself by completely *crippling their friend*."¹⁰⁴ The *Evening Mail* reassured its readers that the expenses of the war would not be as large as imagined, due to contributions from the Marathas and the Nizam. Furthermore, the *Evening Mail* argued, the treaty concluded by

¹⁰⁴ *Public Advertiser* (London, England) 4 July 1792, Issue 18095 Emphasis in the original.

Cornwallis showed that the goal of the war was not the extirpation of Tipu, but the settlement of a safe and honorable peace.¹⁰⁵

Histories of the military campaigns written by officers of the East India Company tended to share the same glowing outlook on the peace. Roderick Mackenzie provided a standard defense of the treaty in his account: "This glorious conclusion of the war was celebrated from the center to the utmost extremities of the British empire, with the most brilliant rejoicings; few indeed affected to disapprove of the treaty, and these were actuated by a desire of seeing the house of Hyder totally extirpated."¹⁰⁶ Mackenzie did not favor a harsher peace out of fear that this would upset the balance of power in southern India, and professed the opinion that Tipu was far too crippled to pose a threat to the Company for many years to come. Alexander Dirom felt compelled to provide a list of the treaty's benefits at the conclusion of his history, going so far as to state that although the war was not profitable financially, it resulted in very important strategic advantages in southern India. Foremost among these in his opinion was security, with no further apprehension of being disturbed by the restless ambition of Tipu. Dirom ultimately concluded:

Finally; this war has vindicated the honour of the nation; has given the additional possessions and security to the settlements in India which they required; has effected the wished-for balance amongst the native powers on the Peninsula; has, beyond all former example, raised the character of the British arms in India; and has afforded an instance of good faith in alliance, and moderation in conquest, so eminent, as ought to constitute the English the arbiters of power, worthy of holding the sword and scales of justice in the East.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Evening Mail (London, England) 6 July 1792, Issue 526

¹⁰⁶ Lieutenant Roderick Mackenzie. *A Sketch of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* Vol. 2 (Calcutta: Unknown printer, 1793; London: Imported and sold by J. Sewell, 1799): 237-38

¹⁰⁷ Major Alexander Dirom. *A Narrative of the Campaign in India, which Terminated the War with Tippoo Sultan in 1792* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer, 1793, 1794, 1985): 273

Much like the other sources, Dirom believed that the war had demonstrated the good faith and honorable conduct of the Company's officers, best symbolized in the person of Cornwallis. This reformed image of the Company was much more responsible than it had been in the past, and patrician military officers like Cornwallis could be trusted to rule over India without fear of moral corruption or other nabobery.

The Anglo-Indian community had a slightly different reaction, mixing exuberant joy over the defeat of Tipu with regret that Mysore had not been conquered completely. The *Madras Courier* contented itself for the moment with tallying up the benefits accrued from the peace settlement: "In the present instance, we have greatly triumphed... [our troops] have elevated the English name in India to the utmost height of glory, and directed by the wisdom, and cumulating the ardour, of their brave leader have dictated a peace to the enemy... which, in its consequences, will be productive of a vast influx of wealth to their country."¹⁰⁸ The Anglo-Indian community of Calcutta heaped praise after praise on the figure of Cornwallis, asking rhetorically "how exalted that magnanimity which stopped short amidst victory, and spared the prostrate foe," before going on to vote for the placement of a statue in his honor at the heart of the city.¹⁰⁹ A speech recorded in the *Calcutta Gazette* specifically compared the changes that had taken place in British rule over the previous three decades:

Thus, in Place of the dark prospect that presented itself seven years ago, we now behold our credit, restored our reputation in arms higher than in the days of Lawrence and of Clive, our alliance courted and our faith relied on. If we look to the internal state of Bengal, we find the contrast Still greater; on the one hand, a declining cultivation, a wretched people, destitute of property and of rights, groaning under the stripes and blows of a merciless extortioner; on the other, a smiling country, a peasantry happy in the secure possession of their cottage and

¹⁰⁸ *Madras Courier* (Madras, India) 8 March 1792, Issue 335

¹⁰⁹ *Calcutta Gazette* (Calcutta, India) 7 November 1793, Issue 506

their field, joyfully rendering to a limited authority, the price of protection and safety.¹¹⁰

The speaker contrasted the earlier period of the nabobs against the new administration of Cornwallis. Plundering of wealth and exploitation of the Indian populace had been replaced by responsible and proper governance. The figure of Cornwallis was deployed as an antidote to the earlier corruption in the Company's governance, putting an end to the days of bribery and misrule. This new image of the East India Company was one which could be folded into British patriotism, allowing the public at home to celebrate the military successes of the Company's armies abroad.

This reimagining of the Company was especially effective when marshaled against the depredations of an Oriental "tyrant" like Tipu. When criticisms of the treaty did appear, they tended to reprimand Cornwallis for not finishing the deal and eliminating Tipu from power completely. One such report from the Anglo-Indian community indicated that "The termination of the war by treaty, is not so popular a measure in India as might be expected; but on no other ground than this, that Tippoo's perfidious policy, and his enormous cruelty to our countrymen, have not been sufficiently punished."¹¹¹ The *General Evening Post* similarly reported that Cornwallis' terms of peace did not please all of the London politicians, at least in part for the same reasons: "They think, or affect to think, that his Lordship ought not to have made any peace, before he had exterminated the tyrant, and got possession of all his dominions, forgetting the infinite difficulties under which the war has been carried on, and the inordinate expence it has cost the Company."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹¹ *General Evening Post* (London, England) 8 November 1792, Issue 9225

¹¹² *General Evening Post* (London, England) 3 July 1792, Issue 9169

Genuine criticisms of the peace, along the earlier lines of it being a naked and immoral grab for territorial gain, were few and far between. Only disaffected individuals like Philip Francis and a few staunchly Opposition newspapers were willing to object to what was increasingly seen as a patriotic victory for the entire nation to share. Even the *Morning Chronicle*, very much an anti-ministry and anti-Company press, limited itself to scoffing at the claims that these new territories would reduce the expenses paid on the Company's military: "We have had many promises of reductions of establishments and patronage, but unfortunately none of them have been yet fulfilled."¹¹³ The popularity of the victory over Tipu, and especially of Cornwallis himself, rendered effective criticism all but impossible. The political opposition had been completely hamstrung, and their earlier arguments against the Third Mysore War were engulfed under a surge of popular patriotic sentiment. Similarly, in the aftermath of Cornwallis' victory, no more satirical prints would appear regarding either Tipu Sultan or the Third Mysore War. The Company's military triumph came as a crushing blow to the plebian strands of protest that had been uttering the old refrains about the dangers of moral corruption and Oriental luxury undermining the British nation. The satirists had evidently moved on to other targets, leaving the Company and its apologists the uncontested masters of this particular public discourse. With the passage of time, this period of debate would be forgotten entirely, and the Company's interpretation of events, the belief that the Third Mysore War had been a defensive war fought to stop the depredations of Tippoo the Tyrant, established itself as the historical memory of this period in the British popular imagination.

¹¹³ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 10 July 1792, Issue 7204

Half a decade later in 1799, there was a complete disappearance of political debate surrounding the legality of the Fourth Mysore War. In stark contrast to the parliamentary and popular furor that the previous conflict attracted, the final conflict against Tipu prompted almost no debate whatsoever, largely due to the presence of the Sultan's French "alliance".¹¹⁴ News of the war was discussed in the House of Commons, although the fierce debates of the early 1790s had now been replaced by votes of congratulations and thanks for the Company. In the session of 24 September 1799, Mr. Shaw Lefevre rose to express his gratitude for the "gallant exploits and illustrious achievements of our able officers and their brave men" over the inveterate and irreconcilable foe of Tipu Sultan. Lefevre made what was now a common claim, accepting that the East India Company was interchangeable with and represented the British nation. However, even though there was no debate over the final conflict in Parliament, Dundas still went out of his way to emphasize that the war was strictly reactionary in nature, insisting that it was just and defensive as well as brilliant and successful.¹¹⁵ While the military success of the conflict was not in doubt, the argument that the war had been defensive in nature strained credibility to the breaking point. Nevertheless, this was an important aspect of Tipu's supposedly despotic nature, and how it factored into changing notions of empire; Britons needed to see themselves as the defenders of liberty, even while amassing vast territories overseas. By claiming that all of

¹¹⁴ See Chapter 5

¹¹⁵ Whitehall Evening Post (London, England) 24 September 1799, Issue 8140

its wars were defensive in nature, and designed to protect India from the whims of mad tyrants like Tipu, the Company was able to achieve this goal.¹¹⁶

Unlike the widespread usage of satirical cartoons during the Third Mysore War, the final war against Tipu conducted by Lord Wellesley would only see the publication of a single confusing caricature of Dundas. Published by W. Hixon and entitled "Low Comedians *Amusing* the Wise Men of the East!!", the print depicts Dundas in Scottish costume dancing a jig in front of William Pitt [Figure 7].¹¹⁷ The image presents William Pitt seated next to Dundas, who is dressed in Scottish Highlands attire and dances a fling. Behind them are rows of amused Directors of the East India Company; the outline of the East India House can be seen in the background, however the actual pediment above the building (which depicted a man standing protectively above a woman with an infant) has been replaced by a man making a murderous attack on a prostrate woman. A sign on the building indicates that this scene was in reaction to the "Death of Tippoo". Hixon's print attempted to tap into the earlier strands of protest against the Company, suggesting unwarranted glee from the Directors at the death of Tipu and rapaciousness on the part of the Company servants. It does not appear to have been a successful print, however, appearing only once and spawning no imitators. The message itself was confusing, with its anti-Scottish imagery hearkening back to earlier decades, and the print found little resonance with the wider public when set against the context of Britain's wars with revolutionary France.

¹¹⁶ John Malcolm, Wellesley's private secretary, made this explicit claim in his 1811 history of British India: **all** of the Company's wars were defensive in nature! John Malcolm. *Sketch of the Political History of India* (1811): 4-5

¹¹⁷ Unknown author. "Low Comedians *Amusing* the Wise Men of the East!!" (emphasis in the original). Published by W. Hixon, 9 February 1800. Image #9516 in Mary Dorothy George. *Catalogue of Political and Personal Satires* (1978)

Conclusion

The disappearance of satirical cartoons and prints mocking the Company during the Fourth Mysore War was therefore an indication that public opinion on the subject was shifting, reflecting the same changes observed in the newspapers and other print media. The anti-Company side of the debate was rapidly disappearing, in both elite circles and popular print culture. Although there were still a tiny few voices criticizing the Company, and protesting over the death of Tipu, this was no longer a mainstream opinion as it had been during the previous conflict. Instead, the depiction of the Mysore Wars in the visual arts had shifted away from satirical cartoons and towards formal history paintings that celebrated the military exploits of the Company's soldiers, incorporating the subject under the larger tent of the British nation.¹¹⁸ This movement towards triumphant artwork demonstrated how the soldiers and administrators that made up the East India Company were increasingly embraced by the wider British public, seen no longer as nabobs but as defenders of the national character.

By the end of the Fourth Mysore War in 1799, the earlier negative representations of the East India Company had largely faded from view. The runaway military successes enjoyed during the 1790s made the British public much more willing to support imperial projects overseas, especially when directed against supposedly despotic figures like Tipu. The almost complete disappearance of any British support for Mysore during the final conflict against Tipu was also due to the increasing association of the Sultan together with the cause of revolutionary France. Tipu was charged with entering into an offensive and defensive alliance with the French, against whom the British had been at war for

¹¹⁸ These battle scenes celebrating the Fourth Mysore War's conquests are considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

several years as part of the conflict generated by the French Revolution. Tipu's connection to the French was the final component in the degradation of his own image and the redemption of the East India Company as perceived by the British public. This is the subject of the final chapter.

Chapter Five

The French "Alliance" and the Storming of Seringapatam

Introduction

One final connection that contributed to Tipu's villainous reputation in the British popular imagination was his association with the French. Britain and France had been colonial rivals throughout the eighteenth century, and their long-running series of wars played an important role in the creation of a British national identity during this same period.¹ Tipu's connection to the French helped to cement his status as an inveterate foe of the British nation, a figure who could never be trusted due to his ties with Britain's longtime enemy. Tipu had been allied with France during the Second Mysore War (1780-84), and worked closely together with French generals and admirals stationed in India, even if their partnership often suffered from poor communication. One of the reasons why Cornwallis had been inclined to fight another war with Tipu in 1790 was due to the inability of France to provide any assistance, with Paris wrapped up in its own revolutionary crisis at the time. Without French military aid, the Third Mysore War (1790-92) had been a striking success for the British East India Company.

This association with France became even more dangerous in the late 1790s, as Tipu was believed to be in league with the French revolutionaries as part of a plot to overthrow the Company's holdings in India. Travelers to Mysore carried back rumors telling how Tipu had founded a Jacobin club in Seringapatam, and placed a liberty cap upon his head.² The British press mockingly referred to the Sultan as "Citizen Tippoo",

¹ Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992)

² Proceedings of a Jacobin Club formed at Seringapatam, by the French Soldiers in the Corps commanded by M. Dompard (173-95) Quoted in *Official Documents, Relative to the Negotiations Carried on by Tippoo*

but the situation still held very real fears for the Company. If Tipu had in fact concluded a new alliance with revolutionary France, and if French soldiers could somehow find a way to land in India, then the British Company had reason to be afraid. This formed the justification for Governor General Richard Wellesley's invasion of Mysore that began the Fourth Mysore War in 1799. Wellesley argued that Tipu had entered into an "offensive and defensive alliance" with the French, in violation of the treaty which had ended the previous conflict, and therefore served as a rationale for a new period of conquest.

The reality of the situation was more complex than the British public was led to believe. Tipu had indeed sought assistance from the French after his defeat in the Third Mysore War, but the French colonial government was unable to provide any military aid of substance. Tipu's ambassadors broke off the discussions with the understanding that they had failed to reach a new agreement. However, in the process of negotiation with the French, Tipu's secret plans were publicly announced in a French proclamation calling for volunteers to serve in the Sultan's armies. This foolish decision left Tipu with no alliance of consequence with France, while simultaneously providing the British with ample cause to renew their struggle against Mysore. This association between Tipu and revolutionary France made it even easier for the British public to accept the claim that the East India Company was representing the interests of the British nation overseas, fighting against an Oriental despot who was also in league with Britain's hated enemy. Based on the misleading claim that Tipu had an alliance with France, Wellesley was able to prosecute a pre-emptive invasion of Mysore with virtually no criticism from the British public, in stark contrast to the debate surrounding the previous Mysore Wars of the 1780s and early

Sultaun, with the French Nation and Other Foreign States, for Purposes Hostile to the British Nation. (Calcutta: Printed at the Honorable Company's Press, 1799): 187-88

1790s. Wellesley carefully crafted his correspondences with the Sultan, intending them for open publication at a later date, in such a way as to shift the blame for the conflict onto Tipu, insisting that his own invasion was a defensive and just act. Due to the quick and easy victory over Mysore, and Tipu's connection with revolutionary France, the British populace accepted Wellesley's interpretation of events without question.

In the British metropole, there was little anxiety in 1798 and 1799 about the threat posed by Tipu to the safety of the Company's possessions in India. That fear was directed instead to the potential combination of Tipu together with the French, who inspired public panic far out of proportion to the actual danger that they posed to British India. Tipu alone no longer inspired the same dread as he had at an earlier date, which was reflected in the near total disappearance of prisoner accounts and captive stories during the Fourth Mysore War. News of Wellesley's invasion came as a surprise to the British public when it arrived in the summer of 1799, but almost before there could be any popular unease about the situation in India, news arrived a few weeks later of the Company's victory and Tipu's defeat. The short and victorious war led to a festive public mood, with widespread celebration over the fall of Mysore and the death of Tipu Sultan. This was best embodied in the form of "The Storming of Seringapatam", a series of popular paintings and theatre productions designed to capture the moment of victory over the Sultan. These public spectacles were unabashedly militaristic and nationalistic, bringing the Company and its soldiers into the welcoming embrace of British patriotism. Far from serving as a symbol of moral unease, or potentially polluting the British metropole, the Company had instead become a pillar of the nation, its military exploits serving as an occasion to rally around the flag and sing Rule Britannia.

Ultimately, Tipu's connection to the French was responsible for bringing about his final defeat and death. The Fourth Mysore War of 1799 also provided the breaking point at which alternate, competing viewpoints of Tipu Sultan, and more broadly the East India Company's role in empire building, were pushed aside from the mainstream of public opinion. Through Tipu's association with France, even though the connection was often more imagined than real, the Sultan was effectively depoliticized, a figure forced outside the realm of British politics. By the year 1800, it was no longer acceptable for a political party to defend the actions of Tipu, or to criticize the morality of the Company's actions, as had very much been the case just a decade earlier. It was the same story in British popular print media as well, with the earlier satires and mockery of the Company's servants disappearing from view, to be replaced with the jingoistic celebration of events like the "Storming of Seringapatam". After the Fourth Mysore War, the historical memory of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars had effectively been fixed and ceased to change further. Tipu became remembered by the British as a tyrannical Oriental despot in league with the French, and the Mysore Wars as a justified stance against oppression. Tipu's association with France was the final key component in understanding this shift in popular opinion over the last two decades of the eighteenth century.

Tipu's "Alliance" with France

The connection between Tipu Sultan and the nation of France in the British popular imagination dated back to Tipu's earliest appearance in the Second Mysore War (1780-84). As part of the worldwide conflict generated by the American Revolution, France had earlier declared war on Britain, bringing France's remaining small colonial holdings in India into the war as well. It was the British Company's invasion of the

French port of Mahé in 1779, a location which Haider Ali had pledged to protect, which brought Mysore into the conflict in the first place.³ Tipu and his father Haider worked together with the French in a true military alliance for the rest of the Second Mysore War. There were two French commanders known as Lally and Pimoran advising Haider and Tipu at the Battle of Pollilur in 1780.⁴ The French Admiral Suffrein had infamously delivered captured British sailors from the ship *Hannibal* over to Tipu, which became part of the controversy surrounding the prisoners during and after the war.⁵ Tipu's forces were also joined by his French allies in some of the key events of the conflict, including the siege of Mangalore in 1783.

This partnership with France was fraught with its own problems, however, and the French General Bussy and Tipu were both thoroughly disillusioned with one another by the end of the war for failing to support one another properly.⁶ When the French government at home signed the Treaty of Paris in 1783, the French soldiers in India were forced to cease their efforts as well, leaving Tipu's Mysore in an uncomfortable position. His allies had deserted him at a crucial moment in the war, and this was a major factor in the Company's ability to secure a treaty that preserved the status quo antebellum despite its poor combat record. Tipu was so angry with the French for having forsaken him that he threatened to march an army to Pondicherry, the largest and most important French establishment in India.⁷

³ H.H. Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963, 1929) Chapter 15, "The Carnatic 1761-84" p. 273-92. See Chapter 1.

⁴ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (London: Sold by J. Sewell, 1788, 1789): 162

⁵ Captain Innes Munro. *A Narrative of the Military Operations of the Coromandel Coast* (London: Printed for the author by T. Bensley, 1789): 277-78

⁶ Mohibbul Hasan, "The French in the Second Anglo-Mysore War" in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan*. Irfan Habib (ed.) (London: Anthem, 2002): 44-45

⁷ Anonymous author [1798?] Notes on Tipu Sultan (p. 281-470) IOR/H/609 p. 289

Tipu Sultan was widely portrayed in the British popular press as a pawn of the French, who secretly pulled the strings of Indian tyrants like Tipu and encouraged the Sultan's antipathy towards the British Company. Writing in the years following the Second Mysore War, William Thomson described how the coalition of Indian powers that the Company faced during the conflict had been "encouraged by emissaries from France", which had then been confirmed through "military succours from the French islands of Mauritius and Bourbon." This association with France had been "a source of great danger and alarm to our government in Asia", and had led to many of the sufferings of the British prisoners taken during the war.⁸ A letter written from an anonymous officer stationed in Madras and published in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* discussed how the French continued to encourage Tipu, in "underhand" fashion, to take advantage of the Company's internal disputes by renewing the war, which in the worst case would mean "Great Britain may be adieu to her power in the East."⁹ From this perspective, Tipu was part of a wider French plot to weaken the British Company and bring it to eventual ruin through endless warring.

The *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* wrote in 1785 that popular rumor had Tipu "assisted with ships and military stores in abundance from the several ports of France", while other sources simply stated that Tipu was "surrounded" by the agents of France.¹⁰ According to the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser*, Tipu Sultan had not only "proved himself a restless, treacherous, inhuman tyrant", but he was also "entirely

⁸ Officer of Colonel Baillie's Detachment [William Thomson]. *Memoirs of the Late War in Asia*. (1789): 1-2

⁹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 10 May 1784, Issue 17288

¹⁰ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 17 October 1785, Issue 3965; *General Evening Post* (London, England) 12 February 1784, Issue 7796

influenced by French politics", with nearly 900 French soldiers entered into his service.¹¹ This last source from 1784 was particularly noteworthy, as it was one of the first times that Tipu was referred to as a "tyrant" in the British popular press. Tyranny was explicitly connected in this case to the influence of French politics upon Tipu, suggesting that their association together was part of the reason for the negative reputation that grew up around Tipu. Along with the treatment of the captured British prisoners during the Second Mysore War, Tipu's association with France played a major role in shaping the villainous role credited to him in the British popular imagination.

When the Travancore controversy broke out at the start of the Third Mysore War in 1789-90, most British commentators both in India and in the metropole argued that it was a particularly opportune moment to renew the struggle against Tipu, due to the lack of assistance that France could provide.¹² The *Daily Advertiser* of Kingston, Jamaica wrote on how Tipu "unsupported as he must be by France, or any European State, will hardly hazard a rupture with the British Power in India."¹³ The lack of an alliance with France was seen as the rationale for why Tipu would refuse to take further aggressive action against Travancore. This colonial newspaper reflected contemporary popular opinion in the London press, and was noteworthy in its own right for displaying the public interest in Tipu throughout the wider British Empire.

Tipu had in fact requested assistance from the local French colonial government, only to be turned away. The French would instead observe strict neutrality during the

¹¹ Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser (London, England) 21 January 1784, Issue 1009

¹² See Ibrahim Kunju, "Relations Between Travancore and Mysore in the 18th Century" in *Confronting Colonialism: Resistance and Modernization under Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan*. Irfan Habib (ed.) (London: Anthem, 2002). This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

¹³ Daily Advertiser (Kingston, Jamaica) 20 July 1790, Issue 172

Third Mysore War of 1790-92.¹⁴ This meant that it was an auspicious time to face Tipu on the field of battle, according to the *English Chronicle*: "Tippoo Saib, and his father Hyder Ally, owed all of their success last war to the assistance of the French forces. At present Tippoo has no such aid, and therefore is not deemed to be an enemy of any importance."¹⁵ Although this London newspaper underestimated the military prowess of Tipu, it pointed to the connection that still existed between Tipu and the French in the British popular imagination. Even though France possessed little territory and few soldiers in India, the country remained a dire threat in the minds of the British public, particularly when combined together with the anxieties surrounding "Tippoo the Tyrant."

The *Public Advertiser* made this connection between Tipu and the French even more explicit when commenting on the war: "The power of the House of Bourbon will be... considerable curtailed; for in the East we have a right to consider Tippoo Saib as a part of that power, and a part that has given us much trouble and alarm – now is the time, unshackled by any other objects to destroy him, and prevent, in future wars with France or Spain, the possibility of an Eastern diversion in their favor."¹⁶ This source viewed Tipu as little more than a client state of the French monarchy, which was a factually dubious claim, but pointed nonetheless to this continued association of Tipu together with the French. Tipu alone was much less frightening than when he was faced in combination with the French. The same *Public Advertiser* had earlier written: "We have now an opportunity that never presented itself before, of ensuring a permanent peace, in the destruction of Tippoo Saib; for, unaided by France, he never can stand against the strength of the British interest in India. The opportunity ought not, and we believe will

¹⁴ Anonymous author [1798?] Notes on Tipu Sultan (p. 281-470) IOR/H/609 p. 465

¹⁵ English Chronicle or Universal Evening Post (London, England) 24 July 1790, Issue 1692

¹⁶ Public Advertiser (London, England) 16 November 1790, Issue 17586

not, be lost."¹⁷ For these authors, Tipu's association with France was very much a part of the negative reputation that had been built up around the Sultan. Tipu was not only an Oriental despot and a religious bigot, he was also a sworn enemy of the British nation, his implacable hatred best demonstrated by the long-standing connection to France. Although these ties to France often existed more in the imagination of the British public than in reality, they played an important role in public perceptions of the Sultan.

Popular interest in Tipu's possible alliance with France took on new meaning in the wake of France's own revolutionary turmoil. Britain had joined in the wider European war against the French revolutionaries in 1793, which would continue with only a brief interlude of peace until 1815. The potential for an alliance between revolutionary France and Tipu Sultan's Mysore summoned up all sorts of fears in the British imagination that were wildly out of proportion to the actual events taking place in India. Tipu's misguided attempts to gain the support of France would ultimately lead to his doom, providing the justification for the Fourth Mysore War of 1799.

The years leading up to this final war continued to indicate ongoing British anxieties about a connection between Tipu and the French. The *Oracle and Public Advertiser* wrote in 1794 how Tipu continued to possess a more formidable military force than ever, despite the diminution of his territory, as the result of an "inundation" of French emigrants. In its view, this potential menace therefore justified the continuation of the Company's large military expenses, which had often been criticized by the political opposition.¹⁸ These fears were exaggerated, and Tipu's military had been significantly reduced during these years as a result of his lost territory and revenue, although the

¹⁷ Public Advertiser (London, England) 26 July 1790, Issue 17488

¹⁸ Oracle and Public Advertiser (London, England) 5 March 1794, Issue 18636

Company did not know this at the time.¹⁹ Tipu Sultan did retain a number of Frenchmen as officers in his army, however, particularly as technical experts for use with artillery and fortification design.²⁰ Newspaper accounts and military histories of the Mysore Wars frequently made mention of these French officers serving under Tipu. The presence of Frenchmen and other Europeans serving in Indian armies was a common practice in eighteenth century India, as Europeans living in the interior of the subcontinent frequently "went native" and adopted a self-fashioned Indian identity for themselves. This often included taking on Indian dress, learning Indian languages, and practicing Hindu or Islamic religious customs to take part in the court of Indian princes.²¹ Frenchmen and other Europeans serving in Tipu's military forces were unexceptional in this regard, no different from the Nizam's court in Hyderabad, which also contained large numbers of French soldiers. The presence of French officers in Tipu's army was not sufficient pretext on its own as a motivation for war, but in the context of a possible military alliance with France, those individuals would appear much more threatening.

Despite the general hope that peace would prevail with Tipu, rumors of his possible military involvement with France continued to stir up great anxiety in Britain. *E. Johnson's British Gazette* wrote in 1796 that Tipu remained at peace but his friendship with the British was "without cordiality", and that he viewed the extension of British power and territory with sentiments of jealousy and apprehension.²² The general belief was that Tipu would like to gain revenge for his defeat in the previous war, but

¹⁹ M H Gopal. *Tipu Sultan's Mysore; An Economic Study* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1971): 35-36

²⁰ James Bristow. *Narrative of the Sufferings of James Bristow* (Calcutta: unknown publisher, 1792; London: Reprinted by J. Murray, 1793; 1794; 1801; 1828): 46-47

²¹ William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (New York: Viking, 2003)

²² E. Johnson's *British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* (London, England) 22 May 1796, Issue 864

practically speaking, all sides were well aware that he lacked the means to do so. Thus an uneasy peace reigned for the moment, one which could potentially be disturbed by the involvement of the French. Writing on this subject in 1796, a dispatch from Calcutta noted: "Should the Sultaun of Mysore have entertained any designs hostile to the English interest in India, it has probably arisen from the hope of deriving succours from the French; but the impracticability of this hope being realized... Tippoo cannot have the most distant intention of coming to a rupture, or giving offence to the English Government."²³

The involvement of the French was the key component for this anonymous commentator; so long as there was no possibility of French involvement in India, Tipu would not provoke a conflict at this time with the Company. The *Oracle and Public Advertiser* agreed, stating that there was little probability Tipu would choose the current moment for hostile action. The French were "not now in a condition to give him the least assistance", whatever hopes they both might entertain for regaining their lost territorial possessions in India.²⁴ Without the assistance of the French, there was little reason to suspect that Tipu could prevail in another war against the Company. By the late 1790s, Tipu alone no longer provided a threat to the British power in India; this helped to explain why so much of the focus shifted away from the earlier concern with British prisoners and concentrated instead upon the possibility of a French alliance.

Tipu had made earlier attempts to ink a formal treaty with the French, even going so far as to send an embassy to the court of Louis XVI during the spring and summer of 1788. This was a very popular story in the British popular press, and was widely reported upon at the time. Newspapers enjoyed commenting upon the exotic spectacle presented

²³ East Indies. Calcutta, 28 September 28 1796 (no author given). Printed in the St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 13 April 1797, Issue 6134

²⁴ Oracle and Public Advertiser (London, England) 18 April 1797, Issue 19600

by Mysorean ambassadors, such as this passage from the *Bath Chronicle*: "Tippoo has sent some very magnificent presents to the court of France; amongst them is a bedstead of *solid gold*, in which, when ambition take its rest, it may enjoy a *splendid* repose!"²⁵ Most observers viewed the embassy as a prelude to further hostile action against the British; the *Bath Chronicle* reported that the French would furnish Tipu with 5000 European soldiers, while the *Whitehall Evening Post* saw the stirrings of a larger plot set in motion: "The restless ambition of that Indian Chief, and his rooted hatred to the English nation, excite him to mediate their destruction and expulsion from the Peninsula of India... He therefore sends this Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, in all the pompous style of Eastern magnificence and splendor, to concert measures with the French Cabinet for carrying his horrid plan into execution!"²⁶ The *Whitehall Evening Post* would go on to invent a conversation between the French king and Tipu, leaving instructions to attack the Company's possessions when Britain showed weakness. Once again, Tipu was portrayed as a close French ally, and therefore inherently hostile to the British Company. While Tipu's delegation ultimately failed to achieve anything of significance, due to the French monarchy's growing preoccupation with its own revolutionary crisis, the continuing print coverage of the embassy demonstrated the genuine interest in news of Tipu Sultan amongst the British public, and their preoccupation with his connection to France. Tipu's next attempt to send an embassy to the French would have much more lasting consequences.

After suffering major military and territorial losses in the Third Mysore War, Tipu Sultan faced an uncertain future, and searched for the means to restore his kingdom to its

²⁵ *Bath Chronicle* (Bath, England) 17 April 1788, Issue 1429 Emphasis in the original.

²⁶ *Whitehall Evening Post* (London, England) 24 April 1788, Issue 6382

former strength. One of Tipu's attempted solutions in the late 1790s was to renew his desire for a closer alliance with the French, in the hopes that they would offset his own setbacks and balance the growing power of the British Company. Through a series of misunderstandings and political blunders, however, Tipu's purported alliance with France would fail to provide him with any substantial assistance, while simultaneously creating the justification for a pre-emptive war of aggression on the part of the Company. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to see that Tipu's pursuit of the French was a disastrous miscalculation which brought about his ruin and ultimate death. Tipu was continuously misled by French adventurers at his court into believing that the French had vastly more military power available in India than actually existed. Tipu appears to have believed these fabrications because he fervently wanted them to be true, rejecting the advice of his councilors who cautioned that closer ties with France would almost certainly draw the attention of the British Company. Tipu's burning desire to overturn the setbacks of the previous war led him into a very serious error in judgment, which was ultimately responsible for his final military defeat and death.²⁷

Tipu was encouraged to pursue these plans for an alliance by a French adventurer named Ripaud, who arrived at the court of Seringapatam in 1797. Ripaud was an individual with an unsavory background who Tipu's advisers correctly deduced to be a fraud. But he managed to convince the Sultan that he was an envoy from the French colony of Mauritius, leading Tipu on with wild claims that a French army would soon arrive to sweep the British out of India. Ripaud and other French adventurers like him were unintentionally playing the role of agent provocateurs, encouraging native rulers

²⁷ There is little doubt that Tipu wanted to regain his lost territories and harbored antipathy towards the Company. Even historians highly sympathetic to Tipu do not dispute this point. See for example B. Sheikh Ali. *Tipu Sultan: A Study in Diplomacy and Confrontation* (Mysore: Geetha Book House, 1982): 327-32

like Tipu to entertain designs against the British with promises of French support which were impossible in practice.²⁸ Against the wishes of the rest of his court, Tipu agreed to move forward with plans for an alliance with the French, and began preparing an embassy to travel to Mauritius. Tipu's desire for revenge and desperate search for allies against the British Company appear to have overridden more sensible judgment and led him into this poor decision. The contemporary Indian historian Mir Hussain Kirmani wrote years later about how sometimes Tipu would act rashly and without thought, refusing to listen even to his most faithful servants, and cited the interactions with Ripaud as one such example of poor judgment.²⁹

Tipu drew up a proposed treaty of alliance with France in April 1797, which is instructive in outlining the goals that he hoped to achieve through this agreement. Contained within the papers captured at Seringapatam and published by the Company after the war, five separate articles were listed detailing how the French would assist in removing the British from India. After two preliminary articles of friendship, Tipu asked in the third article for 10,000 French soldiers and 30,000 French sepoys, to be provisioned for and commanded by Tipu's officers. The fourth article detailed how the Company possessions were to be divided; Tipu wanted half of the British territories, taking Goa for himself and leaving Bombay and Madras to the French. The fifth article stipulated that both alliances partners would also declare war on any native princes that sided with the British Company.³⁰ This unsigned treaty provided an indication of the

²⁸ H.H. Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (1963, 1929) Chapter 19, "The Exclusion of the French" p. 323

²⁹ Mir Hussain Ali Khan Kirmani. *History of Tipu Sultan, Being a Continuation of the Neshani Hyduri* 1958 [2nd ed.] (London: Printed for the Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, first translated 1842, written 1802): 119

³⁰ East India Company. Neil Benjamin Edmonstone (trans.) *Official Documents, Relative to the Negotiations Carried on by Tippoo Sultaun, with the French Nation and Other Foreign States, for*

quantity of forces Tipu expected to receive, as well as hinting at his lingering dissatisfaction with the French from earlier wars, with Tipu desiring command over the French soldiers himself. The planned division of Company territory was perhaps more of a pleasant fantasy than intended as serious diplomatic policy.

Also included in the papers captured in Seringapatam were Tipu's instructions to his ambassadors - Mirza Bakir, Mir Yousuf Ali, Mir Ghulam Ali, Hussun Ali, and Mohummed Ibrahim - who were sent to Mauritius in 1797 to negotiate the terms of this alliance with France. Tipu made it clear that the ambassadors were to sound out the French and determine their level of interest, while making sure to avoid committing Tipu to anything unless the French were serious about providing substantial military aid. As Tipu put it, "Having communicated to them [the French] your arrival and heard what they have to say, you will tell them, that they must, by no means pay you the compliment of going themselves... nor shew open marks of friendship towards the Khoodadaud Sirkar [Mysore], nor outwardly shew you any attention, in order that your mission may not become public."³¹ The secrecy of the mission was therefore imperative, in order to avoid arousing the suspicions of the British Company.

However, Comte Malartic, the French governor of Mauritius, compromised the visit of the ambassadors by ignoring any attempt at their concealment. According to Hussun Ali, the ambassadors requested that Malartic send for them clandestinely, so that their mission would be known to no one; instead, Malartic insisted on sending half a

Purposes Hostile to the British Nation. (Calcutta: Printed at the Honorable Company's Press, 1799) Observations [...] with a rough draft of the propositions to be transmitted to the French, as prepared by the Suldaun himself. 2 April 1797 (19-21)

³¹ *Ibid*, Copy of the Instructions addressed to Mirza Baukir, Meer Yousuf Alli, Meer Ghoolaum Alli, and Hussun Alli. 2 April 1797 (24-28): 25

dozen officials to their ship and receiving them with full pomp and circumstance.³² As Mohammed Ibrahim described, "Afterwards a boat highly ornamented came off with several Sirdars to receive us, and they having placed us in it and brought us on shore, 500 guns were fired off; and two lines of European troops being formed, and a compliment being paid with the colours, we were conducted with the greatest ceremony and respect to the house of General Malartic."³³ So much for secrecy!

The ambassadors were further disappointed to realize that the promised French force of soldiers was nothing more than a mirage. Malartic informed Mohammed Ibrahim in person that Ripaud had brought them there on a false representation to the Sultan, and that at present they had no such forces. Not wanting to send the ambassadors away empty-handed, Malartic instead "caused proclamation to be made in the city, by beat of drum, and sent letters to the neighboring Island, inviting those to come forward, who were desirous of entering into the service of your Highness," essentially calling for volunteers who wanted to join the service of Tipu.³⁴ At some point in the course of the negotiations, the purpose of the embassy had shifted from bringing back thousands of already-present French soldiers to raising untrained recruits from the tiny handful of Europeans present on the island. To continue the tragic-comic farce that the embassy had become, Ibrahim reported that the ambassadors couldn't even afford to take on many of these individuals, because they had not been planning on raising recruits and had no instructions on what monthly pay to offer, or enlistment bonus money to give them.³⁵ The

³² *Ibid*, Translation of the Narrative of the Proceedings of the Ambassadors dispatched by Tippoo Sultaun to the French Islands, from their departure to their return: Written by Hussun Alli, one of the Ambassadors 23 May 1798 (38-45): 41

³³ *Ibid*, Translation of the Narrative of Mohammed Ibrahim, one of the Ambassadors dispatched by Tippoo Sultaun to the Isle of France in 1797 (46-52): 47

³⁴ *Ibid*, Translation of the Narrative of Mohammed Ibrahim ,48

³⁵ *Ibid*, Translation of the Narrative of Mohammed Ibrahim ,48-49

envoys were at a loss on what course of action to take, finding the situation so far changed from what they had been led to believe before setting out.

The ambassadors submitted six proposals to Malartic before leaving, with only the first two being of importance.³⁶ The first proposal consisted of an agreement to send two of Tipu's envoys on to Paris to continue the negotiations, which was approved. The second proposition asked, "That we should enter into a treaty, that their standard [France] and that of the Khoodadaud Sirkar [Mysore] should be united." However, Malartic responded that he could not agree to this, as he could not approve such a deal without approval from the home government in France.³⁷ Tipu and his ambassadors therefore believed that they did **not** have an alliance with the French, at least not until receiving a response of some kind from Paris. In fact, Tipu wrote to the Directory in France in July 1798 specifically requesting an alliance and 10,000 to 15,000 French soldiers, a sign that he also did not feel himself to be in league with the French.³⁸ Tipu deputized one of his ambassadors in the same letter to travel to France and negotiate the terms of this alliance, another indication that he was still searching for the promised military assistance. In other words, there was no military alliance between France and Mysore, and Tipu continued to attempt to persuade the French government in Paris to enter into a formal agreement of some kind. However, the inconclusive proposal discussed by Tipu's ambassadors in Mauritius would be greatly misunderstood by the British Company.

³⁶ The fourth proposal asked the French to send nutmeg and clove trees to Mysore, and the others are nearly as mundane.

³⁷ Translation of the Narrative of Mohummed Ibrahim ,48-49

³⁸ East India Company. Neil Benjamin Edmonstone (trans.) *Official Documents, Relative to the Negotiations Carried on by Tippoo Sultaun* (1799). Tipu Sultan to the Executive Directory, 20 July 1798 (xlix-liii)

Governor Malartic was the one most responsible for this confusion. Thinking to help in raising recruits, Malartic issued a public proclamation calling for the citizens of Mauritius to join Tipu's forces. As this was the crucial document responsible for instigating the Fourth Mysore War, it is worth quoting in full below:

Citizens,

Having for several years known your zeal and your attachment to the interests and to the glory of our Republic, we are very anxious, and we feel it a duty to make you acquainted with all the propositions which have been made to us by Tippoo Sultaun, through two ambassadors which he has dispatched to us.

This prince has written particular letters to the Colonial Assembly; to all the generals employed under this government; and has addressed to us a packet for the Executive Directory.

1. He desires to form an offensive and defensive alliance with the French, and proposes to maintain at his charge, as long as the war shall last in India, the troops which may be sent to him.
2. He promises to furnish every necessary for carrying on the war, wine and brandy excepted, with which he is wholly unprovided.
3. He declares that he has made every preparation to receive the succors which may be sent to him, and on the arrival of the troops, the commanders and the officers will find every thing necessary for making a war, to which the Europeans are but little accustomed.
4. In a word he only waits the moment when the French shall come to his assistance, to declare war against the English, whom he ardently desires to expel from India.

As it is impossible for us to reduce the number of soldiers of the 107th and 108th regiments, and of the regular guard of Port Fraternite, on account of the succors which we have furnished to our allies the Dutch; we invite the citizens, who may be disposed to enter as volunteers, to enroll themselves in their respective municipalities, and to serve under the banner of Tippoo.

This prince desires also to be assisted by the free citizens of colour, we therefore invite all such who are willing to serve under his flag, to enroll themselves.

We can assure all the citizens who shall enroll themselves, that Tippoo will allow them an advantageous rate of pay, the terms of which will be fixed with his

ambassadors, who will further engage in the name of their sovereign, that all Frenchmen who shall enter into his armies, shall never be detained after they shall have expressed a wish to return to their own country.

Done at Port North West, the 30th January 1798

Malartic (signed)³⁹

The text of the Malartic Proclamation rather foolishly revealed all of the aims that Tipu's embassy intended to conceal. Tipu had sought to feel out the French and only take the fateful step of allying with them if Ripaud's promise of tens of thousands of soliders proved to be true. Instead, Tipu would receive only a tiny handful of raw recruits, only a few score in total, still without any concrete promises of assistance from France, while also simultaneously having the entire negotiations revealed publicly. Malartic's Proclamation was not factually incorrect, as it carefully stated that Tipu "*desired* to form an offensive and defensive alliance with the French," rather than stating that he actually had signed such an agreement. Most observers were not interested in engaging at that level of sophistry, however, and simply read the document as a statement of joint war against the British Company. As for stating openly the fourth point, that Tipu "only waits the moment when the French shall come to his assistance, to declare war against the English," it is difficult to understand what Malartic was hoping to achieve. He may have thought that this would help spur on the recruiting process and make Tipu's offer more appealing to patriotic Frenchmen, but it appears to have been a very poor decision of statecraft.

Fewer than one hundred French volunteers returned to Mysore with the ambassadors, a far cry from the thousands that had been promised.⁴⁰ Tipu continued to

³⁹ Anne Joseph Hyppolite Malartic. *Proclamation at the Isle of France*. 30 January 1798.

correspond with the French colonial administrators at Mauritius, hoping that there had been some mistake and that more French soldiers would appear, but to no avail. Admiral Sercey, the commander of French naval forces in the Indian Sea, wrote several times to Tipu apologizing for his inability to do anything: "Prince Tippoo, your Ambassadors have exerted great zeal for your service, but unfortunately we were not at liberty to divert to any other object, the means confided to us for the protection of our own colony..."⁴¹ In his correspondences, Sercey appeared embarrassed at the lack of French soldiers available for use in India, especially in the wake of Malartic's grandiose proclamation. With only a trivial number of French recruits arriving from Mauritius in 1798, Tipu was forced to continue to wait for word of a true alliance from the French government in Paris, and the Sultan made no plans for military action against the British.

Tipu even went so far as to adopt the ideological trappings of the French revolutionaries in a bid to win foreign support: planting a liberty tree, wearing a cap of equality, and in a bizarre spectacle, forming a Jacobin club in Seringapatam. Members were asked to swear the following oath: "Citizens, do you swear hatred to all Kings, except Tippoo Sulstaun the Victorious, the Ally of the French Republic. War against Tyrants; and Love to our Country, and that of citizen Tippoo. All exclaimed unanimously, Yes, we swear to live free, or die."⁴² The strange spectacle of "Citizen Tippoo", an Islamic monarch pledged to the radicalism of the French Revolution, can only have aroused further anxiety and consternation on the part of the British Company. This

⁴⁰ Sir Penderel Moon. *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989): 279

⁴¹ East India Company. Neil Benjamin Edmonstone (trans.) *Official Documents, Relative to the Negotiations Carried on by Tippoo Sulstaun* (1799). Rear Admiral Sercey to the Nabob Tippoo Sulstaun, 4 March 1798 (102-03)

⁴² *Ibid*, Proceedings of a Jacobin Club formed at Seringapatam, by the French Soldiers in the Corps commanded by M. Dompard (173-95): 192

represented the great remaining fear of Tipu that still existed in the British imagination, a figure combining together the tyranny of Oriental despotism with the tyranny of Jacobin mob rule. Britons in the metropole were gripped with a terror of Tipu and his potential alliance with the French which was blown all out of proportion to the actual danger that Tipu posed to the British Company in India. These anxieties provided an opportunity for the new Governor General, Richard Wellesley (Lord Mornington), to take action.

Wellesley and the Company's Response

Wellesley had become the new Governor General of India in the spring of 1798, replacing the unassuming (and non-aristocrat) John Shore. Unlike his predecessor, Wellesley was a vain and ambitious man with dreams of expanding British power over the rest of the Indian subcontinent.⁴³ He was well known as an exceedingly difficult man to work alongside, and he traveled to India determined to eliminate all French influence from the courts of the native rulers.⁴⁴ Wellesley made little attempt to turn a profit for the Company, and was contemptuous of the mercantile Directors on Leadenhall Street. By the end of his seven years as Governor General (1798-1805), Wellesley had conducted so many wars against Indian princes and run up such large debts in the process that he was forcibly recalled home to Britain. Wellesley embodied the increasing shift of the East India Company's administration away from earlier generations of merchants and towards an aristocratic and militaristic command. His official portrait painted by Robert Home while serving as Governor General in 1801 [Figure 1] suggested the growing imperial style of rule practiced by Wellesley in India, far removed from the more humble portrayal

⁴³ C. A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 81

⁴⁴ William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (2003): 45

of earlier Company administrators.⁴⁵ Wellesley's appointment to the position of Governor General signaled a much more interventionist policy by the Company in the affairs of Indian states, a marked contrast to the hands-off approach that had been employed by Shore over the previous five years.⁴⁶

When Wellesley learned of the Malartic Proclamation, he immediately resolved to invade Mysore, believing that it provided sufficient rationale for a preemptive war of conquest. However, with Britain embroiled in an enormous war against France in Europe, there was little enthusiasm at home for further military adventures in India. Henry Dundas and the Company's Board of Control in London were prepared to sanction Wellesley's wars in India, but only insofar as they achieved the goal of protecting British India from the threat posed by France.⁴⁷ The Company's administration in London was not interested in further wars of conquest in India, and insisted that any military conflicts should be defensive in nature, only acting to protect existing Company territory, not acquire further domains. The British public also exhibited little interest in going to war with Tipu Sultan again in 1798, expressing instead fear that he might combine his forces with revolutionary France and conquer the Company's holdings.⁴⁸ The overall sentiment coming from the British metropole with regards to India was somewhat of a "wait and see" attitude, advising a cautious approach designed to safeguard the Company's possessions and wait for further instructions from home.

⁴⁵ Robert Home. *Richard Colley Wellesley, 2nd Lord Mornington* (1801). Stratfield Saye House

⁴⁶ See Chapter 1

⁴⁷ Edward Ingram (ed.) *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (Bath: Adams & Dart, 1969): 4

⁴⁸ See for example Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 3 August 1798, Issue 6387, with an article on how "Buonaparte and His Expedition" would link up with Tipu in India.

These restrictions from London greatly influenced Wellesley's response to the situation, and dictated how he represented events in the wider public sphere. Wellesley had immediately determined to attack Mysore regardless of the actual threat posed by Tipu, seeing the Malartic Proclamation as ample justification for his war of conquest, but it was very important to portray his actions in the proper context. Wellesley took pains to insist that Tipu Sultan was responsible for the conflict, and that the Company's preemptive invasion of Mysore was in fact a defensive act, one within the restrictions laid down by Parliament and the Board of Control. Wellesley was familiar with the controversy surrounding the beginning of the previous Third Mysore War (1790-92), not least because he had been a member of Parliament and argued in defense of the Company during the debates engendered by that war.⁴⁹ Wellesley had spoken out against the political Opposition at that time, insisting that their criticisms had caused a negative effect on the war in India, undermining the confidence of the Company soldiers and elevating the fortunes of Tipu. As Governor General, Wellesley took steps to play up Tipu's supposed alliance with France, placing all of the blame for the fighting on the shoulders of Tippoo the Tyrant, and continued to insist that his own invasion was a purely defensive act. In these efforts, Wellesley would be extremely successful, helping to ensure that there was virtually no criticism of the Fourth Mysore War in the metropole, and persuading the British public to accept his interpretation of events wholesale.

Wellesley first received word of the Malartic Proclamation in June 1798, while he was traveling through Cape Colony en route to India. The Governor General immediately determined that he would go to war with Tipu upon receiving this information, even before his arrival in India. In his letter of 21 November 1798 to the Court of Directors,

⁴⁹ Evening Mail (London, England) 14 March 1792, Issue 477. See Chapter 4.

Wellesley wrote that he issued "final orders" for war to the governments of Madras and Bombay as far back as 20 June, calling their armies into the field against Tipu.⁵⁰ All of the later correspondences between Wellesley and Tipu Sultan were therefore little more than a sham, designed to stall for time until the Company's military was prepared to invade the country of Mysore. The decision for war had already been made.

It is difficult to say how Wellesley's actions would have been interpreted in the British metropole if no further events had taken place; it would not have been out of the question for a sizable political opposition to emerge in the same fashion as in the previous war against Tipu. However, Wellesley was able to take advantage of unrelated military events taking place in Europe to exaggerate the threat posed by Tipu's supposed French alliance, and suggest that British India was in far more danger than actually existed. Fear of the contemporary French expedition to Egypt became associated in the mind of the British public with fears of Tipu Sultan overrunning the Company's territory, and ultimately provided a *carte blanche* for Wellesley's own preemptive invasion. In point of fact, Wellesley was well aware that the French soldiers in Egypt had no possibility of reaching India, but he led the Company's Court of Directors and the British public to believe the opposite.

At roughly the same time that Wellesley left Britain en route to India, a French naval expedition left the port of Toulon in late May 1798. This would become Napoleon's ill-fated Egyptian expedition, but the destination of this force was not immediately known at the time, and there was much anxiety in London that the French were planning to land in India. Henry Dundas learned of the departure of the French expedition on 1

⁵⁰ East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India, Relative to the Cause, Progress and Successful Termination of the War with the Late Tippoo Sultaun* (London: Printed for the Proprietors of East India Stock, 1777, 1800). Governor General to the Court of Directors, 21 November 1798: 6

June 1798, and shortly thereafter received word of the Malartic Proclamation on 14 June, which appeared to confirm the worst fears of a French invasion of India.⁵¹ The Company's Court of Directors responded by sending a letter to Wellesley on 18 June warning him of the possibility of the French landing in India. The Directors wrote that it was "highly improbable" that Tipu would have entered into an alliance with the French without making preparations for war ahead of time; therefore, if it were proven that he was building up for war, "it would be neither prudent nor politic to wait for actual hostilities on his part" and "to take the most immediate and most decisive measures to carry our arms into the enemy's country."⁵²

However, at the same time the Directors also warned Wellesley to use his utmost discretion, so that the Company would not be involved in another war in India without the most inevitable necessity. The Directors and the Board of Control were therefore authorizing Wellesley to use force, and even invade Mysore if necessary, but *only* on the grounds of stopping a French invasion force from landing there. If it could not be proven that Tipu was planning for war, then Wellesley was advised to use his discretion and refrain from further conflict. For the Company's policy makers in London, it was the French who were the threat, not Tipu Sultan.⁵³

News of the French landing in Egypt did not arrive in India until 18 October, and due to this late date, the news would not factor into the Governor General's consideration of the situation at all. Wellesley had already issued to Madras and Bombay his "final orders" for war against Tipu as far back as 20 June, months before any word arrived that

⁵¹ Edward Ingram (ed.) *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (1969): 4

⁵² East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India* (1977, 1800) Court of Directors to the Governor General, 18 July 1798

⁵³ *Ibid*, Court of Directors to the Governor General, 18 July 1798

the French were in Egypt.⁵⁴ Wellesley also learned of Admiral Nelson's destruction of the French fleet only two weeks after hearing the initial news of its landing in Egypt, on 31 October, and therefore long before war with Tipu broke out, he knew that Napoleon's force had no prospect of making its way to India. All of this information about events taking place in the Mediterranean had little bearing on the situation in India because Wellesley had long been committed to war with Mysore, ever since the early summer when he initially heard of the Malartic Proclamation. In a later letter to the Directors, Wellesley restated that he made his decision for war in June 1798, and added: "I have no hesitation in declaring, that my original resolution was (if circumstances would have admitted) to have attacked the Sultaun instantly, and on both sides of his dominions, for the purpose of defeating his hostile preparations, and of anticipating their declared object."⁵⁵ He was prevented from doing so only due to the poor state of the Company's army, and the lack of supplies for a campaign at that time. The next six months were therefore a stalling period to build up the Company forces for war, as Wellesley readily admitted in his dispatches back to Dundas.

In order to defend his aggressive policy, Wellesley was preoccupied with finding enough local Indian justification for attacking Tipu. All throughout 1798 and 1799, Wellesley had to write to the Court of Directors as if Tipu were about to attack the Company, when in fact the Company was preparing to attack him. It was necessary to suggest great provocation, because when the war was fought the Company's military would immediately go onto the offensive into Mysore.⁵⁶ The war could only be

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Governor General to the Court of Directors, 21 November 1798: 6

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, Governor General to the Court of Directors, 20 March 1799: 25

⁵⁶ Edward Ingram (ed.) *Two Views of British India: The Private Correspondence of Mr. Dundas and Lord Wellesley, 1798-1801* (1969): 4-5

characterized as defensive in nature if Tipu had provided enough provocation to justify a doctrine of pre-emptive invasion. This necessitated emphasizing the familiar themes of the Tipu Legend, in which the Sultan was envisioned as a duplicitous and untrustworthy negotiator in his correspondences with the Governor General, and exaggerating the threat posed by the connection to France.

The narrative of the war written by Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Beatson, Wellesley's aide-de-camp, provided an example of how these negotiations were rationalized. Writing on the situation in 1798, Beatson contended, "Although the Governor General deemed it his duty, at this period, to call the armies into the field... his Lordship's views and expectations were all devoted to the preservation of peace; which there was no prospect of securing, than by a state of forward preparation for war."⁵⁷ Passages such as these neatly reversed the burden of culpability, placing responsibility for the conflict onto the Sultan. In truth, Wellesley would be negotiating with Tipu in bad faith during their exchange of letters, having already determined upon going to war regardless of Tipu's response. The Sultan's reputation would once again be deployed here as a means of justifying aggression overseas and making it palatable to British audiences at home.

Wellesley's early letters to Tipu in the summer of 1798 were cordial and made no mention of the Malartic Proclamation or his plans for war, confining the discussion instead to minor issues such as a border dispute in the district of Wynaad.⁵⁸ Strangely, the French were not discussed in these letters at all, given that the "alliance" with France was

⁵⁷ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (London: Printed by W. Bulmer and Co, 1800): 49

⁵⁸ East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India* (1777, 1800). Governor General to Tipu Sultan, 14 June 1798: xxi-xxiii

the alleged justification for going to war later. After receiving word of Admiral Nelson's victory over the French fleet, Wellesley wrote to Tipu on 4 November 1798 to taunt him with the destruction of his supposed allies. After outlining the details of Nelson's triumph and heaping scorn upon the French ("the general enemy of mankind"), Wellesley concluded by stating how "confident from the union and attachment subsisting between us, that this intelligence will afford you sincere satisfaction, I could not deny myself the pleasure of communicating it."⁵⁹ The last line was an obvious taunting jibe directed at Tipu. What makes the message so interesting was the context in which it was delivered; this was the first letter Wellesley had sent to Tipu since 7 August, and that message had not mentioned France at all. This exchange provided further evidence that Napoleon's expedition to Egypt was not a motivating factor in Wellesley's decision to go to war, but rather used as a pretext to justify the decision afterwards.

Wellesley turned up the pressure on Tipu in his next letter, sent just four days later on 8 November 1798. He blamed the French for "perverting the wisdom" of Tipu's councils, and instigating him into war against "those who have given you no provocation." Without stating precisely the exact relationship between Tipu and the French, Wellesley declared that, "It is impossible that you should suppose me to be ignorant of the intercourse which subsides between you and the French," warning Tipu of the ruinous connections which would result from such a friendship. This allowed Wellesley to continue his argument with a classic reversal of the diplomatic situation, very much in keeping with the "untrustworthy" themes often associated with Tipu:

⁵⁹ East India Company. Neil Benjamin Edmonstone (trans.) *Official Documents, Relative to the Negotiations Carried on by Tippoo Sultaun* (1799). Governor General to Tippoo Sultaun 4 November 1798: 151

Combining these professions of amity on your part, with the proofs that the company's government have constantly given of their sincere disposition to maintain the relations of friendship and peace with you... it was natural for me to be extremely slow to believe the various accounts transmitted to me of your negotiations with the French, and your military preparations. But whatever my reluctance to credit such reports might be, prudence required both of me and the company's allies, that we should adopt certain measures of precaution and self defence; and these have accordingly been taken.⁶⁰

The Governor General went on to reassure Tipu that the Company wished to live in peace and friendship with all its neighbors, and entertained no projects of ambition, looking only to the permanent security and tranquility of its own dominions and subjects.

Wellesley suggested sending Major Doveton as an envoy (the same Doveton who had escorted the hostage princes back to Tipu a few years earlier) to discuss the situation and remove any suspicion which had arisen.⁶¹

Tipu's response to Wellesley's letter was one of understandable confusion. In a letter dated 20 November 1798, Tipu stated that he had adhered to peace, and was surprised by rumors of war preparations by the Company, which he had the fullest confidence were "without foundation." The Sultan claimed to have no other thought than "to give increase to friendship" and "strengthen the foundations of harmony and unity."⁶² Tipu did not understand why the Company was acting aggressively towards him, as he had not made preparations for war and had not signed an official alliance with France. In a later letter dated 18 December, Tipu explained that his envoys to Mauritius had brought back forty people who came in search of employment, and that the French had made "deceitful reports" about the trip, referring to the infamous proclamation. Tipu reiterated

⁶⁰ East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India* (1977, 1800). Governor General to Tippoo Sulatun, 8 November 1798.

⁶¹ *Ibid*

⁶² East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India* (1977, 1800). Tippoo Sulatun to the Government of India, 20 November 1798, received 15 December 1798.

his desire to maintain the articles of the past peace treaty with the Company, suggested that sending Doveton as an envoy was not necessary, and expressed his "great surprise" at the actions taken by the Company: "I have the strongest hope that the minds of the wise and intelligent, but particularly of the four states, will not be sullied by doubts and jealousies, but will consider me from my heart desirous of harmony and friendship."⁶³ Tipu was not being entirely truthful in these messages, as he had indeed enquired about the prospects of a French alliance against the British Company. However, when the alliance failed to materialize, he had committed himself to peace for the present, as his correspondences with the Company indicated. There is no evidence to suggest that Tipu had any plans to attack the Company in 1798-99, and he appeared to be genuinely confused about the messages he was receiving.

Wellesley finally revealed his objective in the following lengthy letter to Tipu dated 9 January 1799. Wellesley recounted the expedition of Tipu's ambassadors to Mauritius, concluding that they had reached an agreement (codified in the Malartic Proclamation) and brought back troops raised in the enemy country for his service. This led to eight points, the most important of which stipulated "That the ambassadors, dispatched by your highness to the Isle of France [Mauritius], did propose, and actually did conclude, an offensive alliance with the French, for the express purpose of committing a war of aggression against the company."⁶⁴ As a result of these actions, Wellesley stated, Tipu had violated the treaties of peace and friendship from the last war, and therefore forced the Company into the great expense of building up its own military. As such, the previous agreements with the Company would no longer be enough to

⁶³ *Ibid*, Tippoo Sulatun to the Government of India, 18 December 1798, received 25 December 1798.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, Governor General to Tippoo Sulatun, 9 January 1799.

safeguard the peace, and Wellesley demanded that Tipu must meet with Major Doveton to work out a new series of arrangements. The exact nature of these arrangements were left unstated, but it was implied that Tipu would have to make further commercial and territorial concessions to the Company, as well as expelling all Frenchmen permanently from his territory. Wellesley wrote in closing that Tipu had best respond within one day of receiving the letter or else "dangerous consequences" could result from the delay.⁶⁵

This letter was tantamount to diplomatic extortion, blaming Tipu for breaking the peace and then insisting on reparations for aggression that had not taken place. Wellesley was careful to insist that it was the Sultan who was responsible for failing to adhere to the 1792 Treaty of Seringapatam and not the Company, again portraying himself as reluctantly pressed into military service to stop the aggrandizement of a tyrant. It seems unlikely that Wellesley ever intended this message to be considered seriously, as he had already set into motion the Company's machinery for warfare. Insisting on a response within one day was a sign of this lack of interest in conducting actual diplomacy. When Tipu did not immediately respond, Wellesley incorporated the waiting period into his negative portrayal of Tipu as well, interpreting it as a delaying tactic until the season was too late for military operations.⁶⁶ Viewed from this perspective, Tipu the Oriental despot could never be trusted to keep his word; he was again the "faithless and violent character" as described by Cornwallis in the previous war. As argued from Wellesley's point of view, the only way to defend British India from such a monster was to strike preemptively, before he could achieve his potential alliance with France.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, Governor General to Tippoo Sulatun, 9 January 1799.

⁶⁶ Governor General to Directors, 20 March 1799. IOR/H/255 (p. 1-57): 44

Once the observer bought into the corrosive worldview of the Tipu Legend, every action of the Sultan became suspicious. For example, Alexander Beatson's narrative of the war perceived the refusal of Tipu to admit to Wellesley's accusations as an evasion of the truth. Beatson argued that Tipu's silence with respect to Major Doveton indicated "an additional proof of his disposition to evade the pacific advances of the allies," apparently not seeing the irony in his use of the word "pacific" mere weeks before the Company's invasion of Mysore began.⁶⁷ The Company was demanding that Tipu admit to things which were factually untrue, such as his supposed imminent invasion of British India; when Tipu insisted that he had no such plans, it was interpreted as further evidence of his untrustworthy nature and guilt. There was no escape from this Catch-22 situation, which only made the Sultan appear more and more culpable; first in the eyes of the Company, and later to the wider British public.

Tipu's final letter to Wellesley was received on 13 February, and presumably written at the end of January. In this short message, Tipu stated that he would receive Doveton as an envoy, and was proceeding upon a hunting expedition for the moment.⁶⁸ It was a bizarre response which made little sense in the context of the situation, but Tipu did in fact agree to Wellesley's request in the previous letter, accepting Doveton as an envoy, and apparently was prepared to accept mediation to resolve the situation. However, Wellesley was not interested in any further negotiations. The Governor General had already given the order for the Company's armies to invade Mysore on 3 February, which was long before receiving Tipu's response. Given the slow speed of communications in the eighteenth century, Wellesley likely gave the invasion order before a response from

⁶⁷ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (1800): 33

⁶⁸ East India Company. *Copies and Extracts of Advices to and from India* (1777, 1800). Tippoo Sultaun to the Government of India, received 13 February 1799.

his last letter *could* even have arrived, granting only 25 days for a message to travel from Calcutta to Seringapatam and back again.

In his final letter to Tipu on 22 February, Wellesley responded by stating that Tipu had waited too long to respond, as it was necessary for the Company's forces to move before the start of the monsoon season, and that Tipu's "long silence" on this important and pressing occasion, "compelled me to adopt the resolution of ordering the British forces to advance."⁶⁹ At this point, meeting with Doveton was not sufficient to stave off the attack; even though Tipu had acceded to Wellesley's requests in his previous letter, the Company had decided upon invasion. Although it was indeed true that the monsoon season would put a close to military operations, Wellesley's claims that Tipu was deliberately stalling in diplomacy to prepare his own military strike seem wildly exaggerated, especially given Wellesley's lack of interest in waiting for a response before giving the order to invade.

Wellesley continued to place the public blame for the conflict onto the Sultan, even though it was very obvious from his private letters that he had planned to attack regardless of Tipu's actions. In his official declaration of war, Wellesley wrote that in every instance, "the conduct of the British government in India towards Tippoo Sultraun has been the natural result of those principles of moderation, justice, and good faith" which had been established by Parliament as the rule for intercourse with the native states of India.⁷⁰ Here Wellesley suggested that the Company was indeed acting within the dictates of Parliament, and that it no longer carried out the irresponsible self-aggrandizement of the earlier nabobs. Wellesley insisted that he had been forced into

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, Governor General to Tippoo Sultraun, 22 February 1799.

⁷⁰ Declaration of the Governor General in Council, for all the Forces and Affairs of the of the British Nation in the East Indies, 22 February 1799

conflict, as "Tippoo Sultaun wantonly violated the relations of amity and peace, and compelled the allies to arm in defence of their rights, their happiness, and their honour."⁷¹ He argued that it was necessary to attack immediately and with great force, to prevent Tipu from disturbing the tranquility of India, and potentially allowing a French force to land in the future.

Wellesley echoed these same sentiments in a lengthy letter written to the Court of Directors on 20 March 1799, explaining and justifying his actions in going to war.

According to his official statement to the Company's Directors:

Tippoo Sultaun therefore, having actually concluded offensive and defensive engagements with the French [his emissaries to Mauritius] against the Honourable Company... having avowed the object of those preparations to be the subversion of the British Empire in India; and finally having declared the delay of the meditated blow to proceed from no other cause than his expectation of receiving further aid from the Enemy; I could not hesitate to pronounce, that he had flagrantly violated the Treaties of Peace subsisting between him and the Honourable Company; and that he had committed an act of direct hostility and aggression against the British Government in India.⁷²

As on every other occasion when the subject of treaties was raised, Wellesley made sure to insist that it was Tipu who was violating the Treaty of Seringapatam, and not the Company. Wellesley admitted that there had been essentially no aid given to Tipu from France whatsoever, merely a few dozen volunteers raised in Mauritius, but this did not matter. The war was justified on pre-emptive grounds, to prevent a possible connection between Tipu and France at some point in the indeterminate future.

The Governor General further made it clear that he would have attacked Tipu even sooner, had it been possible. Wellesley told the Directors that every principle of justice and policy demanded "an instantaneous Effort should be made to reduce his

⁷¹ *Ibid*

⁷² Governor General to Directors 20 March 1799 IOR/H/255 (p. 1-57): 11-12

[Tipu's] power and resources" before he could make a connection with the French, and only a "defect of means" had prevented the war from beginning the previous year in 1798.⁷³ This was a clear endorsement for a policy of pre-emption: "Under these circumstances, an immediate attack upon Tippoo Sultaun for the purpose of frustrating the execution of his unprovoked and unwarranted projects of ambition and revenge appeared to me to be demanded by the soundest maxims both of Justice and Policy."⁷⁴ These were the very sort of conflicts that had been prohibited by Parliament, and which had been criticized so heavily during the trial of Warren Hastings a decade earlier. At this particular moment, however, due to the ongoing wars against revolutionary France and Wellesley's skillful use of Tipu's negative reputation, the Governor General's bellicose militarism would end up largely going unchallenged in Britain. The international circumstances of the moment, with the ongoing war against revolutionary France, allowed Wellesley to employ these preexisting characterizations of Tipu in a much more convincing way than ever before.

Wellesley suggested that it was pointless to bother negotiating with a deceitful tyrant like Tipu at all, arguing to the Directors: "My opinion had long been decided, that no Negotiations with Tippoo Saheb could be successful unless accompanied by such a disposition of our Force."⁷⁵ Military might was the only thing that an Oriental despot like Tipu would be able to understand. Beatson's narrative of the campaign concurred, arguing that the mere presence of Tipu created "baneful effects" throughout southern India, leading to a decay of agriculture and industry due to constant fear of invasion.⁷⁶

⁷³ *Ibid*, 48-49

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 17

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 32

⁷⁶ Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (1800): 2

Beatson admitted that Tipu had not actually received any aid from France, but this did not matter as his demands of military assistance were unlimited, and it was impossible to foresee if those demands might one day be satisfied. He therefore agreed with Wellesley that an immediate attack on Tipu was demanded "by the soundest maxims both of justice and policy," using the very same phrase as the Governor General.⁷⁷

The correspondence between Wellesley with the Court of Directors and with Tipu Sultan were therefore important for a number of reasons. They demonstratively prove that Wellesley's decision to invade Mysore had little connection with the French invasion of Egypt, and that the latter was never a factor in his decisions. They furthermore show that Wellesley had no real interest in diplomatic negotiations with Tipu, as he issued orders to prepare for war months ahead of time, and refused to conduct further mediation even when Tipu agreed to Wellesley's requests.⁷⁸ In order to defend his reputation and justify his actions to the British public at home, Wellesley played up Tipu's connection to the French and relied upon the imagery of the Tipu Legend. Over and over again, Wellesley portrayed Tipu as a lying, scheming despot who could not be trusted under any circumstances. The Sultan was the one breaking treaties and driving the Company into war, not the other way around. This reversal of the situation allowed Wellesley to claim that he was fighting a defensive war, reluctantly being forced to protect the British subjects in India from the aggression of a cruel despot, even as Company forces were invading Mysore. Without the pre-existing "tyrannical" representations of Tipu for

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 11

⁷⁸ Older historical scholarship accepted Wellesley's claims about the start of the war, such as H.H. Dodwell. *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 5: British India* (1963, 1929): 339-40. Modern scholarship has revised this opinion, and concurs that the Fourth Mysore War was an opportunistic power play by the British Company; see for example Lawrence James. *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997): 68-69. What has been less commented upon is the connection between Wellesley's actions in India and public opinion in Britain, the focus of the next section.

Wellesley to draw upon, he would have had far less success in convincing so many to accept his interpretation of the conflict. The Tipu Legend was therefore a major factor in British representations of the Fourth Mysore War, creating a stereotyped Asiatic villain full of vice and corruption for the heroic Company to fight against. This was an important factor in the reception of the conflict in the British metropole, which differed significantly from the previous wars against Tipu.

The British Reaction: The Storming of Seringapatam

The Fourth Mysore War (1799) was received in a very different context by the British public at home. Unlike the two previous conflicts in the 1780s and early 1790s, popular understandings of the final war against Tipu Sultan were dominated by Tipu's supposed alliance with revolutionary France. In the wake of Tipu's defeat at the hands of Cornwallis in the Third Mysore War (1790-92), Tipu alone no longer inspired the same anxiety as he had represented in the past. Britons were far more confident about the Company's military strength overseas, and this was reflected in the disappearance of captive narratives and discussion of British prisoners during the Fourth Mysore War. There was no more mention of the forced conversion of European prisoners to Islam, and the threat that this posed to masculinity and European identity.⁷⁹ There was also relatively little mention of the Fourth Mysore War as a conflict designed to liberate the people of Mysore from the rule of an oppressive tyrant, and when these explanations did appear, they were justifications offered after the conclusion of the war for the Company's

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2

annexation of so much additional territory.⁸⁰ Wellesley ignored Tipu's Mysorean subjects in his dispatches, and did not seem to care about their fate.

Instead, it was Tipu's supposed alliance with France which was emphasized repeatedly in 1798 and 1799, both in the East India Company's official correspondences and amongst the wider British public in the metropole. Although Tipu alone failed to inspire the same dread that he had held in the past, the possibility of an alliance between revolutionary France and "Citizen Tippoo" was terrifying to Britons, and represented a threat that had to be prevented at all costs. As such, Wellesley's flimsy justifications for preemptive war against Tipu in 1799 were embraced with enthusiasm by the British public, in the popular presses and in the halls of Parliament, preventing the emergence of any opposition of note. Unlike the past wars against Tipu, there was no dissenting political party that rose to challenge the Company's management of the war and question the legality of the invasion of Mysore. Fear of the potential alliance between Tipu and the French, along with Wellesley's careful manipulation of the diplomatic situation to paint the Sultan as a military aggressor, was enough to stifle potential criticism of the war's morality at home.

The Fourth Mysore War also had the great advantage of being a short and victorious war. Mere weeks passed between the arrival of news from India that the Company had invaded Mysore and the announcement that Seringapatam had been successfully captured, with Tipu himself among the slain. This was a marked contrast from the Second and Third Mysore Wars, both of which had lasted for years and underwent long stretches of military setbacks on the part of the Company. It was easy to

⁸⁰ See for example James Salmond. *A Review of the Origin, Progress, and Result of the Decisive War with the Late Tippoo Sultaun, in Mysore* (London: Printed by Luke Hansard, 1800)

accept Wellesley's claims about Tipu and his connections to the French when the invasion of Mysore had been such an overwhelming success. In a marked contrast to the earlier skepticism of the Company and its servants, who had been viewed separate from the British nation and were commonly believed to be parasitic nabobs, now the soldiers and administrators of the Company were instead perceived as patriotic heroes, with the victory over Tipu celebrated as a nationalistic triumph.

This was best represented by the innumerable paintings, songs, plays, and other works of creative media portraying "The Storming of Seringapatam", the taking of Tipu's capital by the Company's military forces. These popular works demonstrated how public opinion about Tipu Sultan and the East India Company had shifted dramatically over the previous two decades. Instead of cartoons satirizing the nabobs as the plunderers of the East, paintings and plays of the Storming of Seringapatam had become cherished parts of the national identity, embraced by Britons on all parts of the political spectrum. With the passage of time, these images would pass into the British historical memory of the Mysore Wars, with the earlier fears, uncertainties, and debates about the subject matter eventually becoming forgotten.

In India, Wellesley had used the Malartic Proclamation as an immediate trigger to begin preparations for war against Tipu, using the imagery built up over the past two decades as justification for his decision. The reaction in Britain to the news of the Proclamation was rather different, inspiring not a burning desire for further war but instead confusion and uncertainty. Initial observers expressed disbelief, not understanding why Malartic would issue such a proclamation and wondering if the whole thing was some sort of ruse on the part of the French. The notion that this was a form of

deception on the part of the French was more plausible in many ways than the truth of the situation.

An example of this disbelief was provided by an anonymous author in a letter from Mauritius dated 4 April 1798 and published in the *Bombay Courier*. The source described the visit of the ambassadors and the issuing of the Malartic Proclamation, while wondering "whether there was any truth in the Embassy" or if the whole thing was simply a farce created for misdirection.⁸¹ News of the Proclamation first appeared in the London newspapers in June 1798, where the text was translated from French and widely printed for mass circulation.⁸² General confusion was once again the response, as the public wondered what exactly to make of this strange news. *Lloyd's Evening Post* speculated that the French must have made preparations to aid Tipu, as they would hardly expose their old ally "to the just indignation of the English" by disclosing his intentions publicly.⁸³ The *Express and Evening Chronicle* believed that this proclamation announced a new expedition by the French against the Company's holdings on the Coromandel Coast, while also acknowledging that neither the military forces nor the means of transporting them were enough to justify any serious alarm to the British settlements.⁸⁴

Contradictory rumors further muddied the waters about what was taking place in India. One account stated that Tipu was making vigorous preparations for war, having been promised powerful assistance from France. At the same time, the most recent ships

⁸¹ *Bombay Courier* (Bombay, India) 28 July 1798, Issue 305

⁸² See *Whitehall Evening Post* (London, England) 14 June 1798, Issue 8049 for one example.

⁸³ *Lloyd's Evening Post* (London, England) 15 June 1798, Issue 6366

⁸⁴ *Express and Evening Chronicle* (London, England) 16 June 1798, Issue 577

arriving from India in the summer of 1798 insisted that no war alarms had been raised.⁸⁵ As late as February 1799, after Lord Wellesley had already ordered the invasion of Mysore, *Lloyd's Evening Post* still fell compelled to call the veracity of the Malartic Proclamation into question: "The authenticity of this document is extremely questionable. Would a French Governor so rashly have announced publicly a fact of so much importance, and which it was so impolitic to disclose?"⁸⁶ Mass confusion reigned over the Company's relationship with Tipu Sultan, as the news brought by ships indicated everything was peaceful while the Proclamation seemed to indicate a war was brewing. No one in London was quite sure what was happening overseas.

When news of the departure of the French expeditionary force arrived, however, the confusion about Tipu rapidly turned to fear and anxiety for the safety of British India. The *London Chronicle* pointed out the dangers of Napoleon's French force arriving in India to join up with Tipu, which would apprehend "a war more serious, if undertaken in the formidable manner threatened, than any with which that country [India] has ever been visited."⁸⁷ Although the same newspaper stated that this was an extremely unlikely possibility, it did not stop public fears from running wild over the situation. Rumor magnified the size of the force Tipu's ambassadors had raised in Mauritius, with one newspaper reporting the number at 600 men instead of fewer than 100.⁸⁸ A report from a French newspaper insisted that India was the clear destination for Napoleon's expedition, and that the enterprise was concerted with Tipu at the Sultan's own instigation. It suggested that Tipu would dissemble with the Company until his French allies could

⁸⁵ London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 9 July 1798, Issue 4505

⁸⁶ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 4 February 1799, Issue 6466

⁸⁷ London Chronicle (London, England) 10 July 1798, Issue 6141

⁸⁸ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 1 August 1798, Issue 6386

arrive to support him.⁸⁹ The *Morning Chronicle* further reported, "It is said that Buonaparte found Envoys from Tippoo Saib in Egypt, who had been long waiting for him there."⁹⁰ Although all of this news was factually untrue, it fit very neatly into the portrayal of the war that Wellesley and the Company were trying to present.

Napoleon's own actions in Egypt fit neatly into this narrative as well. After landing in Egypt, Napoleon issued proclamations presenting himself as a liberator of the Egyptian populace from Ottoman oppression, praising the precepts of Islam and claiming friendship with Muslims. During a festival celebrating the birth of Muhammad, Napoleon garbed himself in Egyptian dress and proclaimed himself a worthy son of the Prophet and a favorite of Allah. These gestures proved to be ineffective, leading to a mass revolt of the people of Cairo against the French on 22 October 1798, but they lent credulity to the claims of a potential union between Napoleon and Tipu, particularly in the British metropole.⁹¹

In an opinion piece entitled "Buonaparte and His Expedition" from August 1798, *Lloyd's Evening Post* waxed poetically on the threat that the French posed to British India: "Thus they mean to wreck their vengeance upon us, the only people who have not bowed beneath their despotism. They will thus employ at a distance, and disengage themselves of the superfluity of troops which might become fatal to them in the hour of peace. They have, through all parts of the globe, auxiliaries in those dregs of nations, always disposed to shake off the restraint of the law..."⁹² According to this article, Tipu Sultan was being employed as a proxy of the French regime. This particular phrasing of

⁸⁹ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 22 August 1798, Issue 6395

⁹⁰ Morning Chronicle (London, England) 30 October 1798, Issue 9184

⁹¹ This summary is drawn from Christopher Herold. *Bonaparte in Egypt* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) and Juan Cole. *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)

⁹² Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 3 August 1798, Issue 6387

the threat supported and reinforced the various "tyrannical" representations of Tipu which had been established earlier, now associating the tyranny of an Oriental monarch with the despotism of the French revolutionaries. Both of them were presented as threats to British liberty that had to be stopped.

All throughout the summer of 1798, these fears about an alliance between Tipu and the French combined to generate an atmosphere of crisis and uncertainty over the fate of British India. However, as the months passed without any news arriving of an attack by Tipu against the Company's possessions, the tension gradually dissipated. A November article in the *Observer* stated that the latest accounts from India were of the most pacifistic tendency, and that Tipu had not manifested the least disposition to hostility, but was rather trying to cultivate the friendship of the Madras government.⁹³ The article was meant to reassure the public that conflict could be avoided in India, and assist in easing the tension that had built up surrounding the security of the Company's Indian possessions. The *Morning Post and Gazetteer* went further in reassuring its readers on the same subject, suggesting that the rumors of war with Tipu (which had depreciated the value of the Company's stock) were the result of "stock jobbers, of the gross credulity of stock-holders, and of the shallowness of the political speculators of Change Alley." The immediate object of Napoleon had never been India; if it had been, then an understanding with Tipu would have been established long before leaving France, as Napoleon "on the banks of the Nile, without ships, can no more assist Tippoo than if he were on the banks of the Mississippi."⁹⁴

⁹³ *Observer* (London, England) 11 November 1798, Issue 360

⁹⁴ *Morning Post and Gazetteer* (London, England) 12 November 1798, Issue 9313

These sources demonstrate how the immediate panic and anxiety over India were dying down over time, as it became more and more apparent that the French soldiers in Egypt had no way to reach India. They also reveal that the anxiety over British India in 1798-99 was never caused by Tipu himself, but rather from the threat of Tipu combining with a French expeditionary force. Once the French threat to India was removed, there was little interest from the public in engaging in another Mysore war. This was why it was so necessary for Wellesley to write as though Tipu were attacking him, and deploy the tropes of the Tipu Legend as a justification for his own actions. It was the French alliance that was the crucial factor for the British public in 1798-99, and ultimately provided the *carte blanche* for Wellesley's attack.

At the same time that Wellesley was launching his invasion in India, in February and March of 1799, the public perception in London was that the threat to India had been removed, and the Company's prospects for peace in the immediate future were excellent. It was widely believed that the failure of the French expeditionary force meant that Tipu would back down from conflict, ensuring a pacifistic solution to the crisis. In other words, the public perception of the situation in the metropole was exactly the opposite of the events taking place in southern India. The *General Evening Post* reported in February 1799 that although it was clear an agreement of some kind existed between Tipu and the French, there was no longer any apprehension of danger from the French Egyptian force, and therefore it was probable that Tipu's preparations for war would cease.⁹⁵ There was no suggestion from this source that the Company's military might decide to go on the offensive of their own accord, nor any indication that this was what the newspaper's authors desired. The war scare with Tipu back in Britain, caused by word of the Malartic

⁹⁵ *General Evening Post* (London, England) 7 February 1799, Issue 10351

Proclamation, was largely finished before the actual war itself began in India. After Nelson's victory over the French fleet in August 1798, the British public no longer appeared to be worried overmuch about the fate of India. The advocates for pre-emptive war came almost entirely from the ranks of the Company's Indian servants and the Anglo-Indian community overseas; there was little support for further Indian wars in Britain prior to the news of Wellesley's invasion.

When news of the outbreak of the Fourth Mysore War did arrive from India, the newspaper coverage was entirely conducted from within the parameters of the Tipu Legend. Wellesley's interpretation of the situation, in which the Company had been forced into a defensive war to safeguard the territories and peoples under its protection, was the only one offered into the public sphere of print culture. The *Times* reported on 4 June 1799 that although Tipu at first appeared disposed to measures of conciliation, he was all the while making preparations for war, and stalling for time to await the arrival of the French force. Affairs had now been brought to a crisis and Tipu had "thrown off the mask", as he marshaled some 100,000 well-disciplined troops while not troubling to conceal his designs.⁹⁶ From the way in which the article was written, it appeared as though Tipu Sultan were the one initiating conflict and conducting an invasion of the Company's territory, rather than the opposite. The *Sun* wrote that there was every reason to expect success in India, "if the British Army should be compelled by the ingratitude and injustice of Tippoo to take the field against him," once again reversing the situation and shifting culpability for war onto the Sultan.⁹⁷ This editorial comment was noteworthy not only for maintaining the fiction that the Company forces acted defensively, but also

⁹⁶ Report from Bombay, 21 March 1799 (anonymous author). *Times* (London, England) 4 June 1799, Issue 4500

⁹⁷ *Sun* (London, England) 4 July 1799, Issue 2116

for the way in which the Company's military in India was now called the “British Army” and was no longer viewed as a group of adventurers and plunderers, as had been the case earlier. Newspaper coverage of the Second Mysore War in the early 1780s had rarely made this association between the nation and the Company's military forces. This was another sign that the Company was successfully co-opting the patriotic symbols of the British nation and associating them with itself. In the earlier period of the nabobs, the fear had been that the Company and its servants would corrupt the morals of the nation, not embody them in the struggle against tyranny.

These villainous characterizations were nothing new, and had been used extensively by the Company during the previous Third Mysore War a decade earlier. What made the Fourth Mysore War so different from the previous two conflicts, however, was the lack of any interest shown by the print culture of the public sphere in supporting Tipu or criticizing the actions taken by the Company. There were no commentators writing to defend Tipu, or to argue that he did not warrant this aggression, which was nothing less than a seismic shift from the earlier two Mysore wars. If anything, Tipu had done much more to justify a military response by the Company in the previous war, when he had carried out an attack on a native state (Travancore) allied with the Company.⁹⁸ But while the morality of the Third Mysore War had been heavily debated in Parliament and turned into a political issue split along Whig and Tory lines, the ongoing war against revolutionary France meant that Wellesley's interpretation of the Fourth Mysore War would go almost completely unchallenged. There was no significant criticism of the Company in the newspapers at all, likely due to contemporary wartime patriotism, and virtually nothing written in defense of Tipu's character. The closest thing to praise

⁹⁸ See Chapter 4

granted to the Sultan was a backhanded compliment paid by the *Courier and Evening Gazette*, which claimed that Tipu was a wise and intelligent prince, but only in order to make a comparison with Zeman Shah of Afghanistan, who was said to be even worse than Tipu.⁹⁹ The complete lack of an alternative narrative of the Fourth Mysore War in the public sphere meant that Wellesley's and the Company's discourse on the war would go uncontested, presenting itself as a hegemonic worldview of events.

News of the capture of Seringapatam and death of Tipu reached Britain in early September 1799, bringing word of the Company's total victory. Since news of the outbreak of war had only arrived in July, this conflict was extremely short in duration compared to the previous Mysore wars, which unquestionably contributed to the universally positive reception with which the news was greeted. The announcement of victory came mere weeks after the outbreak of the conflict, and it was easy for all parties to share in the fruits of such an overwhelming and painless success. The public reaction was one of wild celebration and excitement, mixed with a heavy dose of cultural arrogance and feeling of British superiority over the Indian people. The long anxiety over Tipu had finally been resolved, and the Company's territories were considered to be permanently secured.

The *Evening Mail* wrote that the Mysore country had been reduced by the "British armies" (once again associating the Company with the British nation) in little more than three months, resulting in the death of "our perfidious and inveterate enemy" Tipu Sultan. It was claimed that Tipu had shown no military talents in the latest war, and the capture of Seringapatam would result in the flow of "incalculable" resources into the Company's

⁹⁹ *Courier and Evening Gazette* (London, England) 6 August 1799, Issue 2172

treasury.¹⁰⁰ *Lloyd's Evening Post* exaggerated the wealth captured inside the fort to £3 million, and happily proclaimed: "Thus at length are all fears removed, and every danger extinguished, which might have threatened our mighty Empire in the East; and thus has perished the perfidious Enemy, who was to stretch out his hand to Buonaparte at Suez."¹⁰¹ It was evident from these accounts that Tipu had remained a source of anxiety in Britain, even after the losses suffered in the previous war. And despite the near-total disappearance of the prisoners issue in this final conflict, many of the London newspapers took an unseemly delight in announcing the death of Tipu, who was perceived as having received his just desserts for the treatment of British captives earlier. For example, the *Star* proclaimed, "It is with the most heartfelt and sincere satisfaction that we congratulate our readers on the Capture of Seringapatam, and the Death of that inveterate and most invidious of all our enemies in India, Tippoo Saib!"¹⁰² The reputation of Tipu as a tyrant continued to influence his public perception in Britain, and became even more dominant as a result of the latest war.¹⁰³

In a clever public relations move, the Company had many of Tipu's private papers distributed to the press and printed in the daily newspapers. This included documents containing some of Tipu's wild fantasies on what he hoped to achieve in the event of defeating the Company's forces, which were never intended to be publicly distributed, but were used nonetheless to further justify the war that had taken place. The *St. James Chronicle* expressed indignation on the behalf of the British public, to hear of an

¹⁰⁰ Evening Mail (London, England) 13 September 1799, Issue not listed

¹⁰¹ Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 13 September 1799, Issue 6561

¹⁰² Star (London, England) 13 September 1799, Issue 3439

¹⁰³ There was one brief account of prisoner atrocities from the Fourth Mysore War, in which Tipu had a dozen captured British soldiers executed. It received very little attention from the British public and disappeared quickly from public view. See Alexander Beatson. *A View of the Origin and Conduct of the War with Tippoo Sultaun* (1800): 167-68. In the London newspapers, see *St. James' Chronicle* or the *British Evening Post* (London, England) 10 December 1799, Issue 6550

"Asiatick Despot" dividing up the Company's territory and ports alongside the French.¹⁰⁴

Once again the British public was asked to feel empathy with the Company, as a group embodying them in the struggle against a foreign Indian tyrant. The London papers further printed in October 1799 some of the damning correspondence between Tipu and the French governor at Mauritius, without mentioning the context in which they were written to put them in the most unflattering light possible. Wellesley had forwarded these letters to London in order to support his interpretation of the events that had transpired, and he seems to have been highly successful in promoting his view of the conflict. For example, the *Morning Chronicle*, an Opposition newspaper which had been highly critical of the Third Mysore War, summarized the causes of the Fourth Mysore War in the following passage:

From the Governor General's letters, it was evident that Tippoo had mediated the most perfidious designs against the British power in India early in 1798; that he had sent Ambassadors to the Mauritius to treat with the French and engage them to co operate with him in hostilities against us. That upon remonstrances strongly urged by the Government of Bengal, he temporized by every means that treachery could suggest, and made plausible excuses for his very questionable conduct, utterly denying his treachery, and asserting the most ardent attachment to the British interests. That at length his guilt was so unquestionable, that the Governor General thought it his duty to take the field against him...¹⁰⁵

These sentiments were typical of the public mood in London. This interpretation placed all of the blame on Tipu, and did not consider the notion that the Company forces were aggressively invading a neighbor that had taken no military action towards them. At no point in time did the *Morning Chronicle* question the necessity of the war, or invoke Parliament's dictum for the Company to avoid engaging in wars of conquest in India. For

¹⁰⁴ St. James' Chronicle or the British Evening Post (London, England) 19 September 1799, Issue 6515

¹⁰⁵ Morning Chronicle (London, England) 26 September 1799, Issue 9467

a paper which had spent much ink decrying the injustices of the previous conflict, this was a dramatic shift in its perception of the Company.

Although the news of the victory had been known since mid-September, the East India House on Leadenhall Street did not formally convene for discussion until holding a large meeting of the Directors on 13 November 1799. These proceedings were later published, granting insight into the outlook of the Company's wealthiest stockholders. A Mr. Johnstone spoke and contended that Wellesley's actions had been thoroughly justified by a thesis of circumstance, that India had been in a crisis posed by the French which excused the taking of extraordinary measures. In his view, pre-emptive war was entirely appropriate due to the "great law of self-preservation."¹⁰⁶ Johnstone then went on to claim a moral progression for the Company forces, who had been "long denounced to their country as plunderers and oppressors" and yet now had been accepted as part of the British nation, celebrated as patriots and their exploits cheered at home.¹⁰⁷ Johnstone's reflections further demonstrated how much the public perception of the Company had changed in the past few decades, a shift which had been greatly influenced by the recurring wars against Tipu Sultan.

As the architect of the victory over Tipu, Wellesley was the recipient of an outpouring of popular acclaim in the British metropole. Although he remained in India as Governor General until 1805, Wellesley was showered with praise and affection from all parts of the political spectrum. The official thanks of the House of Commons was voted to Wellesley on 4 October 1799, after a lengthy speech by Henry Dundas praising his conduct and reiterating many times over the defensive nature of the war: "The

¹⁰⁶ East India Company. *The Proceedings at the General Court at the East India house, on Wednesday, November 13, 1799. Debates at East India House Series.* (London: J. Debrett, 1799): 5-6

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 9

propositions established by those papers were, that the war was inevitable, and that every exertion had been made to avoid hostilities with the late Tippoo Suldaun..."¹⁰⁸ The thanks of the House were passed unanimously ("nemine contradicente"), or without need for a division on the vote, another indication of the shift in opinion since the last Mysore War. A similar vote of thanks was championed in the House of Lords by Grenville, and passed in the same session of 4 October 1799.

One of the results of the conflict was that Tipu had been effectively depoliticized, no longer the subject of the partisan politics of the day as in the 1790-92 period. The role of the French had unquestionably been key to this process. It was no longer possible for members of the political opposition to sympathize with the Sultan and condemn the immorality of the Company's overseas servants; instead, the full body politic had united around the Company's military forces, as part of the struggle against France, leaving no room for alternate interpretations of Tippoo the Tyrant. On the few occasions when the Opposition chose to attack the conduct of the government, they now endorsed the pro-Company stance regarding India, while criticizing the larger conduct of the war against France in Europe. For example, when Whig politician Charles Grey spoke out against the government in a Commons debate on 27 November, he stated he that viewed the war against France in Europe in the most disastrous light, and that it had caused unparalleled calamity to the country, comparing Britain to a sick man dying with every symptom of health. However, Grey had nothing to say against the conduct of the East India Company or the immorality of its wars, merely noting that "we" (again linking the Company with the British nation) had acquired an additional portion of territory in the East and

¹⁰⁸ General Evening Post (London, England) 3 October 1799, Issue 10456. Dundas was the head of the Board of Control and a major influence on Prime Minister William Pitt; he was likely the single most important colonial policymaker in this period.

dethroned Tipu.¹⁰⁹ This was drastic reversal from the politics of a decade earlier, when John Hipplesley and Philip Francis argued vehemently in the Commons on the immorality of the Mysore Wars. This example demonstrated how Tipu had been effectively depoliticized, made over into a contemptible figure that no one in the government was interested in defending. The Indian empire had become a subject of national pride, rather than an embarrassing stain upon the national honor.

Perhaps the best example of this shift in popular perception of the East India Company and the overseas empire can be seen in the form of "The Storming of Seringapatam", the term that came to be applied to various different depictions of the conquest of Tipu's capital city in the final battle of the Fourth Mysore War. Created and marketed to the public on a wide scale, these images of the Storming of Seringapatam celebrated the actions of the Company to the British public, and implicitly justified the wars of territorial conquest in India. They served to internalize the narrative that Wellesley and the rest of the Company promoted about the Mysore Wars, that they had been fought to stop the tyranny of a mad Oriental despot in league with Britain's most hated enemy. Paintings and other visual media based on the Fourth Mysore War were more overtly military than their predecessors, depicting Company soldiers in the midst of raging battle scenes, assaulting the walls of Seringapatam and gaining control over the fortress. With direct Company patronage backing the most famous of these paintings, they continued to draw together the association of the East India Company with heroic patriotism and the British nation, using the conquest of Tipu Sultan as a means to glorify the growing overseas empire in the eyes of the British public. Due to their widespread

¹⁰⁹ London Packet or New Lloyd's Evening Post (London, England) 26 November 1800, Issue 8439

popularity, these representations of the Storming of Seringapatam played a crucial role in disseminating new ideas about empire to the wider British populace.

Robert Ker Porter was the first artist to advertise for subscriptions on a new work of art depicting the death of Tipu and fall of Seringapatam, which appeared in the London newspapers on 11 October 1799. This was only a few weeks after the arrival of news from India of Tipu's defeat, and reflected again the competition to be first to capture the drama of the Mysore Wars on canvass. Porter benefited from the patronage of the East India Company, which helped to supply him with additional details about the individuals present on the campaign against Tipu. Porter's painting *The Storming of Seringapatam* was first exhibited to the public on 29 March 1800 at No. 17 Old Bond Street, and remained open for weeks afterwards, then shown again more publicly at the Lyceum Theatre beginning on 26 April [Figure 2 & 3].¹¹⁰ The painting itself was a gigantic panorama, stretching over 120 feet long at a height of 21 feet, and covering 2550 square feet of canvass in total. Porter depicted hundreds of individual figures engaged in the process of storming Tipu's capital, including 20 portraits of British officers and Tipu Sultan himself manning the walls in vain defense, helpfully identified by a descriptive sketch of the panorama [Figure 4].¹¹¹ The painting captures the moment in the battle when the walls were breached in two places, and Company soldiers surged into the gaps to take possession of the fortress. Full of fire, smoke, and guns on all sides, Porter's

¹¹⁰ Robert Ker Porter. *The Storming of Seringapatam* (1800). Private collection.

¹¹¹ Robert Ker Porter. *The Storming of Seringapatam* (1800), Descriptive Sketch. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

enormous work of art portrays the Company in a moment of triumph and dominion, with Tipu's Indian soldiers falling before the might of the British conquerors.¹¹²

As a visual spectacle, *The Storming of Seringapatam* was without equal for the London public at the dawn of the nineteenth century. An advertisement in the newspapers explained how the painting was on display to the public at the Lyceum every day (Sundays excepted) from nine until dusk, with an admittance fee of one shilling. For another two shillings, visitors could pick up the accompanying pamphlet *Narrative Sketches of the Conquest of Mysore*, which was described as "giving a comprehensive View of the rise, progress, and termination of the late War with Tippoo Sultaun... collected from the authentic and original Information which regulated the design and execution of the Painting."¹¹³ Written by an anonymous Company author, the pamphlet became so popular that it was reprinted four different times in two editions between 1800 and 1804, as thousands of viewers sought after more information about the captivating scene on display. *Narrative Sketches of the Conquest of Mysore* drew most of its source material from the correspondences of Richard Wellesley, and predictably reflected the same biased interpretation of the events leading to the Fourth Mysore War. The *Narrative Sketches* outlined how "it is now incontestable that Tippoo Sultaun's thoughts were perpetually intent upon the ruin of the British power" which explained why the Company was forced into war, due to Tipu's continued "prevarication and falsehood".¹¹⁴ It also accused Tipu of further atrocities towards British prisoners, describing graphically how

¹¹² Hermione De Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 160

¹¹³ Sun (London, England) 18 July 1800, Issue 2441

¹¹⁴ Robert Ker Porter. *Narrative Sketches of the Conquest of Mysore, Effected by the British Troops and their Allies in the Capture of Seringapatam, and the Death of Tippoo Sultaun*. 2 editions (London, 1800; Edinburgh, 1801; Bath, 1803; Hull, 1804): 8, 12-13

six grenadiers and one drummer boy were strangled through the breaking of their necks.¹¹⁵ These accounts of violence towards British prisoners had been rare during the Fourth Mysore War, but were revived in this pamphlet as a means of further denigrating the character of Tipu. This led up to the triumphant conclusion of the war:

Thus have the wisdom and energy of British councils, and the steady bravery of British soldiers, united to overthrow one of the most powerful tyrants of the east; to accomplish as complete and as just a revolution, as can be found on the records of history; and to produce such an increase of revenue, resource, commercial advantage, and military strength to the British establishment in India, as must for years to come ensure a happy and prosperous tranquility, not only to the Company's possessions, but to the native principalities, and to millions of inhabitants on the fertile plains of Hindostan.¹¹⁶

The victory of Tipu was advertised as creating advantages not only for the British, but also producing a better lifestyle for the Company's new Indian subjects as well, anticipating the civilizing mission rhetoric of the later nineteenth century. This "liberation" rhetoric had not been employed by Wellesley at all, but was broken out in the metropole after the war was over as a justification for the annexation of so much territory by the Company. The great popularity of Porter's painting helped lead to the widespread dissemination of its accompanying pamphlet, which repeated all of the old tyrannical representations of the Tipu Legend.

Viewers of Porter's artwork were overwhelmed by the size and spectacle of the production. The panorama design meant that viewers were encircled by the action taking place, causing many to feel that they were themselves participating in the battle unfolding before their eyes. The Reverend Thomas Dibdin recorded his impressions of being overwhelmed by the scene:

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, footnote to p. 45

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 122-23

I can never forget its first impression upon my mind. It was a thing dropped from the clouds - all fire, energy, intelligence, and animation. You looked a second time - the figures moved and were comingled in hot and bloody fight. You saw the flash of cannon, the glitter of the bayonet, and the gleam of the falchion. You longed to be leaping from craig to craig with Sir David Baird, who is hallooing his men on to victory! Then, again, you seemed to be listening to the groans of the wounded and the dying - and more than one woman was carried out swooning.¹¹⁷

As mentioned by Dibdin, there were multiple accounts of viewers actually fainting while taking in the spectacle, overwhelmed by the violent action of the panorama. After months on display in London, Porter's *Storming of Seringapatam* was taken on a tour of the British Isles, awing thousands of further spectators. *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* wrote a glowing description of the painting when it toured the city, once again drawing "crowded audiences from nine till evening", who expressed their admiration "at the grandeur of the scene."¹¹⁸ The painting was even taken to Ireland, where a lighted rotunda had to be built in Belfast specially to display the huge work of art.

Porter's painting was a novel work, the first battle painting showing the British taking active possession of an Indian site. Earlier historical paintings of India had tended to show durbars or treaty ceremonies, much as the works produced by Robert Home and Mather Brown from the Third Mysore War had focused upon the exchange of the hostage princes. *The Storming of Seringapatam* did away with the older image of the British in India as peace-loving commercial traders, replacing it with a militaristic celebration of the Company's martial prowess. Porter was also working with the full financial support and patronage of the East India Company; he gained both a substantial fortune from the public admission fees of the painting, as well as a knighthood from the British crown.

The panoramic spectacle of *The Storming of Seringapatam* changed forever the

¹¹⁷ Rev. Thomas Dibdin (1836). Quoted in Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 161

¹¹⁸ *Trewman's Exeter Flying Post* (Exeter, England) 10 February 1803, Issue 2051

conception of historical painting, and continued to be influential on later artists long into the nineteenth century. Porter heroically captured in paint a staged moment of military drama, one that "patriotically advanced and enhanced the government's full-blown vision of empire as a historic spectacle of glory in which all amongst the British populace could participate."¹¹⁹ Porter's artwork helped bring the Company's military, earlier reviled and feared as an agent of despotism and moral decay, into the fold of British patriotism, making it acceptable and even laudatory for the wider public to share in.¹²⁰

The mass popularity of Porter's work ensured that it would spawn a legion of imitators, all of which shared similar themes in expressing their excitement at the success of the Company's arms. All of these various paintings featuring the "storming" or "assault" or "taking" of Seringapatam depicted the Company military assuming control of Tipu's fortress, repeating the earlier messages from the previous war's artwork in a more explicitly martial fashion. Alexander Allan's *The Assault on Seringapatam* was similar in overall style to earlier landscape paintings he had done in India, however instead of showing the aftermath of the British victory at Tipu's hill forts, this painting depicted the Company in the active process of conquest itself [Figure 5].¹²¹ Wave after wave of soldiers in red coats advance towards the fortress in the background, marching in ranks with bayonets thrust over their shoulders. A cannon crew sizes up the scene on the left and prepares to fire another round. Off in the distance smoke rises over the walls of Seringapatam, as the Company troops advance through the breaches to seize control of

¹¹⁹ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 161-62

¹²⁰ Formal history paintings continued to be employed for nationalistic purposes throughout the nineteenth century. See for example John Springhall. "Of England, Home, and Duty: The image of England in Victorian and Edwardian Juvenile Fiction" in John Mackenzie (ed.) *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986)

¹²¹ Alexander Allan. *The Assault on Seringapatam* (1799). Scottish United Services Museum, Edinburgh.

the city. Unlike Allan's landscape paintings of India, here the terrain has faded into the background and been reduced in importance; the subject matter of this work is unmistakably the soldiers that make up the Company's military. The theme of the painting, British soldiers seizing control of the fortress and occupying the Indian landscape, would have been obvious to the observer.

Joseph Turner created a similar work in his watercolor *The Siege of Seringapatam*, albeit with a bit of a thematic twist [Figure 6].¹²² The perspective of the viewer is very similar to Allan's painting, depicting row after row of impersonal soldiers in their red coats, striding towards the fortress with a pall of smoke hanging over the action. However, in the foreground of the painting there are several British soldiers lying slumped on the ground next to an artillery piece, with visible wounds indicating the casualties already suffered in the battle. The presence of these injured soldiers changes the tone of the piece from an unabashed celebration of triumph into a more reflective and ambiguous work, questioning the viewer as to whether the gains of the Company's military ventures were worth the cost.¹²³ Few other artists of the period were as discerning or nuanced in their portrayals of the battle, however. Thomas Stothard's *The Storming of Seringapatam* was a straightforward glorification of the action, with the familiar waves of British soldiers rushing heroically towards the walls of the city with smoke and fire all around them [Figure 7].¹²⁴ G. Thompson produced a rather crude engraving of the battle as well, showing the same events with a poor conception of depth and perspective [Figure 8].¹²⁵

¹²² Joseph Mallord William Turner. *The Siege of Seringapatam* (1800). Tate Gallery, London.

¹²³ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 286

¹²⁴ Thomas Stothard. *The Storming of Seringapatam* (1804). Private Collection of the Duke of Wellington

¹²⁵ G. Thompson (engraver) *The Storming and Taken [sic] of Seringapatam by Lord Mornington May 4th 1799* (1800). National Army Museum, London.

Thompson's print indicated that these heroic renditions of the Company's military were not limited solely to the artists who gained the patronage of Leadenhall Street, but enjoyed a much wider basis of public approval, including from the same sort of printers and engravers who had mocked the Company for its nabobery in earlier decades. Depictions of Seringapatam's storming were extremely popular in this period, and artists of both high and low culture were willing to supply the public with the images that they craved.

The subject matter of the Fourth Mysore War proved to be so popular that artists soon moved beyond the capture of the fortress itself, and began to portray imagined scenes of Tipu's last stand, his death, and the recovery of his body. Henry Singleton returned to this subject matter to paint *The Last Effort and Fall of Tippoo Sultaun*, likely trying to seize upon the great public desire for artwork featuring the Mysore Wars [Figure 9].¹²⁶ Singleton's work portrays Tipu in his final moments of life, already wounded in the side and in the process of falling; the Sultan is depicted in an oddly off-balance position that gives no power or grace to his posture. On the left side of the painting, Tipu's soldiers appear to be cowering or falling back, unable to stand before the British invaders. The redcoated soldiers advance confidently forward from the right side of the image, stepping over fallen Indians in the process, one of the men gesturing for a further surge ahead. One of the British soldiers has his bayonet raised to strike an Indian man in the face, while Tipu himself is being seized by another soldier, their positioning making it appear as though an adult is grabbing a child.¹²⁷ The message of the painting clearly

¹²⁶ Henry Singleton. *The Last Effort and Fall of Tippoo Sultaun* (1800) British Library, Office of Indian and Oriental Collections.

¹²⁷ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 163

suggests once more the superiority of British soldiers over Indian ones, and invites the viewer to take pride in the downfall of Tipu. Singleton's battle painting is an example of laudatory praise for the Company's militarism, which would have been almost unthinkable a few decades earlier.

Other artists took up the subject of the discovery of the body of the fallen Sultan, which was not found by the British until several hours after the capture of the city. Robert Ker Porter was the first to address this topic once again, painting *Finding the Body of Tippoo Sultan* in early 1800 to go along with his enormous battle piece [Figure 10].¹²⁸ Porter places this scene in the dark of night, with a group of British soldiers surrounding the body of Tipu using a torch for illumination. The Sultan's head lolls to one side, propped up on the knee of a British soldier like a hunting trophy, while an angry expression distorts his facial features. The soldier bearing Tipu's body has his hand raised upwards, as if to suggest a prayer of thankfulness that the world had been rid of the Sultan's menace. In addition to the overwhelming number of British soldiers surrounding the body, there is a single elderly Indian man present, with his hands clasped in prayer and a pitiful expression on his face.¹²⁹ Porter's work suggests that the British soldiers have brought light to the darkness that was India, exorcizing the demon that was Tipu Sultan and making the subcontinent a safer place for all.

These discovery scenes were tackled by other artists, such as Arthur William Devis in his work *Major-General Baird and Col. Arthur Wellesley Discovering the Body*

¹²⁸ Samuel William Reynolds after Robert Ker Porter. *Finding the Body of Tippoo Sultan* (1800). British Library, Office of Indian and Oriental Collections.

¹²⁹ Hermione de Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (2005): 164

of Tippoo Sulatun at Seringapatam [Figure 11].¹³⁰ Devis uses many of the same themes as Porter, employing a night scene brightened by the torches brought by British soldiers, but differs in including recognizable Company officers in the painting. David Baird kneels to check the body of Tipu to confirm his death, while Arthur Wellesley raises his hand in a confident gesture, similar in many ways to the British soldier bearing Tipu's body in Porter's work. The fallen Tipu lies slumped to the side, with his face hidden in shadow, and most of the other Indians have their backs to the viewer, their faces similarly obscured. The one visible Indian looks upwards with an expression of terror on his face; the contrast between the tall, confident British officers and the crouching, fearful Indian attendants comes across obviously to the viewer.

These portrayals of the "Storming of Seringapatam" were not limited only to canvas; the same triumphant celebration of victory was depicted on the London stage as well. Advertised as *The Storming of Seringapatam, or The Death of Tippoo Saib*, Astley's Royal Amphitheatre sought out to create a grand military spectacle unlike anything seen previously by viewing audiences. In addition to new music, scenery, and costumes for this production, Astley's promised to portray:

5th A Correct View of the City of Seringapatam, with the whole of Tippoo's Army, Elephants, Camels, etc. in motion... 6th A British Battery, opening a brisk Fire on Tippoo's Piquet Guard, particularly the blowing up of a Power Mill... 8th The Fortifications of Seringapatam, with the springing of a Mine 9th External View of Tippoo's Palace, with his two Sons firing from the Windows. And 10th, The Zennana and City on Fire, with a variety of circumstances that attended this important conquest.¹³¹

More circus production than traditional theatre, Astley's new show was explicitly martial to a degree rarely seen before. Just as the artwork from the Fourth Mysore War glorified

¹³⁰ Arthur William Devis. *Major-General Baird and Col. Arthur Wellesley Discovering the Body of Tippoo Sulatun at Seringapatam* (1799-1802). Scottish United Services Museum, Edinburgh.

¹³¹ E. Johnson's *British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* (London, England) 29 September 1799, Issue 1039

the occupation of Seringapatam and the death of Tipu Sultan, Astley's *The Storming of Seringapatam* placed the same military spectacle before the British public, incorporating new non-theatrical elements such as acrobatics, large animals, and drilling in formation to create a fantastic new form of entertainment. The application of these military techniques to the theatre allowed for a subjectification of the viewing audience, opening them up to greater control by the state's regulatory powers.¹³² Within the context of how Tipu Sultan was represented by the British public, it meant the elimination of alternate, dissenting discourses of thought about the East India Company and the Mysore Wars, further reinforcing Wellesley's increasingly dominant narrative of the Company having been forced into defensive warfare by the ambitions of Tippoo the Tyrant.

As far as the contemporary public was concerned, *The Storming of Seringapatam* was an exciting show that had to be seen. The *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* wrote that Astley's show exhibited a "light superior to every other", forming "a piece complete and perfect in every part."¹³³ Other newspapers regretted the closing of the theatre season in October 1799 after so few performances; Astley's was happy to oblige them the following year, opening a slightly reworked *The Siege and Storming of Seringapatam* in May 1800. While retaining all of the same scenes from the original production, the reworked show also promised "the grandest display of Horsemanship ever exhibited by 20 Equestrians" involving a series of jumps, grand trampoline tricks to be carried out through a balloon of fire, and over twenty soldiers with muskets and fixed bayonets.¹³⁴ Astley's production would have made a grand spectacle, with its animals and marching soldiers, Indian

¹³² Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007): 312

¹³³ *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* (London, England) 3 October 1799, Issue 22106

¹³⁴ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 5 May 1800, Issue 9657

costumes and exotic Oriental scenery. This martial display encouraged the audience to shed political and ethnic divisions in favor of national consolidation, using the Company's multinational armies as the model.¹³⁵ Newspaper records indicate that this production was taken on the road and performed in provincial cities, where large crowds would have taken in the same messages.¹³⁶ With the ongoing wars against revolutionary France affecting public sentiment, there was no better time to forge a common British identity, in which one of the greatest unifying ties was support for the East India Company and Britain's overseas empire.¹³⁷ The earlier criticisms of the Company and its servants no longer applied in this context. Instead, the British public joined together to celebrate in the spectacle of Tipu's defeat and death, reenacted daily on the stage.

These were hardly the only paintings and dramatic works to emerge from the Fourth Mysore War; Henry Singleton alone produced more paintings on the subject matter of Tipu's death, and there were at least two other imitation theatre productions on the London stage.¹³⁸ However, at the risk of overgeneralization, the works of art featured here serve as broadly representational of the whole. Unlike the earlier cartoons and caricatures which were so critical of the East India Company, the Third and Fourth Mysore Wars saw the emergence of formal history paintings of imperial subject matter, employing artists who were frequently patronized by the Company and created artwork designed to represent their benefactors in a more positive light. Paintings and plays featuring *The Storming of Seringapatam* glorified the Company's military conquests,

¹³⁵ Daniel O'Quinn. *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (2007): 346-47

¹³⁶ See for example Hull Packet (Hull, England) 11 November 1800, Issue 695

¹³⁷ Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation* (1992)

¹³⁸ Henry Singleton. *The Finding of the Body of Tippoo Sultaun Recognised by his Family* (c. 1802). Scottish United Services Museum, Edinburgh; Unknown author, "The Death of Tippoo, and the Capture of his Two Sons by the British Army and their Allies" first staged 16 September (1799) at Sadler's Wells

bringing them within the fold of British patriotism and allowing for the widespread public embrace of the Company's growing Indian empire. In the same process that was taking place in print media, Tipu Sultan was demonized in the visual arts as well, portrayed as the cruel and heartless Tyrant of Mysore, whose death was to be celebrated as a victory for the forces of progress. Through widespread reproduction in cheap prints and engravings, the high art of the formal history painters was disseminated to a mass audience, serving to rewrite the earlier critical discourse of the Company that had been embodied in satirical caricatures. This artwork was an instrumental factor in shifting public opinions, about both Tipu Sultan and the East India Company more generally, at the close of the eighteenth century and the dawn of the nineteenth century.

Conclusion

In surveying the popular literature from the three wars that took place against Tipu Sultan during the 1780s and 1790s, the difference in tone of the Fourth Mysore War (1799) immediately stands out. Whereas the two earlier conflicts witnessed commonplace differences of opinion, and frequent debates over the morality of the East India Company's actions, the print media from the period of the Fourth Mysore War contains no such disagreements. Instead, the contemporary sources unconsciously accepted the Company as a component part of the British nation, a sharp contrast to the distinction made between the two by earlier commentators, and contained almost universal praise for its actions. Most of the literature regarding the war from 1799 and 1800 was celebratory and triumphant in nature, embracing the Company's conquest of Mysore as a cause for patriotic displays of pageantry. It begs the obvious question: what made this conflict so much different from its predecessors?

The best explanation points to the connection between Tipu Sultan and the French, which was greatly emphasized during the Fourth Mysore War over any other potential motivations for action. Tipu's "alliance" with the French united all segments of British opinion against the Sultan, raising the specter of the fearsome Oriental tyrant joined together with the terrors of unchecked Jacobin mob rule. Although these fears were wildly exaggerated, they prevented any potential criticism of Wellesley's heavy handed actions in India, made even more difficult due to the careful manipulation of the dialogue surrounding the war by the Governor General. The conflict itself was short and overwhelmingly successful from the perspective of the Company, rendering the sort of Opposition critiques that had taken place in the past effectively impossible. As for the Sultan himself, Tipu had been killed and his family deposed from power at the end of the war, effectively ending any further discussion about his image. Tipu certainly could not speak in his own defense, or take any actions to change the minds of the British people. Wellesley's interpretation of events was embraced by the public in the metropole, and became the historical memory of the Mysore Wars. The earlier, alternative representations of the events of these conflicts faded with time and were largely forgotten. It was not until well into the twentieth century that South Asian historians began to reclaim this history, and change the memory of Tipu.

Conclusion: Remembering Tipu, 1800-1840

Summary

As the East India Company began to acquire a territorial empire overseas in the years following 1750, Britons in the metropole were faced with an identity crisis. They perceived themselves to be a maritime and commercial people who lived in a society based upon the protection of individual liberties and private property, and yet they increasingly found themselves ruling over a vast Indian population which was accorded none of the same rights.¹ The large amounts of wealth brought back from the subcontinent by Company servants, and the conspicuous spending in which they engaged upon their return, gave rise to the popular satire of the nabobs, status-seeking men of ill repute who had amassed their fortunes overseas through the exploitation of helpless Indian subjects.² The nabobs were perceived as a threat to the natural order of British society; they had been corrupted by the vice and luxuries of the Orient, and it was feared that they would infect the British nation with their decadent morals and political bribery.³ The result was widespread condemnation of the nabobs from across the political spectrum, and a public skepticism towards imperial projects in India during the 1760s and 1770s. For most contemporaries at this time, the Company's Indian territories represented the scandals of empire and a source of consternation, not a source of national pride.⁴

¹ David Armitage. *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Robert Travers. *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India: The British in Bengal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

² Tillman Nechtman. *Nabobs: Empire and Identity in Eighteenth Century Britain*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

³ Philip Lawson and Jim Phillips. "'Our Execrable Banditti': Perceptions of Nabobs in Mid-Eighteenth Century Britain" in *Albion XVI* (1984): 225-41

⁴ Nicholas Dirks. *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

However, during the period between roughly 1780 and 1830, Britons underwent a profound shift in their attitudes about empire. The growing Second British Empire came to be characterized by more autocratic and aristocratic methods of rule, with government-appointed military men who wielded centralized power replacing the loosely organized merchant councils from earlier periods of the Company's history.⁵ There was an increasing emphasis upon racial hierarchies and racial difference between Europeans and the rest of the world, with Indians placed at a lower point on the scale of civilization.⁶ Whereas in the past, European travelers to India had often adopted Indian dress and customs to some extent, and learned to speak some of the local languages, this process of crossing over between cultures was officially repressed by the East India Company's new aristocratic leadership as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth.⁷

At the heart of this shift in attitudes about empire and race was a shift in culpability. Whereas in the past, Britons had feared being morally corrupted by the despotic actions of Company soldiers and administrators acting as nabobs overseas, beginning in the final decades of the eighteenth century, Britons instead began to view themselves as the paternalistic champions of a benighted and hopelessly backwards Indian people. The true tyrants of the East were increasingly perceived to be the native rulers of the subcontinent. It was the immoral and tyrannical actions of Indian merchants and princes who were undermining the Company's rule overseas, not the servants of the

⁵ C.A. Bayly. *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Philip Lawson. *The East India Company: A History* (London: Longman, 1993)

⁶ Jennifer Pitts. *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005)

⁷ William Dalrymple. *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth Century India* (New York: Viking, 2003)

Company themselves.⁸ This allowed the Company and its servants to be reimagined as patriotic heroes of the British nation, as opposed to being a vile force regarded as a separate entity to be cordoned off from the rest of the nation. They would serve as a force for moral progress and the advancement of civilization, thereby anticipating the civilizing mission ethos that came to dominate nineteenth century imperialism.

The Anglo-Mysore Wars fought against Tipu Sultan, and in particular the enormous public interest generated in Tipu during the 1790s, played an important role in this shift in British popular attitudes about empire. The final decade of the eighteenth century was a period in which a real transformation of attitudes took place, where the Company's Indian territories ceased to be regarded as a problem to be solved and began to be viewed instead as a source of national pride.⁹ After attracting initial interest from the British public for his capture of large numbers of British prisoners during the Second Mysore War (1780-84), Tipu came to be perceived as the quintessential Oriental despot. Most often referenced as "Tippoo the Tyrant", Tipu was believed by most of the British public to be a monstrous ruler who tortured his British captives and forced them to convert to Islam against their will. The Tiger of Mysore became a stand-in for the anxieties and uncertainties associated with colonialism; Tipu's absolute power of life and death over his British captives, and his ability to remake their Europeans identities as he saw fit, inspired terror both within the Company's ranks and at home in the British metropole.¹⁰

⁸ C. A. Bayly. *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 77-78

⁹ Peter Marshall.. "British Expansion in India in the Eighteenth Century: A Historical Revision", *History* 1975 60 (198): 28-43

¹⁰ See Chapter 2

Through the process of fighting extended wars against Tipu and conquering his domains, the East India Company was able to overcome these anxieties associated with empire, and convince the British public of the legitimacy of its place within the larger fabric of the British nation. The widespread popular belief in "Tippoo the Tyrant" became a convenient way to disprove allegations of continued nabobery amongst the Company's ranks. Within the contemporary print culture of newspapers, journals, and cartoons, as well as on the London stage and on painted canvas, the defenders of the Company argued that Oriental despots like Tipu Sultan were the true tyrants, not the East India Company. Tipu's supposed repression of his own populace in Mysore led to claims that the Company's invasions of the region were undertaken as acts of liberation, designed to protect the local population from the depredations of a mad tyrant in true paternalistic fashion. By fighting against an imagined despotism in southern India, the Company simultaneously reformed its own reputation in the realm of British popular opinion.¹¹

These shifts in attitude about the East India Company and its overseas territories were not universal, and did not occur overnight. There was a minority political Opposition that continued to view the Company's Indian territories through the old context of the nabobs, and believed the Mysore Wars to be immoral acts of naked aggression designed to make off with additional Indian plunder. Their voices swelled to a crescendo during the Third Mysore War (1790-92), at which time Parliament held numerous hearings on charges that the wars of conquest in India were immoral and antithetical to British liberty. These political debates were reflected in the contemporary

¹¹ See Chapter 3

print culture as well, which pulsed with disagreements over who were the true tyrants in India: the Company servants or Indian rulers like Tipu Sultan.¹²

However, these were still ultimately minority positions, and the political Opposition was never able to secure passage of any resolutions in Parliament condemning the actions of the Company, losing every vote on the subject by large margins. The military victories won over Tipu by Cornwallis in 1792 and Wellesley in 1799 were successful in settling most doubters. Their triumphant conquests served to stifle debate, making it politically untenable to criticize the Company's actions overseas; Tipu Sultan was effectively depoliticized as an issue over time. Tipu's connections to the hated French, skillfully exaggerated in 1798 and 1799 by Wellesley as a means to justify his invasion of Mysore, made it virtually impossible for anyone to defend the Sultan, or argue against the Company in the same fashion that had been commonplace a decade earlier. The final defeat and death of Tipu in the Fourth Mysore War (1799) provided the breaking point at which alternate, competing viewpoints of Tipu Sultan, and more broadly the East India Company's role in empire building, were pushed aside from the mainstream of public opinion. Pride in British rule in India as well as pride in British military successes there had become widely accepted elements of British nationalism, and would not come under serious sustained criticism once more until the advent of the twentieth century.¹³

Remembering Tipu

Although representations of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars had been heavily contested subjects for contemporaries during the 1780s and 1790s, this earlier period of

¹² See Chapter 4

¹³ See Chapter 5

debate would soon become forgotten by later generations and largely written out of the historical memory. The villainous and caricatured Tipu Legend of a heroic East India Company fighting against a monstrous Oriental despot eventually became the dominant memory of these events for the British. This section provides a brief overview of how this process unfolded in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

During the decade following Tipu's death between 1800 and 1810, many of the same members of the political Opposition continued to repeat the old arguments that they had leveled against the East India Company a decade earlier during the Third Mysore War. Wellesley's military campaign against the Marathas (1803-1805) attracted many of the same political criticisms that had been used to argue against the Mysore Wars, namely that it was morally unjust, ruinously expensive, and only fought so that the Company's soldiers and servants could make off with more ill-gained Indian plunder. However, there was now a crucial addition to the Opposition's critique of the Company's actions overseas: the government's Whig opponents specifically noted that the past wars against Tipu were not included in their current objections. For example, *Cobbet's Weekly Register* wrote in an 1806 editorial criticizing Indian wars that, "I must be understood to except from this observation the expences of the war with Tippoo, for as that was the only war he [Wellesley] entered into of real benefit to the Company."¹⁴ The Mysore wars against Tipu remained effectively depoliticized, too popular to be criticized and demanding a special exemption from the usual Opposition criticisms about Indian conflicts. Even if Wellesley himself remained a subject of some controversy, his prior war against Tipu was immune from political attack.

¹⁴ Cobbett's Weekly Political Register (London, England) 26 July 1806, Issue 4

When Philip Francis and Charles Fox rose to speak in a Parliamentary debate on 5 April 1805 regarding the Maratha war, they argued at length about the "abuses" committed by Wellesley in his "excessive lust for power" and his seemingly endless campaigns of territorial annexation. Their objections were easily overrun by Lord Castlereagh's speech in favor of the government, who immediately turned to the subject of Tipu to make his defense: "The Honourable Gentleman [Francis] had also forgot to notice the two Mysore Wars; he surely would not pretend to say that these were wars of aggression for the sake of conquest only – he would not pretend to say that these wars were unjust or dishonourable in their nature."¹⁵ Francis made no move to dispute this argument from Castlereagh, allowing the morality of the campaigns against Tipu to stand unchallenged. Francis and Fox were unable to contest this claim, as the Mysore Wars were now overwhelmingly viewed as just conflicts fought to overturn the rule of an Oriental despot; the report on the proceedings even includes the note "[*A cry of hear! hear!*]" to indicate the large majority that supported Castlereagh's pro-Company opinion. The old outlook of men like Francis and Fox regarding empire had become politically outdated by this point; most Britons no longer viewed the Company's Indian territories with shame or fear, but saw them as a growing source of the country's strength. Opposition newspapers almost plaintively called out for the British public to remember the earlier period in which the legality of the Mysore Wars had been heavily debated and contested, asking at one point in 1806, "Have we all fallen into forgetfulness about Lord Cornwallis? It is quite forgotten that... the most questionable act of any Indian government was his war against Tippoo Suldaun, in the year 1790: at least, there never

¹⁵ Morning Chronicle (London, England) 6 April 1805, Issue 11196

was a measure more questioned in parliament."¹⁶ The British public most certainly had fallen into forgetfulness on this subject, as these alternate representations of the Mysore Wars were few and far between by this period, and continuing to fade with the passage of each year.

Belief in the villainous Tipu Legend had become nearly universal amongst the British public by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, and it continued to be further reinforced through the publication of a series of histories that portrayed Tipu in an extremely negative light. Colonel William Kirkpatrick, a close friend of Wellesley who had accompanied him in the 1799 campaign, published the translated *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries* in 1811. The letters were chosen to emphasize Tipu's connections to the French and make him appear as an untrustworthy figure; Kirkpatrick's notes on the letters characterized the Sultan as "the cruel and relentless enemy; the intolerant bigot or furious fanatic; the oppressive and unjust ruler; the harsh and rigid master; the sanguinary tyrant; the perfidious negotiator."¹⁷ There was a strong implication from Kirkpatrick that the Company was better suited to rule over the people of Mysore than Tipu, and that all Indian rulers were duplicitous and unethical by nature.

Similar messages could be found in histories of British India written during the same decade by Major General John Malcolm, a long service military commander in India, and Mark Wilks, who became the British Resident of Mysore following Tipu's ouster. Malcolm's *Sketch of the Political History of India* (1811) was a triumphant celebration of the growing British Raj, which he claimed would become "the theme of

¹⁶ Cobbett's Weekly Political Register (London, England) 15 March 1806, Issue 11

¹⁷ Col. William Kirkpatrick. *Select Letters of Tippoo Sultan to Various Public Functionaries* (London: Black, Parry, and Kingsbury, 1811): x

wonder to succeeding ages."¹⁸ Malcolm insisted that *all* of the Company's wars had been defensive in nature, its many campaigns in India fought only due to a principle of self-preservation. Its rule was justified due to the "tranquility and happiness which they [Indians] enjoy under our dominion" in contrast to the "falsehoods and treachery which mark the intercourse of the native states of India with each other."¹⁹ Malcolm took great lengths in his history to place all of the blame for the Mysore Wars upon Tipu, while absolving Cornwallis and Wellesley for any culpability. Wellesley's policies in 1798-99 were "moderate and just", "altogether defensive", and "dictated by a desire of security and peace, not by a spirit of ambition or aggrandizement."²⁰ Wilks' *Historical Sketches of the South of India*, published between 1810 and 1817, was the first full history of the Company's conquest of Mysore, and was written to present Haider Ali and Tipu Sultan in harshly negative fashion.²¹ They were characterized as savage barbarians, guilty of severe atrocities against British prisoners, and incapable of holding to any treaties or prior agreements. Wilks denigrated all Indian rulers, even British allies like the Nawab of Arcot, whose government was described as possessing "duplicity and iniquity", "an audacity of falsehood and ingratitude" towards the British, and suffering from "the ordinary misrule of a wretched native government."²² Histories like the ones written by Malcolm and Wilks indicated the increasingly racialized view of India and Indians, their rulers perceived as inferior brutes. In both cases, native princes were portrayed as morally

¹⁸ John Malcolm. *Sketch of the Political History of India from the Introduction of Mr. Pitt's Bill, A.D. 1784, to the Present Date* (London: W. Miller, 1811): 1

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 145

²⁰ *Ibid*, 201

²¹ Mark Wilks. *Historical Sketches of the South of India, in an Attempt to Trace the History of Mysoor* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1810-1817)

²² *Ibid*, 94-95

corrupt and unfit to rule over the populace, thereby providing a legitimization for the Company's own governance.

On occasion, there were voices in the wilderness that argued against this characterization of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars. James Mill published *The History of British India* in three volumes in 1817, which was often highly critical of the Company's actions overseas and drew upon many of the older criticisms of the nabobs from past decades. In his chronology of the wars against Tipu, Mill compared British attitudes towards the Sultan with how Britons had viewed other enemies of the country such as Louis XIV and Napoleon, noting, "It is so common for nations to ascribe the most odious qualities to every party which they dread... several remarkable instances stand in our history of a sort of epidemical frenzy in abusing our enemies."²³ Mill briefly recounted how Tipu was invariably described by contemporary Britons as "a hideous monster", "covered with almost every vice", and "an object of dread and abhorrence", before concluding that the Sultan's reputation was wildly exaggerated.²⁴ In contrast to the claims of the East India Company, Mysore was well-governed and prosperous under Tipu, and it was the Company who had repeatedly made the decision to go to war. Mill criticized Tipu for excessive pride and poor judgment, but nonetheless believed that he had been a strong and capable ruler, with his treatment of British prisoners no worse than their treatment of captured Indian soldiers.²⁵

These arguments were unique to Mill's history, appearing in none of the other major summaries of Indian history from the period, and were reminiscent of the Opposition critics of the East India Company during the Third Mysore War (1790-92).

²³ James Mill. *The History of British India, Volume 3* (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817): 257

²⁴ *Ibid*, 257

²⁵ *Ibid*, 445-49

These unusual callbacks to an earlier era of politics were perhaps understandable, given Mill's liberal political leanings and close friendship with many Whig politicians. His history was unorthodox enough to warrant a lengthy response from the pro-Company *Asiatic Journal*, which wrote no less than six articles to discredit the material, concluding that Mill had made "deep and vital mistakes" due to "his unjust and indefensible prejudices" which "blemish and considerably impair the utility of the elaborate work of Mr. Mill".²⁶ Even Mill's liberal history was derisive in its opinion of the Hindu residents of India, viewing them as living under "the most enormous, irrational, and tormenting superstition, that ever harassed and degraded any portion of mankind", making the Hindus "the most enslaved portion of the human race."²⁷ In this respect, Mill's history was not so very different from those penned by Malcolm or Wilks, placing Indians on a lower scale of civilization and providing implicit justification for British rule over them, even if he regarded Tipu Sultan as an individual in a more objective fashion.

There was also an appearance of a new Tipu play in 1823 which portrayed the Sultan in favorable terms. Henry Milner's *Tippoo Saib; or, The Storming of Seringapatam* depicted Tipu as a tragic hero, fighting to protect his kingdom from the cruel invasion of the East India Company. The British were specifically referenced with the phrase "English tyrants" in one of Tipu's speeches, and in a remarkable reversal of the standard tropes of the Tipu Legend, the Sultan went out of his way to free captured British officers as a sign of his faithfulness and proof of safe conduct.²⁸ The stage production ended in an arguably melancholy tone, with Tipu falling in battle, his fortress

²⁶ *Asiatic Journal* (London, England) 1 May 1829, Issue 161, p. 525-38. The journal was writing in response to the second edition of Mill's history, published in 1829.

²⁷ James Mill. *The History of British India, Volume 1* (1817): 451-52

²⁸ Henry M Milner. "Tippoo Saib; or, The Storming of Seringapatam" first staged 20 January (1823) at the Royal Coburg Theatre

captured by Company soldiers, and without any celebratory or patriotic speeches to suggest that the audience should approve of the event. This brief revival of alternative representations of Tipu was most likely a lower class form of protest that ran counter to the triumphalist support of imperialism taking place in elite culture. Playhouses like the Royal Coburg Theatre served a more working class and multiracial audience, which allowed it to serve as a progressive form of dissent against the ongoing redefinition of Britain's imperial role overseas.²⁹

The viewpoints offered by Mill's history and Milner's play were very much not the norm of British public opinion, however, which only grew more accepting of Wellesley's narrative of past events with the passage of time. By the 1820s and 1830s, even former bastions of Opposition politics that had strenuously argued against the East India Company and its wars in India had come to accept the Tipu Legend interpretation of the Mysore Wars. For example, the *Morning Chronicle*, the same paper which had expended vast sums of ink protesting against the morality of the Third Mysore War, now suggested in 1825 that the current Governor General of India should look to "the most enlightened Statesmen who ever held the office of Governor-General of India: the Marquesses Cornwallis, Wellesley, and Hastings."³⁰ This was a complete reversal of the politics of the 1790s, and the same message would be repeated in future editions of the *Chronicle*. An 1827 report on the meetings at the India House described Wellesley as the man "who had saved our empire in India by the destruction of the power of Tippoo Saib".³¹ An editorial letter to the same paper at the end of Wellesley's life in 1841 went so

²⁹); David Worrall. *Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity, and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007): 100-101

³⁰ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 21 July 1825, Issue 17527

³¹ *Morning Chronicle* (London, England) 27 September 1827, Issue 18108

far as to refer to him as "the greatest statesman this country every produced", and argued that "his principles and policy have stood the test of time: and after an interval of forty years, they are held forth by the Honourable East India Company as models for the guidance of their civil and military servants."³² The seismic shift in the *Chronicle's* treatment of men like Cornwallis and Wellesley, who had been portrayed as avaricious and immoral during the period of the Mysore Wars, demonstrated how even formerly oppositional political groups had come to embrace overseas imperialism in later decades.

The symbolic victory of the East India Company's historical memory of Tipu Sultan and the Mysore Wars was perhaps best captured in a painting by the Scottish artist David Wilkie in 1839. Titled *Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tippoo*, it used the capture of Tipu's fortress of Seringapatam and the discovery of the slain Sultan's corpse at the end of the Fourth Mysore War as its subject matter [Figure 1].³³ Hailed as one of the finest paintings to arise from the conflicts against Tipu, Wilkie's painting demonstrated the confidence and assurance with which the British looked back upon the fashioning of their Indian empire decades after the fact. Wilkie placed General Baird at the center of his painting as a larger than life figure, resplendent in full dress uniform with arm upraised to the sky. With one hand Baird gestures to the British soldiers surrounding him, while with the other hand he points with his officer's sword to the body of his fallen opponent. Tipu lies almost naked upon the ground in a prostrate position, surrounded by fawning Indian attendants, looking very much like a trophy prize that Baird has successfully brought back from the hunt. While Tipu and his companions are mostly enshrouded in darkness, Baird's figure is brilliantly illuminated by the torchlight

³² Morning Chronicle (London, England) 12 February 1841, Issue 22220

³³ David Wilkie. *Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of Sultan Tippoo* (1839). National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

(once again borne by another British soldier), as he stands with feet slightly separated, the consummate Christian warrior.³⁴

Wilkie's painting was an unabashed celebration of imperial triumph, with the deceased Tipu Sultan literally lying at the feet of the saint-like General Baird. Wilkie embodied the new values of the nineteenth century towards empire in advertising the victory of commerce, civilization, and Christianity over the backwardness and darkness of Tipu Sultan's India. Wilkie's portrayal of the slain Tipu represented the antithesis of the Sultan's tiger pipe organ described in the introduction to this study. Whereas the mechanical Tippoo's Tiger stood for the savage and untamed power of India, a wild beast mauling a helpless European soldier, the dreadful anxieties of empire manifested in the form of the Tiger of Mysore, Wilkie's painting represented the complete opposite: an India that had been tamed, and laid prostrate before the rising power of the British empire. Through its domination of Tipu Sultan, the East India Company had found a way to make empire safe and acceptable to the British public in the metropole. The scandals of empire had been reformed, threatening and unscrupulous nabobs had been replaced by virtuous soldier-heroes, and the Company had become embraced as part of the wider British nation. In combating the imagined despotism of "Tippoo the Tyrant", the East India Company found its redemption.

³⁴ Hermione De Almeida and George Gilpin. *Indian Renaissance: British Romantic Art and the Prospect of India* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005): 164-65

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