

**SEPARATED AT BIRTH:
THE ESTRANGED HISTORY
OF THE FIRST CENTURIES OF
AMERICAN-INDIAN RELATIONS**

LINCOLN PAINE
VICE CHAIR, MAINE MARITIME MUSEUM

VASANT J. SHETH
MEMORIAL LECTURE



THE TWENTY-THIRD
VASANT J. SHETH MEMORIAL LECTURE
MARCH 18TH 2021

AN INTRODUCTION TO LINCOLN PAINE

PRADIP SHAH

THE VASANT J. SHETH MEMORIAL FOUNDATION IS A REGISTERED charitable trust, dedicated to promoting education, welfare, health, conservation and publishing in maritime related areas. Founded in 1993 in memory of the Indian shipping pioneer, Vasant J. Sheth, and led by Mrs Asha Sheth as Chairperson and Ketaki Sheth as the managing trustee, the Foundation has funded and supported over 80 projects. Projects range from scholarships, health initiatives, heritage research, environment conservation and protection and disaster relief programmes.

Every year, the Foundation organizes an Annual Lecture on a maritime subject by a distinguished speaker either from India or overseas. This year, because of the pandemic, we have changed the format to a lecture hosted online. Regrettably, the format will not permit interaction with the speaker after the talk

This year we are honoured to have Lincoln Paine lecture us on the effects of the maritime commerce between India and the United States from its early origins through the nineteenth century.

Lincoln Paine is a maritime historian, author, teacher, and curator whose chief aim is to engage people in the wonder of the maritime world in all its manifestations. He has published more than 100 articles and reviews for popular and academic audiences, and his books include the award-winning *Down East: An Illustrated History of Maritime Maine* (2018), *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World* (2013), and *Ships of the World: An Historical Encyclopaedia* (1997).

He is currently writing a book titled *Global America and How It Got that Way: The United States in Maritime Perspective*. Paine has lectured on a wide range of maritime-oriented subjects, including literature of the sea, exploration, oceans and seas in world culture, the history of maritime law, trade, naval history, rivers, decorative arts, and museum curatorship in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia.

He also teaches a course on the history of international law at the University of Maine School of Law and will be guest editor of a forum on the history of maritime law for the 2022 edition of the *World History Connected*, an academic publication committed to the promotion of global learning and global citizenship.

He has visited India twice as a lecturer, once in Chennai and Mumbai as part of the International Writing Program and again for the Times of India LitFest.

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LINCOLN PAINE

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For John W. Wright, friend, mentor, pita
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ENGLAND'S EFFORTS TO COLONIZE NORTH AMERICA AND INDIA were born from the same impulse and at the same time. As early as the 1580s, the great apostle of English colonization Richard Hakluyt, Sr., thought of them in tandem, while the East India Company and the Virginia Company (whose employees established the first permanent English settlement in North America) were founded only six years apart, in 1600 and 1606, respectively.

Considered in imperial perspective, then, India and the United States have been linked for more than four hundred years, though for almost the first two centuries only indirectly. Ships of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could certainly sail between North America and the subcontinent, and the will was there. Direct trade between the two regions was prevented not by technology or indifference, but by policy. The East India Company monopoly on trade between England—later Great Britain—and its colonies and anywhere east of the Cape of Good Hope remained in force until after American independence.

Nonetheless, the people of British North America *were* familiar with a wide range of Indian exports in the eighteenth century, and following the American Revolution, American merchant mariners

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quickly established a trade with India that was transformative both economically and culturally.



Years ago, an older friend of mine recounted a conversation he had with his new son-in-law, who worked at a major multinational bank. The son-in-law reported that at the recommendation of his team, the bank had just “taken a big position in India.” When he had finished his story, my friend John looked at him and said with some exasperation, “You can’t ‘take a position in India.’ It’s a culture, not a corporation.”

John is neither an historian nor a banker, and he has never been to India. But this observation seems useful when thinking about India, especially the history before 1948. And although the cultural history of the United States has shallower roots, we should also conceptualize the U.S. not in terms of the country we know today, but as a mutable place with distinctive characteristics at different points in time starting well before independence in 1776 and at fairly regular intervals in the 245 years since. As Swami Vivekananda advises us, “The reason for every misunderstanding is that we see the people as we are but not as *they are*.” This is as true for history as for anything else.

Put another way, to understand the entangled but estranged histories of the United States and India in the age of sail, we must reckon with the fact that these countries do not exist as some immutable Platonic ideal. Instead, looking into the past, we have to imagine a world in which the modern territories these occupy today were comparatively fragmented, technologically undeveloped, and remote—distant in space from one another, just as they are distant in time from us. In the period covered here, sailing 12,000 miles between the east coast of North America and Bombay, Madras, or Calcutta took six months—if you were lucky—not twenty-four days. And that was the speed of all communication between them. There was no erasing distance with twelve-hour flights or twelve-millisecond internet speeds.

There are other complications to conjuring a common history for India and the United States. One is that while the written roots of Indian culture can be traced back nearly 5,000 years—and with the passage of time, it becomes easier to see the English as just one among many alien people to descend on the subcontinent in its long history—the English only established colonies in North America four hundred years ago. Unlike the people who wandered or fought their way into India, the settlers of English North America were animated by imperfectly-formed ideas sprung from the minds of seventeenth-century merchants, propagandists, and religious fugitives, all of them idealists in their own way. Moreover, intentionally or not, the English came as usurpers. Previously isolated from the rest of the world, as many as 90 per cent of the native people of the Americas died from diseases introduced by European, Asian, and African newcomers. And with them died much of their cultures, traditions, and histories.

A second difficulty is that while English ambition gave birth to Anglo-India and Anglo-America at the same time, these conjoined twins were forcibly separated at birth, as though by parents jealous

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Jodocus Hondius, *America*, 1606



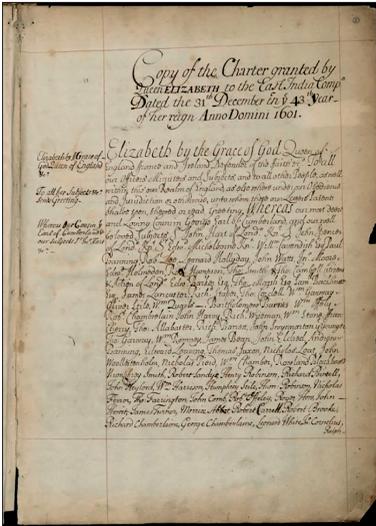
Jodocus Hondius, *India Orientalis*, 1619

of the potential for their children's success—a parenting style known to economists as mercantilism. America and India would remain estranged for nearly 200 years and, as so often happens in families reunited after traumatic ruptures, their subsequent relationship was fitful and often awkward.

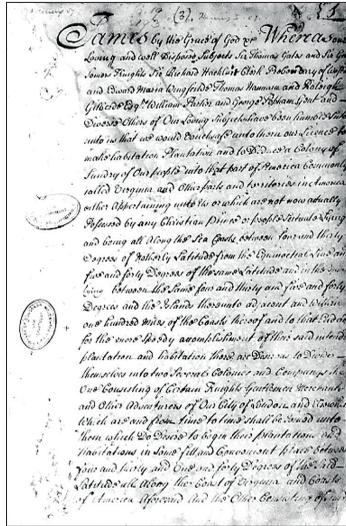


For much of the sixteenth century, northern Europeans were spectators to the world-girdling Iberian voyages of exploration and conquest and watched from the sidelines as Portuguese and Spanish diplomats carved up the trade of the eastern and western hemispheres between them. They lacked the money, experience, and administrative competence to challenge the Catholic monarchies of southern Europe, who invested heavily to secure influence in the Protestant north. Though the lure of easy gain in the form of ships laden with gold, silver, and spices would have been incentive enough, religious enmity was one spur for English, Dutch, and French Protestants to prey on Spanish and Portuguese overseas holdings.

At first, the English were content to attack Spanish ships and ports within and around the Caribbean. By the 1580s, they sought to establish themselves in what is now the southeastern United States, from where they could attack Spanish treasure fleets en route to Europe. The most infamous or celebrated of the English raiders was Francis Drake, who after almost a decade of voyages to the Carib-



Letters Patent for the East India Company, 1600



Charter for the Virginia Company of London, 1606

bean circumnavigated the globe via the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans between 1577 and 1580. Six years later, Thomas Cavendish followed in his wake. Yet neither Drake nor Cavendish reached India in their travels. For them, the attractions of the East were the cloves, nutmeg, and mace of the Spice Islands in eastern Indonesia, which were then Portuguese possessions.

It was with these in mind that in 1600 Elizabeth I chartered the East India Company, a joint-stock company with a monopoly of English trade east of the Cape of Good Hope and that would come to play a pivotal role in the history of India for more than 250 years. At the same time, as the threat of war with Spain lessened, English interest in North America escalated. In 1606, Elizabeth's successor, James I, chartered two companies whose investors intended to gain footholds in an expansive region they called Virginia.¹

Two points are of particular note. More than 20 per cent of the

1 two companies: Andrews, Trade, Plunder, and Settlement, 311–26.

shareholders in the East India Company also invested in the Virginia companies.² And these launched the English into two worlds that could hardly have been more different.³ Although the India of the subcontinent was imperfectly known, it had been on Europeans' radar since antiquity, and English merchants' ideas of the region's potential were based on a century of recent Portuguese experience trading there. The Portuguese and Spanish might be *formidable* adversaries overseas, but they were not necessarily invincible. And however exotic it might be, Asia was a region of comprehensible systems of governance, law, and long-distance maritime trade.

North America was a different proposition altogether. Apart from the Spanish fort at St. Augustine in Florida, there were no permanent establishments on the east coast. Moreover, the English had no meaningful understanding of Native Americans' culture and all but presumed that, without a written language, they lacked coherent systems of government, law, or trade. This is clear from the English choice of name for the vast region they called Virginia—literally virgin territory. “But look upon Virginia,” wrote the English propagandist Samuel Purchas; “view her lovely looks...survay her Heavens, Elements, Situation; her divisions by armes of Bayes and Rivers into so goodly and well proportioned limes and members;... and in all these you shall see, that she is worth the wooing and loves of the best Husband,” namely, England.⁴ The imposition of other names eradicated indigenous identity further still: New England, for the territory now occupied by the six northeasternmost of the United States, and “Indian” as a catchall for the myriad clan and tribal groups that lived there. The latter term was not an English coinage. Columbus had called the people he encountered in the Caribbean *Indios* in

2 “More than 20 per cent”: Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 23.

3 two worlds: Games, “Beyond the Atlantic,” 689.

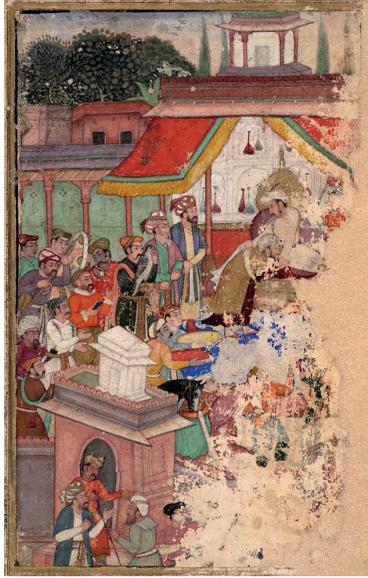
4 “But look upon Virginia”: Purchas, *Hakluytus posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, 19.242.

the mistaken belief that he had reached India, or was close to it.

The conjunction of English ideas about the East and the West was nowhere more apparent than in the work of promoters of overseas expansion, who wrote of plural Indias, by which they meant places of fabulous fertility, variety, and wealth. One of these was to be found in no less a place than Virginia, which, Thomas Abbay wrote in 1612, “might be, or breed us a second India.”⁵ In so saying, he affirmed a notion articulated twenty years before by the apostle of English expansion Richard Hakluyt, who

asserted “with reason and auctoritie” that goods English traders had previously scabbled for in Europe, Asia, and Africa were either available or could be grown in Virginia.⁶ No sooner had three shiploads of settlers landed at the place they called Jamestown than the shortcomings of Hakluyt’s “reason and auctoritie” were revealed. Virginia was not a land of easy virtue and she did not freely let the English have their way with her. Jamestown nearly failed due to the disease, dissension, starvation, and native hostility that plagued the colony in its first decade.

In Asia, the East India Company’s trials differed in magnitude and kind. Its merchants had to decide what and where they wanted



Jahangir investing a courtier with a robe of honour watched by Sir Thomas Roe, English ambassador to the court of Jahangir at Agra (1615-18)

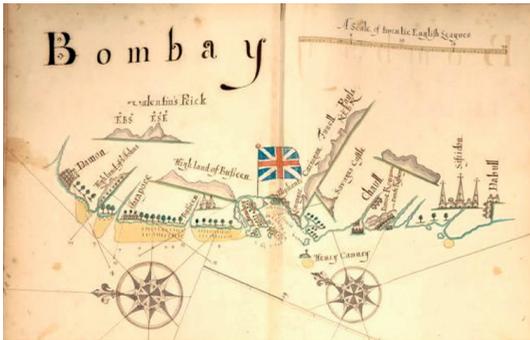
5 “might be”: in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 14.

6 “with reason and auctoritie”: in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 20.

to trade and who they would fight for the privilege. Their initial focus was on the Spice Islands, where the Portuguese and Dutch preceded them. But they were not single-minded in their approach and rather than contend with well-ensconced European rivals, they secured a firman to trade at Surat in 1613. James I—Jamestown's namesake—subsequently appointed Thomas Roe as his ambassador to the court of Jahangir, and in 1618 he secured further privileges for the English to trade at Gujarat. Roe was very much a man of his time. He had explored the Amazon River in South America, and subsequently served on the Council for the Virginia Company.

By midcentury, the East India Company was the dominant European entity in the western Indian Ocean, a position strengthened by Charles II's acquisition of Bombay from Portugal as part of Catherine of Braganza's dowry when they married in 1661. Five years later,

Charles leased Bombay to the Company for £10 a year. In focusing on India, the East India Company had abandoned the spice trade and the all-consuming effort to enforce the monopoly that came with it. Instead, they traded goods between Britain and



Bombay, from William Hacke's *Descript of ye East Indies*, ca. 1690

India and freighted cheap, bulky goods within the framework of traditional inter-Asian trade.

Among the most lucrative of these were Indian textiles, which quickly found an audience in England and elsewhere in Europe, though it was not until the second half of the century that calicoes and chintz were in high demand. The lightweight cotton fabrics were also popular in Britain's American colonies and the West In-



Textile samples from a book sent to Elmina, Ghana, via a West India Company ship in 1788:
 1 English red mixed rumals; 2 Inland Chits, purple background; 3 Red Cambayen; 4 Inland Chits, red background; 5 Inland Chits, white background

dies. Not surprisingly, these became a staple of British trade with West Africa, especially after 1713, when the Treaty of Utrecht gave Britain the *asiento*, the Spanish crown's monopoly contract to transport enslaved Africans

Just Imported from London and Bristol,
 And to be SOLD by JOHN INGLIS, at his Store below the
 Draw-Bridge, in Front-Street, Philadelphia :

Broad-Cloths, Kerseys and Plains, Ruggs,
 Blankets, Oznabrigs, Checks, London Shalloons, Tammies, Caliman-
 coes, seven eighths and yard wide Garlix, Men and Womens worsted Stock-
 ings, Men and Womens Shammy Gloves, Pinns, Baladine Silk, filk Laces,
 fashionable Fans, Padoafoys, Ribbons, filk Ferrits, Gartering, Caddis, But-
 tons and Mohair, cotton Romals, linnen Handkerchiefs, Chiles, Mens wor-
 sted Caps, Bunts, fine Bed-Ticks made up in Suits, India Taffities, Damasks
 and Perfians, six quarter Mullins, Suits of super fine Broad-Cloth, with
 Lining and Trimmings, London double refin'd Sngar, Bird, Pidgeon, Duck,
 Goole and Swan Shot, Bar Lead, 8, 10 and 20 penny Nails, Window
 Glase, Patterns of Chintz for Beds, farinet Handkerchiefs, Bristol quart Bot-
 tles ; and fundry other Goods, for ready Money, or the usual Credit.

Pennsylvania Gazette, 18 December 1740

to its American colonies. This led to the explosive growth in the enslaved population of British North America. Purchased to produce tobacco, sugar, and rice, the colonies' enslaved population rose from 29,000 in 1700 to 150,000 forty years later and more than three times that by the eve of the Revolution. When the United States conducted its first census in 1790, enslaved Africans numbered more than 680,000, more than a third of the new nation's population. Thanks to the East India Company, Indian cotton growers and weavers were deeply if unknowingly implicated in the development of the American slave economy.

Britain's domestic policies had much to do with this. By the late seventeenth century, the woolen industry felt threatened by the growing popularity of Indian cotton. In 1697, a mob of wool and silk weavers and others attacked the East India Company offices in London to protest the Company's import of calico. After several years of lobbying, in 1700 they secured passage of the Calico Act, which

ensured that calico remained an important part of the Company's business even as it protected Britain's shepherds, spinners, weavers, and wool merchants from their competition.

As the intent of the act was to preserve domestic jobs, the Company was permitted to import finished goods for re-export to Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Although Europe was a much larger market than British North America, the colonists were integral to Parliament's mercantilist stratagems. Direct trade between India and America was not allowed, and all calico had to be imported to Britain for re-export to the colonies, where consumption was encouraged and welcome. In fact, per capita consumption of Indian goods was higher in the colonies than anywhere else. It helped that, in keeping with the rationale for the Calico Acts (a second, more restrictive one was passed in 1721), wool production and cotton growing was discouraged, even though cotton was indigenous to the southeastern colonies.⁷ So much for the promise of Virginia becoming "a second India."

From the Company's perspective, the scheme worked well. Colonial merchants routinely advertised the availability of goods from India, and the East India Company accommodated consumer preferences by producing textiles with patterns and motifs that suited their tastes. One upshot of all this was that British North Americans had a greater choice of fabrics than did people in Britain itself. Nonetheless, enthusiasm for Indian goods was not universal. As in the home country, there was anxiety about the corrupting influence of eastern luxuries on both moral and economic grounds. Some wanted to ban calico to encourage colonial manufacturing, an idea that ran counter to the intent of the Calico Acts, while others decried the enormous trade deficit between the colonies and Britain, much of it due to the purchase of Indian goods. Then, too, smuggling cotton was

7 Calico Acts: Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 89–92, 112–16.



Thomas Daniell, *Calcutta from the River Hoogly*, aquatint, 1788

widespread, and the government was at pains to strike a balance between encouraging cotton consumption and controlling the trade to its benefit.

The English were not the only Europeans trading in India. The Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, and French had a presence, and conflicts at other points of friction—

whether elsewhere in Asia, or in Europe, Africa, or the Americas—could embroil Europeans in India. In the Seven Years' War (1757 to 1763), the biggest loser was the nawab of Bengal, a French ally whom the British defeated at the battle of Plassey. In 1765, the East India Company secured the *dewani*, the revenue administration of Bengal, thus becoming the *de facto* rulers of the province. The Company's exploitative tax policies combined with a drought in 1769 led to the Bengal famine and the death of between two and six million people, and perhaps as many as ten million.

Widely considered the first “world war,” the Seven Years' War had a North American component, from which Britain won Canada from France and Florida from Spain. While the *dewani* helped cover the expense of the conflict in India, no comparable mechanism existed in North America. To help defray the costs of the war there, Parliament attempted to regulate trade, increase revenues from duties and, for the first time, impose direct taxes on the colonists through the Stamp Act.

Colonial reaction to the Stamp Act was colored by the shocking news of the manmade catastrophe unfolding in Bengal and took

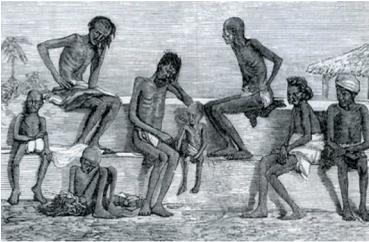
the form of petitions to Parliament, violence against British officials, and a boycott of British goods. Unity of purpose ensured the act's repeal a year later, but Parliament asserted its right to pass whatever laws it liked, including taxes. Parliament then passed the Townshend Acts, a thinly disguised set of taxes on a variety of imports to North America, the revenues earmarked for the expanding bureaucratic apparatus needed to manage the increasingly restive colonies. It hardly seemed worth the effort. As one critic put it, "America hangs like a wasting disease on the strength of Britain," and it generated barely a quarter the revenue that Bengal did.⁸ A new boycott ensued, and by 1769, colonial exports were valued at £800,000 more than imports—a stark reversal of the normal balance of trade. Parliament backed down again, though it left a 3 per cent tax on tea.⁹

Although introduced into America in the seventeenth century, due to the expense of the tea itself and the associated paraphernalia, tea remained the preserve of the well-to-do until well into the 1700s, when the East India Company began marketing it heavily. This of course was Chinese tea—commercial tea growing in India did not begin until the 1840s—but the East India Company monopolized tea imports to Britain just as it did cotton. Despite this dual monopoly, control of the Bengal *diwani*, and other advantages, by the 1770s the Company was in dire financial straits, and the government was desperate to keep it solvent. In an effort to do so, Parliament approved the Tea Act, which for the first time gave the Company the right to sell directly into the North American market, a change that threatened to undermine private traders.

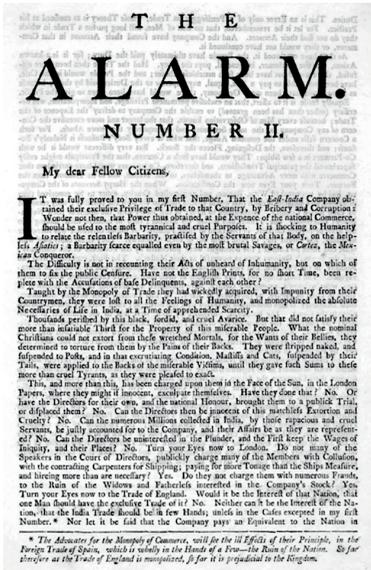
The Tea Act passed as the full horror of the Bengal famine was still being reported, and its opponents seized on the obvious par-

8 "America hangs": in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 197.

9 £800,000: Milazzo and Thorndike, "The Seven Years War to the American Revolution."



The Great Bengal Famine of 1770 from a contemporary engraving



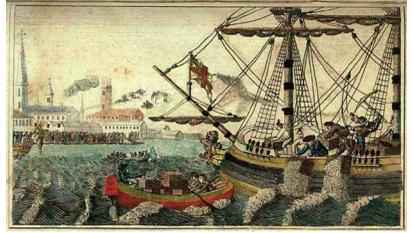
'Rusticus' denouncing the East-India Company's role in the Bengal famine, in an American broadside

allels between the increasingly heavy hand with which Britain wanted to rule North America and the Company's catastrophic mishandling of events in India. Jonathan Shipley, an Anglican bishop sympathetic to the colonists, reminded his readers, "We need only recollect that our countrymen in India have in the space of five or six years, in virtue of this right [of taxation], destroyed, starved and driven away more inhabitants from Bengal, than are to be found at present in all our American Colonies."¹⁰ This was no exaggeration; the total population of the thirteen colonies at the time was about 2.5 million. Despite the outward difference between the colonies of British America and Company rule in India, everyone knew that the East India Company served at the pleasure of the British government. Thus the Company's actions in India could be taken as a reliable gauge of what could happen in America. As the revolutionary pamphleteer Thomas Paine warned, the British "had ravaged one part of the globe, till it could glut them no longer; their prodigality required new plunder, and through the East India article TEA they hoped to transfer their rapine from that quarter of the world to this."¹¹ That the far-flung relations were thought of in the same context in Great

10 "We need only recollect": in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 214.

11 "had ravaged one part": Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, iv, in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 222.

Britain itself is apparent from the fact that reformers had considered transplanting to India modes of governance found in British North America, including assemblies and councils. Nothing came of the recommendations.¹²



Americans throwing the Cargoes of the Tea Ships into the River at Boston

In the end, the most visible display of opposition to the Tea Act came in a series of so-called “tea parties” in which patriots—sometimes dressed as American “Indians”—forced their way onto ships loaded with tea and dumped the offending cargoes overboard. The government countered with still more punitive legislation, including one act that banned the very assemblies that had been contemplated for India. As a result, in 1776, thirteen British colonies—not including Canada or the Floridas—declared their independence as the United States. Five years later, the rebel army under George Washington forced the surrender of the British under Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, a mere fifteen miles from the site of the first English settlement at Jamestown. With the conclusion of the Treaty of Paris, Britain recognized American independence in 1783.



No sooner was the United States on its own in the world than its merchants began looking for new trading opportunities. The British West Indies, with which the colonies had had a symbiotic relationship for 150 years, were all but off-limits. French and Dutch traders were only too happy to provide goods from Europe, including Indian goods, but it would be far cheaper for Americans to get these themselves. The ink was hardly dry on the Treaty of Paris when Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, wrote “Navigation will carry the American flag around the globe itself; and display the thirteen

12 modes of governance: Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 202.



Frans Balthazar Solvyns captured this American East Indiaman at anchor in Calcutta harbour in 1794

stripes and new constellation at *ben-gal* and *canton*, on the *indus* and *ganges*.”¹³ Two years later, Ambassador John Adams wrote from London, “There is no better Advice to be given to the Merchants of the United States, than to push their Commerce to the East Indies as fast and as far

as it can go.... [B]ecause We have no Such manufactures for them to interfere with, We may take them”—that is, cotton textiles—“to a great Advantage.”¹⁴ His assessment was correct, but the facts on the ground were changing fast.

Americans certainly had the advantage of not having to contend with the East India Company’s monopoly, but despite this, and the fact that they had an excellent idea of what goods were on offer in Indian ports, few Americans had any first-hand experience of the trade. In some respects, their vision of the Asian trading world was as vague as European ideas had been two centuries before. Among the most celebrated and successful families of the Federalist Era (the period up to about 1801) was the Derbys of Salem, Massachusetts. On back-to-back voyages to the Indian Ocean, Elias Haskett Derby instructed his son to sail by way of the Cape of Good Hope, in 1785, and Ile de France (Mauritius), in 1786. He fully expected these were centers of trade in their own right, only to discover that they functioned as little more than rest areas for long-distance shipping. When Derby later suggested that his son go to the Coromandel Coast, he confessed, “This I know but little about.”¹⁵ With persistence, he soon

13 “Navigation will carry”: Ezra Stiles, “The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor: A Sermon” (New Haven: 1783), in Kaur and Arora, “India in the American Imaginary, 1780s–1880s,” 8.

14 “There is no better Advice”: John Adams to John Jay, 11 November 1785.

15 “This I know”: Elias Haskett Derby to his son, in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 248.

cracked the code, however, and the profits from his India trade made Derby the United States' first millionaire.



George Ropes, *Crownshield's Wharf, Salem, Massachusetts*, 1806

American success in the India trade was due in large part to the fact that Britain and France were at war from 1792 to 1815, and as neutrals, Americans could theoretically sail almost anywhere with impunity. Some pro-monopoly members of the East India Company protested that their own employees were using the cover of the American flag to ship goods on their own account, and that Americans were profiting from re-exports of Indian goods from the United States to Britain and Europe.¹⁶ This much was true. Between 1794 and 1800, the value of American re-exports grew 7.5 times.¹⁷

This was possible because on the whole the British government and the Company adopted a *laissez-faire* attitude towards the Americans. Even Cornwallis, who had assumed the role of governor general of the Bengal Presidency five years after his defeat at Yorktown, ordered that Americans be given most-favored-nation status.¹⁸ This was enshrined in the Jay Treaty of 1794, which stipulated that “vessels belonging to the citizens of the United States of America shall be admitted and hospitably received in all the sea-ports and harbours of the British territories in the East Indies.”¹⁹ In the Americans' favor, as they produced little that the Indian market wanted, they paid for many of their purchases with silver, which the British needed to pay for the war and to purchase tea in China.

16 on their own account: Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 364.

17 7.5 times: Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 346.

18 most-favored-nation status: Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, 136.

19 “vessels belonging”: Jay Treaty (Treaty of Amity, Commerce, and Navigation), art. XIII.



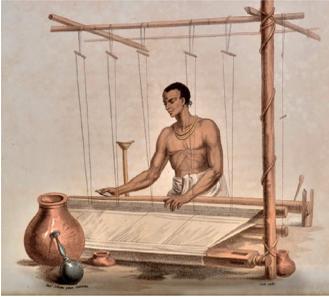
"O grab me!" A palindromic complaint about the embargo of 1807

This period of rapid growth in the Americans' India trade came to a shuddering halt in 1807. As important as Americans were as neutral carriers, American shipping was subject to relentless attacks from both the French, who sought to disrupt Britain's trade, and the British, who had similar goals with respect to French-occupied Eu-

rope. In addition, the British routinely stopped American ships to seize ostensibly British nationals for impressment into the Royal Navy. President Thomas Jefferson favored agriculture and the cultivation of domestic manufactures over international trade. More to the point, he had neither a fleet capable of protecting American commerce against the world's two most powerful navies nor the wherewithal to build one. Over the objections of merchants in international trade, who viewed their losses as the cost of doing business, Jefferson imposed a sweeping embargo "on all ships and vessels in the ports and places within the limits or jurisdiction of the United States, cleared or not cleared, bound to any foreign port or place."²⁰ The effect was devastating. Imports fell by half, and the maritime industries lost some 55,000 jobs. British shippers welcomed the opportunity to regain some of the India trade, but others viewed Jefferson's action as "an attempt to aid...the blockade of the European Continent as proclaimed by the French ruler...in the joint expectation of destroying the commercial prosperity of Great Britain, and of thereby annihilating her existence as a Nation."²¹ Repealed a year

20 "on all ships": "An Act laying an Embargo on all ships and vessels in the ports and harbors of the United States." 2 Stat. 452 (10th Congress, 1st Session, Chapter 5).

21 "an attempt": J. P. Larkins, "A Report on the External Commerce of Bengal as Carried on by Individuals in the Year 1807/8," in Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 366.



Muslim weaver, from Balthazar Solvyns, *Costumes of Hindostan* (1804)



Working eight spools at once. James Hargreaves' spinning jenny (1764) jump-started Britain's industrial revolution

later, the embargo proved more damaging to the U.S. economy than to Britain's, but such a claim testifies to the significant role American shipping played in international trade.

In the long-term, however, the embargo accelerated systemic changes already twenty years in the making. With no foreign commerce to absorb their capital, Americans began to invest elsewhere, including textile mills. For this, of course, they needed cotton, which was now available from southern states, where planters had started growing it during the Revolution. In the post-war period, cotton cultivation was spurred by the rise of Britain's textile industry, which, thanks to several key innovations, including the application of steam power, had become more efficient than Indian manufacturing.

Initially, Britain's cotton came from the Ottoman Empire, the West Indies, Brazil, and India.²² In 1785, a small shipment of American cotton was landed in Liverpool, where customs inspectors assumed it was contraband from the British West Indies. This was the harbinger of an enormous shift in what historian Sven Beckert calls the global empire of cotton. Five years later, Americans grew 1.5 million pounds of cotton. In 1800, seven years after Eli Whitney patented the cotton gin for separating cotton fiber from its seed, pro-

22 Britain's cotton came: Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 100.



Picking Cotton on a Georgia Plantation, 1858

duction was 36.5 million pounds.²³ In 1802, the United States accounted for 80 per cent of Britain's imports of raw cotton, and in the year before the embargo took effect, Britain imported 44 million pounds of American cotton.²⁴ Meanwhile, the first American cotton mill had begun operation in New England. The American textile indus-

try grew rapidly, but even so, the overwhelming bulk of cotton was grown for export—more than half in 1800, nearly 70 per cent a decade later, and 87 per cent at midcentury.²⁵ Nonetheless, American production was enough to warrant protective tariffs on imported textiles, including those from India, which were levied in 1816.²⁶

It had taken more than two centuries and separation of the colonies from the mother country, but at long last Thomas Abbay's vision that North America "might be, or breed us a second India" had come to pass—though largely at the expense of the first India. In 1805, the United States imported \$170,000 worth of Indian textiles, but almost sixty times more—roughly \$10 million worth—of British-made cotton textiles, including calico and muslin.²⁷ Within a few decades, American ships would actually be exporting cotton textiles to India, and in the 1850s these accounted for almost half the country's exports to India.²⁸ As bad as things were for Bengal, the greatest victims of this restructuring of the global cotton supply were the enslaved people of African descent in the United States, who grew

23 Americans grew: Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 104.

24 44 million pounds: Frankel, "The 1807–1809 Embargo Against Great Britain," 296.

25 more than half: *Federal Reserve Bulletin*, May 1923, p. 567.

26 protective tariffs: Verney, "An Eye for Prices, an Eye for Souls," 57.

27 \$170,000 worth: Eacott, *Selling Empire*, 368.

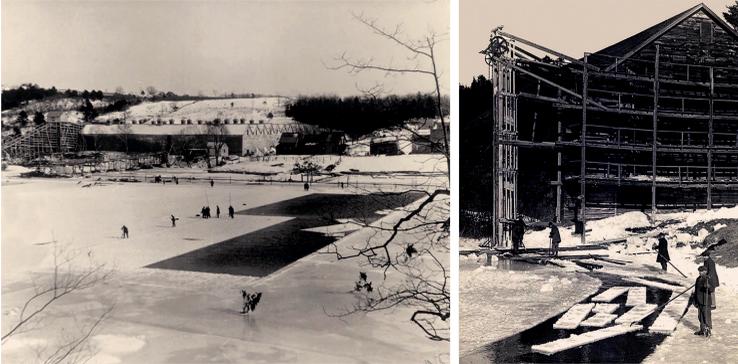
28 exporting cotton textiles: Bean, *Yankee India*, 213.

and processed the bulk of the raw material that fed British, European, and American mills. The irony of Bengal's fate is, as we have seen, that the enslavement of their ancestors had been facilitated by the availability of Indian textiles for trade in West Africa.



Ram Mohan Roy, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Swami Vivekananda

The meteoric rise of the Anglo-American cotton industry, Parliament's withdrawal of the East India Company's monopoly of trade east of the Cape of Good Hope in 1814, American protectionist legislation, and the United States' accelerating westward expansion meant that Americans had less incentive to trade with India. Following the lead of their British counterparts, however, American evangelical missionaries began visiting India. Although Christianity is a universal religion, as practiced it is not necessarily a democratic one. Writing for a domestic audience, many American missionaries were scathing in their characterization of Hindus, especially, on religious, cultural, and ethnic grounds. Yet religious ideas flowed in many directions. Ancient Indian texts had begun to attract scholarly attention in Britain in the late 1700s, and knowledge of India's sacred literature began circulating in the United States by the early 1800s. Among the people most influenced by their teaching was Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leading figure of the American Transcendentalist movement whose advocates, including Henry David Thoreau, drew heavily on Hindu texts. Emerson himself was indebted to the teachings of the Unitarian Rammohan Roy, "a living representative of all those virtues of idealism and high-mindedness" that Emerson



Harvesting ice from the Kennebec River in Maine, and floating it to the ice house where it will be stored until the spring thaw

found in India's sacred writing, whose beliefs are also echoed in the writings Swami Vivekananda.²⁹

The rise of Transcendentalism coincided with the start of the most distinctive trade between the United States and India. Early in the nineteenth century, a young Boston entrepreneur named Frederic Tudor hit on the idea of carving ice out of lakes and rivers in Massachusetts and shipping it to seaports in “Tropical Climates,” including the American south, the Caribbean, and South America. He met with great success, but a quarter century later he lost his fortune speculating in coffee. In an effort to recover, he turned back to the ice trade with renewed vigor and bent on opening the Indian market. As unlikely it seems today, despite a voyage of some 12,000 miles under sail in which ships crossed the equator twice, enough ice remained for the trade to be profitable. His first shipment—100 tons of ice—reached Calcutta in 1833, and Bombay and Madras subsequently became regular destinations, too.³⁰

A decade later, while wintering on Walden Pond, for

²⁹ “a living representative”: Hodder, “Emerson, Rammohan Roy, and the Unitarians,” 148.

³⁰ Frederic Tudor: Dickason, 68–69.



Vivekanandar Illam, Chennai, built as an ice house for Frederic Tudor in 1842

which his best-known work is named, the sight of men harvesting ice for export from the nearby port of Boston moved Thoreau to write:

Thus it appears that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well. In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvat Gēta, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions... The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

The waters of Walden Pond may no longer transcend space to melt into those of the Ganga, but a tangible reminder of the intellectual currents that flow through Thoreau endures. Erected in 1842, the only one of the elaborate structures for storing ice still standing is now the Vivekananda House in Chennai, in what we might see as a symbolic joining of the plural Indias imagined by Thomas Abbay four centuries ago.

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THE VASANT J. SHETH MEMORIAL FOUNDATION is dedicated to education, welfare, health, conservation and publishing in maritime related areas. The Foundation has initiated, funded or supported the following projects to fulfil its objectives by deploying its own resources or by collaborating with other like-minded institutions.

EDUCATION

A Shipping Management Programme at the Indian Institute of Management, a first of its kind in business education; books and computers to the Indian Institute of Management Studies and Research, Goa; an Offshore Management Development course at the School of Synergic Studies, Mumbai; seminars: Ancient & Medieval Ports of India and Accident Prevention on Board Ship and the ISM Code. Set up the Mumbai Maritime Gallery. The documentation of maritime heritage sites in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Orissa, and Kerala. A girls' hostel in a village school at Kelshi, Maharashtra. The Vasant J. Sheth Gold medal for academic excellence and annual scholarships at Tolani Maritime Institute, Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering and The Great Eastern Institute of Maritime Studies. A school project in Gujarat implemented by SWATI, for daughters of saltpan workers. Refurbishment of a conservation van for the Bombay Natural History Society. *Shipwrecked*, an NDTV documentary on the reefs and shipwrecks off the islands of Nicobar and Lakshadweep. A project by Reefwatch and Srushtidnyan to raise awareness in school children on local marine ecology. A workshop in Kochi



to train students interested in a career in museology, in collaboration with the National Maritime Museum Australia and the Kochi Muziris Biennale. A summer programme on environmental education at a Municipal School in Matunga, Mumbai, facilitated by the Toy Foundation, an NGO. Produced three documentaries to foster awareness among school children on the endangered Leatherback, Olive Ridley and Green Turtles. *The Archives of the Indian Maritime Community Traditions* by Dr. Lotika Varadarajan, a scholar and ethnographer. An introductory course in Computers and English for school leavers to improve job prospects. Thanks to new donors and patrons the number of cadet scholarships has risen to 270 this year.

HERITAGE & CONSERVATION

Since its inception, The Foundation is at the forefront of a heritage movement to protect and conserve the Indian coastline, among them: the MarEx and Sea India exhibitions in Mumbai. Formation of the Maritime Heritage Foundation with the Indian Navy and other NGOs to conserve and restore historical maritime monuments. A mangrove conservation project. Donated a van equipped with audio visual aids to the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). The Sea Turtle Interpretation Centre at Rushikulya, Orissa and hatcheries along the Konkan coast, Maharashtra. Restored and beautified the space around the British-built storm signal in Mumbai. A coastal biodiversity awareness programme for the Indian Navy and the Coast Guard conducted by the BNHS. An education/research project



implemented by Srushtidnyan on marine-eco systems in Mumbai. Restoration of rare books at the Gandhi Museum, Mumbai. Two turtle holding tanks to Wildlife Conservation & Animal Welfare Association, an NGO in Dahanu to isolate and treat infected turtles. Two lectures organized by the Museum Society of Bombay: *Benevolent Narmada* by Vithal C Nadkarni and *Sailing the Indian Ocean: The Seafarers of the Gulf of Kachh* by Dr. Chhaya Goswami.

HEALTH & WELFARE

A burns and orthopaedic ward and co-sponsored an ambulance for the Red Cross Hospital, Alang; a Safety, Welfare and Training Centre with the Gujarat Maritime Board; refurbished the Seaman's Ward in St. George's Hospital, Mumbai; toy libraries for fishermen's children across the country; non-formal education for street children in Mumbai; a health project in the Sunderban. Rehabilitated residents of Anumanthaikuppam, a tsunami affected village in Tamil Nadu. A Tuberculosis pilot study on 12,000 migrant shipbreakers in Kuala Bunder, Mumbai. A project to assess and manage the incidence of leprosy among the Koli community along the Panvel coast. Supported the Red Cross Society to build toilets in Nampada, Maharashtra. A project with the Foundation for Medical Research to assess and manage the incidence of leprosy among the Koli community along the Panvel coast has led to pathbreaking research work by Dr. Vana-ja Shetty leading to a Lifetime achievement award for her. Support to Kushtarog Niwaran Samiti to distribute essential groceries to the



Koli community in Panvel during the Covid lockdown. Support to PUKAR to distribute Covid face masks to 3200 households of ship breakers in Kaula Bandar.

PUBLICATIONS

In His Own Words, a collection of Vasant J. Sheth's letters and speeches; *Tramping to success: the story of The Great Eastern Shipping Company Limited* by Dr. S. N. Sanklecha; *Oceans Omnibus*, a book on oceans and ocean life for young people in collaboration with Centre for Environmental Education; *Shipping Management: Cases Concepts*, a compilation of case studies for a shipping management course published by the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad; *Maritime Law of India*, a book and CD by Bhandarkar Publications; *Great Eastern Trade: Other Times, Other Places, (Maritime Trade in the first millennium AD)* by Professor Romila Thapar; *Ethical Obligations of Business Enterprises*, by Soli J. Sorabjee, Attorney General for India; *Swimming to Antarctica: The Mount Everest of Swims* by Lynne Cox, the world's best long-distance cold water swimmer; *The Relative Maritime Technologies at the time of the European Encounter: The Causes of the Conquest of India* by Rear Admiral Raja Menon (Retd.), a prominent naval historian; *The Crisis of India's Wilderness* by Valmik Thapar, a tiger conservationist; *Cultural Practices of Indian Sidis Through the Prism of Indian Ocean Maritime Connections* by Dr. Helene Basu a distinguished German anthropologist; *Bombay Boston: Commercial and Cultural Encoun-*



ters in the Age of Sail by Dr. Susan S. Bean, Curator of South Asian and Korean Art at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts; *India's Rise and the Global Politics of Energy Supply: Challenges for the next decade* by oil expert Dr. Ricardo Soares de Oliveira; *Full Fathom Five: Shakespeare's Old Seas and New Oceans* by Paul Smith, Director, British Council; *Greed, Hubris, Envy and Fear: The History of Financial Bubbles and Crises* by Liaquat Ahamed, winner of the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for History of the critically acclaimed best seller, *Lords of Finance: The Bankers Who Broke the World*; *Voyage for Cleaner Energy: India* by Sir Robert Swan, polar explorer and environmental leader; *Colourful Cosmopolitanisms: Bombay, Calcutta & the Indian Ocean* by Sugata Bose, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History & Affairs, Harvard University; *Treading Water: Reflections on an Intemperate Medium* by Homi K. Bhabha, Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University; *India's Sacred Rivers: Lifelines of Cultures* by Diana L. Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University; *J.M.W. Turner: A Marine Master in a Modernising World* by David Blayney Brown, Manton Curator of British Art, Tate Britain; *The Lone Mariner and his Ghost Fleet* by Vijay M Crishna, Executive Director, Lawkim Motors Group, Godrej & Boyce Manufacturing Company Limited; *The Case for Kanara* by Professor Himanshu Prabha Ray, former chairperson, National Monuments Authority, Ministry of Culture, Government of India; *Gandhi at Sea* by Faisal Devji, Professor of Indian History, St Antony's College, University of Oxford;



Separated at Birth: The Estranged History of the First Centuries of American-Indian Relations by Lincoln Paine Vice Chair, Maine Maritime Museum.



THE FOUNDATION TRUSTEES

ASHA V. SHETH The wife of Vasant J. Sheth, she is the chairperson of the Foundation and a former director on the board of The Great Eastern Shipping Company Limited. She has been instrumental in broadening the horizons of the Vasant J. Sheth Memorial Foundation to encompass maritime, cultural and educational sectors.

BHARAT K. SHETH The nephew of Vasant J. Sheth, is the vice chairman and managing director of The Great Eastern Shipping Company Limited. He contributes a wealth of shipping experience to the Foundation.

PRADIP P. SHAH The founder of India's first credit rating agency, Credit Rating and Information Services of India Limited, he has served with Housing Development and Finance Corporation, ICICI and consulted for USAID, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. He heads IndAsia Fund Advisors Private Limited.

NOSHIR E. PARDIWALA The former Personnel and HRD head of The Great Eastern Shipping Company Limited, he is actively engaged in promoting maritime staff standards and training. He has served the International Maritime Organisation and the International Labour Organisation.



THE FOUNDATION TRUSTEES

KETAKI V. SHETH The daughter of Vasant J. Sheth, she is the administrator responsible for co-ordinating and executing the Foundation's projects. An accomplished photographer, she was recipient of the Sanskriti Award for Indian Photography in 1993 and the Higayakashi Award in Japan for the best foreign photographer in 2006.

SUNIL S. MEHTA A graduate in Anthropology from Cambridge University, was Head, Business Relations, Hutchison Max Telecom. He has a strong background in marketing, advertising and corporate communications and is an active member of the Bombay Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

AUROBIND PATEL A graphic designer with a strong background in typography and publishing technology, is a consultant to leading newspapers in India, Middle East, Africa and UK. Previously for over a decade, he served as Design Director of The Economist in London before returning to India in 1999.



THE VASANT J. SHETH MEMORIAL LECTURE

The Vasant J. Sheth Memorial Lecture is an annual event to honour the memory of Vasant J. Sheth whose working life was intertwined with the seas, initially through overseas trade but mostly through shipping. In 1947, he founded The Great Eastern Shipping Company Limited and remained a tireless proponent of the Indian shipping industry till his death in 1992.

The lectures aim to stimulate public awareness on various issues by presenting speakers from diverse disciplines. Previous speakers have included a diplomat, a policy maker, an economist, a historian, a legal expert, the world's greatest cold-water long-distance swimmer, a prominent naval historian, a world-renowned conservationist, an anthropologist, a museum curator, an expert on the politics of oil, a Shakespeare scholar, a Pulitzer prize winner, a Polar explorer, a maritime historian, an eminent Indologist and accomplished academics. The lecture is published as a monograph and distributed to institutions and individuals in India and overseas.



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Lincoln Paine is a maritime historian, author, teacher, and curator whose chief aim is to engage people in the wonder of the maritime world in all its manifestations. He has published more than 100 articles and reviews for popular and academic audiences, and his books include the award-winning *Down East: An Illustrated History of Maritime Maine* (2018), *The Sea and Civilization: A Maritime History of the World* (2013), and *Ships of the World: An Historical Encyclopedia* (1997).

He is currently writing a book entitled *Global America and How It Got that Way: The United States in Maritime Perspective*.

Paine has lectured on a wide range of maritime-oriented subjects, including literature of the sea, exploration, oceans and seas in world culture, the history of maritime law, trade, naval history, rivers, decorative arts, and museum curatorship in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia.