

# From Ghalib's Dilli to Lutjens' New Delhi

A DOCUMENTARY RECORD

edited by

Mushirul Hasan  
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National Archives of India

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Published in India by  
Oxford University Press  
YMCA Library Building, 1 Jai Singh Road, New Delhi 110 001, India

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First Edition published in 2014

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ISBN-13: 978-0-19-808499-0

ISBN-10: 0-19-808499-4

Typeset in Bembo Std 11.5/14  
by Le Studio Graphique, Gurgaon 122 001  
Printed in India by G.H. Prints Pvt Ltd, New Delhi 110 020

The text of all documents has been retained as in the original, except in the case of obvious  
typographical errors. In some cases, errors noted by the editors have been pointed out by using *sic*.

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# A Century of New Delhi

## Political Reform, Questions of Finance, and the Creation of a New Capital for India

Dinyar Patel\*

On the suburban fringes of northern Delhi, amidst a jumble of construction sites and small agricultural plots, is a peculiar landmark. Within a fenced-off enclosure stands a series of hastily built sandstone plinths, some with statues and others inexplicably empty. Here, arranged in a semicircle, are the stone-hewn figures of the men who once ruled India as viceroys—Lord Hardinge, Lord Willingdon, Lord Irwin, and others—striking imperial poses amidst the overgrown grass. One such statue has suffered an especially ignoble fate: cast out of limestone that has fared badly against the elements, its nose and arms have melted away into an amorphous figure. King George V, cut out of fine marble by the famed English sculptor Charles Jagger, turns his back to this conclave of viceroys and instead gazes toward a granite obelisk that rises in the distance across a dirt field that, when not flooded, is thronged by local children playing pick-up games of cricket. It is this obelisk that distinguishes this site from many other similar places in India—post-independence dumping grounds of colonial-era statues and monuments—and indicates some greater significance for this forgotten corner of Delhi. A plaque reads:

HERE ON THE 12<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF DECEMBER 1911  
HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY KING GEORGE V  
EMPEROR OF INDIA

\* I owe my thanks to Peter Stansky, David Boyk, Namita Dharia, and Mircea Raianu for reading drafts of this essay and providing their valuable comments and criticisms. In addition to Stansky, Geoffrey Tyack and Mark Mancall were my advisors during my larger research project on New Delhi at Stanford University. I am greatly thankful for the support and guidance that they provided me.

ACCOMPANIED BY THE QUEEN EMPRESS  
IN SOLEMN DURBAR  
ANNOUNCED IN PERSON TO THE GOVERNORS  
PRINCES AND PEOPLES OF INDIA  
HIS CORONATION CELEBRATED IN ENGLAND  
ON THE 22<sup>ND</sup> DAY OF JUNE 1911  
AND RECEIVED FROM THEM  
THEIR DUTIFUL HOMAGE AND ALLEGIANCE

One hundred years ago, the marshy earth where this obelisk now stands was the centre of a large temporary city erected for the coronation durbar of the emperor and empress of India. It was unprecedented in size, encompassing nearly 40,000 tents housing 300,000 people and having its own railroad system.<sup>1</sup> The durbar, as with previous ones held in 1877 and 1902–3, had the implied political purpose of displaying British imperial might and solidifying loyalty to the crown amongst Indian subjects. Unlike previous durbars, however, this one had an additional administrative objective. As ceremonies concluded on 12 December 1911, and as the royal couple sat facing a crowd of some 80,000 spectators and soldiers, the king started reading from a sheet of paper handed to him by the viceroy, Lord Hardinge, announcing the reconstitution of a united Bengal, the creation of new lieutenant-governorships for Assam and Bihar and Orissa, and, finally, ‘the transfer of the seat of the Government of India from Calcutta to the ancient Capital of Delhi’. With that, the coronation durbar concluded, and the project of building a new capital city—a task that would take two decades and cost the Indian taxpayer over Rs 144 million (over £10 million in 1931)—began.

While the coronation durbar site is neglected today,<sup>2</sup> the new city that was announced here has matured into the capital of a democratic India and a vitally important centre of international business and politics. In connection with the centenary of what is now known as New Delhi, the National Archives of India has assembled the following collection of documents that throw light on the infant capital’s evolution between the years of 1911 and

<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive description of the proceedings of the durbar and the imperial visit, coupled with striking illustrations and photographs, see *The Historical Record of the Imperial Visit to India, 1911* (London: John Murray, 1914). This was the official publication of the visit produced for the government of India.

<sup>2</sup> Some years ago, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) proposed refurbishing the durbar site, but its plans met with a storm of opposition due to concurrent celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the Indian mutiny–rebellion. In December 2011, the *Wall Street Journal’s* blog ‘India Real Time’ carried an article indicating that INTACH was now pushing ahead with ambitious plans to turn the durbar site into a properly maintained park. The park will feature a flagpole where the Indian tricolor will be hoisted higher than the top of the obelisk. See Tripti Lahiri, ‘Delhi Journal: At Coronation Park, Size Matters’, *Wall Street Journal*, ‘India Real Time’, 9 December 2011, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2011/12/09/delhi-journal-at-coronation-park-size-matters/> (accessed 10 December 2011).

1914. Raising a new capital city, as can be expected, is no mean task.<sup>3</sup> But it was particularly complex and contentious in the context of early twentieth-century British India. Included in the pages that follow are letters, reports, and memoranda that throw light on the initial hurdles encountered—administrative, financial, legal, military, and interest group—based—even before Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker were officially appointed as the city’s principal architects. The king’s brief declaration of 12 December left open much room for interpretation. Where would the new city be built? How would it relate to Mughal-era Delhi and other existing settlements? Who would be in charge of its planning and construction? What was an appropriate architectural style for its buildings? In the subsequent two decades, British Indian officials were confronted with even more important queries as post-First World War financial constraints, along with political reform and the rising tide of the nationalist movement, caused many Indians and Britons to question the wisdom of completing the half-built shells and avenues of a city meant to project imperial power and might.

By bringing together official government correspondence, this volume captures some of the debates and discussions surrounding imperial Delhi (as the new city was popularly known during its construction), revealing the highly bureaucratic and oftentimes fractious nature of the process. It begins in Chapter 1 with the transfer of the capital itself, a decision that was taken secretly in the months before the coronation durbar, and proceeds to the issue of creating a separate administrative area and its corresponding bureaucracy out of a region that spanned two provinces. In Chapters 2 and 4, we find material related to the furious debate over whether the imperial capital should be built on a site north or south of Shahjahanabad, the existing city of Delhi. This debate pitted considerations of historical sentiments (for the British) against factors such as cost, adequate space, and hygiene. Correspondence from the summer of 1912, included in Chapter 3, concerns the government’s immediate task of providing temporary facilities in Delhi while the new capital was under construction. With a large official population set to take up residence in Delhi in autumn, the government

<sup>3</sup> One interesting aspect of New Delhi was that it was contemporaneous with several other capital building and capital expansion projects. In 1902, the United States Senate Park Commission, better known as the McMillan Commission, published its plans for the redesign of Washington, DC’s central core, including the National Mall, envisioned as a grand, beaux arts-style boulevard flanked by monumental buildings. The similarities between the McMillan Plan’s National Mall and the Central Vista in New Delhi are quite evident. Following the Boer War, the government of the new union of South Africa established its capital at Pretoria and, in 1910, commissioned Herbert Baker to construct the two commanding Union Buildings here, meant to give architectural expression to the establishment of concord between British settlers and the Boers. Baker’s Secretariats in New Delhi bear many similarities to his earlier Union Buildings. In 1908, the new commonwealth of Australia selected Canberra, equidistant between Melbourne and Sydney, as the site of its capital and employed Walter Burley Griffin’s plan for an expansive garden city. Canberra was frequently referenced in early discussion about New Delhi. They were also the first major cities to be designed for the coming age of the automobile.

scrambled to arrange for proper hospitals, a new police station, and local administrative bodies. In Chapter 5, there is lengthy correspondence on the thorny issue of acquiring the broad tract of land officials felt necessary for erecting a fitting capital city. Here, the government struggled to survey land and fix appropriate compensation, either in cash or land outside of the Delhi region, while keeping in mind the prospects of rampant land speculation as well as drawn-out litigation. Additional chapters in the volume include correspondence with aggrieved parties, ranging from Calcutta commercial interests to the maharaja of Jaipur (Chapter 6); the formation of the Delhi Town Planning Committee (Chapter 7); and worries over Delhi's sanitary condition, especially in relation to the prevalence of malaria and cholera in the area (Chapter 8). Chronologically, material in this volume ends around the same time that work began in earnest on constructing imperial Delhi's most iconic buildings, such as the Secretariats and Government House (now Rashtrapati Bhavan).

The accompanying CD provides readers with maps of the Delhi region from the early twentieth century. The editors, unfortunately, were unable to trace at the National Archives of India many of the maps and diagrams that are mentioned in the correspondence and reports included in this volume. Nevertheless, the seven maps on the CD visually illustrate the dramatic changes brought about by the construction of the new imperial capital. Maps 1 and 2 date from before the 1911 durbar, showing the old Delhi district in Punjab and highlighting the urban extent of Delhi city. In Map 2, the city's limited spread is clearly apparent, with the monuments and ruins of past cities figuring prominently in the south and gardens covering the west and northwest, while at the top-centre is the amphitheatre from the 1902–03 durbar. But there are already signs of change: Map 1 appears to have been modified in mid-1912 as it shows the administrative transfer of Mehrauli *thana* from Ballabgarh to Delhi district, something that is discussed in the correspondence from June of that year (see Document 4). The northern border of Mehrauli thana is thus crossed out. Skipping ahead to Map 5, one finds the settled boundaries of the new Delhi province, which also reached across the Yamuna River to include Shahdara. Map 3, meanwhile, indicates the spacious confines upon which imperial Delhi's cantonment would soon rise, while Map 4 heralds the beginnings of capital building. Traced upon the contours of the Delhi terrain is the rigid geometry of the road network envisioned by the Delhi Town Planning Committee. Here is Government House, sitting at the head of a broad avenue that terminates at an ornamental basin connected to a dammed Yamuna River. A grand circus fronting the railway station, today's Connaught Place, serves as the hub of communication between the new and old cities, with new avenues stretching northward to pierce old Delhi's walls. All of this planning rested upon the precarious task of land acquisition, and Map 6, dating from 1912, demarcates the vast area of land upon which the government of India sought to buy or exert 'firm control'. Finally, Map 6 represents the end-product of decades of drafting, planning, and building. Titled 'Layout Plan of New Delhi' and dating from 1934, the map shows the imperial capital three years after its official inauguration, a massive garden city

flanked on one side by old Delhi's unbreached walls and one on the other by a modern aerodrome.

This volume comes amidst a growing body of scholarly literature on imperial Delhi. The most comprehensive study of the city remains Robert Grant Irving's *Indian Summer*, which relies upon a vast array of primary sources to trace the building project from the coronation durbar through New Delhi's inauguration in 1931. The leading characters of this work are British—Hardinge, Lutyens, and Baker—and Irving skillfully captures how New Delhi's distinct architectural form resulted from the bureaucratic discussions, political wrangling, artistic debates, and personal quarrels in which these individuals engaged.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Metcalf's *An Imperial Vision* similarly focuses on the evolution of the city's architecture: Metcalf argues that New Delhi marked 'the beginning of the end' in the larger narrative of the colonial architectural tradition on the subcontinent.<sup>5</sup> Sten Nilsson provides further discussion of imperial Delhi's architecture and physical layout while Anthony D. King, who considers the new capital within the context of the Delhi region's colonial development in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, pays particular attention to how city planners gave 'manifest physical and spatial expression' to colonialist notions of racial and social stratification.<sup>6</sup> Three recent studies have helped shift the focus of the literature toward Indians. David A. Johnson relies upon New Delhi's 1931 inauguration to illustrate how the city symbolically disseminated a 'double narrative of promised liberation and continued colonial dependency' to Indians who were waiting on the real delivery of promises of dominion status.<sup>7</sup> Jyoti Hosagrahar delves into the urban development of Delhi in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in order to question notions of what was considered 'modern' and 'traditional'. While she pays limited attention to New Delhi, her study is of great value in understanding how Delhi became a prominent commercial centre before the durbar and how the new imperial capital impacted Shahjahanabad, now increasingly referred to as 'old' Delhi.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Stephen Legg's innovative study, *Spaces of Colonialism*, demonstrates how New Delhi and old Delhi evolved together and became interconnected in the years between the coronation durbar and Indian independence. Legg traces his story upon the backdrop of

<sup>4</sup> See Robert Grant Irving, *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker, and Imperial Delhi* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas R. Metcalf, 'New Delhi: The Beginning of the End', in *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj*, chapter 7 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> See Sten Nilsson, *The New Capitals of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (Copenhagen: The Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1973); Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> See David Johnson, 'A British Empire for the Twentieth Century: The Inauguration of New Delhi, 1931', *Urban History*, vol. 35, no. 3 (2008): 162–84.

<sup>8</sup> See Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture, Urbanism, and Colonialism in Delhi* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Indian nationalism, revealing how Indian officials and residents interacted with government policies for policing, providing residential accommodations, creating infrastructure, and maintaining sanitation in the Delhi region.<sup>9</sup>

By presenting primary material from the first few years of the capital's existence, this volume will complement the existing literature and demonstrate how several features of the built city, such as its political symbolism and its relationship with the old city, were of concern to government officials right from the project's inception. While the authors of the letters, papers, and reports contained herein are overwhelmingly British, the content—addressing land appropriation, preexisting historical and religious monuments, and the city of Shahjahanabad—throws some additional light on how Indians were impacted by the transfer of capitals. Two particular themes run through this material. First, it is clearly apparent that the government intended for imperial Delhi to be a potent symbol of a new era for the Raj, one that indicated political change and openness to Indian traditions and public sentiment. Second, officials of the very same government are shown to be extremely apprehensive and worried about the project's financial cost and ready to sacrifice some of imperial Delhi's most symbolic elements for the sake of fiscal expediency.

The remainder of this essay will pick up on these themes in order to evaluate imperial Delhi's development during its two decades of construction. Relying on material in this volume, I will demonstrate how the looming question of finance forced the government to drastically reduce the imperial project in size, scope, and ambition during the very first year of its planning. Next, I will go beyond the chronological scope of this volume—utilizing the proceedings of British India's legislative bodies—to indicate how Indian political leaders, emboldened by the steady process of political reform that took place in the 1910s and 1920s, impacted the final form of the built city by expressing similar financial concerns. Irving has elaborated on how, in light of India's budgetary deficit following the First World War, British officials in India focused on ways to reduce imperial Delhi's overall costs. I will highlight how Indians were a critical part of this process as well, playing an increasingly assertive role in determining the city's development. Changing Indian attitudes toward the new capital, I argue, serve as a barometer of political change and reform in early twentieth century British India. In 1912, moderate nationalists and Indians in the rubber-stamp legislative council hailed imperial Delhi as a harbinger of political change, largely buying into the British rhetoric of the new city's symbolism. Barely a decade later, following the introduction of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms, Indian political elites had noticeably lost their enthusiasm for the project and instead questioned Delhi's suitability as a capital. Moreover, they attacked the building project as being inimical to the interests of the poor Indian taxpayer and, making use of the new legislative assembly's increased budgetary

<sup>9</sup> See Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007).

powers, took steps to further reduce imperial Delhi in size and scope. The city that was inaugurated in 1931, therefore, was markedly different from the capital envisioned in the months following the imperial durbar. Nearly every part of the imperial capital was impacted by a policy of financial retrenchment, first pursued by government officials and, later, increasingly at the behest of Indians themselves. Much more than an exercise in imperial arrogance, New Delhi can be seen as a product of tenuous political reform, administrative evolution, and changing dynamics between British authorities and Indian political elites in the waning decades of the Raj.

### **One City Not Two: Planning for a Unified Delhi**

In spite of the vagueness of George V's announcement, which simply shifted the Raj's administrative seat from one city to another, it was clear after 12 December 1911 that the government of India intended to build a new urban centre at Delhi that was to be truly grand in scale. As the tents of the durbar's temporary city came down and guests departed Delhi, the government grappled with the first of many tasks associated with the transfer of capitals: delimiting territorial boundaries for a new 'imperial enclave'. Indian authorities were insistent that, similar in nature to Washington, DC or the new Australian capital being planned at Canberra, the 'administration of the new capital and its surroundings should vest in the Government of India direct' as a centrally ruled district.<sup>10</sup>

The precise scope of this area was the topic of great speculation, as was the related question of where, precisely, the new city would rise. British public opinion—in India and as well as in the United Kingdom—was strongly in favour of a northern site, one that would evoke memories of both the mutiny-rebellion of 1857 (Britons held sacrosanct the northern flank of the Delhi Ridge, the location from where they launched the bloody and decisive siege of Delhi that helped turn the tide of the conflagration in their favour) and the three imperial durbars. On the morning after the durbar, *The Times* of London's Delhi correspondent confidently predicted that 'the new Government House will probably be built at the northern end of the Ridge, with terraced gardens leading down to a park below'.<sup>11</sup> During a hastily planned ceremony on 15 December, King George and Queen Mary laid foundation stones for the new capital at the durbar camp, adding to rumors that the city would rise in its vicinity. However, the government had far more ambitious plans in mind, plans that encompassed a much greater expanse of territory for the imperial enclave. It soon informed provincial authorities in Punjab of its intention to take up the entire district of Delhi, an area of 1,290 square miles with a population of 657,600. This included

<sup>10</sup> Document 3, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> 'First Impressions: A Mixed Reception', *The Times*, London, 13 December 1911, p. 8.

a 76 mile-long sweep of land on the eastern bank of the Yamuna from Sonapat to Faridabad, including the walled city of Shahjahanabad and its various suburbs.<sup>12</sup>

The government of Punjab, which administered Delhi district, naturally balked at the proposal. Once again drawing a comparison to the American and Australian capitals, H.P. Tollinton, chief secretary to the Punjab government, noted that the envisioned imperial district of Delhi could 'hardly be styled an enclave' as Washington was only seventy square miles in area and Canberra a lightly populated region of 'a few square miles'.<sup>13</sup> Directly administered Baluchistan, he noted, had a smaller population than the region the government of India now intended to control. Sir Louis Dane, the lieutenant-governor of Punjab, complained that the government of India was threatening to confiscate 'the commercial capital of the Province'—no doubt a slight exaggeration in spite of Delhi's importance as a railway junction and its growing commercial prosperity<sup>14</sup>—and a city that had been 'specially made over to the Punjab after the Mutiny of 1857 in recognition of the great part which the Province had played in the reconquest of Delhi'. Instead, Dane suggested that the government of India assume authority over a compact region extending no further than the new city itself, leaving old Delhi and its hinterlands under Lahore's control and retaining the administrative status quo under which the current residents of the district were 'quite contented'.<sup>15</sup> The government of India categorically rejected Dane's proposals. In a letter dated 13 July 1912, it communicated Hardinge's sentiments that the entire Delhi region, including Shahjahanabad, should come under central control.<sup>16</sup> The viceroy firmly maintained that 'the interests of the old and new cities will be so closely intertwined' that it would be essential for both to come under its direct authority. As a form of compromise, however, the Indian government slightly yielded on its demands to take up all of Delhi district, adopting one of Dane's proposals that it only assume Delhi *tahsil* and Mehrauli. Hardinge nevertheless left open the possibility of acquiring the rest of the district in the future.<sup>17</sup>

Fairly early in the planning process, therefore, the government of India—with Hardinge exercising particular influence—had established that imperial Delhi would not simply be a glorified civil lines; it would not be a bureaucratic enclave isolated from its surroundings. Rather, imperial Delhi would rise alongside the walled city and the two would form a greater urban whole, placed under the watchful eye of the supreme government. The extent of this vision of an interconnected old and new city, something that particularly

<sup>12</sup> Document 3.

<sup>13</sup> Document 4.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter five of Hosagrahar's work for discussion of Delhi's commercial expansion, buoyed by the local administration's land speculation, in the late nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century.

<sup>15</sup> Document 4, pp. 11–14.

<sup>16</sup> Document 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34–6.

preoccupied Hardinge, is borne out in some of the earliest communication regarding imperial Delhi's proposed location and urban design. It is significant that much of this communication concerned the welfare and future development of old Delhi. In May 1912, for example, the government of India began giving serious attention to planning extensions for Shahjahanabad, suggesting various locations beyond the city walls for new suburbs for non-official residents.<sup>18</sup> Henry V. Lanchester, an eminent British architect and town planner who was serving as an advisor to Hardinge, included such a suburb in his first city plan of Delhi. In 1913, the Imperial Delhi Committee, the first body charged with executing the plan of the new capital, boldly moved this suburb to a location immediately adjacent to the neighborhoods of the new city, something that would have truly welded the two urban centres into one.<sup>19</sup>

As significant were the government's directives for the precise location and layout of the new city. Irving's *Indian Summer* provides a detailed discussion of this chapter in imperial Delhi's history, tracing the popular movement in Britain for a northern site and then proceeding to the Delhi Town Planning Committee's three reports that ultimately rejected this location and instead selected the plains south of Shahjahanabad. The Committee's first report, dating from 13 June 1912, is included in this volume.<sup>20</sup> While noting that 'for every reason' the northern site 'deserved and received the most thorough consideration at the hands of the Committee', and acknowledging its advantages of being 'upwind and upstream from the present city', George Swinton, John A. Brodie, and Lutyens, the Committee's three members,<sup>21</sup> gave their overwhelming support to the southern site, a vast tract of land that had relatively little existing development. Health and sanitation were major factors in their decision: they described the Barari plain surrounding the durbar site as badly waterlogged and a malarial 'danger zone'. But the southern site was also advantageous on account of the 'practically unlimited area for [future] expansion' it offered and its proximity to old Delhi.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Document 12.

<sup>19</sup> See chapter five of Hosagrahar's work for discussion of antecedents to this planned suburb: as early as 1888 British authorities had floated proposals for planned extensions to Shahjahanabad. As Hosagrahar demonstrates, in developing such proposals the government was guided by considerations of sanitation, hygiene, and proper regulation of urban growth.

<sup>20</sup> Document 55.

<sup>21</sup> Swinton was an aide-de-camp to a former viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, and had urban planning experience as a member of the London County Council. In line to become Council chairman in 1912, he instead accepted the government of India's offer to come to Delhi and join the Town Planning Committee. Brodie was the city engineer for Liverpool. Lord Crewe, the secretary of state for India, was instrumental in appointing Lutyens to the body, but gave him explicit instructions that his responsibilities on the Committee did not extend to architecture and the design of any specific buildings. See Irving, *Indian Summer*, p. 41.

<sup>22</sup> Document 55, pp. 135, 137, 139.

With the Committee having passed its judgement, Lanchester quickly drew up plans for Government House, situated just below Raisina Hill, to face Jama Masjid, and for a broad central avenue in between that would form a symbolic axis between two of the preeminent monuments of the British and Mughal cities. The plan would, in Lanchester's words, 'bring the new quarters into intimate connection with the old'.<sup>23</sup> On 4 July, Hardinge informed Lord Crewe, the secretary of state for India, of the government's plans to immediately construct this avenue.<sup>24</sup> The viceroy, recognizing the importance of this avenue to the future development and aesthetic form of the imperial capital, ordered Lanchester to return to his architect's study and make certain modifications.<sup>25</sup>

Through the summer of 1912, therefore, old Delhi figured prominently in the plans and administrative arrangements that the government of India pursued with regard to its new capital. Much of this vision, however, depended on the government's ability to proceed quickly and effectively with land acquisition. As many documents in the volume show, the government stumbled and faltered in its ambitious task of acquiring all the necessary land for an expansive garden city, something that would have significant consequences for Delhi's future urban form. In the week following the durbar, the home department dispatched a letter to authorities in Punjab ordering them to immediately survey and notify lands in a vaguely defined region around Shahjahanabad.<sup>26</sup> 'It is doubtless within the knowledge of the Government of the Punjab that speculation in land in the neighbourhood of Delhi has already begun,' the department secretary noted, 'and consequently that every day's delay will result in enhanced prices.' The government of India furthermore ordered the Punjab government to acquire land west of the Yamuna River—territory that lay within the United Provinces. As can be expected, this immediately provoked a response from provincial officials in Allahabad.<sup>27</sup> For the exercise of buying up land for the imperial capital, a major test for the relatively new Land Acquisition Act of 1894, the government continued to delegate work to officials from Punjab such as Major Henry Beadon, the deputy commissioner for Delhi district, whose correspondence makes up a bulk of Chapter 5. Beadon faced the twin challenges of managing conflicting orders from various departments<sup>28</sup> and carrying out his work almost entirely alone.<sup>29</sup> Observing that some 85,000 notifications would have to be

<sup>23</sup> 'Delhi—1st Report of Mr. HV Lanchester. Treatment of the area selected for the Imperial City', Home Department: Delhi Branch, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Document 56.

<sup>25</sup> Document 18.

<sup>26</sup> Document 58.

<sup>27</sup> Document 44.

<sup>28</sup> Document 63.

<sup>29</sup> Document 65.

sent out to landowners in the Delhi region, Beadon in February 1912 rather modestly asked the government to provide him with additional assistants.<sup>30</sup>

Punjab government officials managed to carry out their initial tasks with great speed: nine days after the conclusion of the durbar, Dane had notified property in the Delhi region totalling around 115,000 acres, all but freezing property values.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the government of India remained particularly apprehensive about the prospect of litigation from aggrieved landowners. Notified property came under the jurisdiction of two high courts and, as one official from the United Provinces put it, 'There is nothing in which High Courts appear to like differing from one the other more than in the assessment of compensation for land compulsorily acquired.'<sup>32</sup> Challenges in court could not only significantly augment levels of compensation, they would also delay the actual process of acquisition. Beadon threw up his hands in frustration when the government pressed him for cost estimates and a time frame on acquiring lands, noting that the courts would be the determining factor.<sup>33</sup> While Beadon began to purchase villages,<sup>34</sup> the government scrambled to find ways to offer dispossessed cultivators and hereditary landowners suitable compensation. In order to remove 'any reasonable grounds for discontent among persons of this class', Henry Wheeler, secretary to the home department, reasoned that 'some measure of special treatment of them may be justifiable' and considered offering land in the districts of Delhi, Gurgaon, Rohtak, and Karnal.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, Wheeler could find no such expansive tracts in the vicinity of Delhi and the government settled for offering 'waste lands' in Karnal and Rohtak as well as canal colony tracts in the Lower Bari Doab, situated in distant Montgomery and Multan.<sup>36</sup>

Beginning in the early summer of 1912, the first appeals and petitions by aggrieved parties landed at the government's doorstep. The maharaja of Jaipur requested the home department not to acquire two villages that were in his ancestral possession.<sup>37</sup> Jains in Calcutta protested against the proposed acquisition of an old temple garden south of Shahjahanabad.<sup>38</sup> 'These cases are going to prove a source of much difficulty to us,' William Malcolm Hailey, chief commissioner for Delhi, complained to Wheeler.<sup>39</sup> Hailey was not exaggerating: the temple garden was one of nearly 250 sites of religious and historical importance that Beadon

<sup>30</sup> Document 65, p. 155.

<sup>31</sup> Document 45.

<sup>32</sup> Document 44, p. 116.

<sup>33</sup> Document 64.

<sup>34</sup> Document 68.

<sup>35</sup> Document 66, p. 156.

<sup>36</sup> Document 74, p. 191.

<sup>37</sup> Documents 87–9.

<sup>38</sup> Documents 78–9.

<sup>39</sup> Document 78, p. 223.

identified as being in the way of proposed development. Beadon had, furthermore, relegated this garden to a list of buildings ‘which need not be preserved’; far more explosive cases could (and eventually did) arise with regard to temples and mosques that Beadon classified as having greater importance.<sup>40</sup>

Some correspondence in this volume throws light on one episode in the land acquisition process that was particularly significant for imperial Delhi’s final built form. In July, the viceroy received a petition from the residents of Paharganj, a rundown suburb to the west of Ajmer Gate.<sup>41</sup> Paharganj was of interest to the government for one reason only: it sat just off the axis of Lanchester’s proposed avenue connecting Government House and Jama Masjid and, consequently, the government was intent that this blighted district be leveled to the ground. But Hardinge and other officials soon began to have second thoughts. In August, Beadon submitted a comprehensive report on the Delhi land acquisition process and specifically warned about the ‘arduous task’ of purchasing Paharganj, mentioning that, ‘considering the class of landlord whose property would be acquired, the vista of the subsequent litigation in the courts is lost in the horizon’.<sup>42</sup> It was a far wiser decision to avoid ‘buying up this insanitary little plot’; at the very least, the government could slightly modify the axis of the main avenue.<sup>43</sup> With Beadon’s warning, much of Hardinge’s vision of an interconnected old and new city collapsed. In September, he wrote to Crewe stating that the government of India no longer wished to purchase Paharganj and that it would reconsider the location of the city’s central axis.<sup>44</sup> Hardinge had already dithered on taking the avenue all the way up to the mosque, asking in July ‘whether it is advisable to knock a broad way through the most valuable house property of the old city merely to gain an access at the end on to an almost blank wall of the Jama Masjid at an angle of 45 degrees’.<sup>45</sup> Instead, by the time that the Delhi Town Planning Committee submitted its final report in 1913, both Government House and the axis had rotated east to focus on Purana Qila and the Yamuna River. Lutyens and his colleagues included in their plans a branch avenue on the new city’s northern fringe that roughly followed Lanchester’s axis and entered the old city. Only a portion of it, the present-day Minto Road (Vivekananda Road), was eventually built.

Thus, by the end of the summer of 1912, some of the most ambitious and far-sighted elements of the government’s plans for imperial Delhi had been scotched. Old Delhi shifted more and more to the peripheries in subsequent designs for the imperial city. Lanchester’s proposal for a well-planned extension to Shahjahanabad met with the same fate as his

<sup>40</sup> Document 76, p. 217.

<sup>41</sup> Document 90.

<sup>42</sup> Document 69.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

<sup>44</sup> Document 20.

<sup>45</sup> Document 111, p. 261.

avenue.<sup>46</sup> Even the envisioned imperial enclave shrunk dramatically in scale: far from taking up the majority of Delhi district, the government of India eventually adopted Louis Dane's views and confined its administration to just the new city. Contents in this volume, especially those that relate to the process of land acquisition, reflect how stark financial considerations steadily chipped away at imperial Delhi's scope during the first few years of its planning. This is significant: as the following section will illustrate, continued concerns over cost, this time registered by Indians playing an increasingly assertive role in the government, profoundly impacted the built form of New Delhi and hollowed out any remaining political symbolism.

### **Political Reform and the Imperial Capital: Evolving Indian Attitudes towards the Building Project**

Imperial Delhi was very much a product of cautious political reform in India pursued by the Liberal Party after it came to power in the United Kingdom in 1905. In response to the Indian National Congress' continued agitation for more Indian representation in the government, Lord Curzon's alienation of Indian moderates during his tenure as viceroy, and—perhaps most significantly—political events in Bengal, where Curzon's hasty partition of the province in 1905 had unleashed the Swadeshi Movement, John Morley, the new secretary of state for India, began drafting administrative changes designed to mollify the Indian political elite. Real political change, of course, was not the Liberals' objective; rather, it was their ambition to cement the loyalty of moderates and pro-British elements by further drawing them into the workings of government, something that could consequently diminish the appeal of the Congress and also deepen rifts in the party between moderate and radical factions. The extremely conservative nature of Morley's proposals is borne out in his communication with the viceroy, Lord Minto, on 6 June 1906:

*Fundamental* difference between us, I really believe there is none. Not one more whit than you, do I think it desirable, or possible, or even conceivable to adapt English political institutions to the Nations who inhabit India. Assuredly not in your day or mine. But the *spirit* of English institutions is a different thing, and it is a thing that we cannot escape... Cast-iron bureaucracy won't go on for ever, we may be quite sure of that; and the only thing to be done by men in your place and mine, is to watch coolly and impartially, and take care that whatever change must come shall come slow and steady.<sup>47</sup>

The Indian Councils Acts of 1909, better known as the Morley–Minto reforms, invoked that 'spirit' and did little else. A tiny Indian electorate was created and empowered with the right to elect representatives to provincial councils and an Indian imperial legislative council; these

<sup>46</sup> See Legg's discussion of the Western Extension in chapter four of his work.

<sup>47</sup> M.N. Das, *India under Morley and Minto: Politics behind Revolution, Repression, and Reforms* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964), pp. 66–7.

councils could, in turn, debate budgets and introduce legislation. The thrust of reform was focused at the provincial level: the British Indian government reserved the right to nominate a majority of representatives to the imperial legislative council.

The limited nature of the Morley–Minto reforms frustrated the Congress leadership (Hindu public opinion was further aroused by the introduction of separate communal electorates) and did little to stanch the trouble in Bengal, although the Swadeshi Movement itself had already lost much of its momentum. Nevertheless, the acts did begin a process of political reform that radically changed the nature of the Raj over the following three decades. This was difficult to foresee in 1910. When the new viceroy, Lord Hardinge, arrived in India that year, he noted, ‘I hardly realised till I was actually in Calcutta the state of political unrest and terrorism that prevailed’.<sup>48</sup> Hardinge came under additional pressure to quickly resolve problems in Bengal when, on 6 February 1911, the new monarch, George V, announced to the British Parliament his desire to travel to India for a second coronation. With plans already in the work for the durbar, Hardinge and members of his executive council frantically communicated with London about proposed ‘durbar boons’ that might restore some peace and stability in the country. There was general consensus that Bengal must be reunified.<sup>49</sup> But, as Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson, the council’s finance member, wrote to his colleagues, ‘any modification [of Bengal’s borders] must be based on some other re-adjustment of so much greater importance as to over-shadow the actual partition re-arrangement...[T]here must be no appearance of surrender to the agitation’.<sup>50</sup> John Jenkins, the home member, proposed to Hardinge a new presidency encompassing only the Bengali-speaking population. Bihar, Orissa, and Assam—once ruled from either Calcutta or Dacca—would become separate

<sup>48</sup> Charles Hardinge (Lord Hardinge of Penshurst), 1948, *My Indian Years, 1910–1916: The Reminiscences of Lord Hardinge of Penshurst* (London: John Murray), p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Frykenberg argues that George V himself, having travelled to India in 1905–6, where he witnessed the strong movement against the partition of Bengal, was very keen to reverse Curzon’s decision and reunify the province. See Robert Frykenberg, ‘The Coronation Durbar of 1911: Some Implications’, in R.E. Frykenberg (ed.), *Delhi Through the Ages: Essays in Urban History, Culture and Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 373. Significantly, by 1911, Bengal’s violent revolutionaries had influenced others in the country. On 17 June 1911, Vanchi Aiyar assassinated the district magistrate of Tinnevely in the Madras Presidency. The so-called Tinnevely conspiracy is of interest since, in a note that he wrote before the assassination, Aiyar specifically referenced the upcoming durbar, objecting to the fact that a *mlechha* and beef-eater was about to be crowned the emperor of India. He claimed that three thousand Madrasis had taken a vow to kill George as soon as he landed in India.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson to viceroy’s executive council, 22 June 1911, in ‘Transfer of the seat of the Government of India from Calcutta to Delhi and the creation of a new Lt. Governorship at Patna’, Home Department: Public Branch, Government of India, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 1923, pp. 5–6.

administrative units. Finally, Jenkins suggested the removal of the imperial capital from Calcutta. In its place he recommended Delhi.<sup>51</sup>

By establishing itself amongst the monuments of Delhi, the British Indian government hoped to integrate and legitimate itself within an Indian imperial tradition. In Document 1 of this volume, for example, Lord Crewe, newly appointed as secretary of state for India, praises Delhi for having ‘an Imperial tradition comparable with Constantinople, or with Rome itself’, and remarks, ‘Historical reasons will thus prove to be political reasons of deep importance and of real value in favour of the proposed change’.<sup>52</sup> What is interesting, however, is that Hardinge and his colleagues also justified the transfer to Delhi on the grounds of continued political reform. Similar to Morley–Minto, the government framed both the transfer of capitals and the provincial restructuring of Bengal as necessary measures in the process of accommodating Indian political demands while, at the same time, reinforcing British control over the essential elements of government. The first step in this direction was decoupling the governments of India and Bengal, which sat side-by-side in Calcutta. Crewe and Hardinge, for example, described such an arrangement as ‘a bad one for both Governments’ and the viceroy’s executive council concurred that a ‘transfer [from Calcutta] will in any case eventually have to be made’.<sup>53</sup> Beyond Delhi’s symbolic importance, it had the practical advantage of being more centrally located and less closely tied to any particular province than Calcutta was to Bengal. In a letter dated 24 June, Jenkins described Delhi as an essential element in helping create an almost federal structure for the Raj:

The maintenance of British Rule depends on the ultimate supremacy of the Governor-General in Council [that is, the viceroy]. We can never permit matters of vital concern to be decided by a majority of votes in the Legislative Council of the Governor-General. Yet it is certain that, in course of time, the just demands of Indians for a greater share in the government of the country will have to be satisfied, and the question is how they can be satisfied without impairing the supreme authority of the Governor-General in Council, which is the basis of British rule. It appears to me that the only possible answer is—by gradually giving the provinces a greater measure of self-government, until, at last, India will consist of a number of provinces, autonomous in all provincial affairs, with a Government of India above all of them, possessing the power to intervene in case of mis-government, but whose functions will ordinarily be restricted to matters of Imperial concern. In order that this consummation may be attained, it is necessary that the Government of India should not be associated with any particular province...<sup>54</sup>

While gradual reform would continue at the provincial level, the government of India could remain aloof at Delhi and reinforce its central administrative machinery. Furthermore, the

<sup>51</sup> Frykenberg, *Delhi Through the Ages*, p. 375.

<sup>52</sup> Document 1, p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2; letter from viceroy’s executive council to Robert Crewe, 25 August 1911, in ‘Transfer of the seat of the Government of India’, p. 66.

<sup>54</sup> Letter from John Jenkins to viceroy’s executive council, 24 June 1911, in ‘Transfer of the seat of the Government of India’, p. 9.

Morley–Minto reforms, as Hardinge reminded other officials, made it imperative that the transfer of capitals be done at once. Due to its expansion in size, the imperial legislative council, which met at the viceroy’s residences, was seeking out property in Calcutta to construct a separate chamber. A shift to Delhi, Hardinge warned, had to be ‘done now or never’.<sup>55</sup> The process of political reform that had begun with Morley–Minto ensured that the envisioned administrative readjustments of 1911 quickly ceased to be a simple theoretical exercise.

In spite of the fact that the durbar boons had been discussed, crafted, and finalized in complete secrecy, they continued to be described and justified in the language of reform. Indian political leaders of the time were swept up in this rhetoric as well. For many moderate and pro-British elites, the coronation durbar and the transfer of capitals served as proof of the government’s desire to embark on a new political direction. Such sentiment was apparent when, on 25 March 1912, the imperial legislative council held its last session in Calcutta. Council members, including zamindars, representatives of commercial and industrial interests, and urban professionals—precisely the individuals that Morley–Minto intended to further ally with the government—took the opportunity to reflect on recent events. They were particularly supportive of the government’s decision to move to a city with recognized historical significance for Indians. The maharajahdiraja of Burdwan, for example, welcomed the opportunity to ‘rear up an Imperial city in every sense of the term, wiping away and uprooting the demoralizing atmosphere of the latter-day Moghul Delhi, of the Delhi of the Mutiny days...’<sup>56</sup> Manakji Dadabhoy, a government advocate from Nagpur, hailed the transfer of capitals as no less than ‘a turning-point in British Indian history’ that had ‘conciliated educated India’. ‘Now begins an era of peace and concord, of intellectual and moral progress, of healthy co-operation between the rulers and the ruled,’ he stated.<sup>57</sup>

Congress leaders expressed a similar belief in impending political change. While Gopal Krishna Gokhale told the council that he was ‘looking into the future with the eye of faith and of hope’, Bhupendranath Basu argued that the coronation durbar had signalled the end of Curzonian authority and that a shift to Delhi offered hope of more enlightened rule.<sup>58</sup> Other Congress members were bolder, holding out hope that the administrative changes would usher in real political reform along the lines envisioned by the party. N. Subba Rao, for example, asserted that the new Delhi would be a ‘a first and necessary step in the onward path of self-government’, albeit within the empire.<sup>59</sup> Dadabhai Naoroji, who was not in the

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Hardinge to viceroy’s executive council, 20 June 1911, in ‘Transfer of the seat of the Government of India’, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> *Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General of India*, vol. 50 (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1912), p. 677.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 672.

<sup>58</sup> *Proceedings of the Council*, vol. 50, pp. 667, 694.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 679.

council but had issued a brief statement upon the conclusion of the royal visit to the ‘historic capital of Delhi’, went further. Naoroji put the onus on the government for real reform by claiming to have read royal utterances ‘between the lines’ and concluding that George V was ‘determined to respond to “the stirrings of new life” in India’. It was, consequently, the duty of awakened Indians to ‘work for obtaining that Self Government, under the aegis of the British, to which they aspire’.<sup>60</sup> A large gap existed between the rhetoric and expectations of Naoroji and his fellow Parsi, Manakji Dadabhoy. Nevertheless, one element united them and other Indian political figures: a belief that the new capital and the durbar were potent symbols of political change, whatever its form, for the Raj.

For the most part, the tone of the imperial legislative council’s debate in April 1912 reflected the autocratic nature of the Morley–Minto system. Through 1914, when Hardinge retired as viceroy, council members continued to enthusiastically support the project and praise the spirit of gradual reform that it represented. But such sentiment was to change radically in the next few years. Another round of political reform—this time spurred on by the First World War—transformed Indian perspectives on the new capital city, changing the mood in the legislative council from one of almost sycophantic support for the building project to increasingly assertive criticism. In order to gain greater Indian support and involvement in the conflict, both Parliament and the India Office dangled promises of ambitious political and administrative change. Edwin Montagu, the new secretary of state for India, announced in 1917 a policy of ‘increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions’ and then sailed to India to draft constitutional changes. The Government of India Act of 1919, or Montagu–Chelmsford reforms, was the result. The reforms fell quite short of Indian nationalist demands but did move India toward the quasi-federalist structure that John Jenkins had envisioned in 1911. They went much further than the limited Morley–Minto reforms. Provinces became more autonomous and gained significant new powers of taxation at the expense of the central government. At the national level, the legislative council was transformed into an imperial legislative assembly with new financial powers, including the ability to approve or strike out certain expenditures in the annual budget. The assembly also had a far greater proportion of elected members, who were in turn elected by expanded constituencies.

The Montagu–Chelmsford reforms were hardly democratic. But, turning John Morley’s thesis of 1906 on its head, they dramatically increased the democratic expectations and

<sup>60</sup> Uncatalogued letter, Dadabhai Naoroji Papers, National Archives of India, New Delhi. Naoroji, who possessed vast contacts in the British political establishment, may have been well aware of the irony of his statement. George V was hardly in favour of political reform in India. Harboursing a dislike for the Morley–Minto reforms, the monarch hoped that his coronation durbar would grant greater legitimacy to the more autocratic features of the Raj while recognizing ruling princes as the true indigenous leaders of the subcontinent. See James Pope-Hennessy, *Lord Crewe (1858–1945): The Likeness of a Liberal* (London: Constable & Co, 1955), pp. 87–8.

demands of Indians involved in the government, serving as a catalyst for further reform. While legislative council members harboured no illusions about the limited scope of the current administrative changes, they at least began to speak about and plan for a more democratic future, noticeably incorporating more democratic language in their vocabulary. This change in attitude was clearly apparent in February 1920 when, during its last full session before its dissolution, the council turned its attention to imperial Delhi, the intended symbol of the Raj's commitment to political transformation, which was still very much in the process of construction. B.N. Sarma, a lawyer from Madras and a member of the Congress, questioned the wisdom of continuing with a project that now seemed almost anachronistic in nature. Whereas the transfer to Delhi was understandable under the conditions of 'autocratic rule', which placed a premium on the city's historical associations and its accessibility to friendly ruling princes, it no longer made sense in an India that was now unquestionably on the path to self-government. The pre-eminent criterion for an Indian capital city, Sarma argued, must be its accessibility to citizens and members of the new legislative assembly. '[T]he circumstances under which the transfer was made no longer exist and the new problems, the new ideals and aspirations and circumstances which have arisen since the Reform Bill has been placed on the Statute-book give a new complexion and renders a re-examination of the position absolutely necessary.'<sup>61</sup> Delhi was, quite simply, too remote from the centres of Indian political life.

Once Sarma concluded his attack on imperial Delhi, other members threw their support behind an astounding proposal: selecting an entirely new location for an Indian capital city, one that would be better suited for the assembly. Vithalbhai Patel advocated the creation of a special committee to scout out locations. At least eleven possible sites were discussed—including Bombay, Poona, Allahabad, and Karachi—but much of the debate concerned a possible return to Calcutta. William Vincent, member for the home department on the viceroy's executive council, soon put an end to the debate and reminded members that the transfer of capital to Delhi was a *chose jugée* (settled matter). But Patel predicted that discussion about imperial Delhi's many faults was just beginning. 'You must also be prepared to face the fact,' he told the chamber, 'that after [the implementation of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms] you will have Resolutions coming in over and over again dealing with this question.'<sup>62</sup>

Patel was right. In March 1921, during its first session, the newly constituted imperial legislative assembly returned to the question of imperial Delhi's fate. Since assembly members now possessed powers of the purse—specifically, the ability to reduce or entirely remove expenditures outlined in the budget—they focused on the spiralling construction

<sup>61</sup> *Proceedings of the Council of the Governor General of India*, vol. 58, (Calcutta: Government Superintendent Printing, 1920), pp. 705–10.

<sup>62</sup> *Proceedings of the Council*, vol. 58, p. 765.

costs of the city. Construction of imperial Delhi was finally returning to its pre-war pace but inflation and a major budget deficit, resulting from wartime expenses, were taking their toll. The government informed assembly members that it had already sunk over Rs 48 million into imperial Delhi's sandstone and marble edifices; meanwhile, the public works department revised its estimated total costs for the project to Rs 129 million (Hardinge's original estimate in 1912 was around Rs 60 million) and predicted at least eight more years of construction. This did not sit well with members of the assembly. Hari Singh Gour, an eminent lawyer and educationalist from the Central Provinces, called for a reduction in spending on viceregal estates while reminding his colleagues that they could now decide to altogether abandon the palatial Government House currently taking shape on the crest of Raisina Hill.<sup>63</sup> After a spate of complaints over Delhi's climatic extremes (which were beyond 'any precedent', William Vincent had to acknowledge<sup>64</sup>), Piyari Lal Misra, a member from the United Provinces, proposed reducing expenditure on imperial Delhi by Rs 125,000 a year. Building the city's palaces, offices, and avenues was a 'heavy burden to the poor taxpayer', he noted.<sup>65</sup> Another member, Bhai Man Singh, concurred with Misra and offered a stinging rebuke to the capital project:

[W]e have no right to feed our aesthetic sentiments at the expense of the poor tax-payers of India. And I cannot find any justification whatsoever why we should think that we should be better housed...when we really know that the country is actually starving and suffering not only in the sun, but I would say, that many of them are quite unhousted; and they are not even fed. While representing a country like that, I for one am not prepared to advocate that we should at all try to have comforts very soon or even in the near future or at all if need be.<sup>66</sup>

Singh's statement reflected another shift in Indian representatives' attitudes toward imperial Delhi: in addition to critiquing Delhi's suitability as a capital, they now openly condemned the new city's cost and extravagance. A symbol of political change had transformed into a financial millstone around the neck of the impoverished Indian taxpayer. Ironically, considerations of cost ultimately helped save the imperial city from the axe that assembly members wielded. By the time Misra and Singh spoke in the chamber, many assembly members were slowly realizing that the durbar boons of 1911 were, on practical grounds, irreversible. The government had already expended crores on the plains south of Shahjahanabad. Calcutta could not resume its position as imperial capital as the government had long ago sold off its old quarters. And searching for a new capital, as legislative council members had suggested in 1920, would only cause what assembly members now sought to

<sup>63</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 1 (Delhi and Simla: Government Printing Press, 1921), pp. 1025–6.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1037.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1163–4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1170–3.

avoid: wasted expenditure and more inconvenience for the government. In the interests of economy, the most logical option was to ensure that imperial Delhi was completed in the quickest and most cost-effective manner possible. Therefore, not long after Misra introduced his measure to cut the budget for the new city, other members, equally disillusioned with the imperial project, began proposing an infusion of new funding to support an accelerated programme of construction. The assembly eventually threw its support behind this proposal rather than Misra's. One week later, the assembly approved a resolution calling for Delhi to be completed with utmost speed for reasons of finance and general convenience. Legislators' impatience with the imperial project was now very apparent. Nand Lal, who one week prior had taken part in the general attacks on the city's deficiencies, threw his support behind a loan that would hopefully 'kill two birds with one stone', relieving the Indian taxpayer of a major burden and giving the government of India completed administrative quarters.<sup>67</sup> J. Chaudhuri denounced the government for making 'a very unwise decision' in 1911 for which India was now 'paying the penalty', but nevertheless proposed issuing premium bonds to fund the new Delhi's completion. 'Let us finish with this Capital building business for good,' he declared.<sup>68</sup> A majority of the chamber agreed, and within minutes of the resolution's passage debate over the city ceased. With legislators giving their reluctant approval for the project's completion, Delhi's status as the capital of India now seemed certain.

This by no means marked the end of the assembly's involvement with imperial Delhi: the assembly continued to hammer away at the city's costs and its many deficiencies. In 1922, legislators pressed for the creation of two separate bodies to provide independent analyses on how costs could be curtailed. The New Capital Enquiry Committee and the Inchcape Retrenchment Committee (which examined all of India's finances in addition to expenditure reserved for the capital's construction) were duly formed later in the year. After subjecting both Lutyens and Baker to lengthy questioning, the Enquiry Committee eliminated several features of the city plan, including the extension of the Central Vista (today's Rajpath) to the Yamuna River, cut back on the city's infrastructure, and delegated certain projects to 'private enterprise'. Due to the advanced stage of construction, committee members were only able to shave a few thousand rupees off total estimated costs.<sup>69</sup> Lord Inchcape, who chaired the Retrenchment Committee, described the city as 'monstrous', 'a consummate blunder', and 'a veritable white elephant'. Aside from eliminating a grand railway station for the city, he also found it difficult to make significant reductions in future expenditure.<sup>70</sup> Undeterred,

<sup>67</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 1, p. 1507.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1512.

<sup>69</sup> 'Report of the New Capital Enquiry Committee, 1922', 24 November 1922, in L/PWD/6/1125, India Office Records, British Library, London, pp. 6, 2, 13.

<sup>70</sup> Irving, *Indian Summer*, p. 128. As Irving notes, George V interfered and ordered that the Retrenchment Committee conduct 'no lopping' of the capital scheme.

assembly members continued to vent against the project, raising objections to increased cost estimates, questioning the government's reliance on English artists and designers rather than Indian talent, and interrogating the government over the lack of amenities and services for Indian residents. In 1926, one member challenged the government to justify expenses for the furnishings in the Viceroy's House (the new name for the Government House) while poor citizens across India were starving.<sup>71</sup> Revised estimates for the construction of that residence elicited a chorus of 'Shame, Shame' from the chamber in the following year.<sup>72</sup> As Stephen Legg demonstrates, both before and after the capital city's inauguration in 1931, the assembly vocally criticized the government for not providing enough accommodations in the city for its Indian employees, many of them low-ranking clerks who had to commute from old Delhi.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, in the span of less than 10 years, the attitudes of the Indian political elite towards building imperial Delhi transformed from optimism and support to indignation and outright hostility. While assembly members grudgingly gave their assent for continuing with the project in 1922, they did not let up in their criticism and actively sought for reductions in expenditure through the remainder of the decade. This transformation in attitudes indicates the dramatic change that occurred within the small circle of Indians who held quasi-representative positions during the early twentieth century. While members of the rubber-stamp legislative council held out hope in 1912 that imperial Delhi could symbolize a new era for the Raj, the introduction of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms emboldened them to weigh the city's merits and even clamour for another transfer of the capital to a more suitable location. Members of the new legislative assembly, which was endowed with financial responsibilities, focused on the financial burden that imperial Delhi placed upon Indians and clamoured for reductions in expenditure. Their concerns about the 'Indian taxpayer' and 'public opinion' was markedly absent from the first round of council debates held 10 years prior. Political reform, originally envisioned by John Morley and his peers as a means to strengthen the Raj's central control and its alliance with Indian elites, had taken India on a different course: Indians were now challenging the government's premier showpiece project and holding it up in the light of eventual self-government.

### **Inaugurating an Incomplete City**

New Delhi—as the viceroy, Lord Irwin, christened the city in December 1926—was officially inaugurated in early February 1931. By this time, the government of India had expended around Rs 144 million on its construction and had hardly any resources left for

<sup>71</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 7 (Delhi and Simla: Government of India Press, 1926), p. 62.

<sup>72</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 4 (Delhi and Simla: Government of India Press, 1927), pp. 3375.

<sup>73</sup> Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*, pp. 65–6, 71.

a proper ceremony.<sup>74</sup> There was to be nothing on the scale of an imperial durbar: Irwin and his colleagues organized a series of subdued functions at the city's main landmarks, capped by an aerial demonstration by RAF fighters.<sup>75</sup> For both Britons and Indians, the inaugural ceremonies offered an opportunity for reflection on a building project that had taken nearly two decades to complete, one that had been announced amidst great popularity and fanfare but completed with a relative whimper. Amongst the official guests was an aged Lord Hardinge, who sailed back to India for the ceremonies. He surveyed a city that was vastly different from the one he had originally envisioned after the imperial durbar of 1911. Under his tenure, considerations of cost had already forced the government to abandon elements that would have welded old Delhi and the new capital into one city. But now the two halves of Delhi appeared decisively remote from one another. The Viceroy's House no longer faced Jama Masjid; instead, it stood at the head of the monumental Central Vista that stretched out to (but never reached) the Yamuna River. In the strict topographical hierarchy of New Delhi's city plan, wealthy Europeans were primarily housed south of the Central Vista in the neighbourhoods farthest away from Shahjahanabad. Closer to the old city's walls were clustered the residences of Indian clerks and the poorly ventilated blocks reserved for Indian 'peons'. Between the old and new settlements, the army and sanitation departments had helped to create a grassy, mostly treeless field that functioned as a *cordon sanitaire*. Sten Nilsson describes it as a veritable 'no man's land' and the strip still functions as a geographical barrier in metropolitan Delhi.<sup>76</sup>

Another striking feature of New Delhi in 1931 was the absence of certain buildings deemed essential in the very first plans of the city, complemented by the inclusion of new structures that Hardinge, Lutyens, and Baker could never have foreseen in the pre-war years. Early sketches and plans envisioned a phalanx of secretariats and offices along the Central Vista; by 1931, the government could only afford to build bungalows here. In order to infuse cultural and intellectual life into the nerve centre of Indian bureaucracy, Lutyens, Brodie, and Swinton originally planned for a cluster of institutions at the city's centre, the intersection of King's Way and Queen's Way (today's Rajpath and Janpath), including an oriental research institute, the imperial records office, a museum, and a library. Due to financial considerations, only one wing of the records office was built, its internal courts hastily finished in plaster. Today it forms part of the National Archives complex.<sup>77</sup> To the east of the records office was

<sup>74</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. 2 (Delhi and Simla: Government of India Press, 1931), p. 1701.

<sup>75</sup> See Johnson 'A British Empire for the Twentieth Century', for a detailed analysis of the inaugural ceremonies and how they 'represented a complex vision of the late colonial state where liberal political reforms intended to pacify Indians simultaneously bound them more closely to the British empire' (p. 464).

<sup>76</sup> Nilsson, *The New Capitals*, p. 82.

<sup>77</sup> A.G. Shoosmith, 'The Design of New Delhi', *Indian State Railways Magazine*, February 1931, p. 427.

the sombre form of the All India War Memorial Arch, designed by Lutyens to memorialize Indian soldiers who fell in battle between 1914 and 1918. It was an appropriate monument for the city: after all, the First World War had both accelerated the process of Indian political reform and precipitated a financial crisis for the government of India, two factors that helped dramatically reduce the scope of New Delhi. The massive arch, which let out a column of black smoke from its roof, also completely overshadowed Charles Jagger's statue of George V (the same one that today sits at the coronation durbar site), originally envisioned as the monumental centrepiece for the Central Vista.

In addition to the arch, two new landmarks illustrated the significant political change that India had undergone since the imperial durbar. Baker convinced the governments of Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand to erect the so-called dominion columns outside of his Secretariats, monuments that suggested that India could one day join this exclusive club of self-governing colonies.<sup>78</sup> While inaugurating the columns on the morning of 10 February, Irwin described them as 'tokens of something wider than anything which the past cities of Delhi represent'.<sup>79</sup> To the east of the Secretariats was a far more significant monument: Baker's Council House, the quarters of India's evolving legislature. In September 1912, Hardinge had instructed Lutyens to place the chamber for the legislative council under the roof of Government House, something that effectively illustrated the council's subservient position with respect to the viceroy.<sup>80</sup> This was no longer considered appropriate after the passage of the Montagu–Chelmsford reforms and in 1919 the government commissioned a separate building for the expanded legislative assembly as well as two new bodies, a chamber of princes and an upper house-like council of state. In spite of its awkward location and design (the architectural critic Robert Byron compared it to a Spanish bullring while the politician and socialite Sir Phillip Sassoon, flying over the building in his plane, remarked that it 'looks like a gasometer—which it is!'<sup>81</sup>), the Council House was an unquestionable monument to the shifting power dynamics in the Raj and India's rising political ambitions. In the decades after New Delhi's inauguration, the Council House steadily eclipsed the Viceroy's House as the hub of the city's political life.

<sup>78</sup> The dominion columns were originally intended to memorialize the joint sacrifices of India and the four dominions in the First World War. See Johnson, 'A British Empire for the Twentieth Century', p. 474.

<sup>79</sup> 'New Delhi: The Inaugural Ceremony', *The Times*, London, 11 February 1931, p. 12; Irving, *Indian Summer*, p. 342.

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Edwin Lutyens to Charles Hardinge, 20 September 1912, 'Papers of Charles Hardinge', vol. 111, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, p. 82; Letter from Charles Hardinge to George Swinton, 14 October 1912, *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>81</sup> Robert Byron, 'New Delhi: The Architecture of Sir Herbert Baker', *Country Life*, 4 July 1931, p. 19; Peter Stansky, *Sassoon: The Worlds of Philip and Sybil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 132.

In many ways, therefore, the New Delhi of 1931 was vastly different from the city Hardinge and his colleagues envisioned in late 1911 and early 1912. Similarly, the Indian nationalist response to New Delhi's inauguration contrasted greatly with the measured support that Gokhale, Basu, Subba Rao, and Naoroji offered after the imperial durbar: Congress officials gave a cold shrug and turned their attention to more important matters, such as the recent death of Motilal Nehru, the first Round Table Conference in London, and Mahatma Gandhi's scheduled visit with the viceroy, something that would ultimately lead to the Gandhi–Irwin Pact. In response to these negotiations, which ended the Civil Disobedience Movement, Winston Churchill famously grumbled about the 'seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal Palace...to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King–Emperor'.<sup>82</sup> While individuals such as Jawaharlal Nehru offered occasional criticism of New Delhi—he mocked the Viceroy's House as the 'chief temple where the High Priest officiated'—most nationalists remained thoroughly disinterested in the amenities and affairs of the new capital city, while moderates in the legislative assembly addressed the capital city only in relation to the multiple inconveniences that remained for Indian government employees. It was difficult to find any Indian who remained enthusiastic about this durbar boon that once elicited so much hope and enthusiasm.

New Delhi was intended to be many things: a symbol, a city, and a capital. As this essay has shown, questions of finance proved to be perennial thorns on the side of those involved in its planning and construction. Ultimately, financial considerations diluted imperial Delhi of much of its substance. Only months after the imperial durbar, the government of India began scaling down its ambitious plans for the new city due to the challenges of land acquisition and the fear of drawn-out litigation. Once he realized the difficulties of purchasing Paharganj, for example, Hardinge quickly lost his enthusiasm for Lanchester's proposed axis connecting imperial Delhi with Shahjahanabad. Similarly, the government abandoned its plans to directly administer both the new and old cities as one unit. Financial considerations dealt the first blows to imperial Delhi's political symbolism as a bridge between east and west, a city that would stand for the better integration of Indian tradition and sentiments into the Raj. The nervousness that Hardinge and his colleagues expressed about cost overruns and legal challenges, furthermore, indicates the government's circumscribed ability—and its qualified willingness—to execute a truly grand imperial project. Stephen Legg is correct to classify New Delhi's monumental form and imperial architecture as 'unabashed demonstrations of authoritarian power'.<sup>83</sup> But, right from the start of the building project, there were very real limits to this power. Steady political reform further chipped away at the government's

<sup>82</sup> D.G.Tendulkar, *Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi*, vol. 3 (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1951), p. 53.

<sup>83</sup> Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*, p. xiii.

capacity to fully execute Lutyens and Baker's plans. The Montagu–Chelmsford reforms increased Indian political assertiveness and pushed Indian leaders to question the utility of the vast sums being sunk into the city. Indians in the legislative council and new legislative assembly first rejected imperial Delhi as a symbol, then questioned its worthiness as a capital, and finally diminished its urban cohesiveness by clamouring for the elimination of several elements of its city plan. What remained in 1931 was a vastly incomplete city. While British officials, architects, and planners were undoubtedly the driving forces behind New Delhi during its two decades of construction, it is important to remember that Indians—whether petitioners from Paharganj in 1912 or assembly members in 1921—had a definite degree of agency in moulding the built form of the new capital.

Ultimately, New Delhi's incomplete nature proved to be one of its greatest assets. Its low-density plan, coupled with its extensive and modern infrastructure, undoubtedly helped the region cope with the vast influx of refugees from western Punjab following Partition: home to 93,000 residents in 1941, the city and its new colonies ballooned in size to around 276,000 only 10 years later.<sup>84</sup> The government of the new republic took down statues of viceroys and kings, dedicated new ones for independence leaders, and erected secretariats for its expanding bureaucracy upon the acres of open space that lined the Central Vista. Museums and new cultural institutions were established amidst the urban forest of the garden city. The success of these new institutions, such as the National Gallery of Modern Art in Lutyens' Jaipur House and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in the former residence of the commander-in-chief (later Jawaharlal Nehru's home during his prime ministership), has buoyed hopes for the creative reuse of some of imperial Delhi's expansive palaces and monuments. While Lutyens and Baker's monumental structures atop Raisina Hill still evoke a strong whiff of the Raj, the Indian republic has been able to put its distinct stamp on other parts of the capital. Slowly, New Delhi has matured into a real city, part of an urban conglomeration that now stretches from Gurgaon in the south to the coronation durbar site in the north. The durbar site remains forgotten and neglected today. But the vibrant metropolis that lies to its south, where the promise of economic growth and India's augmented diplomatic weight has increasingly overshadowed any lingering memories of the Raj, perhaps serves as the best monument to the historic changes that were announced here one hundred years ago.

<sup>84</sup> King, *Colonial Urban Development*, p. 85.