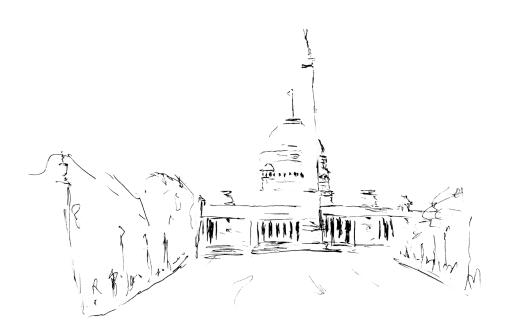
# Defining a Nation

Viceroy's House, Government House, Rashtrapati Bhavan A Study in Iconography, Social History, and Semiotics

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My principal operating assumptions were – and continue to be – that fields of learning, as much as the works of even the most eccentric artist, are constrained and acted upon by society, by cultural traditions, by worldly circumstance, and by stabilizing influences like schools, libraries, and governments; moreover, that both learned and imaginative writings are never free, but are limited in their imagery, assumptions, and intentions.

Edward Said

### Introduction

scope, methodology, acknowledgements

IXING ARCHITECTURE TO TEXT IS NO easy task. Words about architecture can at best flutter around the experience of space, which can only be captured as a shadow of itself. Historical analysis may deepen an understanding of a building but cannot explain it fully. The divisions and shapings of space are impossible to fully transcribe: the indescribable and the elusive lie at the heart of architecture.

Any scholarly discussion of a building is then in some sense its supplement. Architecture, like any human art, lies on the edge of explicability. Yet perhaps more firmly than any human art, architecture lies embedded in history. Buildings are erected – usually – to be functional; they are inhabitable and inhabited. More viscerally, perhaps, than sculpture or painting, architecture finds root in the practical necessities of occupation. The expressive gestures of an edifice may not wander far from their purposes without collapsing into dysfunction. As such, architecture is situated at a unique point in human expression. Fundamentally it concerns the structures of space – by extension the structures of human relation. It is a mirror fashioned from social needs while at the same time shaping them. Any deeper understanding of expression in architecture takes root, then, in both aesthetics and social history. In confronting this task – to decode and interpret architectural works – scholarship is indispensable.

There is a certain straightforwardness to the shaping of space – but it is often useful to be suspicious of the straightforward. Space is a social product.¹ It is not neutral or empty but *produced*. The elements of an architecture which may appear self-evident are embedded in a society

<sup>1.</sup> Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 26.

which has highly codified their particular conventions. Every building is tied to a specific cultural setting, and the most crucial expressions of that culture are more often than not masked as architectural convention. This is especially true in politically charged architecture, where implicit in the program is an expression of national identity.

The work of the architectural scholar is, then, to connect historical threads that shape the creation of a building, to examine and interpret the creative moment as a function of its context, and to explore the ramifications of that particular creative act. While this work may never be fully objective, it may strive to be critical.

What, then, is worth examining? So thoroughly deconstructing architecture that its symbolic elements become isolated and entirely fluid creates little more than debris – this leaves the scholar a large field of material to pick and choose from, creating a perhaps novel but wholly subjective analysis. Working exclusively from a building as a spatial object, an architecture so critically demolished allows equal validity to every potential reconstruction. Le Corbusier, for example, may extract aesthetic qualities from the Parthenon in Athens completely unimportant to its original architects. Such retranslations are valid and deeply important – and yet they are not necessarily scholarly. Such a bridge to past centuries is suppositional and not historical.

An object divorced from history loses a large aspect of its meaning. If the role of the architectural critic is to pass judgement on a created work as it applies to contemporary society, the role of the architectural historian is to attempt a reconstruction of meaning in historical context. The distinction is significant – while it is entirely within the field of architectural history to discuss the contemporary significance of an architectural work, there remains an obligation to account for the crucible in which it was formed. At the root of discovery is contradiction: here, the transient nature of existence sheltered in the permanence of architecture. It is within the dynamic between transience and permanence between a society and its inhabited objects – that the dialogue of history takes place. A text may be inadequate to fully convey a space. Yet it is rare that a building is able to fully convey its history. Histories, with an inherently biased eye towards the past, can never claim to address every aspect, symbolic or concrete, of a building. The expressions of scholar and monument may not be able to fully grasp each other but they are mutually reinforcing.

And yet architecture remains a highly pragmatic art. Durability, in architecture, is tied to occupation and material before aesthetics. The dual relationship of architectural expression in society – for architecture both shapes and is shaped by a culture – creates a physically dynamic history. There is a continuing tension between a building and the occupation of it. Symbols are constantly modified or replaced completely, and shift in meaning through the practice of interpretion.<sup>2</sup> An architectural work houses objects and activities. The creation of a building is then in a sense only the beginning of its biography. The duration of an architectural work – the persistence of its symbolic dialogue with society – provokes architectural history to expand into this biography. We must not be content to solely examine the creation of a building, for creation is only a beginning. Architecture consists of the relation of people to buildings over time: a dynamic relationship of ever-evolving meaning and symbolism.

#### Viceroy's House, Government House, Rashtrapati Bhavan

It is in this vein of exploration, and without presuming to be able to definitively capture any space, that we turn our attention to the architectural head of New Delhi. As a city planned and built at the twilight of the British Raj, New Delhi enjoyed a scant sixteen years as the capital of British India. Constructed from 1913 to 1929, the Viceroy's House sits astride Raisina Hill as the culminating monument which terminates the grand central axis of the city. Through the transition from imperial to independent rule, it became Government House in 1947 and finally the President's House — Rashtrapati Bhavan — in 1950 with the founding of the Republic of India. In this progression of names we catch a glimpse of the complex relationship between this monument and the cultures which claimed it.

Rashtrapati Bhavan serves as a significant example for a study of dynamically shifting meanings. Political buildings, by their nature, are highly symbolically charged. If we take architecture not as static but dynamic, and the relation between monument and society as creating symbolic meaning, then the architecture of governance serves most clearly to consolidate cultural identity. Through the transformation of the Viceroy's House to Rashtrapati Bhavan we see reflected the transformation from British to independent India. Through the dynamic relation between architecture and society, symbolic values impressed into Rashtrapati Bhavan exert themselves on the shape of governance.

<sup>2.</sup> Lefebvre, 18.

Critical analysis of political architecture without considering its societal context is self-contained. Critical analysis of a nation's political history is strongest if it is situated in its physical artifacts. These two approaches are mutually reinforcing – their synthesis is situated in the space between the stylistic and the political and informs both. I wish to present a study of *symbolic transformation*, which examines this dynamic interaction of meaning and identity.

Any monuments a state chooses to designate as national serve as loci of this interaction. Yet occupied government buildings serve as something more: they present physical manifestations of state authority and power. Capitol buildings house the space of negotiation in a government – the mechanics of rule are carried out in their wings. Yet Rashtrapati Bhavan is not a capitol building in a legislative sense; the office of the President is, in the Indian parliamentary democracy, largely ceremonial. The building is then more purely a locus of national identity – an image of government authority which is more symbolic than operative. As such, the symbolic value of Rashtrapati Bhavan is divorced from the mechanics of government and more attuned to national image as a symbolic thing in itself.

That the shape of this complex symbol, a locus of national identity and symbolic self-definition, is a physical remnant of British imperial rule hints at an incredibly complex dynamic of identity and history. The President of the world's largest democracy is housed in the palace of the mightiest empire in recent history! This apparent contradiction reflects the nature of postcolonial India and serves as a flashpoint for discourse on the relation of Indian government to its British heritage. Rashtrapati Bhavan is a lightning rod of Indian history, and encapsulates a dichotomous postcolonial identity as a built legacy of imperialism. As such it remains an active symbolic object – a building which is very much alive in India today. More broadly, such a dramatic shift in meaning provides an opportunity to examine how symbolism operates. The political sphere provides a high concentration of interpretive material - Rashtrapati Bhavan exists, highly self-consciously, in a symbolic spotlight. The dynamic interaction between architecture and identity is here most transparent, for it is here the most critiqued. By navigating the interplay of explicit and implicit symbolic proclamations which do not always agree, I wish to address the methods by which an architecture and a cultural identity create and alter each other.

#### Textual Methodology

The publication, in 1978, of Edward Said's *Orientalism* conveniently marks the creation of postcolonial studies. Employing methods developed by Michel Foucault and others concerning discourse, Said laid out a strong critique on the ideology implicit in the writing of Asian histories. Said argued that no historical discourse is neutral – history is inherently ideological and histories of foreign countries most clearly so. The neutral and scientific search for truth was revealed to be neither scientific nor neutral. Ronald Inden brings this criticism to the specific context of Indian scholarship:

The scholar, whether positivistic and rationalist or a romantic subjectivist, presupposes that his knowledge uses the highest form of reason. This, when identified, is usually referred to as 'theoretical,' 'scientific,' or 'philosophical' reason. The scholar uses this faculty to represent the reality of the Other. ...

The purpose of the scientist is to represent the reality of the Other and not to intervene in it. He is supposed to make his representation as accurate a one as he can. The idea here is that his knowledge is supposed to mirror a reality that is independent of the scholar. ... The knowing subject somehow transcends reality rather than being situated in it.<sup>3</sup>

Knowledge is not natural but constructed and does not transcend ideological reality but is situated within it. Striving for an authentic account of the symbolism of Rashtrapati Bhavan is an inappropriate path to take. We must not forget that any analysis is subjective. This does not mean that our efforts are in vain, and we are to throw up our arms at the prospect of never catching the real truth! The burden of analytical work, especially concerning cultures with a history of Orientalist scholarship, only shifts more strongly to the evidence, material and textual, of that culture.4 Historical discourse may now be recognized for what it is: ideological, and in the case of the Orientalist striving for dominance in the name of objectivity. Thus we assume no objectivity. The dogmatic search for a unitary and blinding truth then transforms into an infinite field of potential - history becomes a multiplicity of narratives which offer competing and often contradictory explanations. To embrace the subjective nature of knowledge is to deny its claim to legitimate dominance on grounds of objectivity. Explanations of the history of any culture must be found not in a presumed objective truth steeped in the ideology of objective rationalism, but rather in the fact that societies exist in different spheres of reality which are "constructed again and again in relation

<sup>3.</sup> Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," Modern Asian Studies, 20, no. 3 (1986):

<sup>4.</sup> Inden, 446.

to those around them, by human thought and action." History can no longer presume to be objective while presuming to remain ideologically neutral, and the writers of history become as important as the record they create.

Unfortunately, a significant portion of the historical literature concerning Rashtrapati Bhavan, and more generally the governance of India and its transition to sovereignty, is couched in Orientalist discourse. Running through many such histories is the supposition of inherent Indian character, largely an imposed construction of British rulers. However this literature, far from being useless, illustrates very clearly the historical ideology in which it was written. We may work around the Orientalist suppositions while noting their implications, and arrive at a less biased – or at least more multifaceted – image of the building.

With the understanding that any analytical approach is inherently subjective and making no claims to ideological dominance, three further historiographical approaches emerge as suitable and mutually reinforcing methods: aesthetic or stylistic history, social history, and semiotics. These historiographical methods have traditionally been employed as tools to uncover an objective truth, but this quality is not inherent in them. They may be employed to construct a coherent image of material and textual evidence, while recognizing the indeterminacy of truth.

STYLE

The most traditional art historical methodology is one of aesthetics. Alternately given as style, character, or zeitgeist, this approach to the evolution of art is largely self-contained. In the history of Western architecture it is presented as the evolution of stylistic periods from the Greek to Roman, to Romanesque and Gothic, then on to the Renaissance, Mannerist, Baroque, and Rococo and on through the centuries. Implicit in this construction of architectural history is that each period has a distinguishing character or style which is immediately recognizable and that the progression of style is evolutionary. The term Gothic, for example, grew from the "barbaric" style of the destroyers of Rome. Renaissance quite literally means rebirth, and denotes artistic style as well as the general character of an age. This character is related the iconology of a historical period upon which a specific iconography draws. Most evident in a religious setting, the specific modes of composition and representation in an artistic work, or its iconography, relates to the larger realm of iconology through which specific motifs are widely understood and

<sup>5.</sup> Inden, 446.

taken to reflect their society's character. Such an approach may be useful in grouping and binding together large bodies of artistic production under the banner of an epoch. Yet it contains two major impediments. First is that the model of stylistic evolution is largely internal to the history of art. Patronage and specific sociopolitical context become largely subservient to the style in which a work is executed. Second, and related, is the automatic assumption that artistic and architectural works define and speak for an entire age. Artistic production has always been situated within production networks. Artistic works are always produced for certain patrons, who usually commission artwork or architecture to bolster a very specific ideology which may not be widespread. Patronage in architecture is especially significant due to the scale and cost of architectural projects. While acknowledging that large stylistic groupings are useful and largely consistent - the majority of Gothic cathedrals are substantively different than the majority of Renaissance churches in disposition, massing, and ornament - we turn to social histories to augment the gaps in the stylistic approach.

#### Social Histories

The constructs of style, biography, and iconography are useful categories but are generally static in nature. They propose a history of art divorced from history, two constructed narratives more or less parallel but only coincidentally related. Social histories of art seek to resolve the dissonance of a historical artifact approached solely through the insular realm of art. Growing largely out of Marxist theory, the social historical approach considers artistic production a result of larger social forces. Art is usually, after all, the result of specific patronage and more often than not highly ideological. There is no division between art history and literary history; conversely they support each other. The creation of an artistic work can be seen as the interaction of artist and patron, struggling along ideological lines for political ends. Patrons seeking to bolster particular ideologies – religious, political, or otherwise – carefully select and inform artists to represent them. The production of art is a social production, embedded in larger structures of ideology and power.

Architecture provides a clear example of specific patronage by virtue of its cost, scale, and function. As architecture houses the mechanics of society, in this case the political mechanics of a governmental ide-

<sup>6.</sup> Kurt W. Forster, "Critical History of Art, or Transfiguration of Values?" New Literary History, 3, no. 3 (1972): 459.

<sup>7.</sup> Forster, 460.

<sup>8.</sup> Forster, 469.

ology, the creation of an architectural object can be seen most clearly as expressing larger ideological structures. The architect, in this view, becomes somewhat ancillary to architecture. Architects are carefully selected to fulfill a certain ideological brief. In this way architecture, as a series of material artifacts of a culture, informs us of the political and ideological shape of the patrons who commissioned it. While situating architecture squarely in society, this approach is not without disadvantage. Distilling aesthetic production to the level of expressing political structure loses a large part of aesthetics. Not only are questions of style reduced to questions of precedent, but the fundamental aspects of architecture such as massing, volumetric construction, and ornamentation are reduced as well. Architecture may be inherently tied to the political, but architectural creation, at least in intention, is to a large degree distinct from it. As questions of aesthetics and artisanship are considered still fundamental to architectural creation, they cannot be entirely distilled to a social level.

#### SEMIOTIC APPROACHES

Semiotics, as the study of signs, is a methodology that inherently implicates the human subject. As a field, semiology emerged from linguistics but stems from a fundamental human question: how do we extract meaning from the environment? Semiotic study is properly concerned with interpretation. Meaning is taken to stem from signs, a sign being "taken as something standing for something else." In providing this definition, Umberto Eco draws a distinction between semiotics and semiology, which is more properly concerned with signs as objects intended to be signs. The distinction is not so academic. Semiology, if we take Eco's definition, is limited to the world of objects. Yet immaterial things such as words or even concepts can be signs as well, as can be objects which were never intentionally created as signs. Within the word "Oriental," for example, lies embedded a veritable army of assumptions, traits, and qualities which merge into a stereotypical character. A specific geographical field may gain deep meaning due only to a battle fought upon it.

The viewer, or agent, is deeply implicated in the semiotic method. The relationship between the object or sign as a *symbol*, the idea which it signifies or the *referent*, and the *agent* who interprets forms a semi-

<sup>9.</sup> Umberto Eco, A Theory of Semiotics (London: Indiana University Press, 1976), 16.

otic triangle.10 To objects are attached symbolic weights, assigned out of a broader collective history. A cross, for example, has very clear representative value as a symbol of Christianity. The process of assigning symbolic representation to objects ultimately takes place individually, and the further linkage of symbol and idea is contingent on the agent as well. An agent passes evaluative judgment on the referent and on the symbol.11 Take, for example, as a broad object the architecture of the Raj. As an object conjuring up the history of British rule in India, it is tied strongly or weakly to imperialist ideology. The link between object and referent is fluid. Further, the judgment of the viewer of the referent informs their value judgment of the symbolic object, and vice versa. An architectural historian with a clear ideological distaste for the Raj more often than not reads its architecture in a negative light. The valued relationship between the referent and agent, and symbol and agent are the same if the referent and symbol are tightly bound. The strength of any of these relations between referent, symbol, and agent - idea to object, idea to person, and object to person - is mutable, and depends both on highly individualized evaluations and broader cultural context. Because of this mutability, symbols may shift and change through interpretation. The transformation of meaning depends on the symbolic instability of objects. If one meaning is so stringently tied to an object, that is if an object is so highly codified a symbol as to preclude any mutability, then the object as symbol cannot be reinterpreted.

Symbolic reading occurs along a continuum which is tied to context. The mutability and fluidity of any reading depends on its place in this spectrum. Take the simplest level of meaning: a door or threshold signifies transition, a ceiling signifies shelter, a column and cornice signifies support. These meanings are loosely bound to their structures – they are so basic as to be submerged into more substantial symbols that are pressed into a building. This level of reading may support a wide range of more complex interpretations. A column which denotes support may substantiate a symbolic claim to either imperial or democratic government without contradiction.

If the relation between idea and object is too strong, however, it may never be re-evaluated, and an interpretation of the object will always be an interpretation of the symbol to which it is tied. The most codi-

<sup>10.</sup> This model was first proposed, to the best of my knowledge, by Charles Jencks in 1969. Charles Jencks, "Semiology and Architecture," in Charles Jencks and George Baird (eds), Meaning in Architecture (New York: George Braziller, 1969), 15. Amos Rapoport refines the model to include valued judgments in Amos Rapaport, The Meaning of the Built Environment (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1982), 37-38.

Lang, Desai, and Desai, Architecture and Independence (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997),

fied symbols are the most unwieldy, and hardly budge upon attempted retranslations. They are what we recognize most explicitly as symbols: the Royal Coat of Arms of Britain, for example, or a national flag. These symbols are so highly structured and so specific that they are, in a sense, ossified. If they are to be opposed they cannot be appropriated but must be *overthrown and rejected*, and remain conquered symbols of opposition, untranslated except as a reminder of the past. In the same vein a reading of the Viceroy's House simply as a symbol of British Rule is not a *mutable* reading. As an architectural symbol so tightly tied to an imperial referent, judgments of both object and idea are necessarily the same.

Between this loosest level of reading formal relations and the highly rigid reading of codified signs is situated a series of symbolic objects which may be read with more fluidity. They are not tied so tightly to cultural history as to be unwieldy and untranslatable symbols. A large building with a central dome, a colonnade, and two extended wings generally signifies a place of government. Where do these associations come from? From collective memory, the shape of a culture, the elements of a society which are recognized and understood to be functioning symbols. This is the middle ground of the continuum, where there are definite associations and readings which depend on context. At this point symbols remain mutable and fluid, able to be shifted. The colonnade as a symbol of government authority, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century an acknowledged symbol in both Britain and India, does not point unflinchingly to imperial rule. It may be translated and integrated into a larger reading of the Viceroy's House as a symbol of democratic India.

These levels of codified readings cohabit within architectural objects. If architecture is to be reconfigured symbolically, the most strongly codified level of meaning must be rejected. Replacing the symbol that an architectural object suggests requires that the symbol be somewhat mutable. Mutable symbols, as we have seen, may support divergent codified meanings. As a column denoting support may bolster governmental authority, more specifically may the colonnade as a symbol of order reinforce imperial or democratic governance.

The strength of association of an object to its symbol determines its mutability as a symbol. An architectural object strongly read as a highly codified symbol resists translation. Associations to symbols which are codifed but not unwieldy may be translated relatively intact. It is along these levels of symbolic reading that the translation of the Viceroy's House to Rashtrapati Bhavan takes place.

As it implicates the individual, the semiotic method serves to link social history and stylistic modes. Perception is the bridge. An individual, abstracting aesthetic qualities of an object, can then relate them symbolically to structures of power and ideology. Conversely, an architect may choose a specific aesthetic mode which reflects and upholds certain ideological structures. The agent, receiving and encoding symbols, liaises between questions of style and questions of power. In creating an architectural object, style and ideology conjoin in a symbolic proclamation. More significantly, the style and ideology of a building may be shifted and translated as new symbolic readings are proposed. A particular architectural symbol may be translated only as fully as its reading is mutable. A strong symbolic association codifies a highly specific idea. If a colonnade is only ever read as an expression of British imperial rule - that is, if its symbolic reading is *rigid* and not mutable – then it can perhaps be conquered but not symbolically translated. Conversely if an association is weaker it will not translate with full symbolic weight. If a colonnade is read rather as a symbol of government authority and support, then it is not tied as specifically to the Raj and may be translated. Further than informing a symbolic approach, the semiotic method allows a negotiation between aesthetic and social historical methodologies through the individual. These interpretations are strongly seen in critical approaches to architecture, be it textual, material, or behavioral.

#### Performative Methodology

These three approaches, while useful, are primarily approaches of reading – that is, they are interpretations of the evidence. Each method takes a field of data and, in a specific analytical mode, constructs an argument from it. Each is in a sense a textual method, which inherently reduces a social space to a reading of social space. But social space – indeed, all space – is performative. Reading the fabric of a building – aesthetic, historical, or semiotic – is only half of the story. The creation of meaning is a productive act: buildings are reinterpreted, reused, and rearranged. It is these actions which shape architectural symbolism and are in turn shaped by it.

Therefore, in addition to the three historiographical approaches presented above, I will trace three branches of the production of space. The first is most evident: architectural interpretations, through architectural histories. The terms in which a building is presented illuminates the attitude of its author but more broadly the ideological concerns of society in which the author is situated. For example, increased mention in

postcolonial architectural histories of Indian stylistic motifs present in Rashtrapati Bhavan point to a larger motive which fits a specifically postcolonial national identity. The historiographical approaches of specific authors at specific times reveal shifting attitudes towards the building.

The second aspect concerns Rashtrapati Bhavan as a set of ceremonial spaces. The behavior of state actors in the series of highly ritualized ceremonies which it houses are as indicative as textual evidence of a certain ideology. Which spaces are chosen for living, bureaucratic work, ceremony, state functions, and recreation indicate an attitude of performance. Specific events and ceremonies held in Rashtrapati Bhavan present a carefully constructed image of the nature of the building. The careful choreography of ambassadors on official visits, for example, presents a set of behavioral attitudes which unearths the relevant ideologies of an official national identity.

Concurrent with these examinations of behavior is an examination of the results of behavior – namely the rearrangement, addition, and removal of objects in specific spaces to symbolically charge or drain different aspects of the building. If, as we have seen above, the strength of a symbolic association with its object determines its mutability, then objects with strong symbolic associations may be strategically placed or moved to alter the more mutable symbols. A strongly symbolic object may charge a weaker symbolic space, presenting a new synthesis of meaning. Again, the placing and replacing of objects are highly choreographed maneuvers. In symbolically shaping a highly political architecture, the dynamic between changing a space and being changed by it becomes a question of governmental, and therefore national, identity.

These three productive approaches serve to uncover symbolic attitudes towards Rashtrapati Bhavan. The first approach examines the production of texts, and concerns explicit textual interpretations of the building. The second examines the production of behavior, and searches for a reflection of attitude in action. The third examines the production of symbols, and addresses specific choices made to symbolically bolster or negate a particular space within Rashtrapati Bhavan. The intellectual distinction between productive and historiographical methodologies is somewhat necessarily artificial – after all, stylistic, historical, and symbolic interpretations are authored. The productive methods of approach – through histories, behaviors, and objects – reveal the evolution of symbolic meaning through time, as different attitudes are expressed in

different texts, actions, and symbols at different periods of the building's history. This reflection makes explicit the historical progression of meaning.

#### STRUCTURAL METHODOLOGY

Rather than force an exploration of Rashtrapati Bhavan through these categories of approach, I will be satisfied to explain them here and let them recede. Dynamic interaction lends itself to chronology, not categorization: to force the symbolic history of Rashtrapati Bhavan into this structure would dissolve the clarity of the argument. Rather, I will examine three broad historical periods, each as a fairly coherent set of narratives and ideologies. Specific events reflecting on the building will be examined and discussed.

Any serious discussion of an architectural work must begin at its creation. The construction of New Delhi from 1911-1931 was situated in a specifically British environment of ideology and an aesthetic unique to the Indian subcontinent. This period implicates the wider stylistic history of British colonial architecture, but for want of less arbitrary boundaries the years 1911-1947 will stand as a marker for the late architectural Raj. This chapter is concerned with the creation of the Viceroy's House and New Delhi from a British perspective, which culminates in a spatial realization of the structure of British governance and ideology. British uses and interpretations of the Viceroy's House will be examined, which are essential in informing subsequent symbolic translations.

Concurrent with and ultimately supplanting this narrative of British imperial power is the rise and consolidation of Indian nationalism into the movement headed by the Indian National Congress. The year 1938 marks the beginning of Gandhi's last noncooperation campaign, which re-established the firm goal of independence and ultimately culminated in the formation of India and Pakistan in 1947. The mechanics of that transfer create a basis for examining the reaction of a new government to existing structures. The Republic of India, established January 26th, 1950, consolidated its functions in New Delhi and undertook the fundamental problem of a symbolically reappropriating an overtly imperial architecture. The negotiation of this transfer effectively ends in 1977, after Indira Gandhi was indicted and Congress' political monopoly was lost. At this point Rashtrapati Bhavan is implicit in the machinery of state and becomes occupied by necessity. Architectural histories of Rashtrapati Bhavan during this period are virtually nonexistent. Classicism, and Lutyens with it, had fallen out of grace - high modernism held sway. As

such it will be necessary to discuss these years performatively – that is, explore changes in behavior and symbolically charged objects as informing the larger symbolic role of the building.

The last chapter concerns the role of Rashtrapati Bhavan as a symbolic object in contemporary India. It begins in 1986 with the creation of the nearby Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, which responded architecturally to New Delhi and by extension Rashtrapati Bhavan. Concurrent with the falterings of the modernist movement, architectural interest in Lutyens and the Viceroy's House reemerges in this period. Robert Grant Irving's groundbreaking Indian Summer, documenting the creation of New Delhi and the Viceroy's House, provided the touchstone for subsequent architectural histories, at least two sponsored by the Indian government. The interpretations which these histories offer reveal how the Viceroy's House has been transformed symbolically in the thirty years after independence. I will also examine current behaviors and ceremonies surrounding Rashtrapati Bhavan to examine its role as an active symbol of India today. As a codified symbol of Indian national identity, Rashtrapati Bhavan becomes a double-edged sword of national pride and sharp critique. It entertains a dichotomous existence as both a symbol of India and a reminder of British imperialism.

Stemming from an examination of the fundamental dynamics between society and object implicit in architecture, I will attempt to trace a history of the meaning of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Employing three reinforcing historiographies and three performative methodologies in a chronological framework, I hope to uncover the dynamism between meaning, reception, and human action in this building.

I feel I must note here that to attempt an exhaustive study of the performative, functional, and symbolic aspects of every major space in the Viceroy's House as it became Government House and Rashtrapati Bhavan would be foolhardy. Not only is the data obscure or nonexistant, but the sheer complexity and scope of such a project would require years of research. I will attempt to survey the major types of spaces built inside the skin of the Viceroy's House as it was created, and give an overview of how the building operated in the mechanics of state. As the building was physically and symbolically transformed to Rashtrapati Bhavan, it will suffice, I hope, to address highly significant spaces which are affected by and drive that transformation. In this way we gain a general picture of the transformation of this building, and assume that any changes not addressed in detail reinforce and augment that interpretation. Neither do I wish to provide a fullly historical picture of British or independ-

ent India. The histories of the Raj, the nationalist movement, and the postcolonial period offer an extensive bibliography. I am concerned only with aspects of that history which directly influence Rashtrapati Bhavan. Even with this limited scope, it will be necessary to reference organizations, movements, and events without giving them more than a cursory summary. This approach may seem slightly impenetrable to readers not familiar with Indian history and somewhat superficial to those who are, but to paint a full contextual picture would require volumes of history. I will strive to reference, rather than exhaust, the historical context surrounding the creation, occupation, and transformation of Rashtrapati Bhavan as a way to reveal the dynamics which guide this transformation.

#### A Note on Nomenclature

If the naming of objects is one key to understanding their symbolic value, we must be concerned with nomenclature. As far as is possible, I will refer to objects and locations by their names given within the chronological period I am discussing. For example, in 1931 New Delhi and Old Delhi, or Shahjahanabad, were almost autonomously separate entities; New Delhi was an almost self-contained city of government. Today this distinction is no longer so physical. The highly planned New Delhi is now known as Lutyens' Delhi; Kings Way has been renamed Rajpath. Bombay is now Mumbai, Calcutta is Kolkatta, and Madras Chennai. I have striven for consistency - when dicussing the inaugaration of the capitol in 1931, for example, I will consider a procession along King's Way, towards the Viceroy's House, in New Delhi. Such a procession in 2007 proceeded along Rajpath, towards Rashtrapati Bhavan, in Lutyens' Delhi. Similarly, the deeply projecting cornice present in many Mughal buildings was termed by the British a chujja, in Hindi transliteration a chajja, and in transliteration from the original Sanskrit a chādya. These terms, among others, will be used in chronological and political context, and when addressing the ideology of particular architectural histories. Certain choices of language are often indicative of a broader ideology, and help illustrate symbolic images of Rashtrapati Bhavan. I will take note of nomenclatural evolution as it reflects the evolution of ideology.

In the same lexical vein, I will of course at times refer to India as British or Imperial India. More significantly I will at times use the word Oriental or Orientalist. These terms are highly suspect and contain an entire system of prejudices and assumptions — I employ them only in specific contexts for that very reason. The same can be said less obvi-

ously of the terms Muslim and Hindu. Implicit in the division of India along religious lines is a characterization of peoples based on their faiths. Discussing stylistic or political history in terms of Hindu and Islamic implies division more ethnic than religious which was at least partially a product of the colonial period. These categories function in the same general way as Oriental and Occidental. The ugly truths of British India are better addressed first as truths and secondly as ugly. I am of the opinion that overt critique too often turns into overpowering critique; it will be more useful to recognize the institutions of imperialism and racism inherent in British India by making explicit their mechanisms and then engaging them in their own terms. In this approach is an implicit critique, and a hopefully more honest examination of the ideological reality. In framing historical examinations in terms employed by each specific historical period, the structures of thought conjoined to each may become apparent. In this fashion we may discuss continuities and discontinuities of ideology as they are written without resorting to an artificially imposing nomenclature.

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W. Gavin Robb Wesleyan University, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007. It is with nations as with men: One must be first. We are the mightiest, the heirs of Rome.

John Davidson

It is not a cantonment we have to lay out at Delhi, but an Imperial City – the symbol of the British Raj in India – and it must like Rome be built for eternity.

Sir George Birdwood

In 20,000 years there must be an Imperial Lutyens tradition in Indian architecture, as there now clings a memory of Alexander.

Sir Herbert Baker

## THE LONG AFTERNOON

New Delhi as the reflection of empire

ISING OVER BROAD TREE-LINED AVENUES, CAREFULLY manicured lawns and glistening fountains, the black copper-plated dome of the Viceroy's House slips in and out of view but hovers constantly over New Delhi. The entire city revolves around its axis [1,2]. Straddling the crest of Raisina hill, the building seems to gaze with a haughty dignity down King's Way, across the plains of the greatest planned city of the British Empire towards ancient Indraprastha, collapsing 3,350 years of history along a single magnificent axis. At one end stand the ancient mists of legend, at the other sits the throne of the Viceroy. The grandeur of New Delhi, steeped in the myths of the British Empire, is a thing almost mythical in itself. Sprung from the mind of Sir Edwin Lutyens, the Viceroy's House is a monument to majesty, the culminating pinnacle of an imperial capital surpassing in the British imagination Rome, Paris, and perhaps even London itself. The Viceroy's House gave tangible form to British India; within its halls lie the reflections of empire. That the grandest architectural proclamation of the Raj was shouted only in its twilight is one of the ironies of history. And yet New Delhi, pronouncing the eternity of empire, was not so stable as to resist translation as the idea of the British Empire shifted through the First World War. Ultimately the Viceroy's House would bear witness to the birth of India, independent at last from two centuries of British rule.

Calm, assured, and majestic, the Viceroy's House was in fact the architectural expression of great instability. The self-confidence of imperialist Europe gave way, through the last terrifying battles of the nineteenth century, to the uncertainty of the twentieth. Drawn together and given spatial form, the elegant proportions of Lutyens' edifice claim permanent British rule almost too desperately. Almost too big, too loud,

I

too *imperial* a structure to be taken seriously, the Viceroy's House gave physical form to the end of the Raj. With perhaps too much vigour did Lutyens reaffirm British rule at New Delhi, with a last loud proclamation of eternity shouted from a dying empire. The Viceroy's House expressed more clearly than the Viceroy himself imperial rule in India – it exuded permanence and a continuity of administrative rule which amid rising nationalisms was hardly stable. These contradictions, rendered in stone, reflected the long afternoon of the Raj as the sun slowly set on the British Empire. Unstable power housed in an architecture of permanence: this proved a contradiction too great for the Raj to bear. "This," wrote Georges Clemenceau upon seeing New Delhi as it rose in 1920, "will be the finest ruin of them all."

#### 1911-1931: MONUMENTS ON THE PLAIN

THE ROME OF HINDOSTAN," WROTE Robert Byron in 1931, "lies on a scorched and windswept plain, historied with tumbledown memorials of the Mohammedan conquerors. Across this plain glitters now an eighth, an English, Delhi." Sited among the ruins of previous Delhis stretching back to the third millennium BCE [3], this glittering Imperial Delhi was to prove the last gasp of British imperialism. The design of the planned city was the design of empire, the Viceroy's House a coalescence of imperial authority. The Viceroy's House condensed the Raj to architectural form; if New Delhi can be seen as the spatial expression of empire the Viceroy's House was then its ruling representative, a monument largely unmarred by the mundane bureaucracy of state. Here was the palace of the representative of the Emperor himself. To delve more deeply into the significance of the Viceroy's House as a symbolic object requires some historical and ideological context of the Raj.

#### THE IDEOLOGY OF EMPIRE

British India was at heart contradictory. British perspectives on India were contingent on circumstance; the ideology of empire was not codified in a consistent political theory but rather composed along broad themes of similarity and difference. Stemming from empirical theories

<sup>1.</sup> Robert Grant Irving, Indian Summer (London: Yale University Press, 1981), 355.

<sup>2.</sup> Robert Byron, "New Delhi, I: The Architecture of the Viceroy's House" Country Life 69 (1931): 708.

more mythic than scientific, India embodied in the British imagination an exotic and foreign place fundamentally different than the West, and thus required different strategies and institutions of government. This highly Orientalist mode was endemic in the nineteenth century and masked the more fundamental economic basis of empire.

India held a unique position in the British Empire. Termed the "most truly bright and precious jewel in the crown of the King," India was the largest and most economically valuable of the Crown Colonies.<sup>3</sup> The British Empire was not driven primarily by ideology or religion but the need to extract profit. The Raj consistently operated with an eye towards business; British presence in India was, after all, predicated on the East India Company. As early as the 1770s, as the Company was rapidly gaining political power, an idea of empire began to consolidate which sustained the Raj throughout its existence. India was seen as a backwards and alien place, which needed Western intervention to give her the gifts of order and government. Rooted deeply in a pseudoscientific construction of the Orient, British Governor-Generals and later Viceroys justified their economic hold on India as ruling in the best interests of the Indian people.4 Such an attitude of inherent superiority was not necessarily unique to the British. The Emperor Babur, a Timurid ruler who founded the Mughal Empire in 1526, recounts in his memoirs:

Hindustan is a place of little charm. There is no beauty in its people, no graceful social intercourse, no poetic talent or understanding, no etiquette, nobility, or manliness. The arts and crafts have no harmony or symmetry. There are no good horses, meat, grapes, melons, or other fruit. There is no ice, cold water, good food or bread in the markets. There are no baths and no madrasas. There are no candles, torches, or candlesticks. Instead of candles and torches they have a numerous group of filthy people called deotis who carry the lamps. ...

Aside from the streams and still waters that flow in ravines and hollows, there is no running water in their gardens or palaces, and in their buildings no pleasing harmony or regularity.

The peasantry and common people parade around stark naked with something like a loincloth tied around themselves and hanging down two spans below their navels. Under this rag is another piece of cloth, which they pass between their legs and fasten to the loincloth string. ...

The one nice aspect of Hindustan is that it is a large country with lots of gold and money.<sup>5</sup>

Winston Churchill quoted in Thomas Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 232.

<sup>4.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 19.

Babur, Emperor of Hindustan, The Baburnama: Memoirs of Babur, Prince and Emperor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 350-351.

The memoirs of the first Mughal emperor could almost have been written by a Governor-General of the East India Company. The construction of India as an exotic land filled with riches then has more to do with the imperial project and less with any inherent quality of British thought: at the foundation of both Mughal and British India we see themes of alienation and superiority. Yet unique to the British was the notion that "the prosperity of the natives must be previously secured, before any profit from them whatsoever is attempted." The distance at which the British ruled put more focus on extracting profit than on subjugating India's peoples and inhabiting their cities.

Indian civilizations, it was thought, had reached some level of progress and then stagnated. If Western civilizations had advanced past the Middle Ages, as Oriental civilizations were thought to have not, then the British were obliged to raise India out of her dark ages. This kind of benevolent paternalism justified British intervention in Indian affairs, and obscured the colony's economic basis. The ideology of empire was based on difference, a fatal divide between East and West created over years of Orientalist history. Legitimating British dominance over the subcontinent required the belief that Indians were unfit to rule themselves. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries that justification clothed itself in rational objectivism and the language of science.<sup>7</sup> Critical to the assumption of imperial power was the assumption of a fundamental difference of character inherent in India's peoples. And yet the ideology of the Raj held aspects of similarity as well, a sort of jocular paternalism which held that for some purposes, Indians could be treated as "people like themselves, or as people who could be transformed into something resembling a facsimile of themselves."8 The rise of Liberalism in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century prompted an interest in uplifting reform, holding that as human nature was equivalent everywhere, India could be uplifted and "totally and completely transformed, if not by sudden revelation as the evangelicals envisaged, then by the workings of law, education, and free trade."9 While itself not a cohesive doctrine, Liberal ideology produced a vision of India as a sort of social laboratory, which required laws and institutions to free her peoples from stagnation.<sup>10</sup> This contradictory ideology of benevolent despotism ran through the Raj and was deeply implicated in its downfall.

<sup>6.</sup> Edmund Burke, 18th century political thinker, quoted in Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 19.

<sup>7.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 8.

<sup>8.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, x.

<sup>9.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 29.

<sup>10.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 29-30.

As the initial wave of political intervention in the 18<sup>th</sup> century yielded to a more integrative approach by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup>, the ideology of empire shifted from that of foreign rulers to almost indigenous successors of the Mughal Empire.<sup>11</sup> By the late nineteenth century the contradictions implicit in such an ideology steadily increased, as organized and educated Indian nationalists asserted their rights as British subjects and equality with their rulers.<sup>12</sup> These ideologies of empire are most clearly expressed in the physical artifacts of the Raj, and most potently in its architecture.

#### BUILDING THE POLITICAL

If architecture occupies a unique position within the arts because it is fundamentally practical, the institutional buildings of the Raj may be seen as most tangibly expressing its nature. The question of style, especially in political architecture, is never far removed from the question of politics and identity. The British imperial ideology was not theoretical but operative – the mechanics of British governance were in effect the mobilization of colonial ideas of difference and similarity. Architecture in this colonial setting provides a most visceral symbolic intrusion of imposed rule. The British colonization of India was physically contingent on controlling and operating the institutions of authority. The physical housings of governance became the markers of empire: barracks, bungalows, government houses, assemblies and universities were the physical spaces through which the British ruled. In a government of continual administrative change, architecture offered an authoritative permanence. Colonial India by definition entailed a "cumbersome and highly inefficient process of occupying territories, cities and buildings in order to occupy the institutional and infrastructural life of the occupied culture."13 Institutional architecture was imperial control made physical. As such it embodied, over the course of British rule, the evolving ideology of empire from foreign imposition to indigenous synthesis. This dynamic, most clearly expressed in municipal and government buildings, is reflected in the change of stylistic preference of the Raj from Greek Revival to Indo-Saracenic.

As the ideological modes of the Raj shifted from imposition to synthesis, so too did its architectural styles. Government House in Calcutta [4], built from 1799 to 1803, provides a clear example of the ideology of

<sup>11.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 157.

<sup>12.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 160.

Catherine Ingraham, "Architecture and the Scene of Evidence," Postcolonial Studies 1 (1998): 204.

foreign rule expressed in architecture. A massive structure modeled on Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire, Government House sat imposingly in a large open green, its wide frontal staircase rising imperiously to a central portico bedecked with six Ionic columns. The State Dining Room, or Marble Hall, was modelled on a roman atrium: life-size busts of the first twelve Cæsars lined its aisles. Even through shifting architectural tastes in Europe through the early nineteenth century did colonial architecture continue in a highly classical and increasingly Greek Revivalist mode. Here was impositional empire in its most pure expression – a new Rome, stretching from India to Canada! The British had conquered by trade and military might, and as yet had not penetrated the depths of Indian society. Rule was in large measure imposed and not yet integrated – the government, after all, rested in the hands of the East India Company and nominal authority was vested in the Mughal emperor at Delhi. 17

Direct Crown rule was established in the aftermath of the 1857 Sepoy Revolt. The Revolt was nominally instigated in reaction to the stipulation that the new Enfield Rifles, issued to the Imperial Armies, were to be greased with beef and pork fat. An insult to both Hindu and Islamic beliefs, this change sparked an uprising led by native sepoys in the Bengal Army which quickly spread across the northern territories of the Raj. Triggered by this event, the Revolt was situated in a much wider context of discontent. Marching to Delhi, a large contingent of sepoys took the undefended city and set up Bahadur Shah, the titular Mughal Emperor at 82 years old, as their leader. This initial assault triggered a wide uprising across northern India, which was quickly and cruelly suppressed. Seen in large part as a reaction to entrenched British political power, the immediate legacy of the Revolt was to further British isolation and increase racial antagonism. Upon its suppression, the Emperor was quickly deposed and exiled, and two of his sons and

Thomas Metcalf, An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 12.

<sup>15.</sup> Metcalf, An Imperial Vision, 13.

<sup>16.</sup> Metcalf, An Imperial Vision, 15.

<sup>17.</sup> Metcalf, An Imperial Vision, 15.

<sup>18.</sup> The nomenclature of this event is highly political. Termed the Sepoy Mutiny or simply the Mutiny by the Raj, it is more commonly referred to in postcolonial India as the First Indian War of Independence. Jawaharlal Nehru consistently employs the term Revolt in his Discovery of India, as does Thomas Metcalf in The Aftermath of Revolt.

<sup>19.</sup> Thomas Metcalf, The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 48.

<sup>20.</sup> Metcalf, An Imperial Vision, 49.

<sup>21.</sup> Metcalf, The Aftermath of Revolt, 290.

a grandson summarily executed.<sup>22</sup> As the Crown assumed direct rule, the Raj began to shift from its identity as foreign conquerors to that of legitimate heirs to the Mughal throne.

It is in the context of this transformation that the Indo-Saracenic style evolved [5]. Indo-Saracenic, as its name implies, consisted of a blend of Indic and European stylistic motifs generally taken from the Islamic tradition rather than the Hindu.<sup>23</sup> The synthesis of style was both a reflection of changing British identity as Anglo-Indian inheritors of India and a means to employ, understand, and thus control Indian forms and thus Indian character. Such an appropriation was properly undertaken to capture and dominate an understanding of Indian style. By defining what was Indian and then building in that mode, Indo-Saracenic architecture can be said to have furthered British dominance in modes well-established by Orientalist thought.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the Indo-Saracenic style remained basically British in siting, composition, and interior organization.<sup>25</sup> Style, rooted in ideas of inherent character, was therefore highly political. In this politically aesthetic context emerged the question of New Delhi.

#### Imperial Delhi

At the Imperial Durbar of 1911, King George V announced that the capital of the Raj was to be transferred from Calcutta to Delhi. Most histories record that the move was a result of growing nationalist violence at Calcutta stemming from Curzon's partition of Bengal in 1905. While nationalist stirrings in Calcutta had major bearing on the decision to shift the seat of governance, they are properly seen in conjunction with larger political and economic developments which impelled the consolidation of a strong centralized government. The subsequent design of New Delhi [6,7] was carefully calculated to further appropriate existing authority networks, create an autonomous central government, and bolster the imperial ideology of the Raj. The siting, design, and style of the new city were highly political decisions which gave physical form to the shape of British authority, both manifest and ideological.

<sup>22.</sup> Irving, 4.

<sup>23.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 157.

<sup>24.</sup> Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai, Miki Desai, Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity – India 1880 to 1980 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 105; Metcalf, An Imperial Vision 137.

<sup>25.</sup> Lang, Desai and Desai, 105.

By the late nineteenth century India had established a particularly profitable position in the British empire. British-controlled infrastructure, especially transport, ensured a monopoly in India for British financial interests. More than just an economic repository, India provided almost infinite manpower and housing for the imperial armies. British India was held for the extraction of profit, and the Raj depended on the collaboration of existing local interests for its financial success.26 The British could ensure profit and keep the peace by dividing Indians into a set of local concerns, each vying for influence and political favor. The Raj governed in name but in practice local Indian authorities assumed much governmental responsibility, yet continued economic pressures revealed the need for further intervention. Calcutta's growing authority over its provinces had become a dominant trend in Victorian India as the economic circumstance began to shift out of Britain's favor. British cotton yarn exports to India, for example, peaked in 1888 as yarn produced locally and Japanese imports began to take precedence. Demand for higher revenues forced a deeper involvement of the central government in local negotiations.27

This increased economic involvement produced a dual result: colonial interests in India, especially in Calcutta, began to diverge from colonial interests in London.<sup>28</sup> The Government of India consolidated and centralized its organization to better negotiate both local and overseas policy. As a second consequence of more direct intervention, local interests were forced to negotiate with the top tier of government officials. In so doing they took British representative bodies as models to form political organizations, pushing local interests towards a more unified national level.<sup>29</sup> By 1909 this trend was significant enough to induce legislative reform.

The Morley-Minto council reforms of 1909 were orchestrated with the aim of winning Indian moderates and aristocrats over to the government.<sup>30</sup> They provided little increase in provincial power in the government but, significantly, introduced elected representatives to legislative councils. The Governor-General's councils were expanded through elected members as well. The electoral process was not direct and was

<sup>26.</sup> Gallagher and Seal, 387-389.

<sup>27.</sup> Gallagher and Seal, 390-391.

<sup>28.</sup> Gallagher and Seal, 391.

<sup>29.</sup> Gallagher and Seal, 392.

<sup>30.</sup> Arthur Berriedale Keith, A Constitutional History of India 1600-1935 (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1936): 228.

"intended to secure due representation of all important interests." While creating more electoral autonomy, the reforms sought to fragment local interests under the principle of divide-and-rule. The result was just the opposite. As politicians seeking election needed win the support of more varied interests to secure their vote they were forced to work across factional boundaries. As more local decisions were being made by the government in Calcutta, these legislative bodies broadened their organizational scope to allow negotiation on a national level. As local interests gained more traction, the atomizing tactic of divide-and-rule served instead to unify. To counter these increasingly broad political networks a stronger central government was needed. Events in Calcutta may have provided the impetus, but it was within this political context and for these political reasons that the capital was moved to Delhi, to be constructed with all the institutions of government, directly under the watchful eye of the Viceroy.

While in the economic sphere the transfer was set as an escalation against increasingly unified interests, the political sphere remained somewhat more fragmented. The Morley-Minto reforms' electoral policy further institutionalized the image of Indian society as a set of separate and antagonistic groups.<sup>33</sup> Bengal had seen widespread nationalist riots after Curzon's ill-advised partition in 1905; the Morley-Minto reforms can also be seen as a divisive reaction to these rising nationalisms in Calcutta. The reforms remained firmly rooted in the ideology of empire and difference, maintaining that representative government, as Minto argued, "could never be akin to the instincts of the many races composing the population of the Indian Empire."34 Democracy was seen as alien to the Oriental character, and thus sovereignty must needs be vested in British hands. India in the eyes of Britain was split irreconcilably into factions - a system which could not sustain democracy but required despotism. Although George V both announced the reversal of the partition of Bengal and the relocation of the capital to New Delhi at his 1911 Coronation Durbar, the move came in the broader context of new Indian economic and political unities. At once consolidating power and fragmenting nationalist opposition, the idea of New Delhi was the physical dream of a centralized, self-contained government that would rule India under a close eye.

<sup>31.</sup> Keith, 229.

<sup>32.</sup> Gallagher and Seal, 393.

<sup>33.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 224.

<sup>34.</sup> Quoted in Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 223.

The Imperial Durbar was unique among British institutions in India. As a ceremony taken in name and form from Mughal traditions of imperial assembly, the Durbar gave institutional shape to the British self-image as heirs to the Mughal Empire in rightful dynastic succession. After India came under direct Crown Rule in wake of the 1857 Revolt, the Raj was quick to legitimate its authority over the network of semiautonomous Maharajas. Economic and to a large degree political control over these states had existed under the East India Company, but the establishment of Crown rule allowed this control to be re-established within the formula of imperial rule inherited from the Mughal court. The Durbar was grand show of imperial power and pomp and created an arena where princely states not under direct British control would support and legitimate Crown Rule through the bestowal of knightly orders and titles.35 It can then be seen as an instrument of control and self-image. The Coronation Durbar provided the setting for this exercise of authority and explicitly proclaimed the British as rightful heirs to the Mughal Empire. First held in 1877 for Queen Victoria, the Coronation Durbar continued, according to Curzon, an imperial tradition, "something familiar and even sacred in ... the East," and allowed the British to "step into the shoes of the Great Moghul [and to adopt] some at least of the time honoured features of Indian durbars," The 1902 Durbar facilities were "built and decorated exclusively in the Mogul, or Indo-Saracenic style," the king's identity as an Anglo-Indian emperor made manifest.36

The 1911 Coronation Durbar of King George V was a magnificent affair. Held to honor the King-Emperor's coronation of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, a visit of the reigning British monarch to India was unprecedented.<sup>37</sup> Lord Hardinge, appointed Viceroy in 1910, was determined to outdo his predecessors. The festivities were dazzling – 20,000 troops stood at attention in the great amphitheater which held an audience of over 100,000, erected on the plains to the north of Shah Jahan's Old Delhi. The Royal Pavilion, with a magnificent "Mughal" dome, crowned the twin thrones of the King-Emperor and Queen-Empress [8]. The population of Delhi increased by three-quarters of a million for the spectacle.<sup>38</sup> The most stunning event of the entire Durbar, however, was the King-Emperor's unexpected proclamation:

<sup>35.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 194.

<sup>36.</sup> Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj, 197; Irving, 7.

<sup>37.</sup> Irving, 7.

<sup>38.</sup> Irving, 10.

We are pleased to announce to Our People that on the advice of Our Ministers tendered after consultation with Our Governor-General in Council, We have decided upon the transfer of the seat of the government of India from Calcutta to the ancient capital of Delhi, and, simultaneously and as a consequence of that transfer, the creation at as early a date as possible of a Governorship for the Presidency of Bengal, of a new Lieutenant-Governorship in Council administering the areas of Behar, Chota Magpur, and Orissa, and of a chief Commissionership of Assam, with such administrative changes and redistribution of boundaries as our Secretary of State for India in Council may in due course determine. It is Our earnest desire that these changes may conduce to the better administration of India and the greater prosperity and happiness of Our People.<sup>39</sup>

The announcement came as a shock – called "the best-kept secret in the history of India," the plan had been known to fewer than twelve people in India, and the Viceroy refrained from informing even the heads of the relevant provinces until the evening before the Durbar.<sup>40</sup> Previous Viceroys and members of the government had however discussed shifting the capital to Delhi for more than fifty years. The move fell out of a larger political context of centralized consolidation, incited by the upheaval in Calcutta.

If the Coronation Durbars had legitimated the British as successors to the Mughals, so too did the transfer of the capital to Delhi. After all, Delhi retained strongly imperial connotations. Lord Lytton had selected Delhi over Calcutta for the Durbar of 1877 at which Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India, and subsequent Durbars had sustained that geographic tradition. "Delhi," wrote Hardinge,

is still a name to conjure with. It is intimately associated in the minds of the Hindus with sacred legends which go back even beyond the dawn of history ... To the Mohammedans it would be a source of unbounded gratification to see the ancient capital of the Moguls restored to its proud position as the seat of the Empire.<sup>41</sup>

The act of transferring the capital to Delhi reflected both a stronger centralized consolidation of government and the proclaimed succession of Mughal to British authority. The design of New Delhi, as the planned city came to be known, did so as well.

<sup>39.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 11.

<sup>40.</sup> Irving, 12.

<sup>41.</sup> Irving, 29.

Edwin Landseer Lutyens and Herbert Baker were chosen to be the leading architects of the new city. Although the design of the Secretariats and some government buildings would fall to Baker, it is to Lutyens that the city is generally credited. The debate as to where to situate the new capital on the Delhi plain continued until March of 1913. The ridge to the north of Old Delhi had been the traditional site of Imperial Durbars and had played a significant military role in the Revolt, and thus attracted a certain nostalgia for the Raj.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately rejecting the northern site upon sanitary and military consideration, the city plan took shape around Raisina Hill, to the southwest of Old Delhi and commanding grand views of the surrounding plains. The fortifications of Shahjahanabad were destroyed and replaced with a boulevard, a development plan with long precedents in Europe.<sup>43</sup>

Dotted with the remains of the historic cities of Delhi, the imperial history of India was to be assembled under the gaze of a new acropolis at Raisina [9]. By March 1913 the city plan was finalized, the complex at Raisina Hill terminating the enormous central King's Way [10], a massive tree-lined parkway consciously over twice the width of the Champs-Elysées at 1,200 feet.<sup>44</sup> The city plan purposely linked the new capital with Shah Jahan's Jama Masjid [11] in Old Delhi and with Indraprastha, the earliest settlement uncovered at Delhi founded in the second millennium BCE.<sup>45</sup> Substantially completed by March 1913, the city plan was a reflection in stone and street of the ideology of the Raj.<sup>46</sup> The entire city would lie under the firm gaze of the Viceroy's House:

Almost a dozen imposing axes led toward Raisina Hill, focusing on the Viceroy and the machinery of his rule. That great palatine acropolis bound to itself the broad boulevards as the Viceroy himself gathered the power once dispersed among a multitude of feudal rajas and warrior chieftains.

Union under one Emperor was Britain's gift to the diverse peoples of India. The geometry of the new capital, invariable and relentlessly exclusive, linking in a single pattern many diverse parts, seemed symbolic of the Imperial attempt to impose unity and even uniformity on India's institutions.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42.</sup> Irving, 63.

<sup>43.</sup> Ali Ahmed, Historical Aspects of Town Planning in Pakistan and India (Karachi: al-Ata Foundation, 1972), 66.

<sup>44.</sup> Ahmed, 65

<sup>45.</sup> Andreas Volwahsen, Imperial Delhi: the British capital of the Indian empire (New York: Prestel, 2002), 216; Irving 2.

<sup>46.</sup> Volwahsen, 68.

<sup>47.</sup> Irving, 90.

The new capital, as it crystallized first in city plans and then in stone on the Delhi plains, became more than a testament to the power and durability of Imperial rule. New Delhi became the spatial expression of the Raj itself, given physical form in its layout and operation. The grand machinery of empire, fiercely ordered and dutifully oiled, was laid out in hexagon and rectangle radiating from the lofty authority enthroned at Raisina Hill. As the hand of the Viceroy claimed all of India, so too would the dome of the Viceroy's House.

British rule in India had always been highly segregated. The typical colonial city in India consisted of two major parts: the indigenous city and the Western or "European settlement."<sup>48</sup> The European settlement was generally composed of "large residential plots containing spacious, one-storey houses, broad, tree-lined roads, low residential density, and the generous provision of amenities."<sup>49</sup> The indigenous city, preexisting or not, typically had by contrast "high residential density, or modified traditional housing, and … very low levels of amenity."<sup>50</sup> The colonial settlement was further divided into civil station and cantonment. The civil station, occupied by members of the local bureaucracy and representative colonial business interests, was spatially distinct from the cantonment, which housed the army.<sup>51</sup> Delhi was so divided, as the old city of Shahjahanabad was densely populated and built, in contrast to the Army Lines to the north and highly composed and isolated New Delhi rising to the south [12].

As a colonial city New Delhi reflected not only the ideology of empire but gave physical form to the bureaucracy of the Raj. A "Warrant of Precedence," laying down the official hierarchy of government roles, served to define the exact social and political standing of each member of the government.<sup>52</sup> The list was exacting and rigid and culminated in the office of Viceroy. This highly articulated hierarchy found clear spatial expression in New Delhi, as different areas of the city were allotted to specific bureaucratic groups, carefully arranged in alignment and proximity to the culminating head at Raisina.<sup>53</sup> Official residences within the city were highly choreographed, with sectors each for Members of Council, gazetted officers, Indian clerks, and Indian princes, among

<sup>48.</sup> Anthony King, Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1976): 33.

<sup>49.</sup> King, 33.

<sup>50.</sup> King, 33.

<sup>51.</sup> King, 38.

<sup>52.</sup> King, 241.

<sup>53.</sup> King, 244.

other divisions [13]. Within each of these sectors hierarchies of importance were further given spatial form by the size and location of individual residences, and by proximity to the Viceroy's House.<sup>54</sup> The nature of the bureaucratic relationship between any class of civil servant and the Viceroy could immediately be read in the city plan.

As New Delhi was assembled along these ideological lines, so too was the aesthetic question of the Viceroy's House. The style of the city was heavily discussed and highly political. The debate was one of precedent: should the new capital be primarily Western, or was it to incorporate Oriental elements? British colonial architecture had evolved from the imposition of classicism to the synthesis of Indo-Saracenic as the self-image of the Raj had shifted from foreign to domestic rule. Both Viceroy Hardinge and King George V made it abundantly clear that to place a purely Western town on the Delhi plain would be a "grave political blunder." <sup>55</sup> By the summer of 1912, the debate in Britain and British India had settled on a compromise: "Western architecture with an Oriental motif." <sup>56</sup>

Edwin Landseer Lutyens [14] was a fiercely aesthetic architect. Born in 1869 and virtually self-educated, Lutyens had grown famous for his very successful manor houses in the English countryside. New Delhi was his largest and first overtly political commission. His early picturesque work became increasingly governed by classical discipline, and by 1903 he had converted wholeheartedly to Palladianism:

In architecture Palladio is the game!! It is so big few appreciate it now & it requires considerable training to value & realize it. ...

To the average man it is dry bones but under the mind of a Wren it glows & the stiff material becomes as plaster clay.<sup>57</sup>

Having arrived in Delhi in 1912, he and the planning commission toured around India at Hardinge's insistence to visit famous architectural sites. As a staunch classicist and strongly imbued with a deep Orientalist bias, Lutyens decried native Indian architecture, writing:

Personally I do not believe there is any real Indian architecture or any great tradition. They are just spurts by various mushroom dynasties with as much intellect in them as any other art nouveau.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54.</sup> King, 245.

<sup>55.</sup> Hardinge quoted in Irving, 102.

<sup>56.</sup> Irving, 102.

<sup>57.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 167.

<sup>58.</sup> Edwin Lutyens, letter to Lady Emily Lutyens dated June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1912, in Clayre Percy and Jane Ridley, *The Letters of Edwin Lutyens to his wife Lady Emily* (London: Collins, 1985), 251.

Lutyens thought Mughal architecture cumbersome and poorly constructed. He could appreciate some of the detail, but reduced the Mughal tradition to a formula in a letter to Baker:

Build a vasty mass of rough concrete, elephant-wise on a very simple rectangular-cum-octagon plan, dome in space anyhow. Cut off square. Overlay with a veneer of stone patterns, like laying a vertical tile floor, & get Italians to help you. Inlay jewels & cornelians if you can afford it, & rob someone if you can't.

And then on top of the mass, put on 3 turnips in concrete & overlay with stone or marble as before. Be very careful not to bond anything in, & don't care a damn if it all comes to pieces.<sup>59</sup>

#### Hindu architecture deserved even less admiration:

Set square stones & build childwise ... before you erect, carve every stone differently & independently, with lace patterns & terrifying shapes. On the top, build over trabeated pendentives an onion.<sup>60</sup>

His preference was to "build as an Englishman dressed for the climate," within the Western classical tradition but adapted to specific Indian context.<sup>61</sup> Hindu and Mughal architecture might provide inspiration and motifs, but should be applied within a Western classical geometry. Indian motifs were perfectly acceptable as ornament, but could not be allowed to seize control of the overall geometric system as in the Indo-Saracenic conception. Seeing Hindu architecture as "jumbled" and Mughal architecture as surface, neither could appropriately measure up to Lutyens' sense of classicism as expressing pure, simple volumes and grand massing.<sup>62</sup> British imperial architecture, in Lutyens' eyes, might be by necessity a joining of East and West but must remain essentially Palladian. Addressing the issue of hybridity, especially in light of Indo-Saracenic precedents such as the recently completed Gateway of India in Bombay, Lutyens acknowledged that the question of style at New Delhi was

... a question of high politics and not one of taste. My position will be easier and I with a free hand might bend but then it must be put on record that we English in giving the Indians our civilisation withdrew our great art traditions for reasons political.... Clarke in Bombay is on the same tack – a mixture to please all parties.

<sup>59.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 101.

<sup>60.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 101.

<sup>61.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 167.

<sup>62.</sup> Irving, 101.

If they would only build well and consider the climate and conditions and realise that these are the paramount objects to aim for and not treat architecture as a mere wall paper it would be easier.

So I suppose I shall have a bit of a fight and for the rest it is just wait and see. I cannot allow the supremacy of the Eastern over the Western mind. The Chinaman is an exception perhaps, but the Hindus and the Moguls are mere children at the game. <sup>63</sup>

Although highly aware of the politics at play, Lutyens consistently campaigned for the scale and detailing of the Viceroy's House in terms of stylistic integrity.

In 1916 it became apparent that the gradient leading to the Raisina acropolis would obscure a full view of the Viceroy's House from the Great Place to the south and thus wreck the culminating visual effect of the entire city [15]. Cursing himself for the oversight and wholly blaming Baker for creating the steep gradient between the twin Secretariats, Lutyens campaigned in vain to reverse the decision. The cost and ensuing difficulty of recutting the gradient was prohibitive. Lutyens grudgingly admitted defeat and, furious with Baker, refused even to speak with him for five further years. Only in 1926 did the two architects re-establish their relationship, and even then distantly. Calling the defeat his Bakerloo, Lutyens in the battle over the gradient fought for aesthetic perfection over economic or pragmatic considerations.

Lutyens was then fiercely concerned with stylistic over political concerns and by all accounts dismissive of Hindu and Muslim architecture. And yet the Viceroy's House presents a fairly elegant synthesis of Western classicism and Eastern elements. The Viceroy's House was to incorporate the "nobler features" of Southern European classicism and Indian architecture: the dome, the colonnade and the arcade, the deep portal arch or *pishtaq*, the open court of audience, and formal site planning in a grand manner. To discuss whether the inclusion of Indian elements was Lutyens' concession to the brief or revealed an unspoken admiration for specific Indian architectural forms is to discuss Lutyens' intent; we are more concerned with the finished product.

<sup>63.</sup> Edwin Lutyens, letter to Lady Emily Lutyens dated December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1912, in Percy and Ridley, 271.

<sup>64.</sup> Irving, 156-157.

<sup>65.</sup> Irving, 159.

<sup>66.</sup> Irving, 105.

The spine of New Delhi, the enormous axis of King's Way, proceeding north under the gaze of an enshrined statue of George V is terminated by the east front of the Viceroy's House [16,17]. This magnificent face presents itself to the Raisina acropolis, its floating central dome supported by a staunchly marching colonnade. The culmination of the grand composition of New Delhi, Lutyens here has expressed the identity of the entire city. The facade presents a masterful manipulation of solid and void. Contrasting massive load-bearing walls with deeply recessed loggias, Lutyens has worked subtle variations in his geometry to throw the entire composition in tension. Supported by an enormous and almost continuous colonnade, the jutting brow of a deeply overhanging *chujja* in turn supports the central dome, rising 166 feet above the court below. Punctuated with *chattris* and fountains, the east face of the Viceroy's House integrates East and West as a self-conscious expression of British-Indian identity.

The classical colonnade has a long history of authoritative connotations. Stretching in the British architectural imagination from Greek and Roman antiquity, classicism passed from Vitruvius to Palladio to Inigo Jones to Christopher Wren, finding root in its cumulative expression in England. Classical geometry and the classical orders were unquestionably appropriate for such a grand edifice. Yet the giant dodecastyle colonnade at the east front of the Viceroy's House is composed not of the Corinthian order which graces Baker's Secretariats but a novel Delhi Order [18] designed by Lutyens. While clearly retaining classical allusion, the innovative capital proclaimed an eternity of rule unique to the Raj and potentially reflected a synthetic identity. Lutyens never explained the derivation of his capital design, but Robert Byron claimed in his 1931 inaugural article that it ultimately derived from the acanthus leaf of the Corinthian order.<sup>67</sup> Other authors have interpreted the design as derived from Asokan capitals of the third century BCE, and capitals at a fifteenth century Jain temple at Moodbidri. 68 Parallels with the lotus leaf capitals of Aśokan edict pillars [19] seem fairly clear as well: Lutyens had encountered both Jain and Asokan precedents on his architectural tours and Gupta victory column with similar lotus capital stood in the Qutb Mosque complex in the Delhi region [20]. Victory pillars were recognized as strong symbols of imperial authority by both Mughal and British rulers, and the popular conception of Asokan as promulgating a written law was symbolically appropriate as well. There is no textual evi-

<sup>67.</sup> Irving, 178; Robert Byron, "New Delhi," Architectural Review 69 (January 1931): 26.

<sup>68.</sup> Aman Nath, Dome Over India: Rashtrapati Bhavan (Mumbai: India Book House, 2002), 62.

dence as to whether these associations were intended, but of all Indian architecture that of the earliest period could be most admired in British thought because of its associations with Alexandrine Greece.

The chattri, literally canopy, is an architectural form prevalent in pre-Mughal architecture and was originally used to mark the cremation site of wealthy or significant individuals. It gained strong imperial connotations during the Mughal period, as illustrated by the 16th century Diwan-i-Khas at Fatehpur Sikri as well as at Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, near Agra [21]. "Chattris," Lutyens wrote on an ink sketch of 1913, "are stupid useless things."69 Nonetheless pared-down chattris break up the roofline of the Viceroy's House, framing the central dome and extended wings. The dramatic downswept cornice, or chujja in British transliteration [22], juts eight feet from the wall face and reduces solar heating on the Dholpur sandstone below. Another common feature in Mughal buildings, the chādya is found in Indo-Aryan temples as early as the eleventh century and had been extensively used in Mughal imperial architecture as well [23].70 Incorporating such Mughal features under the rubric of classical massing and geometry, Lutyens created a synthesis of British and Mughal traditions, drawing on two architectural histories to produce a reflection of imperial ideology.

Commanding the entire facade, the central mass of the dome [24] rises from the roofline supported by four sandstone turrets reminiscent of the Red Fort in nearby Shahjahanabad [25]. Above, a sharply incised chādya runs around the drum and turreted extrusions, covering a recessed void evenly punctuated by masonry supports. Above this void floats a great circular railing in white sandstone, incised like that of the great Stupa at Sanchi [26], in Lutyens' words "one of those wonderful Aśokan rails which I admire most of all in India's work. ... The shrine itself is a restoration built by the British." The dome proper rises Stupalike above this railing, topped by a flagpole flying the Viceregal Standard. Even as it expressed the "very essence of art for empire's sake," the massive dome referenced Indian monuments of imperial and religious authority. Like the rest of the House it presented a synthesis, however uneven, of East and West.

<sup>69.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 174.

<sup>70.</sup> Irving, 175.

<sup>71.</sup> Quoted in Nath, 54.

<sup>72.</sup> Irving, 186. Irving argues the dome as a pure expression of empire.

These Indian elements can be seen as reflecting British Orientalist constructions of the major periods of Indian history. Oldest and most venerable by way of association with the Greeks was the Buddhist period, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE to around the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. Next came the Hindu period, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century until the 12<sup>th</sup>. The capture of Delhi by Qutb al-Din Aibak, governor to an Afghani Sultan of the Ghurid dynasty, marked the beginning of the Islamic period. Culminating in the Mughal empire, this last period had ended with the conquest of India by the British themselves.

The Buddhist railing around the dome can be taken as a reference to the ancient past of India, when her peoples had just begun to stagnate but were sustained through contact with the Greeks. Hindu architecture, of which Lutyens was at best dismissive, has little overt representation in the Viceroy's House. Many of the Indian elements are lifted from the Mughal period, at once establishing a continuity and exhibiting the Orientalist view that Mohammedans, though inherently inferior to Europeans, deserved at least credit as a significant military enemy. In addition to proclaiming the Raj as heirs to the Mughal throne, the architecture of the Viceroy's House symbolically encapsulated all the best of Orientalist Indian history, and merged it into a frame mostly Western.

### THE GREAT WAR

From the late nineteenth century India had functioned as an "English barrack in the Oriental Seas," as Lord Salisbury expressed in 1882.<sup>73</sup> India was a permanent strategic reserve; its army of some quarter million was justified in the language of domestic security but in reality trained for international field deployment. Upon the royal declaration of war of August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914, the Government of India became immediately involved in the Great War. Doctrine adopted in 1913 stipulated that India must provide for defense against local aggression or any attack on its territory but was not required to maintain troops to be deployed outside an Indian theatre.<sup>74</sup> Wide support for Britain from the princes, provinces, and the Indian Government however meant that at the outset of hostilities some 800,000 combatants and 400,000 noncombatants stood ready to serve alongside the 80,000 British and 230,000 Indian troops in the British Indian Army already stationed on the subcontinent.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73.</sup> Kieth Jeffery, "An English Barracks in the Oriental Seas? India in the Aftermath of the First World War," *Modern Asian Studies* 15 (1981): 369.

<sup>74.</sup> Keith, 240.

<sup>75.</sup> Keith, 240.

By the middle of the war this loyalty had turned to disillusionment, and reconciliatory efforts by the Viceroy and his Council towards increasingly frustrated Indian opinion were unsatisfactory. The issue lay with severe mismanagement of the army and came to a head over what was widely viewed as inadequate support by the government for the Indian expeditionary force which led to its disastrous defeat in Mesopotamia in April of 1917. An almost complete breakdown of support services by the government was to blame. The Report of the Mesopotamian Commission, published in July of 1917, scathingly attacked those responsible, highlighting the administrative discrepancy of an army provided by India following exclusively the military policy of London. The Report provoked a response from the Raj. Against a background of growing nationalisms, most strongly Annie Besant's "Home Rule" campaign, the British government on August 20th 1917 declared:

The policy of His Majesty's government, with which the government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. They have decided that substantial steps in this direction should be taken as soon as possible.<sup>78</sup>

The term "responsible government" was widely understood to mean Dominion status within the empire.<sup>79</sup> The ensuing report, compiled by the Viceroy and the Liberal statesman Edwin Montagu, laid out an infrastructure of self-government and constitutional change.<sup>80</sup>

The Government of India Act of 1919, stemming from the Montagu-Chelmsford report, established the principle of dyarchy, which essentially entailed a split of government along national and local lines. It stipulated as well a Legislative Assembly, an upper house of notables, and a Chamber of Princes at New Delhi.<sup>81</sup> Local self-government was extended, but New Delhi remained responsible only to London. Local governments, moreover, were given control in only a specific set of legislative arenas, mostly concerning domestic administration.<sup>82</sup> Most significantly, the government of India kept defense, national taxes,

<sup>76.</sup> Hugh Tinker, "India in the First World War and After," Journal of Contemporary History 3, no. 4 (1968): 89.

<sup>77.</sup> Tinker, 89; Jeffery, 375.

<sup>78.</sup> Tinker, 90.

<sup>79.</sup> Keith, 243.

<sup>80.</sup> Jeffery, 90.

<sup>81.</sup> Irving, 295.

<sup>82.</sup> Keith, 253-254.

and criminal law under its direct control.<sup>83</sup> By creating such a divide between central and local politics, the government again sought to fragment Indian politics on the provincial level.<sup>84</sup> This divide shows that these reforms were actually more reconciliatory than progressive. The British attitude toward India remained very much paternal; the Indian people might be "intellectually agile, they might individually possess great talents and abilities, but as a community they were morally unfit for self-government."<sup>85</sup> The Government of India Act of 1919, whether benevolent or malicious, worked well within this ideology of patronage. The British Government wished 'responsible government' in India, but this was a gradual and perhaps infinitely distant goal. India would possibly, in the distant and uncertain future, become autonomous but needed Britain's paternal hand to guide her toward even that limited freedom. Such a compromise was unacceptable to the newly energized nationalist movement.

The greatest consequence of the war was a loss of confidence in the Empire, both in Britain and India. London was now committed to establishing some sort of autonomous government at New Delhi. The loyalty by which India had given 60,000 of her own had been tempered by the continued policy of divide-and-rule implicit in the Act of 1919. Massive debt which followed the war led to increased taxation, and then a steep currency inflation. Poor crops and a series of epidemics killed over six million people across India in the space of five months of 1918; the following year brought severe droughts. In reaction to increased revolutionary activity, the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act – usually called the Rowlatt Act – was brought into force in March 1919 and granted sweeping provisions of arrest and trial to the government. Best of confidence in the Empire of the Empire o

Into this atmosphere had Gandhi returned from South Africa and impelled the growing nationalist movement to nonviolent noncooperation. In light of the recent tragedy partially caused by the government's economic policy, he declared April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1919, a day of mourning and called general strikes and boycotts. At Amritsar, Brigadier-General Dyer ordered one such crowd to disperse. When they did not, he "fired and

<sup>83.</sup> Keith, 263-264.

<sup>84.</sup> John Gallagher and Anil Seal, "Britain and India between the Wars," Modern Asian Studies 15 (1981): 395.

<sup>85.</sup> Metcalf, The Aftermath of Revolt, 324.

<sup>86.</sup> Irving, 258.

<sup>87.</sup> Ram Gopal, How India Struggled for Freedom: a Political History (Mumbai: Book Centre, 1967): 297.

<sup>88.</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru (New York: The John Day Company, 1941), 47.

continued to fire." Official figures counted 379 dead and 1200 wounded. The figures of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre are disputed, but its impact is not. It laid bare the cruelty of the Raj, and the lack of ensuing furor from Delhi or London betrayed its barbarity. The Indian National Congress held session in Amritsar in late 1919, and turned largely to Gandhi for guidance, marking the beginnings of the end of British India. The atmosphere in India was in 1919 drastically different than it had been in 1911. The Raj was no longer so stable as its new capital would suggest. Seemingly unperturbed by the increasing economic and political unrest, the Viceroy's House slowly rose on the plains of Delhi [27,28].

#### A SHIFT IN VALUE

On July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1926, Herbert Baker gave a report on the New Delhi to the Royal Institute of British Architects. Citing the battle over securing the ultimate location of the city plan, he noted:

The battle of science and of faith in the future of the new Capital against association and sentiment, and of a clean against a rather dirty architectural slate raged for some time, as in the longdrawn wars of the Mahabharata between Hastinapur and Indraprastha. But as in that Homeric contest Indraprastha won. For now the great central vista of New Delhi faces Indrapat, the reputed Indraprastha of the first legendary city of Delhi. 91

The creation of New Delhi, in Baker's view, was an epic undertaking, the final resolution of the Raisina site appropriate with its history as an ancient seat of power. New Delhi existed in the scope not of decades but millennia, and was to be a testament to the Western brilliance of scientific rationalism to future generations. Yet in the same report Baker discussed the Council House, stipulated by the Government of India act of 1919. "The criticism," he remarked,

that the Legislative Buildings are placed in a position of inferiority to that of the Secretariats on the Acropolis may have some justification. This building was ... conceived after the foundations and basements of the Secretariat were born.<sup>92</sup>

As an afterthought in the scheme of New Delhi, the Council house [29] stood below and to the northeast of the Secretariats, disrupting the perfect symmetry of the Raisina acropolis [30].

<sup>89.</sup> Tinker, 93.

<sup>90.</sup> Nehru, Toward Freedom, 51.

<sup>91.</sup> Sir Herbert Baker "The New Delhi," Journal of the Royal Society of Arts 74 (1926): 773.

<sup>92.</sup> Baker, 780.

New Delhi was officially inaugurated in February of 1931.93 Lasting a fortnight, the festivities included countless banquets, receptions, investiture ceremonies, and the unveiling of the four Dominion columns between Baker's Secretariats [31].94 By the end of 1931 the British Empire had become the British Commonwealth. Passed that December, the Statute of Westminster established that the legislation of any Dominion in conflict with imperial legislation could no longer be declared invalid.95 This effectively granted any Dominion within the Commonwealth the right to secede upon revision of its constitution. With this reform the Crown quickly became silent on the issue of Dominion status in India.96 Churchill could "not forsee in any reasonable time within which India could have the same constitutional freedom as Canada," and that the Dominion status as promised to India ten or fifteen years ago did not imply "Dominion structure or Dominion rights," This discrepancy revealed a larger contradiction which was not unnoticed in Britain. Robert Byron, writing in Country Life the first of a series of articles celebrating the new capital, exclaimed:

Its architecture combines the grandeur of Bernini and the subtlety of Palladio with the colour, shade, and water of Mohammedan Asia. Its maker is Sir Edwin Lutyens, whom posterity will celebrate as the last of the humanists, and as an artist who expressed, in his medium, the splendour of a political idea.

... Thus was the fusion [of Hindu and Mughal style], so earnestly desired by political sentimentalists, accomplished. It was a fusion, not of historical reminiscences, but of two schools of architectural thought. The outcome of it is monumental. Never was so large, so well planned, so arrogant, yet so lovely a palace – so fit a setting for the man who, if power be measured by the number of those subject to it, is the most powerful man that breathes. Beside these intrinsic qualities, the house exhales an external, conscious monumentality.... But the climax, the shout of the imperial suggestion, is the dome, reared blind and sudden from the middle of the house. From a white drum, incised like the Buddhist railings of Sanchi, rises a copper hemisphere on a band of red and white.... This dome is an offence against democracy, a slap in the face of the modern average-man, with his secondhand ideals, and an artistic achievement whose precedent must be sought among the empires of Antiquity.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>93.</sup> Irving, 341.

<sup>94.</sup> Irving, 341-342.

<sup>95.</sup> Keith, 464.

<sup>96.</sup> Keith, 472.

<sup>97.</sup> Keith, 469.

<sup>98.</sup> Robert Byron, "New Delhi, I...," 708-710.

That New Delhi was built with an eye towards eternity is no secret, and the Viceroy's House sat, as we have seen, as the architectural culmination of the city dominating all from the Raisina Acropolis [32,33,34].<sup>99</sup> But Byron, writing in 1931, already recognized that such imperial architecture was anachronistic.

The Viceroy's House was decidedly British but distinctly Indian, the expression of the Anglo-Indian self-image of the Raj. But the idea of British architecture was not itself cohesive and yielded no architectural form as clear as that of the East, which had been encapsulated and understood through Orientalist histories. The imperial shout of the Viceroy's House required self-referential support by the many versions of the Royal Coat of Arms scattered throughout the building and the Britannic lions lining the grand Viceregal Forecourt [35]. Even as it was completed was the Viceroy's House outdated, an unsustainable expression of an Empire which was quickly dissolving.

#### BRITISH PERFORMATIVE SPACE

The Viceroy's House, designed largely as the culmination of nine-teenth century ideologies of empire, procedure, and habitation found itself, after the First World War, situated in a new ideological context. The splendid dream of empire, expressed at its fullest in "so large, so well planned, so arrogant, yet so lovely a palace" confidently perched on Raisina Hill, rang more hollow in the wake of social and political unrest. If this contradiction was felt at large it was hardly expressed in the use and performance of the Viceroy's House during the last years of the Raj. The building hosted a staggeringly complex series of programs; at the eve of independence in 1947 the Viceroy's staff [36] was over two thousand strong, and was comprised of

aides and clerks, soldiers and police, and a veritable army of servants and staff throughout the palace and its grounds, stables, garage, post office, and dispensary. Including families and other dependants, altogether more than six thousand persons had permanent housing in the Viceregal compound at Raisina, and over a thousand more lived at Simla and Calcutta.<sup>101</sup>

The Viceroy's House was at once residence and capitol building, a grand bungalow for the King-Emperor's representative in India. It would be inaccurate to treat the building as one unit – the Viceroy's House is better understood as four or five buildings enclosed in one skin [37]. The

<sup>99.</sup> Irving, 90.

<sup>100.</sup> Ingraham, 208.

<sup>101.</sup> Irving, 227.

most pure functions of state and of domestic life were clearly separated within its walls, but between the grand Durbar Hall and the private domestic wing existed a spectrum of state and semi-state rooms, used for different purposes and different audiences. Ceremonies flowed across this spectrum of state—semi-state—semi-private—private, unified through Lutyens' careful geometry and circulation paths.

The entire palace is organized around the Durbar Hall. Sited in the geometric center of the building and the direct culmination of the ceremonial axis of King's Way, its effect permeates every detail of the plan. The domed chamber provided a space in which the Viceroy would symbolically hold perpetual Durbar, receiving tribute and bestowing titles. All the ceremony and symbolism of the 1911 Coronation Durbar was referenced, in both name and function. Investiture ceremonies akin to those at the Coronation Durbar were here carried out as well. In this grandly impressive space, the Viceroy could hold audience with princes and notable dignitaries under the indubitable auspices of imperial rule.

Modelled most clearly on the Pantheon in Rome rebuilt by the Emperor Hadrian, the Durbar Hall [38] is seventy-two feet in diameter, its bare plastered domical ceiling rising seventy-nine feet above an inlaid marble floor. The continual cornice is only slightly interrupted as it steps back into slight niches in the four massive piers which frame four apsidal exedrae, each topped by a half-dome incised as is the ceiling of the Pantheon. Above all soars the undecorated dome, half the size of that in Rome but seemingly more vast. As at Hadrian's temple a central oculus allows the sunlight to penetrate the Hall, flooding it in a warm glow. Within this strongly symbolic allusion to the Roman Empire sat the twin thrones of Viceroy and Vicereine, capped by two lions and a crown each, themselves set in front of a monumental royal seal [39].<sup>102</sup> The imperial symbolism could not be clearer; the uninterrupted gaze of the enthroned Viceroy could, if the grand bronze doors were opened, pass over all of New Delhi and capture ancient Indraprastha at the other terminus of King's Way.

And yet interspersed with these overwhelming allusions to imperial Rome are set some hybrid elements. Although somewhat incidental to the dramatic architecture of classicism, the attic level above the cornice is pierced with carved stone screens, or *jaalis*, an architectural form employed extensively in Mughal imperial architecture. The four pairs of columns framing the exedrae are crowned with Lutyens' Delhi Order, itself a novel synthetic form. This most rigidly classical space in

102. Irving, 191.

the Viceroy's House was not immune to the hybrid fastening of East to West. The Durbar Hall functioned purely as a state room. Exceedingly formal and grandiose, its presence can be felt throughout the House but it is possible to avoid completely by circumambulating through a series of vestibules.

The Viceroy's House was fundamentally both a formal stage for imperial ceremony and a comfortable manor house. There were

rooms for a steward, a housekeeper, valets, and a barber, and workshops for three tailors, tinsmiths, a mason and stone-cutter, a blacksmith, a painter, a carpenter and electricians. Multiple godowns provided storage for tents and camp equipment, coal and wood, furniture, boxes, stationary, linen, china and glass, and carpets. Scattered throughout this Lower Basement were a still room, a bakery, a pastry room, a pot scullery, kitchens and kitchen stores and larders, wine and beer cellars, refrigerating and icemaking rooms, a boiler-house, a European servants' hall, a cinema theater, and the Viceroy's Press, where sixty men produced a never-ending torrent of invitations, menus, seating plans, and minutely detailed programs of Viceregal tours and events.<sup>103</sup>

The Viceroy's House was in itself almost a functioning city, housing within its walls all the ceremonial mechanics of state. The southwest wing contained the distinctly private Viceregal suite, but between this wing and the central Durbar Hall wide range of functions were layered across the plan and tied together by carefully arranged circulation paths.

To the west of the grand ceremonial staircase directly behind the Durbar Hall, the West Garden Loggia overlooking the gardens ties together the State Dining Room and the State Ballroom. The State Dining Room, the setting for grand Viceregal banquets, was lined with an impressive gallery of portraits depicting previous Governors-General and Viceroys. The splendour of State Dinners became a living continuation of British authority in India. The State Ballroom [40] presented no such overt symbolic allusion but splendidly exhibited British luxury and culture. Purposed for ceremonies and events of state as significant as investitures, the State Dining Room and Ballroom flank the West Garden Loggia along the central western facade of the House and overlook the extensive gardens of the Viceregal estate.

The gardens [43] functioned as a semi-state arena, both a private retreat from the demands of office and an entertaining arena more informal and expansive than the numerous loggias or State Ballroom.

<sup>103.</sup> Irving, 214.

Designed in a wildly rigid system of interlocking squares cut by paths and wide channels of water interspersed with fountains [41], Lutyens drew almost exclusively on the Mughal tradition for the Viceregal garden, but their current name, the Mughal Gardens, was not formally used by him. 104 Imported from Central Asia by Babur, resplendent examples of Mughal gardens are to be found across India. The char bagh quadrilateral layout is sublimely expressed at the Taj Mahal in Agra and at nearby Humayun's Tomb to the southeast of New Delhi. Originally drawing on Qur'anic depictions of paradise, the char bagh layout had obvious connotations of Mughal authority. Extending westward from Lutyens' western facade, the Viceregal gardens can be properly seen as an extension of the House. The north and south retaining walls grow out of the northeastern and southeastern wings, passing a twin row of tennis courts to ultimately frame the Round Pool Garden [42]. A secluded haven, the quiet pool surrounded by a high orchard wall ensured peace and respite from the requirements of office. "Here," writes Robert Grant Irving,

the Viceroy would retreat with his wife from a world increasingly alien and uncertain and take afternoon tea and savor the last hour of sun and its magic afterglow. Then a gray haze would steal over the gardens, and on the Ridge, jackals would cry at the moon. The fragrance of roses and mignonettes perfumed the air, and, to Lutyens' delight, the fountains formed lunar rainbows. Small wonder that Indians called the garden "God's own heaven," and one Viceroy pronounced it "a paradise." 105

Blending the Qur'anic paradise of Mughal garden planning and elements of traditional English landscaping, the garden created a haven of hybrid identity, safely secluded from its inherent contradictions. As a state arena or as a private retreat, the garden expressed a specific Anglo-Indian identity, hybrid but safely self-contained and at all times under Viceregal control.

The garden, like the rest of the house and New Delhi as a whole, blended British and Indian forms. Reflecting an image of the Raj as Anglo-Indian, this synthesis was not simply stylistic but included hybrid ceremonies and hybrid historical references. The Viceroy's House illustrates such a synthesis through style and behaviors, but as its architecture is based on a Western frame so too was this synthesis carried out under auspices highly European. Self-confident and superior, the Viceroy's House like the Raj may have been a synthesis of East and West, but it was an unquestionably controlled synthesis.

<sup>104.</sup> Nath, 113.

<sup>105.</sup> Irving, 226.

As strongly as it proclaimed the authority of the Raj, the Viceroy's House was not symbolically stable. The inconsistencies of imperial ideology were not resolved by its ultimate architectural expression. Forged of contradiction and uneasy synthesis, the idea of empire proved increasingly untenable. As the Raj, shifting and faltering in the wake of the First World War, drew to a close, the Viceroy's House as a political symbol shifted and faltered with it.

New Delhi was immaculately planned but not so rigid as to be only the calcified expression of an oppressive empire. For if the Viceroy's House had been so rigid a symbol it would have resisted translation. And yet it was reconfigured. The monumental head of an independent India housed not the grandeur of Imperial Viceroys but the humble progeny of nonviolence. The Raj faded from view as India arose and the Viceroy's House, the grandest relic of the Raj, would rise with it as Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Curious how each person judges of the other race, not from the individual with whom he has had contact, but from others about whom he knows very little or nothing at all.

Jawaharlal Nehru

By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people, and, if I could secure it at the hands of the English, I should bow down my head to them. If any Englishman dedicated his life to securing the freedom of India, resisting tyranny and serving the land, I should welcome that Englishman as an Indian.

Mahatma Gandhi

Mr. Nehru, I want you to regard me not as the last Viceroy winding up the British Raj, but as the first to lead the way to the new India.

Louis Mountbatten

# Nationalist Threads

narratives of independence

ISTORY, AS A RULE, DOES NOT have the luxury of being objective. The story of the Viceroy's House and the construction of New Delhi is told largely from a British perspective. This is largely unavoidable – New Delhi was so thoroughly an imperial venture as to preclude any substantial alternate narrative. The Viceroy's House was designed and constructed as the culminating capstone to its city and as a functioning monument to British imperial authority. And yet as that monument it represented the empire for only sixteen years. A new generation was rising, and India was preparing to fulfil her tryst with destiny. If in the last chapter we were concerned with the creation of New Delhi as a British imperial project, here we will concern ourselves with the rising threads of nationalism.

The Indian independence movement was never as cohesive and unitary as superficial histories of the Indian National Congress would have it portrayed. And yet the Congress assumed control of the independence movement and ultimately gained political power. The British first conferred Dominion status on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947 and then bore witness to the creation of the Republic of India on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1950. Yet neither the end of British power on the subcontinent nor the founding of the Republic of India are such discrete events. The transfer of political power, in postcolonial countries generally and India especially, is never so convenient as a date. The roots of the newly powerful Congress Party extend deeply into a tangled web of nationalist threads, and the formation of national identity has much to do with how its leadership negotiated their mediation.

If we are concerned with Rashtrapati Bhavan as a symbolic object in the aftermath of independence, we must explore the ideology and formation of the organization which occupied and claimed it. Because of this specific architectural scope, the question of Indian nationalism is only of concern to us here as regards the formation, organization, and ideology of the Indian National Congress, which became in 1950 the Congress Party and assumed control of the government. The traumatic partition of British India into the Dominions of India and Pakistan [44] deeply impacted the immediate postcolonial history of New Delhi.

As we are concerned with India, not Pakistan, we must limit our discussion of this devastating partition to an Indian perspective, and more specifically the perspective of Congress. In exploring the ideological dynamics of the emergent nation, we are somewhat forced to simplify the nuanced and divergent images of India which informed a multiplicity of nationalist movements. We are concerned with drawing out clear sets of ideas and strategies held by leading members of Congress which inform the shape of subsequent occupation of Rashtrapati Bhavan. We will take certain leaders of the Congress Party - primarily Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru but also Vallabhbhai Patel, Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari, and Dr. Rajendra Prasad - as embodying different but allied ideologies, whose synthesis informs a symbolic appropriation of New Delhi. This method is necessarily somewhat limited. On one level the beliefs of individuals, even national leaders, do not necessarily inform larger questions of national identity. Elites did however have an immediate impact on interpretations of the Viceroy's House, and later upon alterations and occupation of Government House as it became Rashtrapati Bhavan. We may not claim a full account of Indian identity in relation to this building through these individuals' ideologies, but we may ascribe to them authorship in certain physical and symbolic changes.

## 1938-1947: THE FINAL CAMPAIGN

AHATMA GANDHI AND JAWAHARLAL NEHRU [45, 46], the two strongest leaders of the independence movement, operated under distinct ideologies which though largely congruent offered different visions of an independent nation of India. If their *cultural* and *civic* nationalisms were not the only ideological forces at play, they were the most significant in relation to Rashtrapati Bhavan. As the major dissonances of these two modes implicated the institutional framework of government, their ultimate union had direct bearing on interpretations of and behaviors towards the Viceroy's House as it became Government House in 1947.

This ideological synthesis provides a foundation from which to view further changes, interpretations, and occupational behaviors of Rashtrapati Bhavan in the emergent Republic of India. These images of India born out of the struggle for independence became the basis for national identity. Through an exploration of the symbolic history of the Viceroy's House as it became Government House and then Rashtrapati Bhavan, we explore the ideologies and methodologies of Indian nationalism, consolidated in the Indian National Congress as it shouldered the burden of transition, the trauma of partition, and began to define a national identity. The newly independent Republic of India took to the relics of the Raj and the effects which those artifacts produced upon it are implicated in India's emergent national identity, complex and contradictory. The foundation for the contemporary role of Rashtrapati Bhavan lies here, in the formative period where its role in the newly independent national government was solidified.

#### Cultural against Civic Nationalism

The nationalist movement as embodied by Congress embraced two different and somewhat contradictory visions of India. Described most succinctly as cultural nationalism and civic nationalism, these dual ideologies are expressed most clearly by Gandhi and Nehru. Cultural nationalism, embodied by Gandhi's thought and action, immediately concerned the moral dignity of the individual and the strength of cultural and ethnic histories as a national strength. The philosophy of nonviolence appeals most strongly to moral convictions. Gandhi's vision for the future of India grew from his moral philosophy of satyagraha, or nonviolent noncooperation. Swaraj, or freedom from oppression, could only be legitimately attained through "one's rule over one's own mind."2 Everything in Gandhi's political view stemmed from a simple profound faith: humanity over enmity, dignity over spite, and the firm and unwavering belief in the inherent goodness of mankind. He could hate imperialist oppression but never the British themselves. European institutions, not Europeans, were the enemy. "Parliaments," he wrote in 1909,

are really emblems of slavery. If you will sufficiently think over this, you will entertain the same opinion, and cease to blame the English. They rather deserve our sympathy. They are a shrewd nation and I, therefore, believe

I. This ideological distinction runs through histories of independence and is clearly formulated in: Nasir Tyabji, "Less-than-total unities: Patel and the National Movement," in Chandhoke, Neera (ed), Mapping Histories (London: Anthem Press, 2000), 210.

M. K. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and other writings (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 118.

that they will cast off the evil. They are enterprising and industrious, and their mode of thought is not inherently immoral. Neither are they bad at heart. I, therefore, respect them. Civilisation is not an incurable disease, but it should never be forgotten that the English people are at present afflicted by it.<sup>3</sup>

Real victory lay not in political gain but in overcoming the divides that politics and institutions forced upon humanity.

Implicit in this ideology is a specific and radical notion of an Indian nation focused on individual freedom, founded on the unit of the village, rejecting traditional institutions of government, and strictly national in scope. The institutions of Western civilization served to alienate humanity from itself and were as imposed upon India as British rule. Gandhi opposed industrialization, or machine civilization, on the grounds that it was fundamentally exploitative and degraded human life. In his vision of India, there was "no room for machines that would displace human labour and would concentrate power in a few hands. ... I have thought of Singer's sewing machine. But even that is perfunctory. I do not need it to fill in my picture."

His ultimate vision of India was a stateless society based on non-violence and compassion. A sort of enlightened anarchy, such a state depended on two major conditions. First, that in general administration as well as in social reform and reconstruction "it should, as far as possible, use persuasion instead of compulsion, and turn to legislation only as a last resort." Secondly, that it should "adopt the policy of decentralization specially in regard to the village, giving it the maximum amount of local autonomy and interfering as little as possible in its simple, quiet and even life."

Gandhi was not, however, so much of an idealist to absolutely demand a stateless society. He recognized that his vision of India was not immediately feasible, and that a liberal democratic state as traditionally conceived could function as a transitory form of organization on the way to a stateless society.<sup>7</sup>

- 3. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 38.
- Bidyut Chakrabarty, "Jawaharlal Nehru and Planning, 1938-41: India at the Crossroads," Modern Asian Studies 26, no. 2 (May, 1992): 286.
- 5. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 189.
- 6. S. Abid Husain, The Way of Gandhi and Nehru (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1959), 165.
- 7. Husain, 165-166

The village unit, or *panchayat*, was in Gandhi's view the heart of India. The structure of a Western-styled federal government could be conducive to *panchayat raj*, or full local autonomy on the village level, by taking the village unit as a voting unit.<sup>8</sup> Acting as a corporate body, India's government would be structured on a communal, not individual level:

Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world.<sup>9</sup>

The strength of the Indian character had persisted through the ages, and through that strength would India sustain itself in the future. Through that strength as well could India drive out the British. Speaking on the persistence of imperial rule, Gandhi argued that "the sword is entirely useless for holding India. We alone keep them." Opposition to British rule must come, he argued, from an individual level of nonviolent resistance.

Nehru took the moral force of nonviolence as a foundational tool but held a conflicting view on the shape and value of institutions. Taking an international view of India in a modern world, Nehru's civic nationalism focused more closely on the economic identity of the individual, existing parliamentary institutions of government, and an interest in global competition through industrialization.

In 1938, Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose had put large-scale industrial planning on the national agenda through the formation, through Congress, of a National Planning Commission. The Commission was to give overall direction to economic development – Nehru saw economic planning as the only feasible instrument for alleviating the poverty of the Indian masses. Nehru's view of planning did not mean concentrating "on a few industries, and ignoring the other aspects of the problem, including the human aspect," but nonetheless took faith in the potential of Western economic institutions for India. Contrary to Gandhi, he

<sup>8.</sup> Husain, 166

<sup>9.</sup> Gandhi, Hind swaraj, 188-189.

<sup>10.</sup> Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 41.

II. Chakrabarty, 276.

<sup>12.</sup> Quoted in Chakrabarty, 281.

never believed that industrialization itself was evil, but instead the "capitalist structure of society where so many vested interests intervene" in the social equilibrium.<sup>13</sup> "Congress," Nehru maintained,

has thus always been in favour of the industrialization of India and, at the same time, has emphasized the development of cottage industries and worked for this. Is there a conflict between these two approaches? Possibly there is a difference in emphasis, a realization of certain human and economic factors which were overlooked previously in India....

This fact of increasing mass poverty influenced Gandhi powerfully. It is true, I think, that there is a fundamental difference between his outlook on life generally and what might be called the modern outlook. He is not enamoured of ever-increasing standards of living and the growth of luxury at the cost of spiritual and moral values.<sup>14</sup>

Nehru hardly lived in or valued personal luxury, but held the standard of living as a legitimate marker of national progress. He held a modern outlook which took Western economic and political institutions as appropriate for India.

To Gandhi internationalism for India meant to lead by example. His message was not only for India but for the world: "my patriotism," he had said, "includes the good of mankind in general. Therefore, my service of India includes the services of humanity. … The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states, warring against one another but a federation of friendly, inter-dependent states. The consummation of that event may be far off. I want to make no grand claims for our country." As nationalism for Gandhi grew from personal convictions of nonviolence and goodwill, so too must internationalism grow from national convictions founded on that moral force. Gandhi's interdependent federation would eventually and naturally grow out of swaraj.

Nehru was convinced that a free India must operate in an international theater, and that India could not wait for the far-off consummation of inter-dependence which Gandhi proposed. As Nehru saw economic planning as a viable solution to the widespread problem of poverty, so too did he see Western institutions of government as a viable solution to negotiate India's place in international affairs. Laying out his vision of the future of India, Nehru wrote:

<sup>13.</sup> Quoted in Chakrabarty, 283.

<sup>14.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1961), 428.

<sup>15.</sup> Quoted in Nehru, The Discovery of India, 445.

The very first practical question is: What are the essential common bonds which must bind and cement various parts of India if she is to progress and remain free, and which are equally necessary even for the autonomy and cultural growth of those parts. Defence is an obvious and outstanding consideration, and behind that defence lie the industries feeding it, transport and communications, and some measure at least of economic planning. Customs, currency, and exchange also, and the maintenance of the whole of India as an internally free-trade area, for any internal tariff barriers would be fatal barriers to growth. 16

Defence, customs, exchange, and tariffs: modern institutions of state which were fundamental, in Nehru's view, to the continuation of India.

Gandhi's nationalism grew from the level of interpersonal goodwill, his India organized through the panchayat as a stateless society. Considered with his rejection of Western industrialization and capitalism as exploitative, this vision of India may be termed *cultural*. Nehru's nationalism implicated from *civic* institutions, wary of the alienating dangers of industrialization but not rejecting the modern mode wholesale. This schism on the question of institutions would only be uneasily reconciled.

Oppositions and syntheses of these two ideologies, manifest in the political transition to independence, would create a complex image of the Viceroy's House as a space of opposition, artifice, negotiation, and ultimately nationalist appropriation. This image allowed its subsequent occupation as Government House in 1947 and as Rashtrapati Bhavan in 1950, and informed symbolic and physical alterations to the building. Both cultural and civic modes of nationalism drew on a history of India that was largely constructed by the British. In drawing on India's past as a source of national pride, both Gandhi and Nehru inverted the pejorative connotations of this highly Orientalist history but retained some of the assumptions implicit in its structure. Out of this partial continuity of Orientalist modes and the eventual synthesis of cultural and civic nationalisms grew a unique image of the future of India.

# THE LEGACY OF ORIENTALISM

Colonial European histories of India were largely constructed in what Said terms an Orientalist mode, which is founded on two major assumptions. The first, and underlying, is that the Orient exists as a geography apart from the Occident; that is it has a character and history entirely

<sup>16.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 566.

separate from that of Europe and must be studied in a different way. As Western academic disciplines grew up to study the Orient, the image of India came increasingly under the authority of their knowledge. Implicit in this categorization is a cultural typifying, a classification that assumes a unified set of characteristics and values for the entire geographical area and by extension the cultures contained within it. These assumptions at times stemmed from climatic and geographical characteristics and at times from pure myth rather than from observed traits of society.<sup>17</sup> The inhabitants of India, for example, were passive, unchanging, and subject to a series of invasions because the bright unyielding climate induced in them a sort of lethargy.<sup>18</sup> Standing in contrast was the "hardy European," who, springing from a cold climate, was more naturally fit to dominate and progress. The dominance of European - in this case British - culture over Indian society became a natural event, explained by scientific observation. Here, most explicitly, is the justification for empire by objective rationalism. Because Western society was naturally superior, it was scientifically justified in subjugating (or, more philanthropically, elevating) Eastern cultures.<sup>19</sup> This sort of reasoning takes as its foundation the academic creation of the Orient as something outside of Western experience, that must be translated through scientific research.

The second assumption, built upon this separation of Occident and Orient, was that the constructed image of the East perversely reflected some aspect of the West, and could thus be placed in relation to a part of European society. The Orientalist "makes it his work to be always converting the Orient from something into something else: he does this for himself, for the sake of his culture, and in some cases for what he believes is the sake of the Oriental." By creating and then subsuming images of "Orientals" to neatly defined characteristics, given with or without scientific justification, Orientalist literature inextricably defines Eastern societies as inferior to the Occident. Such histories present the "thoughts and institutions of Indians as distortions of normal and natural (that is, Western) thoughts and institutions." The "Oriental" was either of an entirely foreign character to the European, or he was a sort of parody of one aspect of the European character. Couched in the language of objective rationalism, the Orientalist attitude is profoundly

<sup>17.</sup> Thomas Metcalf, Ideologies of the Raj (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 113-114.

Timothy Mitchell, "Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order," in Dirks (ed), Colonialism and Culture, 289.

<sup>19.</sup> Metcalf, 19.

<sup>20.</sup> Edward Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 67.

<sup>21.</sup> Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India," Modern Asian Studies, 20, no. 3 (1986): 411.

anti-empirical.<sup>22</sup> It stems from opposition; at its root is the axiom that the Orient is an encapsulated geography that is different. It assumes an almost unbridgeable divide between the East and the West. Said most pointedly addresses Orientalism as directed towards the Near East, and specifically territory seen to be under Islamic rather than Christian control, although these classifications themselves do more to serve this divide than describe their adherents.<sup>23</sup> As Islamic states presented a very real military opposition, European attitudes towards the Near Orient exhibited a sort of reverent fear. Early Orientalist presentations of the Near East, therefore, can be seen as militantly hostile oppositions – a filter perhaps more understandable as it sprung from antagonism. Yet the persistence of Orientalism extended to India – a region which "itself never provided an indigenous threat to Europe."24 Western historical constructions of India in Europe grew out of histories of Islam, and operated within the same ideological framework. India became in the eyes of Europe an exotic and strange land, decadent and crumbling and posing no direct military threat. This historical construction was assembled through centuries of Orientalist literature, and transformed during the period of direct colonial rule from a set of literary assumptions to a set of operative assumptions deployed in governing India.

Inherent in Orientalist discourse is the idea of racial character. This idea neither emerges with nor is unique to Orientalist discourse, but within it acquires a sort of pseudoscientific objectivity. Traditionally, European histories of India had drawn conclusions about the "Hindu character" from customs, rituals, and artifacts for which they had very little context. Take James Mill's *History of British India* as an example, published in 1820:

This religion has produced a practice which has strongly engaged the curiosity of Europeans; a superstitious care of the life of the inferior animals. A Hindu lives in perpetual terror of killing even an insect; and hardly any crime can equal that of being unintentionally the cause of death to any animal of the more sacred species. This feeble circumstance, however, is counteracted by so many gloomy and malignant principles, that their religion, instead of humanizing the character, must have had no inconsiderable effect in fostering that disposition to revenge, that insensibility to the suffering of others, and often that active cruelty which lurks under the smiling exterior of the Hindu.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22.</sup> Said, 70.

<sup>23.</sup> Said, 75.

<sup>24.</sup> Said, 75. Of course, the terms "Islamic" and "Christian" do more to serve this divide than describe their adherents.

James Mill, A History of British India v. I (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1820), 325-6;
 Quoted in Inden, 409.

Implicit are at least six traits of the presumed Hindu character, all derogatory, inferior, and inherent. Mill was, of course, not the first to create this characterization but was writing within a preconceived image of India as a foreign, mystical, and unchanging place and its inhabitants as passive, receptive, weak in spirit, cunning, and cruel. These traits stemmed from a body of purportedly neutral academic history, and as such the term "Hindu" silently called up this entire body of assumptions:

Thus for a writer to use the word Oriental was a reference for the reader sufficient to identify a specific body of information about the Orient. This information seemed to be morally neutral and objectively valid; it seemed to have an epistemological status equal to that of historical chronology or geographical location. In its most basic form, then, Oriental material could not really be violated by anyone's discoveries, nor did it seem ever to be revaluated completely.<sup>26</sup>

Said, Orientalism

"Curious," Jawaharlal Nehru notes, "how each person judges of the other race, not from the individual with whom he has had contact, but from others about whom he knows very little or nothing at all."<sup>27</sup>

Educated in London first at the prestigious Harrow School and then at Cambridge, Nehru had long familiarity with Orientalist literature.<sup>28</sup> Yet he, and other major nationalist leaders inverted the connotations of this discourse while leaving some of its structure intact. Under British rule Orientalist discourse became operative – literary constructions of a distant and exotic Orient were translated into British policies towards India. As the Raj dominated the institutions of government and education, British histories of India became the dominant histories of India. Implicit in the methodology of Congress and the writings of Nehru are assumptions of a unified national character, which can be known and represented politically. This assumption of unity pervades both Gandhi's and Nehru's images of India. To some degree any nationalism will speak to a unified national character. It may not be entirely fair to label such expressions as Orientalist. Yet they grew from a history of Orientalist discourse and entertain some of the same characteristics.

Educated nationalist leaders were quick to point out the blatant fallacies of British histories of India but worked within some of the more implicit Orientalist constructions. Three assumptions are of concern

<sup>26.</sup> Said, 205.

Jawaharlal Nehru, Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru (New York: The John Day Company, 1941), 4.

<sup>28.</sup> Nehru, Toward Freedom, 30-32.

here. First is the divide between East and West - India and Indian history under the British became fundamentally alien. Second is the construction of racial character tied to the "Hindu" mentality and supported by a pseudoscientific justification by strongly biased interpretations of textual, artistic, and religious evidence. We have already addressed these constructions as implicit in Orientalist literature. The third assumption translated the Hindu Character to a societal level and produced a history of India as assimilative, passive, and subject to constant invasions. Because of its geography of vast river valleys and mountainous regions, Indian civilizations were bound to form large despotic empires. As the climate was divided into hot or cold, so too was India inhabited by "peoples of extreme temperament."29 Civilization, it was written, began in the Nile and in the Fertile Crescent and then passed to Europe. The peoples of the West, beginning with the Greeks, therefore entertained the sole privilege of enjoying progressive civilization. Apparent changes in the Orient were not cumulative or directional but repetitive, and most astonishing of all, such a structure of civilization persevered in the face of repeated invasions and empires. India "was remarkable, for the repeated conquests of that subcontinent did not bring an end to her civilization or even, for that matter, produce any fundamental change in it."30

The most blatant offense in this constructed aspect of Indian history is a lack of civilizational progress. It assumes, quite unequivocally, that India requires intervention if it is to evolve. We have encountered this ideology in attitudes of British rule stretching as far back as the 1770s. Nationalist leaders exposed to this type of history quite rightly called into question this assumption. Most explicit examples are found in Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, in which he first acknowledged the paradox of coming to Indian history from the West and then questions the validity of that history:

India was in my blood and there was much in her that instinctively thrilled me. And yet I approached her almost as an alien critic, full of dislike for the present as well as for many of the relics of the past that I saw. To some extent I came to her via the West, and looked at her as a friendly westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India? – I who presumed to scrap much of her past heritage? ...

'The Indus civilization,' writes Professor Childe, 'represents a very perfect adjustment of human life to a specific environment that can only have resulted from years of patient effort. And it has endured; it is already specifically

<sup>29.</sup> Inden, 422.

<sup>30.</sup> Inden, 426.

Indian and forms the basis of modern Indian culture.' Astonishing thought: that any culture or civilization should have this continuity for five or six thousand years or more; and not in a static, unchanging sense, for India was changing and progressing all the time.<sup>31</sup>

Such a continuation is "astonishing;" Nehru has raised a hint of suspicion:

Whether there was such a thing as an Indian dream through the ages, ... I do not know. Every people and every nation has some such belief or myth of national destiny and perhaps it is partly true in each case.<sup>32</sup>

If Indian civilizations were denied progress by British Histories, Nehru resoundingly rejects their assumptions. Further, Nehru rejects – or at least distances himself from – the question of national character as implicit in Orientalist histories. Whether there is a Hindu character is almost irrelevant; what is significant is the national myth which bound India's peoples together. And yet as Nehru further questions the equation of Hindu with Indian, stating:

A Christian or a Moslem could, and often did, adapt himself to the Indian way of life and culture, and yet remained in faith an orthodox Christian or Moslem. He had Indianized himself and become an Indian without changing his religion....

Whatever the word we may use, Indian or Hindi or Hindustani, for our cultural tradition, we see in the past that some inner urge towards synthesis, derived essentially from the Indian philosophic outlook, was the dominant feature of Indian cultural and even racial development. Each incursion of foreign elements was a challenge to this culture, but it was met successfully by a new synthesis and a process of absorption. This was also a process of rejuvenation and new blooms of culture arose out of it, the background and essential basis, however, remaining much the same.<sup>33</sup>

The assimilative quality of India is retained. Rather than producing stagnation, frequent invasions provoked new vitality and revived the "Indian way of life." Repeated invasions had not destroyed India and were not necessarily repetitive – India has incorporated many cultures, Indianizing a wide diversity of humanity. Instead, Indian culture takes strength from a vibrant diversity. Yet is is an *assimilative* diversity, which assumes a fundamental Indian philosophic outlook.

<sup>31.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 51.

<sup>32.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 56.

<sup>33.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 78.

But such an inversion is simply a secularized Hindu character, which informs a larger assimilative culture. Under this transformation a large part of Orientalist structure remains intact. India's nature as unchanging becomes a mark of durability and pride rather than evidence of inferiority. And yet the conflation of individual character and national history remains. There is something constant in India which permits Indianization:

In the midst of all this, India remains immovable, and that is her glory. It is a charge against India that her people are so uncivilised, ignorant and stolid, that it is not possible to induce them to adopt any changes. It is a charge really against our merit. What we have tested and found true on the anvil of experience, we dare not change. Many thrust their advice upon India, and she remains steady. This is her beauty; it is the sheet-anchor of our hope.<sup>34</sup>

M. Gandhi, Hind Swaraj

Culture is taken as persistent, and inextricably tied to the character of India's peoples. Here is the same structure as the Orientalists Hindu character with the values reversed. The assumptions of racial character and geographic specificity, are shifted somewhat but remain largely intact. That the assumption which underlies them remains so as well in Nehru's thought is illustrated by a passage on Indian art:

Indian art is so intimately associated with Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideals that governed the Indian mind. In art, as in music, there is a gulf which separates eastern from western conceptions. Probably the great artists and builders of the middle ages in Europe would have felt more in tune with Indian art and sculpture than modern European artists who derive part of their inspiration at least from the Renaissance period and after.<sup>35</sup>

Indian art, Indian religion, Indian culture, and the Indian mind are inextricable. An underlying Indianness informs them all. Assimilative as this quality may be, East and West remain distinct entities across a wide gulf. India is implicitly closer to the middle ages than modern Europe, revealing the persistence of the myth of civilizational progress. We have seen that the British employed this myth to justify their rule in India. Gandhi further illustrates the point, in relation to the role of industry in India:

<sup>34.</sup> Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 66.

<sup>35.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 219.

There is a difference between the civilization of the East – the civilization of India – and that of the West. It is not generally realized where the difference lies. Our geography is different, our history is different, our ways of living are different. ... Well, now, the economics and civilization of a country where the pressure of population on land is greatest are and must be different from those of a country where the pressure is least.<sup>36</sup>

M. Gandhi, Harijan, November 5<sup>th</sup> 1935

His point is agreeable enough. It is clear that different distributions of population and labor require different modes of economic production. But there remains a hint of Orientalism about the divide between East and West – civilizations now described in terms of economic science in addition to those previously employed of geography, history, and culture.

These remarks on persistent Orientalism would have little bearing on the meaning and translations of the Viceroy's House in the years leading up to independence if Nehru had not presided over the Indian National Congress in 1937 or become the first Prime Minister of the Republic of India in 1950. That this ideology was implicit in nationalist thought is reason enough to consider it. Moreover the ideological construction of India as assimilative is directly related to the occupation and appropriation of Lutyens' building. Congress, by promoting a vision of India that was unified and assimilative, could claim to represent the whole of India. This attitude would have direct bearing on the endgames of empire. The approach of Congress, and specifically of Gandhi and Nehru, toward negotiation with the British concerning independence further illustrate this assimilative ideology. The role and philosophical shape of Congress in winning freedom would persist through independence and the creation of the Republic of India, and was manifest in the symbolic appropriation of the Viceroy's House. As such these dynamics are fundamental to the shaping of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

## Congress and Freedom

The British Raj, as we have seen, governed largely by proxy. The bureaucracy, especially in the princely states, was almost entirely Indian. Economic and political needs, shifted after the Mutiny, impelled the British towards an increasingly strong government. It is partially out of this Edwardian shift that New Delhi was conceived, as the creation of an explicitly centralized government. And yet the political structure of the Raj remained largely confederate – political affairs of the disparate

<sup>36.</sup> Quoted in Louis Fischer, The Essential Gandhi (New York: Random House, 1962), 293.

localities and provinces were addressed, for the most part, at a local level. The British government functioned more as an overseer than a direct meddler. Increased centralization responded to, among other factors, a weakening economic relationship illustrated by decreasing dominance of British imports over Indian manufactured goods.<sup>37</sup> As India became more economically autonomous, the increasingly controlling central authority at New Delhi found itself intervening more directly in local economic affairs. This tension was one cause of concessions to Indian legislative bodies, most clearly expressed in the 1909 reforms of Morley and Minto.<sup>38</sup> We have seen how these reforms, rather than placating Indian politicians by appealing to conservative elements in Indian society strengthened inter-provincial networks that fed into the nationalist movement. By creating such a national political network, India could potentially unite across disparate local concerns. Over the course of the interwar period, this unity coalesced into a strong nationalist movement. By 1938, after the 1935 Government of India Act, the Indian National Congress was in full swing as a national body of legislators. Far from being merely a political party, however, the Congress was a national organization which focused, organized, and assumed full responsibility for disparate ideas of Indian nationalism.

Congress had declared, in its Lahore session of 1929 under the presidentship of Jawaharlal Nehru, its goal to be Purna Swarajya, or complete independence from British rule. This declaration illustrated a generational break within Congress - the older nationalists, including Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal's father, had campaigned for dominion status within the British empire. The declaration was given to propel a "start to our campaign, and partly also to judge the temper of the country."39 January 26th, 1930, was fixed as Independence Day; nothing less than complete independence from British governance would be acceptable. In May of 1934 the Indian National Congress demanded the formation of a Constituent Assembly elected by the people to frame a constitution for India, making explicit Congress' opposition to the Government of India Act of 1919.40 Seen as a continuation of the Act of 1919, Congress rejected the Government of India Act of 1935 as a conciliatory gesture not significantly different from previous concessions and as giving no substantial traction to constitutional independence. Nevertheless, it decided to

<sup>37.</sup> John Gallagher and Anil Seal, "Britain and India between the Wars" Modern Asian Studies 15 (1981): 392.

<sup>38.</sup> Gallagher and Seal, 393.

<sup>39.</sup> Nehru, Toward Freedom, 150.

<sup>40.</sup> Pratap Kumar Ghosh, The Constitution of India: how it has been framed (Calcutta: The World Press Private LTD, 1966), 1.

participate in the elections stipulated by the Act, if only to "wreck the constitution."<sup>41</sup> The Act established a degree of provincial autonomy through "ministers responsible to an elected legislature."<sup>42</sup> Although many safeguards ensured the ultimate power of provincial appointed Governors, ministerial councils were formed from elected majority parties and granted substantial political power.

Endowed with legitimacy in the wake of the elections in 1937 stipulated in the Government of India Act of 1935, Congress enjoyed both political power and the support of the people as the organization of the independence movement. Congress won 715 out of 836 general seats in the election, and membership rose from 3,102,113 in 1938 to 4,478,720 by the beginning of 1939.43 Congress was no mere political party but a massive organizational network which coordinated non-cooperation campaigns against British. Congress claimed exclusive representation of India. In addition to operating under the model of assimilative diversity through a unified Indian quality, this claim was given support through the moral role Gandhi played with respect to Congress. While Jawaharlal Nehru presided over the Indian National Congress in 1936 and 1937, he himself acknowledged that Gandhi was its "permanent Super-President."44 Gandhi enjoyed a hold on the people and many members of Congress through the force of his moral convictions. He was not primarily a politician but served as the conscience of the nation, inspiring India towards freedom and mediating between various conflicting groups, political or otherwise. 45 In 1934, Gandhi had officially resigned from Congress, as he felt his personality had come to dominate the organization and there was no longer "free play of reason" in it. 46 Congressmen firmly believed that Gandhi, even in his detachment from political life, could do no wrong and that he alone could lead and guide the Congress.<sup>47</sup> Through this detachment Gandhi could apply his moral convictions of nonviolence to heal wounds of communal cruelty politicizing the issue. His moral clarity and conviction led Congress, and the nation, towards freedom.

Ram Gopal, How India Struggled for Freedom: a Political History (Bombay: Book Centre, 1967), 412.

<sup>42.</sup> Select Committee of Parliament quoted in Gopal, 412

<sup>43.</sup> Gopal, 412; Louis Fischer, Life of Mahatma Gandhi (New York: Harper, 1950), 341.

<sup>44.</sup> Fischer, Life of Mahatma Gandhi, 341.

<sup>45.</sup> Judith Brown, "The Mahatma and Modern India" Modern Asian Studies 3 (1969): 334.

<sup>46.</sup> Quoted in Gopal, 407.

<sup>47.</sup> Gopal, 409.

# THE SPACE OF OPPOSITION

Fewer than fifteen Indian princes attended the inauguration of New Delhi in 1931. There was a "general lack of enthusiasm" about the new capital, as the Daily Mail had put it six years earlier.48 To Congress the regalia and pomp of the celebrations smacked of artifice and only further illustrated the pretensions of the Raj. The naked expense and ceremony of so imperial a monument as New Delhi inspired ridicule and spite. Nehru derided the imperial rituals of the British, their "court ceremonies, their durbars and investitures, their parades, their dinners and evening dress, their pompous utterances." The "elaborate show" of self-celebration most offended at the Viceroy's House, which Nehru termed the "chief temple where the High Priest officiated," a "visible symbol of British power, with all its pomp and circumstance and vulgar ostentation and wasteful extravagance."49 Gandhi was even more critical, and in keeping with his mantra of simplicity in such a poverty-ridden country, deplored the "waste of money on architectural piles." New Delhi was an unwanted and unnecessary imposition on the country, its expense and architecture "in conflict with the best interest of the nation."50 The Viceroy's House was to Gandhi a naked symbol of imperial rule, a consolidation of the imposition and oppression of the British upon India.

Two days after New Delhi's inaugural celebrations had ended, Gandhi was to meet with Lord Irwin. Appointed Viceroy in 1926 and first resident of Lutyens' palace, Irwin hoped to break the political impasse which had arisen over recent constitutional proposals. Arriving at the Viceregal court at precisely 2:20 on the afternoon of February 17<sup>th</sup>, Gandhi sought to pierce the bubble of pomp and circumstance which had just been enshrined at Raisina. Adorned only with a torn woolen shawl and loincloth and carrying a bamboo stave, he made his way past the stone gauntlet of Britannic lions and up the broad steps of the palace [47].<sup>51</sup> Not two days out of a British prison, the revered leader did not come to the Viceroy's House as a supplicant, but as India.<sup>52</sup> In Britain, Winston Churchill decried the event, assailing the

<sup>48.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 350.

<sup>49.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 351.

<sup>50.</sup> Quoted in Irving, 351.

<sup>51.</sup> Irving, 351.

Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre, Freedom at Midnight (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 70.

nauseating and humiliating spectacle of this onetime Inner Temple lawyer, now seditious fakir, striding half naked up the steps of the Viceroy's palace, there to negotiate and parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.<sup>53</sup>

And yet six months later this "half-naked fakir" would take tea with George V at Buckingham Palace clad only in loincloth and sandals.

The procedure and ceremony of empire was to Gandhi complete artifice and pretense. Buckingham Palace and the Viceregal palace at Delhi were interchangeable as symbols of British parasitism. By consciously dressing and acting simply, without ceremony, Gandhi provoked the disparity of what the British saw as India and the India he knew. He would willingly negotiate with the Viceroy in his palace, but not in the language of British procedure. Gandhi created a highly visible opposition of fakir and Viceroy, and in refusing to follow British protocol robbed that ceremony of its legitimacy. As he later expressed to Mountbatten, the Viceroy's House

would have to go, in an independent India. Its arrogant opulence, its associations with the past were an affront to India's impoverished masses. Her new leaders would have to set an example. Mountbatten as their first chief of state would, he hoped, give the lead. Move out of Viceroy's House and live in a simple home without servants, he urged. Lutyens' Palace could be converted into a hospital.<sup>54</sup>

With an affront to the might of imperialism through his simple dignity, Gandhi defined the Viceroy's House as a space alien to the Indian spirit. Embodying Viceregal pomp and the symbolic weight of a divisive Western mode of civilization, Lutyens' arena became necessary for negotiation but tiresome and morally gluttonous. As a highly visible embodiment of Western institutions and British oppression, the Viceroy's House had no role in Gandhi's cultural nationalism except as a space of opposition.

# Independence through Partition

The steady growth of the nationalist movement through both legislative institutions and mass movement was met with strongly centralized opposition. Independence was a national, not regional, question, and the constitutional stakes of "responsible government" grew steadily higher from the 1909 Morley-Minto reforms to the 1935 Government of India Act. These constitutional proposals can be seen as a series of political

<sup>53.</sup> Quoted in Collins and Lapierre, 70.

<sup>54.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 222.

concessions by the British. They raised the negotiation of independence to a national level - only leaders claiming to represent the whole of British India could meaningfully engage with the Raj. 55 Following its overwhelming electoral victory of 1937, Congress was prepared to make such a claim. Mohammed Ali Jinnah [48], president of the Muslim League, proposed an alliance. The League, founded in 1906, sought to protect Muslim liberties and rights against a potentially oppressive Hindu majority. Congress responded that no coalition would be possible without fusion - the Indian nationalist movement, in its eyes, could only succeed encompassing a unity of Indian peoples against the British.<sup>56</sup> Congress was working in an assimilative mode, and would not operate with alliances or factions but required a national cohesion for its national movement. The struggle for swaraj, in the eyes of Gandhi, was not fundamentally a political struggle which required coalitions, alliances, and negotiations but a moral struggle of the Indian people who would, as one mass and with one voice, peacefully but fiercely oppose the British. Gandhi maintained that India must remain cohesive, by necessity including Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jewish, and Parsi communities. This position was untenable to Jinnah, who had very real concerns that the Islamic minority would be drowned out or worse. It may have been that Jinnah thought Gandhian idealism misguided or simply not possible in the fiercely political reality of the independence struggle. He certainly called into question Congress' claim to national representation. Nehru had stated, while campaigning for the 1937 elections, that they constituted not a contest of political parties, but a contest between

Two forces – the Congress as representing the will to freedom of the nation, and the British Government in India and its supporters who oppose this urge and try to suppress it. Intermediate groups, whatever virtue they may possess, fade out or line up with one of the principal forces.<sup>57</sup>

J. Nehru, September 18th 1936

To this Jinnah remarked: "I refuse to accept this proposition. There is a third party in this country and this is Muslim India" This ideological fission lay under the political buildup to partition.

<sup>55.</sup> Seal, Anil, "Imperialism and Nationalism in India," Modern Asian Studies 7, no. 3 (1973): 344.

<sup>56.</sup> Simone Panter-Brick, Gandhi against Machiavellism (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 175.

<sup>57.</sup> Nehru's statement to the press, September 18<sup>th</sup> 1936, SWJN, 7: 468. Quoted in Prasad, Bimal, "Congress versus the Muslim League, 1935-1937," in Sisson and Wolpert (eds), Congress and Indian Nationalism (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1988: 310.

<sup>58.</sup> Sisson and Wolpert, 310.

The outbreak of World War II forced the question of independence with renewed urgency. Indian troops were dispatched overseas in the middle of 1939, and as the armed forces remained strictly under the control of the Viceroy under the Government of India Act of 1935, constituent assemblies were neither consulted nor informed. The secrecy and unilateral nature of this decision provoked an outcry from provincial governments and the Central Assembly. Congress was strongly opposed to fascism, but asked, as Gandhi asked: "We are asked to fight for democracy in Germany, Italy and Japan. How can we when we haven't got it ourselves?" The memory of the First World War and its disastrous consequences for India resurfaced in the national dialogue.

On September 14th, 1939, the Congress Working Committee drafted a statement of conditional support for the war effort. The resolution expressed Congress' dual policy towards war: strong opposition to fascism, Nazism, and Japanese militarism and a willingness to take part in any war against those aggressions, but only as a free and equal nation. If India was not free, her participation in a war for freedom was hypocritical.<sup>60</sup> War would again be a perpetuation of British imperial interests. As such the 1939 statement pledged collaboration with the war effort on the following conditions: the Government of India must declare its war ends not to be imperial, and that India be ensured the right to frame its own constitution without interference from Britain through a Constituent Assembly. Linlithgow, Viceroy from 1936 to 1943, proposed in response first the formation of a War Advisory Defence Council, and then to enlarge his own Executive Council with representatives selected by Congress, the League, and other political parties. This was widely seen as the old policy of divide-and-rule. At this every provincial Congress government resigned in November 1939, and the government at Delhi suspended the constitution.<sup>61</sup> By January 1940 the Viceroy pledged full dominion status after the war, and in August offered yet stronger representation in his Executive Council of the selected members as ministers of the departments of State. These offers, in the eyes of Congress leaders, remained insufficient. Linlithgow wrote to King George VI after the January proposal:

As soon as I realised that I was to be subjected to heavy and sustained pressure designed to force from us major political concessions as the price of Congress's co-operation in the war effort, I summoned representatives of all the more important interests and communities in India, including the

<sup>59.</sup> Gandhi, Interview with Louis Fischer, June 6 1942; quoted in Fischer, 345.

<sup>60.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 448.

<sup>61.</sup> Panter-Brick, 178.

Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes and Mr. Jinnah ... [The declaration] has made plain the fact that we cannot concede to Congress the validity of that party's claim to speak for the whole of India.<sup>62</sup>

Linlithgow to George VI, February 1940

The Viceroy approached Congress as a political party among many, while Congress saw itself as the embodiment of the nationalist movement. The British government, either as a diplomatic move to divide and conquer its political opponents or a sincere hesitation, was unwilling to concede solely to Congress authority to speak for India.<sup>63</sup>

The causes of the partition of British India into India and Pakistan in 1947 are complex and extend deeply into faultlines of identity, but find some resonance here. Linlithgow's August offer had merely exposed issues of unity and the construction of difference based on religion. Congress, by demanding an autonomous Constituent Assembly with full power of government and the right to draft its own Constitution, put serious weight behind the "two nations theory" as proposed by Jinnah. <sup>64</sup> The League feared that, with a Hindu majority, its constituent Muslims would be politically persecuted. The August offer provided that neither the League nor the princely states must needs submit to a government whose authority it did not recognize. <sup>65</sup>

Ultimately the question of war forced the question of freedom. "The cry of 'Quit India'," wrote Gandhi in 1943, "has arisen from a realization of the fact that if India is to shoulder the burden of representing or fighting for the cause of mankind, she must have the glow of freedom now. Has a freezing man ever been warmed by the promise of the warmth of the sunshine coming at some future date?" 66

The All-India Congress Committee met for its last session on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1942 in Bombay. At that session it officially resolved to approve Gandhi's "Quit India" resolution, stating:

The committee feels that is no longer justified in holding back the nation from endeavouring to assert its will against an imperialist and authoritarian government which dominates over it and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and in the interest of humanity. The Committee resolves therefore to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to

<sup>62.</sup> Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, The Rajaji Story (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1984), 46-47.

<sup>63.</sup> Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 46.

<sup>64.</sup> Panter-Brick, 185.

<sup>65.</sup> Panter-Brick, 185.

Letter to Lord Samuel from Detention Camp, May 15<sup>th</sup> 1943, M.K. Gandhi, Correspondence with the Government, xiii. Quoted in Fischer, The Essential Gandhi, 345.

freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines and on the widest possible scale so that the country might utilize all the non-violent strength it has gathered during the last twenty-two years of peaceful struggle. Such a struggle must inevitable be under the leadership of Gandhiji, and the Committee requests him to take the lead and guide the nation in the steps to be taken.

Gandhi spoke after the passage of the resolution, first in Hindi then in English. He said, in part:

I want freedom immediately, this very night, before dawn, if it can be had. Freedom cannot now wait for communal unity. If that unity is not achieved, sacrifices necessary for it will have to be much greater than would have otherwise sufficed. But the Congress must win freedom or be wiped out in the effort; and forget not that the freedom which the Congress is struggling to achieve will not be for the Congressmen alone but for all the forty crores of the Indian people. ... Every one of you should consider from this moment onwards a free man or woman and act as if you are free and are no longer under the heel of this imperialism. It is not a make-believe that I am suggesting to you. It is the very essence of freedom. The bond of the slave is snapped the moment he considers himself to be a free being.

The communal unity of which Gandhi dreamed would indeed require great sacrifice. The divisional wounds across India which came to a head in its partition ran deeply across religious lines, and the resulting upheaval and mass migration is certainly one of the greatest tragedies in modern history.

While the mechanics of the end of the Raj are well documented, the effectiveness of the Quit India movement in provoking independence is disputed. Certainly influential during the war was the militant Indian National Army, a group some 20,000 soldiers strong and headed by Subhas Chandra Bose with the stated goal of taking Delhi by force, with Japanese assistance if necessary. As Clement Attlee assumed power as Britain's Prime Minister at the head of the Labour Party, it became the stated and immediate goal of Britain to negotiate complete independence for India. The Viceroy Wavell, an army field marshal who saw India through the war, announced that on September 18th, 1945, upon consultation with the new Labour government in London, "His Majesty's Government are proceeding to the consideration of the Treaty which will require to be concluded between Great Britain and India [and have] authorised me, as soon as the results of the provincial elections are published, to take steps to bring into being an Executive Council which will

<sup>67.</sup> Gopal, 443.

have the support of the main Indian parties."<sup>68</sup> On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, in response to trepidations of Congress over the vagueness of this declaration, the Secretary of State for India clarified, stating: "Self-government within the British Commonwealth carried with it freedom of choice. No member of it is bound to other members by bonds other than those of mutual assent."<sup>69</sup> Full independence for India was assured. At the conclusion of a great war fought for freedom and democracy, India was to take her place in the new world order at the cost of partition.

The Viceroy invited Nehru to assist him in the formation of an Interim Government. His offer was accepted by the Congress on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1946, and the Interim Government, consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Asaf Ali, Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari, Sarat Chandra Bose, John Mathai, Baldev Singh, Shaffat Ahmed Khan, Jagjiban Ram, Syed Ali Zahir and C. H. Bhaba, took office on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1946.<sup>70</sup> The Muslim League, initially reluctant to join the Interim Government, appointed five representatives on September 13<sup>th</sup>. Jinnah declared that the League would not, however, join the Constituent Assembly and remained firm in its demand for the creation of Pakistan.<sup>71</sup>

#### THE SPACE OF NEGOTIATION

The newly appointed Viceroy, the Viscount Mountbatten of Burma, arrived in New Delhi on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1947 [49,50,51].<sup>72</sup> Great-grandson of Queen Victoria and cousin to King George VI, Louis Mountbatten was seen by members of the royal family as something of a radical. As Supreme Allied Commander in Southeast Asia during the war, he had extensive first-hand knowledge of the nationalist movements in Indochina, Indonesia, Burma, Malaya, Singapore, and India, and had worked to accommodate rather than suppress their demands.<sup>73</sup> Appointed by recently elected Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee, Mountbatten had been sent to negotiate the transfer of power by June 1948. In light of the impending partition of the Raj into the Dominions of India and

<sup>68.</sup> Gopal, 449.

<sup>69.</sup> Gopal, 449.

<sup>70.</sup> Ghosh, 26

<sup>71.</sup> Ghosh, 27.

<sup>72.</sup> Alan Campbell-Johnson, Mission with Mountbatten (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1953), 38.

<sup>73.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 17.

Pakistan waves of violence had engulfed the Punjab: the situation "was threatening to become anarchical."<sup>74</sup> Sent to broker the transfer of power, Mountbatten and his staff inherited

communal rioting, which is spreading as though by chain reaction; the key Province of the Punjab, with its threefold Hindu, Moslem, and Sikh Communal problem, governed by emergency decree; a Viceregal plan which is nothing more nor less than a phased military evacuation; a Congress formula for an Independent Sovereign Republic with a Direct Action campaign by the Moslem League to resist it; Paramountcy which returns to the Indian Princes but contains no machinery for direct negotiation to provide a new relationship with our successors in British India or, indeed, with anyone else.

So, in short, we have the people rioting, the Princes falling out among themselves, the entire Indian Civil Service and Police running down, and the British, who are left sceptical and full of foreboding.<sup>75</sup>

Alan Campbell-Johnson, Press Attaché to the Viceroy.

The British Government had assured full independence for India in late 1945, but provided little infrastructure through which to enact the transfer. In the face of a political situation which seemed almost on the brink of chaos, Mountbatten, Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and Jinnah faced a daunting task. Yet on the morning of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, India would become a Dominion of the British Commonwealth, with expressed intent to become an independent sovereign Republic upon the drafting of a Constitution. In this space of five months Mountbatten, Congress, and the Muslim League would negotiate the shape of that transfer.

The negotiations of the end of British imperial rule were primarily carried out at the Viceroy's House in New Delhi. Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, and Jinnah, were, though allied in the struggle for independence, "as diverse a quartet as it is possible to imagine." Gandhi and Nehru, as we have seen, worked in an assimilative mode which assumed an Indian unity embodied in Congress. Patel, more of a political realist, had quickly recognized that the short timetable of negotiations would require the partition of British India into Pakistan and India and, cru-

<sup>74.</sup> Gopal, 455.

<sup>75.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 40.

<sup>76.</sup> The Viceroy's House, under the Raj, was occupied only for half of the year. During the summer months the Viceroy and his Council would move to Simla, a hill station nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas to the north of Delhi. Negotiations also took place at Simla, but the major symbolic meetings took place in the Viceroy's House.

<sup>77.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 117.

cially, helped Congress to accept the Dominion Status formula proposed by Mountbatten.<sup>78</sup> Jinnah was, of course, committed to the creation of Pakistan.

Gandhi's position as increasingly outside of politics meant that his role in the transfer of power was more consensual than participatory. Gandhi held a position of infallible moral authority with the masses, but the actual mechanics of the creation of the Dominion of India would be decided through Nehru and Patel. The Viceroy's House had been previously codified as a space of opposition, yet as Nehru and Patel took more direct involvement in the management the political transfer the House became a vehicle for negotiation [52]. Nehru had written in *The Discovery of India* that

between Indian nationalism and an alien imperialism there could be no final peace, though temporary compromises and adjustments were sometimes inevitable. Only a free India could co-operate with England on equal terms.<sup>79</sup>

With India assured freedom to cooperate on equal terms, however, the negotiation of independence was not so oppositional.

Working so closely within traditional government institutions seemed incongruent with Gandhi's vision of India. Gandhi, of course, was not so short-sighted as to deny negotiation with the Raj and clearly recognized the necessity of negotiating with the regime in power to attain his vision of India. Yet neither was he convinced that Western institutions of government could ensure that vision. As an elaborate but artificial barrier which divided humanity from itself, the Viceroy's House was to Gandhi a necessary but not sufficient means to secure independence. As a shout of imperialism, the Viceroy's House gave physical form to everything Gandhi saw as evil in Western civilization. It gave form to imperial opposition, necessary to negotiate with but nonetheless oppositional, where the elaborate pomp and artifice which the British so loved should rightly be pierced with a simple human dignity.

However, that New Delhi remained a spatial manifestation of opposition to British rule was generally expressed by all factions of the nationalist movement. Telling is a speech given by Subhas Chandra Bose to the Indian National Army in which he had urged on his troops, assuring them that "we shall ultimately win and our task will not end

<sup>78.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 118.

<sup>79.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 387.

until our surviving heroes hold the victory parade in the Lal Killa [the Red Fort] of Ancient Delhi."<sup>80</sup> The new Indian nation, after it had been won by blood, would be celebrated according to Bose not in the Viceroy's House or along King's Way but at the seat of Mughal power in the heart of Shahjahanabad. New Delhi remained alien territory – the Red Fort of the Mughals was the proper location of Indian victory. Bose's Indian National Army was, of course, armed, violent, and vehemently anti-British. This oppositional stance was far more extreme than Congress', which generally approached New Delhi as a space of negotiation with an oppressive government rather than an immutable citadel of the enemy.

Congress, though opposed to the oppression of the British Government, through the negotiations of Nehru and Patel implicitly accepted the rules of that system of government - negotiation with a government, after all, requires an acceptance of the legitimacy and mechanisms of that government. The Viceroy's House, far from being a symbol of empire to be destroyed became a space of negotiation, a functioning space to advance the process of securing independence. Relations with Mountbatten were furthermore amicable, as all parties recognized the difficulty of the situation and, generally, sought to navigate it as smoothly as possible. Mountbatten's charm was legendary, and he quickly forged a very close relationship with Nehru [53]. At the end of Mountbatten's first interview with Nehru on March 25th, 1947, he expressed his motives: "Mr. Nehru," Mountbatten said, "I want you to regard me not as the last Viceroy winding up the British Raj, but as the first to lead the way to the new India." To which Nehru replied: "Now I know what they mean when they speak of your charm being so dangerous."81

This shift in attitude refined the Gandhian definition of the Viceroy's House as a symbol of imposition and opposition and set the conditions for the building to be appropriated and symbolically transformed. The Viceroy's House might have been a ridiculous "chief temple" to Nehru in 1931, but as the practical realities of transferring political power became apparent it emerged as a viable and appropriate space to facilitate negotiation. This level of comfort in the house of the Raj gave it validity as a functioning architecture. As Nehru and Patel negotiated the shape of independence with Mountbatten and the Muslim League through Lutyens' architecture, the Viceroy's House proved itself to be a useful institution of state. In Nehru's vision of independent India such a space of international mediation would be necessary.

<sup>80.</sup> Gopal, 445.

<sup>81.</sup> Quoted in Campbell-Johnson, 45.

The Viceroy's House was then on the eve of independence necessary for the continuation of state but remained a symbol of opposition. The ostentatious grandeur of its furnishings and architecture sat uneasily with the moral convictions of cultural nationalism. Yet as Nehru and Patel negotiated the shape of independence within its walls the advantages of such a building became clear. With an international scope, civic nationalism required some physical expression of an Indian government which could facilitate political relations. In August of 1947 the relationship between the Viceroy's House and the emergent Dominion of India was grudging and uneasy. A contradiction of opposition and negotiation, the Viceroy's House ultimately became in the eyes of Congress a space of governance that ought necessarily be appropriated.

#### WHILE THE WORLD SLEPT

India was to become free, but only through the partition of British India into the Dominions of India and Pakistan. The Mountbatten Plan, as the partition was known, had been agreed upon by June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1947. Gandhi staunchly resisted the Plan, maintaining that the split could be avoided with more time. Nehru, Patel, and other major Congress leaders disagreed. Without an established second line of leadership in place, Gandhi accepted the Plan as inevitable and devoted himself fully to preventing the violence erupting throughout India.<sup>82</sup>

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1947, the Indian Independence Bill received Royal assent in the British Parliament and provided that as from August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, "two independent Dominions shall be set up in India, to be known respectively as India and Pakistan." King George VI was to remain the constitutional monarch of the new Dominion of India but that status held in name only. August 15<sup>th</sup> would rightly mark the independence day of India. No longer headed by a Viceroy, India would be led by a Governor-General who retained only a symbolic link to the Crown. The Constituent Assembly, led by Congress and with Gandhi's blessing, had offered that position to Mountbatten to ease the transition to full sovereignty.<sup>84</sup>

On the eve of independence, having just returned from celebrating the formal transfer of power in Pakistan on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, Mountbatten was occupied in the last-minute details of dismantling the Viceregal

<sup>82.</sup> Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 133.

<sup>83.</sup> Ghosh, 49.

<sup>84.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 157.

machine. As the midnight hour drew near the last official messages and formalities drew to a close. Based on interviews with Mountbatten, Alan Campbell-Johnson, and other members of the Viceregal staff, Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre narrate the flurry of symbolic change at the Viceroy's House as midnight approached:

While India celebrated, the great house that had been the repository of Britain's imperial power in India was undergoing a revolution. From one end of the house to the other, servants rushed along the corridors obscuring or snatching away each of the 6,000-odd representations of the old Viceregal seal. Mountbatten was determined that on India's independence day, no Indian was going to wash his hands with a soap stamped with his old imperial seal, or light his cigarette from a similarly emblazoned pack of matches.

One team of servants did nothing but go from room to room replacing stationary bearing the offending words "Viceroy's House." Another group of workmen hung a screen over the enormous seal above the entrance to Durbar Hall.<sup>85</sup>

This purge of the Viceroy's House began in part to define the set of translatable symbols as the most heavily codified references to direct British rule were removed. Erasing a symbolically Viceregal authority, this purge effectuated the transformation of the Viceroy's House into Government House. It is unclear as to whether the royal seal over the Viceregal thrones [39] was retained, but the exterior coat of arms emblazoned on the tympanum of the main ceremonial entrance to Government House was removed. The Viceregal thrones, however, remained intact [51,59]. On India's independence day, the set of unsustainable symbols were those which contained overt references to the Viceroy, and analogous references to British authority on the exterior of the building.

As midnight struck, Alan Campbell-Johnson found himself alone with Mountbatten in the Viceregal office:

Mountbatten was sitting quietly at his desk. I have known him in most moods; to-night there was an air about him of serenity, almost detachment. The scale of his personal achievement was too great for elation, rather his sense of history and the fitness of things at this dramatic moment, when the old and the new order were reconciled in himself, called forth composure.

Quite deliberately he took off his reading-glasses, turned the keys on his dispatch boxes and summoned me to help tidy the room and stow away these outward and visible signs of Viceregal activity.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 296. Although the prose of this volume at times borders on the melodramatic, it is largely in agreement with Campbell-Johnson's memoirs. While some details of this symbolic purge may have been hyperbolized, there is no reason to doubt its general validity.

<sup>86.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 157.

Meanwhile, in the Constituent Assembly Hall of Herbert Baker's Council House, Nehru addressed what was soon to be the new nation of India. As Prime Minister, the heavy burden of partition and the anguished upheaval it entailed would weigh most heavily on his shoulders. Shaken by the news of mass riots and widespread violence which erupted that day in Lahore, Nehru spoke without notes:

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, while the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom.

A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation long suppressed finds utterance.

At the dawn of history, India started on her unending quest, and the trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her successes and her failures. Through good and ill fortune alike, she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideal which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune, and India discovers herself again.

This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell.<sup>87</sup>

Midnight struck, and India became free.

On Friday the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, the newly titled Earl Mountbatten of Burma became the first transitional Governor-General of the Dominion of India. The ceremony took place in the Durbar Hall, heavily layered in imperial symbolism. The weight of British rule in India, the memories of previous Durbars both British and Mughal, even the vestiges of the Roman Empire itself all condensed into the soaring circular room at the center of Lutyens' palace. Mountbatten's press attaché remarked on the incongruences of holding the ceremony proclaiming independence in such a manner:

The strangeness of this great occasion lay not in its points of contrast with Mountbatten's earlier Viceregal installation, but in its essential similarity to the March ceremony. ... Once again the rich red-velvet canopies were lit with hidden lights above the golden thrones. The carpets were a veritable field of the cloth of gold. Lady Mountbatten in gold lamé herself adorned the splendid scene. ...

<sup>87.</sup> Quoted in Collins and Lapierre, 289.

At the end of the ceremony the great bronze doors of the Durbar Hall were opened and the link between the old order and the new was proclaimed with the playing of "God Save the King" followed by the Jana Gana Mana.<sup>88</sup>

Dominionship stood halfway between British rule and complete independence. Although the Dominion of India was understood to be transitory and the Governor-Generalship an interim position, there remained a symbolic link with the Crown.

As the full title of the Viceroy had been Governor-General and Viceroy of India, so too had Lutyens' building been variously titled Government House and the Viceroy's House throughout the late colonial period. The building had been termed Government House in design discussion and construction proposals from 1911 to the mid-1920s. As the monuments at Raisina rose, the building became generally known as the Viceroy's House. With the abolition of the office of Viceroy on the morning of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, the Viceroy's House once again became Government House.<sup>89</sup> The British crown atop the flagpole of Government House was removed [56], and the Governor-General's flag was hoisted over the dome.<sup>90</sup>

Nearly two centuries of British rule on the subcontinent drew to a close as the world slept, at the stroke of the midnight hour on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1947: on the morning of August 15<sup>th</sup> India awoke to freedom. The carefully choreographed ceremonies of the day hardly survived intact. The official unfurling of the new flag took place after Mountbatten's formal institution as Governor-General. Slowly making their way through a jubilant maelstrom of some three hundred thousand people [55], the Mountbattens slowly rode in in State down King's Way to Princes Park near the War Memorial Arch, designed by Lutyens and completed in 1931 to commemorate Indian soldiers who died in the First World War and Afghan campaigns. The State carriage, "a raft bobbing on a stormy sea," could get no closer than twenty-five yards to the flagstaff. The carefully placed barriers, bandstands, visitors' gallery, and guide ropes were swept away as the planned ceremonies gave way to unrestrained

<sup>88.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 158.

<sup>89.</sup> Alan Campbell-Johnson explicitly notes this change in his memoirs. Campbell-Johnson, 158.

<sup>90.</sup> Aman Nath, Dome over India: Rashtrapati Bhavan (Mumbai: India Book House, 2002), 124.

<sup>91.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 160; Irving, 258.

<sup>92.</sup> Eyewitness as quoted in Collins and Lapierre, 314.

jubilation.<sup>93</sup> Mountbatten could get no closer to Nehru at the flagstaff; the flag was hoisted and he took the salute from the Governor-General's carriage.

Just as the flag was unfurled light rain began to fall, and a rainbow appeared in the sky, matching the saffron, white and green of the flag. If Hollywood had added this last touch, we would all have complained that once again they were overdoing it; as it was, it would seem to provide a dramatic omen to refute the gloomier astrologers.<sup>94</sup>

On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup>, Nehru addressed from the Red Fort [54] the teeming crowd of half a million which stretched to the Jama Masjid under the newly raised tricolor. The ceremonial space of the transfer of power from Britain to India may have been Government House and the War Memorial Arch, but it was from the ramparts of the Red Fort that Nehru would address the masses. New Delhi had been captured for India, but Government House had not as yet been appropriated.

# 1947-1950: The Transition to Republic

Pakistan, and the sheer scale of violence erupting in its wake in the Punjab, Bengal, and across India was staggering. Innumerable refugee camps and hospitals teemed with the human fallout of mass migration, as nearly ten and a half million people were uprooted in the space of three months. Fearing religious persecution, millions crossed newly established borders. Mob violence raged and forced evictions were rampant; Amritsar was "like a place of the dead." Gandhi began a fast on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 1948, calling to redress wrongs suffered by Muslims in Delhi at Hindu and Sikh hands. The delicately constructed alliance between Nehru and Patel, held together through negotiations for independence, was faltering as well. The conflict between Patel's realistic pragmatism and Nehru's socialist idealism had come to a head by January 30<sup>th</sup>, when Patel submitted a letter of resignation to Nehru's government. Se

<sup>93.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 314.

<sup>94.</sup> Campbell-Johnson, 161.

<sup>95.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 350.

<sup>96.</sup> Muriel Watson, Lady Mountbatten's personal assistant quoted in Campbell-Johnson, 176.

<sup>97.</sup> Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 153.

<sup>98.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 493.

Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated that afternoon on his way to an afternoon prayer meeting. Nathuram Godse, his murderer, was a militant member of the Hindu Mahasabha, a right-wing nationwide Hindu political party. Godse had spoken publicly against Gandhi in November 1947:

Gandhi's nonviolence has left the Hindus defenseless before their enemies. Now, while Hindu refugees are starving, Gandhi defends their Moslem oppressors. Hindu women are throwing themselves into wells to save themselves from being raped, and Gandhi tells them "Victory is in the victim." One of those victims could be my mother! The motherland has been vivisected, the vultures are tearing her flesh, the chastity of Hindu women is being violated on the open streets while the Congress eunuchs watch this rape committed. How long, oh, how long can one bear this?

Gandhi's death shocked the nation. In accordance with his wishes, Gandhi's body was not embalmed but cremated within twenty-four hours. The outpouring of grief across the nation was unprecedented. Once again New Delhi was flooded with millions, gathered now not in jubilation but mourning [57,58]. "You realize," Mountbatten had told Nehru and Patel, "that we will have crowds such as India has never seen in Delhi tomorrow. There is only one organization in the country capable of organizing and conducting a funeral procession in those conditions: the military."100 The father of the nation, paragon of nonviolence, would take his final journey in ceremonial procession down King's Way with military escort. Alan Campbell-Johnson, watching the procession as it inched down King's Way among throngs of mourners, realized Gandhi "was receiving in death an homage beyond the dreams of any Viceroy." 101 After his death Gandhi became even more of a saint than he had been in life. Revered and mourned by millions, Gandhi was no longer an active political figure but the greatest martyr to India's freedom.

### THE SYNTHESIS OF CULTURAL AND CIVIC NATIONALISM

These political and historical dynamics of imperialism and nationalism had little architectural bearing on the Viceroy's House. We have so far discussed physical alterations, such as Mountbatten's removal of the Viceregal seal and letterhead on the eve of independence and the removal of the crown on the flagpole of Government House. We have discussed disparate interpretations of the building from Gandhian and Nehruvian

<sup>99.</sup> Collins and Lapierre, 417, 496.; Nathuram Godse at a stockholders report of the *Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation)* newspaper, quoted in Collins and Lapierre, 415.

<sup>100.</sup> Quoted in Collins and Lapierre, 499.

<sup>101.</sup> Quoted in Collins and Lapierre, 504.

perspectives, and looked at behaviors of negotiation within Viceroy's House as a result of these two attitudes. There is yet very little architecture in all of this; the newly christened Government House remained largely a symbol of the Raj – first in opposition, then in negotiation and acceptance. Yet this context is absolutely critical in the symbolic refashioning of the building as India became independent. The dynamics of history, of assimilation, opposition, and division, lay under every action taken in Government House as it became Rashtrapati Bhavan and was shaped as a symbol of an emerging nation. It is immensely necessary to situate this transformation in its proper political and ideological context if we are to honestly trace the dynamics of space.

Two dominating ideologies driving this transformation were, as we have illustrated, cultural nationalism as expressed in Gandhi's vision of state, and civic nationalism as envisioned by Nehru. At times, and especially concerning the institutions of government, these two approaches are irreconcilable. And yet the Viceroy's House was retained in the new Dominion of India largely unchanged through the institution of Mountbatten as its first Governor-General. The continuance of government in free India required a continuity of architectural occupation. The Viceroy's House, now Government House, was no longer relevantly a space of opposition or negotiation.

It is probably necessary to point out that the categories cultural and civic are somewhat too stringent. It would be more accurate to claim that Indian nationalism, as a movement, comprised a vast set of personalized ideologies. That large swaths of Gandhi's and Nehru's thought permeated Congress is the only reason to consider their oppositions relevant to Government House. They serve largely as a framework to focus the relevant dynamics of national identity along two major branches.

How, then, to reconcile the institutional divide between cultural and the civic ideologies? How to reconcile Gandhi's call to convert the Viceroy's House into a hospital with the bureaucratic and symbolic institutions of government, viewed in large part by Nehru, and Congress, as necessary for the continuation of state? Cultural nationalism was founded in moral conviction, and both cultural and civic nationalism took the history of India as a proud and vibrant heritage. Civic nationalism was founded in a faith in democratic institutions. The synthesis of these two ideologies took place along the lines of humility, codifying national history, and state institutions.

New Delhi was an impossibly British establishment. So too was the Viceroy's House an offense against equality and a very tangible symbol of the Raj. And yet it was to be inhabited and appropriated. Here lies the heart of the matter; how to transform these institutions so blatantly imperial into the governmental foundations of a free Indian nation? The Indian National Congress, as it assumed power as the Congress Party, took as necessary the institutions of state required in the civic mode. Imperial contradictions coupled with the moral force of Gandhi's cultural nationalism forced a reconciliation of the institutions of government with symbols of India. The result was a symbolic transformation, physically manifest by altered behaviors towards and objects in Government House. The cultural and civic modes were synthesized by inserting strong symbols of national history into the necessary but offensive splendor of Government House. Self-consciously attacking the ceremonial pomp of Government House, India's first leaders mitigated the imperial grandeur with simple dignity. Thus could such an occupation be rightly transformative. Along these lines could Government House be symbolically transposed and not remain simply as a constant and defunct reminder of British imperial rule.

### C. Rajagopalachari: Symbolic Changes, Symbolic Charges

Due in part to the continuity of the Governor-Generalship through Mountbatten, Government House became an appropriate building to inhabit. Through the negotiations leading up to partition, the Viceroy's House had become a symbolic space of negotiation. As India remained in the interim years 1947-1950 a Dominion of the British Commonwealth, the Governor-General remained a nominal representative of the King. Government House remained, somewhat contradictorily, an obvious institutional continuation of the Raj into free India.

Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari had been the Premier of the Madras Presidency from July 1937 to his resignation on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1939, in protest against British ambivalence concerning Dominion status. Direct and pragmatic, Rajagopalachari was widely praised in Congress for his statesmanship and had been one of the major leaders of the independence movement. In the wake of widespread chaos in Calcutta in apprehension of the impending partition, Patel and Nehru asked Rajagopalachari to head the government in Bengal. Pefugees would soon flood across the new border, and Calcutta would surely emerge as a major flashpoint of violence. One fourth of West Bengal's inhabitants were Muslim, soon to

102. Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 140.

be in the Dominion of India. Between one fourth and one third of the inhabitants of East Bengal were Hindu. Rajagopalachari was unsure as to how he could stop the rioting without executive powers and said as much to Nehru. Nehru replied, "don't be silly, Rajaji. You can handle any job in this country." 104

Rajagopalachari expressed extreme discomfort with the rituals of Government House in Calcutta during his tenure there. "I feel like living in a cage here with people all round peeping through the bars," he noted in 1947, and a full month after moving in he wrote the previous governor that he was "still trying to familiarise myself with your late residence." While Gandhians in Calcutta called for the Government House to be converted into a hospital, Rajagopalachari maintained that such proposals rightly applied to Government House in New Delhi and other Governors' residences throughout India: such a step called for serious thought and not hasty gestures and could not be decided by him alone. <sup>106</sup>

Mountbatten was to leave by June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1948. Nehru wrote to Rajagopalachari: "we have to find a successor for him, and inevitably our eyes turn to you. ... I hope you will agree. Your presence in Delhi will be a great help to all of us, and especially me." Rajagopalachari had admirably handled the situation in Calcutta during his tenure as governor, and he had briefly stepped in as Governor-General at New Delhi when Mountbatten had been out of the country in November of 1946. After Gandhi's death, Patel wrote, "it is all the more essential that the remnant of his circle should pull his weight together and the counsels of each should be available to all." Against trepidations concerning the relative political weakness of the post, especially in light of the growing Nehru-Patel conflict, Rajagopalachari reluctantly accepted and was sworn in as India's second interim Governor-General in the Durbar Hall [59].

As uncomfortable in Viceregal splendor at New Delhi as he had been in Calcutta, Government House seemed to Rajagopalachari a cross between a zoo and a jail. "I should," he wrote during his tenure as Governor-General,

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103. Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 141.
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<sup>104.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 140.

<sup>105.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 145.

<sup>106.</sup> Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 145.

<sup>107.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 163.

<sup>108.</sup> Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 163.

<sup>109.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 164.

have been a college professor. Instead I have been a wanderer and after many vicissitudes I have settled down in a kind of prison called Government House in New Delhi. None of my movements are my own; everything is dictated.<sup>110</sup>

Rajagopalachari moved out of the southwest domestic wing and into a simpler suite that had previously been the quarters of the Vicereine's lady-in-waiting; all subsequent Presidents have followed this example.<sup>111</sup> In a similar symbolic move, Rajagopalachari ploughed up the golf course on the Viceregal estate in solidarity with the Grow More Food campaign, as food shortages and famines were rampant throughout the country [60].<sup>112</sup> Mitigating the ostentatious pomp of Viceregal life, Rajagopalachari self-consciously acted towards Government House with simple dignity.

Congress responded to Gandhian critiques that Government House was wasteful and ostentatious by altering its symbolic value. During the winter months of 1947-1948, a great exhibition of Indian and Pakistani art was held in London at Burlington House to celebrate the independence of the two Dominions. Congress decided that this heritage should be collected at Delhi and open to the public, and moved to form a National Museum. In 1949, the collected Indian pieces of the London exhibition were housed in Rashtrapati Bhavan rather than returning to their respective museums across India. The collection was displayed in the Durbar Hall and provided the core for the National Museum, completed in 1960.113 Drawing on a national heritage now a source of pride rather than evidence of stagnation as in the Orientalist mode, the exhibition both symbolically neutralized authoritative connotations of Government House and illustrated an attitude of transparency, openness, and public access to the previously British spaces of power. Government House was reprogrammed from a space of rule to a space of culture, a monument housing India's heritage rather than an monumental pile of imposed authority.

As the most ostentatious affront to democracy, Lutyens' building presented the problem of assimilation most purely on symbolic ground. In the interim years of 1947 to 1950 as the Constituent Assembly drafted a constitution of the Republic of India, Government House served no real function outside of the ceremonial. The Dominion of India remained

<sup>110.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 186.

<sup>111.</sup> Nath, 131.

<sup>112.</sup> Nath, 119.

<sup>113.</sup> Sharada Prasad, Rashtrapati Bhavan: the Story of the President's House (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in association with National Institute of Design for Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1992), 58.

under Mountbatten's nominal authority, but Mountbatten as Governor-General played a significantly different role in 1948 than he had in 1946 as Viceroy. Real political authority in India rested no longer in his hands but in those of Nehru, as Prime Minister. Government House became, then, a symbol even more ceremonial than it had been during the Raj. It is therefore here, in the most pure symbol of empire, that the strongest symbols of India were placed. Changes in occupation and ceremony further distanced India from the Raj. In this way the moral qualms of inheriting a legacy so blatantly imperial were placated by appealing to both civic and cultural nationalisms. The appropriation of the Viceroy's House as it became Government House did not simply symbolize a victory over the British, but a symbolic resolution of two visions of India, at times contradictory. By the end of his tenure in 1950 [61], Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari had set important symbolic precedents at Government House which would be given fuller release as it became Rashtrapati Bhavan. New Delhi, in its transformation, became a reflection not of empire, but of India.

### 1950-1977: THE SHAPE OF A NATION

irthed into trauma, the newly independent Republic of India fit itself uneasily into a bureaucratic structure inherited from the Raj. The Governor-Generalship of the interim period was rightly transitory, and the Dominion of India remained under nominal Crown rule. On January 26th, 1950, the Republic of India was born. No longer would India pay homage to a foreign king, even as nominal a tribute as it recently had been. The synthesis of cultural and civic nationalisms, so fundamental to the shape of the nation, was now allowed more performative leeway. Renaming rooms and institutions, relocating functions, choreographing ceremonies and performances, and installing or removing specific symbolic objects all served to transform Lutyens' imperial palace into an institution more properly suited to the emerging socialist republic. With a full formal break from the British Government, changes begun in 1948 by Rajagopalachari yielded fuller expression after 1950. India's rulers could not so easily settle into a palace inherited by the British. The occupation of Government House was more precisely an appropriation, an active process of reclamation and symbolic charging which functioned at the most obvious level in its change of name in 1950: Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President's House.

The new Republic inherited a direct legacy of prejudice and oppression stretching back nearly two centuries. How to fit itself to that institutional structure, and how to create a national identity out of such a divisive tragedy as partition? These questions yield physical expression in the reshaping of space. We look again to Rashtrapati Bhavan as a symbol of the nation.

#### CONSTITUTION AND CEREMONY

Common to both cultural and civic nationalisms was an assimilation of all the people of the geographic unit called India.<sup>114</sup> The three major leaders of the Congress Party - Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Vallabhbhai Patel – all held different views of the essence of Indian nationhood.115 Both Gandhi and Nehru ideologically encompassed all of India's peoples and assumed to speak on their behalf. In such a mode factional groups were impossible. India had become free under one organization, the Congress, and the Republic of India would govern through that organization. Gandhi, however, had opposed Congress' reformulation as a political party after independence – in his view it had outlived its usefulness as an organizing tool and the nation should properly be organized at the panchayat level. Gandhi saw conflict between groups as peripheral to an underlying harmony which could be achieved through satyagraha. Patel by contrast saw Congress' unity as a political alliance between different factions. 116 He also strongly opposed Congress' continuation as the dominating political party, but primarily because it assumed to speak for all of India.<sup>117</sup>

India had lost her strongest moral voice with the death of Gandhi in 1948. Patel and Nehru had been reconciled in the years following Gandhi's assassination, but by 1950 their conflict had once again flared and threatened to induce a political split. Upon Patel's death in December 1950, Nehru as Prime Minister would be allowed more freedom to shape the new nation along his ideological lines of civic nationalism.

To properly address the transformation of Government House to Rashtrapati Bhavan it is necessary to understand the structure of Indian government and the role the President plays within it. There is a considerable degree of similarity between the Constitution of India and the Government of India Act of 1935. As an April 1955 ruling of the Supreme

<sup>114.</sup> Tyabji, 210.

<sup>115.</sup> Tyabji, 218.

<sup>116.</sup> Tyabji, 211.

<sup>117.</sup> Tyabji, 212-213.

Court of India expressed, the Constitution, "though federal in its structure, is modelled on the British Parliamentary System," and that the President is the "formal or constitutional head of the executive," while "real executive powers are vested in the Ministers or the Cabinet." The Constitutional President of India is "superimposed on [a] Parliamentary system of the British type."

The President was widely seen to play a role analogous to the sovereign in the British Parliamentary system. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, expressed in 1960 that equating the powers of the President with those of the British Monarch would be to "wrongly interpret" the Constitution, as there "is no provision in the Constitution which in so many words lays down that the President shall be bound to act in accordance with the advice of his Council of Ministers." Nehru, however, affirmed categorically that the system of government prescribed by the Constitution was "basically modelled on the British Parliamentary System" and that the position of the President of India was similar to the position of the King in England. 121

The President of India was then to reign and not rule, on the model in effect at London. As Buckingham Palace is the residence of Britain's sovereign and not its Prime Minister, so too was Government House chosen to be the residence of the President at New Delhi. As a largely ceremonial executive, the President could safely occupy Government House without conjuring up too many immediate associations with the absolute power of previous Viceroys. So too would replacing Viceregal with Prime Ministerial authority seem improper – Government House held too many memories of direct British rule to allow such a substitution to go unnoticed. Nehru chose instead a personal residence on visual axis with Rashtrapati Bhavan, to the immediate south. Named after a memorial to Indian soldiers who fell in the First World War, Teen Murti Bhavan was originally the residence of the Commander-in-Chief of the British armed forces.

<sup>118.</sup> Rai Sahib Ram Jawaya Kapur and others vs. The State of Punjab, 1955, 2 S.C.R. 236-7; quoted in Ghosh, 141.

<sup>119.</sup> Ghosh, 141.

<sup>120.</sup> Quoted in Ghosh, 141-142.

<sup>121.</sup> Quoted in Ghosh, 142.

# Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the First President

By late 1949 the Constituent Assembly had finished drafting the constitution; India would become a Republic on January 26th, 1950. Nehru favored Rajagopalachari for the office of President and felt a continuity of the head of state appropriate. 122 By the end of September of 1949, however, it was clear that Dr. Rajendra Prasad, a prominent Congress leader, was interested in the position and that the majority of the party preferred Prasad over Rajagopalachari.123 Nehru moved, against Patel's advice, a resolution before the Congress that Rajagopalachari be chosen as President. A number of speakers opposed this resolution, Rajagopalachari further had no desire to cling to power. "I would rather be out of the picture," he had remarked to Patel in June. "Who wants this Governor-Generalship or Presidentship or Deputy Premiership or anything else?"124 Partially in support of Prasad and partially to prove to Nehru that he held no absolute sway over the Congress, Patel endorsed Prasad for the Presidency, and Rajagopalachari announced his retirement. As his last official act as Governor-General, Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari announced the birth of the Republic of India: on the morning of January 26th he swore in Dr. Rajendra Prasad as its first President [61,62].125

Government House, during the transitory period, had retained connections with the Crown. The interim Dominion of India had been, after all, a nation in the Commonwealth. Symbolic links with the Crown had been maintained. On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1950, this symbolic association was no more and the symbolic purge begun by Mountbatten on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1947, could continue in full force.

Two royal statues of the King-Emperor George V and the Queen-Empress Mary had been commissioned for the Viceroy's House and had held eternal watch over the grand Viceregal forecourt [63,64]. Funded by the Maharaja of Gwalior in a bid for imperial favor, the 2.3m statues had cost a total of £5,200. $^{126}$  Such highly overt and expensive references to imperial authority were unacceptable to the new Republic, and dur-

<sup>122.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 190.

<sup>123.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 190-191.

<sup>124.</sup> Quoted in Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 191.

<sup>125.</sup> Gandhi, The Rajaji Story, 197.

<sup>126.</sup> Nath, 101

ing Prasad's tenure they were first boxed [64] and ultimately removed to a less offensive interior loggia and there forgotten until the tenure of President Venkataraman in 1991.<sup>127</sup>

In another type of symbolic purge, Nehru in 1955 changed the road names of New Delhi to reflect an Indian, rather than British, heritage. The New York Times reported (*New York Times*, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1955) that on August 12<sup>th</sup>, he called a meeting of municipal councilors and local politicians, and new road signs were placed within the following few days. King's Way was renamed Rajpath – a literal Hindi translation of King's Way – and Queen's Way bisecting it perpendicularly, was renamed Janpath, or the People's Road. Altering the symbolic resonances of the city, this substitution presented a more Indianized New Delhi but left the connotations of the two major ceremonial roads intact.

Alterations to the State Dining Room present a similar structure of symbolic translation. As designed by Lutyens, the State Dining Room included an impressive gallery of portraits, hung on huge teak panels alternating with windows overlooking the gardens to the west. Governor-Generals and Viceroys, flanked by Delhi Order pilasters, lined the room and oversaw every State dinner, reminding the guests of the lineage of imperial power on the Indian subcontinent. As Prasad and his successor, Sarvepalli Radhikrishnan, settled into the house the portraits were gradually replaced. It is not entirely clear when the individual paintings were commissioned and hung, but as late as 1961 Lord Hardinge still graced the wall of the State Dining Room [65]. By 2002 every portrait had been replaced, the successive Presidents of India usurping the previous Governor-Generals and Viceroys [66]. The structure of this symbolic charging is the same employed during the Raj but with changed subject matter.

India, as a newly independent nation with an international perspective, needed a highly codified set of symbols to function in the same way as had the Royal Coat of Arms and the Viceregal Seal at the Viceroy's House. Congress had turned to India's past to search for an appropriate national symbol. The Emperor Aśoka, as Nehru wrote in *The Discovery of India*, had inherited a great empire in 273 BCE which he had then expanded to include almost the entire subcontinent:

<sup>127.</sup> Ramaswami Venkataraman, My Presidential Years (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1994), 387.

The whole of India acknowledged his sway, except for the southern tip, and that tip was his for the taking. But he refrained from any further aggression, and his mind turned, under the influence of Buddha's gospel, to conquests and adventures in other fields.<sup>128</sup>

Asoka both as a strong symbol of India's military power and a peaceful and just Buddhist leader provided fertile material from which the new nation of India, torn along lines Hindu and Muslim, could draw symbolic identity. Buddhism, as a minority religion, provided fairly neutral symbolic ground. Furthermore, Asoka was widely acknowledged to have been fair and magnanimous, promulgating famous edicts which stated in part that

no longer would Ashoka tolerate any more killing or taking into captivity, not even of a hundredth or a thousandth part of the number killed and made captive in Kalinga. True conquest consists of the conquest of men's hearts by the law of duty or piety, and, adds Ashoka, such real victories had already been won by him, not only in his own dominions, but in distant kingdoms.

The edict further says:

"Moreover, should any one do him wrong, that too must be borne with by His Sacred Majesty, so far as it can possible be borne with. Even upon the forest folk in his dominions His Sacred Majesty looks kindly and he seeks to make them think aright, for, if he did not, repentance would come upon His Sacred majesty. For His Sacred Majesty desires that all animate beings should have security, self-control, peace of mind, and joyousness." 129

# "This astonishing ruler," Nehru continues,

beloved still in India and in many parts of Asia, devoted himself to the spread of Buddha's teaching, to righteousness and goodwill, and to public works for the good of the people. He was no passive spectator of events, lost in contemplation and self-improvement. He laboured hard at public business and declared that he was always ready for it....

Everywhere an appeal was made to the mind and the heart: there was no force or compulsion. Ardent Buddhist as he was, he showed respect and consideration for all other faiths.<sup>130</sup>

What better symbolic spokesman for the secular state trying to consolidate an identity in the wake of religious violence? Aśokan building projects, edict pillars, religious ideology, and methodology of rule were all models that Nehru and the Congress Party would draw upon for symbolic weight to bolster the identity of the new nation.

<sup>128.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 137.

<sup>129.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 137.

<sup>130.</sup> Nehru, The Discovery of India, 137-138.

The most clear symbolic association of the new Republic of India with the Aśokan empire are found in the most strongly codified symbols of India. The national emblem of India [67] was adapted from the capital of an Aśokan edict pillar at Sārnāth comprising a circular abacus surmounted by four identical crouching lions. The National Flag of India was adapted from the flag which Gandhi had proposed in 1921, featuring a *charkha* or spinning-wheel and was made of hand-woven *khaddar* cloth, a symbol of protest against British cloth imports to Bengal in 1905-07.<sup>131</sup> Adopted as the flag of Congress in 1921, the appropriateness of this symbol had been affirmed by Rajagopalachari, then Secretary General of the Congress Committee, in a speech at Nagpur:

You don't find on our flag a tiger or lion or unicorn but only a charkha. It represents industry, good will and our new weapon against brute force. The government wouldn't have minded if we'd put the sign of a gun on it, as they have bigger guns. But the charkha represents thirty crores of charkhas and they can't resist its force. 132

The National Flag of India [68] is a slight revision of this flag, employing an Aśokan *dharmachakra*, or Wheel of Law, as its central emblem on a field of white between two horizontal bands of saffron and green. The similarity in form and name of spinning wheel and Wheel of Law created a new flag that referenced both an ancient and a recent past.

The Aśokan period, then, was widely read as analogous to the spirit of the new nation. As a glorious and appropriate past to draw on, its artifacts were employed as symbols in Rashtrapati Bhavan, charging Lutyens' ostentatiously imperial architecture with symbols of Indian strength. The collection exhibition of 1949 which had been housed in the Durbar Hall was moved to the National Museum upon its completion at the intersection of Janpath and Rajpath in 1960.<sup>133</sup> Two pieces from the collection were specifically retained at Rashtrapati Bhavan: an Aśokan Bull-capital from Rāmpūrvā, and a 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century CE Buddha from the Gandhara region, in what is now northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>131.</sup> Arundhati Virmani, "National Symbols under Colonial Domination: The Nationalization of the Indian Flag, March-August 1923," Past and Present 164 (August, 1999): 177-178.

<sup>132.</sup> Quoted in Virmani, 180.

<sup>133.</sup> Prasad, 58.

<sup>134.</sup> John Irwin, "Aśokan Pillars: A Reassessment of the Evidence," The Burlington Magazine 115, no. 848 (November, 1973): 713; Nath, 74. Irwin notes that the Bull-capital was actually uninscribed and in all likelihood predated the Aśokan period, but as in 1960 it was generally assumed to be Aśokan the symbolic connotations stand.

Standing under the grand dodecastyle portico on the monumental eastern façade of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Rāmpūrvā capital guards the main ceremonial entrance to the Durbar Hall [69,70]. Occupying the threshold between architectural and urban scales, the specific placement of this highly charged symbolic object creates a strong reference to Aśokan rule and mitigates the immediately imperial connotations of Lutyens' palace. The Rāmpūrvā Bull, as both a sacred animal in Hinduism and a proclamation of a more neutral Buddhist authority by virtue of Aśoka, presents at once an appropriately secular statement of symbolic association and an acknowledgment of religious faith.

The Gandhara Buddha, placed on a dais where once stood Lutyens' Viceregal thrones, mitigates the overtly imperial connotations of the Durbar Hall in a similar fashion [62,71]. Referencing spiritual simplicity and Aśokan connotations of beneficent and religiously tolerant rule, it rather than the Bull-capital is more appropriately placed in the symbolic heart of ceremonial authority. A symbolic object with Hindu connotations would have run counter to Nehru's and Gandhi's insistence that the the national identity be secular. The Preamble to the Constitution of India makes this distinction explicit:

We, the People of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic, and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation; In our constituent assembly this twenty-sixth day of November, 1949, do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this constitution.

The Preamble is replicated in the Durbar Hall, inscribed in both English and Hindi on two panels which flank the central Buddha [72].<sup>135</sup> The literal seat of Viceregal power in the Viceroy's House has been transformed into a symbolic seat of secular power, flowing not from a Viceroy but from a President duly elected and ruling ceremonially through a constitution. The accoutrements of secular democratic authority – the Preamble to the Constitution and a symbolic representation of religiously tolerant rule – have replaced the Viceregal thrones and Royal Coat of Arms which referenced autocratic imperial power. The Gandhara Buddha

<sup>135.</sup> Whether the Preamble is a permanent installation is unclear. In Prasad's book of 1992 it is featured, but in Nath's 2002 photographs it has been replaced by Indian flags. The symbolic connotations work on the same general model, and in both cases the Buddha is present.

works symbolically in collaboration with the Preamble as a symbol of governance, referencing a distinctly Indian tradition of assimilative rule stretching back to the mists of antiquity.

And yet there were in many ways more symbolic continuities than discontinuities in the transition from Government house to Rashtrapati Bhavan. The royal symbols of Crown rule had been prominently displayed on the Viceregal gate, on the tympanum over the main ceremonial central entrance, behind the Viceregal thrones in the Durbar hall, and topping the thrones themselves in the form of Britannic lions and twin crowns. In the years 1950-1977, these symbols were for the most part replaced wholesale with the national emblem of India [67]. As a highly codified reference to British rule, the Royal Coat of Arms was entirely inappropriate to the newly claimed architecture. Yet that method of symbolic representation remained, switching wholesale one codified symbol for another. To effectuate an immediate symbolic transformation, Prasad and Nehru had installed two key sculptural pieces with strong connotations of India's ancient past, a strong source of national pride in the cultural mode of nationalism. 136 By widely replacing the royal seal with the national emblem, they further altered the most strongly codified level of symbolic reading from British royal power to Indian national pride. This change was carried out with very little physical modification - the national emblem has replaced the royal seal on the gates, and the Viceregal thrones no longer flaunted Britannic lions but Asokan emblems [51,59,62]. By selectively reorienting strong symbols of India within Rashtrapati Bhavan consonant with the Congress' nationalist movement, Prasad and Nehru reconfigured the building to function as a symbol of the Republic of India instead of as a defunct reminder of British rule.

### Modernism as a New National Identity

The Republic of India emerged at the height of the Modernist movement, as new ideas about material and mass-produced construction gained significant traction in postwar reconstruction. The partition of the Punjab had left its traditional capital, Lahore, in Pakistan. Finding resonance with the progressive aims of Modernist architecture and city planning, Nehru commissioned Albert Mayer and Matthew Nowicki

<sup>136.</sup> It is unclear whether Prasad and Nehru drove these changes exclusively – more likely the highly specific symbolic decisions were made by Congress leaders. As Prasad occupied Rashtrapati Bhavan and acted as the head of the nation, the substitution of agency will hopefully be acceptable.

to design the new city of Chandigarh in 1948. Upon Nowicki's death in 1951, Le Corbusier was brought in and the city developed under his direct guidance [73,74,75].<sup>137</sup> The progressive rhetoric, focus on modern industry and infrastructure, and humanism increasingly apparent in Le Corbusier's later works all appealed to Nehru, who found a newly planned Modernist city an ideal symbolic step into India's future. Light, space and greenery, grand ordered planning with clear focal points, and a fusion of European and Indian traditions were of primary concern to Le Corbusier at Chandigarh, directly influenced by Lutyens' work at New Delhi. Like Lutyens, Le Corbusier combined themes and motifs of Mughal architecture with what he took as the Western tradition, no longer classical but embodied by his five points of new architecture.<sup>138</sup>

Yet the debt which Chandigarh owed to New Delhi was largely overshadowed by the Modernist rejection of traditionalism. At the inauguration of the Parliament building at Chandigarh, Nehru spoke of Chandigarh as a "temple of the new India,"

... the first expression of our creative genius, flowering on our newly earned freedom... unfettered by traditions of the past – reaching beyond the encumbrances of old towns and old traditions.<sup>139</sup>

Even as Nehru decried the "old tradition" of classicism so thoroughly expressed by Lutyens' at Rashtrapati Bhavan, it became quietly established as an integral part of Indian identity. Historiographies and hagiographies of Lutyens were in short supply between his death in 1944 and the late 1960s, but the President of India continually occupied his largest and most complex work. As Nehru turned India to Modernism as a new national identity unfettered by the traditions of the past, Rashtrapati Bhavan quietly solidified as a necessary and fundamental symbol of India. By 1977, the newly elected President Sanjiva Reddy would test Rashtrapati Bhavan's legitimacy as integral to Indian identity. The failure of this attempt marks the end of the transitional period, as Rashtrapati Bhavan became accepted as necessary to the functioning, both symbolic and operative, of the Indian State.

<sup>137.</sup> William Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900 (Oxford: Phaidon, 1982), 276.

<sup>138.</sup> Curtis, 277.

<sup>139.</sup> Curtis, 281.

# THE POST-TRANSITIONAL MOMENT

The Congress Party held a near monopoly in the Indian Government for almost thirty years after the founding of the Republic, in large part due to the particularly assimilative nature of its representational organization. Congress could claim to represent all of India as it had led India peacefully through independence. After Nehru's death in 1964, India fell into a "prolonged succession crisis and struggle for power," which culminated in the rise of Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, to political power in 1966.<sup>140</sup> Prompted by the death of President Zakir Husain in 1969 the Congress split over the nominee for the Presidency. V.V. Giri, Indira Gandhi's chosen candidate, won the battle against the official Congress nominee, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy. However, in the aftermath of President Giri's election, Indira Gandhi was expelled from the Congress and lost control over the party organization. Calling for national parliamentary elections in March 1971, Indira Gandhi's new Congress (R) party won a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, the lower parliamentary house. This overwhelming victory cemented Indira Gandhi's position as leader of the country.<sup>141</sup> Following the civil war and secessionist movement in East Pakistan, the Indian Army invaded in December 1971 in the major military action of the Third Indo-Pakistan War which led to the foundation of the new state of Bangladesh. In the wake of this political and military victory, Indira Gandhi developed a highly personalized and centralized political methodology that involved an unprecedented assertion of executive power.<sup>142</sup>

Food shortages and rising prices of 1973-74 focused criticism on the government, and a nationwide movement against governmental corruption prompted an investigation by the Allahabad High Court into the legitimacy of the 1971 Parliamentary elections. The High Court found Indira Gandhi's election invalid on the grounds of corrupt practices on June 12<sup>th</sup>, 1975. On June 26<sup>th</sup> President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed declared at Indira Gandhi's request a national state of Emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution. Parliament quickly passed new electoral laws which validated the 1971 elections, and President's Rule was imposed on the entire country. Parliamentary elections scheduled for March 1976 were postponed indefinitely and state legislative assembly

Paul Brass, The Politics of India since Independence (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990), 38.

<sup>141.</sup> Brass, 39.

<sup>142.</sup> Brass, 39-40.

<sup>143.</sup> Brass, 40-41.

and Parliament terms extended.<sup>144</sup> The effectively dictatorial rule, in addition to draconian policies largely instituted at the behest of Sanjay, Indira's son, prompted wide discontent which pressured her to call for national elections in 1977. The Janata party, leading a coalition formed with the goal of ousting Congress (R) from power, won a bare majority of 295 seats in the Lok Sabha. The coalition as a whole, however, gained a more than two-thirds victory, leaving only 28 percent of the seats in the House to Congress.<sup>145</sup>

Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, elected President in 1974, had died in office in February 1977 before the end of his term. With the backing of the Janata Government, Neelam Sanjiva Reddy was elected as the sixth President of India in July, the only President to be elected unopposed. On his first Independence Day address to the nation, President Reddy "stressed the need to avoid vulgar ostentation and unnecessary pomp." He writes, in his memoirs:

I had decided "to move out of Rashtrapati Bhavan into a simpler house which will not be inconsistent with, or detract from, the dignity of the high office of President of India." <sup>147</sup>

President Reddy's critique of pomp and ceremony was likely an implicit critique of Congress, which he may have seen as fitting too comfortably into the monopolizing precedent of British power. The recent dictatorial stance of Indira and Sanjay Gandhi would certainly have had some resonance with British imperial methods. Drawing on the simplicity preached by Gandhi, President Reddy effectively reflected his opposition to Indira Gandhi's rule through opposition to the remnants of British rule.

By 1977, however, Rashtrapati Bhavan had become an integral part in the ceremonial and practical functioning of state. The building was used to house visiting heads of state, invest military and civil honors, the presentation of credentials by ambassadors, the swearing-in ceremonies of Ministers, and numerous other diplomatic relations of state. Rashtrapati Bhavan further housed the Cabinet Secretariat, the President's own office and secretariat, and the Departments looking after the maintenance of the President's Estate and gardens.

<sup>144.</sup> Brass, 41.

<sup>145.</sup> Brass, 42.

<sup>146.</sup> N. Sanjiva Reddy, Without Fear or Favour: Reminiscences and Reflections of a President (Allied Publishers Limited: New Delhi, 1989), 10.

<sup>147.</sup> Reddy, 10.

<sup>148.</sup> Reddy, 11.

In pursuance of my decision the authorities concerned in my Secretariat and in the Government examined the feasibility of using Hyderabad House as the President's residence. ... they felt it would be necessary to make numerous additions and alterations before [the proposed new residences] could be held suitable for use of the President, his domestic staff, and his ASDC. Also it involved non-recurring expenditure of over Rs.1,25,00,000, and recurring annual expenditure of nearly Rs.10,00,000. I baulked at the prospect of imposing so heavy a financial burden on the exchequer. My sole purpose in wanting to move to a more modest quarters was to set an example of simple living, but if it was to result in large additional recurring expenditure, it was not worth it. ... it cost the nation a great deal of money to keep Gandhiji poor.<sup>149</sup>

Even if the President should move to a different building, there would be no reduction in expenditure; for Rashtrapati Bhavan will have to be maintained for these purposes.

Rashtrapati Bhavan is thus a public building, one that should be maintained in good condition.<sup>150</sup>

By 1977, the occupation of Rashtrapati Bhavan was no longer an open question. Ceremonial institutions of state, both domestic and international, required that it be maintained in good working order. As a symbolic arena representative of India to foreign dignitaries, the dignity of the high office of the President required an adequately dignified residence. Rashtrapati Bhavan, still a contentious symbol of imperial grandeur, had become a necessary symbol of India. The transformation of the Viceroy's House through Government House into Rashtrapati Bhavan was effectively complete.

# THE CODIFICATION OF LEGACY

THE VICEROY'S HOUSE, SO STRONG a symbol of the Raj upon its completion in 1929, was by 1977 an integral institution of the Republic of India. Through an underlying ideology which held that India accepted and assimilated its invaders into a uniquely Indian identity, the divergent ideologies of cultural and civic nationalism shaped the Viceroy's House first as a space of opposition and then as a space of negotiation in the years leading up to independence. Through mounting tensions and increasingly antagonistic conflicts along religious lines, the Raj was partitioned into the Dominions of India and Pakistan in 1947. On the

<sup>149.</sup> Reddy, 10.

<sup>150.</sup> Reddy, 11-12.

momentous day of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947, India awoke to freedom and began to haltingly consolidate the institutions of the new Republic to the physical remnants of the Raj at New Delhi. The continuity of the office of Governor-General in the interim period of 1947-1950, symbolically tied to Crown rule while the Constituent Assembly drafted a constitution, eased the symbolic transition from the Viceroy's House to Rashtrapati Bhavan and gave credence to Lutyens' architecture as a useful institution of state. During this transitory period physical changes to the building were somewhat limited but the synthesis of cultural and civic nationalisms informed the direction in which Government House was to take symbolically in the coming years.

With the founding of the Republic of India on January 26th, 1950, these pressures were given full release, as Government House became Rashtrapati Bhavan and was strategically altered to navigate the incongruity of occupying such a strongly imperial symbol. The strongest remnants of empire were removed or altered, and new symbols of India drawn from the ancient Buddhist past put in their place. The most offensive behaviors of British rule, specifically grand ceremony and pomp, were altered and subdued. As Nehru searched for an architectural outlet for India's identity, he turned to Modernism as reflecting the ideals of the new nation. As concerns of state and healing the trauma left in the wake of partition came to the forefront in the immediate postcolonial period, Rashtrapati Bhavan continued to operate in the background as a ceremonial institution housing the head of the nation. As the Congress Party began to lose its political monopoly in the late 1970s, the appropriateness of Rashtrapati Bhavan was called into question but deemed necessary. For better or worse, the transformation of the Viceroy's House into Rashtrapati Bhavan was largely complete.

From animosity and through unease, to acceptance and ultimately to necessity, attitudes towards Rashtrapati Bhavan reflected attitudes towards the British past. Consciously motivated discontinuities from British procedure and symbolism drew Rashtrapati Bhavan into symbolic consonance with the new India but left many continuities intact and implicit. This process of symbolic transformation was not so linear nor so wholeheartedly accepted as it has been presented here, but by 1977 Rashtrapati Bhavan was accepted by the government as a necessary symbolic object. Assimilating an imperial identity into the image of India, Rashtrapati Bhavan was instrumental to defining a nation, both reflecting India's transition to freedom and pulling it through independence by providing symbolic continuity.

The Viceroy's House had never been a stable symbolic object. Designed as a functioning monument to the strength of the British Empire, it embodied in architectural form the deep contradictions embedded in that imperial ideology. The building was never even a wholly codified symbolic unit, but a conglomeration of functions and symbolic spaces under one skin. Erected with full expression of the contradictions of empire, the Viceroy's House was selectively dismantled after independence to fit into the emergent Republic of India. As both a symbol of the Raj and a newly appropriated symbol of India, the legacy of this transformation from Viceroy's House through Government House to Rashtrapati Bhavan has great bearing on the political and ideological shape of contemporary India.

Few heads of state anywhere in the world live in such imposing splendour as the President of India does in Rashtrapati Bhavan. Moreover, as the house of the President of India it symbolises the authority of the world's largest democracy. But Rashtrapati Bhavan has also become something of a historical paradox. It was built to announce that the British had arrived in India, and intended to stay. But as we know, the British Raj ended in 1947 and it became the new democracy's Presidential lodging.

President Ramaswami Venkataraman

When the moment comes to talk about the Viceroy's House as colonial architecture, we cannot say for sure what it stands for, what its evidentiary status is. Is this a diorama of a reconstructed British-Indian "family group," harmoniously arranged in front of our eyes? Is this an evil predatory animal poised to swallow New Delhi? Is this evidence of British hubris and Indian docility? Is this evidence of the degree of infiltration of Indian culture by Britain? What we suddenly start discussing are Lutyens' intentions. And what we have to say about this building is reduced to a description of it – here is the tea garden, here is the entry court. Description, in architecture, tries to pass the building off as an account of the evidence, but it is really a form of lament for something that has been lost.

Catherine Ingraham

# Postcolonial Reflections

the dichotomies of nationalism

DWIN LUTYENS BEARS A MIXED LEGACY in contemporary India. His triumphs as an aesthetic genius are generally undisputed yet his disparaging and imperialist attitude towards India is rightly decried. Indian residents of Rashtrapati Bhavan have consistently expressed both veneration and unease in inhabiting such a building. And yet the pomp and glory of Lutyens' creation has not significantly changed. Its immediate occupants after independence pledged humility in the face of such grandeur – through carefully keyed behaviors and carefully placed objects the imperial shout of Rashtrapati Bhavan has been tempered. Impelling this transformation were two ideologies in tension; competing ideas of India which, when brought to head in the halls of the Viceroy's House, transformed it to Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Today, India steps increasingly towards the forefront of a globalized society. With a burgeoning economy and booming population, India is quickly establishing itself as a worldwide economic and military power. New Delhi, the physical and symbolic heart of the government of India, is uniquely structured to resonate with India's increasingly militant national identity. As a monument to British imperialism, pointed transformations of Rashtrapati Bhavan reflect the relationship of India to its colonial heritage. Symbolic transformations along lines previously discussed continue, and continue to reflect an Indian national identity. The nuances of an emergent Hindu nationalism and the myriad contemporary expressions of national identity are rooted in complexity – to produce a more complete image of symbolic changes from the late 1970s to 2007 would require a more thorough examination than is possible here. Nevertheless, significant alterations to Rashtrapati Bhavan and New Delhi through symbolic objects, behaviors, and interpretative histories reveal the general shape of this transformation. The following survey is hardly comprehensive but clearly illustrates the symbolic status of Rashtrapati Bhavan in India today. As a postcolonial nation employing in its government the relics of colonial rule, India enjoys a dichotomous relationship with its past both as a source of pride and a flashpoint for critique.

# 1986-2007: Nationalist Resonances

Much in India has changed in the past quarter century, and attitudes towards Lutyens' Delhi have shifted much from the immediate postcolonial period. Rashtrapati Bhavan and New Delhi generally have settled into a symbolic role as rightly gained spoils of peaceful victory over the British, a living example to the assimilative quality of India to incorporate diverse cultures. Yet the relics of the Raj, erected so strongly in support of empire, resist symbolic neutrality. The symbolic structures of Rashtrapati Bhavan and Lutyens' Delhi hold memories of imperial aspiration by their very form. The splendours of imperialism exert a subtle influence on contemporary Indian nationalism and the national identity of India, proposed at New Delhi through the shape of government ceremonies and official interpretive histories. As ceremonies and objects proclaiming the military, cultural, and historical strengths of India fit themselves to New Delhi, the contemporary image of the city finds some resonance with the imperial image of 1931.

The first physical evidence of this resonance concerns the creation of the Indira Gandhi Centre for Arts, commissioned by the Government of India as a memorial to the late Prime Minister who had been assassinated at the hands of Sikh separatists in 1984. The design competition of 1986 called for an institution sited at the ceremonial center of New Delhi to reflect India's diverse cultural heritage and the Government of India's claim to represent it.¹ The brief called for a museum sited at the southeastern corner of the crossing of Rajpath and Janpath. An area originally envisioned by Lutyens to be the cultural node of New Delhi, this intersection was to house four symmetrically disposed buildings: an Ethnological Museum, an Oriental Institute, the National Library, and the Imperial Record Office. In 1918 a War Museum and Medical Research Institute were added to this group, but due to lack of funds

I. Swati Chattopadhyay, "Expedient Forgetting: Architecture in late-twentieth-century Indian nationalist imagination," Design Book Review 43 (2000): 17.

only the Record Office, now the National Archives, was built [30].<sup>2</sup> The competition guidelines were extremely intricate, calling for a wide range of programs and, significantly included a "laboriously detailed recommendation about the symbolic references that designers could bring into play and presented a curiously uncritical reading of Lutyens' plan of New Delhi."<sup>3</sup> The competition called for stylistic integration into New Delhi, a building which would reflect themes employed by Lutyens and Baker. As if in anticipation of a critique of the political implications of explicitly referencing a colonial legacy, the brief quoted Indira Gandhi as stating, "whatever influence came to this country the end product was unmistakably Indian."<sup>4</sup> Attempting to define Indianness along nationalist lines in reference to Lutyens' works, the competition guidelines reflected the official political ideology of late-twentieth-century India.<sup>5</sup>

As Swati Chattopadhyay argues, the highly political overtones of the competition have hardly been recognized as overtly political when seen only as an architectural problem.<sup>6</sup> He further argues that assimilative requirements of the brief in fact belies a specifically Hindu nationalism, highly visible and militant among other competing nationalisms, some of them separatist, fundamentalist, and extremist. Drawing explicitly on an imagined Hindu antiquity, the competition

must be understood in political terms and alongside the constant effort to bring disenfranchised groups within a Hindu majority. After all, a Hindu majority can only be maintained as long as tribals and untouchables do not openly declare themselves outside this majority. The feeble secular rhetoric of the competition guidelines could not mask a model of a nation grounded in an imagined view of Hindu antiquity. ... For matters architectural, this tradition fetish allowed many entrants to flirt with postmodern aesthetics using traditional artistic motifs.<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not the brief implicitly supported a specifically Hindu nationalism on the part of the government it did call for a reconciliation of antiquity with modernism, placing Lutyens' Delhi on the same symbolic level as India's ancient past as a history to be assimilated into Indian national identity.

- 2. Chattopadhyay, 18-19.
- 3. Chattopadhyay, 19.
- 4. Quoted in Chattopadhyay, 23.
- 5. Chattopadhyay, 23. Chattopadhyay further claims that Indira Gandhi's assimilative claim is without basis upon further reflection. I would maintain that the assimilative diversity embodied by Congress' ideology is a prevalent and real ideological force in national self-identity.
- 6. Chattopadhyay, 29.
- 7. Chattopadhyay, 27.

The winning design by Ralph Lerner [76] clearly fulfilled the symbolic and functional requirements of the brief. Although it rejected overall axial symmetry, Lerner's design employed large courts shaped similarly to those at Rashtrapati Bhavan, slightly battered walls of red and pink sandstone, and overall axiality and symmetry of access which all referenced Lutyens' work. Whether or not Lerner's response to the brief acquiesced to a specifically Hindu nationalism, it serves as a concrete example of the strong assimilative nationalism of the Government of India today, which wholeheartedly embraces Lutyens' Delhi.

Government buildings such as the Supreme Court of India, constructed after independence, draw heavily on the "Lutyens style" as well, a unique neoclassicism presenting an unequal synthesis of British and Indian forms. Upper class residents of Delhi demand and erect "Lutyens Bungalows," emulating the stately classicism of the green and open Lutyens' Delhi. In government institutions and elite residences not necessarily tied to the national bureaucracy, new construction in Lutyens' Delhi contains a reflection of the ideology of a highly organized bureaucracy of the city as originally composed [13].

### CEREMONY AND RITUAL

The investiture ceremonies in which the Viceroy would bestow titles and favors on local princes finds great resonance in Ambassadorial ceremonies carried out in Rashtrapati Bhavan today. The State Ballroom, an entertaining space in the Viceroy's House, functions more as a formal state room conducive to international relations and bestowing national awards [77,78]. Some formal ceremonies of state have migrated here from the daunting formality of the Durbar Hall. Renamed Ashok Hall, the room functions as a supplementary arena for formal state ceremonies and international receptions. The reference to Aśoka is highly intentional and creates a symbolic continuity of Indian authority across two millennia. Ramaswamy Venkataraman, the eighth President of India from 1987 to 1992, gives an account of the ceremony of receiving Ambassadorsdesignate in his memoirs. He narrates the presentation of credentials by new Ambassador-designate of China on July 31st, 1987. Following strict protocol, the Ambassador-designate arrives in a motorcade at the gates of Rashtrapati Bhavan, then takes a horse-drawn state coach through the forecourt. Here,

<sup>8.</sup> Chattopadhyay, 28.

<sup>9.</sup> B.P. Singh, The Millennium Book on New Delhi (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 132.

the Ambassador-designate inspects a Guard of Honour presented by the three services. The national anthem of the Ambassador-designate's country is played, followed by our national anthem. ... Led by the Military Secretary to the President, the Ambassador-designate and his officers and the Foreign Secretary and his officers arrive at the upper loggia adjacent to the Ashoka Hall. ...

The President is then escorted to the Ashoka Hall where he takes his seat in a silver chair. The silver chair weighs about 640 kg and was used by British Emperor George V at the Delhi Durbar held in 1911-12. After independence, this chair was used by Presidents when they received letters of credence from heads of missions accredited to India.<sup>10</sup>

There is hardly an example more clear of the shape of symbolic appropriation than this: the throne from which the King-Emperor decreed that the capital should be moved to Delhi was then employed in receiving official Ambassadors to postcolonial India [79]. The British imperial standard has been replaced with Sārnāth lions, but other than this exchange of highly codified symbols the function and connotation of the silver throne remains intact from its imperial employment in 1911.

### Interpretive Histories

During his tenure, President Venkataraman also commissioned an official biography of Rashtrapati Bhavan. In the preface to this slim volume, published in 1992 and written by Sharada Prasad, President Venkataraman placed Rashtrapati Bhavan in a wider scope of Indian history. He wrote, in part, that

Indian stone, both supple and tough, smooth and heavy-grained, had earlier gone into the making of two other regal residences in Delhi, the Purina Qila and the Red Fort. Those gaunt monuments proclaimed India's architectural excellence – and more. They bespoke India's artistic skills and symbolized its strength. ... But to the genius in architecture, Edwin Lutyens, the Raisina Hill appealed as an ideal site for the [Viceroy's House]. A palace on this hillock would crown the landscape. Visible across miles, the palace would levitate on the horizon as a monument that is a cut above the rest.

... Years of painstaking research and meticulous study went into the planning of the noble pile. ... When in 1929 after years of construction activity the monumental work was completed, there came to be added to the list of the world's palaces a fresh, new name. But a name that had an

<sup>10.</sup> Ramaswami Venkataraman, My Presidential Years (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1994), 31.

old ring to it. The "wicker trellis" of Sarnath hallowed by Gautama the Buddha and ancient Indian motifs like the Sun, the serpent, and, of course, the elephant adorned its walls, lintels, cornices, plinths and courtyards.<sup>11</sup>

As a continuation of the qualities of Indian palaces and adorned with Indian symbolic motifs, President Venkataraman has presented Rashtrapati Bhavan as the creation of an aesthetic genius. This attribution may not be completely incorrect, but the stress on the inherent Indian qualities of the Viceroy's House is somewhat misleading. President Venkataraman further addresses the symbolic translation of the building in the years leading up to independence:

The building which Lord Irwin stepped into in 1929 was a metaphor for the Raj: strong, regal and majestic – like a caprisoned elephant. The building which, three Viceroys later, Lord Mountbatten stepped out of retained the same elephantine bearing, but there was a difference. The pachyderm now displayed a different aspect of its personality: wisdom and sagacity. Mahatma Gandhi had in the meantime visited the building for several rounds of parleys. The best minds of India and Britain had interacted in it, often with heat but always with courtesy and decorum of which the Indian leaders were living examples.<sup>12</sup>

We have seen how the Viceroy's House shifted from a symbolic space of opposition to a space of negotiation, and how this ideological reframing prepared the course for occupation and symbolic transformation. Yet this process was halting and difficult, an almost violently self-conscious appropriation through symbolic and behavioral change. The absence of literature on New Delhi or Rashtrapati Bhavan for nearly half a century alone speaks of the unease with which this translation was carried out. Nehru primarily searched for postcolonial identity in new building projects such as at Chandigarh, not in appropriating imperial monuments.

The contemporary resurgence of interest in Rashtrapati Bhavan and Lutyens, then, finds some resonance in the "post-transitional" period, after the occupation of Rashtrapati Bhavan became a definitively closed question. By 1992 the occupation of Rashtrapati Bhavan was taken not only as necessary but as appropriate, and Prasad discusses how symbolic changes to the building fit into Lutyens' original scheme rather than critiquing its occupation. Referencing the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century Buddha in the Durbar Hall, Prasad notes its importance and recounts a short history

Sharada Prasad, Rashtrapati Bhavan: the Story of the President's House (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in association with National Institute of Design for Rashtrapati Bhavan, 1992), i-ii.

<sup>12.</sup> Prasad, i-ii.

of the National Museum. Contrasted with the "architectural resplendence" of the Hall, Prasad notes that the "face which radiates beatitude" bestows a benediction on ceremonies and charges the space towards reverence and ancient history rather than ceremonial pomp.13 "The mellow light of the Hall," he writes, "gives the impression more of the cavern of a cathedral than the main chamber of a palace."14 And what fantastic coincidence, what utter genius on Lutyens' part to create such a space that, in the center of a grand imperial palace, shouted not "Empire" but "Te Deum." The Durbar Hall, in spite of its name and heavily imperial symbolism, has become a symbolically fluid space, which allows alternate interpretations more in keeping with Indian national identity. Of course this interpretive position can almost be expected in a publication by the Government of India, but the veneration with which Rashtrapati Bhavan is treated elsewhere supports the proposition that even the most strongly imperial space in the building has been reconfigured to speak for India rather than Britain.

President K.R. Narayanan, sworn in July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1997, commissioned a similar biographical volume of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Lavishly illustrated, Aman Nath's *Dome Over India* attacks more sharply Lutyens' disparaging attitudes towards Indian art and the hubris of British imperialism. Revealing an uneasy relationship with Lutyens, Nath writes:

Eventually, however, it was the grandeur of empire which gave Lutyens his Indian scale and style, elevating him internationally to new commanding heights, a supreme master of his craft, who, despite his failings, remains a legend of his Indian era.<sup>15</sup>

Nath draws the fine line between an admiration of Lutyens' genius and critique of his imperialism. Ultimately he presents the continuity of Rashtrapati Bhavan as two very distinct attitudes towards the building: imperial and democratic.

Both official histories draw on this distinction, and employ the same basic structure. After a historical sketch, Prasad and Nath both give an overview of the major spaces of the building, highlighting Indian motifs and symbolic objects in Rashtrapati Bhavan not included in Lutyens' original scheme. They then recount the history of its occupants and give a brief biographical synopsis of each President and, where applicable, their attitudes toward the building. Presenting Rashtrapati Bhavan as a British monument which through occupation and reconfiguration has

<sup>13.</sup> Prasad, 58.

<sup>14.</sup> Prasad, 52.

<sup>15.</sup> Aman Nath, Dome over India: Rashtrapati Bhavan (Mumbai: India Book House, 2002), 69.

become a living Indian monument, both Prasad and Nath present the official interpretive history of the building. The Viceroy's House may have been built resplendently but through occupation and alterations however uneasy, Rashtrapati Bhavan is unquestionably Indian.

#### **OBJECTS**

In keeping with his desire to preserve and display the history of India's British material heritage, President Venkataraman organized and presented the extensive collection of art treasures accumulated by Viceroys and Presidents over half a century in a series of museums in Rashtrapati Bhavan opened in October, 1991. A museum diagonally opposite the Durbar Hall, previously the State Supper Room [37] houses an extensive collection of works by modern Indian masters and autographed portraits of heads of state presented to the Presidents of India. Presented as well are artifacts of the Raj, such as the silver throne [79] crafted for the 1911 Coronation Durbar now retired from Ambassadorial ceremonies.

In a similar vein, President Venkataraman opened the Portrait Gallery on October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1991, converting the previously named Marble Hall into a museum to house and display British memorabilia. In collaboration with the British High Commission, President Venkataraman had listed and sorted the vast stores of Rashtrapati Bhavan, and the resulting collection [80] includes Viceregal portraits previously hung in the State Dining Room [65], marble busts and large portraits of royalty and Viceroyalty, crests bearing Viceregal coats of arms, a gilded crown, and the two monumental marble statues of George V and Mary [63] which once stood on the eastern porticoes.

The accumulated artifacts of the Raj remain in Rashtrapati Bhavan, but no longer as symbolically functional objects in a monument to imperial splendour and steeped in imperial procedure. The eternity which these objects proclaim persists only as a testament to faded power and imperial hubris. In the spirit of collecting and presenting an imperial heritage in what had been the Viceroy's House, President Venkataraman has effectively neutralized the Raj to a historical event.

And yet a certain level of comfort with the accoutrements of Viceregal splendour betrays the somewhat contradictory national identity presented by the Government of India. The memory of Rashtrapati Bhavan as the Viceroy's House can hardly be erased, but the attention paid to the proponents of its grandeur serves almost rather to bolster the

<sup>16.</sup> Prasad, 78.

implications of imperial splendor rather than to negate it. The assimilative ideology which holds that any period of foreign rule may be appropriated under an Indian quality seems here a rather thin veil to a more authoritative ideology.

#### Urban Resonances

Nowhere is this comfort with the remnants of imperial ideology more strongly present than at the Republic Day Parade, held annually on January 26<sup>th</sup> to commemorate the foundation of the Republic of India in 1950. The parade presents an elaborate spectacle, as performing groups from every corner of the nation converge on Delhi to represent their cultural constituencies. The parade begins at the Raisina Hill complex and proceeds down Rajpath, ultimately culminating with a speech by the Prime Minister at the Red Fort. Exhibiting a blend of cultural and civic nationalisms, traditional dances and floats illustrating the history of diverse Indian regions pass down Rajpath, flooded with spectators [81]. Showcasing a wide range of cultural traditions, the Republic Day parade draws on the diverse heritage of India, presenting the vibrancy of tradition and culture as a strong source of national identity and pride.

Military strength presents another strong source of national pride, which fits more closely to the civic mode of nationalism [82,83,84]. India's postcolonial history has not been extremely peaceful, and tensions with Pakistan have erupted in a series of wars and conflicts, largely centered around the region of Kashmir.<sup>17</sup> India has witnessed as well in recent years an increasingly powerful Hindu nationalism whose roots and nuances are too complex to trace here.<sup>18</sup> This rising nationalism in confluence with economic, technological, and military developments have created a somewhat militant nationalism in India today.

Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, the "Missile Man of India" and the nation's eleventh and current President, was sworn in on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Something of a folk hero in India, Kalam studied aeronautical engineering at the Madras Institute of Technology, ran a missile development program in the 1980s, and had served as scientific advisor to the Ministry of Defence for the BJP party from 1998 until his election as President in 2002. He led the development of the AGNI-II missile system, an intermediate-range ballistic missile platform capable of delivering a nuclear

<sup>17.</sup> A predominantly Muslim territory, the Maharaja of the princely state of Kashmir had opted to join the Dominion of India and not Pakistan in 1947. The dispute over Kashmir has raged since 1948, and continues as a divisive military question today between India and Pakistan.

<sup>18.</sup> John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) presents a valuable history of this emergence and its causes.

warhead [85]. With a range of 2,500 km, the AGNI-II is instrumental in India's nuclear threat to Pakistan and a great source of national pride. <sup>19</sup> In an article on Kalam's election to the Presidency (*New York Times*, July 19, 2002), David Rhode quotes Kalam's call that "India has to be transformed into a developed nation, a prosperous nation and a healthy nation, with a value system." Technical and military development, seen as instrumental to India's future, feature prominently at the Republic Day Parade, the unabashed militancy of tanks and marching troops following presentations of cultural heritage.

Such ceremonial displays find unique resonance with the grandly imperial avenues of Lutyens' Delhi. The Government of India has in large part selectively rejected its imperial legacy, but employs the ceremonial disposition of its capital as uniquely conducive to nationalist ceremonies, at once cultural and civic. Nationalism in India fits its image to the relics of the Raj, translating overtly imperial connotations of New Delhi while retaining to large degree its imperial mechanics. Both on an architectural and urbanistic scale, ceremonies choreographed to India's strengths within the structures of New Delhi reflect upon an architectural splendor uniquely British.

Beating the Retreat [86], the ceremonial end to three days of official celebrations following Republic Day, comprises a procession of military marching bands along the Raisina complex at sunset. Adapted in name and form from the British ceremony, the Republic Day festivities officially end with this procession, as the band master requests permission from the President to march the bands away and the Secretariats, Parliament building, and Rashtrapati Bhavan are brilliantly illuminated.

New Delhi was built as a thoroughly imperial city, but in some ways the flaws in Lutyens' grand scheme serve to draw from it a more democratic urban reading. The battle of the gradient, Lutyen's "Bakerloo," obscured the culminating dominance of his Viceroy's House from the foot of Raisina Hill. But what Lutyens saw as his greatest failure at New Delhi can perhaps be read as an appropriate symbolic disposition in contemporary India. The Prime Minister holds office in Baker's South Block; as Rashtrapati Bhavan slips out of sight upon approach, Raisina Hill is read as a cohesive unit. The Secretariats, housing the bureaucracy of the Indian Government, function on the same symbolic level as does Rashtrapati Bhavan. Standing in Vijay Chowk at the base of Raisina Hill, only the dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan is visible but the wings of Baker's

<sup>19.</sup> Anupam Srivastava, "India's Growing Missile Ambitions: Assessing the Technical and Strategic Dimensions," Asian Survey 40 (March - April, 2000): 315.

Secretariats project prominently. The culmination of New Delhi is no longer the Viceroy's House as it would have been in Lutyens' conception, but an acropolis across which power is symbolically shared between the head and the ministry of state. As an architectural culmination to an urban scheme, Raisina Hill expresses not authority flowing from one source but a collaboration of ceremonial and ministerial power.

#### A Double-Edged Sword

If the Viceroy's House was transformed from a symbol of British rule to a symbol of independent India, it retains an unstable history. Symbolic transformation does not imply historical amnesia. Rashtrapati Bhavan remains a built legacy of the British Raj, even standing as it does at the head of the Republic of India. This symbolic duality produces a deep instability. Rashtrapati Bhavan, ostensibly reflecting independent India, enshrines as well a memory of the Raj and acts as a universally understood symbol of imperial legacy.

Such unstable symbolic objects as Rashtrapati Bhavan are often useful tools of governmental critique. The 2006 Bollywood film, Rang de Basanti, draws upon the symbolic instability of New Delhi to drive a narrative highly critical of the Indian government. As a physical arena where parallels with the Raj are immediately and deeply implicated, New Delhi drives the film and provides a sharp critique by drawing on a shared symbolic history. Though appropriated, the buildings of Lutyens' Delhi immediately conjure up associations with the Raj.

The film, directed by Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, and written by Mehra and Renzil D'Silva, tells the story of a group of university students in Delhi. Disillusioned with India, they are instigated to follow in the footsteps of militant nationalists Chadrashekhar Azad, Ashfaqulla Khan, Ram Prasad Bismil, and Bhagat Singh. This group of freedom fighters took up arms against the British in the late 1920s. Equating the oppression of the Raj with contemporary government corruption, the group of students parallel their predecessors' struggle for India. The international title of *Rang de Basanti* is *Paint it Yellow*, more liberally translated as "the color of my freedom." The film, while not exactly propagandistic, draws on the prevalent image of Bhagat Singh and his comrades as extremely popular nationalist heroes.

By contrast Nehru, in his autobiography, gives a divergent picture of the historical popular opinion on Baghat Singh. On October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1928, Lala Lajpat Rai – a prominent nationalist leader and member of the

more extremist Hindu faction of Congress - was assaulted and beaten by an English police officer while leading a demonstration against the Simon Commission. While not fatal, the beating probably hastened his death, which aroused a "national humiliation that weighed on the mind of India."20 Bhagat Singh was witness to the event and swore revenge on the police officer, subsequently murdering a Deputy Superintendent of Police in Lahore in a case of mistaken identity. Nehru argues that Bhagat Singh's "act of terrorism ... [had] no longer any real appeal for the youth of India."21 Because of fifteen years' history of nonviolence, Bhagat Singh's sudden popularity in north India was, for Nehru, more of an outlet for furor stirred up by the death of Lala Lajpat Rai than the emergence a genuinely militant nationalism. Bhagat Singh became a symbol of national honor and his popularity fueled further demonstrations against the Simon Commission. Bhagat Singh was arrested and ultimately executed on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1931. Gandhi had discussed the case with the Viceroy, and while he seemed to consider a mitigation, Irwin remained convinced that the sentence was fair and refused to postpone the execution.22

Rang de Basanti parallels the story of Bhagat Singh through a group of university comrades who are impelled to violent action by the death of one of their friends, a pilot in the Indian Air Force who died heroically when his MiG catastrophically malfunctioned, saving a village but losing his life in the process. The government then places blame on the pilot to obscure a series of corrupt weapons deals with Russia. Incited by what they view as the murder of their friend by the Defence Minister, the group organizes a peaceful protest at the War Memorial Arch, now renamed India Gate, to draw attention to the government's neglect [87]. The police violently disperse the protest, leaving many injured and the pilot's mother in a coma. In one particularly explicit dream sequence, General Dyer of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre becomes the Defence Minister and orders his soldiers to fire on the pilot [88]. Driven to violence, the friends conspire and murder the Defence Minister, the direct parallels with Bhagat Singh made explicit through a series of intercut flashbacks. The major scenes of conflict and oppression which drive the film's narrative take place in New Delhi, drawing on the relics of the Raj as preconstructed symbols. New Delhi provides the symbolic arena

<sup>20.</sup> Nehru, autobiography, 133.

<sup>21.</sup> Nehru, 133.

<sup>22.</sup> Sarvepalli Gopal, The Viceroyalty of Lord Irwin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 115.

where such a comparison is explicitly rendered in stone. Two readings of Rashtrapati Bhavan, ideologically incompatible, allows this unique and sharp criticism.

But such a double-edged sword of critique does not necessarily address the underlying theory of assimilation that bestowed validity upon the transformation of the Viceroy's House to Rashtrapati Bhavan. History is taken as history - that is, the housing of the institutions of government in New Delhi is not the subject of Mehra's critique. He faults the actions of politicians within the framework of government and not the framework itself. The parallel of the Defense Minister to General Dyer, though striking, is justly a critique of the corruption and brutality in the Indian government and not a critique of the space of governance. The critique is made all the more potent by comparison to the Raj, but the only sense in which Lutyens' Delhi plays any symbolic role is through the India Gate, a memorial to fallen Indian soldiers and housing the Amar Jawan Jyoti, or tomb of the unknown soldier. Mehra stages his scene of protest against the government here, instead of at the parliament building or upon the Raisina complex. The decision is significant – the Indian government, corrupt as it may be, mimics the Raj only in the actions of its members and not in the continued occupation of its institutions. If Mehra had set the scene of the protest at the gates of Rashtrapati Bhavan he would have betrayed its legitimacy as a symbol of the Indian state. Mehra's critique of government corruption by comparing it to the Raj is, therefore, more superficial than institutional. The institutions of state are here removed from their agents. While Rashtrapati Bhavan and New Delhi may serve as a flashpoint for this sort of government critique, the underlying assumption that there be a New Delhi is not seriously questioned. Both official and unofficial accounts of Lutyens' Delhi as an imperial legacy present it, ultimately, as symbolically legitimate.

LEGACIES

ONE ARE THE DAYS OF empire in India. The fabled glory of the Raj, full of mystery and grandeur, seems today only so much grandiose posturing. The dreams of eternity, the glory of empire, and the grand sweep of ages all vanished like wisps of smoke on the morning of August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947. And yet the "Rome of Hindostan" remains, standing nearly a century after its conception, as the administrative nucleus of a thriving city and a vibrant country [89]. The grandly romantic view of Lutyens'

city assuming its rightful place along the ancient capitals has given way to a living image of New Delhi, situated not in the scope of millennia but in the present life of India.

The Viceroy's House [90], the culminating architectural monument to the highly planned city of New Delhi, was erected as a full expression of British Imperial power in India and gave physical form to the ideology of the Raj. And yet Lutyens' building was functionally and symbolically transformed to Rashtrapati Bhavan with the creation of the Republic of India on January 26th, 1950. As an architectural symbol, it was reconfigured through strategic alterations of ceremonial behavior and the placement of symbolic objects to function as the architectural head of the Indian nation. Largely a ceremonial monument, this transformation of the building from the seat of Viceregal authority to housing the ceremonial embodiment of India was driven by a synthesis of nationalist ideologies developed in the struggle for independence. Rashtrapati Bhavan, like any postcolonial monument, bears a mixed legacy. Faltering and discontinuous, the transformations of the building through objects, behaviors, and interpretive histories have solidified it as a proud monument to India.

Enshrined as a testament to the strength of India, the shape of this living symbol in a new era of nationalism finds some resonance in Lutyens' draft inscription for the Jaipur column:

Endow your thought with faith
Your deed with courage
Your life with sacrifice
So all men may know
The greatness of India.

A dichotomous symbol of freedom and oppression, the symbolic structure of the building and greater New Delhi interacts with Indian nationalism today in a somewhat contradictory way. As a flashpoint of critique and national pride Rashtrapati Bhavan reflects India's identity, defining a nation through its multiplicitous and contradictory legacies.

# APPENDIX A

chronology of political leaders in India, 1899-2007

# Viceroys:

	Lord Curzon of Kedleston 1899–1909	
	The Earl of Minto 1905–1910	
	Lord Hardinge of Penshurst 1910–1916	
	Lord Chelmsford 1916–1921	
	The Earl of Reading 1921–1925	
	Lord Irwin	
	The Earl of Willingdon 1931–1936	
	The Marquess of Linlithgow 1936–1943	
	The Viscount Wavell 1943–1947	
	The Viscount Mountbatten of Burma 1947	
Governors-General:		
	The Earl Mountbatten of Burma 1947–1948	
	Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari 1948–1950	

# Presidents of India:

# Prime Ministers of India:

Dr. Rajendra Prasad 1950–1962	Jawaharlal Nehru 1947–1964
Sarvepalli Radhikrishnan . 1962–1967	Gulzarilal Nanda 1964
	Lal Bahadur Shastri 1964–1966
	Gulzarilal Nanda 1966
Zakir Hussain 1967–1969	Indira Ghandi 1966–1977
Varahagiri Venkata Giri 1969–1974	
Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed 1974–1977	
Neelam Sanjiva Reddy1977–1982	Morarji Desai 1977–1979
	C. Charan Singh 1979–1980
Giana Zail Singh 1982-1987	Indira Gandhi 1980–1984
Ramaswamy Venkataraman .1987–1992	Rajiv Gandhi 1984–1989
	V. P. Singh 1989–1990
	Chandra Shekhar 1990–1991
Shankar Dayal Sharma 1992–1997	P.V. Narasimhi Rao 1991–1996
	Atal Behari Vajpayee 1996
	H.D. Deve Gowda 1996–1997
K. R. Narayanan 1997–2002	Inder Kumar Gujral 1997–1998
A.P.J. Abdul Kalam 2002–pres.	Atal Behari Vajpayee 1998–2004
	Dr. Manmohan Singh 2004–pres.

# Appendix B

figures and photographs

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