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EMERGING THE RAJ

*Essays on British India in the
Heyday of Empire*



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Essays on British India in the Heyday
of Empire

Thomas R. Metcalf

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Introduction

The essays included here were written over a span of forty years from 1961 to 2002. Reflecting the continuing focus of my professional interests, they examine the structure and working of the British Raj in India during the first half-century of Crown rule (1858–1914). Together they assess a number of the institutions, policies, and strategies for ‘knowing’ India that the British brought to the task of governance. They ask how effectively, and in what ways, these various instruments of empire, separately and together, sustained and legitimized the imperial presence. These imperial structures did not, of course, exist in a vacuum. Indians sometimes defied the Raj, or unwillingly accommodated themselves to it; at other times, they took advantage of the opportunities the Raj offered, and shaped its structures to their own needs. Hence several of these essays inquire how British ideas and policies affected the lives of ordinary Indians, from landed elites to lowly policemen and labourers contemplating migration overseas. For the most part, however, this volume examines what the British were doing, as well as what they thought they were doing, as they governed India. It is, in a word, concerned throughout with the process of ‘forging’ the Raj as it came to exist in the later nineteenth century.

Several themes unite these essays. A number of them take, as a central turning point, the revolt of 1857. From the days of my graduate studies, I have looked upon that tumultuous upheaval as a critical event in the shaping of the India of the Crown. To be sure, by itself the revolt did not determine everything that followed afterward. But its importance, I would argue, for Indian lives and

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British policies alike, cannot be easily disregarded. Above all, as I describe in the essays in the first section, the uprising provoked a reconsideration of the way the British ordered relations on the land. This reordering, in turn, changed the way lives were led on the land. Architecture, the subject of the essays in Part II, at first glance may seem remote from the stirring events of 1857. Yet the kinds of buildings the British put up did not exist apart from politics, in a world defined only by aesthetics, or by simple considerations of cost and utility. The year 1857, with the larger fears and anxieties the revolt spawned, left its mark on the buildings the British erected, as well as on the layout of their cities, their memorials, and their archaeological enterprises.

A second theme of these essays is the enduring tension between institutions and ideas, or, put differently, between practice and representation. Of necessity, as they set out to rule India, the British had to put into effect policies that would produce the revenue, the political order, and the structuring of society, that they wanted. At the same time, both to reassure themselves and to convince the colonized of their right to rule, they had to represent the Raj as impartial and beneficent, and India itself as a society capable of being ruled. The two objectives, to some degree, sustained each other. Policies were often devised with the aim of making possible a representational strategy the British sought for the Raj. Similarly, a decision to represent the Raj in a certain fashion enforced upon the government policies that would make this representational strategy visible. The endeavour, for instance, on the part of the British to describe themselves as seated on the throne of the Mughal emperors enforced a certain pattern of relationships with the Indian princes. In similar fashion, the creation of the idea of 'martial races' enforced certain patterns of recruiting for the Indian Army and for colonial police forces alike.

The fourteen essays included here reflect the development of my own interests as a scholar, as well as the way the fields of South Asian and imperial history have developed over the decades since my student days. Throughout I have struggled with one central question: how did empire matter to the history of modern India? I have asked this question in different ways over the course of my career, but I have always returned to the Raj, and to its role in shaping India's history. To fully appreciate the changing

intellectual contexts in which this question was asked, and answered, it may be helpful to situate these essays in what may be called my professional biography as a historian. This autobiographical focus may also be of use to readers interested in charting the changing historiography that informed writing about imperial Britain and colonial India during the second half of the twentieth century.

RETHINKING THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE: THE 1950S

As a child growing up in a middle class family in upstate New York, I had no experience of India, or of the British empire. Unlike many of my generation of historians of India, who, if American, were often missionary children, or, if British, were linked to the Raj by family ties, my world view as a youth encompassed little more than mapping the battles of World War II, together with an enthusiasm for collecting stamps. Perhaps anticipating my later interests, stamps of the territories of the British empire formed the core of my collection. In my public high school, no history of any consequence and little geography were taught. I have no personal recollection of the coming of India's Independence in 1947, when I was 13 years old. However, I did follow American politics closely. By the early 1950s, I had come to regard myself as an Adlai Stevenson liberal, committed to the use of government to ameliorate poverty, and to the benevolent exercise of American power on behalf of world peace through the United Nations.

As an undergraduate at Amherst College in Massachusetts, I was drawn to the study of history from my second year. Perhaps out of curiosity to explore the roots of my own political views, I determined to study modern British history, and particularly that of the Victorian era. Further, I was intrigued by the simultaneous rise of liberalism in Victorian British political life and the country's ascent to world power, and wondered if there might be links between them. There might even exist, I thought, suggestive parallels between mid-nineteenth-century Britain and mid-twentieth-century United States as it, 100 years later, took up a position of predominance in the world. For my senior honours thesis, therefore, I decided to analyse the development of liberalism in the political philosophy of William Gladstone. I wanted to see how the High

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Church Tory young Gladstone of the 1830s grew into the 'People's William' at the head of a revitalized Liberal Party by 1868. Throughout this exercise, the empire figured not at all. I wrote chapters on Peelite free trade, church disestablishment, and the other 'canonical' topics of mid-Victorian history. Nevertheless, as time went on, I became aware of an odd disjuncture between the way the mid-Victorian empire was described, and what I could see happening on the ground as I read more deeply into the literature. The conventional view was that this was a period of pervasive 'anti-imperialism'. I read K.A. Bodelson's classic *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (1924), and a more recent influential article by J.B. Brebner, on 'Laissez-faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth Century Britain' (1948), putting forth that view. Yet I could plainly see that the empire was expanding in the 1840s and 1850s, with the annexation of territory in India and South Africa; that British overseas trade was rising rapidly; and that the British never hesitated to assert their power overseas, from the 1850 Don Pacifico affair, in which Palmerson belligerently uttered the phrase '*civis Romanus sum*' to justify protecting the rights of Britons abroad, to the two Opium Wars with China. None of these events, I reflected, could be effectively explained under any theory of mid-Victorian 'anti-imperialism'.

After graduation from Amherst, I was determined to go to England to get more intensive exposure to British history, and with the aim of taking a second BA (a degree then equivalent to an American Master's degree). After gaining admission to St Johns College, Cambridge, in 1955, I was assigned by chance to work under Dr Ronald Robinson as my director of studies. Though I did not know it at the time, Robinson's first influential article, written with Jack Gallagher, on the 'imperialism of free trade' had appeared just two years before I showed up at his door; and he was then hard at work on the project that would culminate in the revisionist *Africa and the Victorians* (1961). Hence, when I mentioned my reservations about the conventional view of British anti-imperialism, he at once took me under his wing. He encouraged me to abandon studying for the tripos exams after the first year, and to devote my second year instead to research preparatory to a doctoral dissertation. Robinson himself was an historian of Africa. So I told him that, presumably, as his student

I should work on Africa as well. To my surprise, he said, 'I am doing Africa. You do India'. I protested that I knew nothing about India, and had no topic in mind. (My initial thoughts had been directed either to Sierra Leone or the Chinese treaty ports.) So he gave me a research topic: the 1857 revolt. Again, I protested that I knew nothing about it. But that did not alter his opinion. So easily was the British empire divided up among scholars in the 1950s!

From this point, my career as an historian of India, and of the Raj, can be said to have begun. Unwittingly, however, I found myself simultaneously caught up in controversies about the nature and fate of the British empire of which I had had little prior understanding. In their work, Robinson and Gallagher were challenging not just the conventional theory of mid-Victorian anti-imperialism. Their notion of 'informal' empire, which lay at the heart of the imperialism of free trade, overturned the coherence of the empire as a formal constitutional structure, and so opened the possibility of studying British imperialism in, say, Argentina. It opened up space as well for study of British imperialism as a continuous phenomenon existing from the 1840s to the 1950s. Further, by locating the driving forces for the expansion of the empire on the imperial frontier, above all in interactions with indigenous 'collaborators', Robinson and Gallagher turned upside down the traditional historiographical assumption that European expansion—whether seen in diplomatic or in economic terms—originated within Europe.

Contemporary events in the 1950s also resonated within Robinson and Gallagher's history, as well as forcibly introducing me to the hold of the empire on the British imagination. Their focus on politics at the periphery evoked the contests of the Cold War, while, as British left liberals, Robinson and Gallagher remained suspicious of both protagonists: the Soviet Union and the US. As a rather naïve American liberal, I reflexively opposed all imperialism. I was therefore unprepared for the powerful sentiments evoked by the Suez crisis of 1956, which took place during my second year at Cambridge. I could not fathom how Anthony Eden could join a conspiracy to invade Egypt. Yet, despite the existence of anti-war demonstrations in Cambridge, in which I sometimes participated, I soon discovered that the empire

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mattered deeply across wide sections of the British public. Indeed, friends left me in no doubt of their bitter feelings of betrayal when the US President Eisenhower forced the British to call off the invasion. The trauma of Suez marked the effective end of Britain as a great power. From it, there emerged in Britain a historiography of the empire shaped by mixed feelings of loss, nostalgia, and regret at displacement by the US. I could not share these sentiments, but I could no longer simply assume that imperialism was an unquestioned 'evil' that would vanish without a trace. To the contrary, the rise of American power from the 1960s, and even more after the end of the Cold War in 1990, began, as I saw it, more and more to resemble the imperialism of its Victorian British predecessor.

The first two pieces in this volume represent the outcome of my work under Robinson's influence. Both assess the working of the empire from the perspective of the imperial periphery, and together they laid the groundwork for my enduring concern with imperial ideology and practice. Both took as their central theme the British response to the 1857 uprising, especially as it affected the control of agricultural land. I was intrigued by the way British officials in India, even as they described the events of 1857 as a 'Mutiny', acted in formulating policy, as though it involved an uprising of the civil population. The first essay, 'The Influence of the Mutiny of 1857 on Land Policy in India', asks why the uprising provoked a widespread disillusionment with a near half-century support for peasant proprietorship. In its place, the British now gave support to landed elites whom they had previously spurned. The essay focuses upon the province of Oudh (Awadh), a centre of rebellion, in which much of the rural population—landlord and peasant alike—threw in their lot with the rebel forces. Unwilling, or unable, to come to terms with the varied motives that may have provoked the peasantry to join the revolt, the colonial government saw only a betrayal, in which their presumed generosity, at the initial land settlement of 1856, was rewarded by rebellion. The second essay examines the contradictions inherent in a British policy that sought, on the one hand, to demonstrate its impartiality by protecting peasant tenants, seen as sturdy yeomen, against rapacious landlords; and, on the other, guided by the ideals of a newly conservative liberalism, in the unsettled years

after 1857, sought the support of powerful landed elites, now seen as a 'bulwark' of the new Raj of the Crown.

My studies of land policy were incorporated in a fuller account of the British response to the Mutiny with the publication in 1964 of a volume entitled *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870*. In this work, by analysing several arenas of policy formation, I examine the larger climate of post-Mutiny disillusionment, which caught up liberals in Britain as well, and so laid the foundation for a newly pessimistic assessment of the prospects for government-sponsored social change in colonial India and elsewhere.

FROM EMPIRE TO SOUTH ASIA: THE RISE OF AREA STUDIES, THE 1960S AND 1970S

The history of India was little studied at Cambridge in the 1950s; there was only Percival Spear secluded at Selwyn College, and I did not study with him. Indeed, I was barely aware of his existence even though only a few years before my arrival he had published a refreshingly original account of the decline of the Mughals. At Harvard, where I completed my doctoral training, no one at all taught modern Indian history. In the 1950s, even though Soviet and Chinese studies, tied to the Cold War, were undergoing a vigorous renaissance, India, with Africa, evoked but little interest. The only senior historian of modern India in the entire US at the time was Holden Furber of the University of Pennsylvania. As a result, my first serious engagement with the subject came at Wisconsin, when, while teaching a course in what was then called the 'History of the Indian world', I endeavoured desperately to keep one jump ahead of my students. My Wisconsin appointment was a dual one: in both British and Indian history, and I taught both subjects. This was not to last. In 1960, Wisconsin's newly hired African historian Philip D. Curtin, himself trained in imperial history, organized an innovative Comparative Tropical History programme. This programme, the first step towards a later area studies approach, sought to comprehend the histories of Latin America, Africa, India, and South-east Asia under a rubric that would enable these regions to be studied together, and—most importantly—apart from Europe. To introduce this new programme Curtin had my appointment terminated in favour of a 'properly trained' Indian historian.

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As the Wisconsin episode indicates, by the early 1960s, imperial history was fast falling out of favour in American academia. Inspired by the enthusiasm of the Kennedy era, and the excitement generated by the Peace Corps, Americans had now begun for the first time seriously to take up the study of such countries as India. This was facilitated by the so-called National Defense Education Act, which, responding to the challenge of the Soviet 'Sputnik' satellite, offered fellowships to graduate students to study a range of foreign languages, including now for the first time, among other South Asian languages, Hindi, Urdu, and Tamil. Further, historians now insistently sought to make sense of the transformations of colonial societies on their own terms, rather than through the lens of the empire, and to do so by close-grained studies of localities and peoples. In the US, this style of research, which informed work in the social sciences more generally, was known as 'area studies'. It was further closely linked with what is called 'modernization' theory, in which social scientists sought to establish criteria that would enable Third World countries to break out of their presumed 'traditionalism' in favour of an American-style path to prosperity. Such studies flourished in India as well during those years. The *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, to which I contributed a piece for the first number (the second essay in this volume), edited by Dharma Kumar from the Delhi School of Economics, began publication in 1963. Eminent Indian scholars, from Romila Thapar and Irfan Habib to Ashin Dasgupta and M.N. Srinivas, contributed importantly to understanding the history of their country in a stimulating current of scholarship.

Responding to the changing temper of the times, I abandoned imperial history, and set out to strengthen my credentials as an historian of India. I was fortunate to secure a junior appointment on the Berkeley faculty in 1962, where for several years, I was the campus's sole historian of India. I taught its history from Mohenjodaro to the present, and I did so for undergraduate and graduate students alike. My first Ph.D. students undertook dissertation research in topics ranging from the Mughal empire and eighteenth-century Awadh to the reformist Arya Samaj and the constitutional politics of early nationalism. My research too, though remaining engaged with the study of the 1857 revolt and

its consequences, shifted its focus away from the British and towards the colonized Indians. Land—how its cultivation should be organized, how it should be taxed, and what kinds of rights should be secured to those on the land—lay at the very heart of the Raj. As an agrarian empire that sought law, order, and revenue from the land, the British, like their Mughal predecessors, devoted immense energy to this fundamental task. Not surprisingly, as I sought to come to terms with the working of the Raj, I had myself to come to terms with the land. To understand how the empire mattered for India, the structuring of landlord society, I realized, was the place to start. It was also a logical outgrowth of my previous interests. I took as my primary concern what it meant for the landed class in Oudh to be deprived of the forts and retainers on which they had relied to assert authority under the Nawabs, yet at the same time to be awarded novel private property rights over their estates, which reduced their former subjects to tenants-at-will. The essay 'From Raja to Landlord' explores the implications of this agrarian transformation by a close examination of the resulting struggle between landlord and tenant as it was fought out on the ground and in the courts. My 1979 volume, *Land, Landlords, and the British Raj*, incorporating my study of Oudh with a parallel study of the neighbouring North-Western Provinces, provides a comprehensive account of the consolidation, over much of the north Indian countryside, of a wealthy landlord community. In the early 1950s, following India's Independence, what is called 'zamindari abolition', breaking up these big estates, brought an end to this predominance. Yet, despite being officially 'abolished', landlords did not at once disappear. The essay 'Landlords without Land' assesses how one group of landlords, the Oudh *taluqdars*, came to terms with the new agrarian order, often with surprising success, during its first two decades. Published in 1967, this essay does not of course pretend to anticipate the events of subsequent years, marked by the democratization of Indian politics and diffusion of wealth in the countryside.

This research strategy did not, however, put an end to the suspicion that I was in some way not fully an Indian historian. The problem centred in large part around language. Modern Indian languages were not taught at either Cambridge or Harvard, and I had, of course, not been the beneficiary of the intensive

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area training secured by subsequent generations of graduate students. English language source materials fortunately existed in abundance for the Raj, which had generated a vast archive of documents on Indian social, economic, and political history. Hence it was possible, as I proposed to do, to carry out extensive research in the country's history through the medium of English source materials. Indeed, the very richness of this archive, with its preponderance of material on tax policy and tenurial relations, drove research—not only mine but also that of others at the time—towards study of rural society in preference to, say, Indian economic or intellectual history. Reassured by my commitment to the study of rural India, the Berkeley history department promoted me to a tenured post in 1968.

Throughout the later 1960s, and much of the 1970s, I undertook intensive research on colonial Indian land systems. As the 1857 upheaval had centred upon the central Gangetic plain, and I wished to make its impact on society the focus of my new research. I took up residence, first for a year in Allahabad, and then for a second year, in Lucknow, with my wife Barbara, who, taking advantage of the new 'area studies' approach, was just commencing her own doctoral research, using Urdu sources to study Muslim educational institutions. Life in quiet Allahabad, as I rode my motor scooter through the broad leafy lanes of the Civil Lines, and past the Nehru family residence of Anand Bhavan, evoked easily the days of the Raj. The High Court faced the residential hotel where we first lived, and the Anglican cathedral, situated in the middle of the main road, loomed over the business district. Across the line of the main railway, cut off from the British area by the track itself, and out of sight, was the old city with its chowk. The layout of Allahabad, I soon came to realize, itself made visible both what the Raj stood for, and what it feared. Bustling Lucknow, which in the 1920s had displaced Allahabad as the capital of the United Provinces (now the state of Uttar Pradesh), provided access to the government secretariat records and to those of the province's landlords, whose families I wished to study.

In the historiography of India, two movements defined the 1970s. One was the so-called 'Cambridge School', which took as its central concern the politics of Indian nationalism. Breaking from the canonical study of nationalist leaders and ideologies, its

mainly British practitioners sought the motive force of Indian nationalism in local networks of patronage and influence. Despite the freshness of its approach, the Cambridge School's controversial political agenda, with its deprecation of the idealism of India's nationalists, did not attract me. More appealing was the so-called 'new social history' associated with E.P. Thompson in Britain, Natalie Davis in the US, and the Annales school in France. Like the Cambridge school, the practitioners of the 'new social history' shared a commitment to studying ordinary people in place of sweeping narratives and national politics. The essay 'Rural Society and British Rule in Nineteenth Century India' assesses the historiography of India during these years through an examination of the writings of one of its leading historians, Eric Stokes. In some ways rather like myself, Stokes looked to the 1857 revolt as a key event that could be used to understand the region's colonial transformation. However, he sought to understand not the effects of the Mutiny on subsequent relations on the land, but rather how agrarian change from the 1820s triggered off the outbreak itself. Disdainful of all sweeping explanations for behaviour, Stokes meticulously examined how ties of caste and clan in varied local arenas, shaped by ecological and economic variables, produced not only complex patterns of loyalty and rebellion in 1857, but enduring structures of landholding. Complementing my research interests, my graduate teaching in the 1970s was directed to training scholars in the social history of India in the colonial period.

My work in Indian social history did not entirely displace my earlier engagement with the larger British empire. Indeed, after telling me that my department had finally approved my promotion to tenure, the chairman smiled, and said, 'Now you can teach the British empire'. Although I did so, the subject remained deeply out of favour. Imperial history, for younger scholars, was too closely tied to the older narrative strategies associated with high politics, and, more importantly, to the empire itself. In Britain, the subject endured, but, a field suffused with a nostalgia for that which was gone, it was disdained by those who, in an era of decolonization, sought to make a break with a tainted past. Strikingly, E.P. Thompson, a son of the Raj, born and brought up in India, eschewed any reference to the empire in his work until the very end of his career. In the increasingly multicultural US,

study of the empire, together with British history itself, suffered as part of a dying Anglophilia. In the late 1970s, I induced my department to offer a graduate field in 'Modern Imperialism and Colonialism' but for some years there were almost no takers.

CULTURAL STUDIES AND 'POST-COLONIALISM': THE 1980S

With an extraordinary suddenness, both Indian and imperial history was revitalized in the early 1980s. The first volume of the *Subaltern Studies* series appeared in 1982. Four years earlier, in 1978, Edward Said published *Orientalism*. In its early years, closely tied to its founder Ranajit Guha, the subalternists stirred up controversy, as they made innovative contributions to scholarship, by their studies of class and resistance among the Indian peasantry. Both old-fashioned nationalist history writing, and the then fashionable Cambridge School, with its focus on faction and self-interest, felt the sting of the Marxist-inspired subalternist critique. But the boundaries of the subalternist circle were closely patrolled; throughout the 1980s, its members included no US-based scholars. In any case, as I saw it, the subalternist insistence on peasant 'resistance' made more balanced studies of rural society nearly impossible. The impact of Said's *Orientalism* was, if anything, even more far-reaching. Said's contention that the 'Orient' was an artefact of European knowledge—constructed to 'control' the East—quickly radiated out from his own concern with Islam and the Middle East to larger issues of imperialism and colonialism. In Indian history, even as Said was writing, the anthropologist Bernard Cohn was already undertaking pioneering studies of colonial power in its relation to 'knowledge'. I had always admired Cohn's work, much of which paralleled my own, for the originality and power of its insights. With the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, it was clear that imperialism now mattered, for the first time in decades, and there existed fresh ways of thinking about it. Inspired by Said and Cohn, I resolved to take up the study of colonial architecture.

My study of architecture was not as abrupt a break with my earlier interests as might appear on the surface. In part I was simply returning to my past. How the British represented India, and constructed a place for themselves within it as imperial rulers, had underlain my studies of colonial 'policy-making' from my

days at Cambridge. During my visits to India, I had always been intrigued by its colonial architecture, which I regularly photographed for my teaching. In the mid-twentieth century heyday of architectural modernism, however, the ornately decorated buildings put up by the Raj, with their historicist references, were, for serious scholars, beneath contempt. The great Mughals of the seventeenth century, in the conventional view of art historians, had erected the most recent buildings worthy of study in India. When they did condescend to look at colonial building, art historians saw only the banal aesthetic of derivative styles. Nor did historians find colonial architecture of any great interest. In 1982 in New Delhi, when I gave a talk on the architecture of the Raj to the Jawaharlal Nehru University history department, the assembled scholars—Marxist and nationalist in their orientation—looked upon me with amazement, unable to discern any purpose in such a lecture.

What Said, and his followers, supplied was a new vocabulary, that of cultural studies, and a new way of reading colonial 'texts'. These texts, as Said demonstrated, though purporting to be objective descriptions of the 'Orient', described an imagined 'Orient' defined as the West's 'Other'. For the colonial ruler, this 'knowledge' could be used to justify the subjugation of 'Oriental' peoples to European domination. For myself I saw British building in India as a kind of 'text' that could be 'read' in a similar manner. Architectural styles and forms, that is, could reveal to us much about the ways in which the British conceived of India, and of the 'Orient' more generally. I was hardly alone in studying colonial architecture during the 1980s. Indeed, outside academia, that decade marked the growth of what was called 'Raj nostalgia'. Participating in a conservative revival in Britain under Margaret Thatcher, the empire, part of a now distant past, no longer had to be mourned; to the contrary it could be celebrated. Books on architecture, with films and television series such as *The Jewel in the Crown*, reached audiences avid to immerse themselves in a romantic fantasy. Though I disdained Thatcherite neo-conservatism, still, after two decades immersed in close analysis of rural India, it was exhilarating to engage afresh with the Raj as an integral political system. In addition to my work on architecture, during these years I began a larger study of the ideas that shaped the

British governance of India. Part of the *New Cambridge History of India* series, this work appeared in 1994 in a volume entitled *Ideologies of the Raj*.

'Architecture and the Representation of Empire: India, 1860–1910' provides an account of the mutually constitutive workings of the built form and the colonial imagination in the India of the Raj. The piece takes as its central concern the style of architecture known as 'Indo-Saracenic'. In it, British architects, claiming mastery of India's architectural elements, asserted the supremacy of the Raj as an 'Indian' power; as a result, throughout the later nineteenth century, they clothed colonial public buildings, no matter the purpose for which individual structures were erected, in domes, *chattris*, and other 'Indic' forms. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the British had become increasingly apprehensive as they confronted European and colonial challenges alike. Hence they turned back to the use of classical styles of architecture, for these, with their Greek and Roman origins, could be seen to embody universal ideals of law and order administered by an impartial imperial ruler. The most enthusiastic exponent of an imperial classicism was Herbert Baker, whose South African designs won him an appointment to work with Edwin Lutyens, also a recent convert to classicism, in the building of New Delhi (1912). The essay titled 'Architecture and Empire: Sir Herbert Baker and the Building of New Delhi' explores Baker's role in New Delhi, and his often tense relationship with his collaborator. The following essay on 'Monuments and Memorials' takes up Lord Curzon's work as patron of colonial architecture. Widely known for his support for the Archaeological Survey of India, Curzon also endeavoured, by erecting monuments of his own, to create a visible past in India for the British themselves. The British could thus make their Raj an integral part of India's past, and 'keep alive' an enduring memory of their achievements as India's rulers. This involved not only the construction of massive structures such as the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, but also the commemoration in stone of those events that, by their expressions of sacrifice and heroism, marked out the triumphs of the Raj. Pre-eminent among these was the Black Hole of Calcutta (1756), memorializing of which occupied Curzon throughout his viceroyalty. The next essay in this section asks whether there can be said to have been a

distinctive aesthetic ordering of colonial design. This essay juxtaposes the way Indic architectural elements were deployed in pre-colonial, largely Mughal, buildings, with the way such forms were used by the British. I argue that, while earlier rulers participated un-self-consciously in regional architectural traditions, the British extracted Indian architectural forms from their context, and then used them to create an idealized 'Orient'. The final essay in this section ranging widely across time and place, takes up architecture throughout the British empire. Its concern is with historiography, or the writings about architecture that shaped larger attitudes to the built forms of the colonial world.

COMPARATIVE COLONIALISM AND THE 'NEW IMPERIAL HISTORY': THE 1990S

The 1990s saw the flourishing of work in postcolonial theory, and of cultural studies more generally. Even the subaltern studies group shifted its focus from class and resistance to a concern with discourse and colonial knowledge. Much of this outpouring of theory was stimulating and provocative. Indeed, I had the pleasure of introducing one subalternist-turned-theorist to American academia when I invited Dipesh Chakrabarty to Berkeley from Australia as my replacement for a semester in 1990. Still, I found the arcane terminology and obsession with theory of post-colonial writing uncongenial. Consequently, in addition to pursuing occasional studies in colonial architecture, I sought new ways of thinking about the India of the Raj. This took two interconnected forms. One was to encourage comparative historical studies among my graduate students. With the growing attractiveness of imperial and colonial history from the mid-1980s, I began a series of thematic, explicitly comparative, graduate seminars. From these seminars, there emerged Ph.D. dissertations that examined afresh such topics as colonial exhibitions, imperial jurisprudence, colonial 'companions', the Masonic movement, missionary enterprise in the Pacific, and the humanitarian movement in Edwardian England. Other students, drawn from the Berkeley departments of architecture and urban design, took inspiration from my studies of colonial Indian architecture. But they quickly went beyond my concern with major civic monuments and canonical questions of

'style'. Instead, for their own research, they sought to assess the ways colonialism shaped domestic as well as public structures, and the layout not just of buildings but of cities. They endeavoured as well to make clear the numerous ways the colonized themselves participated in the processes of colonial urban design. By a fortunate chance, I helped direct dissertations set in four of the major cities of South Asia: Calcutta, Delhi, Lahore, and Bombay.

At the same time, building on research I had done some years earlier on Indian migration to South Africa, I devised a project (still underway) that I tentatively call, 'Empire Recentred: India in the Indian Ocean Arena'. An initial overview of this project, together with several of the pieces that define it, make up the final set of essays of this book. For some years, I had grown increasingly dissatisfied with the conventional historiography that examined colonies such as India only on their own terms and only in their relationship to the imperial centre of Great Britain. Too much, I felt, was lost by this narrowness of focus. More profitable, it seemed to me, would be to look at the empire as an integral system, and at the circulation of ideas and peoples within it. In doing so, one might imagine the colonies and Britain as linked by a web of ties that caught up all together. Further, in this way, by comparing colonies to each other, one might get a sense of the similarities and differences that informed the working of the colonial enterprise, and avoid generalizing from any single instance.

As it was obviously impossible to study the empire as a whole, I determined to assess India under the British Raj, not just as a colonial territory, but as itself an imperial 'centre'. No mere colony on the order of a Kenya or Malaya, the India of the Raj, a subcontinent, dominated the Indian Ocean, linking East Africa and the Gulf with South-east Asia and beyond. Surely, I reflected, this unique position in the imperial structure gave India an exceptional role as a reservoir of men, materials, and ideas for the larger British empire. A powerful recent historiographical current gave added impetus to my work. A response in large measure to the globalization—at once economic, political, and cultural—that has shaped the last decade, this new historiography cuts across the accustomed boundaries of national histories to seek out new kinds of linkages. Prominent among these are those created by oceans. Pioneered by Fernand Braudel in his studies of the Mediterranean,

and by K.N. Chaudhuri in his work on Indian Ocean trade, this historiography now includes the black Atlantic and the Pacific Rim, among others. I have sought to assess the Indian Ocean not so much as a trading arena, but rather as a site for the expression of a power—at once political, military, and economic—centred in the India of the Raj, but radiating out from that India to the lands spread along the rim of the ocean.

Three of the essays in this section focus upon the theme of labour migration. A great deal has been written about the recruitment of indentured labourers from India, throughout the last half of the nineteenth century and into the first decades of the twentieth, to work, primarily on sugar plantations, in colonial territories around the globe. Controversy continues to rage as to whether such recruitment was 'a new system of slavery' or an opportunity eagerly grasped by Indians seeking to escape poverty at home. I do not directly address this question here. Rather my concern is with the larger process of migration, and the ways the existence of the Raj in India shaped it. The first two essays take as their focus South Africa during the years from 1860 to 1911. During those years some 150,000 Indian indentured labourers, together with a number of traders, left India for Natal. 'Indian Migration to South Africa' examines the flow of Indians to South Africa, briefly considers how they fared in the colonial economy, and assesses the Indian government's ambivalent encouragement of indenture. 'Hard Hands and Sound Healthy Bodies' focuses on the process of recruiting labourers in the Indian countryside. Looking at the working of indenture from the perspective of the recruiter, it asks how 'coolie' labourers were secured, and explores the intricate networks that brought Indians to the docks of Calcutta and Madras for shipment to Natal. The last essay on migration takes up the little studied recruitment of Punjabis, above all of Sikhs, for colonial police forces. Convinced that the alleged 'martial' quality of the Sikh that had gained him a central place in the post-Mutiny Indian Army made him exceptionally well suited for policing, colonial governments from Central Africa to the Straits Settlements and on to the Chinese treaty ports sought out Sikh recruits. In their view, the indigenous peoples of their own colonies were either insufficiently 'manly', or simply untrustworthy, or both. Hence in India, with its low wage rates and vast pool of labour,

could be found the police constables as well as cane cutters that enabled the empire to flourish.

In this set of essays, as in my other publications, I have tried, above all, to give the reader some sense of the Raj as an instrument of imperial governance. In doing so, I have sought critically to assess the various strategies that it devised to justify its rule; I have endeavoured to see how rule was implemented on the ground; and I have tried to give some indication as to how Indians responded to their subjection to colonial rule. The work makes no pretence at providing a comprehensive account of the Raj, let alone of India's history. The topics taken up here, most notably land tenure, architecture, and overseas migration, are a product, at one level, simply of my intellectual interests as they intersected with the changing historiography of the last four decades. Still, each opens up suggestive ways of thinking about what the empire meant for India, and for the British. Land, both for the British as India's rulers and for those millions who sought to make a living on it, is obviously so central to history of colonial India as to make its study almost imperative. Architecture's importance to the Raj is of a different order. Although the Raj obviously required buildings to function, I use architecture here as a window into the assumptions that ordered British perceptions of India's society and its peoples. Its study, in other words, is a useful way to gain some understanding of what is sometimes called 'colonialism's culture'. The study of migration, as I conceive it here, involves not just the movement of peoples but the circulation of ideas and institutions. Hence it pulls together several themes that have found a place in my earlier writing, while projecting them outward from India onto the larger canvas of the Indian Ocean littoral. To refract one's vision of Kenya or Malaya through the lens of the Raj in India is to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of empire for all three colonial territories alike. In the end, I would hope that students and scholars gain from this collection of my writings some insight into the varied ways India was shaped by its long subjection to British rule, and a clearer understanding of the imperial heritage that continues to make its presence felt in the post-colonial world. I am grateful to W. Roger Louis for encouraging me to reflect upon my career as an historian, to James Vernon for a careful reading of an earlier draft of this essay.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC NOTE

The 'classic' works that defined the field of imperial history were a product of the late nineteenth century expansion of empire. J.R. Seeley's *Expansion of England* (1883; reprint University of Chicago Press, 1971) first tied the empire to the history of England itself. Schooled in the Whig tradition, Seeley saw in the empire a device for the advancement of liberalism and progress. He also first asserted—in a provocative phrase that has misled historians ever since—that the British 'conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind'. The radical liberal J.A. Hobson, writing in the midst of the Boer War, saw the empire as emerging from a conspiracy among financiers and capitalists to increase their profits by overseas investment. Hobson's *Imperialism: A Study* (1902) has remained, ever since, a work that no historian of empire can ignore.

The interwar years of the twentieth century saw the publication of two influential works that sought explanations for the empire outside economics. Joseph Schumpeter's *Imperialism and Social Classes* (1919; English edition 1951) looked to declining landed elites, anxious to reassert their social status, as the principal protagonists of empire. William L. Langer in his *Diplomacy of Imperialism* (1935) saw imperialism as an inevitable outcome of great power rivalries in Europe. All of these works, with their focus on the European origins of empire, formed the staples of my education in the 1950s. An insistence on the anti-imperialism of the early Victorian era followed logically from the assumptions embedded in these works, that empire was somehow connected to the great power rivalries, wars, and financial trusts that emerged from the late 1870s onward. Standard accounts of this earlier period, cited above, include K.A. Bodelsen, *Studies in Mid-Victorian Imperialism* (Copenhagen, 1924), and J.B. Brebne, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 8 (1948), Supplement.

The first revisionist challenge to this enduring historiography was J. Gallagher and R. Robinson's 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, Vol. 6 (1953), pp. 1-15. The argument was elaborated, and extended to encompass the late Victorian conquest of Africa, in their monumental *Africa*

and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism (London, 1961). The enduring revolution in historiography brought about by this book has already been discussed. The 'imperialism of free trade' argument did not go unchallenged. It found an early critic in D.C.M. Platt, in articles in the *Economic History Review* in 1968 and 1973. More recently the role of the metropole, and of finance, in the expansion of empire have been rehabilitated in P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London, 1993).

My initial encounter with the India of the Raj was through the volumes written by British historians of the late colonial era. Most prominent among them were Edward Thompson and Percival Spear. The former a missionary (and father of the social historian E.P. Thompson), the latter a historian who taught in Delhi before independence, both represented a British liberal tradition which sympathised with Indian nationalism, but could not suppress an admiration for the Raj, whose achievements they traced from Macaulay to Mountbatten. The title of Edward Thompson and G.T. Garratt's *Rise and Fulfillment of British Rule in India* (London, 1934) itself illuminates the assumptions of this liberal colonial historiography. Many of the same themes were developed in Spear's several volumes, most notably his *Oxford History of Modern India*, and his paperback history for Penguin; these books were the standard texts used in Indian history courses, at least in the United States, through the 1960s.

During these years, the Raj began to be put under critical scrutiny. The ideas that shaped the Raj were brilliantly examined in Eric Stokes's *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford 1959), while the working of its administration at the local level received a first scrutiny in Robert E. Frykenberg, *Guntur District* (Oxford, 1965). My own work, especially my *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton, 1964), as I indicated above, participated in this reassessment of the nature and working of the Raj.

Although Americans of the first generation trained in area studies pioneered the study of Indian nationalism at the provincial level, with works on Bengal, Madras, and Maharashtra in the late 1960s, it was British historians of the so-called 'Cambridge School' who put together the first coherent, if controversial, account of the working of Indian nationalism at the local level. Inspired by

Namier's influential studies of eighteenth century British politics, these historians emphasized faction and self-interest on the part of local leaders in the building of nationalist coalitions in place of the order hagiographical tradition which stressed the moral idealism of India's national 'heroes' as followers flocked to them. The views of this school were set out by its founder Anil Seal, in his *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1968); but the most useful collection of the writings of this school can be found in John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson, and Anil Seal, eds, *Locality, Province and Nation* (Cambridge, 1973).

The Subaltern Studies school, the creation of Ranajit Guha, operated as a tight collective of like-minded neo-Marxist scholars, based initially in India and Australia. It took as its central objective the recovery of a peasant and working class autonomy contained in neither classic nationalist nor 'Cambridge School' writing. Published as a series of occasional volumes, ten in number over the twenty years from 1982 to 2002, *Subaltern Studies* was immensely influential even outside the historiography of South Asia. A convenient collection of 'subalternist' writings can be found in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, eds, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (1988), while Vinayak Chaturvedi has brought together a stimulating collection of historiographical essays about the subaltern studies project in his *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial* (2000).

The writings of the 1990s on the Raj, as well as on colonialism and postcolonialism more generally, are so vast as to defeat any attempt at a short list of influential titles. One must nevertheless single out for mention the work of Bernard Cohn who from the later 1970s was forcing scholars to reassess the importance of the cultural practices that sustained the working of the Raj. His most important essays are collected in Nicholas Dirks, ed., *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (1996). The field of the 'New Imperial History' likewise clearly came into being during the 1990s, as a way of thinking afresh about the British Empire, most often, using Nicholas Thomas's term, by focusing upon 'colonialism's culture'. Further exciting new works can be expected as the researches of my graduate students, and others', are readied for publication.

Part I

LAND

The Influence of the Mutiny of 1857 on Land Policy in India*

The events of 1857 etched themselves deeply into the consciousness of the British in India. Throughout the remaining years of British rule, the lessons of the Mutiny were never forgotten; indeed they provided the constant backdrop against which British policy was enacted. To a large extent, this experience played a decisive role in recasting the whole direction of British policy. Its impact on policy towards the native Indian states was sharp, and lasting in its effects. Canning realized that the native states were 'breakwaters to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave', and he henceforward, by his grant of the right of adoption, committed Britain to their maintenance.¹ This post-mutiny solicitude for the native states stands in obvious contrast with the deprecatory, if not avowedly annexationist, policy of Canning's predecessors.

On land settlement policy, the Mutiny had a no less marked influence. This has not always been recognized, yet it is in many ways more significant, for land policy has played a central role in the history of India. The Government of India traditionally derived most of its revenue from the land. When the British came to power, in order to collect the revenue, they had of necessity to record and define the rights in land of the various classes of society. This responsibility gave to the British an instrument of

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great power in shaping the structure of Indian society; for, as they bestowed the rights and privileges at their disposal on one class or another, they could virtually ensure the dominance of that class.² Indeed land policy, through its influence on the distribution of power within Indian society, was perhaps the one really effective organ of social change open to the British in the nineteenth century.

Recent studies have thrown much light on the development of British land policy during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.³ These authors have examined in some detail the controversies over land policy which divided the early British administrators, men such as Lord Cornwallis, Sir Thomas Munro, Mountstuart Elphinstone, and the Utilitarian reformers; and they have shown how each of these various schools of thought left its mark on the land system of a particular Indian province, as the country came progressively under British rule.

By 1850, the basic work of conquering the country and settling the land revenue had been completed, and the earlier controversies had been largely resolved with the widespread acceptance of peasant or village settlement. Yet, no sooner had this been accomplished than the Mutiny broke out, and all accepted ideas were thrown into the melting pot. During the Mutiny, the whole question of land settlement was opened up and reconsidered. The result was a new appreciation of the value of the landlord class and a new direction in British land policy. How and why this change in attitude took place is the question to be considered here.

Before the Mutiny, British land policy had been for almost fifty years dominated by the ideal of peasant proprietorship. From the day in 1812 when the House of Commons gave its approval to Munro's *ryotwari* settlements in Madras down to the time of Sir John Lawrence's Punjab village settlements, the British strove consistently to enhance the position and independence of the peasant cultivator.⁴ Behind this policy lay several different strands of thought which, however much they conflicted in other respects, worked together to ensure the long continued dominance of peasant settlement. The policies of Sir Thomas Munro, for instance, were motivated by a paternalist sentiment which desired above all to protect the peasant and preserve his traditional simple way of life. This, Munro's school felt, could best be accomplished by securing

the peasant in possession of his land as a proprietor with a fixed revenue assessment. When the utilitarian reformers arrived upon the scene in the 1830s, they operated from quite different premises but nevertheless continued in the path of peasant settlement. Their aim was to free the peasant from all traditional restraints in order to make him the instrument of a vast agrarian revolution. At the base of their attitude lay Ricardo's theory of rent, with its assertion that landlords were nothing more than parasitic rent receivers who should be set aside by a government dealing as universal landlord directly with the peasants.⁵ Benthamite egalitarian prejudices reinforced this anti-aristocratic bias in men like James and John Stuart Mill. James Mill insisted that 'the improvement of India must take place through the ryots, by giving a proper protection to their property and to themselves in the exercise of their industry'.⁶ And John Stuart Mill, on his part, reiterated in his *Principles of Political Economy* and in all his schemes for land reform in India (and in Ireland) that only through peasant proprietorship could agrarian society ever progress.⁷ Although Ireland remained closed to such theories, in India the reformers obtained a free field for their application during the 1830s and 1840s—with devastating results for the old aristocracy of the North-Western Provinces and the Punjab.

The annexation of Oudh in 1856 provided the agrarian reformers with what proved to be their last great triumph. The Governor-General, Lord Dalhousie, was so confident of the value of peasant settlement that he ordered it instituted in Oudh without even so much as a cursory investigation of the actual nature of land tenure in the province. In spite of the existence of an aristocratic taluqdar class, Dalhousie assumed Oudh tenures were identical with those of the North-Western Provinces, and so directed that 'the system of village settlements in the North-Western Provinces should unquestionably be adopted'.⁸ Accordingly the taluqdars were, wherever possible, shunted aside, and peasant rights sought out and confirmed.

The self-confident reforming enthusiasm, which marked the 1856 Oudh settlement was, however, shattered by the events of the succeeding year. The outbreak of the Mutiny in May 1857 quickly forced upon the British a reassessment of their entire India policy. At first, they insisted the rising was merely military and

had no deeper roots than abhorrence at greased cartridges, but by the summer of 1857 the British discovered that the disaffection had become widely spread throughout the population of Upper India. Indeed, in Oudh, the struggle was nothing less than a bitter and protracted war in which the peasantry joined with the mutineers and the taluqdars against their new British masters.⁹ Except for the beleaguered garrison of Lucknow, British authority in Oudh was non-existent for over a year, from June 1857 to the summer of 1858.¹⁰ Oudh reverted to its traditional ways and the peasants to their former allegiance to the taluqdars. The peasant settlement of 1856 disintegrated within a month. One District Officer wrote to the government, from his refuge in Allahabad, on 28 June 1857, 'They [the taluqdars] have most of them quietly resumed the villages they had at the time of annexation. The villagers except in rare instances don't seem to have made a struggle even against it. They certainly gave us no assistance'.¹¹ Looking back on the events in Oudh, Lord Canning commented in June 1858 that:

It might have been expected that...the village occupants who had been so highly favoured by the British Government...would have come forward in support of the Government who had endeavoured to restore to them their hereditary rights....Such, however, was not the case....The villagers relapsed into their former subjection to the talookdar, and obeyed his authority as if he had been the lawful suzerain. The endeavour to neutralise the usurped and largely abused power of the talookdars, by recognizing the supposed proprietary rights of the people, and thus arousing their feelings of self-interest and evoking their gratitude had failed utterly.¹²

The events of 1857-8 in Oudh cracked beyond repair the British vision of a reformed and prosperous India based upon peasant proprietorship. With the uprising of the Oudh peasantry, the British felt they had been betrayed; their generosity had been rewarded not by loyalty in the great crisis but by disaffection. Lord Ellenborough bitterly commented on the 1856 peasant settlement, 'Its chivalry was that of Robin Hood, who is said to have robbed the wealthy and to have given to the poor. Robin Hood, however, managed to secure the favour of those to whom he gave his loot. We managed to make them as hostile as those we plundered'.¹³ This disillusionment spelled the end of the peasant system of settlement and opened the way for a new attitude to

Indian society and a new laissez-faire landlord-oriented settlement policy.¹⁴

From the uprising in Oudh, the British drew the lesson that the Indian peasant was incorrigibly conservative. The pre-Mutiny reformers had believed that human nature was the same everywhere and that all men were educable and rational.¹⁵ On this ground they had built their plans for a regenerated India, using the peasantry as the agents of social progress. The behaviour of the peasantry during the Mutiny, however, dealt a heavy blow to such hopes, for it seemed to show that they clung obstinately to their traditional ways and rejected whatever benefits Britain offered. Optimistic plans for reform had accordingly to be given up as hopeless if not dangerous. Sir Charles Wood, Secretary of State for India (1859–66), in explaining to Parliament the failure of the first Oudh settlement, pointed out, 'They [the peasants] preferred the former system to that which we had introduced. The mistake we fell into, under the influence of the most benevolent feelings, and according to our notion of what was right and just, was that of introducing a system foreign to the habits and wishes of the people'. Henceforth, Wood concluded, 'We ought to adopt and improve what we find in existence and avail ourselves as far as possible of the existing institutions of the country'.¹⁶

Among those institutions there was one which, after the Mutiny, the British could no longer ignore—the taluqdari system. During the time of the anarchy in Oudh in 1857–8, the power of the taluqdars had been made manifest. They had resumed control of their old estates, with the willing acquiescence of the peasantry, and they stood forth as the leaders of the insurrection in Oudh. The British rapidly came to the conclusion that, as Robert Montgomery put it, 'the superiority and influence of these talookdars form a necessary element in the social constitution of the Province'.¹⁷ Moreover, they soon realized that a class with such widely acknowledged influence could, if properly conciliated, prove a useful instrument in restoring order and tranquillity. Admittedly the taluqdars were, as Canning confessed, 'a coarse looking lot', little likely to advocate reforms; but in the unsettled days of 1858 their political value far outweighed any such shortcomings.

At first, during the summer of 1857, Canning authorized the Chief Commissioner of Oudh to 'promise to any Landed Proprietor who deserves well of the Government and who has suffered by the summary settlement...that his case shall be heard anew and that he shall certainly not be worse off than he was before our rule'.¹⁸ By the spring of 1858, the government was so anxious to obtain the support of the taluqdars in the final pacification of Oudh that it was promising restoration of estates even to taluqdars who had been hostile during the Mutiny, provided they now came in willing to aid the British Government.¹⁹

Eventually in October 1858, the Government of India decided on the complete reinstatement of the taluqdari system of land settlement, above and beyond the practice of dealing leniently with individual taluqdars. This was first proposed by Sir James Outram, when Chief Commissioner of Oudh, in a Memorandum of 15 January 1858. He stated that 'The talookdars have both power and influence to exercise either for or against us. The village proprietors have neither'. He therefore urged the government to introduce taluqdari settlement, as it 'would enlist this powerful body of men on our side'.²⁰ Canning recognized the compelling force of this argument. In addition, he brought forward another argument, which took away from the new policy the appearance of sheer political expediency. The conduct of the peasantry during the Mutiny, Canning asserted, 'amounts almost to an admission that their own rights, whatever these may be, are subordinate to those of the talookdars; that they do not value the recognition of these rights by the ruling authority; and that the Talookdaree system is the ancient, indigenious, and cherished system of the country'. The people preferred the taluqdari system to village independence, Canning argued, so surely there could be no injustice to them in its restoration.²¹ In Canning's eyes, justice and policy alike dictated a return to taluqdari settlement in Oudh.

Before sanctioning the taluqdari settlement, however, Canning in March 1858 took the controversial step of confiscating all landed rights in Oudh. In his Memorandum of January 1858, Outram had recommended an immediate return to taluqdari settlement. As most of Oudh was still at that time under rebel control, Canning felt that to proclaim a general restoration would give the appearance of rewarding rebellion. To offer land to men in arms against the

British government would be, as he put it, 'to treat the rebels not only as honourable enemies but as enemies who had won the day'. Confiscation would, on the other hand, give the government a free hand in granting new property rights to those deserving of reward. While readily admitting that 'considerations of policy and mercy and the newness of our rule prescribe a relaxation of the sentence more or less large', he insisted that 'this relaxation must be preceded by submission'.²² Outram was, however, convinced that this Proclamation would hinder rather than assist 'that attempt to enlist the landholders on the side of order' and that the confiscation would in fact drive the taluqdars 'to prepare for a desperate and prolonged resistance'.²³ The Home Government agreed with Outram and censured Canning in a dispatch of 19 April 1858. Although Canning stuck by his Confiscation Proclamation throughout the summer of 1858, its execution was entrusted to Robert Montgomery, who as Chief Commissioner from April onwards, modified its inherent harshness by offering assurances of good treatment to the taluqdars. Little actual confiscation was in fact ever carried out under the terms of the Proclamation.²⁴ By October, Oudh was almost completely reconquered, the rebels had submitted or fled to Nepal, and Canning therefore considered the time had come when a general taluqdari settlement could be instituted without the appearance of negotiating from weakness.

In the following year (1859), the Government of India went a step further towards reinstating the taluqdar class in their traditional powers and privileges. On the recommendation of the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, selected taluqdars were granted power to adjudicate revenue disputes and to act as Deputy Magistrates within their estates. The grant of these powers was a logical extension of the general policy of building up the taluqdar class. As Canning realized, 'Now that the revival in perpetuity of the Talookdaree system in Oude has been declared it becomes more than ever necessary that the authority of the Talookdars should, within wholesome bounds, be sustained'.²⁵ Nevertheless, the decision to grant such powers to these men reflects a great deal of the general change in outlook which British policy had been undergoing since the Mutiny. Previously, the British had striven to provide efficient administration under government officials and to reform obsolete customs through their influence. Now, however,

with taluqdars as magistrates, reform would of necessity be relegated to second place. This the government readily admitted; indeed it stated that its aim was 'to adopt that system of administration to which the people have become accustomed' rather than 'to introduce new measures, even though they may be founded on sounder principles'.²⁶

At the same time, the interests of the peasantry were placed in the care of the taluqdars, who now exercised fairly wide judicial authority over their tenants.²⁷ That the taluqdars, being interested parties, might abuse these powers, was ignored; in fact, Charles Wingfield went so far as to assert that 'the exercise of this authority by the landed aristocracy must contribute greatly to the happiness of the people'.²⁸ This attitude again reflects the belief, which largely arose out of the Mutiny experience, that the people preferred, and would be happier living under, their traditional modes of government. Judged by these standards, the scheme of taluqdar magistrates was quite obviously a success. Both Canning and Wingfield sent home reports showing how the taluqdars had taken up their new duties with enthusiasm, and how 'the results exhibited are most satisfactory and encouraging'.²⁹

The grant of revenue powers was but the most striking of several measures designed to enhance the position and status of the taluqdar class. They were granted direct access to District Officers, to free them from the harassments and petty tyrannies inflicted by native subordinates of government; and officers were directed to show them the utmost 'consideration and courtesy'.³⁰ In judicial proceedings, Montgomery urged that 'particular care should be taken to avoid summoning in person respectable talookdars to answer the petty summons of some trifling complainant'. He went on to say:

Much, very much, of the unpopularity of our rule is attributable to that principle of equality, which renders every man liable to be sued and summoned into a public court by any mean man who may choose, or be hired, to offend the dignity of his superior. To English ideas, such fears regarding dignity and station may appear frivolous, but they assume a serious importance in the mind of the Natives of the East, and we must legislate and deal with the people of a country as we find them.³¹

The cherished English ideal of equality before the law was henceforth to be subordinated to the needs of taluqdar goodwill,

and to the special requirements of the 'Oriental mind'. During the Mutiny, the British felt they had discovered the inherent conservatism of the Indian people; and now even the laws must bend to accommodate the demands of their deeply-rooted customs. The taluqdars therefore required special privileges before the law, both in order to ensure their contentment and to conform to the traditional ordering of society.

Canning's efforts on behalf of the landed aristocracy were by no means confined to Oudh. He hoped to restore the landholders in the North-Western Provinces to the position of 'independent gentlemen of property and influence', but he admitted that, in view of the twenty years of peasant settlement, 'we should be puzzled to hunt out many of them'. In the Punjab, his efforts met with more success. In February 1860, he began there the same policy of building up a landed gentry and associating it in the local administration. He extended magisterial powers to selected members of the *sirdar* class and consolidated their estates, so as 'to establish for each who shall be considered worthy of trust a recognized influence in some one part of the Punjab'. By these measures he hoped 'to arrest the decadence of the Great Families' and to convert an idle and dangerous aristocracy into a prosperous and contented class, possessing the 'status and trust of gentlemen associated with...the ruling power of their country'.³²

Much of the appeal of Canning's policy of creating 'independent Gentlemen of property and influence' lay in its congeniality to the social ideals of mid-Victorian liberalism. As against the egalitarian Benthamism of the pre-Mutiny reformers, men like Canning and Wood accepted that brand of liberalism of which Walter Bagehot was the most representative figure. In England, Benthamite enthusiasm was by mid-century giving way to a more cautious, conservative, and eclectic liberalism; and this liberalism after the Mutiny found its way into India.³³ Under the impress of these ideas, the English administrators in India looked with favour on a society composed of a series of classes culminating in a landed gentry, to whom proper deference should be paid. Indeed they, like their contemporaries at home, possessed great faith in the beneficent influence on society of a landed gentry, for it was the principal repository of responsible leadership. To encourage the growth of such a class in India was therefore the course of wisdom

as well as policy. Sir Charles Wood commented that 'the dead level of nothing between our officers and the people is an unnatural state of society' and that it would be far better to work through 'the natural chiefs and leaders of the people' than to leave them 'open to the persuasion and seduction of upstart leaders'.³⁴

The taluqdari system also found support from another quarter within English liberalism, for it fitted in with the ideas of laissez-faire political economy. Since the time of Cornwallis, the ideas of political economy had found little scope in India, due to the dominance of Benthamite peasant theories. With the changing character of liberalism, however, laissez-faire landlord ideas found receptive soil in India after the Mutiny. They strongly reinforced the preference for the taluqdari system of settlement, for, according to the political economists, to give the landlord full control over his estate and to refrain from interference with him was the most effectual way of promoting agricultural prosperity. Sir James Outram, in a strongly worded minute of 2 May 1858, maintained:

By the aid of its existing landed aristocracy Oudh may easily be made the most prosperous division of our Indian Empire. And I think that even the most fanatically keen admirers of the N.W.P. and Punjab systems are now inclined to admit that it is worth trying whether the universal laws of social progress do not hold, as regards India—whether the revenue of the State may not be maintained, and the happiness of the masses promoted, as satisfactorily under a system which recognizes the legitimacy and advantages of capital and of baronial landlordism, as under a system which tends to reduce the entire population to the dreary and ever-sinking level of a demi-pauperised peasant proprietary.³⁵

Sir Charles Wingfield, like Outram, the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, was even more firmly convinced that progress could only come through government non-interference with society. As he saw it, 'the natural laws of society and of political economy' demanded the liberation of the landed class from all restrictions imposed by government on the management of their estates or the relations with their tenants.³⁶

In reorienting the British land policy, Canning evoked a good deal of opposition, notwithstanding his broad base of support. The radical reformers, who had dominated India policy in the time of Dalhousie, were not completely submerged by the events of 1857, and they did not hesitate to criticize Canning's reliance on the

taluqdar class. Cherishing the ideal of peasant proprietorship, they found the new policy to be antagonistic to the demands of social justice and they could see nothing in the events of the Mutiny to justify such a change. Among the most prominent of this school was Sir John Lawrence, whose solicitude for the peasant survived his departure for England in 1859. At home, on the India Council, he became the most outspoken critic of the change in policy he saw taking place in India. With Dalhousie, he had been responsible for the peasant settlement in the Punjab, and he considered Canning's tenderness towards the sirdar class there to be both impolitic in itself and unjust to the peasantry.³⁷ In Oudh, Lawrence felt Canning was 'only breeding up a class of people who will turn against you on the first opportunity'.³⁸ Lawrence's great authority on Indian questions won over to his view the majority of the Council, including the entire Political Committee.³⁹ They were not able to halt or reverse Canning's policy, as the Secretary of State, Sir Charles Wood, possessed ultimate authority; but the Council did force Wood to moderate the tone of his dispatches, sending out more qualified approval than he would himself have desired.

In India, Canning encountered much less resistance. He managed to convert most of John Lawrence's old subordinates, the District Officers in the Punjab and its Lieutenant Governor, Robert Montgomery, to the new policy; and in Oudh the Chief Commissioner, Charles Wingfield, was 'very hearty in the cause' of the taluqdari settlement.⁴⁰ There was still an undercurrent of opposition 'to the policy of trusting and employing the native Gentry', which Canning detected 'lurking amongst our officers', particularly in the lower ranks of the Indian Civil Service.⁴¹ But Canning kept such discontent well under control. Indeed there was no effective opposition in India to Canning's policy until Sir John Lawrence came out as Viceroy in 1864.⁴² Canning was in fact hampered far more by Lawrence's legacy of peasant settlement than by any opposition either in India or England. He found the greatest obstacles to his gentry policy in the Punjab to be 'the deliberate and avowed thrusting aside and lowering of every great family for ten years past', combined with the fact that the Punjab peasant settlement had survived the Mutiny, so that there was not, as in Oudh, 'a clear stage upon which to work out anything that might seem fittest'.⁴³

The policy which Canning inaugurated marked the beginning, as Sir Charles Wood at once realized, of 'a new and most important era in our Indian administration'. Only in Oudh was the pre-Mutiny pattern of peasant settlement completely upset in favour of the landlord class, yet the Oudh taluqdari settlement was but the most distinctive feature of a quite new departure in British policies and attitudes in India. Throughout India, British policy from 1858 onward was dominated by one overriding concern: 'to enlist on our side, and to employ in our service, those natives who have, from their birth or position, a natural influence in the country'.⁴⁴ In this endeavour the British were remarkably successful. Canning made the taluqdars of Oudh into firm bulwarks of the British empire, and elsewhere British solicitude for the interests and privileges of the landed classes was reciprocated by loyalty and affection.⁴⁵ Indeed the staunch loyalty of the Indian aristocracy later provided the British with a firm base of power from which to fight the growing nationalist movement.

With this concern for the upper classes, a change occurred in the goal which the British set for themselves in India. Henceforth their aim was not so much to reform and regenerate Indian society as simply to rule it, maintaining intact its traditional ordering and all its deeply rooted customs; and this rule was to be avowedly permanent, exercised so far as possible with the assistance of that aristocracy whose power and influence the Mutiny had made manifest.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See Foreign Dispatch from Governor-General to Secretary of State, No. 43A of 30 April 1860.

2. To some extent, of course, the British had to take account of established patterns of landholding. Yet, in their self-confidence, they felt free to ignore forms of land tenure they disliked; and moreover, Indian land tenures had been largely disorganized by the anarchy of the eighteenth century. As Sir George Campbell noted, 'We found all the interests in land throughout most of India in a sort of fluid state, to be moulded much as we thought expedient and just' (*Memoirs of My Indian Career*, II, 44).

3. Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959); Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in Western India*

1817-30 (1957); B.B. Misra, *The Central Administration of the East India Company* (1959).

4. See the Fifth Report of the House of Commons Select Committee on East India Company, 1812, for decision of conflict between Munro and the adherents of Cornwallis' Bengal system. There were of course dissenters throughout this period to peasant settlement, most notably Elphinstone, Malcolm, and Henry Lawrence, who valued aristocracy for both sentimental and political reasons. But their influence was overridden and left little permanent mark; *vid.*, victory of John Lawrence backed by Dalhousie over Henry Lawrence in the Punjab 1852.

5. See Stokes, *op.cit.* 87-92, for the Utilitarian application of Ricardian rent theory to India.

6. Evidence to House of Commons Committee, 4 August 1831, in *Parliamentary Papers [PP]* (1831), v, 309. See also James Mill, *History of British India* (1820), v, 416.

7. On his support for present proprietorship and his schemes for converting the Irish and Indian peasants into proprietors, see J.S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (Boston, 1848), I, 380-93.

8. Instructions of 4 February 1856 to Chief Commissioner of Oudh, *PP* (1856), xlv, 264. He specifically stated that 'the intention of the Government is to deal with actual occupants of the Soil...and not to suffer the interposition of middle men, as talookdars, farmers of the revenue, and such like' (*ibid.* 260).

9. Canning noted that 'The rising against our authority in Oudh has been general, almost universal' (Letter to Secret Committee, 17 June 1858, *PP* [1859], 290). See also S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (Delhi, 1957), 411-12.

10. Even as late as June 1858, Robert Montgomery reported to the Government of India that 'We hold Lucknow District and the line of road to Cawnpore. Most of our other posts have been abandoned...Throughout the country of Oudh the rebels are complete masters' (*Secret Consultations [SC]*, 25 June 1858, No. 63, National Archives of India).

11. Captain L. Barrow to Edmonstone, Secretary to Government of India (*SC* [25 September 1857], No. 509).

12. Letter to Secret Committee, 17 June 1858, *PP* (1859), xviii, 287.

13. Undated Memorandum (1858), Ellenborough Papers, Box 22.

14. This disillusionment was clearly expressed by Canning in a letter of 6 October 1858 to C.C. Oudh: 'Our endeavour to better, as we thought, the village occupants in Oudh has not been appreciated by them....It can hardly be doubted that if they had valued their restored rights, they would have shown some signs of a willingness to support a Government which had revived those rights. But they have nothing done of the kind. The Governor-General is therefore of opinion that

these village occupants deserve little consideration from us.' (*Foreign Consultations [FC]* [5 November 1858], No. 193).

15. Stokes, *ibid.* 39–40. See also the optimistic hopes for total and rapid reformation of the Indian character expressed in C.E. Trevelyan, *The Education of People of India* (1838); and in Macaulay's *Minute on Education*. This belief in complete and efficacious transformation brought together the utilitarian reformers, evangelicals, and free-trade merchants.

16. Speech of 13 August 1860; *Hansard*, CLX 1195. See also letter of Wood to Canning (10 October 1859) in *Wood Papers*, India Office Library. The Court of Directors in a dispatch of 5 May 1858 dealing with the pacification of Oudh pointed out that 'it is necessary to deal tenderly with existing usages' and that 'it is often wiser even to tolerate evil, for a time, than to alarm and to irritate the minds of the people by the sudden introduction of changes...' (Political Dispatch No. 17 of 1858).

17. 'General Report on the Administration of Oudh 1858–9' (*PP Lords* [1859], Sess. II, VIII, 42).

18. Government of India to Outram, 27 September 1857, in *SC* (18 December 1857), No. 614.

19. See British offers to Rajas Kunwant Singh and Man Singh, who after conspicuous loyalty in the summer of 1857, had later sided with rebels. Both were allowed to put forward claims to land lost at annexation, provided they lent 'heartly support' to government in re-establishing order (*SC* [28 May 1858], Nos 392–4).

20. *PP* (1859), XVIII, 304, and *FC* (5 November 1858), No. 192.

21. Government of India to C.C. Oudh, 6 October 1858 (*FC* [5 November 1858], No. 193). In point of fact, it is extremely unlikely that the peasantry, by subordinating themselves to the taluqdars in 1857, thereby expressed any preference for the taluqdari system. Far more likely they joined their chiefs in a common loyalty to their deposed king and looked to them to provide leadership in a quasi-national struggle. See S.N. Sen, *1857*, 412. No doubt also many were overawed by the military might of the rebellious taluqdars and forced to go along. The point of importance here, however, is that the British *thought* the peasants, by joining the taluqdars in revolt, had thereby expressed a preference for the taluqdari system of settlement, and they revised their policy accordingly.

22. Government of India to Outram, 31 March 1858 (*SC* [30 April 1858], No. 120).

23. C.C. Oudh to Government of India, 8 March 1858 (*SC* [30 April 1858], No. 116).

24. Canning stated in a minute of 22 April 1859 that only fourteen taluqdars forfeited all title to land. Indeed Canning justified the Proclamation on the grounds that 'by it alone and by no other means was a return to the talookdar system possible', for confiscation cleared

the ground of all previous titles and allowed the taluqdars to obtain clear and unquestioned titles from the government. See *FC* (27 May 1859), No. 367, and letter from Canning to Granville, 31 January 1860, in Granville Papers.

25. Memorandum of 31 October 1859 (*FC* [18 November 1859], No. 130).

26. Political Dispatch of 24 April 1860, from Wood to Canning (*PP* [1861], XLVI, 441).

27. Charles Wingfield stated that 'they are in an analogous position to that of a Government Tehseeldar, who is also a magistrate. They enjoy the same confidence and act under the same checks....Within these limits there is no authority but their own'. 'Oudh Administration Report for 1859-60', *FC* (August 1860), Part A, No. 371.

28. *Ibid.* Sir Charles Wood alone, although approving the scheme, noted that 'talookdars view their revenue powers as a boon conferred upon them' instead of acting as agents of the government; and he urged the government not to extend their jurisdiction to cases in which they were personally interested. Wood to Canning, 17 August 1861 (*PP* [1861], XLVI, 542).

29. Government of India to Wood, 8 May 1861 (*PP* [1861], XLVI, 452).

30. Circular No. 31 from C.C. Oudh to all District Officers, 16 November 1858 (*FC* [20 May 1859], No. 284).

31. Circular No. 46 of 30 December 1858 (*FC* [21 January 1859], No. 279).

32. For Canning's policy in Punjab, see his letters to Wood of 6 December 1859 and 27 February 1860, in *Wood Papers*; and his letter to Granville of 4 July 1860, in Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice, *Life of the Second Earl Granville* (1905), I, 384. For Wood's approval of policy, see Political Dispatch No. 75 of 20 September 1860.

33. On Bagehot as the central exponent of mid-Victorian liberalism, see Asa Briggs, *Victorian People* (1954), 100-7. Among the most distinctive features of Bagehot's liberalism were his stress on the role of deference and dignity in society, and his preference for a system of removable inequalities, which allowed men to rise but kept a class structure.

34. Wood to Bartle Frere, 1 August 1862, in John Martineau, *Life of Sir Bartle Frere* (1895), 1, 449.

35. Quoted in F.J. Goldsmid, *Life of Sir James Outram* (1881), 11, 339.

36. Minute of 26 March 1864 in *PP* (1865), XL, 207. He asserted that 'any limitation' of the landlord's power over his land 'must tend to deter the application of capital to land and check the development of its productive powers, and consequently of the wealth of the country'.

37. With regard to Lawrence's attitude to the new Punjab policy, Sir Charles Wood commented that 'Lawrence does not like it at all, thinks there are very few [sirdars] fit to be trusted, and that there is danger in uniting their lands....He thinks it very objectionable giving up any village from our mild superintendence to the grasp of a sirdar' (Wood to Canning, 10 August 1866, in *Wood Papers*).

38. Wood to Canning, 18 January 1860, in *Wood Papers*.

39. See letter from Wood to Canning of 9 January 1861, describing his difficulties with the India Council. The Political Committee was composed of Lawrence, F. Currie, Willoughby, Prinsep, and Captain Eastwick.

40. On support of Montgomery and Punjab Officers, see Canning to Wood, 22 July 1861; on Wingfield, see Canning to Wood, 12 November 1859, in *Wood Papers*.

41. Canning to Wood, 3 December 1861, in *Wood Papers*.

42. Sir John Lawrence's arrival in India as Viceroy marked the opening of the great tenant-right controversies in Oudh and the Punjab; these raged throughout Lawrence's viceroyalty, from 1864 to 1868, and were only terminated by Oudh Rent Act and Punjab Tenancy Acts of 1868.

43. Canning to Granville, 4 July 1860, in Fitzmaurice, op. cit., 1, 384.

44. Wood to Canning, 3 January 1860 and 18 April 1860, in *Wood Papers*.

45. On the success of Canning's policy in Oudh, see the reports of the Durbar of 1861, where Canning was lionized by the taluqdars and from which he came away reporting that 'the certain proof and knowledge that they are trusted...has made men of them. The acuteness and impartiality with which they do their work is quite remarkable'. Canning to Granville, 3 May 1861, in Fitzmaurice, 394.

Laissez-faire and Tenant Right in Mid-Nineteenth-Century India*

Land policy in India has always involved an intricate and shifting relationship between three elements in society: the government, the landlord, and the small peasant who tills the soil. (Perhaps one should add a fourth party—the bullock who actually does the work, but then he has never had many defenders, except in his old age.) During the nineteenth century, the agrarian scene was further complicated by the presence in India of a British government. The British found the system of land tenure in India in many ways deceptively similar, especially in Bengal, to that with which they were familiar at home. Yet, it was, in reality, quite different.

Before the British arrived, land was never held in outright ownership as private property. The state possessed a traditional claim to a share of the produce, known as the land revenue demand, and was in theory considered the ultimate owner. The intermediary classes who collected the rent for the state were of diverse origin. Some, such as the Rajput taluqdars of Oudh, were ancient heads of clans; some were court favourites or successful military leaders; others, such as the Bengal *zamindars*, were tax farmers of the Mughal government. During the decay of governmental authority in the eighteenth century, they had all vastly enhanced their power over the land, and encroached upon

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the rights of the state. But this power fell far short of a true proprietary title, for the zamindar had still to take account of the customary rights of his tenants. The cultivator, or *ryot* as he was known in Bengal, was obliged to pay a share of his produce as rent to the superior holder, but this share was usually fixed by custom, and so long as it was paid, the cultivator and his heirs were entitled to remain on the soil. The Indian peasant thereby acquired an effective right of occupancy, which protected him from unjust enhancement or eviction, and gave him a tangible interest in the land. During the anarchy of the eighteenth century, although often subjected to extortion by powerful zamindars and forced to contribute to the support of armed bands of retainers, the cultivator was still in a strong bargaining position. The population was relatively small, and much land lay uncultivated. A ryot who considered himself oppressed could always take his labour elsewhere, and be certain of finding favourable terms.

Convinced that progress was dependent upon private property, the British invariably awarded proprietary rights in the soil to those upon whom they settled the land revenue, whether the zamindar, as in Bengal, or the village community of the North-Western Province. In doing so, they did not intend to destroy the traditional rights of the tenancy. Cornwallis in 1793 for instance had ruled that no ryot was to pay more than the customary *pargana* rates. Yet, once the Permanent Settlement was in force, no further efforts were made to ascertain or preserve the *pargana* rates, and the courts lacking detailed information were unable to enforce the old assessments. As a result, the peasantry soon found themselves reduced to the status of tenants-at-will. Depression of the peasantry was further accelerated by the economic changes which followed the introduction of British rule. Law and order—the ‘Pax Britannica’—gave an impetus to population growth, and triggered off a rise in the value of land. By mid-century, the zamindars were in a position to dictate terms. The same process took place in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh during the 1860s. As prosperity and population growth made themselves felt, the landholders were able to mount a successful attack upon traditional tenant right.¹

In the face of this social upheaval, the British had at last to decide whether they wished to protect the occupancy tenant by

special legislative action. This question formed the subject of continuing and bitter debate in the years after the Mutiny, and sooner or later drew in almost all the officials of the British Indian government. In each case, the individual officer formed his opinion partly on the basis of his Indian experience and partly from his own particular view of that liberalism which most educated Englishmen shared. Those who accepted the theories of laissez-faire, for instance, looked upon tenancy legislation as a harmful and retrograde measure. By restricting the landlord, they argued, it would stifle capital investment and perpetuate uneconomic smallholdings. This faith in the landlord as the agent of agrarian progress reflected ultimately the success of large scale capitalist farming in England. As free contract and unfettered proprietorship had made English agriculture the most advanced in the world, so would they shake Indian agriculture out of its centuries-old stagnation. Despite the inability of the Bengal zamindars to act like English gentry, and the dismal failure of laissez-faire in Ireland, the English liberal of 1860 still maintained, with Charles Wingfield, that

The majority of our talooqdars share the feelings of English landlords. Their demands are fair, and observed with good faith, and innumerable little kindnesses, so dear to the Natives of this country, are shown, which cease when our laws, by creating rights on the part of the peasantry, set the two classes in antagonism. I firmly believe that half the bickering and bad blood that prevails between landlord and tenant have been caused by our ill-judged interference.²

The theories of laissez-faire gained further reinforcement from aristocratic prejudice. The English landed gentry saw clearly that tenancy legislation, with its restraint upon the landlord, posed a challenge to their own dominant position in society. By interfering with the rights of property, it was, indeed, the first step on the road to socialism, and had therefore to be opposed wherever it raised its head. The Duke of Argyll, for instance, as Secretary of State for India in the first Gladstone government, repeatedly urged the Viceroy to 'defend *property* where it has, fortunately, grown up under our system'; ten years later, in 1880, he bitterly denounced Gladstone's Irish Land Act as a 'plan to destroy ownership' and resigned from the cabinet in protest.³

The supporters of tenant right in India also drew upon the storehouse of English liberalism. They looked, however, to its authoritarian Benthamite side, and found their justification in Ricardo's theory of rent. According to Ricardo, landlords were a parasitic class of rent receivers, living off an 'unearned increment' to which they had no just claim. His disciples, led by James Mill, urged the government to deal directly with the peasantry and to secure to them the fruits of their own industry. During the quarter century from 1825 to the Mutiny, as Stokes has pointed out in his study, *Utilitarians and India*, this doctrine played a decisive role in shaping Indian land policy.⁴ The village settlements of the North-Western Provinces and the Punjab, in particular, owed much to its influence. By mid-century, utilitarianism was in the process of decay. As a fixed body of doctrine, it no longer exercised the attraction it had in the time of James Mill. But the ideal of peasant proprietorship, and the reforming enthusiasm which sustained it, were by no means dead. In India, men such as John Strachey upheld the rent doctrine in all its rigour, while at home John Stuart Mill kept alive the ideals of his father.⁵ Much as his restless mind helped smash the rigid framework of Benthamite radicalism in other fields, in agrarian questions he never deviated from the utilitarian path. He adhered throughout his life to the Ricardian theory of rent and insisted that progress could only take place through the peasant cultivator.

Interestingly, both Mill and his laissez-faire opponents directed their attention simultaneously to India and Ireland. The two countries, they realized, had many similarities. In each case the economy was wholly dependent upon agriculture and the land was tilled by peasant farmers. The Irish aristocracy, however, were far more deeply entrenched in power and had almost completely destroyed the customary rights of their tenants. By virtue of their close ties to the English gentry, moreover, they commanded considerable influence in Parliament. Hence tenancy legislation went much further in India than in Ireland, and when the government finally did step in to restrain the Irish landlord, India provided a precedent and a model. Mill opened the way with his discussion of peasant proprietorship in the *Principles of Political Economy*, but the most timely contribution came from Sir George Campbell. An Indian civilian home on leave, Campbell

in 1869 published a pamphlet on *The Irish Land*, in which he set out to prove, on the basis of his Indian experience, that the Irish peasantry possessed a 'moral claim' to tenant right.⁶ The pamphlet caught Gladstone's eye and several of its recommendations found their way into the Irish Land Acts of 1870 and 1881.

In India, the young British officer found his ideas shaped by his choice of service and the nature of his work. Each of the major provincial services from the outset developed its own distinctive attitude towards land tenure. In Bengal, the aristocratic sentiments of Lord Cornwallis still dominated the civil service seventy-five years after the Permanent Settlement. The Bengal civilian instinctively thought in terms of laissez-faire, and left the peasantry in the care of the zamindar. In the Punjab, on the other hand, the District Officer, armed with far-reaching power, regarded himself as the father of his district. Like his hero John Lawrence, the Punjab officer usually combined a rough and ready paternalism with the reforming zeal of a self-confident Victorian. He considered it his duty above all to aid and encourage the tillers of the soil. In much the same fashion, those who served in the revenue line were more favourably disposed toward the peasantry than those whose duties were exclusively judicial or political. Out in the field, settling disputes and making assessments, the young collector soon developed feelings of sympathy and affection for the sturdy yeomen of the soil. He readily identified himself with their aspirations and stood up for their interests. Consequently the ranks of the tenant party were not materially depleted by the decline of utilitarian theory. There remained, not only the few agrarian reformers, but the much larger number who cherished the vision of a contented peasantry tilling the soil under the benign and watchful guidance of British officers.

Far more decisive in its impact on land policy was the Mutiny of 1857.⁷ The disastrous events of that year showed the British, with startling clarity, the dangers inherent in a policy of well-intentioned muddling. Agrarian reform, it appeared, had failed to achieve its primary purpose—the creation of a contented peasantry—for the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, where peasant settlement had recently been introduced, were foremost in revolt. During 1857, the British discovered as well that the old aristocratic classes still wielded immense power. In many areas they led the

people in revolt, and occasionally, as in Oudh, even resumed possession of their former estates. After the Mutiny, the government accordingly embarked on a policy of conciliation. Once their friendship had been gained, these men, they saw, would prove a valuable source of strength for the empire. Such a policy was of course hardly compatible with a vigorous assertion of tenant right, which would necessarily antagonize the aristocratic classes by curtailing their power over their estates. At the same time, the Mutiny contributed to a resurgence of *laissez-faire* in India. Sober and disillusioned, the British during the years after the Mutiny were little inclined to pursue radical schemes of social reform. The restoration of confidence took first priority. In this atmosphere, *laissez-faire* acquired a new validity, and found support, for the first time in years, at the highest levels of government. Both the Viceroy, Lord Canning, and the Secretary of State, Sir Charles Wood, insisted that lasting reform could only come from within Indian society, and when it had the support of the influential classes.⁸ To force the pace of change, they said, was to invite explosive disaffection. Canning and Wood represent in fact the type of moderate liberals who dominated the Indian government during the post-Mutiny decade. Cautious and conservative, they found their inspiration, not in Bentham, but in Walter Bagehot; and they always remained keenly aware of the lessons of the Mutiny. For them, as for many of their contemporaries, expediency and principle combined to mar any extensive creation of occupancy rights.

The tenancy legislation of the 1860s therefore was the product of considerable compromise. Despite their newly enhanced position, the opponents of tenant right were not able to block legislative action altogether—the plight of the peasantry was too obvious, and the forces of the tenant party were too strong, for that; but they did render weak and ineffectual much of the legislation that did reach the statute book. Often indeed the protection which it afforded was little more than nominal. In Oudh, for instance, after a protracted battle in which John Lawrence fought valiantly on their behalf, the tenants obtained precisely nothing. The Oudh Rent Act of 1868 awarded rights of occupancy to a few expropriary tenants, but left the bulk of the peasantry at the mercy of their taluqdars. This unfortunate outcome reflects the fact that

Oudh was both a centre of rebellion and the seat of a government dedicated to laissez-faire. Many British officers, bitterly disappointed at the behaviour of the Oudh peasants during the Mutiny, agreed with Canning that 'these village occupants deserve little consideration from us'.⁹ The Chief Commissioner, Charles Wingfield, shared these sentiments, and was at the same time opposed to tenant right on principle. He considered it 'an invasion of the rights of property, and a clog on enterprise and improvement', and accordingly ordered his settlement officers to ignore all claims to occupancy tenure.¹⁰ When Lawrence took over as Viceroy in 1864, these orders were countermanded, and inquiries conducted, but no substantial change in policy took place. The government in the end simply refused to do anything which might upset the taluqdars. Their continued friendship was worth far more than any measure of tenant right. Hence the condition of the cultivators rapidly deteriorated during the 1870s, and further legislation was put on the statute book in 1886.¹¹ This act was somewhat more effective, for it provided that all ordinary tenants were entitled to remain in possession of their land at a fixed rate for seven years. At the end of each seven-year period, the landlord could eject the tenant altogether, or enhance his rent not more than 6.25 per cent. The Oudh peasantry thus obtained at last some protection against arbitrary enhancement. But the power of the taluqdar was in no way curbed. Not only was he free to oust the tenant every seven years, he even managed to defeat the intent of the act by extorting large sums of money, known as *nazrana*, from the cultivator before reinstating him in his holding. The authorized rent was in fact soon buried underneath a whole series of illegal exactions and special levies.

In Bengal, much the same story was re-enacted. There, however, the initial tenancy law—Act X of 1859—went considerably further. It awarded a right of occupancy in the land at 'fair and equitable' rates to all cultivators who had occupied the same holding continuously for twelve years. The plight of the Bengal peasantry had by this time become so desperate that no one could any longer deny the need for corrective legislation. Canning and Wood alike defended the measure as a simple act of justice for the peasantry, and ignored the objections put forward by the zamindars and their English allies.¹² Act X was, nevertheless, a flimsy bulwark

against a powerful zamindar. It neglected to define a fair and equitable rent, and, as the zamindars soon discovered, could easily be evaded by the simple expedient of shifting the cultivator from one field to another before the twelve-year period had expired. The Act had, moreover, to contend with the traditional *laissez-faire* sentiments of the Bengal civilian, who rarely took up the cause of the peasantry with any enthusiasm. As one officer (John Beames) fresh from the Punjab, noted with some surprise:

It was held in 1862, and for long after, that the Collector and other public officials had no right and no business to inquire how the zamindar managed his estate, or how he dealt with his immense body of tenants. ...When I spoke to my Collector about the welfare of the peasant class...he laughed at me and told me it was no business of ours; the zamindar had a right to do what he liked with his ryots.¹³

The protection therefore, which the cultivator obtained under this act, was more nominal than real, and land tenure continued to be a serious source of agrarian discontent. Eventually in 1879, a Rent Commission was appointed, extensive inquiries were carried out, and in 1885 a new tenancy law was put on the books. This complex and lengthy act¹⁴ marked a significant step forward in tenancy legislation. Under it, the practice of shifting was stopped by the award of occupancy rights to all ryots who had held any land in the same village or on the same estate continuously for twelve years. In other respects, the act very much resembled the Irish Land Act of 1881; it gave the Bengal tenant the famous 3 F's—fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale of his occupancy right—plus compensation for disturbance and for improvements in case of eviction. The power of the zamindar, however, was by no means broken. They were still able to intimidate their tenants, and even, at times, to break down their privileged status, by the threat of legal proceedings. The complexities of the act afforded ample opportunities for litigation, and the zamindar, once in court, would not admit defeat until he had exhausted every avenue of appeal. Rather than face this prospect, the tenant, with his meagre resources, would usually bow before his landlord's demands.¹⁵

The Government of India, then, during the second half of the nineteenth century, undertook simultaneously to conciliate the landlords and to protect the peasantry. Their tenancy legislation

throughout clearly reflects the ambiguities and inconsistencies of such a policy. At no time did the British ever cease to acknowledge a responsibility for the welfare of the peasantry. This after all was the ultimate justification of British rule—that they could best judge the needs and look after the interests of the Indian people. Indeed with the rise of middle class nationalism towards the end of the century, the government asserted that it alone represented the 'real people of India', the silent masses who tilled the soil.¹⁶ The opposition of the educated Bengali community to the Tenancy Act of 1885—which in the end was passed only by the weight of the official majority in Council—seemingly confirmed this belief, and helped sustain British confidence in their mission in India. Similarly, the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900, which the leading Congress politicians all denounced, and R.C. Dutt's defence of the Permanent Settlement, bolstered Britain's claim to speak for the Indian peasantry. Yet, at the same time, the government was always sensitive to the interests of the Indian aristocracy and responsive to their demands. Tenancy legislation was carefully tailored to avoid any real damage to the position of the landlord community, and was rarely enacted without their consent. Even the Bengal Act of 1885, despite the bitter hostility of the zamindars, was considerably diluted to meet their objections. In an era of rising nationalism, the government simply could not afford to antagonize this influential and conservative class. They alone offered hope of stability and security in the years ahead. Tied together by 'mutual sympathy and trust' as Sir Harcourt Butler put it, the Englishman and the taluqdar would stand 'as brothers before the altar of the Empire'.¹⁷

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. B.B. Misra, *The Central Administration of the East India Company* (Manchester, 1959), pp. 191–6. See, for instance, Memorandum of the Deputy Collector of Champaran cited in letter from Government of Bengal to Board of Revenue, 5 March 1955: 'The curse of this District is the insecure nature of the ryot's land tenure. The cultivator, though nominally protected by Regulations of all sorts, has, practically, no rights in the soil. His rent is continually raised; he is oppressed by every successive tookadar(sic), until he is actually forced out of his holding, and driven to take shelter in the Nepaul Teraee'. Papers relating to Act X, National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi.

2. Wingfield to Maine, 3 November 1864; enclosure to Maine to Wood, 20 November 1864. *Wood Papers*, India Office Library. Wingfield was Chief Commissioner of Oudh 1859–66.

3. Argyll to Northbrook, 23 May 1873, in Argyll, *Autobiography and Memoirs* (London, 1906), II, 282; and Argyll to Gladstone, 3 November 1880. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

4. Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford 1959), ch. ii.

5. Strachey was Collector of Moradabad 1855–61, and later rose to the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-west Provinces (1874–6) and Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council (1876–80). For his support of the Ricardian rent theory, see a letter of 30 September 1859. Home Revenue Proceedings, 17 October 1861, No. 42, NAI.

6. George Campbell, *Memoirs of my Indian Career* (London, 1893), II, 190. R.D. Collison Black, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 55–6. For a defence of property see Charles Wingfield, *Observation on Land Tenure and Tenant Right in India* (London, 1869); for a theoretical justification of fixity of tenure and tenant right both in Ireland and India, see J.S. Mill, *Chapters and Speeches on the Irish Land Question* (London, 1870).

7. See my article, 'The Influence of the Mutiny of 1857 on Land Policy in India', *Historical Journal*, IV, 152–63 (1961).

8. See for instance Wood to Frere, 1 August 1862, in John Martineau, *Life of Sir Bartle Frere* (London, 1895), I, 449.

9. Secretary, Government of India to C.C. Oudh, 6 October 1858. Foreign Consultations, 5 November 1858, No. 193. NAI.

10. CC Oudh to Secretary Government of India, 7 September 1860. Foreign Department, Revenue A Proceedings, March 1862, No. 7. NAI.

11. See B.H. Baden-Powell, *The Land Systems of British India* (Oxford, 1892), II, 250–1.

12. See Minute by Lord Canning of 20 April 1859. Papers relating to Act X, NAI.

13. John Beames, *Memoirs of a Bengal Civilian* (London, 1961), p. 129.

14. For the provisions of the act, see Baden-Powell, *Land Systems*.

15. See R. Carstairs, *The Little World of an Indian District Officer* (London, 1912), pp. 88–92.

16. See for instance speech by Lord Curzon of 16 November 1905, in Sir Thomas Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, (London, 1906), pp. 584–5.

17. Harcourt Butler, *Oudh Policy: The Policy of Sympathy* (Lucknow, 1906), p. 40.

From Raja to Landlord: The Oudh Taluqdars, 1850–70*

Most studies of social change in rural India under the British rule have focused upon the institution of caste and the character and extent of social mobility. In the process such useful concepts as 'Sanskritization' and 'Westernization' have been formulated, and a considerable body of literature has grown up, much of it devoted to exploring the relationship between these two concepts.¹ This preoccupation with questions of caste and mobility can, however, easily obscure other types of change which took place in the structure of rural society as a result of British rule. One of these, at least in Bengal and north India, relates to the position in society of the great landholders, known as taluqdars or zamindars.² The most striking feature in the fate of this landlord community under the British was neither the decline, except in a few places, of the traditionally dominant groups, nor the rise of new men, but rather the persistence in positions of power of the old landed classes by a process of adaptation to the altered political and economic conditions.

Among the various landed classes of north India, perhaps the most numerous and powerful were the taluqdars of Oudh. A force to be reckoned with by *nawabs*, British District Officers, and harassed peasant cultivators alike, they towered above rural society

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in Oudh for decades. This essay is a study of the way in which this group maintained its old status in the new environment of British rule by a thoroughgoing transformation of their relations with each other, with the government, and with those beneath them on the land. The taluqdars were still the dominant figures in the countryside in the later days of British rule, as they had been at annexation in 1856; but the bases of their power and the sanctions by which it was sustained were of a new and different character.

Before annexation, the Oudh taluqdars cannot properly be regarded as landlords. They built estates, amassed followers, and contended with the nawab's officials for the control of the land revenue. But their power came not so much from the ownership of land as from the control of the resources, in men and material as well as land, of a given locality. Their estates have been called 'little kingdoms', and the taluqdars, as little 'kings' or *rajās*, were not owners of land but rulers of men—leaders in time of war and arbiters in time of peace of all those subject to their sway.³ The physical symbol of this quasi-independent political status can be found in the sturdy mud fort, fortified with cannon and surrounded on every side with dense growths of jungle, which lay at the heart of every *taluqdari* estate. In the safety of this fort, the taluqdar could defy his marauding neighbours, and often the nawab's officials as well; from it, accompanied by his bands of armed retainers, he could venture forth to prosecute his own quarrels. In 1856, the British counted 623 forts in Oudh, of which 351 were in a state of good repair.⁴

Nor were the taluqdars of 1850 like the English gentry of the time, a stable and cohesive group of men, bound together by mutual interests and institutions and bulwarked by centuries of prescriptive right. The term 'taluqdar' was applied rather indiscriminately to all those who had succeeded in the scramble for power on the local level, and this included a very diverse and fluctuating group of men. Most numerous were the heads of the old Rajput lineages, long-settled and widely scattered in each district. These Rajput families often remained taluqdars generation after generation, for their position was sustained by the deferential support of their numerous kinsmen; but even in these old families factional disputes or the dissipation of the family patrimony among

several heirs could easily reduce once powerful families to penury. In addition, by the mid-nineteenth century the taluqdari ranks contained many self-made men, of various castes, who had taken advantage of the increasing weakness of the nawabs of Oudh to seize control of sizeable local areas and recruit large bodies of armed retainers. The Mehdona estate of Faizabad, for instance, comprising property assessed at two lakh rupees, was put together during the first half of the nineteenth century by two brothers, Bukhtawar and Darshan Singh, the eldest of whom began service as a trooper in the Oudh Cavalry. Darshan's son, Man Singh, continued up to annexation to expand the estate, largely through abuse of his official position as *nazim*, by quietly incorporating into his private holdings villages for whose revenue he was responsible to the nawab.

The first challenge to the traditional position of the taluqdar came with the British annexation of the province in 1856. Determined to monopolize the military force of the state and to retain in their own hands the powers of law and order, the British set out to deprive the taluqdars of their quasi-independent political position. They dispatched troops to reduce the taluqdars' forts, and they ordered the taluqdars to disband their bodies of armed retainers. Neither move was immediately successful, but the importance placed upon them, when, as the judicial commissioner readily admitted, these forts were unlikely to prove formidable to the forces of the British government, indicates the extent of the British determination to eradicate the memory of those 'lawless times' when the taluqdars exercised military power.⁵

At the same time, the British set out to lower the social and economic position of the taluqdars. In the eyes of the British, these men were not only potential competitors for dominance in the countryside, but a parasitic and oppressive class which stood squarely in the path of all agrarian improvement. Hence, during 1856, a great many of the taluqdari estates were settled with the village communities on the pattern of the adjacent North-Western Provinces. Man Singh, for instance, emerged from the summary settlement with only six villages to his name, and many of the old Rajput families fared but little better.⁶

Barely fifteen months after the annexation of Oudh, the Sepoy Mutiny broke out, and by the middle of June 1857, apart from

the Residency in Lucknow, British authority in Oudh had ceased to exist. The taluqdars thus found themselves presented with an unparalleled opportunity for reasserting their old position. One year of British rule, while sufficient to arouse their hostility to the new government, was not long enough to break their political power. Many taluqdars still lived within the walls of their forts and had only to dig up their concealed cannon in order to make good their independence. Hence, no sooner had the rebellion broken out than the taluqdars resumed the villages they had lost at annexation, and by September the bulk of the taluqdars were in open revolt.

The hostility of these men was only to be expected, and their motives for joining the rebellion were relatively clear-cut. What is more remarkable, and more revealing, is the behaviour of the so-called village proprietors, the taluqdars' former 'tenants' or 'subjects'. When the Mutiny broke out, the British assumed that these men would remain loyal, for they had been befriended in the settlement of 1856. In fact, however, over wide areas of the Oudh countryside, these villagers rallied to their local taluqdar's standard and willingly submitted to his leadership. In June 1857, Captain Barrow, District Officer in Pratabgarh, who had sought shelter with Raja Hanwant Singh, was by dumbfounded as the village proprietors of the previous year trooped into the raja's courtyard to pledge their allegiance. This disillusioning experience marked the end of village settlement in Oudh. The British came away from the Mutiny convinced that the taluqdars were the natural leaders of the people, and that their superiority and influence were a necessary element in Indian rural society. To fight against the power of such men, they concluded, was both dangerous and fruitless. And so in 1859, when the Mutiny was finally crushed, the taluqdars, despite their rebellion, were put back into possession by a 'most unreserved and liberal settlement' of all those villages they had held on the eve of annexation.⁷

That some of their old tenants supported the rebel taluqdars is an unquestioned fact. However, it is by no means obvious, as the British assumed, that this support of the taluqdar during the Mutiny implied any desire to see him restored with fresh powers on a permanent and legal basis. Indeed, as we shall see, fierce opposition to the Taluqdari Settlement flared up among the villagers

in several districts during 1859–60. Most often the villagers seem to have thrown in their lot with the taluqdar because he was the unquestioned leader of the locality, or the chief of their clan, a man of power and position whose authority they would not think of defying. No doubt, some villagers gave reluctant support to the taluqdar in order to secure protection for their lives and property during the time of disorder. Also, many were drawn into the rebellion on altogether different grounds—a sense of fellowship, perhaps, with the mutinous sepoy, many of whom came from Oudh, a loyalty to the deposed Oudh dynasty, or simply a desire to prosecute old feuds with their neighbours—and fell in with the rebel taluqdars only as a matter of mutual convenience. Particularly in the old Rajput *talucs*, where strong deferential ties of loyalty, if not of kinship, bound the village leaders to their taluqdari overlords, much support was forthcoming to the taluqdar simply because he was the traditionally acknowledged leader of the locality. As ‘raja’, and often head of the local Rajput lineage as well, he commanded by his very position the allegiance of those beneath him.

The suppression of the Mutiny and the subsequent restoration of the taluqdars radically altered both the nature of taluqdari power and their relationships with their tenants. When the taluqdars regained control of their estates during the 1859 settlement, they stepped into a transformed political environment. They had been decisively defeated in battle and their homeland was now a conquered country. They could no longer put forward any pretensions to independent ‘rajaship’. At the same time, the British proceeded to complete their conquest of Oudh by introducing into the province all the apparatus of the modern state. The taluqdars’ forts were levelled, and their armed retainers permanently disbanded. In their place, the British provided their own army and police force; they set up a complete civil administration in each district, and they opened courts to arbitrate and punish according to the laws of British India. As a result, the taluqdars were stripped of the bulk of those quasi-political functions they used to exercise as petty rajas. There remained only the new role of landlord.

Accustomed as they were from home to the idea of a landed aristocracy as an integral part of society, the British had no difficulty

in conceiving of the taluqdars in this role. Indeed, after the disillusioning experience of the Mutiny, they were anxious to see them flourish as landlords and directed much of their policy in Oudh towards this goal. But the taluqdars could not be made over into a group of landlords without in the process effectively redefining the term 'taluqdar' and giving it a new social content. This can be seen most clearly in the way in which the British took upon themselves the task of deciding who was a taluqdar.

Initially, in 1860, the Chief Commissioner of Oudh, Charles Wingfield, told his subordinates, engaged in compiling a list of the taluqdars in their districts, that the term should be understood as meaning 'an opulent landholder', and hastened to add, 'I should not consider any man who paid less than Rs 5000 as an opulent landholder'.⁸ Even this admittedly arbitrary rule was, however, by no means rigorously adhered to. Several taluqdari claimants paying over 5000 rupees in land revenue were disqualified, largely on the ground that their holdings were partitioned among several co-sharers or were liable to such partition in the future.⁹ In similar fashion, several landholders were awarded taluqdari status despite revenue assessments below the 5000 rupee minimum. In such cases, the decision was usually justified on the ground that the applicant was a man of high social standing, often the chief of a clan, and the owner of an estate which had descended undivided in his family for several generations. As Wingfield noted in approving the application of Karamat Hosein of Kataria, whose assessment was only 2763 rupees, 'it seems clear that Nubbee Bux [Karamat's uncle] was always regarded and treated as a talooqdar. The estate is a small one but it is sufficiently extensive to have gained for the owner the estimation and treatment of a talooqdar both from the neighbours and the Government officials [of the old administration]'.¹⁰ The process of definition was completed by Act I of 1869. By the provisions of that act a list was prepared of all persons entitled to the status of taluqdar. When completed, it contained 276 names.¹¹ Thereafter, a taluqdar was a person whose name was on this list, or an heir of such a person. The society of the taluqdars had become close and exclusive; no amount of opulence could henceforth gain a newcomer admission.¹²

In this fashion, within little more than ten years, the British changed the character of taluqdari system almost beyond

recognition. What had been a vague and fluctuating title, applied in a haphazard fashion to those who had succeeded in the scramble for power in the countryside, had now acquired a precise legal meaning. It denoted those of the defeated rebels of Oudh whom the British for reasons of imperial policy had pardoned and admitted as an act of administrative favour to the privileges of a special position on the land. To be sure, most of the new British taluqdars were the same men who had held the title in the last years of the nawabs, and the criteria used for deciding claims to taluqdari status were based to a large extent on previous nawabi usage. Those whose pre-eminent position in the old order was unquestioned or who could produce evidence that they had formerly been addressed as taluqdars had little difficulty in gaining recognition under the new regime. But the British did give the lands and title of taluqdar to favourites of their own choosing, including one Bengali *babu* from Calcutta;¹³ and what is more important, in order to fulfil their policy objectives, they did not hesitate to apply their own rules to the decision of taluqdari claims. The 5000-rupee limit, for example, reflected their determination that the new taluqdars should be above all a wealthy landed class, while their insistence that a taluqdar must be the sole owner of an undivided estate, preferably one descending by the rule of primogeniture, reflected their belief that a landlord community could only flourish by adhering to the laws of inheritance of the British aristocracy.

Although the British imposed this new legal position upon them by force of arms, the taluqdars themselves readily accepted it. At the outset, during 1858, before the new policy had become clearly enunciated, the taluqdars remained suspicious, for they knew only too well that they were rebels with no claim to mercy at the hands of an avenging government. However, once they realized their military position was hopeless, and saw that they would be well treated under the new government, they quickly abandoned their attempt to recover by rebellion their old political power. They set out instead to exploit their position as a privileged class of landlords within the British Raj. And the amount of power at their disposal in this new role was by no means inconsiderable. Especially after the award in October 1859 of *sanads*, or patents, endowing them with full proprietary rights in their estates, the

taluqdars possessed extensive powers over the tenure and cultivation of land, the collection of rent, and the exaction of fees and services, which they could use to enforce their will over those who lived upon their property. Indeed, in some ways, the position of landlord was more powerful than that of petty raja, for the taluqdar now had what he had never possessed before, the support of the government, with its invincible legal and administrative apparatus.

The village zamindars, as we have seen, had willingly followed their taluqdari overlords into battle in 1857, for the latter had not then, despite the 1856 land settlement, suffered any marked diminution in power and prestige. Two years later, however, after he had seen his taluqdar defeated and discredited as a political leader, the villager was willing to fight for his independence. Hence, the British decision to restore the taluqdars to power met with fierce and stubborn resistance from the subordinate holders. The resistance took the form of a refusal to pay the taluqdar his rent, or the payment at best of only the government revenue demand plus 10 per cent taluqdari *malikana*, or allowance.¹⁴ During 1859, this agitation became so widespread and embittered that the government on several occasions had to warn recalcitrant tenants that continued recusancy would be met with force. Indeed the decision to issue sanads to the taluqdars reflects in large measure the realization that in no other way could the government so effectively show the discontented villagers that the new settlement was permanent and final.¹⁵

When the village zamindars discovered that they had no hope of overturning the Taluqdari Settlement, they simply shifted their ground, rather than abandon the struggle, and fought to preserve for themselves the largest possible amount of independence as privileged tenants or underproprietors. This immediately touched off a protracted conflict, which was only resolved in the 1870s with the establishment of a new set of relationships between the taluqdars and their subordinate tenants.

When confronted with this agrarian strife, the British tried to hold the balance even between the two contenders, and more particularly to preserve the old village holders from further damage to their position, such as a reduction to the status of tenants-at-will. Therefore, while awarding sanads to the taluqdars, they bound them to secure all holders under them in the possession of all the

subordinate rights they had hitherto enjoyed. To make sure that this provision was carried out, the Governor-General, Lord Canning, ordered that the rights of these inferior holders as they existed before annexation should be defined and recorded, and the rental demand of the taluqdar against such persons should be limited to a fixed sum for the duration of each thirty year settlement.¹⁶ This process was known as sub-settlement, and those who could lay claim to its privileges were called underproprietary. Eventually in 1864, after considerable controversy and protracted negotiations with the taluqdars, it was agreed that underproprietary rights were to be protected if they had been enjoyed at any time during the twelve years prior to annexation. This decision was given legal form, and the rules relating to underproprietary right defined in the Oudh Sub-Settlement Act (XXVI of 1866).¹⁷

This attempt at legal protection by no means put a stop to the antagonism between taluqdar and village zamindar. Partly this was because such influential men as Charles Wingfield (Chief Commissioner of Oudh, 1859-66) continued to give tacit encouragement to the taluqdars. He tried, for instance, throughout the discussions on the sub-settlement question to confine the award of underproprietary rights within the narrowest possible bounds. More important, however, was the fact that the taluqdars were determined to break the power of these privileged tenants. This can be seen most clearly by looking closely at one or two important estates.

The Mehdona estate of Maharaja Man Singh in Faizabad district, a large and scattered property of recent origin, contained a great many former village proprietors reduced to the status of tenants. Relations between the taluqdar and these former village holders had never been smooth, but the Mehdona family had never completely obliterated the rights of the former zamindars. The estate was too vast and had grown too rapidly to enable sufficient pressure to be brought to bear at any one point, while the taluqdars themselves were continually distracted by the demands of their official duties as nazims. As a result, the ex-zamindars enjoyed favourable rates averaging 25 per cent below those paid by ordinary cultivators.¹⁸ No sooner had the summary settlement of 1859 been completed, however, than the *maharaja* set out to squeeze more money out of these privileged tenants. Often this was done by

refusing to issue a *patta* or written lease to the tenant until he acquiesced in an enhancement of his rent. The tenants on their part responded by withholding rent and thus forced the taluqdar to default on his revenue payments. In November 1859, Man Singh was in arrears to the extent of 52,120 rupees on the revenue demand of the preceding four months.¹⁹

This conflict flared up in a particularly acute form during 1867–8, just after the passage of the Sub-Settlement Act. The storm centre was Amsin pargana, located along the southern bank of the river Ghagra. The pargana was in the possession of a powerful and pugnacious clan of Barwar Rajputs, who had once owned 159 villages, but who during the years just before annexation had lost all of them, mostly to the growing Mehdona estate. In 1867, while their claims to sub-settlement were being adjudicated, the government introduced into the pargana a revised and enhanced revenue demand, amounting to 73,633 rupees, as part of the regular settlement of the province. In such circumstances, the taluqdar would normally be entitled to increase his own rental demand on ordinary cultivators to twice that amount, that is, to the full net assets of the estate. To protect those claiming underproprietary rights it was proposed that wherever sub-settlement cases were still pending, the taluqdar should limit his rental demand to the revenue demand plus 5 or 10 per cent. Instead, the maharaja issued notices of enhancement to all his tenants, underproprietary claimants and avowed cultivators alike, demanding that they pay rent henceforth at double the revenue demand plus 8 per cent.²⁰ The Barwar tenantry stubbornly resisted this attempt to reduce them arbitrarily to the status of ordinary cultivators. A special settlement officer, who was sent into the pargana to induce the recalcitrant Barwars to pay at least part of their rent, reported despairingly that they were 'obstructive from spite' and would pay nothing at all.²¹ This recusancy, exasperating though it might have been to a harassed settlement officer, was in fact not so much an act of spiteful defiance of the government as a measure of the deep-rooted enmity between the Barwars and the maharaja, and it reflected above all their growing desperation in the face of the maharaja's persistent attack on their privileged position.

In the end, the Barwars lost most of their suits for sub-settlement. But in the process they exacted a heavy toll from the maharaja.

Throughout the proceedings they invoked every legal stratagem to delay a final decision on their sub-settlement cases, often absenting themselves for months and then appearing in court just in time to avoid an *ex parte* decree. And in so doing they also forced a delay in the decision of the suits for arrears of rent or for failure to pay at the enhanced rates brought against them by the maharaja, for the courts were clogged with sub-settlement cases. During this period—and the sub-settlement cases were not finally decided until February 1869—the maharaja was called upon to pay government revenue at the enhanced demand, while he was not permitted to oust the leaseholders, or to collect directly from the cultivators, and the underproprietors on their part withheld payment of even the old rent. Furthermore, even when the claims for sub-settlement were disallowed, the maharaja had little hope of collecting the large arrears of rent to which he could lay claim, for many of the defaulters had absconded with their valuables and he could find almost no property to proceed against.²² As a result, the maharaja found himself driven ever more deeply into debt. In February 1866, he had borrowed 31,000 rupees at 15 per cent annual interest, and during the subsequent three years he was obliged to petition a variety of banks and moneylenders for ever increasing sums in order to meet the continuing heavy government demand upon him. By August 1870, his total debt, together with accumulated interest, amounted to some three lakh rupees.²³

The stubborn resistance of the Amsin underproprietors was duplicated widely on other taluqdari estates. The subordinate holders on the Raja of Pirpur's estate, for instance, were so determined in their opposition to the taluqdar that not only did they withhold their rent for years, they even forced the taluqdar at times to employ police guards in support of his authority.²⁴ The underproprietors elsewhere were often more successful than the Amsin Barwars in winning legal recognition of their privileged status. In Faizabad district as a whole, 860 villages were decreed in sub-settlement to a total of 10,000 underproprietary shareholders. This meant that nearly one-fourth of the total area of the district, and upwards of one-third of the taluqdari villages were held in sub-settlement by the former proprietors.²⁵ The British settlement officers at the time spoke with pride both of the total area under sub-settlement in Faizabad, which was among the largest in Oudh,

and of the generosity of the taluqdars in liberally conceding subordinate rights. P. Carnegy, in particular, who was in charge of much of the Faizabad settlement proceedings, prided himself on the spirit of conciliation he was able to evoke among the taluqdars and singled out Man Singh for special praise for his assistance in bringing about a compromise settlement of many underproprietary claims.²⁶ Yet neither the figures of sub-settlement nor the enthusiasm of the settlement officials can hide the fact that the successes of the tenantry in this contest were more apparent than real.

One clear indication of the inherent strength of the taluqdar's position can be found in the working of the highly-touted 'compromise' sub-settlement agreements. Invariably they turned out to be far more advantageous to the taluqdar than to the tenants they were supposed to protect. Before these agreements were concluded, the village proprietors on such estates as those of Maharaja Man Singh were occupying and managing their holdings subordinate to the taluqdar, but on terms which left them a considerable margin of profit. They consented to these *razinama* or compromise sub-settlements on the understanding that their position would remain essentially unchanged. In fact, however, the proportion or percentage of the government revenue which the underproprietor was to pay was alone fixed; that is, he committed himself to pay the government revenue plus a proportion of from 10 to 50 per cent. Consequently, whenever the government demand was raised, the entire burden fell upon him. And as the taluqdar had no interest in keeping assessments low, for he profited from every enhancement, the revenue demand was often set at such a high level that the underproprietor, who had also to bear the risks of collecting from the cultivators beneath him, was left with no margin of profit. Indeed, as early as 1873, the Commissioner of Faizabad was insisting that unless the sub-settlements, including the compromises, in his division were carefully revised, the underproprietary communities could not be maintained.²⁷

The position of the taluqdar was further strengthened by the government's willingness to come to his assistance whenever he got into difficulty. Although many taluqdars suffered acute financial embarrassment when their attempts to raise rents resulted only in the diminution of their actual receipts, the government was always

ready to come to their rescue. In 1870, for instance, the government took the heavily encumbered Mehdona estate under its own management, and four years later lent it three and one-quarter lakh rupees at moderate interest to enable the maharaja to clear off his old debts. Moreover, in its role as manager, the government was as willing as the taluqdar to resort to severe measures in order to collect the rents from underpropriators. On several occasions, arrests were even made of 'the most notoriously recusant of the subpropriators'.²⁸ And where tenants held reduced rates only by favour of the taluqdar, without any legal claim based on a former proprietary title, the government exerted itself vigorously to bring rents up to the level of those paid by ordinary cultivators.

Although this pattern of conflict between taluqdar and underproprietor was widespread in Oudh during the 1860s, it was by no means universal. On some estates, the taluqdar's authority was never questioned by a quiescent tenantry, while on others the underpropriators were so much the masters of the property that the taluqdar was little more than a helpless figurehead. The most striking instances of unchallenged taluqdari power can be found in Gonda and Bahraich districts. These two districts were unusual in that much of their area was either forested or had only recently been reclaimed from the Terai by the taluqdars themselves. The vast Ikauna estate of Bahraich, for instance, which was conferred on the Sikh raja of Kapurthala after the Mutiny, had originally been granted to a *risaldar*, or lieutenant, of the Delhi sultan Firoz Shah with a mandate to reduce it to order and reclaim it from the jungle. The bulk of the cultivators on the estate were either pacified forest tribes or had been placed in their holdings by the descendants of the original royal grantee and possessed no rights in the land other than those they had obtained through the taluqdar's favour and protection. Even where the subordinate holders on the estate had managed to preserve some small rights in the soil, moreover, they were deterred from putting claims forward by the threatening attitude adopted by the agents of the Sikh raja, who made it clear to possible claimants that their only hope of obtaining any concession was to look to the taluqdar and not to the courts. As a result, no underproprietary rights of any sort were decreed on the Ikauna estate during the revised settlement.²⁹

The geographical location of the Bahraich and Gonda districts,

cut off by the river Ghagra from the seat of government at Lucknow, also facilitated the taluqdars' claims to unfettered independence, for it considerably hampered the nazims of the Oudh government in their attempts at interference. The Balrampur Raj family, for instance, with large estates in both districts, had over the years gradually absorbed the rights of the other members of the brotherhood. By annexation, the raja, living in almost regal splendour, had become so powerful that none of the subordinate holders dared defy him, though they still resented his pretensions to almost absolute ownership of the soil. As W. Capper, the Commissioner of Faizabad, remarked in 1873:

The clan feeling is strong and is opposed to anyone bringing a suit in court against the Maharaja. It is known that though a kind landlord on the whole, he would unhesitatingly do all in his power to crush anyone who asserted a right against him, and it is thought that his personal interest with all the hakims of the district and with the authorities at Head Quarters is great. So that the man claiming a subordinate interest in the land will long hesitate before he brings a suit to be judicially tried, and perhaps dismissed, when he feels he would be at the mercy of a powerful landlord now converted into a foe.

Awards of sub-settlement within the estate were in consequence confined to a very few villages.³⁰

On the Birhar and Kapradih estates of Faizabad, by contrast, the underproprietary community was so strong and united that the taluqdar was never able, even with British assistance, to enforce his authority effectively. Although acknowledging him as their head, for the taluqdar was the chief of the brotherhood, the underproprietary kept the powers of village management completely in their own hands. The Birhar and Kapradih estates were largely sub-settled as a result, the taluqdars were continually in debt or in arrears on the government revenue demand, and the estates were often brought under government management. Kapradih, for instance, was attached for arrears of revenue in 1866; yet the government fared no better than the taluqdar in subduing the recalcitrant underproprietary on the estate. In 1876, after ten years of government management, they owed arrears of rent amounting to over 50,000 rupees, and the British officials sent to collect revenue from them often returned empty-handed.³¹ With regard to one portion of the estate located in Sultanpur district, the

Deputy Commissioner reported in 1879 that 'these underproprietors were generally defaulters under the Oudh Government and they have not given up the habit yet'. Much of this rescusancy, he acknowledged, had legitimate economic causes:

There are no less than 75 pattis [shares] and more than 80 houses of the underproprietors and all of them seething with children. Of the whole cultivated area the underproprietors hold less than one-fourth and that is their only means of livelihood, for the rest of the rental...goes towards liquidating the Government demand and cesses and the malikana of the taluqdar and the village expenses.³²

He concluded despairingly that with the underproprietors and those under them united in this way against the government, it was impossible to enforce payment of rent in the usual way by the attachment of crops: 'Police would have to be quartered in the villages and certainly there would be open resistance and probably direct violence'. Only the threat of sale, he argued, would produce any results.

While the taluqdar and underproprietor were fighting each other for mastery of the countryside, the ordinary tenant cultivators were quietly submitting to the will of their taluqdari overlords. Such cultivators, who comprised the bulk of the rural population in Oudh, as settled members of the village community (*khud-kasht asamis*), had often held their land, if not at avowedly favourable rates, then in accordance with local village customs which ensured them continued occupancy from generation to generation at rents fixed by usage and consensus. After the Mutiny, the taluqdars set out to bring the rents of all such cultivators up to the maximum the land would bear. This slow erosion of occupancy rights did not go unnoticed or uncontested. There was, in fact, heated controversy and a concerted effort to preserve for the settled cultivators some small measure of their traditional privileges. But the participants in this tenant-right struggle were all British. The contest was not between the cultivator and his landlord, but between two sets of British officials, one led by the Chief Commissioner, Charles Wingfield, the other by the Viceroy, Sir John Lawrence. It was in effect a paper war, which did not affect existing social relationships, and whose outcome, the Oudh Rent Act of 1868, simply placed a stamp of official approval on the new

agrarian order.³³ The tenants themselves made no effort to challenge the growing power of the taluqdar. Even on the Mehdona estate, where the underpropriators had fought bitterly, the ordinary cultivators accepted without question enhanced rents at double the government demand or more.³⁴

This passivity among the tenantry can be accounted for in part by the fact that they were too impoverished, disorganized, and politically inert to mount a concerted resistance. Organized protest was simply outside the frame of their experience. Beyond this, however, is the fact that during its early years, the new settlement did not pose a significant threat to the economic position of the cultivating tenant. Population density was low, wasteland was readily available, so that a person who considered himself ill-treated could always find better terms elsewhere. During the inquiries carried out by the British in 1863 and 1864, the cultivators, though they spoke proudly of their long connection with the soil, readily acknowledged the power of the taluqdar and unhesitatingly conceded that he could do as he pleased. With the passage of time and the increase of population, the plight of the peasantry began to worsen; yet, even then, there was no overt sign of resistance among them until they were brought into the nationalist movement in 1920 during the Eka agitation.

By the 1870s, therefore, throughout most of Oudh, the taluqdars had made good their claims to mastery of the countryside. The village zamindars had been subdued, and the ordinary cultivators reduced to tenants-at-will. The taluqdars now stood forth no longer as rulers of men, or petty rajas, but as landlords bound to those beneath them by the ties of rent and revenue. To be sure, they did not completely abdicate their old position of social and political pre-eminence. Indeed they could not do so, for the ingrained habit of deference to their social superiors was too deep-rooted among the peasantry, and their own traditions of local leadership and responsibility were too persistent to permit wholesale change. Moreover, the British were anxious to see the taluqdars, as 'natural leaders' of the people, play some role in local administration; and so from 1861 onward they awarded to many of them the powers of honorary magistrates over their estates. The taluqdar-magistrate was empowered on the civil and criminal side to try offenders brought before him in petty cases by the police, and on the

revenue side to hear suits for arrears of rent, exaction, and ejection involving his tenants. Although the taluqdars often performed the duties of this post in a lethargic and haphazard fashion, they meted out at all times a good deal of rough and informal justice to those living under them and enforced their decisions where necessary by the stout arms and clubs of their bands of personal retainers.

By 1870, the role of the taluqdars in north India had substantially changed. Their earliest role, that of locality leader or petty raja, found its last effective expression in the joint enterprise of 1857, when taluqdar and villager marched together against the British. After their restoration in 1859, the taluqdars saw their forts destroyed and alien courts established within their domains. Little was left for them but the position of landlord, and they seized upon it with vigour. As the protracted struggle with the underproprietors shows, the taluqdars after 1860 had little interest in retaining the deferential respect of those living on their estates. Under the changed conditions of British rule, when such loyalty would benefit them hardly at all, they preferred to seek the more tangible returns of increased cash rentals, and to exploit their powers as landlords.

In their progress from raja to landlord, the Oudh taluqdars show how a high-status group, by radically altering the bases of its power, could maintain a dominant position in Indian rural society. It appears that adaptability and a willingness to accommodate to new ways are features not only of upwardly mobile caste groups, or ambitious individuals, but can be found in traditionally dominant groups as well and can indeed help perpetuate that dominance.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Two seminal studies of this process are Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste', in McKim Marriott, ed., *Village India* (Chicago, 1955), pp. 53-7; and M.N. Srinivas, 'A Note on Sanskritization and Westernization', *Far Eastern Quarterly*, XV, No. 4 (1956), 42-62. Much of this work has now been conveniently summarized in M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley, 1966).

2. The Persian term *zamindar* (*zamin*, 'land'; *dar*, 'holder'), although applicable to any landowner, is by usage applied in Bengal to large landlords and in north India only to small landholders (e.g., village

coparcenary communities). The Arabic term *ta'alluqa* signifies dependency or attachment to a superior. In Bengal, the term *taluqdar* is used in its literal sense to denote the subordinate holders or dependents of the great zamindars. In the upper Ganges valley, it has been used since the early nineteenth century to refer to those large landholders subordinate only to the officers of government.

3. B.S. Cohn, 'Political Systems in Eighteenth Century India: The Banaras Region', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, LXXXII, 315-17. Cohn, however, restricts the usage of the term 'taluka' to the 'territory controlled by a lineage of agnatically related kin of the same biradari', whereas the Oudh usage is somewhat broader.

4. National Archives, New Delhi, Foreign Consultations, 31 October 1856, Nos 136-52, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner (Sec. C.C.) of Oudh to Secretary to the Government (Sec. Govt) of India, 3 September 1856.

5. Ibid., M.C. Ommanney, Judicial Commissioner, Oudh, to Sec. C.C. Oudh, 18 August 1856.

6. Overall, the taluqdars lost 9900 of the 23,500 villages they had held on annexation. They were treated most harshly in the districts of Faizabad and Sultanpur, and most liberally in the districts of the Bahraich Division. See the 'Report on Settlement Operations in Oudh', 24 June 1859, Appendix E, Political Collections to Dispatches, Vol. 17, Part II, Collection 37, India Office Library, London.

7. See Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India 1857-1870* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 134-73.

8. Uttar Pradesh State Archives, Board of Revenue (B.R.) Records, Oudh General, File 1964, Sec. C.C. Oudh to Commissioner Lucknow, 24 April 1860.

9. See, for instance, the case of Jaggernath Baksh and Basant Singh, who held estates assessed at 32,000 rupees in Pratabgarh district, but were not awarded taluqdari status because they were only two out of a large brotherhood who jointly owned the Nain estate; and the share held by these two was itself further subdivided among other cosharers. See B.R. Records, Oudh General, File 4, Part II, Commissioner (Commr) Rae Bareilly to Financial Commr, 20 January 1870.

10. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 634, Sec C.C. Oudh to Settlement Commr, 13 October 1863. See the case of Raja Mehpal Singh of Umri, Pratabgarh district, whose claim was upheld despite a *juma* of 3600 rupees on the grounds that he was chief of the Bilkaria Rajputs and that the rule of primogeniture had prevailed in his family for many generations (B.R. Records, Oudh General, File 4, Part II).

11. For the text of the act, see Chhail Bihari Lal, *The Taluqdari Law of Oudh* (2nd ed., Allahabad, 1921), pp. 397-422. The original list of

taluqdars is included as Appendix G, pp. 565–74. Three additional taluqdars were added to the list during the 1870s.

12. It should be noted that there was no prohibition on the sale or transfer of taluqdari holdings, with the result that many taluqdars were reduced over the years to only a portion of their 1859 properties, several enlarged their estates, and a few taluqs were extinguished altogether.

13. The Bengali was Dakhinaranjan Mukherjee, who was awarded part of the confiscated estate of Shankerpur and was later instrumental in founding the taluqdars' association. Several European planters and the Sikh raja of Kapurthala also received confiscated estates.

14. See, for instance, a letter of 1 December 1858 from an officer in Hardoi district reporting that the 1856 settlement had 'so thoroughly broken up the talooks that the *mokuddums* [village zamindars] who then got settlement now get up their backs at the talookdars' (B.R. Records, Oudh General, File 396). See also B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 115, Officiating Deputy Commr Faizabad to Commr Faizabad, 6 December 1858.

15. For references to original sources, see Metcalf, *op. cit.*, pp. 149–50.

16. Sec. Govt India to Sec C.C. Oudh, 19 October 1859, *Parliamentary Papers* (London, 1861), XLVI, 429.

17. For discussion of the controversies surrounding this act, and for the text of the act itself, see Chhail Behari Lal, *op. cit.*, pp. 517–43, and Chap. III of the Introduction, taken from J.G.W. Sykes, *Compendium of the Law of Oudh Specially Relating to the Talukdars* (Calcutta, 1886). Skyes defines sub-settlement as an arrangement whereby when there are two distinct interests in land the holder of the superior interest is admitted to engage and is responsible for the land revenue thereof during the currency of the existing settlement and is entitled to receive from the holder of the inferior right a fixed sum representing such revenue and a further fixed sum in respect of his profits and the cost and risk of collection; the inferior holder has a permanent heritable and transferable right in such land conditional on his regular payment of such sum.

18. A.F. Millett, *Fyzabad Settlement Report* (Allahabad, 1882), pp. 449–50. See also W.H. Sleeman, *A Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849–50* (London, 1858), I, 149–50.

19. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 6, Deputy Commr Faizabad to Commr Faizabad, 18 November 1859.

20. *Ibid.* For discussion of the Amsin settlement, see the memorandum by P. Carnegy, Settlement Officer, Faizabad, 5 November 1867.

21. *Ibid.* J. Woodburn, Assistant Settlement Officer, to W.E. Forbes, 28 October 1867.

22. Ibid. Capt. J. Erskine, Offg Settlement Officer, Faizabad, to Commr Faizabad, 25 February 1870.

23. Ibid. For a list of Man Singh's debts, with the name of the creditor and the date on which it was incurred, see Deputy Commr Faizabad to Commr Faizabad, 26 August 1870, and further letter of 15 September 1870.

24. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 11, Part I, G. Elphinstone, Settlement Officer, Faizabad, to Commr Faizabad, 20 April 1870.

25. A.F. Millett, op. cit., Appendix No. 4, p. 17 A. Slightly different figures are given in the *Gazetteer of the Province of Oudh* (Lucknow, 1877), I, 435. Fractional portions of a further 847 taluqdari villages were also held in sub-settlement.

26. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 11, Part I, P. Carnegy, Annual Faizabad Settlement Report, 7 May 1864. See also his Faizabad Divisional Settlement Report for 1868-9, in Records of Commissioner's Office, Faizabad, Bundle No. 77, File 12.

27. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 11, Part II, Commr. Faizabad to Personal Assistant to C.C., 23 December 1873. For discussion of the deteriorating condition of the underproprietors under the revised settlement, see *Gazetteer of Oudh*, I, 436; and B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 11, Part III, Sec. Govt India to Sec. Govt North-Western Provinces and Oudh, 11 August 1882, commenting on the Faizabad Settlement Report.

28. B.R. Records, Oudh General, File 853, Commr Faizabad to Sec. C.C. Oudh, 30 September 1872. The arrests noted here took place on the estates of Mehdona, Kapradih, and Sehipur.

29. For the history of the Ikauna estate, see *Gazetteer of Oudh*, I, 116-17 and 190-5. The Nanpara estate was also granted to a risaldar and subsequently colonized in much the same fashion. Ibid., pp. 123-25.

30. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 11, Part II, Commr Faizabad to Personal Assistant to Commr, 23 December 1873. For discussion of the Balrampur estate, see *Gazetteer of Oudh*, I, pp. 179, 216-19.

31. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 23, Part I, Deputy Commr Faizabad to Commr Faizabad, 12 May 1876. On sub-settlement and recourse to government management in Birhar taluq, see A.F. Millett, op. cit., pp. 437-42.

32. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 23, Part I, Deputy Commr Sultanpur to Commr Rae Bareli, 6 August 1879.

33. For discussion of this controversy, see Metcalf, op. cit., pp. 187-96; and Jagdish Raj, *The Mutiny and British Land Policy in North India, 1856-68* (Bombay, 1965).

34. B.R. Records, Oudh Faizabad, File 6, memo by P. Carnegy, Settlement Officer, Faizabad, 5 November 1867.

Landlords without Land: The UP Zamindars Today*

Among the more spectacular achievements of the Indian government during the first decade of Independence were the extensive programmes of land reform carried out in almost every state. Basing themselves upon Congress resolutions dating back to the 1930s, which called for an end to feudalism and exploitation on the land as well as to imperialism, the various state governments took up the question of agrarian reform as soon as they were in power. In the large and populous state of Uttar Pradesh (UP), for instance, a Zamindari (Landlord) Abolition Committee was appointed even before Independence, in 1946, and its report formed the basis of legislation, enacted in 1951, which stripped the large landlords of the bulk of their estates and awarded the land to the cultivators. Similar legislation was soon passed into law elsewhere, and provides to this day the fundamental legal framework for India's agrarian order.

In the fifteen years since its enactment, this land reform legislation has come under severe criticism. Many critics have pointed out how the initial proposals were watered down for political reasons in the course of their passage through the state legislatures, with the result that sizeable loopholes were built into the legislation. They insist furthermore that the proposals were even in their initial conception excessively timid, for they failed to

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deal in any significant way with either of the two fundamental problems facing rural India, that of social inequality and of agricultural stagnation. The lot of the landless and the outcaste at the bottom of rural society, the critics contend, was in no way improved by the abolition legislation, while the cultivating castes which were its beneficiaries simply became tenants of the state rather than of the zamindar, with neither their social status nor their tax burden substantially altered, and with little new incentive for investment in the land. W.C. Neale concludes his exhaustive study of land reforms in UP with the flat assertion that 'the abolition of the zamindari system will not end poverty in Uttar Pradesh or even contribute much to the solution of that problem'.¹

In all of this discussion of the working of land reform, attention has been focused almost exclusively upon village society and agricultural productivity. Once it became apparent that zamindari abolition was ineffectual in meeting the problem of rural poverty, the planners and the economists turned to other more promising schemes: community development, Panchayati Raj, consolidation of holdings, and cooperative farming, among others. Each of these schemes now has its band of enthusiasts, and continual warfare rages between them for official sanction and funds. In the process, the zamindars have been completely ignored. Perhaps because they have been officially 'abolished', it is assumed that they have disappeared and are no longer of any consequence. Yet this is far from being the case. Though shorn of much of their former power, the zamindars still exercise considerable influence in Indian rural society. Indeed, so firmly based is the local position of many of these men, and so widely spread their network of contacts and influence, that the fate of the various development schemes now being hawked about, and the shape of rural political life as well, depend to a surprising extent on the attitude of the zamindars toward them, and on the nature of their involvement in them. It is, then, worth asking not only what zamindari abolition has meant for the peasantry, or for productivity, but what it has meant for the zamindar. How has fifteen years of 'abolition' affected his status and position? What are the sources of his continuing influence over rural society, and how is it exercised?

Indian zamindars come in a bewildering array of shapes and sizes. In order to keep the discussion within reasonable bounds,

I shall confine my attention to one state, UP, and to one group of zamindars within that state, namely, the Oudh taluqdars. Oudh consisted of the twelve central districts of UP clustered about the capital city of Lucknow. Because it was taken over by the British in 1856, fifty years after the rest of the province, Oudh was for many decades administered separately, and the land policy pursued by the British there differed radically from that carried out in the rest of UP, then known as the North-Western Provinces. After the Mutiny of 1857, which in Oudh took the form of a widespread agrarian uprising, the British set out to establish on the land a strong conservative bulwark for the empire. The result was the creation of a specially favoured and legally privileged group of zamindars, known as the Oudh taluqdars, marked off from all other landowners by the possession of *sanads* awarding them unfettered proprietary title over their estates.² Some 270 in number, the taluqdars owned over 60 per cent of the soil in the twelve districts of Oudh, and were, if not a true landed aristocracy, an elite group very much conscious of their superior status in rural society. As early as 1861, they had come together in a special organization, the British Indian Association of Oudh, which expressed their corporate sense of belonging to a distinct group, and through which they fought to secure what they regarded as their rights.³

With their elitist ethic, their extensive landholdings, and their close ties with the British, the taluqdars were peculiarly vulnerable to the threat of zamindari abolition. Indeed they fought strenuously, though not too effectively, to avert this legislation from the time it was first proposed. In the 1930s, and again in the late 1940s, the Oudh taluqdars, in conjunction with zamindars from the rest of UP, formed independent political parties and contested legislative seats with the Congress on a platform of private property and free enterprise.⁴ In the face of the great strength of the Congress, however, such efforts were unavailing. The landlord parties were decisively beaten both in the 1937 and the 1952 elections. The Zamindari Abolition Act passed into law as Act I of 1951, and took effect on 1 July 1952.

As a result of zamindari abolition, the taluqdars found themselves stripped of all their landholdings except that which they had kept unlet as 'home farm' (*sir* and *khudkasht*) or as

grove land. Acquisition of agricultural land after the passage of the act was prohibited whenever it would give the purchaser total holdings within the state of more than 30 acres. To cushion the blow, the government gave compensation in the form of non-negotiable government bonds to all zamindars at the rate of eight times their net assets. In addition, the act provided for the payment of rehabilitation grants to all intermediary holders paying less than 10,000 rupees of land revenue annually. For the numerous tiny zamindars who comprised the bulk of the UP landholders, abolition often made itself felt more in a reduction of social status than of income, and its effects were alleviated to a large extent by more intensive cultivation of the land which remained to them in their home villages. For the Oudh taluqdars, however, who had been accustomed for decades to support themselves from the rental income of their extensive estates, the process of adjustment to the new order was a difficult and delicate task, and one which would try their reserves of adaptability.

Contrary to what one might expect, the most successful of the taluqdars in adapting to the new conditions have been neither the largest nor the smallest, but rather the holders of middling-sized estates. Before zamindari abolition, the largest estate in Oudh by far was that of the Maharaja of Balrampur, the head of a family of Janwar Rajputs who had entered the province in the fourteenth century. The Balrampur holdings encompassed some 500 square miles in the sub-Himalayan districts of Gonda and Bahraich, and enabled the maharaja to support a way of life equal in splendour to that of many of the independent Indian princes. His elaborate household and estate establishments, several palaces, including an ornate Victorian guest house for European visitors, and his lavish *durbars* and shooting tours, gave the maharaja a commanding position among the status-conscious taluqdars from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. When he was of age and of sound mind, the holder of the Balrampur estate invariably held the post of president of the Taluqdars' Association.

But the maharaja was at the same time effectively insulated from the harsh realities of rural life, and from political events as well, by his assured income and his many layers of estate servants.⁵ For decades at a time, the successive maharajas left the affairs of their estate in the hands of the manager, often an Englishman,

and the local *thekadars*, to whom was farmed out on long-term contract the duty of collecting the rent. Hence when the estate was faced with the crisis of zamindari abolition, much depended upon the competence of these servants, and upon the extent to which the maharaja could himself be induced to take an active part in estate affairs. Fortunately the manager at the time was a politically astute Muslim, Syed Ali Jafri, realized which way the wind was blowing. In the early 1940s, well before zamindari abolition, endowment trusts were established, largely at his initiative, for the support of the various educational and charitable enterprises which the estate maintained. The land deeded to these charitable trusts was exempted from the provisions of the Zamindari Abolition Act. Although the maharaja could, of course, no longer appropriate the produce of such land, it still remained largely under his control through his power to appoint trustees, and the charitable works which it financed still spread abroad the prestige of the maharaja.

Beyond this, however, the estate was ill prepared for zamindari abolition. The Maharaja, Pateshwari Prasad Singh, was by common repute a 'simple man', interested only in his religious devotions, while the bulk of the huge estate staff were poorly paid and, particularly in the remote corners of this far-flung property, loosely supervised. They had little incentive at the best of times for the faithful performance of their duties, and were only too willing to utilize the momentary chaos brought about by zamindari abolition to enrich themselves. As the Maharaja took no personal interest in what went on about him, his servants and other unscrupulous persons made away almost before his very eyes with all estate property that was not nailed down. Mango groves and forests were stripped, rest houses and bungalows belonging to the estate in remote areas were ransacked, and even the estate records were sold for waste paper. Almost overnight, the Balrampur Raj was reduced to a shell of its former magnificence. The precipitous character of its fall can be readily appreciated by anyone spending a night in its European Guest House, alone with the lizards and the mosquitoes amidst the overstuffed furniture, the Rubenesque nineteenth-century paintings, and the lavish marble bathrooms whose faucets no longer work.

Much the same tale, on an only slightly less grand scale, can be told of the Maharaja of Ayodhya, once the owner of the

second largest estate in Oudh. A Brahmin family of comparatively recent prominence in Oudh, the Ayodhya taluqdars had prospered from the early decades of the nineteenth century onwards through their connection first with the nawabs and then with the British.⁶ This political astuteness did not win for the Ayodhya taluqdars the exalted status of a Balrampur—they had neither a private militia nor a European guest house—but as second in the very carefully defined order of precedence of the taluqdars, they were entitled as of right to the Vice-Presidency of the Oudh British Indian Association. Their huge rambling palace dominated the sacred city of Ayodhya, the mythical home of Rama on the banks of the Ghagra. For the last few years, however, the Maharaja of Ayodhya has inhabited his decaying mansion as a recluse, playing little part in local affairs. He emerges only on religious occasions, and has made no attempt to mobilize for secular or political purposes the considerable influence he could command on his former estates. Even to arrange an interview with him required a sizeable effort of persuasion.

For the greatest of the taluqdars, then, zamindari abolition effectively put an end to their careers. Even though these men after 1951 still possessed considerable holdings of land, and a prestigious position in society, they were unable to respond to the opportunities of the new order. They had lived for so long in such splendid isolation, assured of an ample income, surrounded by sycophants, and relieved of all managerial duties, that once their unquestioned position had disappeared, they could only retreat helplessly before the onslaught. They had come down too far and too fast.

The smaller taluqdars, in similar fashion, were also often reduced to a state of demoralization by the catastrophe of 1951. These men, distinguished from the numerous petty zamindari landlords of the province more by their possession of taluqdari status than by any substantially greater wealth, were usually content to live quietly on their estates and to support themselves on the proceeds of their rental income. Rarely did they receive much education, and while they took pride in their taluqdari status, for it gave them a sense of belonging to the aristocratic elite of the province, they only infrequently ventured into Lucknow or participated in provincial or taluqdari politics. Zamindari abolition consequently

caught them unawares, and left them with the awkward choice of either eking out a meagre livelihood from their few remaining acres or moving into the city. But without capital or education, they were poorly placed to retrieve their fortunes in the competitive marketplaces of Lucknow and Allahabad. The plight of these petty taluqdars can perhaps most readily be appreciated by noticing one or two representative individuals.

The taluqdar of Raje Sultanpur in Faizabad district, whom I met in November 1965, still lives in the unpretentious old family home just outside the village of Sultanpur. The village itself is a bustling place, with a twice-weekly bazaar and intermediate school, but it is located in a remote corner of the district, far from any town and five miles by dirt track from the nearest bus stand. The taluqdar is a member of the Palwar clan of Rajputs, an ancient lineage but one whose history, as the gazetteer writer records, 'is mainly a record of intestine quarrels and violent deaths'.⁷ Because of this continued feuding, the family habitually divided their holdings into small parcels held individually by the various members of the clan, with the result that no one man ever possessed sufficient property to sustain great wealth or sufficient education to escape from the confines of his narrow upbringing. By 1965, the taluqdar of Raje Sultanpur had sunk into such obscurity that the District Officer who in the old days, while camping in the village, would have been lavishly entertained by the local taluqdar, was totally unaware of his existence and evinced no interest even in meeting him. The villagers, on their part, looked on the taluqdar as an anomaly, a harmless relic of the past, and when questioned about his former position in the village, they preferred to talk instead of the 1942 Quit India Movement, in which the village had played a prominent part.

Those of the smaller taluqdars who had moved to the city rarely fared much better. Barabunki district, close by Lucknow, and once under the tight control of the Oudh nawabs, contained a very large number of exceptionally small taluqdari estates, many of them held by Muslims. It was only natural for these men, once zamindari abolition had deprived them of their lands, to drift into nearby Lucknow in search of new opportunities. But they were not ordinary job seekers. Status conscious members of the province's rural elite, they had no interest in manual labour or in

the demeaning minor clerkships that their limited skills and training could alone ordinarily command. As a result, many spent more time looking for jobs than working at them and the jobs they did find were rarely very remunerative. One scion of a Barabunki family even set himself up in business as a travel agent in the lobby of the Carlton Hotel. This position had the great advantage of being adequately dignified, and at the same time of requiring little capital. Unfortunately, however, neither the taluqdar's business acumen, nor the flow of tourists into the hotel, was sufficient to sustain the business for more than a short time.

For the Muslims among these minor taluqdars, as indeed for many Muslims throughout UP, life under the new order was peculiarly difficult. Many of the Muslim landlords had been active in the Muslim League during the years before Independence, and even those who had not, found themselves after 1947 alienated from a political system increasingly oriented toward Hindu interests. Although the Congress leadership consistently proclaimed its loyalty to the ideals of the secular state, the party was in practice never reluctant to cater to the religious sentiments of the majority community for political purposes. And when the Congress exercised restraint over its actions, Jan Sangh and Socialist zealots at Lucknow were quick to fill the void. Perhaps the most deeply-felt source of Muslim resentment was the continuing exaltation of the Hindi language, and the accompanying attack upon Urdu, for many Muslims the heart and soul of their culture. This marked out all too clearly the extent of their estrangement from the new political order.

Some of the larger and wealthier Muslim landholders—among them the Raja of Mahmudabad—retired to Pakistan, but the smaller men, bound to India by ties of family and property, more often moved into Lucknow, where they took up residence in their town houses, usually with their kinfolk, in the *chowk*, or old Muslim quarter of the city. There, bereft of both landed position and political power, they nurse their grievances and cherish such mementoes of past greatness as the sanads awarded to their ancestors by Lord Canning in 1858. Not even those few Muslim taluqdars who have remained politically active have been able to escape this sense of isolation. Indeed they have been driven by their joint opposition to zamindari abolition and the imposition of

Hindi into a position of extreme, and thereby hopelessly ineffectual, conservatism. Most conspicuous among them is doubtless Begam Aizaz Rasul, wife of the former taluqdar of Sandila in Hardoi district. A member of the original Zamindari Abolition Committee in 1946, Begam Rasul almost single-handedly led a protracted struggle against the recommendations of the committee, first in the UP Legislature and then in the courts. She is now a leading member of the impotent UP Swatantra Party.

Among holders of large to middling-sized estates (that is those comprising from fifty to 250 or 300 villages) the effects of zamindari abolition have been by no means as disabling as for the Muslims or the petty landlords of Barabunki. Many of these larger taluqdars have in fact shown a surprising resilience, so much so that they have been able to preserve in large measure not only their fortunes but their political influence as well. The possession of a moderately large estate in 1951 was in itself a valuable asset, for it gave the owner access to considerable capital resources and increased the likelihood that he would retain a viable base of operations after the deluge. But mere size was no guarantee of success in the new era. As we have seen, the owners of such mammoth properties as Balrampur and Ayodhya, living in almost regal splendour, were so insulated from the realities of the world, and psychologically so unprepared for change, that they could not cope effectively with the problems of adjustment. Even those holding moderately-sized estates could—and often did—fall victim to the common taluqdari obsession with status and prestige to the exclusion of all else. Success in the new post-abolition world required, in other words, not only a sound economic base but some appreciation of the value of education, combined with a modicum of common sense and adaptability. Education, above all, was crucial.

In 1864, barely six years after the flames of the revolt had been extinguished, the taluqdars, through their association, founded Canning College, later affiliated to the University of Lucknow; a few years afterwards they established the Colvin Taluqdars' School as a preparatory school for the college. The support of these two institutions remained until the very eve of zamindari abolition the taluqdars' major corporate philanthropic activity. From the start, however, the bulk of the taluqdars gave their support to the schools not out of any deep commitment to education, but as a prestigious

act of charity and because their British rulers expected it of them. Secure in their local position, and often orthodox in their Hinduism, they saw no benefit to themselves in education. The Colvin School catered especially to the sons of taluqdars, with special classes set aside for them, and modelled many of its activities and customs on those of the English public schools; yet its appeal to the aristocratic sentiments of the taluqdars was only moderately successful. Not even the motto emblazoned over the doorway of the school—'noblesse oblige'—could induce many to part with their sons for very long. Hence those few taluqdars who did attend school, either at Colvin or elsewhere, and who went on to obtain university degrees, had a distinct advantage over the others during the troubled times of the 1940s and 1950s. Almost without exception, the most successful have been the most highly educated.

For taluqdars with capital and education, the opportunities under the new order were both remunerative and diverse. The most ready source of income, and of social standing, was the land still in the former holder's possession. Though stripped of the bulk of their land, and prohibited by law from leasing agricultural land to tenants, the taluqdars were permitted to retain in their private possession all sir and khudkasht (personally supervised or 'home farm') land and all groves. Anticipating the eventual enactment of abolition legislation, many foresighted taluqdars had already, well before 1951, begun shifting cultivated land into mango groves, and converting tenant holdings to sir cultivated by hired labour. On the eve of abolition, the average size of sir and khudkasht holdings among those paying over 10,000 rupees in land revenue was 245 acres.⁸ During the course of the abolition proceedings, these loopholes were further widened by lenient application of the law, particularly in the case of politically influential landholders, and by the division of large holdings among family members so that each could claim a certain amount of unlet sir. As a result, the larger taluqdars often kept hold of quite substantial acreage. The Raja of Mankapur in Gonda district, for instance, retained some 2000 acres in his private possession.⁹

But holdings even of this size could support an affluent style of life appropriate to the position of a taluqdar, only if they were vigorously and efficiently exploited under the direct personal supervision of the owner. The waste, the incompetence, the disdain

for agrarian affairs, which were so marked a feature of the old taluqdari land system, could not be tolerated under these new and more straitened circumstances. The taluqdars had now, of necessity, to take an active part in agricultural improvement. Many took to this unaccustomed role with enthusiasm. The Raja of Kasmanda, for instance, a man of considerable means and cultivated tastes, proudly showed me through the extensive mango groves which now surround his country house in Sitapur district, and then brought me back to watch a demonstration of a new ox-drawn disc harrow, which he hoped to introduce to the villagers. The demonstration took place in the middle of what had been until then the side lawn immediately adjacent to his house. When I commented upon this newly found interest in agriculture, he replied, 'Ah well, it gets one out of doors into the air'.

The more successful taluqdars have not only undertaken intensive cultivation of their old lands, but have diversified into new areas. Several have invested in apple orchards in the Himalayan foothills—a most profitable undertaking in a country where fresh apples command exorbitant prices—while many have set up ancillary processing enterprises on their estates, or have taken up distributorships for agricultural and electrical equipment. Few perhaps have gone so far in this direction as the Raja of Mankapur. His estate, which Paul Brass calls 'a small-sized agro-industrial complex', includes, in addition to his 2000 acres of land, a livestock farm, a 350,000 rupee cold storage, a tube well parts distributing agency, a petrol tank, and a mango canning factory.¹⁰ The management of such diverse enterprises, many of which demand constant close supervision, is of course no easy matter. One common solution to the problem has been division of labour within the family. On the thriving Pratapgarh Raj estate, for instance, one son lives at the old family seat of Qila Pratapgarh, another manages Pratap Agencies (Ltd), an equipment distributorship in Lucknow, while the Raja himself, a Jan Sangh Member of Parliament, is active in national politics in Delhi.

No less than economic enterprise, participation in politics was essential to the taluqdar bent on preserving his position under the new order. The taluqdars had, of course, as a group been active in provincial politics for many decades. This political involvement, though initially successful in securing for them a position of

dominance, first through the British Indian Association and then through the landlord parties of the dyarchy era, was in the long run a dismal failure. The old landlord system was indefensible before an aroused tenant electorate. But once emancipated by zamindari abolition from the constraints of a class platform, the taluqdars were able as individuals to reap political advantage from their traditional local influence. And their allegiance, as men of standing in the countryside, was eagerly sought by all political parties. Where they had failed together, they could succeed apart.

Some taluqdars, spurning landlord politics, had from the start thrown in their lot with the established political parties. Such men, when they joined the Congress, were able not only to build upon their established positions of wealth and power, but at the same time, by following Gandhi to jail, to enhance their status still further by seeming to renounce it all. By far, the most politically influential of all the taluqdars is Dinesh Singh, Raja of Kalakankar in Pratapgarh district. A member of one of the very few landlord families with a tradition of radical politics, Dinesh Singh joined the Congress movement as a youth during the 1930s, became a close friend of the Nehru family, and worked his way up through the party, first to the post of Minister in the External Affairs Ministry, and then, after the 1967 elections, to the cabinet where he was Commerce Minister. Though the most spectacularly successful, Dinesh Singh was not the only taluqdar to have made a mark in national Congress politics. The Raja of Pirpur, for instance, was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education and Power, while Rai Bajrang Bahadur Singh of Bhadri was elevated to the post of Vice-Chancellor of the Agricultural University in Pantnagar, UP.

Apart from these few exceptional individuals, most of the taluqdars who joined Congress did so as a matter of calculated political expediency during the immediate post-Independence years. The alliance was mutually advantageous, for the party wanted access to the large purses and extensive local influence of the taluqdar, while the old landlord was anxious to secure for himself a place of honour and prestige under the new order. The Opposition parties, no less than the Congress, also sought the support of these local magnates. Initially the Opposition parties in UP were too radical, too ineffectual, or too disorganized to appeal

successfully to these proud landholders. But from the mid-1950s onward, the UP Congress has been rent with bitter factional strife, while the Jan Sangh and Swatantra parties have come into existence as congenial homes for the conservative and the disillusioned. The resulting competition for their adherence has substantially increased the taluqdars' bargaining leverage and their readiness to shift their political allegiance. It is no longer uncommon to see a long-time Congress supporter desert the party with his followers after some personal slight, as did the Raja of Mankapur in 1955, and then throw his influence behind an opposition party. Similarly, a taluqdar who had previously ignored politics might, when provoked by the actions of the local Congress leadership, enter the political arena for the first time as the head of an opposition party. The Raja of Pratapgarh, for instance, after a long residence outside the district returned in 1960 as a Jan Sangh candidate for Parliament, and set out to mobilize support against what he regarded as the misuse of power by the Brahmin elite controlling the district Congress. In like manner, Audesh Pratap Singh, a taluqdar of Faizabad, secured election as an independent candidate to the powerful position of Zillah Parishad President in defiance of the Congress, and proudly told me that he was the only non-Congress president in all the districts of UP.

It would be tedious here to describe at length individual cases of taluqdari success at the polls. The subject has been amply dealt with in the recent studies of Paul Brass and Angela Burger, which discuss taluqdari electioneering in Gonda and Pratapgarh districts as part of an overall analysis of UP state politics.¹¹ The reasons for the taluqdars' persisting local influence do, however, require some notice. Why have these old and presumably discredited landlords gained such a commanding position in local politics? Why have they been so conspicuously successful, whether on Congress or opposition tickets, in the race for Parliamentary and State Assembly seats in the rural areas of the state?

Much of the answer can be found in their position in the ritual hierarchy of caste. The bulk of the taluqdars, including almost all the Hindu holders of moderate to large estates, are of Rajput caste. A ritually high caste, second only to the Brahmins, Rajputs have traditionally provided the secular elite of the province. Not only as large landlords, but as petty zamindars and substantial

peasant cultivators, Rajputs control most of the productive agricultural land, and have long dominated the village *panchayats* and other local government institutions. The mere existence of such a large group of influential caste fellows scattered throughout the countryside gives the taluqdar a substantial advantage over a non-Rajput rival in gathering electoral support. But the taluqdar is usually more than just a Rajput; he is also the head of the local Rajput lineage or clan. This position, with its traditionally acknowledged ceremonial precedence and powers of dispute settlement, invariably gives the incumbent a great deal of deferential respect from the other members of the lineage, and provides a very strong base from which to mount an electoral campaign.

In addition to the support of fellow caste members, the taluqdar is also sustained by the deference of the lower castes for a ritual superior. This continuing deference when the taluqdars have lost most of their old legal and economic sanctions, is a reflection of the persisting strength of traditional social ties and values in the villages of UP. As a settled rural elite of long standing, the patrons of local fairs and festivals, sometimes even the focus of religious sentiment, the taluqdars are often looked upon with veneration similar to that accorded to a raja. Indeed, many of the taluqdars were once rajas, or rulers of men, in the days before the British came; many hold the title still; and the aura of this former greatness surrounds them even now in the eyes of the local peasantry.¹² This deferential loyalty, as the taluqdars discovered to their dismay in 1937 and 1952, was not given automatically or unthinkingly, and could not be harnessed to a platform of landlord class privilege. But now that the taluqdars are no longer tied to the British Raj, and no longer burdened with the defence of an exploitative system of agrarian relations, they are well situated to turn their social eminence to political advantage.

Their landlord past does, of course, place certain restraints on their political activity. They must not, for instance, act together in concert or in any way give the appearance of wishing to restore the old agrarian order. Their electoral appeal is almost of necessity conservative, but it must be a calculated and selective conservatism. The mere passage of time works in the taluqdars' favour, for it softens the harsh memories of landlord exploitation and diverts attention to the continuing pin-pricks, and occasional dramatic

failures, of the Congress government. The new order may be better than the old, but it does not always appear so to a peasantry still engaged in a precarious struggle for existence. More important, however, in accounting for taluqdari political success, is the fact that they have effectively married modern electoral tactics to their traditional social pre-eminence. Unlike their naïve predecessors of the 1930s, who expected their position of local dominance by itself to secure for them the votes of the tenant electorate, the taluqdari politicians of today have become aggressive and sophisticated vote-getters. At election time they campaign actively in the rural areas, addressing public meetings, smoking the *huqqa* with fellow Rajputs, and sitting on the *charpoys* of the lower castes to listen to their grievances. They remain always accessible, but at the same time exploit adroitly and often consciously the glamour and mystery which surround them as rajas. Perhaps the most distinctive mark of the successful taluqdari politician is that he is both aware of the basis of his power and adept at its manipulation.

As might be expected, the taluqdar is best able to translate his social position into votes in the villages of his old estate. There the traditions of deference are strongest, and the number of people dependent on the taluqdar's patronage, either now or formerly, is greatest.¹³ But throughout the rural areas, so long as the peasantry continue to be moved by traditional symbols, the taluqdars will remain a powerful political force. Indeed they are the most likely beneficiaries of the mounting popular dissatisfaction with the entrenched Brahmin and Kayastha leadership of the UP Congress. Alone among the contenders for power in the rural areas, the taluqdars (and zamindars) possess an acknowledged position of pre-eminence as members of an elite caste, and sufficient wealth and education to enable them to provide an alternative source of leadership. The value of a large purse in politics is self-evident, but education in this case is no less essential, for it enables the aspiring taluqdar to seek out the most effective ways of combining his traditional social position with modern political techniques. Hence the most successful members of this new political elite have so far been men, usually with university degrees, who once held middling-sized estates and who now manage their remaining holdings as efficient business enterprises.

On the land, in commercial enterprises, and in the political arena itself, then, the taluqdars have found ways to preserve much of their old wealth and influence. The appearance and techniques of dominance have been transformed, but the substance has been surprisingly little altered. The taluqdars are not now, of course, anywhere near so wealthy as they once were, nor do they tower over rural society to the same extent. Their formerly unchallenged dominance has been undercut not only by zamindari abolition but by the growth of such new channels of political expression as universal suffrage, panchayati raj, and easier access to the bureaucracy. But this loss of status, by forcing the taluqdars to revamp drastically their style of life and behaviour, has had the result of enabling the more enterprising among them to play a much more constructive role than before in both the economic and the political life of rural India.

Where they were once renowned only for their bloated wealth and social distance, they are now actively involved in rural development. By providing capital and managerial talent for agricultural experimentation and the establishment of ancillary processing and distributive enterprises, these taluqdars are making a notable, if somewhat belated and reluctant, contribution to India's economic progress. Similarly in politics, where they once looked down disdainfully upon a peasantry bound to them by the ties of rent, whose support they took for granted, the taluqdars now campaign actively for the votes of the rural populace. Like the landed and princely classes throughout much of north India, the Oudh taluqdars have proven themselves remarkably adept politicians in the new democratic political order. To be sure, this wide-ranging transformation has been accomplished under the spur of necessity, and many have been left behind, but in the process the old landed classes have established themselves as a moderately progressive force at the head of rural society. Despite the disappearance of the zamindari system, the zamindars as individuals are still very much a power to be reckoned with in rural India.

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12. See T.R. Metcalf, 'From Raja to Landlord: The Oudh Taluqdars 1850-1870', in R.E. Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control in India* (Madison, Wisconsin).

13. For an analysis of the pattern of support for the Raja of Mankapur in the 1962 election, see P.R. Brass, op. cit., p. 84. The Raja of Kasmanda, describing his experiences as Congress candidate for Parliament in the 1962 election in Sitapur district, told me in an interview in November 1965, that he had won decisively in all the villages of his old estate, but lost the remainder of the constituency—and the election—to his Jan Sangh opponent.

Rural Society and British Rule in Nineteenth-Century India*

One of the enduring themes in the history of India is the transformation of rural society under British colonial rule. The subject attracts the historian not only because of the vast extent of India's thickly settled agricultural lands, but because the patterns of landholding and the distribution of power in rural India have never fitted easily into the categories of Western thought. From the time of Charles Metcalfe and Henry Maine, colonial administrators—and academic scholars after them—have sought, with varying degrees of success, to comprehend the essential ties which bound Indians to the land and to each other. With the traditional social order so little understood, it is hardly surprising that the effects of British rule on this society during the nineteenth century have been a matter of continuing debate. The views of observers who perceived a 'revolution in property rights', as Holt Mackenzie did in 1819, have little in common with those of historians who find the underlying structures of power undisturbed after decades of colonial rule.¹ The Mutiny of the sepoy army during 1857, and the uprising in rural north India which accompanied it, reflect as well the dislocations associated with colonialism, and so compel the attention of historians of rural India.

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These central concerns of Indian historiography have shaped much of the scholarly career of Eric Stokes, Professor of Commonwealth History at the University of Cambridge. In 1959, he published *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press). This work, with its subtle analysis of the connections between the ideas of the early nineteenth century political economists and the formulation of revenue and judicial policy in India, set new standards for the study of the ideology of empire. Now, with the publication of *The Peasant and the Raj*,² Professor Stokes has turned to an examination of the agrarian system itself, with the aim of 'exploring the extent to which rural society underwent fundamental alteration under colonial rule' (p. 1). Though *The Peasant and the Raj*, as a collection of essays, is less well integrated than its predecessor, this volume too raises the study of Indian history to a new level of sophistication.

The four central chapters that form the core of the book focus on the revolt in the countryside during 1857. As recently as 1957, when a great outpouring of articles marked the centenary of the Mutiny, the rural disorders were still seen as a response to general causes, which caught up entire classes of the population. In the North-Western Provinces (now part of the state of Uttar Pradesh), the land settlements of Robert Bird and James Thomason, which had displaced the old landed elites during the 1840s, inevitably, (according to this view) drove these declining magnates into the rebel camp. At the same time, the British court system, by decreeing the sale of land for debt, placed the peasant smallholder at the mercy of the moneylender, and so turned those who had lost their land against the government. Even so painstaking a scholar as S.C. Chaudhuri argued that the protection afforded to moneylenders by the courts was 'the sole reason why the peasants and other inferior classes were so vindictive and uncompromisingly hostile against the English during the rebellion'.³ With the series of detailed studies of the rising which he began to publish in the late 1960s, Stokes has systematically demolished this entire set of assumptions. Indeed, by insisting that the events of 1857 be examined district by district and caste by caste, with close attention to the social context in which they took place, Stokes has revolutionized the study of the Mutiny. No longer can anyone assert, as the present reviewer did fifteen years ago, 'the Brahmin challenged by a new

educational system, the aristocrat deprived of his ancestral lands, the prince shorn of his state...all readily joined together to overthrow the British Raj'.⁴

Stokes offers no simple answers to explain why some groups and individuals joined the revolt, while others did not. Some readers might indeed complain that Stokes has provided no answers at all. To be sure, Stokes's style is frequently dense, and his arguments tightly woven; several of the essays will repay—and probably require—two or three readings. Furthermore, as he acknowledges in the introduction, Stokes has revised his vocabulary and analytical apparatus over the years. Accepting the pervasive implication of the British records, he began with the assumption that caste was the primary bond that moved men to act together. Further study convinced him, however, that at least among the Jats of the Upper Doab, factions based on clan and reinforced by cross-caste alliances at the local *tappa* and *khap* level were more important in determining the varying responses of the wider Jat community to the events of 1857. Unfortunately, Stokes has not revised the conclusions of the earlier essays in light of his later findings before reprinting them in this collection.

Stokes's essays are of seminal importance, rich with provocative insights into the causes of popular disaffection in 1857. Two general hypotheses stand out. The first offers an alternative to the explanation of the uprising that emphasizes peasant resentment at the rise of the moneylender. According to this theory of 'relative deprivation', the unequal imposition of land taxes on communities in similar economic and social circumstances drove into rebellion those who felt the relative decline of their income and status more severely rather than those subject to the heaviest absolute assessments. The second hypothesis argues that, in areas where the tightly-knit clan structure of the village community had given way to individual landholding, the decisive factor tilting the balance for or against revolt was the 'presence or absence of a thriving magnate element heavily committed by interest to British rule'. Those landlords who had survived the blows of the Thomason settlement and were able—most commonly by cash crop cultivation of the lands that remained to them—to turn the new institutions of British rule to their own advantage had every incentive, Stokes

believes, to rally to their colonial masters. Moreover, they brought with them the discontented small landholders of the neighbourhood, who were in no position to defy their wealthy and powerful superiors. In those places, by contrast, where a 'declining, aggrieved aristocracy held sway', these men drew into rebellion districts much less severely affected by the dislocations produced by British rule.

Although stimulating and original, Stokes's essays are still but the beginnings of a new interpretation of the Mutiny rising. A great deal is still left unexplained, many events are unaccounted for, and certain assumptions remain unexamined. Even the 'thriving magnate' theory, perhaps the most compelling part of Stokes's argument, must be applied with caution. Information on how these men managed their estates, and on how much they actually profited from them, is scarce. The distinction between the economic position of the 'loyal' Tikam Singh of Aligarh and the 'rebellious' Tej Singh of Mainpuri, for example, is by no means as clear as Stokes implies. This theory also fails to account for the behaviour of such men as Thakur Gobind Singh of Hathras, who lost *all* his land at settlement, yet remained a staunch supporter of the British.⁵

Furthermore, apart from a brief reference, Stokes's analysis ignores such major centres of the revolt as Rohilkhand and Oudh. Even his account of the disturbances in the Doab stops short at Mainpuri, so that the whole of eastern United Provinces or Uttar Pradesh is omitted. Comprehensiveness is, by itself, no virtue, but a broader perspective might well have enabled Stokes to elaborate and clarify his theories. Were clan rivalries, for instance, a feature only of the Jat risings, or are they a more general phenomenon? Scattered evidence indicates that clan allegiances may help to account for the behaviour of some of the Rajput landholders of northern Oudh, but there is no sign elsewhere of the extensive factional alignments Stokes discerns in the Doab and north of Delhi. Stokes also pays no attention to the role of the mutinous sepoy themselves in the disturbances. In Bulandshahr and Mainpuri, and probably other districts as well, the constant passage of large numbers of rebel troops, even if it did not by itself provoke the rural uprising, surely extended and shaped it. Furthermore, it is likely that throughout Oudh, which had served for decades as the principal recruiting ground of the army, the

sepoys as influential village residents drew kinsmen and fellow villagers into the revolt. One might even argue that the taluqdars were in part pushed into rebellion from below by tenantry whose sympathies were enlisted on the side of their sepoy brethren.

Finally, one must ask to what extent the participants in the uprising, apart from the sepoys, conceived of themselves as 'rebels'. Stokes too readily assumes, like the British colonial administrators upon whose records he depends, that certain behaviour connotes 'rebellion', while other acts are evidence of 'loyalty'. But the matter is not so easily resolved. In the near-anarchy which reigned throughout northern India once the British garrisons had been withdrawn, simple prudence would have dictated an armed vigilance, while in the absence of external constraint, personal ambition alone could well impel the bold to violent acts. Neither the plundering of a moneylender's house nor the forcible ouster of a neighbour was by itself necessarily a sign of rebellion against the government.⁶ It is difficult to believe that the uprising among the major landholders in Oudh, where British rule had been in effect for only a year, was anything other than a reflex response to the loosening of the bonds of order. As such, it has more in common with the risings of 1707-22, 1750, and 1765, when the authority of the landholders' Mughal or Nawabi overlord was temporarily in eclipse, than with any deep-seated animosity toward the British colonial regime.⁷

The four essays that precede the discussion of the 1857 rising, and the four that follow, examine a wide variety of themes in the colonial transformation of the north Indian countryside. They raise questions of economic development, the character of privileged (*inam*) landholding, the recent historiography of the 'rich peasant', the position of the moneylender in the Central Provinces, and the persisting attraction of classical rent theory for the 'official mind'.

Many writers, beginning with Sir Charles Metcalfe and B.H. Baden-Powell, have explored the distinctive character of village tenures in northern India. The notion that these communities formed little unchanging 'republics' has long since passed into folklore, and their various sub-tenures—*bhaiacharya*, *pattidari*, and the like—have been elaborately catalogued. This static analysis was first effectively challenged by Richard Fox in his stimulating *Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

1971). In that brief work, Fox argued that state and village interacted continuously in the pre-British period. He viewed the proliferation of the descendants of a village's original founder as a key to much of its subsequent history; and he saw in this process of lineage growth a 'developmental cycle' which repeated itself over a period of centuries. The first stage took place when the lineage founder made good his control over a block of land, usually one on the margin of the state's authority. As the lineage membership increased and the power of the state intensified, the lineage became increasingly stratified. A chieftain or raja dealt with the state; along with his immediate kinsmen he moved against his genealogically more distant kin and the cadet lines of his own lineage. Together these men were reduced to the status of privileged shareholders (pattidars) within their individual villages. As the state further consolidated its power, the chiefs too found their prerogatives curtailed, until at last they were at the same level as their village kinsmen. In the final stage, even the local kin bodies lost their revenue collecting and managerial privileges over the lands of other cultivators in the village. Thus, stratification gave way to a system of landholding (the bhaiacharya tenure) in which the clan members, all cultivating owners of their individual properties, were once again equal.

Fox's model, with its compelling internal dynamic, has shaped all subsequent studies of north Indian rural society. Yet its rigid developmental cycle, and its rejection of all factors except demography and state power, leave it vulnerable to the charge of being an ideal construct, far removed from the complex realities of the north Indian countryside. In his essay on 'Agrarian Society and the Pax Britannica', Stokes subjects Fox's analysis to searching scrutiny. Stokes accepts as valid Fox's essential argument—that the state 'reacted powerfully' on the village community throughout the pre-British period. But he denies that state power played so overwhelming a role in determining the fate of the clan community as Fox would have us believe. Furthermore, the notion of a developmental cycle must be used with caution. Stokes claims that, far from 'change pursuing the path of a developmental cycle through lineage proliferation, change was effected precisely through the constant interruption of the cycle'. But what brought about these 'interruptions'? Here Stokes insists that we must look at the

soil and water resources which lie at the base of agricultural productivity. This 'ecological constraint', far more than state power, determined whether a developmental cycle would begin in a particular area, and if so, how far it could proceed. Stokes illustrates his argument with an examination of the varying agrarian situation in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh.

Stokes argues that in the fertile, well-watered areas of the east, from Faizabad through Bihar, where agriculture was secure enough for population to press on the soil and tributary rents to emerge, social stratification developed rapidly and was a continuing fact of rural life. Although the dominant landholding groups—whether Rajput, Brahmin, or Buinhar—in time formed a dense rural population, and sometimes held a high proportion of the land in owner-cultivation (*sir*), they never abandoned the status of a petty gentry living on rental or labour tribute. They were thus unable to form a true *bhaiacharya* community, and so the final stage of Fox's developmental cycle was never reached. Proper *bhaiacharya* tenure, in Stokes's view, took shape only on soils of marginal agriculture with a low population density, and so was found toward the west, in the dry areas of Bundelkhand, the Upper Ganges–Jamuna Doab, and Haryana. But in these regions, the *bhaiacharya* tenure arose at the very outset of the developmental process, for the poverty of the soil prevented the growth of a rent-collecting elite. Among these Jat communities, where marked social and economic stratification was absent, and where 'land was permanently abundant and hands scarce', the agrarian structure testified to Metcalfe's theory of the 'indestructibility' of the Indian village community (pp. 82, 88).

In a later essay, Stokes elaborates the implications for contemporary agricultural development of the contrasting land tenure patterns of east and west. The more rapid growth rates of western UP, he argues, are not the product of its Jat cultivators' innate thrift and industriousness, nor of the lower population pressure on agrarian resources in the west. Even in the east, with its dense rural population, a high proportion of the cultivated area was made up of holdings of considerable size. In remote Deoria, for example, where the average holding in 1950 was only three acres, some 70 per cent of the cultivated area consisted of holdings averaging 8.5 acres, and 40 per cent comprised holdings above

8.5 acres. The key to the west's advantage lay in its distinctive tenurial form. While the Rajputs and Brahmins of the east endeavoured to the end to live on rents, and resisted cultivation themselves, *bhaiacharya*, with its invigorating union of ownership and cultivation, gave the Jats the tenure 'most readily adaptable to maximise production under Indian *petite culture*'. Although it is admittedly speculative, this hypothesis is a welcome relief from both the ethnographic stereotyping done by the British officials and the superficial statistical approach of the modern survey, with its double counting and misleading averages.

The delineation of tenures is, for Stokes, only the first step toward an understanding of the colonial transformation of this agrarian system. He contests both Bernard Cohn's assertion that the British brought about no change in the distribution of power in the countryside, despite the widespread sales and transfers of land precipitated by their coming, and the earlier, more widespread notion that colonial rule utterly destroyed the traditional framework of rural society. He insists throughout—and here he is in agreement with Fox—that Indian land tenures remained always 'malleable'. He argues that, far from the 'transfer of the rights of village *maliks* [lords] being a British innovation, it was integral to the internal processes of 'traditional' politics'. Much of his interest in the *bhaiacharya* tenure in fact reflects its apparent exemption from those struggles for dominance, which disturbed village tenures elsewhere. But if most of the country was always open to tenurial change, what difference did the coming of the British make? Stokes explores this central question incisively and at length, although he permits himself few generalizations.

Stokes believes that British rule, at least during the first half of the nineteenth century, accelerated or intensified existing processes of expropriation and displacement. New landholders, given revenue contracting rights by the new regime, endeavoured, as had their predecessors, to transform themselves into gentry-like proprietors; old elites, anxious to make their tenures secure, redoubled their efforts to subjugate the village zamindars beneath them; those least adept at taking advantage of the opportunities of the new order were driven ever downward. The sole British innovation—though one of momentous consequence—was to make landholding rights alienable under due process of law. This meant that the

quick-witted and ambitious could now 'employ state power rather than placing sole reliance on their military forces' to gain a position on the land. Yet the increased ease of land transfer, together with the heavy assessments the British levied on their new territories, brought about a dramatic, even if uneven, upheaval in property rights. By the 1850s, British rule was 'beginning to produce novel strains' in rural society.

In Stokes's view, the major beneficiaries of British rule in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not just the pampered large landlords—who were now close allies of the government—but also the tenant cultivators. The latter, as long as they were permanent residents of their villages, secured from British tenancy legislation rights of occupancy over their holdings at rents fixed 'by the courts. As the price of grain rose, these occupancy tenants thus received an increasing proportion of the agricultural profits at the expense of the rent-receiving proprietors. By the 1920s, with prices double what they had been a quarter-century before and occupancy rents increased only 25 per cent, the occupancy tenants were even better off than the cultivating proprietors. This view flies in the face of one of the longest standing and least examined propositions concerning Indian rural history: that the tenantry were always oppressed by powerful landlords who, with such exactions as *nazrana* (enforced gifts), successfully circumvented restrictions on rental increases. Much work remains to be done before Stokes's revisionist hypothesis can be established, but it is not inconsistent with other recent studies that show the power of the Indian landlord to have been much more limited than was once assumed.⁸

Taken as a whole, the changes colonial rule wrought on rural society remain, for Stokes, surprisingly limited. He considers the two or three decades prior to the 1857 revolt the era of greatest upheaval. The 'decisive revolution' in land control came about during these years; after 1860 the rate of transfer of land to commercial castes declined, no new estates were formed, and society evolved slowly 'along lines laid down in an earlier period'. Such an interpretation might at first glance seem improbable, given the extension of railways and irrigation, the rise in prices, and the intensification of cash cropping which marked the later nineteenth century. Yet Stokes insists that these economic changes

carried with them no 'decisive expansion of agricultural production'. In its absence, 'the institutional arrangements of colonial rule' were by themselves 'relatively powerless to bring about decisive tenurial change.

But why was there no self-sustaining growth in commercial agriculture? Although the peasant cultivator might grow cash crops only to pay rent or taxes, one might expect the 'thriving magnates', who elevated themselves out of peasant agriculture before the Mutiny and prospered afterwards, and perhaps the moneylender, purchasers of land, to take the lead in such an enterprise. There were, to be sure, occasional surges of capitalist agriculture—in the Doab and Bundelkhand in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and in the Central Provinces in the last three, for example. Yet none of this led anywhere: overseas markets were never stable; the threat of drought and famine persisted; and—as rents rose and legislation secured much of the agricultural profit for a subsistence-oriented tenantry—the magnates eschewed entrepreneurship and contented themselves with their rental income.⁹

The most enduring beneficiaries of the structural and economic changes that did take place under the Raj were the rich peasants, who later became the pillars of the Congress movement in the countryside. When they found their rising expectations thwarted, above all by the Great Depression, they turned to agrarian agitation—most powerfully in the Civil Disobedience campaign of 1930. The impoverished lesser peasants, whom one might have expected to adopt a more radical political style, instead followed the dictates of their well-to-do patrons, and so remained quiescent. Challenging the Marxist division of rural society along class lines, Stokes insists that caste organization and values dominated village life, with the poorer peasants linked to the richer by cross-caste alliances determined by the clientage networks of rival factional leaders within the dominant caste group. The 'solidarities of class' made but an 'intermittent' appearance at the wider territorial level; and even then they issued in agrarian agitation only 'where supra-village caste organization remained strong'.

Stokes's scepticism is both provocative and compelling, and testifies to his enduring respect for the complexities of Indian rural history. He reminds us repeatedly that neither the 1857 rising nor peasant nationalism yields to the 'political slogan-mongering'

that so often passes for historical writing. Indeed, he is even wary of relying too heavily on the concept of the rise of the rich peasant, which is central to his own analysis. In his concern with historical detail within a carefully circumscribed region, Stokes exemplifies much recent historical writing on rural India. Nor is he alone in focusing on questions of tenure—in devoting more attention to tenancy than to crops, and more to caste than to markets. As a result, a number of important questions go unexplored. First among these is the nature and extent of the commercialization of agriculture. Stokes's analytical framework provides no way of explaining why commercial cropping put down stronger roots, and so brought about a more far-reaching transformation of agriculture, in south India and the Punjab, although there it took hold later than in the Gangetic plain.¹⁰ Stokes's focus on a single region of India also prevents him from seeing that the rise of the rich peasant was not simply a product of British colonialism. It can, in fact, be viewed as a worldwide phenomenon associated with the growth of markets and an international economy in the later nineteenth century. Developments strikingly similar to those Stokes discerns in the UP countryside can be found not only among the Russian kulaks, but among cultivators in many regions of Africa.¹¹

One might ask why Indian rural historians have been so reluctant to grapple with the larger economic issues. Much of the answer surely lies in the complexity of Indian land tenures, together with the ready availability in the British revenue records of a rich source of historical information on this subject. It is all too easy to succumb to the temptation to burrow deeply into the intricacies of landholding in a single district or region. Even Marxist theory has a surprisingly small following among historians of rural India. Apart from a few scholars in India itself—for most of whom Marxism is more a matter of sentiment than of consistent theory—historians have eschewed such broad issues as class formation and the changing relations to the means of production in the countryside. There is much talk of colonialist exploitation, but almost no indication of how it took place. Dependency theory, so fashionable in studies of Africa and Latin America, is conspicuous by its absence in the history of rural India. Perhaps the closest approach to it is Rajat and Ratna Ray's formulation of the 'dynamics of

continuity' in rural Bengal.¹² But nowhere do we find the consistent point of view that informs a work such as *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa*, by Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

Nor have certain other important themes yet received much attention. Historians are only beginning to appreciate the role cultural values played in shaping rural social behaviour. Stokes briefly took note of the 'attachment to a traditional life style' based on lordship and display which he saw among the magnates of the Narmada valley, yet such patterns of behaviour were widespread throughout northern India. Wherever their wealth permitted them to do so, the rural elite conceived of themselves in terms derived from the Indian kingly tradition; they sought not the greatest production from the soil, but the deferential support of the greatest number of followers.¹³ Nor was such behaviour simply a matter of 'traditional', as opposed to 'modern', rational values. It often made more economic sense for the zamindar to purchase land than to improve it. Similarly, the perpetual insecurities that attend uncertain rainfall underlay peasant scepticism toward schemes for agricultural innovation. Even the moneylender, usually seen as a grasping villain bent upon foreclosing on the mortgages of his hapless debtors, has recently been portrayed as an investor with limited working capital, prudently reluctant to invest it in the purchase of land.¹⁵

Stokes's careful research and probing insights are models for all who would undertake the study of Indian rural history. His concept of a prospering magnate class provides a key to understanding much of nineteenth century north Indian history, especially that centred about the 1857 revolt, while his re-examination of the notion of the 'rich peasant' helps place in a fuller perspective this controversial rural figure, whose predominance in the countryside was confirmed by zamindari abolition in 1951. Stokes's work now in progress, with its focus on cultural values and the broader patterns of economic behaviour, will further enrich our knowledge of both the peasant and the Raj.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Holt Mackenzie, 'Memorandum of 1 July 1819', in *Selections from the Revenue Records of the North-Western Provinces* (Calcutta:

Government of India, 1866), p. 98. For an alternative point of view, see Bernard S. Cohn, 'Structural Change in Indian Rural Society, 1596-1885', in R.E. Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 53-121.

2. Eric Stokes, *The Peasant and the Raj: Studies in Agrarian Society and Peasant Rebellion in Colonial India* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), Cambridge South Asian Studies No. 23, viii.

3. S.C. Chaudhuri, *Theories of the Indian Mutiny* (Calcutta: The World Press, 1965), pp. 135-6.

4. Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 62, *passim*.

5. For further discussion of these men, and a general account of the revolt in the North-Western Provinces, see my *Land, Landlords and the British Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), ch. 6. Gobind Singh was apparently moved to remain loyal by his clan ties to the other loyal Jat landholders of Aligarh.

6. For a perceptive discussion of this question, see E.I. Brodtkin, 'The Struggle for Succession: Rebels and Loyalists in the Indian Mutiny', *Modern Asian Studies* 6 (1972): 277-90. Once labelled a 'rebel', a landholder often had no alternative but to act as one, for the British would not treat him otherwise. The belated rebellion of the Rani of Jhansi is perhaps the most famous such incident.

7. For the eighteenth century risings, see A.L. Srivastava, *The First Two Nawabs of Oudh* (Agra: Shiva Lal Agarwala, 1954), pp. 35-43, 93-5, 166; *idem*, *Shuja-ud-daula* (Agra: Shiva Lal Agarwala, 1961), 1: 235-6, 247-51. In the later phase of the revolt, especially after the issuance of the Oudh Proclamation in March 1858, which ordered the confiscation of all land in the province, the taluqdars' resistance may well have been stiffened by a fear and dislike of the British.

8. See P.J. Musgrave, 'Landlords and Lords of the Land: Estate Management and Social Control in Uttar Pradesh, 1860-1920', *Modern Asian Studies* 6 (1972): 257-72; and my *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, ch. 9. For a recent account arguing the traditional point of view, see M.H. Siddiqi, *Agrarian Unrest in North India: The United Provinces 1918-1922* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), especially ch. 2. As the occupancy tenants in Oudh who were the subjects of Siddiqi's research had less protection than those in Agra, they may have been less well-off. Only detailed study of estate and district records can answer this question.

9. Stokes's 'Peasants, Moneylenders, and Colonial Rule in Central India', the only previously unpublished essay in the book, contains a stimulating account of the short-lived 'boom' in the Central Provinces

(see especially pp. 258–63). See also Peter Hernetty, 'Crop Trends in the Central Provinces of India, 1861–1921', *Modern Asian Studies* 11 (1977): 341–78. For early nineteenth century developments in the Gangetic valley, see Asiya Siddiqi, *Agrarian Change in a Northern Indian State: Uttar Pradesh 1819–1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), Ch. 5; C.A. Bayly, 'Town Building in North India, 1790–1830', *Modern Asian Studies* 9 (1975): 483–96; and Bayly's unpublished paper, 'Inland Port Cities in North India: Calcutta and the Gangetic Plain, 1780–1900', presented to the conference on Colonial Port Cities in Asia at Santa Cruz, California, and summarized in Dilip K. Basu, ed., *The Rise and Growth of Colonial Port Cities in Asia* (Santa Cruz: Centre for South Pacific Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1979).

10. For preliminary accounts at the local level, see David Ludden, 'Agrarian Organization in Tinnevely District' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1978), especially ch. 8; and T.G. Kessinger, *Vilyatpur 1848–1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), especially Ch. 4. Punjab farmers also showed a readiness to accept agricultural innovation; see Carl Pray, 'The Economics of Agricultural Research in British Punjab and Pakistani Punjab, 1905–1975' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1978).

11. See, for example, Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (London: Heinemann, 1979). Stokes cites the work of J.M. Lonsdale and J. Iliffe on the African peasantry, but only in connection with the growth of resistance movements (pp. 121, 125).

12. Rajat and Ratna Ray, 'The Dynamics of Continuity in Rural Bengal under the British Imperium', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 10 (1973): 103–28; Rajat Ray, 'The Crisis of Bengal Agriculture, 1870–1927—The Dynamics of Immobility', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 10 (1973): 244–79.

13. For brief accounts of this lifestyle, see Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Permanent Settlement in Operation: Bakarganj District, East Bengal', in Robert Eric Frykenberg, ed., *Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), pp. 163–74; and my *Land, Landlords and the British Raj*, ch. 12.

14. For the zamindar, see M.M. Islam, *Bengal Agriculture 1920–1946, A Quantitative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), ch. 7. For the peasants' economic behaviour, see the papers presented at the SSRC-sponsored Workshop on the Effects of Risk and Uncertainty on Economic and Social Processes in South Asia, at the University of Pennsylvania, 1977.

15. P.J. Musgrave, 'Rural Credit and Rural Society in the United Provinces', in Clive Dewey and A.G. Hopkins, eds, *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India* (London: Athlone Press, 1978), pp. 216–32.

Part II

ARCHITECTURE

Architecture and the Representation of Empire: India, 1860–1910*

Speaking before the Society of Arts in 1873 on architectural art in India, T. Roger Smith, recently returned from Bombay, concluded his discussion by urging that

as our administration exhibits European justice, order, law, energy, and honour—and that in no hesitating or feeble way—so our buildings ought to hold up a high standard of European art. They ought to be European both as a rallying point for ourselves, and as raising a distinctive symbol of our presence to be beheld with respect and even with admiration by the natives of the country.¹

No sooner had Smith taken his seat than William Emerson, who had just completed a design in an Indic style for a college in Allahabad, rose to dissent. The British, he maintained, should not carry into India a new style of architecture, but rather should follow the example of those whom they had supplanted as rulers, the Muslims, who ‘seized upon the art indigenous to the countries conquered, adapting it to suit their own needs and ideas’. Indeed, he insisted, ‘it was impossible for the architecture of the west to be suitable to the natives of the east’.²

A debate was thus joined that was to rage unabated for over fifty years: whether in their building in India the British ought to

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look to their own, or to India's architectural traditions. The choice between styles did not reflect solely aesthetic concerns. As with the contest between Classical and Gothic in Britain, such decisions involved as well larger conceptions of national identity and purpose. Indeed, by providing a vocabulary for the consideration of those questions, the architectural debates themselves shaped and defined Britain's conception of its national purpose.³ In the colonial environment, the bricks and mortar carried with them especially far-reaching significance. The choice of styles, the arrangement of space within a building, and of course the decision by the government to erect a particular monument, all testified, as both Smith and Emerson were aware, to a vision of empire. Sometimes these conceptions moved the architect in the design of a building; at others they lay embedded beneath the surface. In either case, the varied ways the empire was represented in these buildings help us to understand the assumptions that shaped Britain's imperial enterprise. This essay is an examination of the meaning and implications of the use of Indian architectural styles by the British Raj.

Regardless of their commitment to a particular style, all architects who worked in the empire shared a measure of common ground that set off their work from that at home. Most central was a concern with political effect. The classically-educated Briton, as he built his empire, invariably conceived of himself as following in the footsteps of the ancient Romans. With its roads, its system of law, and its monumental structures spread across the face of the ancient world, Rome stood always as an exemplar to spur the British on in their own imperial enterprise.

Were the British occupation of India to terminate tomorrow, the visible tokens of it would survive in our canals, and our railways, our ports, and our public buildings, or, at least, the remains of them for centuries to come.

Those like Smith, who rejected the emulation of indigenous styles took from Rome a further specific architectural precedent:

They unquestionably not only cut their roads and pitched their camps in Roman fashion, but put up Roman buildings wherever they had occasion to build; ... the Roman governor of a province in Gaul or

Britain continued to be as intensely Roman in his exile as the British collector remains British to the backbone in the heart of India.⁴

But British builders in the empire sought as well to take into account what they saw as the special demands that the climate, and with it the colonial style of life, imposed on architecture. As a result, all agreed that successful colonial building involved the incorporation or adaptation of some elements of indigenous design. For their private residences, the colonial British adopted the single-storyed bungalow, with pitched roof and expansive veranda, set in a spacious compound ringed with servants' quarters. This arrangement of space substantially altered the nature of the indigenous bungalow, but it at once secured the ventilation the English required in a hot climate and marked out their separateness as a colonial elite.⁵

In public and monumental structures, a number of indigenous structural features were regarded as essential for comfort. Even Smith, though he sought precedents for most of them in the 'sunshiny regions' of Europe, could list what was required: walls of ample thickness to ward off the heat, an absence of vertical features such as buttresses that might interrupt the flow of air, a 'constant preference' for horizontal cornices to cast shade, 'frequent and ample' openings, piers and columns 'frequent and numerous', a 'constant use' of balconies and corbelled projections, roofs 'sometimes flat, sometimes domical', and above all 'an ample space allowed the whole building and its surroundings'.⁶ Colonial architecture in sum, no matter of what elements particular buildings were constructed, remained always distinct. Neither European nor Indian, it made tangible, and helped define, the uniquely colonial culture of which it was a part.

During the first decades of their rule in India, following the victories at Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1763), the British gave little thought to architecture. For the most part, they were engaged in extending and consolidating their hold over the subcontinent, a task not completed until the mid-nineteenth century. Nor was the commercially-minded East India Company, ruler of Britain's eastern possessions, eager to expend its profits on what they regarded as the needless extravagance of showy buildings. Hence the presidency capitals of Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta were alone during the

early years of British rule adorned with buildings of some architectural distinction. Each had at its core a massive fort, the seat of colonial government for the city and its hinterland; arrayed outside its ramparts were mercantile offices, civic buildings, churches, clubs, official residences and other structures required by the colonial elite.

In their architectural style, these buildings transplanted contemporary European forms on Indian soil. Cities founded as trading outposts, and subsequently developed as centres of European commerce and government, the presidency capitals, with their substantial white populations and British forms of local self-government, to some degree were regarded as extensions of Europe in Asia, and their architecture inevitably reflected this conception. In Madras and Calcutta, which experienced sustained growth from the later decades of the eighteenth century onward, the predominant architectural motif was Classical. Madras buildings ranged in style from the Wren-inspired Renaissance of Fort St George (c. 1760) to the Greek revivalism of the Banqueting Hall (1802) and Collectorate (1817), while in Calcutta, proverbially a city of gleaming white 'palaces', Wellesley's baroque Government House (1802) was surrounded by such classically proportioned structures as the Doric Town Hall (1813) and Metcalfe Hall (1840). By the time the western capital of Bombay had spurred to wealth and prosperity—in the middle decades of the nineteenth century—Gothic had triumphed in England's 'battle of the styles'. Hence Bombay's major civic structures were clothed in Gothic forms. Indeed so totally is Bombay's architecture a product of its mid-Victorian boom that the city retains to this day a distinctively Gothic appearance.

The colonial buildings of this era were not without political significance. As Sten Nilsson has pointed out, their Classical forms 'began to contain forces that were not to be found in the prototypes; they stood as symbols of a conquering militarism and a culture and a race which considered themselves superior'. Yet the demarcation of England's new role in Asia took the shape not of devising new architectural forms but rather of enhancing the impressiveness of the old. Lord Wellesley's Government House sought to project for the first time an image of British power: to make clear that India was now 'to be ruled from a palace, not

from a counting-house; with the ideas of a Prince, not with those of a retail dealer in muslins and indigo'. But, although it was an imposing structure with its stately central pile, curving wings, and ceremonial stairway, the building remained firmly rooted in the accepted conventions of the baroque idiom. It was no more than a grander version of the aristocratic country seat on which it had been modelled, Robert Adam's Kedleston Hall. In the days of the 'Company Bahadur' up to mid-century, British buildings in India remained always, as Nilsson wrote of Calcutta and Madras, 'projections of Greece and Rome'.⁷

In 1857, Britain's hold over India was shaken by a revolt, the so-called 'Sepoy Mutiny', which, though originating in the armed forces, spread rapidly throughout northern India. The uprising was suppressed ruthlessly within little more than a year. Nevertheless the events of that year shattered British complacency. In 1858, the East India Company was abolished, and direct Crown rule instituted; at the time, determined to avoid any further challenge to their rule, the British undertook a more thorough and systematic governance of their vast Indian possessions. The white garrison was substantially increased, and a comprehensive network of railways was laid down. A central public works department had already been established in 1854; a decade later consulting architects were appointed in each province, and the government set on foot a building programme that spread new roads, irrigation canals, military cantonments, and civil stations across the face of India.

As the sinews of rule were strengthened, so too during these years did the British begin to formulate an ideology of empire. The construction of a conception of Britain as an imperial power, which lay at the heart of the late-century 'new imperialism', first took shape in India in the 1860s and 1870s as the British grappled with the problems of post-Mutiny reconstruction. The capstone was Disraeli's proclamation in 1877 of Queen Victoria as Empress of India. Though subjected to much satirical criticism in an uncomprehending England, this act nevertheless at once defined, and inaugurated, Britain's self-conscious presentation of itself as an imperial power.

Effective imperial rule required not only troops and expressive symbols but knowledge. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the British sought to comprehend, and thus to control, the colonial

peoples and their past. In India this took the shape of such institutions as the Census (first taken on a nationwide basis in 1872), the Archaeological Survey, and the production for each province of detailed gazetteers and ethnological surveys. In the process, the range and character of India's architectural heritage became known in the West for the first time. Much of this was the work of James Fergusson (1808–86). He began his studies, unsupported by government, in the 1830s while employed as an indigo merchant in Calcutta. In those days, as he told the Society of Arts in 1866, 'The subject of Indian architecture had hardly been touched.... No attempt had been made to classify them [India's buildings] and the vaguest possible ideas prevailed as to their age or relative antiquity'. When he returned home in the early 1850s he found an unsympathetic public, 'not then prepared for such works', and so for a time abandoned his enterprise. In the post-Mutiny years, the more supportive climate of opinion, as the British sought a fuller understanding of their Indian subjects, gave Fergusson at last an audience, while the dissemination of photography during these same years helped make familiar India's novel architectural forms. Anyone, Fergusson wrote, 'at a small expense may now make himself master of any branch of the subject'.⁸ This self-confident sense of mastery informed above all Fergusson's own magisterial *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, first published in 1876, and for the subsequent half-century the final authority on the subject.⁹

Britain's effort to grasp India was shaped by a search for those categories that would reveal the essential and enduring structure of its society. One such category was caste. A comprehensive but loose ordering of India's peoples based upon Hindu notions of purity and pollution, with countless local variations, caste was elaborated by the British into an intricate and rigid system of hierarchy, enforced by the courts and defined by the decennial Censuses. Another, and for the British more central, marker of identity in India was religious affiliation. From the early days of British rule, the entire population, apart from tiny scattered minorities, was fitted into two mutually exclusive, and comprehensive, categories: those of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'. In the process, as part of the larger transformation of India during the nineteenth century, localized identities in which religion was only one of many elements,

and which itself took varied forms, gave way to membership of two all-embracing and India-wide communities.

British study of India's architecture at once reflected this colonial sociology and reinforced its hold. The 'architecture indigenous to the soil' as Fergusson called it, that is, buildings erected in states with Hindu rulers, was labelled 'Hindu', while the buildings of the Muslim dynasties that ruled between AD 1200 and 1800 were classed together as 'Saracenic', a term for Islam derived from the European encounter with the Arabs of the early conquests. All scholars, and especially Fergusson whose work was devoted to its elaboration, recognized that India's architecture comprised a number of different styles corresponding to various 'ethnological' and political divisions among its people; Fergusson himself counted thirteen distinct 'Saracenic' styles. Yet it was accepted as a matter of course that 'the division of the whole of India into two great classes—Hindoo and Saracenic—was undoubtedly happy and true'. The insistence on the centrality of a religious identity, which took shape in fixed architectural styles, defined an India that was in effect an 'Orientalist' construct: a timeless land of tradition-bound peoples for whom religion alone had meaning.¹⁰

For the most part, the British disdained the so-called 'Hindu' style. Lord Napier, amateur student of architecture and Governor of Madras, in a speech in 1870 acknowledged that Hindu building 'is imposing; it is even poetical...; yet, regarded both from a scientific and an aesthetic point of view, it is manifestly defective'. The ruling feature of this style, he argued, was 'the horizontal line: the wall or the column supports a beam, the beam supports a flat roof. When the building is lofty, the fabric ascends by successive horizontal stages, one succeeding another in diminishing proportions to the apex'. Though such a structure might rise with a 'certain measure of continuity and elegance', with its method of construction 'ingeniously concealed' by decoration, still the inherent 'mechanical deficiencies' of the style could always be discerned. Hence, Napier concluded, the Hindu style was 'unavailable, under the present Government, for the purposes of the State, and ill-adapted for the common and public use of the collective people'. It was alone suited to domestic building, where its principles of shade and seclusion fitted it ideally to social and climatic needs alike.¹¹

The arch and dome, the principal features of the 'Saracenic' style, were by contrast, in Napier's view, the 'most beautiful, the most scientific, and the most economical' ways of covering large spaces. Saracenic forms were in consequence, he argued, as suitable for modern buildings—railway stations, theatres, galleries, and lecture halls—as for their traditional employment in mosques and tombs; and he even urged the Government of India to adopt this as its official architectural style.¹² What made the Saracenic as a style so much more appealing? Part of the answer no doubt lies in its engineering, which managed stresses so as to avoid the 'vast application of material in its most weighty and expensive form' that the horizontal style demanded. But most important surely was the association of the arch and dome with early Christendom, with the Roman and Byzantine empires, and with Renaissance notions of ideal beauty. Moreover, as the style associated with the Indian empire the British had themselves recently dispossessed, that of the Mughals, its use would enhance their own sense of power and majesty. Of the indigenous styles, the Islamic was, simply, the most suited for the representation of empire.

Lord Napier himself inaugurated the new era by employing R.F. Chisholm (1839–1915), the Government Architect, to design a building in the 'Mussulman style' for the Madras Board of Revenue (Figure 1). With this design, Napier proudly proclaimed, Chisholm 'has paid the first tribute to the genius of the past; he has set the first example of a revival in native art, which, I hope, will not remain unappreciated and unfruitful'. Chisholm too saw his role as that of advocate for a new architecture. He told the Madras University Senate in 1869:

We have arrived at a most important period in the history of architecture in this country, and it will be decided in the course of the next five or ten years whether we are to have a style suited to the requirements of this country, or whether we are to be the mere copyists of every bubble which breaks on the surface of European art, and import our architecture, with our beer and our hats, by every mail-steamer which leaves the shores of England.¹³

But the 'Saracenic' style did not win an easy or an immediate public acceptance, nor were its elements elaborated without extended experimentation. Chisholm proposed to inaugurate the

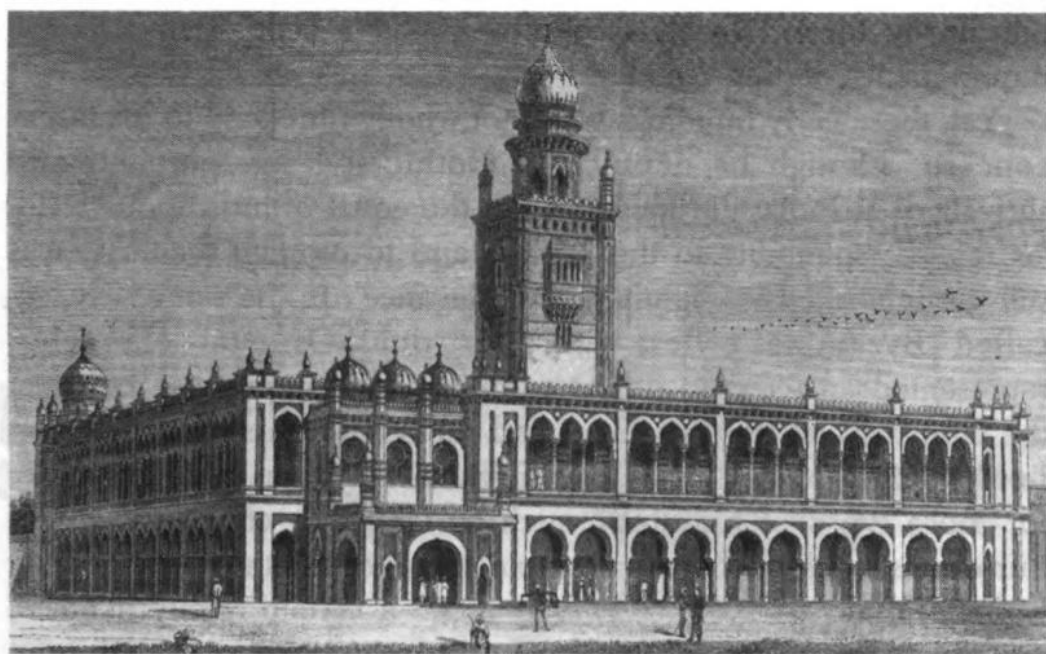


Fig. 1 The Revenue Board Buildings, Madras (From *The Builder*, 31 December 1870, p. 1047)

new era by establishing a professorship in architecture at the Madras University; the scheme was rejected by a unanimous vote of the Senate. Just a few years before, in 1860, Madras had celebrated its escape from the Mutiny by a Memorial Hall executed in a pure Greek style. This building was to be the last classically designed structure in Madras, and marked as well the end of the era of unselfconscious 'projection' of European styles onto Indian soil. Yet its erection testified to the strength of established convention. Indeed the bulk of Chisholm's own building during his first decade in Madras owed little to Indic influence. He had initially been drawn to the city in 1864 from the Bengal Public Works Department by the announcement of a competition for new buildings for the Presidency College. His design not only won Chisholm the commission, but a prize of 3000 rupees and a permanent appointment as Consulting Architect to the Madras Government. The style was, however, 'pure Italian' derived from Renaissance classicism. His design a few years later for the Senate House of the University, extravagantly idiosyncratic with a huge raised hall, was described as one that 'leans to the Byzantine'.¹⁴ Clearly, in his early work, apart from the Revenue Board Building, which was in any case modelled on the existing 'Saracenic'-styled Chepauk Palace of the Nawabs of the Carnatic, Chisholm moved

but slowly toward his goal of developing a style 'suited to the requirements of this country'.

Yet, these early buildings were not wholly unrelated to his larger concern. Though he deprecated Gothic style as 'parched and shrivelled' in India, the Italian, if not the equal of indigenous styles 'as regards suitability to the climate and to oriental scenery', was still 'distinguished for lightness and elegance'. In the same way, so-called 'Byzantine' styles, with their 'quasi-Oriental' character, represented an effort to devise some sort of compromise between the familiarity of the European and the strangeness of the Indian. Lord Napier had urged the use of Byzantine styles in India especially for those types of buildings, such as Christian churches, where Europeans would feel uncomfortable in Saracenic surroundings. The two styles, he wrote, 'have ever retained a certain family likeness, and the common possession of the dome constitutes a capital point of union'. Besides, as the 'most venerable' of Christian styles, Byzantine could never be 'repugnant' in an ecclesiastical structure.¹⁵

While Chisholm was developing an Indic style for colonial building in Madras, architects elsewhere in India were moving toward the same objective. Of these perhaps the most prominent was Major C. Mant (1839–81) of the Royal Engineers. Mant first made his mark on Indian architecture with two Gothic designs in the Bombay Presidency: a high school in Surat (1868) and a town hall in Kolhapur (1872). These structures were 'adapted to the requirements of the climate' by such devices as arcaded verandas running along the entire length of the building, but they remained otherwise obstinately European.¹⁶ From 1872, however, until his death by suicide a decade later—he was distraught at the possibility that one of his structures might collapse—Mant devoted himself wholly to elaborating an Indic style. He was fortunate in winning the patronage of Sir Richard Temple, successively Governor of Bengal and of Bombay. One of the most powerful Indian officials of his day, Temple prided himself on his connoisseurship of India's ancient architecture, and 'warmly appreciated' Mant's efforts to incorporate such designs into his own building.¹⁷ Through Temple's influence Mant secured from the Government of India in 1875 a commission—for the Mayo College, Ajmer—that was to announce the coming of age of what was to be called 'Indo-Saracenic' architecture (Figure 2).

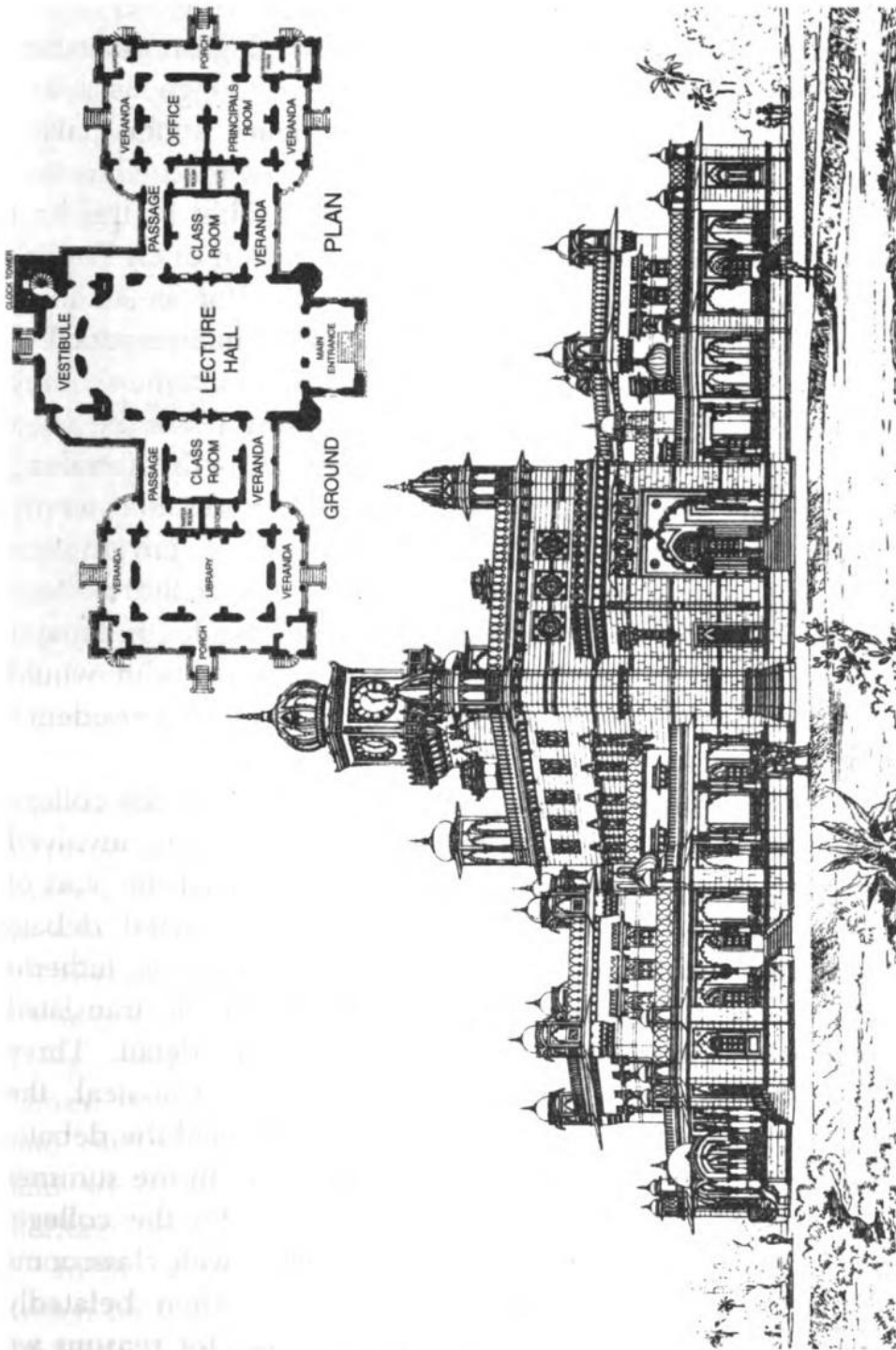


Fig. 2 The Mayo College, Ajmer (From *The Building News*, 21 February 1879)

The Mayo College had its origin in a scheme by Lord Mayo as viceroy of India (1869–72) to educate the sons and relatives of the ruling princes of Rajputana (now Rajasthan) in an environment as closely as possible resembling that of an English boarding school. Only in a proper public school, Mayo's Foreign Secretary wrote, could the young chief escape the intrigues of the palace *zenana* (women's quarters), where much of his boyhood education took place, and the 'fawning parasitism, inseparable in the East from rank and coming power'. Under the instruction of an English staff, these desert rulers, now attached to the Raj as its loyal 'feudatories', would learn not only English and mathematics but games and discipline. Educated as 'ordinary gentlemen', they would, so the British conceived, on their return home be in a position to 'revolutionize' their states.¹⁸ A governing body of ranking European officials and Indian princes was formed under the viceroy to oversee the operation of the college. The Indian government took upon itself responsibility for constructing the central college building, for lectures and academic functions, while the major princes each agreed, over the objection of officials who would have preferred English-style mixed boarding, to build a residence for the boys from his state.¹⁹

The question of the appropriate architectural style for the college building provoked a controversy that raged for five years, involved the submission of seven separate designs, and delayed the start of construction until 1878. Not surprisingly, this protracted debate brought into the open the conflicting sets of assumptions, hitherto barely visible, as to how the empire ought best to be translated into stone; hence it is worth looking at in some detail. Three alternative conceptions—which may be called the Classical, the mixed 'Hindu-Saracenic', and the 'pure' Hindu—shaped the debate. The Classical was Lord Mayo's original preference. In the summer of 1871, he asked J. Gordon, executive engineer for the college, to prepare a plan for a 'plain but handsome Hall, with classrooms surrounding a pillared verandah'. The princes, when belatedly consulted over a year later, gave their support too, for reasons we will discuss presently, to this 'Grecian' design. In the meantime, however, Mayo had changed his mind. In December 1871, he requested Gordon to prepare a 'Hindoo' design. Mayo acknowledged that a Classical design might be 'superior in beauty

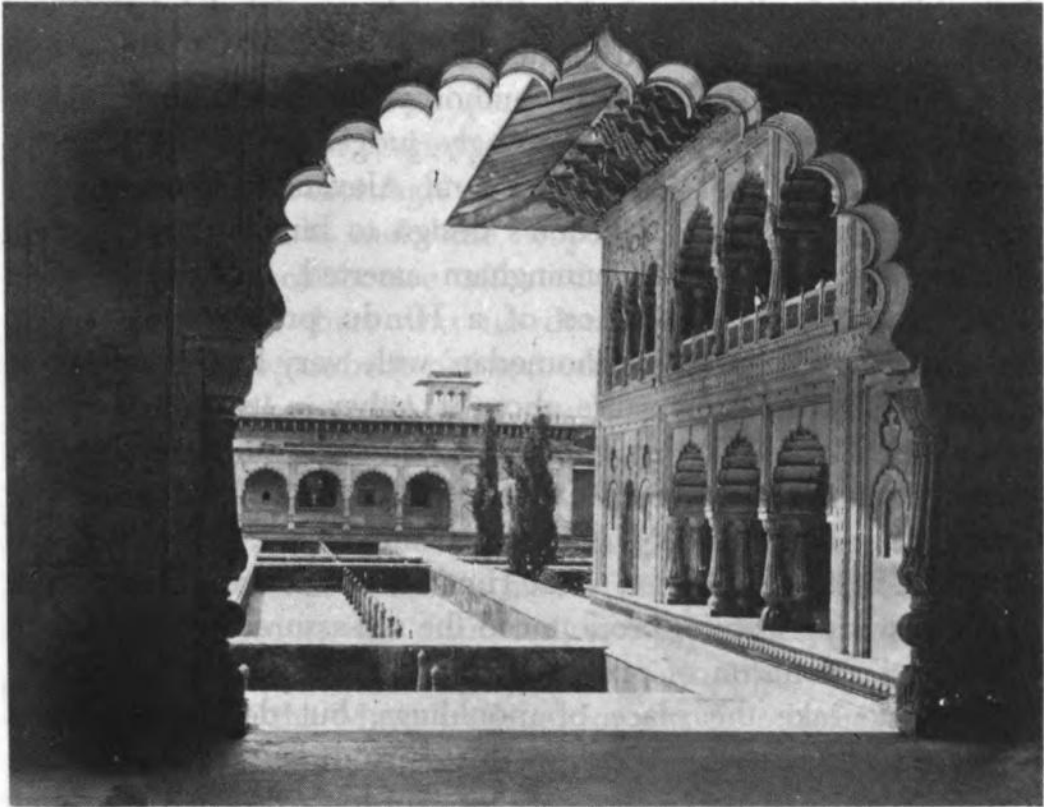


Fig. 3 View of the Central Pavilion of the Palace at Deeg (From Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Vol. II, p. 180)

essentially', but it was, he had now decided, 'less appropriate' for a princely boarding school than a design based on 'Hindoo models'.²⁰ Exactly what a Hindu design ought to consist of, however, or where appropriate 'Hindoo models' were to be found, was by no means clear. Two opposing views soon emerged: one found its inspiration in the deserted eighteenth-century Jat capital of Deeg, near Agra; the other in the architecture of the ancient Hindu temple. Each depended upon detailed historical research, and carried with it the assumption that the British had mastered, and so could turn to their own purposes, India's architectural heritage.

In Mayo's view, the best 'Hindoo models' were those of Deeg, which he instructed Gordon to visit and sketch before drawing up his revised plan for the college (Figure 3); Gordon visited not only Deeg, but the nearby Mughal capitals of Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, and six months later submitted a design in what he called 'a modern Hindoo or Indian Saracene style' of architecture. It was, he insisted, 'not a mere copy' of any historic building, but a

design that embodied the 'spirit of the style suggested to me', and was at the same time suited to the 'requirements of a College and to the present age'.²¹ The 'best authority' on Hindu architecture was, however, perhaps not surprisingly, judged to be the Director of the Archaeological Survey, General Alexander Cunningham; and so Mayo submitted Gordon's design to him for an opinion.

The palace at Deeg, Cunningham asserted, in opposition to Mayo, though the residence of a Hindu prince, was in its architectural style 'purely Mahomedan' with 'very little if any trace of the real Hindu architecture about it, either in its outlines or in its details'. Hence Gordon's design belonged, with Deeg, to the 'common class of modern Mahomedan garden architecture'. The British knew, or rather he, General Cunningham, knew, even if the Rajas of Deeg did not, what Hindu architecture consisted of. Its most striking feature, pronounced the self-assured archaeologist, was a 'rich profusion of ornament, not a mere surface scratching intended to take the place of mouldings, but delicately carved lines of foliage, which cover the mouldings themselves....' Cunningham then proceeded to alter Gordon's design by adding a pair of small closed turrets, canopied balconies supported on brackets, and two open cupolas in the upper parapet; at the same time he struck out 'the plain hemispherical or round domes', which, he said, were 'purely Mohamedan'. Hindus, he admitted, among them the Rajas of Deeg, did occasionally make use of similar domes. So also, he argued, with a stupendous leap, 'do they make use of English shoes; but no one has yet ventured to call them Indian shoes because they have been partially adopted by the Hindoos'. Hindu domes, he explained, were constructed by layers of overlapping stones and thus presented externally a series of horizontal lines or steps, 'of which the Hindoo architect availed himself in ornament'.²² For Cunningham clearly the categories of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', in keeping with the conventions of colonial sociology, were mutually exclusive. To be properly Hindu, a building had to conform to certain stylistic principles which the archaeologist, who had studied the whole of India's past, was most competent to delineate. Furthermore, older structures built before the time of Muslim rule were by virtue of that antiquity regarded as authentically 'Hindu'; later buildings, such as those of eighteenth-century Deeg, were by contrast inevitably debased.

The viceroy, by now Lord Northbrook, acknowledged that 'on the question of what is, and what is not, purely Hindu in architecture' he could not question the opinion of 'so high an authority as General Cunningham'. Nevertheless, while anxious always 'to secure a thoroughly Hindu feeling throughout the design', he sought as well to make the proposed structure consistent with 'the style of architecture affected by the Rajpootana chiefs themselves'; and there was no doubt, as the secretary to the public works department pointed out, that 'in modern times the Hindoos have borrowed very much from the beauties of the Mussulman architecture'.²³ Hence there was no necessary barrier to the use of a 'mixed' style. For inspiration Northbrook turned at this point to the work of Major Mant, who had just completed in the high school at Kolhapur his first Indic design. In early 1873, the hapless Gordon was dismissed, and an assistant engineer, R. Joscelyne, instructed to adapt the Kolhapur design to the requirements of the Mayo College. Joscelyne's scheme, submitted in March 1874, was ultimately judged unsatisfactory, so early in 1875 Northbrook commissioned Mant to draft an original design of his own.²⁴ Although the first was rejected as too costly, the revised draft, approved by the viceroy, was unveiled in January 1877 on the occasion of the first meeting of the Mayo College Committee. Construction commenced in January 1878, and the building was finally completed in 1885.

What does this extended controversy tell us about the way the empire took shape in architecture? Why, in the first place, did the government choose the mixed 'Saracenic' style over the 'pure' Hindu or the European Classical? In support of his design, Mant argued that the 'fusion' of Hindu and Muslim architecture that had grown up in Rajasthan and elsewhere was 'admirably suited' to the needs of modern building, met the exigencies imposed by the climate, and 'harmonizes with the traditions of the people'. But, sensitive to Cunningham's criticism, he insisted further that

great care has been taken, in preparing this design, to use only such Mohammedan features and forms as the Hindus of Rajputana have themselves universally adopted, and in using them to so subordinate them, to Hindu feeling and treatment, and to so supplement them by purely Hindu forms and details, that the whole building may be almost literally described, as being an adaptation of modern Hindu domestic

architecture, and therefore thoroughly suitable, as far as architectural style is concerned, for a College in which the sons of Rajput Chiefs and Nobles are to be educated.²⁵

No doubt to some degree, in rejecting a purely 'Hindu' style, the government recognized that the endeavour to enforce such a style could lead only to the arid scholasticism of a Cunningham. The Hindu religious faith, they had to admit, like all others, had never carried with it a commitment to any particular style of architecture. The Rajas of Deeg were by no means exceptional in drawing upon varied elements, reflecting the fashion or 'taste' of the times, for their buildings without regard to the religious convictions of those who might first have used them. To have insisted upon the use of only 'Hindu forms' would have been to be more Hindu than the Hindus. 'Pure' Hindu architecture too, as Mant and others before him argued, 'from its massive construction and elaborate ornamentation' was 'scarcely capable of satisfactory adaptation to modern requirements'.²⁶ Yet there was surely more to it than this. Lord Northbrook, in announcing his preference for Gordon's over Cunninghams's design, said that he did so 'as a matter of taste'.²⁷ However, more than simply aesthetic considerations were involved. Lacking the dome and the arch, and overwhelmed with ornamentation, so-called 'Hindu' architecture did not convey an adequate sense of sovereignty and majesty, and hence was politically unsatisfactory. An architecture primarily of temples, and of a people conquered by both Muslim and British alike, it had of necessity to remain confined to its traditional domestic and sacral purposes.

The Indo-Saracenic style by contrast ideally suited the needs of British colonialism. In it not only could the distinct 'Hindu' and 'Saracenic' forms be melded, but the British, self-proclaimed masters of India's culture, could in the process shape a harmony the Indians themselves, communally divided, could not achieve. Indo-Saracenic thus found its widest application in buildings meant for Indians, but where the content and meaning of the structure were defined by the colonial ruler and embodied British definitions of appropriate behaviour. Mayo College obviously served precisely this function. Indeed, a college of Indo-Saracenic design encapsulated in itself the assumptions, and contradictions, of colonialism: the structure defined for the Indians their past, while

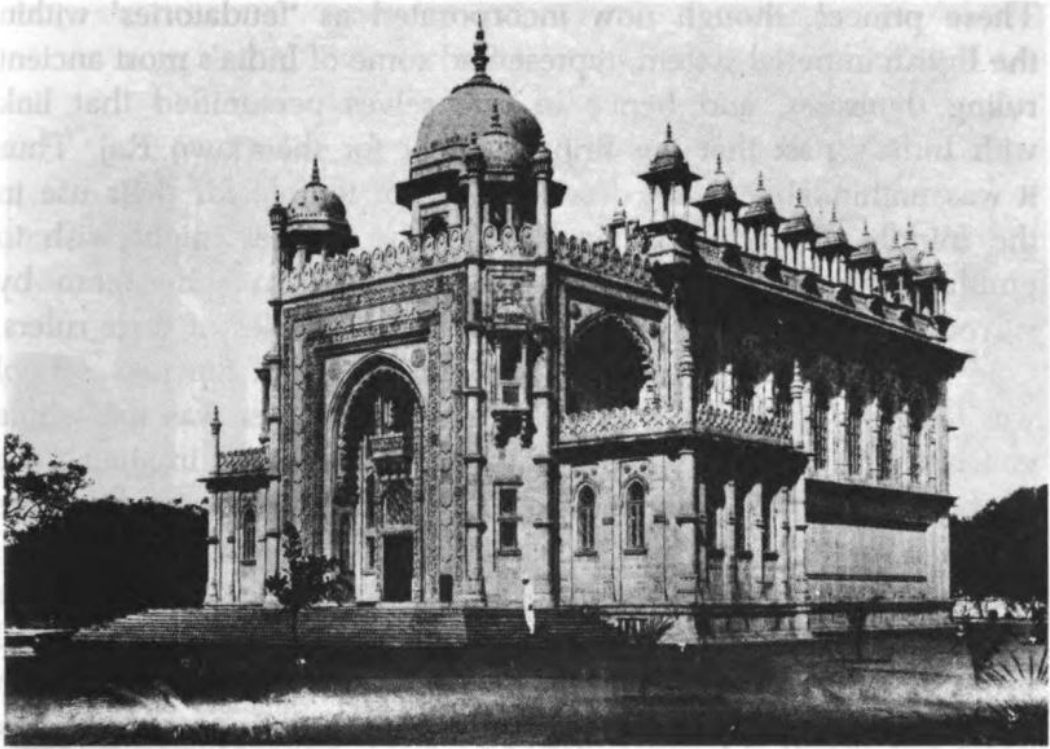


Fig. 4 Victoria Memorial Hall, Madras, designed by H. Irwin (From *Annual Report on Architectural Work in India 1909-1910*)

the curriculum—based on European learning—laid out for them their future. In similar fashion, several of the most spectacular Indo-Saracenic buildings were museums, among them the Albert Hall in Jaipur, the Prince of Wales Museum in Bombay, and the Victoria Memorial Hall in Madras (Figure 4). As a museum by its very nature was a showcase of India's past as organized and classified by its colonial rulers, an Indo-Saracenic structure—whose architectural forms reflected precisely the same enterprise—was altogether appropriate.

But why did the British reject with so little hesitation, when it was the princes' own preference, the Classical design Mayo had first proposed? Certainly once Mayo had abandoned the 'Grecian' design, there was no looking back. In large measure, this decision reflected the considerations that underlay Chisholm's original objective in the 1860s: to derive from India's indigenous traditions an architecture suited to the needs of the British Raj. But there were further specific reasons that impelled the British to insist upon an Indic design for the Mayo College. The college was, after all, meant for the use of the sons of the princes of Rajputana.

These princes, though now incorporated as 'feudatories' within the British imperial system, represented some of India's most ancient ruling dynasties, and hence in themselves personified that link with India's past that the British sought for their own Raj. Thus it was unthinkable to set down a Grecian temple for their use in the middle of the Rajasthan desert. The princes might wish to emulate the West, and to enhance their own self-esteem by surrounding themselves with the architectural styles of their rulers. One might even argue that, as the curriculum of the new school was to be Western in character, as for that matter was the whole concept of a boarding school, surely the buildings in their style ought to reflect this orientation. As we shall see, the architecture of the college was by no means devoid of Western symbolism. But precisely because the princes had by the later nineteenth century become in such large measure creatures of the colonial order, it was for the British all the more essential that these men define their rulership in terms derived from India's past, and mark out visibly in architecture their distinctive status.

Nor did the princes raise a protest. Their continuing position as rulers was dependent upon the support of their colonial overlord; as 'protected' princes they could ill afford to defy their master. Furthermore, insofar as the princes defined themselves as traditional rulers—and they had of course no other claim upon legitimacy—the clothing of structures meant for their use in a traditional Indian idiom could only enhance their kingly role. They were, in the end, confined by the assumptions which alone gave validity to their rule. Although given the freedom to build their boarding houses according to their own designs, the princes for the most part simply handed over the money to the College Executive Engineer, who was then left in charge of the design and construction. Although the various states' houses are by no means identical, none ventures far from the Indo-Saracenic idiom of the main college building.²⁸

As the 'Hindu-Saracenic' (or 'Indo-Saracenic') established itself as a recognized colonial building style, the British turned for inspiration and models to the medieval cities of northern India. Deeg was lavishly praised. Fergusson described its buildings as surpassing all the Rajput palaces in 'grandeur of conception and beauty of detail', while Sir Richard Temple called its buildings

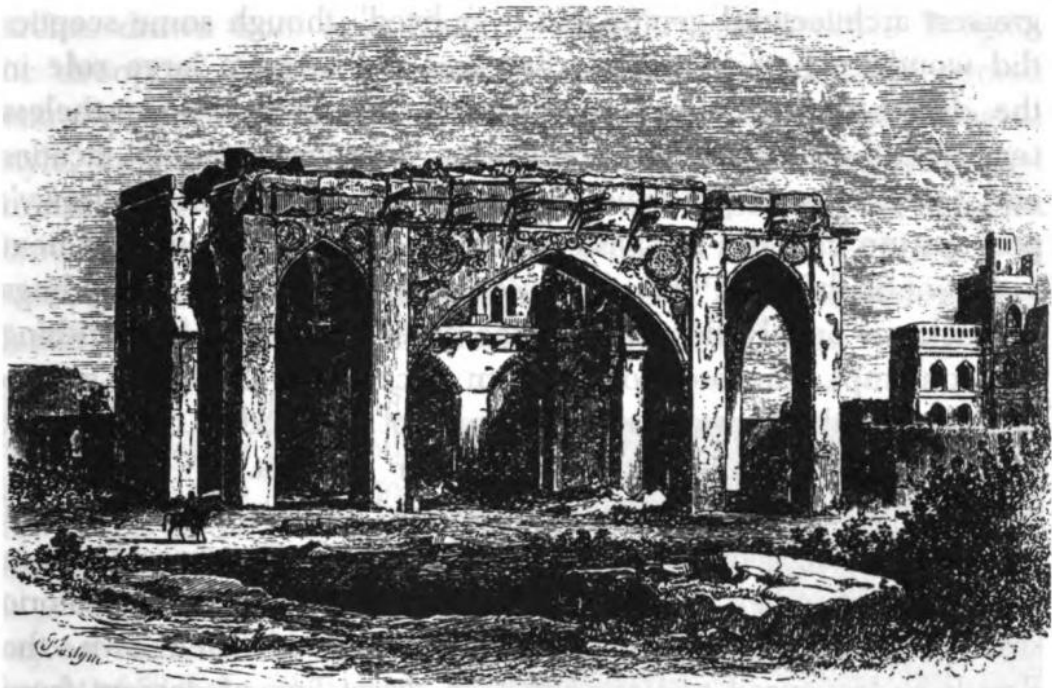


Fig. 5 The Audience Hall, Bijapur, c. 1600; such romantic ruins inspired Indo-Saracenic builders (From Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, Vol. II, p. 278)

‘unsurpassed on earth’ for ‘tasteful ornamentation, gracefully refined’. The finish of detail within the boldness of outline, Temple wrote:

the chiaroscuro produced by the shadows from the projecting eaves; the arrangement of arched windows and doorways; the exquisitely projecting balconies; the balanced proportion between the whole and the parts; the combination of straight lines, curves, and angles; the adaptation of the stone material to the climatic surroundings—render it quite a study in the art of producing beauty. A school of architectural design could not do better than send out a class of students to note and mark this structure.²⁹

The British found other attractive examples of what they regarded as ‘Hindu-Saracenic’ building in the capitals of several of the lesser Islamic states, above all Gaur, Bijapur, and Ahmedabad, where vigorous independent building traditions had grown up; in the Rajput capitals, above all Amber and Jaipur, whose architecture joined indigenous and Mughal styles; and to some extent in pre-Mughal Delhi (Figure 5). About the high Mughal architecture of Agra and Delhi, the British were ambivalent. From first to last, the ‘peerless’ quality of such structures as the Taj Mahal was never questioned—indeed Temple spoke of the Great Mughal as ‘the

greatest architectural genius that ever lived'—though some sceptics did wonder whether Italian artists had not taken a large role in the decoration of Agra's monuments. The British nevertheless regarded these stupendous buildings, with their marble facades and inlay of semi-precious stones, as too 'florid' and 'showy'; perhaps too they did not wish to have their own work judged next to that of Shah Jahan.³⁰ For the Europeanized post-Mughal buildings of Lucknow and Hyderabad, on the other hand, they had nothing but contempt. The pseudo-classicism decked out in tawdry stucco favoured by the Nawabs of Oudh was not the kind of compliment India's colonial rulers sought from their subjects.³¹

In applying the term 'Indo-Saracenic' to this wide array of historic buildings, the British were not defining a coherent era in the history of Indian architecture. Rather, by lumping these historic structures under a common label together with their own, the British endeavoured to lay claim to a direct line of descent from the Rajputs and Mughals to themselves. James Ransome, Consulting Architect to the Government of India, in 1905 discussed, without any sense of incongruity, the Mughal tomb of Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri (circa 1580), and the Albert Museum at Jaipur (1876) as being representative samples of 'Saracenic work'.³² As a term for scholarly analysis, 'Indo-Saracenic' has in recent years been increasingly jettisoned as too vague and inclusive, and it now has no place in academic discourse on India's architecture. Yet, as an artefact of colonialism, the term remains useful as a way of describing British building that sought to model itself upon, or sought inspiration from, these earlier structures.

The balance of stylistic elements, and the sites from which models were selected, varied for each building, depending on the objectives and interests of the architect. By and large the more remote and inaccessible sites such as Gaur and Mandu rarely figured in British building. Simply too little was known about them. By contrast, the Mughal buildings of Delhi and Agra, visited annually by thousands and mapped in detail, provided a rich source of stylistic elements, from copings and plinths to pillars and brackets.³³ In the Mayo College design, as we have seen, Mant endeavoured to draw the bulk of his stylistic elements from Rajput buildings. The plan nevertheless found room for a wide array of design elements. It included, among others, plain and cusped

arches drawn from later Mughal work, several so-called Bengali, or 'drooping', chattris (porticos) of the same period, small domed entrance porches, an overhanging *chajja* or eave of pre-Mughal style, cupolas of varied forms at the angles, and two octagonal minarets at the front terminating at the roof level in cupolas crowned by 'the well known Hindu "Sikra" domes'. Above it all soared a clock tower, 94 feet high (Figure 6). The 'most prominent feature in the design', the clock tower, wrote Mant,

has a richly moulded and slightly spreading base, and is taken up as a square to the height of 22 feet from the ground. From this point it is chambered to an octagonal shaft, which, at the height of 58 feet, corbels out again to the square form.... Above the corbelling bold stone brackets support a narrow projecting balcony, with perforated stone railings, above which rises the square clock chamber (with marble angle shafts), terminating in a richly corbelled cornice and crowned by an iron gilded dome of ornamental design, the sides of which, being pierced by open arcading, will allow the sound of the gongs of the clock ... to be heard freely below.³⁴



Fig. 6 The Clock Tower at the Mayo College, Ajmer (Photo by author)

Even that pre-eminent symbol of British technology, the clock, was cast in an Indo-Saracenic form.

The profusion of design elements in the completed structure makes it clear that Mant had made no attempt to be faithful to the style—the 'taste'—of any particular period of India's past. Clearly, one of the attractions of Indo-Saracenic for the British builder was the freedom it afforded to 'mix and match' elements of design.

Chisholm himself had no doubt as to how to proceed. The architect, he said, 'may choose the comparatively easy archaeological road, copying piecemeal and wholesale structures of the past, or he may endeavour to master that spirit which produced such works, and select, reject, and modify the forms to suit the altered conditions'.³⁵ India's architectural heritages were as colours on a palette. Reflecting the Orientalist conceptions of the times, they were at the deepest level similar and interchangeable. Once mastered, they were available for any purpose the colonial ruler considered appropriate; none needed to be taken seriously on its own terms.

One unifying feature of much Indo-Saracenic architecture was a search for the 'picturesque'. The cult of the picturesque was also a feature of Victorian Britain, but in India, where the British lived surrounded by the 'exotic' and unfamiliar, it was an almost invariable accompaniment of art that sought to take the environment into account. Much of the attraction of remote and ruined capitals was to be found in their 'picturesque' situation. In the space of a few pages James Fergusson, in his *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* praises the 'fairy-like' setting amidst lakes and hills of princely palaces from Udaipur and Bundi to Orcha and Amber. They are, he said, 'seldom designed with much reference to architectural symmetry, but are nevertheless always picturesque and generally most ornamental objects in the landscape where they are found'.³⁶ The search for the picturesque could sometimes lead to extraordinary, if not absurd, results. The Mayo College tower, Mant proudly announced, 'has been purposely placed at an angle and out of the centre of the building to obtain a picturesque effect' and to take the place of a massive central feature such as a dome. The bureaucrats in the Central Secretariat were not impressed. The clock tower, wrote back the Public Works Secretary, 'is not only not quite consistent with the rest of the building but also gives it a lopsided effect', and so should be eliminated. Undaunted, Mant insisted that to omit the tower 'would make the design somewhat tame and commonplace in its grouping, and wanting in spirit and picturesqueness of character'. In the end, the government gave way. The tower, one official noted, 'certainly is inconsistent, but as the rest of the design is by no means a pure style, and is a resultant of the combination of two

or more styles, I do not think the addition of another style in the tower is objectionable, rather it is advantageous, as marking a further transition and the commencement of a new era'.³⁷

In what way does the Mayo College tower mark 'the commencement of a new era'? Mant does not tell us, but the symbolic meaning of such a tower is clear enough. The clock tower, frequently attached to the Victorian town hall, was a common feature of the urban landscape of provincial Britain. Nor were towers wholly unknown in pre-colonial India. But for the most part, following the precedent of the Qutb Minar set up by the first Muslim conquerors of Delhi about AD 1200, they told of conquest, not the hours. From the 1860s onwards, the British erected clock towers, usually free-standing, in the major cities of northern India. Delhi obtained one some 110 feet high opposite the town hall in Chandni Chowk, at the expense of the municipality, as one of the first 'improvements' in the city following the devastation of the 1857 Mutiny.³⁸ In Lucknow, the British induced the trustees of the Huseinabad Endowment, a Shia charitable body established by the rulers of Oudh, to meet the cost of a soaring tower some 221 feet in height adjacent to the burial ground of Nawab Mohammed Ali Shah.³⁹ Set down in the two centres of the 1857 revolt, these structures can hardly be regarded as other than latter-day Qutb Minars, to mark out the presence of a new conqueror in the land. Lesser towers in cities like Ludhiana and elsewhere no doubt made the same point. Colleges were especially favoured with towers. Sometimes these reflected the munificence of large donors, like the Maharaja of Vizianagram, whose gift of 10,000 pounds was commemorated with a 200-foot-tall bell tower at Muir College, Allahabad. But political symbolism was surely never distant. It takes little imagination to see in the open iron dome which caps the Mayo College tower a symbolic representation of the British Crown: the Raj triumphant! The clock itself already had a symbolic significance as an element of 'the new era'. The British had always railed against the laziness and lethargy of their Indian subjects. With its hourly chiming gongs, the clock helped to remind the students and passers-by not only of the supremacy of the Raj but of the virtues of punctuality. The modern world in India, as it had been for the peasant-become-

factory-worker in Britain a half-century earlier, was to be marked by discipline and orderliness.

The crown surmounting the Mayo College was distinctive in yet another way: it was made of iron forged in a British foundry. The 'new era'—and of this the British were in no doubt—was to be scientific and technological. Its 'skin' might be of an ornate Indic design in marble, but the interior structure of the Mayo College incorporated the latest technology. In the roofs, Mant wrote:

full advantage has been taken of the capabilities of cement concrete, which is to be used in flat slabs not exceeding twelve feet in span; spans of this size being obtained by throwing arches across the rooms, where possible ... and elsewhere (as in the main entrance porch and lecture hall) by provision of iron girders.⁴⁰

This unity of 'European science' and 'native art' was central to the conception of Indo-Saracenic architecture. Sir Richard Temple, in his eulogy of Mant, put the matter concisely. 'You may ask', he said,

why, if the native architecture is so extremely good we should not follow it absolutely—follow it pure and simple—in our Anglo-Indian structures. Well, gentlemen, there is this particular reason: If you are to construct buildings which are perfect in respect of utility and convenience, then you must call in the aid of European science.... [Mant's distinguishing merit] was this: that whereas some of his architectural and artistic predecessors transplanted European styles bodily into India ... he tried instead to hit on some style which should unite the usefulness of the scientific European designs together with the beauty, taste, grandeur and sublimity of the native style; and this style he called the Hindu-Saracenic.⁴¹

Once the style had been elaborated, the question remained: how widely ought Indo-Saracenic to be used, and for what kinds of structures was it appropriate? The Public Works Member of the Viceroy's Council in 1877 wrote:

There can be little doubt that buildings for native purposes, such as the following, should be built in some style of native architecture: temples, mosques, palaces, colleges, schools, markets, hospitals, asylums; whilst those specially for the comfort and wants of Europeans, such as residences, churches, offices, railway buildings, etc., are more appropriate for some European style adapted to the various climates of India.⁴²

But the matter was not as simple as that. As a colonial regime, the British had no intention of constructing mosques or temples. As we have seen, schools and colleges, with museums, were ideally suited for Indo-Saracenic architecture, and were commonly constructed in it. As the style became accepted in the later nineteenth century, public buildings meant for the joint use of Britons and Indians, including banks, railway stations, and even some government office blocks, were also frequently clothed in Indo-Saracenic forms. This was most strikingly the case in Madras. Here the influence first of R.F. Chisholm, and then of Henry Irwin, as Consulting Architects to the Government, was decisive in raising an array of imposing Indo-Saracenic buildings that dominate the Madras skyline to the present day. Among these are such diverse structures as the State Bank, the Law Courts and adjacent Law College, the Victoria Technical Institute, and the Egmore Railway Station. The Law Courts along the strand, capped by a tower used as a lighthouse, were designed by Irwin on the pattern of Chisholm's Revenue Board buildings. Like its predecessor, though on a much larger scale, the Law Court design incorporated arches extending from floor to ceiling; these 'were borrowed from the designs of the Pathan buildings of the fifteenth century, where they were used in domed mosques, and were intended to throw light into the highest recesses of the domes, and shew their beautiful ornaments'.⁴³ The Egmore Station, designed a decade later in 1902, boasted a 'Mogul style of architecture' with 'intricate stone carving, fantastic-shaped brackets, drip stones, and rich friezes that at once attract the attention of any observer to the excellence of the structure from an architectural point of view'.⁴⁴

In buildings meant primarily for European use, especially in port cities such as Bombay where European forms continued in favour Indo-Saracenic decorative motifs were frequently added to basically Gothic structures. Such a melded architecture reassured the public with its familiar forms while introducing a touch of the 'exotic'. F.W. Stevens's stupendous Victoria Railway Terminal, for instance, and the Bombay, Baroda, and Central India Railway offices, though wholly Gothic in style, were decorated with Indic carving and details, carried out by students of the Bombay School of Art, that lent the structures a vaguely 'Oriental feeling'.⁴⁵ But Bombay remained wedded to its Gothicized forms. Even though

Chisholm in 1888 won the first prize in an open competition for new Bombay Municipal Offices, his Indo-Saracenic design was shelved, and the commission awarded to the trusted local builder F.W. Stevens.

Gothic and Indo-Saracenic could also be joined in larger, if idiosyncratic, conceptions, for the arches and ornamentation the two shared made them to some degree compatible. Perhaps the most notable mixture of the two, which made its author's reputation as an architect, was William Emerson's Muir College, Allahabad. In part, in order to accommodate a large bell tower, Emerson

determined not to follow too closely Indian art, but to avail myself of an Egyptian phase of Moslem architecture, and work it up with the Indian Saracenic style of Beejapore and the north-west, combining the whole in a western Gothic design. The beautiful lines of the Taj Mahal influenced me in my dome over the hall, and the Indian four-centered arch suggested itself as convenient for my purpose, as working in well with the general Gothic feeling.⁴⁶

He further blended 'Gothic tracery' with Indian geometrical perforated stonework, Gothic shafts and caps with Indian arches, and set his domes on 'Gothicized Mohammedan pendentives and semi-circular arches'.

The building of churches in an Indo-Saracenic style posed especially intractable problems. Like other public buildings of the same era, Indian churches in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries followed contemporary English Georgian styles. The British modelled their Indian churches above all upon St Martins in the Field, Trafalgar Square, for this church with its soaring tower not only was located at the heart of the empire, but detailed published plans of the structure existed for the guidance of overseas engineer-builders.⁴⁷ By the 1840s, under the influence of Pugin and the 'ecclesiologists', Gothic had become accepted in India as in England as the appropriate style for church architecture. Even in Calcutta, with its wholly Classical facade, the cathedral (1847) was put up in a Gothic style. In time, the conventions that governed church architecture became so rigid that it was inconceivable to build an ecclesiastical structure in other than a Gothic style. Emerson's cathedral in Allahabad, though barely half a mile from Muir College, was strictly Gothic. Indeed, far

from modelling the cathedral on the College, Emerson found in the proximity of the cathedral reason for refraining from 'a rigorous adherence to the Saracenic style' in the college design.⁴⁸ Likewise, the renowned Indo-Saracenic architect Swinton Jacob, while constructing the elaborate Albert Hall in Jaipur, put up the city's Anglican church in a severe early English style. The church, he wrote, must be 'in keeping with a style with which all our feelings of devotion are associated'. The only modifications he would allow were those dictated by a concern for climate: a high nave with clerestory windows protected by projecting sunshades to increase ventilation without heat and glare; and a flat ceiling with hooks to which a row of *punkahs* (fans) could be attached.⁴⁹

Any attempt to introduce Indo-Saracenic elements into a church structure at once provoked a fury of controversy. Mathura, a small north Indian district town adjacent to the sacred Hindu shrine of Brindaban, was graced, after its consecration in 1856, by an airy and elegant Anglican church in Italianate style for the use of the garrison. However, there was no Catholic church; this the Catholic officer in charge of the district in the 1870s, F.S. Growse, determined to set right. An enthusiast for Indian arts and crafts, Growse designed the ground plan and general proportions 'in accordance with ordinary Gothic precedent', but then set out to make the rest of the church 'purely Oriental in design'. The carving in the doorways, the tracery in the windows, the kiosks set on the sides of the dome, all were 'specimens of native art'. He had further intended, he wrote, to model the dome itself on the *shikara*, or spire, of a Hindu temple at Brindaban. Fearing opposition, however, Growse 'altered it into a dome of the Russian type, which also is distinctly of Eastern origin and therefore so far in keeping with the rest of the building'. As every compromise must, he sighed, 'it fails of being entirely satisfactory'.⁵⁰

Similar attempts at an Indo-Saracenic Christian architecture elsewhere fared little better. The building of the Madras Young Men's Christian Association in a style consistent with the adjacent Law Courts provoked an outraged correspondent to ask *Indian Engineering* why 'the authorities of this Christian Institute have ordered their architect to design this building in Heathen Architecture? It may have been so designed on the same principle that the Teetotal Preacher has a drunken man beside him, to

emphasize the hideousness of the crime'. 'Surely', the writer went on, echoing Napier's recommendation of some thirty years earlier, 'there are plenty of Oriental Christian edifices, in and around Armenia, of Byzantine Oriental type which would have carried out that great and first principle of Architecture, I mean "Fitness", better than the absurd caricature it now present's.⁵¹ When a storm of criticism broke around the Cambridge Mission for putting up their Delhi College in a 'Mughal' style (Figure 7), the principal defended his decision by an appeal to the universal character of the Christian faith:

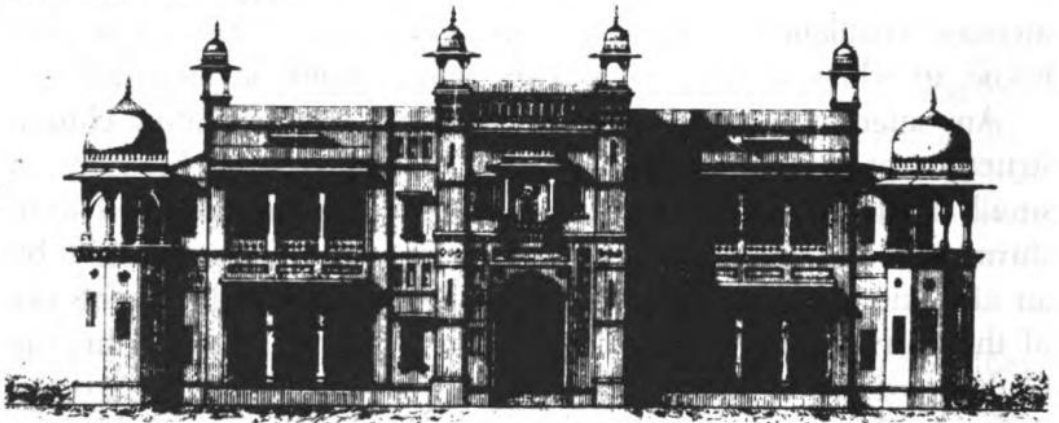


FIGURE 7 St. Stephen's College, Delhi (From *Indian Engineering*, 11 October 1890, p. 292)

I should have thought that it was somewhat late in the day for anyone to argue that a Christian College must necessarily be designed in some style of architecture already consecrated, so to say, to Christian use. ... [He could conceive] no nobler task for the Christian architect in this country than after patient sympathetic and accurate study of the best periods of Indian architecture, both Hindu and Mahomedan, to endeavor to fashion out of the models he has studied, new forms, not slavishly imitative of the old, but adapted to meet the needs of Christian worship and life.⁵²

At no time, even as a secular form, was Indo-Saracenic exempt from criticism. Always there were those who argued, with Roger Smith, that the British ought 'proudly and truthfully [to] mark our sojourn in this country' with 'an indelible history in brick and stone of the Anglo-Saxon rule', and not make 'the noble art of architecture a living lie by affecting foreign styles'.⁵³ At home there was always grumbling at the Indian government's commitment to the strange and unfamiliar Indo-Saracenic. *The Builder*, though

upset at Chisholm's unfair treatment in the Bombay municipal competition, nevertheless found it difficult to share his—and Fergusson's—enthusiasms. The editors wrote in a leading article:

You may learn to like anything if you try hard enough. Fergusson made Indian architecture his specialty, and managed to work himself up into an enthusiasm (not always communicated to his readers) even over things that are like the architecture of nightmare, without form, proportion, or logic.

Of Indian buildings, only the Taj Mahal was 'marked by a purity of line and balance of proportion which may really be called quite Greek'. They expressed their preference for a European style adapted to suit the climate and conditions of India, and lamented that British India's cities were still 'much in want of their Norman Shaw'.⁵⁴

Only a very few critics perceived that Indo-Saracenic was fundamentally flawed: a colonial style masquerading as a 'national' one. E.B. Havell, critic and art school director associated with the burgeoning arts and crafts movement in England, argued that a true Indian architecture could only come about by encouraging its untutored master builders, and giving them a free hand to work within their own traditions. Of the British 'Indo-Saracenic' architect, he wrote scornfully that he

clothes his engineering with external paper-designed adornments borrowed from ancient buildings which were made for purposes totally foreign to those which he has in hand. The engineering is more or less real (according to the skill of the designer); the 'style' is purely artificial. ... [The British did not] come as the Moguls did, to learn the art of building from the Indian master builder, but—on the false assumption that art in India vanished with the last of the Moguls—to teach the application of Indian archaeology to the constructive methods of the West, using the Indian craftsman only as an instrument for creating a make-believe Anglo-Indian 'style'.⁵⁵

In the end, in the years following 1912, Indo-Saracenic succumbed before the forceful genius of the man who was to be British India's 'Norman Shaw': Edwin Lutyens, the builder of New Delhi. Swinton Jacob's buildings, Lutyens reported to his collaborator Herbert Baker during his first tour of India, 'are all made up of titbits culled from various buildings of various dates

put together with no sense of relation or of scale. I do want', he insisted, 'old England to stand up and plant her great traditions and good taste where she goes not pander to sentiment and all this silly Moghul-Hindu stuff'.⁵⁶ A decade earlier, Indo-Saracenic had already been forced onto the defensive. From the late 1890s onwards, in Europe a resurgent Classicism had swept aside Victorian Gothic—as Lutyens wrote in 1903, 'In architecture Palladio is the game.' As these changing patterns of taste altered architectural styles in Europe, they also affected imperial building. In India this Classical revival gained its first triumph with the 1905 Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. Although it was designed by William Emerson, the guiding hand was that of the Viceroy Lord Curzon, who insisted that 'a structure in some variety of the classical or Renaissance style was essential'.⁵⁷ James Ransome, the Government's Consulting Architect during this decade, for the most part too sought inspiration from European Classical designs.

So it is not surprising that when the decision was made in 1912 to build a new capital at Delhi, the vision that informed it bore the impress of European and of classical forms. Elements of the older vision survived, above all in the placement of the new Delhi adjacent to the old Mughal capital. The British still sought to capture for their empire the majesty of their predecessors. The Viceroy Lord Hardinge also fought for a decorative scheme that would at least give an Indian appearance to the facades of these Classical structures. But henceforward Classical styles were to inspire Britain's building in India. They alone, as Herbert Baker wrote to *The Times*, 'embody the idea of law and order which has been produced out of chaos by the British Administration'.⁵⁸

The Indo-Saracenic, then, shaped Britain's conception of how its empire in India ought to be marked in stone for some fifty years, from 1860 to 1910. Insofar as it involved a repudiation of Western forms, this architecture sought to define Britain's empire in Indian terms. It endeavoured to draw upon the legitimacy of the Mughal empire—and, occasionally and ambivalently, of Hindu rulership. In so doing, this architectural enterprise was part of a larger effort, in the years after the 1858 inauguration of Crown governance, to create for Britain in India a 'secure and usable past'. The elaboration of distinctive rituals and dress, the forging of special ties with India's princes, the proclamation of Victoria as

Empress of India—all were directed to this same objective. As the Viceroy Lord Lytton wrote of the grand Imperial Assemblage he had convened in 1877 to proclaim Victoria's new title, it would conspicuously 'place the Queen's authority upon the ancient throne of the Moguls, with which the imagination and tradition of [our] Indian subjects associate the splendour of supreme power'.⁵⁹

Yet at no time did the British ever cease to define themselves as above and apart from their Indian subjects. They never, for instance, built temples or mosques, acts by which previous rulers had sought to bond themselves to their subjects and make manifest the righteousness of their rule. The British after the 1850s vigorously disavowed any involvement whatsoever with Indian religious institutions. They set out instead systematically to order and classify the elements of India's heritage. Its peoples, its languages, its philosophies, its styles of building, were all labelled and defined. Set apart from the West, India had become an object. In this respect, the elaboration of Indo-Saracenic architecture was part and parcel of the contemporaneous listing of tribes and castes, the recruitment of 'martial races' and award of princely gun salutes. Yet like colonialism itself, the buildings spoke with an inconsistent voice. The schools, office blocks, railway stations, and even clock towers the British built derived from Western models, and signified new values and new technologies at work in India. Yet their facades announced a 'traditional' India—unchanging, stable, deferential, with a past defined for its people by its colonial masters. The Mayo College typifies the contradiction, for in it the architectural elements of the past defined a space within which a new learning took place.

The use of Indian forms to represent the empire testified in sum to a double claim. Buildings put up by the Raj for its purposes proclaimed the supremacy of the British as they sought to reshape India. At the same time, they asserted a claim to knowledge, and hence to power, from within. Britain not only ruled, as the Romans had done, but had mastered the Orient. As the Viceroy Lord Hardinge wrote to Lutyens, when the latter wanted to use the round instead of the pointed 'Saracenic' arch in New Delhi, 'In your London surroundings you cannot feel the whisperings of the East, but I have lived fifteen years in the East, and I know and feel the language of Eastern buildings'.⁶⁰ New Delhi, and the coming

of Indian nationalism, were each in their own way to confound this claim.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. T. Roger Smith, 'Architectural Art in India', meeting of 28 February 1873, *Journal of the Society of Arts* (hereafter *JSA*), XXI (1873), 278–86, esp. p. 286.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 286–7. For a further account of Emerson's views, see 'A Description of Some Buildings Recently Erected in India, with Some Remarks on Domes and the Mingling of Styles of Architecture', meeting of 19 May, 1884, *Transactions of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (hereafter *TRIBA*), 1st ser. XXXIV (1883–4), 149–57, esp. p. 152.

3. For a similar controversy in Britain, see Ellen K. Morris, 'Symbols of Empire: Architectural Style and the Government Offices Competition', *Journal of Architectural Education*, XXXII (1978), 8–13.

4. Smith, *JSA* (1873), 279–81.

5. For the evolution of the colonial bungalow, see Anthony King, 'The Bungalow', *Architectural Association Quarterly*, V (1973), 6–25; and *Colonial Urban Development* (London, 1976), pp. 123–54.

6. Smith, *JSA* (1873), p. 286. There are numerous discussions of adaptations that ought to be made to take account of India's climate. See, e.g., James Ransome, 'European Architecture in India', meeting of 23 January 1905, *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* (hereafter *JRIBA*), 3rd ser. XII (1905), 185–99.

7. Sten Nilsson, *European Architecture in India, 1750–1850* (London, 1968), pp. 105, 162–4. For a detailed account of Wellesley's Government House, see Curzon of Kedleston, *British Government in India* (London, 1925), Vol. I, pp. 39–74.

8. James Fergusson, 'On the Study of Indian Architecture', meeting of 21 December 1866, *JSA*, V (1866), 71–9, esp. p. 71.

9. Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* comprised Vol. III of his comprehensive history of world architecture. It was republished as late as 1910. For brief unsatisfactory accounts of Fergusson's career, see M. Craig, 'James Fergusson', in J. Summerson, *Concerning Architecture* (London, 1968); and Partha Mitter, *Much Maligned Monsters* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 260–7.

10. See, e.g., Fergusson, *JSA* (1866), pp. 71–2 and *passim*; Smith, *JSA* (1873), 278–9; J. Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (Rev. Ed. London, 1910), Vol. II, pp. 186–90 and *passim*; R.F. Chisholm in discussion of Ransome 'European Architecture in India', *JRIBA* (1905), 200. For a stimulating discussion of these themes, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978). Though I do not agree

with his imputation of political motives to all European scholarship on the 'East', nor with his often polemical tone, Said's insights have stimulated and helped shape my own study of the ways the British created knowledge of, and represented, 'India' in architecture and scholarship.

11. 'Modern Architecture in India', *The Builder*, XXVIII (27 August, 1870), 681.

12. *Ibid.*, 723 (10 September 1870).

13. 'Architecture in Madras', *ibid.*, XXVII (5 June, 1869), 449; *ibid.*, XXVIII (31 December 1870), 1047; and 'The Revenue Board Buildings in Madras', *Professional Papers on Indian Engineering*, 2nd ser., Vol. I (1872), 1-2.

14. *Administrative Manual of the Madras Presidency* (Madras, 1885), Vol. I, p. 375.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 535; *The Builder*, XXVII (5 June 1869), 449; and *ibid.* (27 August 1870), 682.

16. 'The Surat High School', *Professional Papers on Indian Engineering*, 1st ser., V (1868), 315-16. For an account of Mant's career see R. Phene Spiers, 'The Late Major Mant, R.E.', *TRIBA*, 1st ser., Vol. XXXII (1881-2), 100-2.

17. Temple comment on Spiers, *ibid.*, pp. 103-5.

18. Major-General H.D. Daly to C.U. Aitchison, Secretary of Government of India in Foreign Department, 5 August 1870; and Note by Aitchison of 23 August 1870, National Archives of India (hereafter NAI) Foreign Political A Proceedings, December 1870, 608-9.

19. On the boarding arrangements, see Agent to the Governor-General Rajputana to Political Agent Marwar, 24 May 1873, NAI Foreign General A Proceedings, July 1873, No. 14. For a detailed account of the early years of the College, which remains to this day (though no longer open only to princes), a highly select boarding school, see Herbert Sherring, *The Mayo College: A Record of Twenty Years 1875-1895* (Calcutta, 1897).

20. Secretary Government of India, Public Works Department [PWD] to Executive Engineer, Mayo College, 7 December 1871, NAI PWD B. & R.-Civil Building Proceedings, April 1872, Nos 1-4; and Note by C.W. Buckland, 2 May 1872, Foreign General A Proceedings, June 1873, Nos 114-37. Part of the objection to the Grecian design stemmed from the very high cost of quarrying and conveying the large blocks of marble that the scheme required.

21. J. Gordon to Secretary Government of India, PWD, 26 July 1872, B. & R.-Civil Building Proceedings, September 1872, Nos 7-18.

22. Maj.-Gen. A. Cunningham to Secretary Government of India, Home Dept., 9 July 1872, *ibid.*, No. 17.

23. Secretary Government of India, PWD to Exec. Engineer, Mayo College, 27 August 1872, *ibid.*, No. 18.

24. Proposed Design by R. Joscelyne of 24 March 1874, B. & R.-Civil Building Proceedings B, May 1874, Nos 31-33; and Government of India to Agent to Governor-General Rajputana, 6 March 1875, B. & R.-Civil Building Proceedings B, March 1875, Nos 10-12.

25. 'General Description of the Design for Mayo College', B. & R.-Civil Building Proceedings, March 1877, No. 6.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Secretary Government of India, PWD to Exec. Engineer, Mayo College, 27 August 1872, B. & R.-Civil Building Proceedings, September 1872, No. 18.

28. For the boarding houses, see H. Sherring, *The Mayo College*, pp. 20-50.

29. Fergusson, *History*, p. 178; and Sir Richard Temple, 'Picturesqueness in Reference to Architecture', *TRIBA*, 2nd ser., V (1889), 58.

30. Temple comment in discussion of Mant, *TRIBA*, 1st ser., XXXII (1881-2), 105; Colonel Sir Andrew Clarke in *ibid.*, 107; and Chisholm, 'New College for the Gaekwar of Baroda', *TRIBA*, 1st ser., XXXIII (1882-3), 142.

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32. Ransome, 'European Architecture in India', *JRIBA* (1905), 197-8.

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Architecture and Empire: Sir Herbert Baker and the Building of New Delhi*

For years it has been a commonplace among historians that the British, in building their new capital at Delhi, sought to cast it in a Mughal mould. In much the same way as the great durbars and the awards of Indian titles were designed to symbolize Britain's position at the head of an ongoing Indian political order, so too, it has been argued, did the British by putting up buildings which embodied the essence of the north Indian tradition of imperial architecture, seek to capture for themselves the authority, unquestioned and legitimate, of their Mughal predecessors. The use of red sandstone as a building material, and the decorative scheme of turrets, pierced stone screens, chattris and porticos, as well as the placement of the new city adjacent to the old Mughal capital of Shahjahanabad, have all been taken as evidence of the British endeavour to create for themselves an imperial capital in the Mughal grand manner.

Yet the British were of course not Mughals, and the new city could no more be mistaken for a Mughal capital than Lord Lytton's Imperial Assemblage for one of Shahjahan's. The new Delhi was not, however, built simply to provide housing and office space for bureaucrats. From the outset it was charged with symbolic meaning,

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and the two architects, Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, who laid out the city, put up its principal structures with a carefully thought-out set of objectives in view. Lutyens, as the chief designer and architect, has won much deserved fame for his work in Delhi. Baker, by contrast, has been often disparaged. Yet the buildings Baker designed are central to any understanding of the architecture of imperial Delhi. By extension, they may tell us something about the character and purposes of the British empire itself.

One must start, as Baker did, not in India at all but in South Africa, for underlying the design of the buildings of the new Indian capital lay a set of principles about imperial architecture worked out in South Africa around the turn of the century, and above all during the decade of reconstruction that followed the Boer War. Apart perhaps from conceiving of its buildings as Mughal-inspired monuments, perhaps the greatest fallacy of most studies of Delhi, as of India in general, is to view the subcontinent in isolation, as though India existed by itself or in relation only with London. The Indian empire was part of a larger British empire. The buildings of New Delhi, like much else in India, testify to the continuous flow of men and ideas among the various lands of that far-flung imperial system.

An Englishman, born in 1862, Baker went to South Africa at the age of thirty after completing his architectural apprenticeship in London. Unformed and inexperienced, he had decided to seek his fortune



Fig. 1 Sir Herbert Baker (Courtesy the University of Cape Town Library)

overseas. In South Africa he had the good fortune of a well-placed cousin: the admiral commanding the British naval base at Simonstown. Through him Baker was introduced to Cecil Rhodes, then Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. This encounter gave the young architect not only a patron, for Rhodes at once set Baker to work building houses, but a set of ideals. Above all, from his association with Rhodes, Baker came to appreciate the greatness of the British empire as a force for civilization in the world.¹ In 1900, Rhodes sent Baker on a tour of the classical sites of the Mediterranean. Rhodes' objectives were wholly political: a part of the grand scheme for a federated South Africa he saw emerging from the Boer War, and of which he regarded himself as the presiding spirit. As Pericles, so Baker wrote, believed that art could teach 'the lazy Athenians to believe in Empire', so too, for Rhodes, did classical architecture give visible expression to imperialism, and draw men to it.²

Rhodes died before any of these ideals could be realized—indeed he had long since been politically discredited—but Baker's four months in the Mediterranean transformed his architectural vision. Fittingly, one of the first structures to reveal his new orientation was a memorial to Rhodes himself. Spread across the rugged slopes of Table Mountain, Cape Town, to which he and Rhodes shared a romantic attachment, the memorial sought to recreate an isolated Greek temple, that of Segesta on the coast of Sicily. Four stepped platforms, flanked by eight sphinx-like lions, lead up to the temple, which contains in the central niche of the back wall a large head of Rhodes.

In 1902, as the Boer War came to an end, Baker moved to Johannesburg. The incentive was an invitation from Sir Alfred Milner, the British governor of the newly conquered Transvaal colony, 'to go up there to aid in introducing a better and more permanent order of architecture'. In Milner, Baker found a new patron; in the reconstruction of the Transvaal, a new imperial cause.³ Baker at once fell in with the group of young and energetic men dedicated to the empire whom Milner had called to South Africa, and who were dubbed Milner's 'kindergarten'.

The work of the kindergarten was of fundamental importance in shaping the South Africa of the twentieth century. Despite the early award of self-government, and the subsequent return to

power of the Boers (or Afrikaners), Milner's band of civil servants during their decade at the helm laid down an enduring structure for the South Africa that was to follow: in its governance, its economy, and the ordering of its social relations.⁴ As architect, Baker complemented in stone the work of his friends on paper and at their desks. At first, he built houses, some 300 in the Transvaal. But he soon moved on to government building. The first structure to embody the classical ideals Baker had brought back from his 1900 tour was the Pretoria railway station, built in 1908.⁵ But this was little more than a preparatory essay for the great enterprise that was to follow two years later—the Union Buildings. Till then a small sleepy town, Pretoria was in 1910 designated the administrative capital of the new self-governing Union of South Africa. Of necessity the city had rapidly to be outfitted with suitable government office space. Impressed with Baker's work on the Pretoria station, the two Boer generals, Jan Smuts and Louis Botha, leaders of the incoming government, dispensed with the usual competition and awarded the commission on the spot to the now experienced English architect.⁶

Baker was determined to give the new structure an appropriate 'nobility' both of site and of style. He envisaged above all a building set upon an acropolis like that of Athens, or the Greek temples of Sicily, which had so fascinated him on his study tour. Hence he rejected as unworthy the block of flat land the government had already purchased in the centre of the city. Instead he explored the surrounding hills, and finally settled upon a narrow broken shelf halfway up a hill about a mile from the centre of town. Far from being a disadvantage, the steepness of the hillside was for Baker an attraction of the site. It gave him an opportunity, as with the Rhodes Memorial at Cape Town, to elaborate terraces with gardens and statuary at different levels, and as well of course to draw the eye ever upward. The two identical blocks on the hillside, with their twin towers, symbolized the 'two races' of South Africa—not, of course, the black and the white, but the Dutch and the English—while the central amphitheatre, which Baker envisaged as a gathering place where the crowds in Greek fashion might listen to their leaders, brought together the races: it was indeed the union of South Africa.⁷

Each of the office blocks, inspired by the symmetries of Renaissance classicism, focused upon two arcaded inner courtyards, while the semicircular connecting building is fronted with a monumental colonnade. The projecting porticos and balconies at the four corners not only relieved the tedium of the long horizontal facades, but served, as Baker saw it, a further special purpose. Inspired by Rhodes' habit of taking his guests out on his porch to look at Table Mountain, these columned loggias were meant to draw the ministers out of their offices so that they might 'lift their eyes up to the surrounding hills and the ... splendours of the high veld, from which they may gather inspiration and visions of greatness'.⁸

In 1912, in response to an invitation from Edwin Lutyens, Baker left South Africa for India to join in the building of New Delhi. Despite the triumph of the Union Buildings, Baker had grown increasingly discontented with his prospects in South Africa. By 1912, all but two of his kindergarten friends had left. The imperial era in South Africa had come to an end.

India brought the prospect, on a scale undreamt of in South Africa, of an elaboration of imperial architecture; also the excitement of collaboration with Lutyens, the most original and creative British architect of the age. It also brought frustration, tension, and the rupture of a friendship with Lutyens formed when both were apprentice architects in London 30 years earlier. According to the terms of their agreement, Lutyens took responsibility for the overall layout of New Delhi, and the design of the Viceroy's House; while Baker was to take charge of the Secretariat blocks. By the time Baker arrived, in February 1913, a number of decisions had already been made: that the new city was to be built south rather than north of the old, that the focus of the plan was to be the Viceroy's House on its citadel at Raisina Hill, and that a wholly Indian style of architecture was inappropriate to a British imperial capital. With much of this Baker was in agreement. Above all he was drawn to the idea of an acropolis capital, which accorded so well with his own Greek sentiments. Baker insisted however upon one alteration, that the secretariats be moved up onto the acropolis with the Viceroy's House. The whole, as he conceived it, should form 'one high platform

expressing the importance of the unity of the Viceroy with his government'.⁹

Furthermore, Baker, Lutyens, and the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge, all agreed that the new Delhi, a city which made manifest Britain's imperial position in India, demanded an imperial architecture. But just what such an architecture ought to consist of was by no means obvious. Hardinge urged the use at least in part of an 'Eastern' style, preferably that of Indo-Saracenic with its historic associations with Delhi and its neighbourhood. Hence he insisted that the architects tour old Muslim forts and cities, Jaipur, Agra, even remote Mandu; he imposed upon them a special adviser on Indian art, Sir Swinton Jacob; and he pressed them to incorporate the pointed Mughal arch in their designs. These views reflected of course Hardinge's anxiety above all to make the new capital acceptable to Britain's Indian subjects, and he conceived that a familiar imperial architecture would best serve that purpose.¹⁰

On the opposite side, that of an uncompromising adherence to European classicism, stood Lutyens. A youthful builder of romantic English country homes, Lutyens slowly turned to classical models as he matured, and sought a style more appropriate to large-scale public building. As he wrote enthusiastically to Baker in 1903, 'In architecture Palladio is the game! It is so big—few appreciate it now.... To the average man it is dry bones, but under the hands of a Wren it glows and the stiff materials become as plastic clay'. As Lutyens saw it, the line of descent in architecture was straight and clear: from 'the Greeks, who handed the torch to the Romans, they to the great Italians and on to the Frenchmen and to Wren, who made it sane for England'.¹¹ Overseas, in countries without a great architectural tradition of their own, it was even more essential to adhere strictly to the canons of classical style. 'Would Wren', he wrote sarcastically, 'had he gone to Australia, have burnt his knowledge and experience to produce a marsupial style? ... You cannot play originality with the Orders.... [Their] perfection is far nearer nature than anything produced on impulse or accident-wise'.¹² For Indian architecture Lutyens had nothing but contempt. 'Personally I do not believe there is *any* real Indian architecture or any great tradition. There are just spurts by various mushroom dynasties with as much intellect as there is in any other *art nouveau*'. Indian buildings, even the Taj Mahal, were picturesque and

decorative, but pervaded by a 'childish ignorance' of the basic principles of architecture. 'There is no trace', he sighed, 'of any Wren'.¹³

For Herbert Baker, an imperial architecture had to be 'not Indian, nor English, nor Roman', but simply imperial.¹⁴ This meant, as he expressed it in a letter to *The Times* of 3 October 1912, that at its heart must be a political objective: that of capturing in stone the spirit of the British Indian empire. 'The new capital', he wrote, 'must be the sculptural monument of the good government and unity which India, for the first time in its history, has enjoyed under British rule. British rule in India is not a mere veneer of government and culture. It is a new civilization in growth, a blend of the best elements of East and West.... It is to this great fact that the architecture of Delhi should bear testimony'. Hence the new city had to embody in its style of building a synthesis.¹⁵

What were the elements of the synthesis? With Lutyens, Baker repudiated the Indo-Saracenic as inappropriate to British imperial building. But his objection was not so much aesthetic as political. The Indic style, he argued, simply does not have 'the constructive and geometrical qualities necessary to embody the idea of law and order which has been produced out of chaos by the British Administration'. Classical architecture by contrast, above all the buildings of Wren, had 'eminently the qualities of law, order, and government'. European classicism, then, was to be given pride of place in the new Delhi as it had been in Pretoria: not, however, because of its aesthetic perfection, but because of its political expressiveness.

Yet this was not all. There remained, to complete the synthesis, considerations of climate and of decoration. From his earliest days in South Africa, Baker had urged that European buildings in southern lands had to be adapted to the needs of the tropical climate. Hence his work in South Africa and his plans for Delhi incorporated such features as spacious colonnades, open verandahs, overhanging eaves or cornices, and small high window openings. These structural devices increased the circulation of air while reducing the amount of sunlight within buildings, and brought the outdoors close at hand. Apart from the classically-inspired colonnade, all these features were standard elements of indigenous architecture. The stoep, or open verandah, was found everywhere

in Cape Dutch building, while the *chajja*, or wide-projecting shade-giving stone cornice, and *jaalis*, or pierced stone lattice screens to admit air but not sunshine, are central features of Mughal architecture. By incorporating such elements into his design, Baker could simultaneously adapt his Delhi buildings to the extreme climate and enhance their Indic appearance. Perhaps the only Indian element adopted purely for its effect was the *chattri*, or freestanding pavilion with a wide *chajja* which mounts the roof line of the secretariat buildings. These little structures did have an aesthetic purpose to serve—that of breaking the long horizontal lines of the flat roofs—but they contribute a great deal to ‘Indianizing’ these imposing administrative blocks.

As construction proceeded, Baker and Lutyens found sufficient common ground to create a harmonious set of buildings on top of Raisina Hill. Lutyens’ Viceroy’s House, for instance, incorporated several Indian elements. The strong horizontal lines of the building for instance are reinforced by a cornice with a *chajja* casting a 10-foot shadow, while the roof line is punctuated by sunken *chattris* and the entrance gateway is even marked by a sculptured elephant. Indeed, as Wren had made classicism ‘sane’ for England, Lutyens conceived of his role as making it ‘sane’ for India. This meant a return to the ‘essence’ of classical form, and its subsequent reconstitution. The Viceroy’s House was the outcome: plain, austere, massive, with its Indian detail transformed by the imaginative genius of the architect. Baker’s secretariats by contrast show a more direct grafting of Indian motifs onto the classical surfaces. In large part, this reflects Baker’s political concerns: that the secretariat buildings, so visible on their high pediments, and so much more open to the comings and goings of Indians, should be seen to be distinctly Indian.¹⁶

Despite the similarity of their buildings, the two architects had by no means resolved their differences. Indeed their collaboration was to end in bitterness and rancour before the building of Delhi was complete. The ostensible cause of the rupture was a disagreement over the angle of the inclined roadway which led up the hill between the two secretariats to the Viceroy’s House. The problem had its origins in the decision, taken, as we have seen, largely at Baker’s initiative, to place the secretariat buildings, as well as the Viceroy’s House, on top of Raisina Hill. Baker’s

objectives were praiseworthy—'to give architectural expression to a common dignity and distinction in the instrument of government as a united whole'—but the result was to spoil the vista of the Viceroy's House from the roadway. Lutyens had intended the viceregal mansion, as the axial point of the scheme, to be visible from the entire length of the ceremonial (King's Way) Rajpath. But placed far back on the hill behind the secretariats, the Viceroy's House was for a time lost from view as the roadway climbed steeply up the hill. For Baker, this was a matter of no great moment. Lutyens, however, pressed doggedly to have the vista restored by the excavation of a deep trench cut into the hillside past the secretariats, so that the road could ascend at a lesser gradient. When refused he broke angrily with Baker, whom he accused of deceiving him in drawing up the design plans for the hill.¹⁷

Lutyens' sensitivity seems altogether disproportionate to the issues involved, the more so as he sought to have the gradient altered at great expense with the construction of the city already two years underway. Yet the controversy goes to the heart of the differing conceptions that Baker and Lutyens brought to the building of New Delhi. For Baker, schooled as he was under Rhodes and Milner, architecture served always a political purpose. His placement of the secretariats on the hilltop, the use of Indian decorative features—indeed his commitment to European classicism itself—all testify to his one overriding objective, that of creating an architecture expressive of the ideals of the British empire. For Lutyens, the empire was incidental. He was not untouched by its spirit. He was impressed by the Indian Civil Service, and the 'unselfishness' of British rule; and he was convinced that the Indians had but 'low intellects' that 'spoil' easily.¹⁸ But his professional interests lay elsewhere. In Delhi, while working within the context of an imperial architecture, he sought nevertheless to realize the universal truths he saw embodied in the European classical tradition. Fired by this aesthetic vision, he could tolerate no interference with its implementation. The Viceroy's House, as the axial point of an ordered symmetry, must remain always visible.

Imperial architecture, then, shaped by its colonial setting, must be regarded as a distinct style of building. Such an architecture did not involve the simple transplantation of European modes to

foreign lands. Nor was it the same as the endeavour to realize, with Lutyens or later Le Corbusier, an abstract universal vision. Much less of course did it involve the copying of 'native' styles. No doubt in large part because of his early tutelage under Rhodes and Milner, Baker recognized always that an architecture meant to symbolize the empire made unusual demands upon the builder. Central to these demands was the necessity of appealing simultaneously on different levels to a variety of different audiences.

In South Africa certainly the audience was the resident white population. Dutch and English alike, they could comprehend the symbolic references of the Union Buildings, and be drawn by them toward a larger South African nationality. Indeed Baker explicitly conceived of his work in Pretoria, in words taken from Wren, as that which 'establishes a Nation... [and] makes the people love their native country'.¹⁹ In New Delhi the intended audience was more diffuse. Certainly much that was done was meant to impress the Indians with the special greatness of Britain's empire. The juxtaposition of the old city and the new, the alignment of the principal avenues with the Purana Qila and the Jama Masjid, the decorative scheme of turrets, pierced screens, and chattris in red sandstone, all were devices meant to capture for this empire the authority, legitimate and unquestioned, with which Indians invested its predecessors. From the porticos of the secretariat, ministers could look out, so Baker wrote, across 'the far ruinous sites' of India's historic capitals, and then look down 'to the new Capital beneath them that unites for the first time through the centuries all races and religions of India'.²⁰ The buildings of New Delhi, then, were meant to connect Britain's rule with India's own imperial past, and at the same time to evoke a sense of pride in the unique accomplishments of the British Raj.

For this reason, much of the architectural symbolism of New Delhi had meaning primarily for the British themselves. Baker wrote of the secretariat blocks that on their great podium they 'seem the guardians of the Processional Way up to the Acropolis, and may suggest the attributes of majesty which distinguished the rock platforms and stairway at Persepolis'.²¹ The likelihood of many Indians appreciating such symbolism was negligible.

The British chose a classical style for their new capital, in some measure, simply because that was the medium through which

Europeans apprehended the empire. Its 'eternal principles' and 'ordered beauty' more than those of any other architecture, were those fit to embody in stone the spirit of the empire. But more surely was involved. Above all, it would seem the British sought by connecting their monuments to the ideals, and empires, of a cherished classical antiquity, to enhance the moral worth—in their own eyes—of their political handiwork. For this reason, imperial architecture was not tied to any particular geographic setting. Its elements could be reordered to fit any tropical dependency. What had been hammered out in Pretoria, and refined in Delhi, could be carried to such places as Kenya, where the Government House, Nairobi, built by Baker in 1925, was but a minor variant of the design worked out earlier. The empire remained always a special place; and its buildings served always a special purpose. It was none other than to make manifest—to ruler and ruled alike—that, as Baker wrote, echoing Curzon, 'Our work is righteous and it shall endure'.

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9. For the early discussions on the site and layout, see Christopher Hussey, *The Life of Sir Edwin Lutyens* (London, 1953), pp. 245–76, 286–9; and Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, pp. 64–7.
10. For Hardinge's views, see Hussey, *Lutyens*, pp. 252, 274, *passim*; Baker, *Architecture and Personalities*, pp. 70–2. He ultimately gave way to his architects on most disputed points of design.
11. Hussey, *Lutyens*, p. 280.

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18. Hussey, *Lutyens*, pp. 248, 255–6.
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Monuments and Memorials: Lord Curzon's Creation of a Past for the Raj*

On 7 February 1900, Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, addressed the Asiatic Society of Bengal on the occasion of its annual meeting. It was, he told the assembled scholars, the 'duty' of the British Indian government, indeed one of 'its primary obligations', to undertake the 'conservation of [India's] ancient monuments'. Furthermore, he went on, 'a race like our own, who are themselves foreigners, are in a sense better fitted to guard, with a dispassionate and impartial zeal, the relics of different ages and of sometimes antagonistic beliefs, than might be the descendants of the warring races or the votaries of the rival creeds'. All monuments too, of whatever era, deserved such care. 'To us the relics of Hindu and Mohammedan, of Buddhist, Brahmin, and Jain beliefs, are...equally interesting and equally sacred', Curzon averred, for 'each fills a chapter in Indian history'. Preserved in a state of arrested decay, India's monuments were mute witnesses to a past whose illustrious achievements were stages in a historical memory that had, as its end point, the coming of the British Raj. Even the half-century-old palace of the Burmese kings in Mandalay deserved protection, at once as a mark of respect for Burmese art and architecture and as a 'reminder' that that land 'has now passed forever into our hands'.¹

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As the British created a past for India, they sought to make room in it for themselves. As the 'relics' of Mughal India had to be preserved, so too did those of its successor empire, that of the British themselves. Much as the restoration of the Taj Mahal, or Akbar's tomb, signified Britain's 'offering of reverence to the past', and stood as a testimony to its successful guardianship of that past, memorials could also create a past for the British in India. 'I am doing no more here', Curzon said as he unveiled a memorial to the Black Hole in Calcutta, 'than I have done elsewhere, if I turn to the memories of my own countrymen, and if I set up in the capital of the Indian empire this tardy tribute to their sacrifice and suffering'. Despite the assertion of similarity, these were, in fact, radically different modes of memorialization. As they preserved ancient monuments, the British took pride in the aesthetic qualities of their predecessors' work. As they created their own monuments, they sought instead to commemorate historical events that marked out Britain's political and military achievements. Further, the past of earlier kings and dynasties had to be seen as past. Sequestered in garden sites overseen by the Archaeological Survey of India, the monuments of earlier ages, steeped in the 'picturesque', were meant to evoke romantic visions of 'grandeur' and 'fallen majesty'. The monuments of Britain's own past, by contrast, defined a living past, which informed, and gave meaning to, the present. Nevertheless, whether conserved or built afresh, whether obelisks erected newly or crumbling towers repaired, monumental architecture—so the British conceived—enabled them to claim a past in India that would make them worthy rulers.²

This essay examines Lord Curzon's endeavour to construct, for the British, a remembered past in India that could make visible, and so 'keep alive', the memory of what they had wrought during their years as India's rulers. Throughout, whether he was restoring old monuments or erecting new ones, Curzon's activities were shaped, down to their last detail, by his restless, inquiring personal style. Nothing was ever too small or obscure to escape his eye or his pen, as he toured monuments never before visited by a viceroy, and filled pages with precise orders to subordinates. His style is best exemplified by his insistent determination to make the Taj Mahal resemble his vision of what it ought to have been like. He had the 'garish English flowers' in the garden

removed in favour of rows of cypresses; he insisted that the guardians of the tomb wear, not their 'very dingy' ordinary garments, but 'the traditional garb of Mogul days', and so he fitted them out with white suits and a green scarf; and he installed a lamp brought from Cairo over the tomb chamber.

Nor did Curzon let criticism deter him. He brushed aside critics who pointed out that the dense mass of the rows of cypresses would interfere with the view of the Taj from the garden. Similarly, in his restoration of Akbar's tomb at Sikandra, he was determined to repair the white marble minarets at the corners of the main gateway. These, he insisted, had been 'shot away' when Agra was sacked by the Jats in 1764, and should be restored to their 'original form'. The Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, Sir Antony MacDonnell, warned Curzon that some scholars had expressed 'doubt' as to whether these minarets had ever been finished. He then went on to raise a more fundamental objection to the repair. 'As our policy has been *to conserve*', he wrote, 'and as the injury had been done before British rule was established, it is an administrative question whether we ought *to restore*'. To all of this, Curzon paid no attention. These 'truncated and headless towers' had to be restored, and quickly, so that 'when the Prince of Wales visits Sikandra...he may be able to see—what no one has seen for a century and a quarter—viz., a perfect gateway to the finest of the Mogul Emperors' tombs'.³ Mughal monuments had always to be made to represent an idealized vision of a great empire frozen in the past.

Such achievements could not be left unpublicized. As Curzon told the Secretary of State as the Agra restorations were being brought to a close, 'We have carried through a work that will redound to the credit of the British name' and 'be fit to attract the pilgrimage of the entire world'. To ensure that the 'world' would see and appreciate what he had achieved, Curzon sought out the Indian photographer Deen Dayal (1844–1905) to accompany him on his annual tours. Appointed official state photographer to the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1884, Deen Dayal achieved fame for the range and variety of his photographic work. One among very few eminent photographers of Indian origin, Deen Dayal has rightly been praised for his sympathetic studies of Indian life. But his association with Curzon as Viceroy was close and enduring, and

included, in addition to photographing Curzon on his travels throughout India, a commission to photograph the 1903 Durbar. Figure 1 shows Curzon touring the Agra Fort but see the camera set up on the far left. Curzon clearly recognized Deen Dayal's skills as photographer, and took advantage of them to create a heroic vision of himself as Viceroy, and to project a vision of the Raj as powerful and beneficent.⁴



Fig. 1 Lord Curzon inspecting the Saman Burj tower of the Agra Fort, 1899 (By permission of the British Library)

Two central events in the history of Britain's Raj—the Black Hole of Calcutta with the subsequent battle of Plassey in 1756–7 and the Mutiny uprising 100 years later in 1857–8—by their expression of sacrifice redeemed by heroic valour, possessed an enduring claim on British remembrance. Each too, as defeat was transformed into military victory, laid the foundations for first Company, and then Crown, rule over India. Inevitably, therefore, they took pride of place in Britain's memorialization of its past. By the time Curzon arrived in India in 1898, commemoration of the Mutiny had already produced a number of monuments or 'relics'. The most important were located in the three cities—Delhi, Cawnpore [Kanpur], and Lucknow—most marked by British

'valour'. In Lucknow, commemoration focused upon the half-ruined residency, whose British defenders had held off the rebels for six months, and where the Union Jack was alone in all the empire allowed to fly day and night. In Delhi, the 'sacred' site was the Ridge, from which the final attack on the rebel-held city was launched and where a towering memorial had been raised; while in Cawnpore sentiment took the shape of a marble memorial at the well into which the bodies of murdered English women and children had been thrown.

Curzon was not unaware of the power of Delhi as a site of remembrance. It was not by accident that his Durbar of 1903, like Lytton's a quarter-century earlier, took place in Delhi, or that its ritual observances and architectural symbolism were meant to evoke that of the Mughal empire. It was altogether appropriate, Curzon insisted, as the British sought to 'step into the shoes of the Great Mogul', for them to adopt the 'time honoured features of Indian durbars'. Nevertheless, for Curzon, Delhi, like Agra, was associated with the Mughals, not with Britain's own Raj; and it was primarily to claim a connection with the enduring legacy of that great empire that Curzon organized his Durbar in the Mughal capital.⁵ Curzon did, however, erect an obelisk, situated in front of the Delhi Telegraph Office, to the memory of the 'loyal and devoted' telegraph officers who on 11 May 1857 sent word of the arrival of the mutineers. As he said while unveiling this, his one Mutiny memorial, 'in the defeat of the rebels, and in the re-establishment of British power, the Indian Telegraph Department will always have the pride of remembering that it bore no mean or inconspicuous part'.⁶

Curzon's heart remained always in Calcutta. Indeed, he fought strenuously, from England in retirement, against the plan to shift India's capital from Calcutta, where it had been located since 1772, to a new city to be built on the plains of Delhi. For Curzon, Calcutta, more than any other city, enshrined Britain's past in India. It was nothing less than 'one great graveyard of memories'. 'Shades of departed Governors-General', as he told a Calcutta audience in 1902, hovered about the corridors of Government House itself, while not far away in Park Street cemetery lay 'generations of by-gone Englishmen and Englishwomen, who struggled and laboured on this stage of exile for a brief span'. Not

surprisingly, therefore, it was Calcutta that Curzon sought to embellish with monuments meant to place Britain at the heart of India's remembered past.

Queen Victoria's death provided the occasion for the grandest of all such monuments. On 6 February 1901, less than two weeks after the Queen-Empress's death, Curzon laid out his vision of what a memorial to her ought to accomplish. 'Let us', he told a crowd gathered in the Calcutta Town Hall, 'have a building, stately, spacious, monumental, and grand, to which every newcomer in Calcutta will turn, to which all the resident population, European and native, will flock, where all classes will learn the lessons of history, and see revived before their eyes the marvels of the past'. It was to be in sum a 'great imperial memorial' which would fulfil a 'great imperial duty', that of 'handing down to posterity...a standing record of our wonderful history'. The architectural style, the sculptural ornamentation, the individuals commemorated in the building's statuary, with the displays inside—various memorabilia of the Raj—were all meant to enforce the same lesson. Together they would 'teach more history and better history than a studyful [sic] of books'.⁷ Figure 2 shows the Memorial in 1922 at the time of its completion.

Unlike many of his official colleagues, who insisted that Indian nationalists were 'little disposed to join us in celebrating the achievements in war and politics of the English', Curzon was convinced that the building would evoke a 'pride in their country' among the Indian people. Put differently, he believed that they could be induced to participate in a past constructed for them by their British rulers. This he proposed to accomplish by including statues of eminent Indians, including even those who had 'fought against the British, provided that their memories are not sullied with dishonour or crime'. Tipu Sultan of Mysore might find a place, Curzon said, but not the rebels of 1857. As he concluded in an address on the proposed memorial before the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 'I believe it will do much to bind together the two races whom Providence, for its mysterious ends, has associated in the administration of this great empire'.⁸ Such expectations could never be more than a fantasy. Already, as the memorial was being furnished, Curzon's plea for the inclusion of Indian figures was brushed aside. A full-length statue of Clive dominated the Statuary



Fig. 2 Victoria Memorial, Calcutta, south front, with King Edward VII memorial, 1922 (By permission of the British Library)

Gallery, while the busts along the walls, with the photographs and paintings throughout the Memorial, depicted British 'heroes' of the Raj. Curzon had anticipated that the poor would 'wander, wondering perhaps, but interested and receptive, through its halls'. One wall of the picture gallery, even displayed, in addition to the usual portraits, two horizontal views of the 1903 Durbar, thus enabling the viewer to appreciate at the same time two notable accomplishments of Curzon's viceroyalty. Although preserved as a pre-eminent tourist site of Calcutta to this day, the Victoria Memorial testifies less, perhaps, to a shared Anglo-Indian past than to a sense of the transitoriness of a Raj ever more remote from Indian consciousness. At best, it can be said to generate a nostalgia for that which was.

There remained the commemoration of the Black Hole. The term 'Black Hole' refers to an event which took place—or, according to some accounts, did not take place—on 20 June 1756. During that year, as the British in Calcutta were jousting for power and influence with the new Nawab of Bengal, Siraj-ud-Daula, the

headstrong Nawab was determined to teach the British a lesson. Marching on Calcutta, he besieged the city, and, following the flight by boat of most of the garrison, confined the remainder in a tiny prison. Siraj then went off to celebrate his victory. Left without food or water, crushed together in a small underground room in the heat of a Calcutta summer, 123 of the 146 English prisoners suffocated during the course of the night. Determined to avenge this tragedy—not only that of the Black Hole, but of the loss of Calcutta—the British mounted an expedition from Madras under Colonel Robert Clive. The reconquest of Calcutta in January 1757 was followed in June by the Battle of Plassey. Looking back on this series of events, Curzon saw in the ‘heroism and suffering’ of these English ‘martyrs’ on that ‘night of horror’ the ‘foundation stone of British Dominion in Bengal’.⁹

It is not possible here to assess the substantial literature about the Black Hole that has grown up over the years since 1756. Almost certainly, the survivor and author of the major narrative of the event, J.Z. Holwell, self-interestedly exaggerated the extent of the tragedy. So too is it almost certain that Siraj himself did not order the confinement of his prisoners in this room or intend that they should be left to die of suffocation. Nevertheless, the ‘Black Hole’ as a mythic event has resonated down the years. Generations of English school children, with the British public more generally, have seen in the ‘Black Hole’ evidence for the evil and perfidy of Indians, and hence ample justification for their subjugation to the British Raj. Even well after the end of the Raj, as one graduate student at Berkeley recounted to me, on one occasion in her English school, the teacher marked out on the floor with chalk a square meant to define the ‘Black Hole’; the children then crowded together into that space to experience the sensation that, presumably, the English prisoners would have felt in 1756.¹⁰ The proliferation of postcard views testifies as well to the enduring fascination with the Black Hole as a site for memory among the British into the twentieth century.

Holwell himself had caused a monument to be erected to commemorate the Black Hole in the early 1760s. This monument is shown in Figure 3, where it dominates the foreground of James Baillie Fraser’s ‘A View of the Writers Building’. The painting, including a bullock cart and a group of Indians clustered under



Fig. 3 'View of Writers Buildings from the monument at the West End' by James Baillie Fraser (© Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, USA. Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library). The original Black Hole Memorial is in the foreground, the Writers Buildings to the left, and St Johns Church in the distance.

an awning at the foot of the dilapidated monument, exemplifies the romanticism of the time, as well as the extent to which the Black Hole episode had lost whatever symbolic consequence it may have possessed for the British in Holwell's time. In 1821, this original monument was taken down, as the monument had crumbled into disrepair, while the old Fort William, in which the dungeon had been located, had been razed to the ground. Hence, when Lord Curzon arrived in India, few tangible signs of the tragedy remained. There was, he lamented, 'no monument, not even a slab or an inscription', to record the names and fate of these 'unhappy victims'.¹¹ Curzon was determined to remedy this shortcoming by setting up memorials himself. This process of commemoration involved two related aspects. One was the marking out of the site of the Black Hole, and, more generally, that of the old fort. The other was the reconstruction of Holwell's Black Hole monument.

The site of the old fort was, by Curzon's time, largely swallowed up in the Calcutta Post Office. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, several scholar-officials, most notably H.E. Busteed, assay master of the Calcutta Mint, had written

detailed narratives of the events of the Black Hole, and had traced out on the ground the location of the fort and the prison. Busteded even built a small wooden model of the old fort with a portion of the roof hinged so that one could look down into the room, with its barred windows, meant to represent the site of the prison.¹² Curzon marked out the lines of the curtain walls and bastions of the old fort by brass strips set into the stone of the pavements around the Post Office building, and had white marble tablets inserted into the walls of the adjacent buildings. On these he set inscriptions stating which part of the old fort originally stood at that spot.

The presumed site of the Black Hole itself, located inside the Post Office, had at some point in the later nineteenth century become partially obscured by the construction of a brick and plaster gateway. Although hardly visible to the general public, this gateway, shown in Figure 4, did keep alive the memory of the Black Hole. Above the gate was a tablet noting that 'the stone pavement close to this', next to the squatting figure in the photograph, marked the position of the prison cell 'known in History as the Black Hole of Calcutta'. Curzon had this gateway pulled down, and replaced with a polished black marble pavement surrounded by an open iron railing. On the wall above, he affixed an inscription in gilt letters on a black marble tablet—contrasting with the white marble used elsewhere—indicating that the marble flooring marked the exact site where the prisoners had been confined.¹³

The numerous photographs taken of the site for its representation on postcards (Figure 5) make clear how the visitor is meant to engage with this memorial. The marble pavement stretching from the foreground into the middle distance, together with the two side railings, draws the viewer into the scene, which is then abruptly terminated by the wall on which is affixed the plaque. The window grills adjacent to the plaque suggest the barred windows of a prison, while the linked vertical iron columns that define the site reinforce the imagery of a jail cell. At the same time, the railings separate the space of the Black Hole from the viewer and announce it as a 'sacred' space not to be trod upon. On some postcards, as in the one shown in Figure 5, the photograph of the site is framed by a gilt-edged border. This framing further



Fig. 4 Black Hole site, prior to Curzon's reconstruction. The tablet above the gateway arch reads, 'The stone pavement close to this marks the position and site of the prison cell in old Fort William known in history as the "Black Hole" of Calcutta' (By permission of the Getty Research Institute)

sets the site apart as a 'sacred' space, and enables the postcard itself to be imagined as a valuable miniature painting. The numerous postcard views of the site, with others of similar character produced during the early twentieth century heyday of the colonial picture postcard, sustained an imperial nostalgia both for the

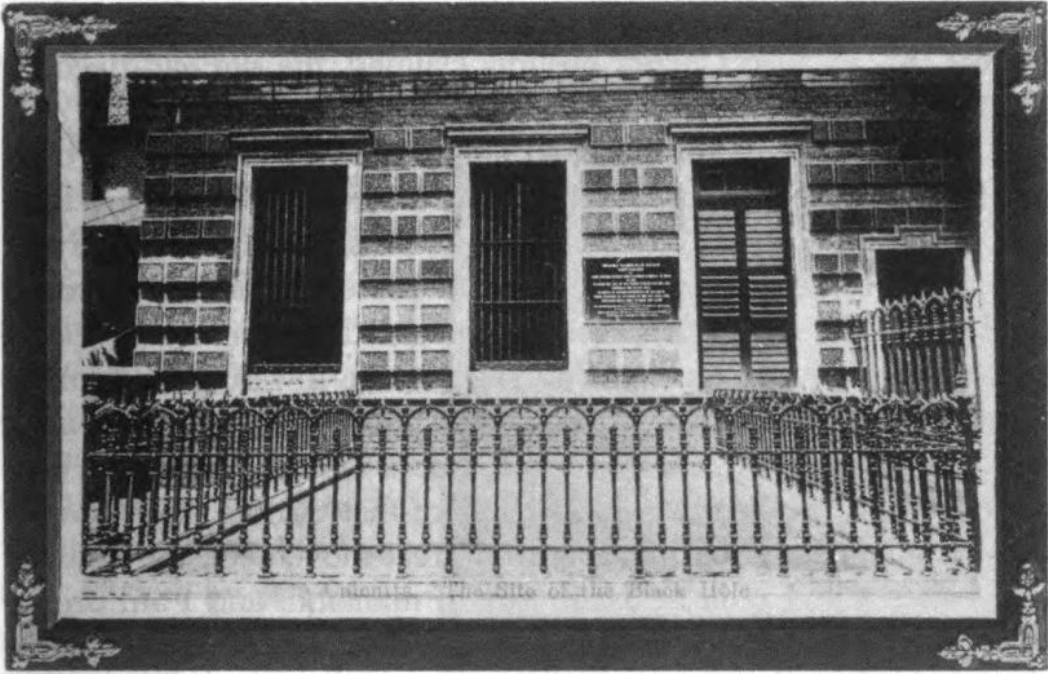


Fig. 5 The reconstructed Black Hole monument in front of the General Post Office, Calcutta, c. 1930 (Postcard from the Paul F. Walter collection)

traveller who sent them as well as for those back home who received these mementos.

Together, the brass lines, pavements, and tablets of the Black Hole site formed, in Curzon's view, a sort of tour by which visitors could 'make vivid' in their mind's eye, as they made their way from tablet to tablet, the tragic events of June 1756. Curzon himself set the precedent. Inaugurating the memorial, he said, 'I never pass this way without the Post Office and Custom House and the modern aspect of Writers Building fading out of my sight, while instead of them I see the walls and bastions of the old fort...and the ditch in front of the ravelin, into which the bodies of those who had died in the Black Hole were thrown the next morning'.¹⁴ To ensure that the whole ensemble was 'intelligible to the modern student', Curzon had two further models constructed in teak. One showed the fort as a whole; the other, rather like Busted's, left the top open so that the interior of the Black Hole was visible. These were exhibited in the Victoria Memorial Hall. That which had disappeared thus became real once again. By the imaginative use of space, accompanied by models and photographs, Curzon had adroitly contrived to give permanence and monumentality to a building that did not exist, and in so doing

to provide a solid 'foundation' in the past for the British Indian empire. By 1925, so Curzon proudly claimed, the site had become 'a place of pilgrimage to all visitors to Calcutta'.¹⁵

There remained Holwell's monument. As Curzon told the crowd at its inauguration in December 1902, 'I determined to reproduce this memorial with as much fidelity as possible in white marble, to re-erect it on the same site, and to present it as my personal gift to the city of Calcutta'. As the imagined prison was to testify to the horrors of Siraj-ud-Daula's regime, the towering monument next to it, inscribed with the names of those who had died as a result of the Black Hole, was to provide a lesson in morality and patriotism for the British. The 'victims of that terrible night', were, Curzon recounted, 'the pioneers of a great movement, the authors of a wonderful chapter in the history of mankind: and I am proud that it has fallen to my lot to preserve their simple and humble names from oblivion, and to restore them to the grateful remembrance of their countrymen'.¹⁶

Curzon had to confront two questions: whether to reconstruct Holwell's original pillar in its exact dimensions; and how to deal with Holwell's inscription on the monument, which not only omitted the names of a number of the dead but spoke with bitterness of the confinement of the prisoners as a 'horrid act of violence' 'deservedly revenged' by the subsequent conquest of Bengal. Conceiving of the original monument as being 'rather stunted', Curzon had two models made, each composed of cloth and boards. After an extensive inspection of the two, placed side by side on the site, he chose, as the *Indian Daily News* reported, the one with the pedestal 'considerably heightened for effect'. The aim was to represent the original monument, but 'with something more lofty and on a grander scale'. Figure 6 shows the monument as finally constructed. Curzon endeavoured to minimize any 'possible controversy' by putting up the money for the monument out of his own pocket. In the end, he contributed 9450 rupees out of a total cost of 18,565 rupees.¹⁷

Given the subject matter of the monument, and its placement at the heart of the most politically volatile city in India, controversy could hardly be avoided. Even before the monument was completed, the Indian press had launched a campaign of opposition to it. As *The Bengali* wrote on 20 March 1901, 'A tablet

such as is proposed would keep alive the remembrance of an event which should be buried in oblivion'. Further, they insisted, 'We regard the Black Hole tragedy as a myth—a gigantic fable—a fraud upon history'.¹⁸

Curzon was not unaware of the difficulty of commemorating the Black Hole in an India increasingly stirred by nationalist sentiment, which was to erupt with fury in 1905 when he partitioned the province of Bengal. Curzon sought to blunt criticism by removing from the monument all references to 'revenge'.

As he said at its inauguration, 'I have struck out [Holwell's harsh references to Siraj-ud-Daula] as calculated to keep alive feelings that we would all wish to see die'. The stirring up of racial animosity was no part of Curzon's plan for the remembrance of the Raj.

Once the Black Hole Memorial had been set in place, Curzon moved on to commemorate the subsequent Battle of Plassey. He had the positions of the various forces on the battlefield marked out by small pillars containing appropriate inscriptions, and he replaced an existing pillar marking the site by a 'noble obelisk', designed by himself, set on the highest point of the field. On this obelisk, Curzon placed an inscription reading, 'On this site the British forces numbering 3200 under the command of Col. Robert Clive defeated the army of Siraj-ud-Daula, numbering 50,000, and won the dominion of India for the British Crown'. Not content with this memorial, back in England after his retirement Curzon set about securing subscriptions for a 'personal memorial' to Clive

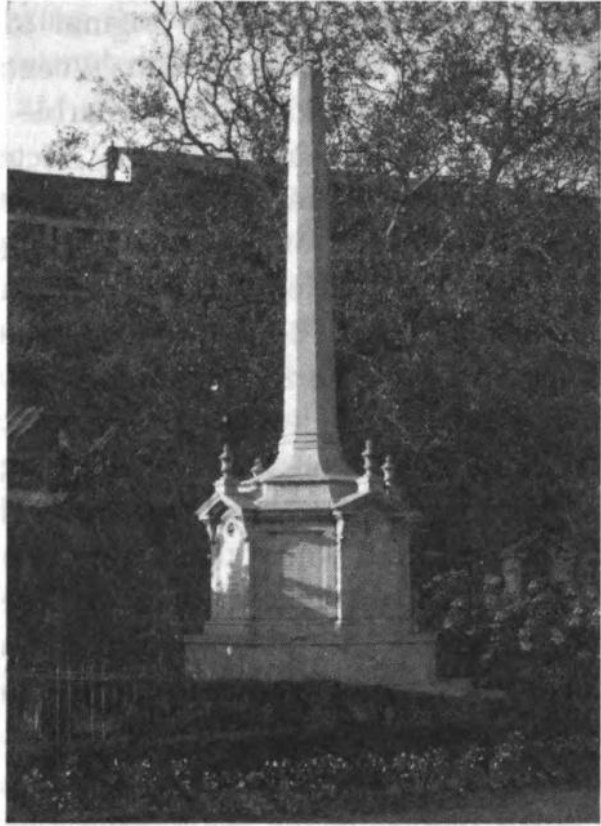


Fig. 6 Photograph of the reconstructed Black Hole monument in the Yard in the of St Johns Church, Calcutta (Photo by author)

himself. Abandoning his original idea of setting up a bronze figure on the *maidan* [Calcutta's central park], Curzon eventually secured funds sufficient for a marble statue.¹⁹ This found a home in the sculpture gallery of the Victoria Memorial.

To justify the construction of such memorials, whether at Plassey, the Black Hole, or in Delhi, Curzon adopted the pose of a disinterested student of history. Inaugurating the Telegraph Memorial in Delhi, Curzon spoke eloquently of the fact that 'Tragedies and horrors and disasters do occur in the history of men, and it is useless to pretend that they do not. In the history of India they have not been wanting; and, as in the case of the Mutiny, there have been instances where the racial element was introduced, and where there were deeds of blackness and shame'. One should not 'ignore' them or 'pretend that they did not take place'. Rather, he said, we should 'pass over them the sponge of forgiveness; blot them out with the finger of mercy and of reconciliation'. All these events, he concluded grandly, 'are wayside marks in the onward stride of time'. If some are 'slippery with human blood', let us 'wipe them clear of their stains' so that the English and the Indian people can march 'to a better understanding and a truer union'.²⁰

Such rhetoric, with the monuments it was meant to sustain, had little hope of achieving its objectives. The 'racial element' that inspired 'deeds of blackness and shame' in 1857 had caught up both Indians and British; yet Curzon sought reconciliation by the erasure, not the acknowledgement, of the deeds committed by the British. More generally, to make of the Black Hole a site for the remembrance of the 'sacrifice and suffering' of its British victims inevitably depreciated the 'sacrifices' of the Raj's Indian opponents, whose subjugation, as the perpetrators of the Black Hole and the Mutiny, was thereby rendered legitimate. As with the Victoria Memorial, so too with the Black Hole and Mutiny Memorials, Curzon had created a past for the Raj in India which inevitably excluded, as equal participants, the people of India. They could claim a place in it only by accepting the justice of colonial rule, and the generosity, forgiveness, and beneficence of their rulers.

Though the Victoria Memorial as a museum found an enduring place in Calcutta, the Black Hole Monument evoked only bitter antagonism. In 1940, for instance, the famed Bengali nationalist

Subhash Chandra Bose, seeking the memorial's removal, wrote that it 'is not merely an unwarranted stain on the memory of the Nawab [Siraj-ud-Daula], but has stood in the heart of Calcutta for the last 150 years or more as the symbol of our slavery and humiliation'.²¹ Not surprisingly, after Independence, the Holwell Memorial was removed from its prominent site outside the Post Office and placed in the yard of St John's Church, where it remains. The presumed site of the Black Hole itself, so lovingly marked out by Curzon, has been obliterated. The creation of a historical memory that endures requires memorials that incorporate the ideals and the imagined past of the community in whose midst they take shape, not just those of its colonial rulers.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Thomas Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India, Being a Selection from his Speeches as Viceroy and Governor-General of India* (London, 1906), pp. 182-5.

2. Speech of 19 December 1902, *ibid.*, p. 447. For discussion of British attitudes toward memorialization, see my 'Past and Present: Towards an Aesthetics of Colonialism', Essay 9 in this volume.

3. Orders of December 1899; A.P. MacDonnell to Curzon, 19 October 1900; Curzon to E.N. Baker, 10 April 1905, in OIOC Curzon Papers Mss. Eur. F 111/620, esp. pp. 126, 152-3.

4. Curzon to Lord George Hamilton, 17 December 1903, *ibid.*, p. 139. For a discussion of Deen Dayal, see Clark Worswick, ed., *Princely India: Photographs by Raja Deen Dayal 1884-1910* (New York, 1980) and John Falconer, *India: Pioneering Photographers 1850-1900* (London, 2001).

5. For a discussion of Curzon's Durbar, see Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley California, 1989), pp. 201-2 and Metcalf, *Ideologies of Raj* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 196-8.

6. Speech of 19 April 1902, in Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, pp. 439-42.

7. Speech of 19 December 1902, *ibid.*, p. 448; speech of 6 February 1901, *ibid.*, pp. 517-26, esp. p. 521; speech of 26 February 1901, *ibid.*, p. 530; for a discussion of the architectural style of the memorial see Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, pp. 203-9.

8. Speech of 26 February 1901, in Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, pp. 533-4, 547.

9. Speech of 19 December 1902, *ibid.*, p. 443; and Curzon of Kedleston, *British Government in India* (London, 1925), Vol. I, p. 150.

10. Deana Health, personal communication, Berkeley, California, 15 January 2002.

11. Speech of 19 December 1902, in Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, p. 443.

12. Busteed was assay master of the Calcutta Mint 1872–86, and author of *Echoes of Old Calcutta* (1882). In 1937, Busteed's model of the Black Hole was donated by his daughter Edith Busteed to the India Office Library, where it remains. [See IOR L/R/7/317]

13. For Curzon's account of the marking of the site, see his *British Government in India*, Vol. I, pp. 150–7.

14. Speech of 19 December 1902, in Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, p. 444.

15. Curzon, *British Government in India*, p. 157.

16. Speech of 19 December 1902, in Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, pp. 445, 447.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 446; Curzon, *British Government in India*, p. 164; cutting from *Indian Daily News* of 16 March 1901 in Mss. Eur. F 111/482. Correspondence regarding the cost, and arrangements for payment, is found in Mss. Eur. F 111/482.

18. Cutting from *The Bengali*, 20 March 1901, in *ibid.*

19. For the Plassey Monument, see Curzon's 1905 correspondence with the Bengal government in Mss. Eur. F 111/446; for the Clive Memorial, see the correspondence in Mss. Eur. F 111/467 and 448A.

20. Speech of 19 April 1902, in Raleigh, ed., *Lord Curzon in India*, pp. 440–1.

21. Speech of 29 June 1940, cited in Leonard Gordon, *Brothers against the Raj* (New Delhi, 1990), p. 412.

Past and Present: Towards an Aesthetics of Colonialism*

On 19 April 1905, Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, wrote to Lord Cromer, British Proconsul in Egypt:

I want to give a beautiful hanging lamp of Saracenic design to be hung (in the Taj Mahal) above the cenotaphs of Shah Jahan and his queen in the upper mausoleum. The original chain is still hanging from the centre of the great dome, but the lamp has long disappeared. I have been trying for years to get the people here to give me a design, but have failed. I turn therefore to Cairo, where my recollection is that some very beautiful lamps still hang in the Arab mosques. If I can get a good design I would propose to have one of these reproduced in silver at Cairo. The style of the Taj you know to be what we call Indo-Saracenic, which is really Arabic, with flowering substituted for geometric patterns.¹

What is striking about this passage—other than the fact that two such powerful imperial luminaries as Lords Curzon and Cromer are corresponding about lamps—is the sense of mastery, control, and self-confidence that emanates from it, and that not on a matter of high policy, but of aesthetics. Curzon knew what the Taj was, how it should be decorated, and who had the responsibility for its ornamentation (Figure 1). We shall return presently to the Taj lamp—which still hangs where Curzon placed it—but let us first

First published in G.H.R. Tillotson, ed., *Paradigms of Indian Architecture: Space and Time in Representation and Design* (London: Curzon Press, 1998), pp. 12–25. By permission of Taylor and Francis Group, Thomson Publishing Services.

notice two other—seemingly different—structures of the same years. One is the Victoria Memorial Hall, Madras, designed by H.C. Irwin in 1906. Built of red sandstone, this building endeavoured to recreate the style of Akbar's capital of Fatehpur Sikri, a thousand miles to the north. The second, a thousand miles to the east of Madras, is the Selangor Secretariat in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, completed in 1897 (Figure 2). Its architectural style was described at the time variously as 'Arabesque judiciously mixed with Indian detail', and, by the architect C.E. Spooner, simply as 'Mahometan'.

What is it, one must ask, that binds together as distinctively colonial these three diverse building enterprises—the Taj lamp, the Madras Memorial, and the Selangor Secretariat? In what ways can they be seen as manifesting a set of aesthetic values at all different from those of earlier Indian rulers? How is Curzon's search for a lamp for the Taj different, say, from Feroz Shah Tughlaq's removal in the fourteenth century of a Mauryan pillar from Meerut to his new capital at Kotla Feroz Shah? Is the British modelling of the Madras museum on Akbar's capital at all different from the Vijayanagara rulers' emulation of the architectural styles of the Cholas, or the eighteenth-century Travancore Raja Martanda Varma's use in painting and architecture of the styles of *his* predecessors, that is, of Vijayanagara and its successor Nayak kingdom? At one level, of course, the answer is obvious. The British as colonial rulers, as I have argued elsewhere, saw in the use of Indian styles a way to affirm their legitimacy as rulers. As



Fig. 1 Lord Curzon's lamp in the Taj Mahal
(By permission of the British Library)

the architect William Emerson, a foremost designer of Saracenic structures, put it, the British should follow the example of those whom they had supplanted as conquerors, the Mughals, who had 'seized upon the art indigenous to the countries they conquered, adapting it to suit their own needs and ideas'. Indeed, argued the Madras governor, Lord Napier, in 1870, the Indian government ought 'to consider whether the Mussulman form might not be adopted generally as the official style of architecture'. Throughout the subsequent half-century, the British endeavoured to represent themselves, and their empire, as 'Indian' through the patronage of 'Saracenic' forms.²

Yet matters are not so simple. Earlier rulers too, whether the Mughals or those of Vijayanagara, were not averse to appropriating the politically-charged forms of their predecessors as a way of legitimizing their own regimes. Feroz Shah surely did not drag an Asokan column all the way from Meerut to Delhi simply for his amusement. Though he did not know of its third-century BC origins, this massive stone shaft, with its roots in the ancient past, and its association with the mythic heroes of antiquity, still served (or was meant to serve) an important purpose—that of giving Feroz Shah's inept and tottering regime a status, at least in the emperor's own eyes, that it otherwise lacked. Jahangir too erected in the Allahabad fort a Mauryan pillar bearing inscriptions by Asoka, Samudragupta, and other ancient rulers; and he added to these his own name with full regnal titles and lineage back to Timur. Most importantly, he erected this pillar several months before Akbar died while he was himself still heir apparent. Jahangir's act thus served a double purpose: of affirming at once the legitimacy of the Mughal dynasty, as heir to the illustrious predecessors whose inscriptions the pillar contained, as well as his own personal claim to the throne.³

Curzon, nevertheless, was not Jahangir. One critical difference is to be found perhaps, not so much in the *purpose* for which Indic architectural elements were used, but in the *way* they were deployed. One must, that is, look at the underlying sets of assumptions about 'India', about 'architecture', and about 'history', that shaped British Indian building as compared with those of pre-colonial Indian rulers. This is obviously a complex subject about which it is unwise to make easy generalizations. A case could be

made, however, for the argument that, by and large, Indian rulers participated in an ongoing indigenous architectural tradition. This made available to them an array of forms and styles which they could rework imaginatively, but which confined them within certain modes appropriate to their set time and place in India. Contrary to the accepted view in most scholarly writing since the mid-nineteenth century, Akbar, for instance, as he built Fatehpur Sikri, surely did not self-consciously deal out architectural elements labelled 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' in order to create for his political purposes a 'synthesis' or 'syncretism' of the two religions. The vision, for instance, of the Diwan-i-Khas, as containing, as H.H. Cole wrote, an interior column 'thoroughly Hindu' in its outline and details, but covered with 'Mahometan' decorative carving, is one that is wholly British, and wholly colonial.⁴

In his building enterprises, Akbar participated instead in a regional architectural tradition of the sixteenth century. Its forms are to be found in the neighbouring, and contemporaneous, sites of Fatehpur Sikri, Datia, and Gwalior, and were employed alike by rulers of the Hindu and Muslim faiths. To be sure, powerful men, such as Akbar and Jahangir or the Vijayanagara emperors, might endeavour to associate their reigns with the glories of past kingdoms by stylistic emulation, by the appropriation of objects, or by an exaggeration of forms.⁵ A vast scale of building announced a ruler's intent to surpass the work of his predecessors. But these monarchs all worked from within a distinctive set of aesthetic conventions—about architecture, about the past, and about how the past was meant to inform royal building—that set them apart from their successors, the British, whose building activities in India were shaped by a wholly different set of assumptions.

One way of capturing part of the difference might be to say that Indian artists and designers endeavoured to make the past, seen as flexible and fluid, into the present, while for the British their chief objective was to make the present appear to be the past. Vishakha Desai's study of copying in painting offers some suggestive insights. In her view, when eighteenth-century artists modelled their work on earlier Bundi paintings, they followed the original composition and iconographical styles, and then altered clothing, furniture, and architectural elements to reflect contemporary taste. Nothing else changed. The paintings took this

shape not because the artist was trapped in some unchanging 'immemorial' tradition, nor were they the product of an unsuccessful attempt to recreate the past. Rather, seeing the present as an extension of the past, the artist endeavoured by an exercise of imaginative interpretation to synchronize past and present in his work, and so evoke the correct emotion in the viewer. When, in the early nineteenth century, artists began to copy earlier Mughal paintings for British patrons, however, the situation was dramatically reversed. Explicitly instructed to *copy* such works, the artist could no longer exercise the freedom of updating clothing, furniture, or architecture. Instead, he was meant to create consciously archaized works that would delude British buyers into thinking that they had purchased a Mughal original. The tie to a glorious past remained—in the desire of the British to procure works of their illustrious Mughal predecessors—but the whole relation to that past was different. No longer was it to flow into the present. It was a past seen as past, from which the British stood apart. Now, for the first time, as he sought to make the present appear to be the past, was the copyist painter truly confined by tradition. It was, however, British, not Indian tradition, that confined him.⁶

One must beware, of course, of attributing these differing perceptions to some inherent difference between India and Britain, or arguing that there exists some essentially 'Indian' mode of appropriating the past. The typology of the 'present' as a centre into which the past always runs, and which alone gives meaning to the 'past', is not a mode of thought uniquely Indic. It is found elsewhere, above all in Europe itself, before the rise in the Enlightenment of a historicist, or linear, consciousness. In this earlier view, the present was not simply a link in a chain of empty events, but simultaneously that which has been and that which will be. Early Italian and Flemish painters of the Nativity, for instance, clearly expressed this vision in paintings that, without incongruity, dressed the Holy Family in contemporary garb, while setting the scenic backdrop in the painter's own locale, Tuscany or Flanders, say, not Palestine. Only from the seventeenth century, or later, does the past become a 'foreign country' cut off from ourselves and our time.⁷

Informed by novel, and peculiarly modern European, perspectives on time and the past, the colonial aesthetic thus

involved a self-conscious distancing of the British from India and its past. To be sure, the British often imagined themselves within the ongoing traditions of Indian design. James Ransome, consulting architect to the Government of India, in 1905, for instance, without any sense of incongruity described the tomb of Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri together with Swinton Jacob's 1880 Albert Hall in Jaipur as representative samples of 'Saracenic work'.⁸ Indeed the very use of the term 'Indo-Saracenic' by the British to describe their own building, as well as that which had gone before, carried with it the implication that their structures were but the latest in a long line of buildings constructed in a similar style.

Yet the British always ordered Indic elements in new ways, and for novel purposes, with scant regard for the contexts in which they were rooted. The ritual of the great British Indian durbars is suggestive. Although Disraeli, when he made Queen Victoria Empress of India, exulted that now, as his viceroy Lord Lytton put it, the monarch would 'sit in the seat of the great Mogul', nevertheless the accompanying decoration and ritual were all inspired by European feudalism, and represented a British conception of India as medieval and its princes as feudal vassals. In his 1903 Durbar, repudiating Lytton's 'medieval' idiom, Curzon sought to utilize the 'familiar and even sacred' forms of 'the East'. As he proudly proclaimed, the entire arena was 'built and decorated exclusively in the Mogul, or Indo-Saracenic style'. Yet Curzon refused to sanction an exchange of presents, or *nazrs*, which had formed the central binding element of pre-colonial durbars. Instead he had each prince in turn mount the dais and offer a message of congratulation to the new king-emperor. Curzon then simply shook hands with the chief as he passed by. Incorporation and inclusion, so powerfully symbolized by *khillat* and *nazr*, had given way, despite the Mughal scenery and the pretence, to a wholly colonial ritual.⁹

In architecture, a similar sense of distance and manipulation informed at once Britain's own building in India and the British appropriation of its historic buildings. Swinton Jacob's six-volume 1890 *Jeypore Portfolio of Architectural Details*, for instance, brought together for British Indian buildings 375 plates of architectural drawings, illustrating an array of elements from historic buildings throughout northern India. In similar fashion, during the later

nineteenth century, and especially during Lord Curzon's viceroyalty, the British meticulously identified India's major historic sites, and preserved them through the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Yet none of this took appreciable account of the historical context in which such structures came into being. Design elements the British liked—such as the arch and dome, together with various plinths, copings, capitals, brackets, and so forth, illustrated in Jacob's compendium—were, in their view, available for any purpose and could be employed anywhere. For the colonial builder, that is, the elements of Indian architecture represented not an aesthetic tradition within which he worked, but an external 'Oriental' aesthetic, whose elements, at the deepest level, were similar and interchangeable.

Of course, the British were not unaware of India's lengthy and complex past. To the contrary, they were determined from the beginning of their rule to give to this land a 'proper' history. For this purpose, India's historic architecture served at once as text and signifier. As the pioneer architectural historian James Fergusson wrote, the architecture of India was a 'great stone book, in which each tribe and race has written its annals and recorded its faith'. Fergusson himself, and after him the ASI, set on foot a minute and detailed study of India's monuments with the objective of compiling a 'systematic record and description' of all historic structures, and so placing them in proper chronological order. Nor was this history without a moral. For these ancient structures, so the British argued, told a tale of India's decline from an ancient era of greatness, associated above all with the Buddhist period, to a 'corrupt' and degenerate' idolatry associated with medieval Hinduism. Almost always, the triumphs of Indian art were ascribed to the influence of foreign invaders. As Curzon told the Asiatic Society in 1900, India's great artistic achievements were all 'exotics imported into this country in the train of conquerors, who had learnt their architectural lessons in Persia, in Central Asia, in Arabia, in Afghanistan'. The British themselves were only 'borne to India on the crest of a later but similar wave'.¹⁰

Nevertheless, despite this obsession with history, in practice, the process of preservation abstracted monuments from their historical context. In archaeology, the colonial aesthetic demanded that ancient monuments be preserved, preferably in garden

surroundings, in a half-ruined state. The aesthetic was one of the 'picturesque', in which romantic notions of 'grandeur' and 'fallen majesty' were linked to a keen sense of the British role in preserving these structures in the proper state of arrested decay. Mute witnesses to a past whose achievements had been superseded by those of the Raj, India's antiquities could not be allowed to crumble into oblivion, nor could they be put to use, either by the British themselves or by the local people. A district official was slapped down when he proposed outfitting Tirumal Nayak's palace at Madurai as government offices, while Curzon spoke disapprovingly of devotees being allowed annually to whitewash the tombs of saints in Bijapur. He insisted that, once the government had saved these structures from 'destructive carelessness and the uncultured neglect' of the British, 'we were not going to hand them back to the dirt and defilement of Asiatic religious practices'. Indeed, as he told the Asiatic Society in 1900, 'A race like our own, who are themselves foreigners, are in a sense better fitted to guard, with a dispassionate and impartial zeal, the relics of different ages, and of sometimes antagonistic beliefs, than might be the descendants of the warring races of the votaries of the rival creeds'.¹¹

So thoroughly did the British tear India's monuments from their historic connections, that they never even considered preserving intact entire districts or neighbourhoods in India's cities. In 1912, New Delhi, for instance was set down next to the seventeenth-century Mughal capital of Shahjahanabad, now called 'Old Delhi'. But the British objective in doing so was only to associate their Raj with that of its Indian predecessor. The fate of that older urban centre was of no concern to them. Indeed, the British themselves had demolished large chunks of Shahjahanabad for reasons of security after the 1857 revolt, and subsequently tore out further tracts as they drove the new railway lines through the city. In addition, over time, the city's *mohallas* (neighbourhoods) and *havelis* (mansions) were transformed in character. Once the splendid residences of wealthy princes whose harems, dependants, and storehouses covered vast areas focused around ornately-decorated courtyards, these structures were subdivided, sold and taken over by squatters and petty shopkeepers as the old Mughal elite became ever more impoverished; many over time even became centres of small-scale manufacturing. Even British surveys

of these historic structures were not accompanied by any measures to preserve them. Gordon Sanderson, for instance, in 1916 consigned most of Delhi's old tombs and havelis to a category of decayed and 'dilapidated' structures, allowed to remain 'monuments of interest' so long as they 'keep together'.¹² Nostalgia for a 'picturesque' old Delhi is a very recent phenomenon.

Such a strategy contrasts not only with the preservation, and renewal, over centuries of such contemporaneous Asian capitals as Isfahan, but even with French colonial practice, above all in Lyautey's Morocco. There, in the years after 1912, under the influence of the ideals of 'associationism', French planners, while erecting ordered colonial cities for themselves (the *nouvelle ville*), also carefully preserved, in their entirety, indigenous urban forms, above all the *medinas* of the old cities of Fez, Marrakesh, and Rabat. To be sure, in the process, the French constructed a notion of Moroccan culture, with the medina that represented it, as frozen in a 'picturesque' past. By its very nature too, the act of defining another's cultural heritage, arrogant and patronizing, made manifest the authority of the colonial regime. Moroccans had no voice in these decisions. Though, at one level, no more than a romantic vision of the exotic, counterposed to the 'modern' French colonial towns, still, as Gwendolyn Wright has written in her study of French colonial urbanism, the preservation of a city such as Fez testifies to a sensitivity, 'an awareness of cultural particularities', perhaps to an 'aesthetic of pluralism', not found in British India.¹³ One might argue, of course, that Delhi had been too battered by war, invasion, and revolt over the years since the early eighteenth century for its preservation to be a feasible undertaking. Nevertheless, British indifference to the living city of 'old' Delhi is striking when one considers the loving attention lavished upon deserted cities such as Fatehpur Sikri and Mandu. Only as a ruin, set in a romantic garden, and given over to tourists, could the British accommodate India's historic sites. Despite the work of James Fergusson and the ASI, one might say, the colonial aesthetic in India remained essentially detached from the country's past.

One might, then, return to two of the monuments with which we began—the Taj Mahal and the Selangor Secretariat. They have, a critic might insist, little in common. Yet both tell us much about the way the British, from within the confines of a colonial aes-

thetic, sought to make sense of the past and of the present. Even though the Selangor Secretariat is not in India at all, but in the Malayan capital of Kuala Lumpur, it still remains intimately connected to India. At one level, the connection is simply that of the designer. C.E. Spooner, Selangor State Engineer during the 1890s, though he never served in India itself, had spent some fifteen years employed by the Public Works Department in nearby Ceylon—an experience that presumably taught him what a properly ‘Oriental’ architecture ought to consist of. Hence, when the official Selangor government architect, A.C. Norman, submitted a design for the new building in a ‘classic Renaissance’ style, Spooner rejected it in favour of a structure in what he called the ‘Mahometan’ style.¹⁴ But the question remains: *why* should Spooner do this? After all, the Mughals had never ruled Malaya, and its sultans, though Muslim, had never employed Indic or ‘Saracenic’ forms. Indeed, there existed very little monumental architecture of any sort in pre-colonial Malaya. Consequently, with no models close at hand, Spooner, with his assistant R.A. Bidwell, had to invent his ‘Mahometan’ style as he went along. The Selangor Secretariat, with other Kuala Lumpur structures of similar character, thus mixed north Indian elements, like the platform-based cupolas or chattris, with horseshoe arches and bands of colour derived from North Africa and Spain, and imaginative features such as elongated spirelets somewhat reminiscent of Ottoman Turkey. The copper-clad

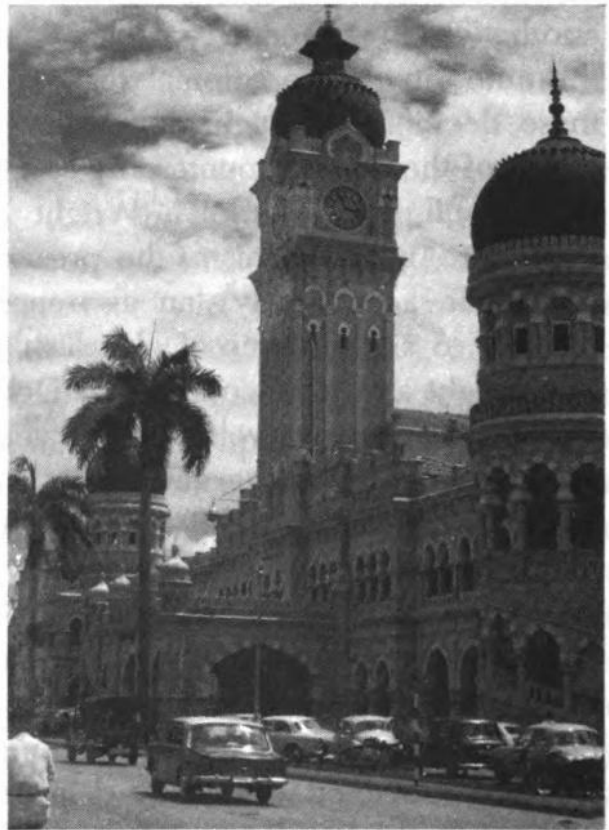


Fig. 2 The Selangor Secretariat, Kuala Lumpur (Photo by author)

clock-tower, lacking any Islamic precedent, was of course wholly colonial and idiosyncratic in its design.

Such an architecture clearly did not, unlike its counterpart in India, create a past for the British in Malaya, or link their regime to that of some illustrious predecessor. There were no such predecessors; such architectural forms had no past in Malaya. The British sought rather with these buildings to create for Malaya a diffuse 'Mahometan' past, but one defined by Orientalist fancy, not by local usage. All Muslim forms anywhere, that is, could evoke the 'Orient', and so could equally well represent and constitute what was for the British the central fact about Malaya: that, despite the immense number of Indians and Chinese who, along with the British, had come to exploit its resources of tin and rubber, this country was a Malay land; that being Muslim was a prominent part of being Malay; and that 'Muslimness' should take architectural shape through certain forms that the British, largely on the basis of their experience in India, had determined were properly 'Muslim'.

Even more than in India itself, in consequence, colonial building was in Malaya detached from the land and its past. The distinctive character of this aesthetic—at once wholly colonial and wholly modern—can perhaps best be appreciated by contrasting the design of Malaya's pre-colonial mosques with those erected under the British. Indigenous Malayan mosque design was extremely varied in character. Kampung Laut, for instance, erected in the early eighteenth century in Kelantan in the far north-east, was constructed of rich dark wood in a local style of interlocking pieces, while the contemporaneous Masjid Tenkara, at the opposite end of the country in Malacca, was characterized by the use of square sloping roofs joined by a pagoda, presumably of Chinese influence. In the early nineteenth century, as the populations of the coastal towns grew ever more cosmopolitan, the local Muslims devised ever more eclectic styles of mosque architecture. Some, originally from south India, built shrines that un-self-consciously joined together Corinthian pilasters, stepped pagoda-style minarets and domes. The most striking of these early nineteenth-century structures, is undoubtedly the 1846 Hajjah Fatimah mosque in Singapore, whose single prominent minaret recalls, and was presumably modelled

on, the nearby Anglican cathedral. In sum, until well into the colonial era there existed no sense that domes, arches, arabesques and all the rest were needed to make a building Muslim.

All this was to change as the British, after the conquest of Malaya in the 1870s, endeavoured to enforce upon its people, above all its sultans, an 'appropriate' architecture that would mark out the land as Muslim. The central mosque of Kuala Lumpur itself (1909) is perhaps representative. Its design incorporates an open courtyard, with three domes and two minarets, predominantly north Indian in character, together with bands of colour and scalloped arches drawn from non-Indian sources. The whole fitted harmoniously into the larger Kuala Lumpur architectural scheme, which was not surprising since the structure was designed by the local British architect, A.B. Hubback. But the British vision of Islam, and of Muslim architecture, could not be wholly contained within the chaste forms of north Indian design. Hubback himself designed what is by far the most lavish colonial mosque in Malaya—that of Kuala Kangsar (1915) in the tin-rich state of Perak. With its enormous dome and towering minarets, brilliantly painted a golden colour, its horseshoe arches that recall Andalusia, and the glowing red glass embedded in the base of the dome, this structure evoked a British fantasy of Islam wholly separate from the living world of the Malay peninsula.

In conclusion, we might return to the Taj Mahal. The Taj always posed enormous problems for the British. It was, simply, too beautiful, too magnificent, too overwhelming. British travellers, from the late eighteenth century onward, could hardly find word sufficient to praise it. William Hodges, for instance, wrote of the Taj that:

it possesses a degree of beauty, from the perfection of the materials and the excellence of the workmanship, which is only surpassed by its grandeur, extent, and general magnificence The fine materials, the beautiful forms, and the symmetry of the whole, with the judicious choice of situation, far surpasses anything I ever beheld.¹⁵

Certainly, some of the appeal of the Taj was due to the way it incorporated European aesthetic values such as balance and symmetry, together with its 'picturesque' location in a park-like garden, and its romantic associations with Shah Jahan and his

queen. Yet the attraction of the Taj was inseparable from the idea of the 'Orient'. As the architect William Emerson wrote:

Its romantic situation, dazzling brilliancy, excessive elaboration, and the ...lavish display of wealth in its ornamentation, make it beyond all others a place in which a cold-blooded Caucasian can perhaps realize somewhat of the poetical and luxurious feeling of the voluptuous Easterns.¹⁶

The custom of a moonlight viewing, as it was no doubt meant to be, further enhanced this exoticizing effect. In so far as the Taj represented for its European visitors an idealized 'Orient', detached from India, it expressed the values that shaped a colonial aesthetic. From the Kuala Kangsar mosque to the Taj Mahal was, in the end, but a small step.

Lord Curzon as Viceroy made the Taj his obsession. He visited Agra annually, and, as he himself proudly acknowledged, personally supervised and gave orders on every single detail of its restoration. He was determined, above all, to make the Taj resemble his vision of what it ought to have been like. He had the 'garish English flowers' removed, and rows of cypresses planted instead, ignoring critics who pointed out that their dense mass would interfere with the view of the building. He insisted that the guardians of the tomb, in place of their 'very dingy' ordinary garments, should wear 'the traditional garb of Mogul days'; and so he fitted them out with white suits with a green scarf and a badge. 'It is', he said, 'what Akbar himself always wore'.¹⁷ And he set out to find a lamp for the tomb chamber.

Given the enduring British view of the Taj as not only a Mughal, but a 'Saracenic' and an 'Oriental' structure, it is not surprising that Curzon looked to Cairo for his lamp. But his vision of where an appropriate lamp might be found was not confined to the mosques of Egypt. At the same time as he wrote to Cromer, Curzon asked the Imperial Library to send him any books they might have on Saracenic art. In particular, he suggested, 'the lavishly illustrated edition of the *Arabian Nights* which he used to pore over in his childhood' might have such designs. Alas, the Imperial Library had no copy of the *Arabian Nights*. In the end, on his way back to England at the end of his viceroyalty, Curzon stopped over in Cairo, where he himself visited the principal mosques and museums, and placed an order for a lamp made

from an Arabic model. 'I trust', he wrote, after its installation, 'that the lamp may hang there as my last tribute to the glories of Agra which float like a vision of eternal beauty in my memory'.¹⁸

Perhaps Curzon's lamp might be taken to represent the colonial aesthetic. It is an aesthetic of difference, of distance, of subordination, of control—an aesthetic in which the Taj Mahal, the mosques of Cairo, even the *Arabian Nights*, all merge and become indistinguishable, and hence are available for use however the colonial ruler chooses. It is an aesthetic in which the past, though ordered with scrupulous attention to detail, stays firmly in the past. It is an aesthetic Shah Jahan could never have comprehended.

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Architecture in the British Empire*

Any assessment of architecture within the British empire must take into account both the historic monuments of the colonized territories and colonial architecture. The British had to come to terms with the often imposing structures they encountered from India across the Middle East and even into Africa. For the most part, they did so by constructing a history for these territories, and their architecture, that linked that past to Britain's own past while preserving Britain's superiority. As they assessed the buildings they themselves had erected, the British brought to bear upon them canons of taste informed at once by aesthetics, history, and attitudes towards the empire. They judged such architecture too in terms of its likeness or difference from that with which they were familiar. For the most part, early expressions of pride gave way over time, first to severe condemnation, and then ultimately to a critical reappraisal mixed with nostalgia.

As British travellers, in the wake of the conquests of the East India Company, began to explore the Indian subcontinent, they found themselves overwhelmed by the 'sublime grandeur' of its ancient cave temples, while the tombs and palaces of the Mughals excited such admiration that the artist William Hodges exclaimed of the Taj Mahal that, 'the fine materials, the beautiful forms, and the symmetry of the whole, with the judicious choice of situation, far surpasses anything I ever beheld'.¹ This delight in the 'sublime'

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and the 'picturesque', shaped by the aesthetics of early-nineteenth-century Romanticism, involved, however, no coherent account of the past, or the present, of these structures. The classifying and ordering of India's historic architecture was to be a product of the mid-nineteenth century, above all the work of two men—James Fergusson and Alexander Cunningham—and it went hand-in-hand with the establishment of the Raj itself on a new basis after 1858.

A one-time indigo planter and self-taught student of architecture, James Fergusson set himself the task of bringing India's architectural history 'within the domain of science'. In the process he not only described and catalogued India's historic architecture, above all in his authoritative *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876), but he also devised the categories by which it was to be understood for the subsequent century. Two fundamental assumptions shaped the study of India's architecture: the theory of decline, and that of the division of India's peoples into the two opposed communities of Hindus and Muslims. Sustaining these assumptions was the conviction that at no time could India, or its architecture, however great its accomplishments, stand comparison with Europe. As Fergusson wrote on the very first page of his *History*: 'It cannot for one moment be contended that India ever reached the intellectual supremacy of Greece, or the moral greatness of Rome'. Hence, inevitably, her historic architecture could 'contain nothing so sublime as the hall at Karnac, nothing so intellectual as the Parthenon, nor so constructively grand as a medieval cathedral'.²

The theory of decline complemented the idea of progress which, from the Enlightenment onwards, defined Europe's perception of its own past. Indeed, the notion of a continuous Eastern 'decline' provided the necessary foil against which the triumphalism of Western 'progress' could be measured. Further, scholars such as Fergusson insisted that their aesthetic judgements were not mere prejudice, but rather expressed universal principles valid for all times and cultures. The superiority of the Parthenon over the Taj Mahal, for instance, was confirmed by its rank upon a numerical scale that measured 'the true principles of beauty in art'. In similar fashion, south India's medieval temples were not merely unpleasing, but constructed according to a 'false system of design'. In contravention of the universal principle that structures required a 'tall central object to give dignity to the whole from the outside',

the south Indian temple builders had enclosed the sanctuary with a series of towers that decreased, rather than increased, in size as they approached the centre. This, Fergusson argued, 'is a mistake which nothing can redeem'.³

The notion of decline at once made possible an appreciation of India's ancient architecture, and yet, as the two cultures diverged ever more dramatically, paved the way for British colonial conquest. Invariably the oldest structures were the finest. This reflected in part the Oriental scholarship of those who, from Warren Hastings's time onwards, had, with Sir William Jones, been drawn to the 'magnificence' of an ancient civilization whose language, and whose texts, they had themselves deciphered. In the early nineteenth century, the discoveries of the Ajanta caves and Gandharan art, with the simultaneous recognition of the existence of an extended period of Buddhist predominance, provided a new and attractive way of marking out India's era of ancient greatness. Not only was the Buddhist faith free of Hindu 'superstition', but its art, shaped by aesthetic forms similar to, and in part influenced by, those of classical Greece, could be awarded unstinting praise. Thenceforward, however, as Hinduism displaced Buddhism, the 'backward decline' of India's architecture proceeded unabated. Products of an 'idolatrous and corrupt' society, neither India's medieval temples nor the rulers who erected them deserved much respect.

With the coming of Islam to India in the medieval era, architectural styles related to those of the Middle East found a footing in South Asia. For the British, these styles, which incorporated the dome and arch as central elements, were reassuringly familiar. As Lord Napier, Governor of Madras, wrote in 1870, Islamic architecture united 'dignity, elegance, and the picturesque' with 'perfect constructive science'.⁴ Labelled 'Saracenic', the buildings erected by Muslim rulers were juxtaposed to, but seen as wholly separate from, contemporaneous 'Hindu' architecture. From the outset, the British had taken it for granted that there existed in India distinct 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' communities, and that these differences in religious belief shaped enduring differences in character. To be Hindu or Muslim by itself, that is, explained much of the way Indians acted. Not surprisingly, therefore, India's architecture, as the British sought to classify it, expressed the values of these religiously defined communities. Much in Indian

Islamic architecture, along with the other achievements of these conquering warriors, was seen as deserving of praise. Akbar's capital at Fatehpur Sikri, for instance, marked out his 'wisdom, clemency, and justice', while the Taj Mahal was always seen as the 'central jewel' of a 'brilliant and splendid' architecture.⁵ Nevertheless, neither this architecture nor its patrons were exempt from the universal law of 'Oriental' decline. By the eighteenth century, the architectural 'abominations' and 'vulgarity' of such post-Mughal rulers as the nawabs of Awadh (Oudh) defined a society of such 'utter degradation' that the British conquest was wholly justified.⁶

The study of India's archaeological remains was informed by much the same schema. Like Fergusson, Alexander Cunningham was determined to place the study of archaeology on a 'scientific' basis, and during the 1860s, as India's first archaeological surveyor, he initiated a systematic investigation that produced a list of monuments, classified, labelled, and deemed worthy of restoration and protection. This enterprise gave India a visible past, but one defined by the imperial regime, and sustained by the assumption that the Indian people had themselves neglected and defiled these monuments. Preserved in a state of picturesque decay, isolated from the living present, India's archaeological sites testified at once to the country's past greatness, her subsequent decline, and Britain's essential role as custodian of that greatness.

These assumptions shaped all subsequent studies of India's historic architecture. The earliest indigenous scholars, men such as Rajendralal Mitra, the author of a two-volume account of the antiquities of Orissa, contested Fergusson's claim that only the British were able authoritatively to define the nature of India's past, and insisted upon the autonomy and originality of design in India's architectural traditions; in return, Mitra found himself, together with all 'native knowledge', vilified.⁷ Other scholars, such as A.K. Coomaraswamy, seeking ways to assuage the hurt of the colonized, argued for the existence in India's art and culture of a 'spiritual essence' which set India apart from a 'materialistic' West, and whose elements could be discerned, for instance, in the cosmological symbolism of the Hindu temple.

Nevertheless, neither the nationalists nor later European scholars called into question the larger theory of decline or the division of

India's peoples, and her architecture, into the two opposed communities of Hindus and Muslims. Fergusson's *History*, reprinted in 1910, continued to be the standard work on India's architecture until the middle of the twentieth century; and such writers as Percy Brown and Benjamin Rowland only further elaborated its fundamental ideas. To be sure, some critics, such as Hermann Goetz, spoke up for the 'rococo' beauty of India's 'decadent' eighteenth-century art, but for the most part India's architectural history, apart from the great Mughal monuments, still came to an end no later than the thirteenth century. Later structures were at best 'overripe'.⁸ The struggles that led to the partition of the subcontinent also, by the logic of historicism, validated the categories of communal affiliation. Inevitably, after 1947, Hindu and Muslim were read back into the past as the defining markers of South Asia's cultural identity.

Only in the last years of the twentieth century have scholars begun to appraise more favourably the architecture of the later medieval kingdoms, and at the same time to call into question the easy association of religion with architectural style. Writers such as Catherine Asher and George Michell identified regional clusters of styles, shared among religious communities, that embody the 'taste' of particular eras. In this scholarship, the Hindu state of Vijayanagara, for instance, and its Muslim neighbour Bijapur, even while they warred against each other, are seen as joined by architectural styles and forms of patronage that blurred even the distinction between mosque and temple.⁹ The ending of the imperial connection, with the questioning in recent years of the Orientalist certainties that sustained it, have at last opened up a new historiography of India's historic architecture.

Outside India, imposing monuments were rare in the areas that comprised the British empire. Most were located in the Middle East. The massive tombs and other structures of ancient Egypt exerted a powerful attraction for European observers, especially after the Napoleonic expedition in 1798 and the decipherment of the hieroglyphic script. As the oldest surviving structures on earth, they possessed a secure hold on Europe's imagination. Middle Eastern Islamic architecture similarly drew admirers from among European scholars and travellers from the early nineteenth century onwards. Most compelling, perhaps, was the Alhambra in Granada,

Spain. Exotic yet comprehensible, with its fountains and arches, its coloured tiles and intricate stalactite domes, the Alhambra was well situated to appeal to the Romantic imagination. Travellers and artists, from the American visitor Washington Irving to the painter John Frederick Lewis and the architectural designer Owen Jones, all published extensive volumes of illustrations and stories drawn from the Alhambra. But Moorish Spain had long vanished—that, of course, was part of its attraction—and Spain was now an independent Christian land. Nor was Egypt allowed to escape the logic of ‘Oriental’ decline. Even the sympathetic Richard Burton, travelling through Cairo, described a ‘gradual decadence of art through one thousand two hundred years down to the present day’.¹⁰

For the most part, as tropical Africa, South-east Asia, and the South Pacific came under imperial dominion, the British regarded their inhabitants as mere savages. The lack of an imposing architecture, indeed, reinforced this presumption. As hunters and gatherers who did not erect permanent shelters for their homes, the Australian aborigines, in the view of the British colonizers, could make no claim even over the land itself. Hence the newcomers were free to do with it what they wished. In Malaya, as they built their new capital of Kuala Lumpur, with its massive government offices, the British imagined themselves taming a wilderness ‘where man scarce ever trod, and whose only inhabitants were the beasts of the forests’.¹¹ In tropical Africa, however, one monumental ruin did exist, that of Great Zimbabwe, and its history and meaning were to prove a subject of enduring controversy.

As British adventurers and explorers marched into central Africa to claim what became the colony of Southern Rhodesia, they were drawn by reports of an ancient kingdom associated with the legendary King Solomon’s mines. The earliest archaeologists, sent by Cecil Rhodes in the 1890s, refused to believe that the indigenous Shona peoples could have constructed the vast and intricate structure of the Zimbabwe ruin. Imbued with the racist assumptions of the late Victorian era, men such as J. Theodore Bent insisted that the builders had to have been a ‘former civilized race’ for whom the walled structure would have acted as a defensive fortification amidst a conquered people. Such a race could only, in their view, have been of Semitic stock, and probably consisted of Phoenicians from the Middle East drawn by reports of gold.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, professional archaeologists had already begun to question these claims alike of antiquity and of alien builders at Zimbabwe. These experts insisted that there were no gold mines, and no alien races, but rather that the ruins had been built in African style by Africans to serve local purposes. White settlers and their apologists, still anxious to claim a place for themselves in central Africa, now asserted that the workmanship was rudimentary, the product of a society in decline, and the builders one among numerous invaders who had swept through the area. Nevertheless, the image of Zimbabwe as ancient and exotic persisted in the popular mind; from time to time it was reanimated by anthropologists, by tourist promoters, and finally by the secessionist white settler regime after 1965 as it sought to legitimize its position. Throughout, the interpretation of the past remained the handmaiden of politics. Nor did the situation change with the rise of African nationalism. For nationalists, Zimbabwe was a reminder of the powerful African states whose vanished glories would return with the ending of colonialism. As early as 1961, Rhodesia's African politicians had claimed the name for their own; in 1980, in the wake of independence, they hastened to rename their land after its illustrious predecessor.¹²

As the empire expanded across the globe, the British themselves, as settlers and as rulers, erected a wide range of structures, in a variety of architectural styles, in the colonies they established. For the most part, these buildings were not, until recently, judged of sufficient importance to be worthy of study. Those modelled on European forms, with the exception of the few designed by famous architects such as Edwin Lutyens, were deemed inferior and derivative by English critics; those that sought to incorporate indigenous forms, whether in the domestic bungalow or the monumental 'Saracenic' facades of British Indian cities, were disparaged as exotics. The exceptional occasions when such unfamiliar forms were employed in Britain, as in the Prince Regent's Brighton Pavilion, and in the architecture of seaside resorts and pleasure palaces, only served to confirm their essential quaintness or their inferior quality.

For those who lived or worked in the colonies, however, these buildings served important purposes. Above all, they marked out the power and authority of the British empire, and so secured

favourable notice from contemporary critics. As early as 1781, the painter William Hodges wrote of Madras that its 'long colonnades, with open porticos and flat roofs', offered to the eye 'an appearance similar to that which we conceive of a Grecian city in the age of Alexander'.¹³ In similar fashion, Wellesley's Calcutta Government House (1802), modelled on Kedleston Hall, evoked from Lord Valentia an expression of pride that India was now 'to be ruled from a palace, not from a counting-house; with the ideas of a Prince, not with those of a retail dealer in muslins and indigo'.¹⁴ Britain's empire, so such structures proclaimed, was one with that of Alexander and of Rome.

Architecture that celebrated colonial difference, such as that erected in the 'Saracenic' style in late-nineteenth-century India, was always more troubling to critics. The 'ecclesiologists', for instance, denounced the use of 'heathen' forms in buildings meant for Christian worship. But these forms had their admirers as well. Oriental scholars insisted, with William Emerson, that 'it was impossible for the architecture of the west to be suitable to the natives of the east'.¹⁵ Further, the incorporation of such forms enabled Britain to represent itself as successor to the Mughals, hence as an 'Indian', imperial state. Such considerations ensured for the 'Saracenic' style a favourable reception, which included its adoption even in the Malayan capital of Kuala Lumpur, until the Raj itself was forced on to the defensive in the twentieth century.

In settler cities, such as Sydney and Toronto, the familiar forms of classical and, after mid-nineteenth century, of Gothic architecture reassured their inhabitants that, even though far from 'home', they remained British. Domestic building too, with its half-timbered cottages and stone mansions, from Australia's Ballarat to India's Ootacamund, though often incorporating the distinctively colonial verandah, evoked a remembered, if sentimentalized, England. By the late nineteenth century, however, in the colonies as elsewhere, architectural critics increasingly disdained the work of their predecessors. Pride in Governor Macquarie's 'elegant' structures, erected from 1816 to 1822 in Sydney by the convict architect Francis Greenway, was replaced by condemnation of their 'supreme ugliness of design'.¹⁶ Still, in the 1880s and 1890s the burgeoning Arts and Crafts movement, as it spread from England to the colonies, secured the architecture of the early colonial period,

together with the work of contemporary artisans in India, a more favourable appraisal.

For men such as John Ruskin and William Morris, although the European Middle Ages enshrined most fully the values of independent craftsmanship they cherished, India, so they conceived, was a 'timeless' land that kept alive 'medieval' values in the modern world. Hence crafts enthusiasts such as George Birdwood and Lockwood Kipling, father of the poet, trained artisans and organized crafts exhibitions; while F.S. Growse, of the Indian Civil Service, employing only local artisans, erected public buildings conceived in the spirit of Ruskin in the towns in which he served. In his writings on India's architecture during the decade before World War I, E.B. Havell, more sympathetic to Hinduism than his predecessors, singled out for praise as models of Indian craftsmanship both the domestic architecture of princely Rajputana and the temples in the great pilgrimage centres of Benares and Hardwar.¹⁷

In South Africa, the young English architect Herbert Baker, newly arrived in the Cape in 1892, saw in the gabled thatch-roofed houses built by the early-eighteenth-century Dutch and Huguenot settlers, not the inferior work of rustic Boers but a 'simplicity' that corresponded exactly to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement.¹⁸ A more favourable appraisal of early colonial architecture also advanced political objectives within settler communities. Above all, by laying claim to these buildings, the colonists could lay claim to a past for themselves separate from that of Britain, and yet one, as Joseph Fowles wrote of Sydney in 1848, able 'boldly to claim a comparison with London itself'.¹⁹ By the end of the century, as the historic preservation movement gained momentum, writers and artists in each colony meticulously detailed the early architecture of its towns and cities. Characteristic, perhaps, was John R. Robertson's six-volume *Landmarks of Toronto: A Collection of Historical Sketches of the Old Town of York from 1792 until 1837, and of Toronto from 1834 to 1914* (Toronto, 1894-1914).

Such celebratory writing, all the same, helped define, and so set boundaries around, the colonial political community. Everywhere, after an initial curiosity about their dwellings and habits, the aboriginal peoples faded from view. Loving descriptions

of old homesteads in the Grahamstown region of the Eastern Cape, for instance, emptied the landscape of native peoples. Hence, in a fashion similar to the commemoration of the 1820 settlers by writers such as Sir George Cory, histories of the region's architecture announced the vitality of a proudly English South African community. Colonial architecture could also bring peoples together. The mining magnate Cecil Rhodes in the 1890s patronized the old Dutch crafts, even to the extent of building a house for himself in the Cape Dutch style. Through this shared past, encompassing both white races but excluding the black, Rhodes sought to generate a distinctive sense of Cape identity, and in the process to advance his own political fortunes.

From World War I on to the 1950s and 1960s, colonial architecture sank increasingly into disfavour among critics. Edwin Lutyens alone among colonial builders, with his ambitious design for India's new capital at Delhi, stirred critical enthusiasm. Robert Byron, for instance, described Lutyens's Viceroy's House on its completion as a 'real fusion of national motives into a pure and highly individual style'.²⁰ In general, however, colonial nationalism and architectural modernism between them ensured that the lavishly ornate architecture of the empire was treated at best with indifference and at worst with contempt. Symptomatic, perhaps, was Jawaharlal Nehru's selection of the uncompromising modernist, Le Corbusier, to design the new Punjab capital at Chandigarh. The new India, this decision announced, was to be a modern nation free of the encumbrances of the colonial past.

As the passions aroused by the end of the empire faded, the structures erected under imperial auspices began to be seen as historically significant, and so worthy of serious study. At the same time, from the 1970s the rise of post-modernism in design encouraged a more sympathetic judgement of the ornamented style characteristic of so much colonial building. This reassessment, driven forward as well by other larger currents of historical scholarship, has produced a substantial corpus of writing on the architecture of the empire in recent years. Sten Nilsson's path-breaking *European Architecture in India, 1750-1850* (London, 1968) stood alone, but two works of the later 1970s, though from very different perspectives, announced the coming of the new era. One was Anthony King's *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social*

Power and the Environment (London, 1976); the other, Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (London, 1978). Robert Irving's *Indian Summer: Lutyens, Baker and Imperial Delhi* (New Haven), the first full-length study of the architecture of a British imperial site, followed in 1981. Though neither of the first two took architecture as its central concern, together they opened up new interpretive strategies for understanding colonial buildings within the historical context that had produced them.

King worked from within a Marxist framework, and sought to show how 'the power structure inherent in the dominance-dependence relationship of colonialism influenced urban development in the colonial society'. Unlike traditional Marxists, however, King identified the cultural beliefs and assumptions associated with Western imperialism as the element, situated within the social relations of production of the capitalist state, that most powerfully shaped the built form of the colonial city. In the hierarchical encounter between colonizer and colonized, King discerned the emergence of a 'colonial third culture'; to this culture he attributed such distinctively colonial institutions as the residential bungalow, the hill station, and the military cantonment. In his subsequent 1984 study, *The Bungalow: The Production of a Global Culture* (London), King assessed the cultural role and worldwide diffusion of this uniquely colonial architectural form.

Alongside Marxist-inspired studies are those that have drawn inspiration from Michel Foucault, especially as his ideas were directed towards study of the colonial encounter by Edward Said. In his *Orientalism*, Said argued that the 'Orient' existed only in Europe's imagination, so that knowledge about it was never disinterested scholarship, but rather served always to advance Europe's imperial objectives. It was, he wrote, 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient' (p. 3). Said's critical posture gained further authority during the 1980s from the post-modernist literary theory which insisted upon the 'decentring' and 'deconstructing' of texts, and so denied the existence of any authoritative modes of knowing.

When applied to the study of architecture, such an approach inevitably undercut traditional aesthetic and formalist modes of analysis. To be sure, some scholars have resisted the imputation of political motives to all colonial building, and have insisted upon

the autonomy of aesthetics and design, while others have pointed to the existence of a widespread 'sympathy' and 'respect' for Oriental architectural forms not connected to a politics of domination.²¹ Still, much recent scholarship, not only on British colonial architecture but on French and Italian as well, has sought to demonstrate the ways in which colonial design was subordinated to the politics of imperialism. As the present author has argued in the 1984 article on 'Architecture and the Representation of Empire', and the subsequent *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (Berkeley, 1989), in the colonial environment 'the choice of architectural style, the arrangement of space within a building, and the decision to erect a particular structure all testified to a vision of empire'.²²

In Britain, the 1980s saw an outpouring of celebratory writing on the architecture of the empire. No longer inhibited by lingering colonial guilt, and encouraged by the Thatcherite 'revolution', as well as the patriotic enthusiasms unleashed by the 1982 Falklands War, Britons began to look back with increasing nostalgia upon their imperial past. Lovingly detailed and often lavishly produced, these books, mostly written by amateur scholars, include the travel writer and historian Jan Morris's *Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj* (Oxford, 1983); Philip Davies, *Splendours of the Raj: British Architecture in India: 1660-1947* (London, 1985); Raymond Head's, *The Indian Style* (London, 1986); and *Architecture of the British Empire* (London, 1986), edited by R. Fermor-Hesketh.

In the old settler societies, where the imperial past had long since been assimilated to a national past, the earlier study of the architecture of the colonial period has continued unabated. Rarely have these works sought to make connections with the larger British empire, but they have examined a wide variety of regional styles, together with the work of individual architects, so that the architecture of the colonial era is now, for the most part, well documented.²³ For these societies, together with those of colonial America, recent scholarship has increasingly shifted from civic monuments toward the study of vernacular architecture. In a series of studies of what is called 'material culture', combining textual evidence, architecture, and archaeology, scholars have sought to identify the actual uses to which buildings were devoted, and thus the world of the individuals who inhabited them. In the process,

they have focused upon the ways local landscape and cultural forms shaped the design of even structures derived from European models. Most stimulating, perhaps, has been the work of such scholars as James Deetz, Dell Upton, and their students in the Eastern Cape Historical Archaeology Project.²⁴

Elsewhere, coming to terms with the buildings left behind by the departed imperial ruler has been more difficult. For most of these former colonial societies, preoccupied with more urgent tasks, neither the study nor the preservation of the colonial architectural heritage has evoked much interest. Still, younger architects and architectural historians in Malaysia, India, and elsewhere have recently begun to reappraise the colonial past, and to fight, through such organizations as the Delhi Conservation Society, for its recognition as a valid part of a national past. As a result, the fabric of the colonial city is now at last being subjected to detailed scrutiny, together with assessment of the ways indigenous peoples themselves actively participated in its creation. The historiography of the architecture of the British empire, together with that of its art and the larger colonial culture in which both were embedded, is fast being transformed.

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Part III

MIGRATION

Indian Migration to South Africa*

Everyone knows that Mahatma Gandhi began his political career fighting for the rights of the Indian residents of South Africa. Gandhi's campaigns on their behalf were, however, but one chapter in the 120-year saga of the South African Indians. Gandhi's campaigns, too, halted only temporarily the deterioration in the status of the Indians, which resumed, and even intensified, in subsequent years of Afrikaner rule and apartheid legislation. Today the Indian community—now three-quarters of a million strong—is wooed both by the government, which seeks to strengthen its position by giving the Indians at least the appearance of inclusion in a new constitutional order, and by the black opposition, anxious to bury the explosive ethnic rivalries of the past in a united front against white rule. Yet the Indians still regard their position as profoundly unsatisfactory.

This turbulent history has made the South African Indians the subject of substantial scholarly attention.¹ Yet in all of this, surprisingly few writers have asked how there came to be an Indian community in South Africa in the first place, nor have they examined closely why they ended up sandwiched between white and black. I should like to take a closer look here at the Indians in South Africa during the formative years of the community, from the arrival of the first Indians in 1860 to the end of colonial rule, and of immigration, in 1911. In so doing we will have to

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examine two separate, but related, questions. First, why did certain Indians and not others migrate; and how did they choose South Africa? Gandhi, it must be remembered, came to South Africa, not to hone his political weapons, but to make money. Did his compatriots travel to South Africa for the same reason? Secondly, what was the character of the Indians' integration in South Africa's socio-economic order? Was it fixed at an early date, or did it change as South Africa developed? How well did the Indians as an immigrant community prosper in their new home?

The bulk of South Africa's immigrants came under the indentured labour scheme. The system operated in the same way for South Africa as for other colonies needing unskilled labour—most notably Mauritius, Fiji, and the Caribbean islands. In each case, the colonial government, under the supervision of the Government of India, set up an emigrant depot, at a major port, and then employed agents to scour the interior districts for recruits. Once signed up, the recruit was dispatched overseas, bound to serve usually for five years as an unskilled labourer on a white-owned plantation at nominal pay. On the expiry of his indenture, the labourer was free either to return to India, usually with a free passage guaranteed, or to remain where he was as a free man.² In addition to these indentured (and ex-indentured) labourers, the South African Indian community contained also a sizeable number (perhaps 10 per cent in all) of voluntary migrants, drawn by the opportunities of trade and commerce.³

Let us look first at the indentured labourers. Where did these migrants come from, and why did they leave India? At the outset it is important to bear in mind that the various regions of India did not contribute equally to the emigrant stream. Except for brief occasions (such as the building of the Uganda Railway), Bombay Presidency remained closed to indentured recruitment. Nor was this only a matter of legislative prohibition. Initially, in 1855, Natal had sought labourers from Bombay. The Indian government, in denying this request, had pointed out that in Bombay there existed a steady demand for labour, that employers there were prepared to pay higher wages than South African plantation owners, and that in consequence it would be pointless to attempt to recruit indentured labourers in western India.⁴ Even within the rest of India, however, all of which was open to recruitment, only certain

districts supplied substantial numbers of overseas migrants. To some degree, this was a result of informal agreement between overseas and inland recruiters, for the latter drew labour for the Assam tea plantations and Calcutta factories from Bengal and the tribal belt of southern Bihar.

By and large, overseas migrants were drawn from northern Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP) and the central and southern coastal districts of Madras. Why did these areas contribute almost all recruits? The answer at one level is obvious. These were areas, especially eastern UP and Bihar, of intense poverty and dense population, so that the poor and underprivileged were driven into the arms of colonial recruiters. Clearly poverty—the ‘classic’ push factor in migration—lay behind this migration stream. But one cannot find a simple correlation between poverty, or overpopulation, and overseas migration. Even within the Gangetic plain, for instance, similarly situated districts often contributed unequally to the migrant stream, Basti and Gonda, but not Gorakhpur; Shahabad more than Saran. At the same time, some districts sent migrants to certain colonies and not to others. This phenomenon was most marked in the south. Ganjam supplied recruits for Burma, and Tinnevely for Ceylon, while South Africa secured a vastly disproportionate number of its emigrants from North Arcot. Geographical propinquity, of course, explains some of this, for example, the Tinnevely–Ceylon flow. But there is no obvious reason why North Arcot should have supplied nearly one-third of Natal’s inflow of south Indian migrants in the decade from 1901 to 1910.⁵ Then too, over time, recruitment became increasingly narrowly focused. In the 1860s and 1870s, Bihar contributed 20 per cent of north India’s emigrants; by 1900, only 5 per cent or less came from Bihar and Bengal together. Indeed, by 1910, the two districts of Basti and Gonda alone supplied almost one-quarter of the total emigrant flow from northern India.⁶ These patterns of recruitment are not susceptible to easy explanation. Still, it is clear that it had much to do with the establishment of networks of recruitment: recruiters would tend to concentrate on those areas which were (so to speak) the most remunerative, while villagers who had friends and relatives already overseas might well be more tempted themselves to undertake the long and hazardous voyage.

As the pattern of emigration varied across the face of India, so too did the flow of migrants vary over time. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, for instance, the annual emigration through Calcutta fluctuated wildly from about 10,000 to 30,000. These variations in flow seem, by and large, to have been determined by the interaction of two variables: the Indian harvest, and the colonial economy. At home, bad years reduced employment opportunities in the countryside, and so increased migration. Indeed the emigration reports, in almost macabre fashion, dwell fondly on years of drought and famine. But the critical determinant was colonial demand; and this in turn was set, as most Indian labourers worked in the canefields, by the world demand for sugar. When sugar prices were depressed, plantation owners required less labour. Precisely how these two factors—of the demand for labour, and its supply—fitted together to determine each year's migrant flow, however, is not a simple matter. Colonial quotas sometimes went unfilled for want of recruits, low caste agricultural labourers were not the only migrants, and recruitment did not invariably rise in the immediate post-harvest months. Indeed some observers have detected a subtle wave pattern *within* the cycle of the agricultural year.⁷

South Africa's voluntary (so-called 'passenger') migrants differed dramatically from those of the indentured labourers. Drawn to South Africa by the opportunities of trade and commerce, these men were largely Gujaratis of the established trading castes. For many in fact, South Africa was only a part of a wider network of kinship, and of trade, which radiated out of Kathiawar and Kutch to Bombay, Karachi, Mombasa and other ports on the rim of the Indian Ocean. Indeed some even moved beyond. The first Indian traders in Fiji, for instance, were two jewellers, originally from Kathiawar, who in 1906 went from Natal to that far-off South Pacific isle, which they had first heard of from Indians who had been there as indentured labourers.⁸ Other Gujarati migrants to South Africa were agriculturalists, from areas such as Surat district. Particularly in the famine years of the later 1890s, lower caste Kolis and more substantial Kunbis alike sought employment as labourers and traders in Africa. Nor was this migration wholly a product of destitution. As the Collector of Surat wrote in 1903, 'The profits obtained in South and East Africa induced a large

number of persons to go out after the [Boer] war. The number of persons from this district was about 1000 altogether; of no one caste in particular'. The following year, one *taluqa* alone was estimated to have sent 1350 migrants to South Africa. That these emigrants prospered can be judged from the volume of postal remittances. Estimated at 400,000 rupees annually in Surat, these funds were used to liquidate debts, build houses, and buy land.⁹

Any assessment of indentured emigration must begin by asking whose interests it served. From the outset, the Government of India had justified their participation in the recruitment of such labourers in terms of the benefits it brought India. These benefits were of two sorts: those that accrued to the individual emigrant, and those secured to India as a whole. It was accepted as a matter of course by all concerned with emigration that those who went overseas would be, as the Bengal Lieutenant-Governor noted, 'happier and better off than they had ever been in their native land'. The annual reports on emigration emphasized the amounts of remittances sent back by emigrants, and the cash and valuables brought back by those who returned.¹⁰

About the benefits of emigration for India, opinion was mixed. For many, the 'main object' of emigration was to secure 'the relief of overcrowded tracts' by drawing off their excess population. Committing the government to a more systematic encouragement of emigration, Salisbury as Secretary of State in 1875 argued:

Having regard to the greatness of our Indian population, and to the probability that, under the protection which the British Government affords from depopulation by war, and, as far as possible, from famine and other evils, that population must continue very greatly to increase, especially in the healthier and more densely peopled parts of the country where the numbers already press on the means of subsistence, and the lowest classes are at all times little removed from want, it appears to me that, from an Indian point of view, it is desirable to afford an outlet from these redundant regions into the tropical and sub-tropical dominions of Her Majesty, where people, who hardly earn a decent subsistence in their own country, may obtain more lucrative employment and better homes.¹¹

Others were less sanguine. 'The benefit to British India', the Bengal Lieutenant-Governor cautioned, 'is of very limited character....Let it be imagined that the number of some few tens

of thousands (of annual emigrants) were doubled or quadrupled, were raised from 25,000, the present maximum, to 50,000 or 100,000. What effect would that have on a prolific people inhabiting the North-Western Provinces, Oudh and Bihar, the total population of which may be set down at 65 million'? Still, he argued, the number of emigrants ought to be increased, for 'such a result would manifestly conduce to the advancement of the British Colonial Empire, and must therefore command the earnest sympathy of every British officer'. India in sum must labour so that the colonial empire might prosper.¹²

But why, one must ask, were Indians ever brought as indentured labourers to South Africa? That country, after all, unlike Mauritius or the sugar islands of the Caribbean, contained a substantial black African population. One might have expected that these reservoirs of manpower, which from the beginning provided the massive unskilled labour force required by South Africa's gold and diamond mines, could have met its plantation needs as well. Yet such was not to be the case. Geography and political economy together dictated a different outcome. The only area of South Africa suitable for plantation agriculture was the warm well-watered coast of Natal, facing the Indian Ocean. In the 1850s, the Colony of Natal, annexed to the British empire only a decade earlier after the expulsion of the Boer trekkers, contained a straggling white population, mostly British, of under 10,000. Within the colony there lived in addition from 120 to 150 thousand Africans. Outside it, in the as yet unsubjected areas of Zululand, resided perhaps a quarter-of-a-million more Africans. Surely these seemed to be labour in plenty. In fact, there was almost none.

When first the Boers, and then the British, moved into Natal, its African population had been much reduced by the devastating wars of Shaka's Zulu state. Vast tracts of land were therefore unoccupied, and at once laid claim to by the earliest white settlers. By 1849, nearly 2 million acres of land had been divided among 360 claimants. A decade later, fifteen men controlled 700,000 acres. For such landholders, direct capitalist farming was out of the question. Indeed most were speculators, whose limited capital was wholly tied up in the purchase of land, and who sought a return in a later appreciation of its value. In the meantime these men—joined after 1860 by the Natal Land and Colonisation

Company, with its mammoth holdings of half-a-million acres—found in the extraction of rent from African tenants the most attractive way of securing some return on their investment. They had no interest in measures designed to force the Africans off the land and into labour relationships.¹³

While the speculators were purchasing their broad acres, the colonial government was developing a policy of paternalist protection for the Africans flooding back with the end of the wars into the colony. Under Theophilus Shepstone, the government set aside native reserves in Natal totalling two million acres, in which the authority of the traditional chiefs was reaffirmed and white settlement prohibited. Though inadequate to maintain twentieth century populations, these reserves were expressly made large enough at the time to avoid, in Shepstone's word, 'so crowding the Kaffirs as to compel them to leave their location and seek work'. Hence those Africans—by no means all of course—who settled on the reserves were able to resume their traditional subsistence agriculture. Their hut taxes, and other obligations, they could meet by the cultivation of commercial crops on part of their land. Indeed, with only a small and largely urban white population in Natal, many African cultivators found in the towns a ready market for their produce, and so prospered.¹⁴

Between the reserves, with their bulwarking of the traditional economy, and the tenancies available on Crown and speculators' land, the African had little incentive to labour for a wage for a white farmer. Yet plantation agriculture, above all such demanding crops as sugarcane, where the cane had to be cut as soon as it ripened, could not subsist with an erratic and uncertain labour supply. From the beginning, therefore, the white farmers had railed against the system of reserves. One Natal newspaper listed what was required: 'The breaking up of the locations; a readjustment of native taxation; the cautious, but firm discouragement of the heathen customs that bind the Kaffir to an indolent and licentious life; a more comprehensive and stringent magisterial surveillance' and so on. But none of this was practical politics. So, encouraged by the example of Mauritius, where Indian labour had reversed the decline of its sugar industry since 1843, Natal's farmers turned in 1860 to the importation of indentured labourers from India.¹⁵

The Natal sugar industry had its origins in the 1850s as one among a number of experiments designed to find a profitable export crop for the fledging colony. In this competition, sugar faced several disadvantages. Natal's mild subtropical climate, first of all, enforced longer growing seasons and lower yields than were found in the hotter, moister lands of the tropics. Nearby Mauritius, with its flourishing sugar industry, provided not only a model and a source of talent—for many of Natal's planters and their technical staff came from that island. It also provided its upstart rival, in an era of free trade, with stiff competition both in export markets and in South Africa itself. Nor was the local market, before the development of the Rand gold mines in the 1880s, at all expansive. Hence indentured labour was indispensable to a successful sugar industry. Growth in output went hand in hand with the increase in the number of Indian labourers. In 1859, the industry produced about 1100 (tonnes) of sugar. A decade later, with 4000 Indian labourers, total output had reached nearly 10,000 tonnes. By the mid-1880s, with a resident indentured population of some 10,000 Indians, sugar production had doubled, to 20,000 tonnes. The industry had of course its ups and downs. A severe depression in the mid-1860s led to a six-year halt in the importation of Indian labour, while a sharp fall in the world price of sugar in 1884 precipitated declines in acreage and in Indian migration, which were not made good till the early 1890s. Sugar nevertheless always remained a mainstay of the Natal economy, and its major export crop.¹⁶ At the same time, a steady flow of Indian migrants was transforming the colony's society. By the turn of the century, the Indian community equalled in numbers that of the Europeans themselves.

As their contracts of indenture expired, most Indian labourers, foregoing their return passage home, took up employment as free residents of Natal. Many continued for some time to work in the cane fields. In 1888, free, or ex-indentured, Indians comprised some 30 per cent of the planters' labour force. J.R. Saunders, one of the largest planters, employed only free Indians.¹⁷ Others worked for such public enterprises as the railways, or took up market gardening in villages near the plantations, or on the outskirts of Durban city. Such cultivation, wrote the Protector of Immigrants in 1895, was 'the principal object in view' for Indians whose term

of indenture had expired. During the 1890s, the acreage of land cultivated by Indians expanded dramatically—to 38,300 acres, or 6 per cent of the cultivated area; and they came to control the commercial cultivation of certain crops, above all tobacco, beans, and (in the coastal districts) maize. They also supplied almost the entire fruit, vegetable, and fish requirements of the Durban market, and were successful rice growers as well. Outside agriculture, free Indians gained employment as hawkers and domestic servants. The demand for Indian house servants is always constant, wrote the harassed Protector of Immigrants in 1887, and ‘hotel-keepers frequently apply to me for cooks, waiters, dhobies, etc.’¹⁸

How far Indians prospered in South Africa is of course hard to judge. Certainly the figures for the wealth held in Indian hands show substantial increases during the later nineteenth century. Indian deposits in the Natal Government Savings Bank rose from £2800 in 1885 to £23,300 in 1900; remittances to India over the same years rose from £580 annually to £1854; while Indian owned property in the city of Durban increased in value from £14,000 to £50,000. Even taking into account the doubling of the Indian population over those fifteen years, it is clear that some Indians at least had amassed a financial stake in their new home. Of those who left the colony on the expiry of their indentures, from two to three times as many in the 1890s sought their fortune in the Transvaal gold fields, thereby renouncing their right to free passage, as took up that passage and returned to India. These emigrants to the mines, mostly cooks and domestic servants, obtained there, so the Protector of Immigrants reported, substantially ‘higher wages than they could possibly get in Natal’.

As the South African Indian community prospered, they reaped the jealous hostility of the European settler. The Indian of course posed no threat to the livelihood of the sugar planter or rich exporter. But, unlike other areas of substantial Indian migration, East Africa, say, or the Caribbean, Natal possessed a white population large enough and poor enough to see in the Indian, once emancipated from plantation labour, a rival as trader and as agriculturalist. While little evidence exists that many Europeans were ever driven out of business by Indians, still the spectre of Indian competition helped precipitate the spate of discriminatory legislation that marked the mid-1890s in Natal, and drew Gandhi,

the newly-arrived lawyer, into political activity. This legislation was directed explicitly at those who were the most prosperous, and hence most threatening. An English literacy test put an end to free immigration; a residential tax of £3 per year was imposed on ex-indentured labourers to force them to return to India; while harassing restrictions were placed on the renewal of commercial licences to drive traders out of business. In short, Natal wanted indentured labourers from India, but none other. Behind this legislation lay the award of responsible government to Natal in 1893, and the consequent restriction of the franchise to whites. Natal was, like the Cape, Australia, and Canada, freed thenceforward from the tutelage of the Colonial Office in London.

This restrictive legislation placed the Indian government in a most awkward and unpleasant dilemma. As Calcutta wrote to the presidency governments in February 1894:

The Government of India would prefer the continuance of the existing system...and they have no sympathy with the views which would prevent any subject of the Crown from settling in any Colony under the British Crown. Nevertheless the facts have to be dealt with that such views exist; that they are likely to assume tangible form whether emigration is continued or not; that they have already gone far to exclude British Indian subjects from the Australian Colonies and from the Cape; and that they will probably end in keeping British Indian subjects altogether out of Natal, unless, while the party favourable to the maintenance of emigration is still in power in the Colony, a compromise can be arranged on...reasonable terms.¹⁹

In a word, in order to preserve the opportunity for indentured labourers to go to South Africa, the Indian government agreed to condone the imposition of harsh restrictions on all classes of South African Indians. They insisted only that no ex-indentured labourer be compulsorily repatriated to India under penal sanction. Indeed they themselves suggested the alternative of a residence tax as a way of encouraging freed Indians to return to their homeland.

Yet politics are but part of the picture, for the years at the turn of the century witnessed a far-reaching transformation of Natal's economy, which was to catch up Indians and Africans alike. The growth of the mining industry, the spread of railways, and the quickening pace of urbanization in South Africa brought in their wake new markets, and a steady demand, for Natal's agricultural

produce. This drove up the price of land, and at the same time made commercial farming profitable for white landowners, who had previously been content simply to rent land to Africans. As a result, white absenteeism and block share-cropping fast gave way to a vast expansion of commercialized white agriculture. By 1909, the amount of land cultivated by Europeans, 85,000 acres twenty years earlier, had risen to 450,000 acres. Squeezed out of the market, and increasingly denied access to land, the African had no option but to take up employment, where his labour was needed, on the burgeoning white farms. The Land Act of 1913 drove home the principle that the African was to labour for the European, not to farm himself.²⁰

For the Indian, the effects of this vast upheaval were hardly less momentous. With local African labour now available, there was no longer any need to import indentured Indian labour. The ending of indenture is usually portrayed as a response to the agitation mounted by Gandhi in South Africa and Gokhale in India against the treatment meted out to the South African Indians. This certainly played a major part, for the government could not ignore its increasingly vocal and well-organized nationalist constituency. At the same time, the Government of India itself became increasingly exasperated at the stiff and unyielding attitude of Natal, which refused to do anything to ameliorate the condition of its Indian residents. Lord Curzon was by far the most outspoken. As early as 1902, he had written:

What Natal wants is our labour, but not our competition. They are willing to cringe for the one, but they are....adamant when it is a question of the other. I do not say that, in their own interests, they are wrong.... They are a self-governing Colony: and we cannot expect from them altruistic emotions. On the other hand we are equally the guardians of the interests of our own people; and I have not the slightest desire to increase the dimensions of what is already a 'raw sore' on the surface of the Imperial body politic, for no other return than that a few more thousands of Indians shall be able to make their livelihood outside of India.²¹

Slowly, over the subsequent five years, the Government of India screwed up its courage, so that by 1908 it was willing to consider playing its one trump card: the ending of indentured recruitment unless the treatment of the Indians in South Africa improved. But

by then it was too late. The threat was empty; for Natal's economy no longer required a steady flow of labourers from India. Indeed, before Calcutta could act, a Bill calling for an end to indentured immigration was introduced into the Natal Legislature. Planter

TABLE 1 Indian Immigration to Natal

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1860	1226	1886-7	496
1861	368	1887-8	897
1862	—	1888-9	1585
1863	1021	1889-90	4124
1864	1979	1890-1	4330
1865	1320	1891-2	3349
1866	534	1892-3	3119
1867	—	1893-4	3612
1868	—	1894-5	3592
1869	—	1895-6	3337
1870	—	1896-7	4038
1871-2	—	1897-8	6036
1872-3	—	1898-9	4958
1873-4	—	1899-1900	4590
1874-5	6025	1900-1	6312
1875-6	393	1901-2	7763
1876-7	761	1902-3	6140
1877-8	3510	1903-4	4601
1878-9	4452	1904-5	9436
1879-80	743	1905-6	8108
1880-1	2378	1906-7	10,049
1881-2	2229	1907-8	6664
1882-3	1647	1908-9	1722
1883-4	2775	1909-10	2935
1884-5	3548	1910-11	6257
1885-6	—	1911-12	3401

TABLE 2 Indian Population of Natal

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number</i>
1862	1184	1897	53,370
1866	5041	1900	70,369
1870	4858	1901	74,385
1874	6787	1902	79,777
1877	12,823	1903	79,857
1880	18,877	1904	100,918
1883	26,978	1905	108,409
1885	29,357	1906	112,126
1888	35,270	1907	115,807
1891	35,411	1908	116,679
1894	41,142	1909	118,714

Source: Colony of Natal, *Statistical Yearbook for the Year 1909* (Pietermaritzburg, 1910), p. 3.

opposition caused that Bill to be withdrawn. But the writing was on the wall. As the Natal Governor wrote:

The planters appear to anticipate that greater use may gradually be made of native labour, and also that by more and more Indians reindenturing the necessity for fresh importations will gradually decline so that eventually, if the matter is treated cautiously, it will be possible to stop the importation without the industries which have hitherto depended on it being ruined.²²

Hence the Government of India—with domestic industry booming and wages at record levels no longer so concerned about the need of its own labourers for overseas employment—took the decisive step. Indentured migration to South Africa came to an end on 30 June 1911.

As the Governor of Natal had already predicted, this act did little more than hasten the inevitable. Initially, free Indians and those reindenturing to avoid the residential tax made good the shortfall. But, as time went by, even free Indian labour was gradually displaced by blacks in the cane fields. Ironically, the last great Gandhian strike, that of 1913, which spread from the mines to the sugar plantations, only hastened the process, for the planters found Indians no longer the docile labour force they had originally

hired. By the 1930s, Indian farm labourers had dropped from 50 per cent to a mere 11 per cent of the farm labour force. A decade later, only 2 per cent of the labourers in the cane fields were Indian.²³

TABLE 3 Value of Sugar Exported from Natal by Sea
(1854-98)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Pounds</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Pounds</i>
1854	2	1876	135,201
1855	16	1877	184,788
1856	483	1878	141,077
1857	2008	1879	56,958
1858	3067	1880	215,191
1859	8368	1881	172,237
1860	32,005	1882	84,668
1861	19,415	1883	122,084
1862	21,178	1884	185,131
1863	26,153	1885	144,064
1864	94,372	1886	100,500
1865	76,519	1887	114,079
1866	66,191	1888	71,912
1867	70,563	1889	93,990
1868	90,387	1890	18,491
1869	145,982	1891	23,156
1870	111,068	1892	119,461
1871	180,686	1893	95,943
1872	153,987	1894	99,093
1873	161,854	1895	—
1874	159,115	1896	22,376
1875	169,815	1897	—
		1898	17,801

TABLE 4 Comparative Population Figures for Indians and Europeans in Natal

<i>Year</i>	<i>European</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>	<i>Indian</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>
1861	12,538	8.2	c. 1100	1.0
1871	17,380	6.0	5,000	1.8
1881	28,480	7.6	20,200	5.3
1891	46,790	8.2	41,140	7.2
1904	97,100	8.8	100,900	9.1
1921	136,830	9.6	141,650	10.0
1936	190,550	9.9	183,660	9.5

Where did the Indians go? Despite repatriation schemes and the repeated urging of the South African government, they did not return to India. Some remained on the land as small-scale farmers and market gardeners, or as supervisory staff on European farms. But by and large, despite the intense continuing white dislike of the Indian as trader and city-dweller, the Indians moved to the urban areas. By 1950, three-fourths of the community was urban, and spread through the professional, commercial and industrial sectors of the economy.

Hence, within less than a century of his arrival, the Indian's position in South Africa had been utterly transformed. Labourers, brought to Natal to make possible a prosperous white agriculture, the Indians found themselves first displaced from the plantation, and then from the countryside altogether. At the same time, with immigration from India stopped, they lost touch with their homeland. But the Indian nevertheless remained a member of an encapsulated community. To be sure, it was increasingly prosperous, but it was still the one which was walled off by apartheid from blacks and whites alike. Whether this precarious isolation will come to an end in a multi-racial South Africa, or whether the Indian will simply exchange one hostile master for another, time alone will tell.

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**'Hard Hands and Sound Healthy
Bodies': Recruiting 'Coolies'
for Natal, 1860–1911***

In 1860, the colonial government of Natal, on the south-eastern coast of South Africa, secured permission to import Indian labourers under bonds of indenture. In doing so they were following in the footsteps of Mauritius and the colonies of the West Indies. For these colonies, the recruitment of Indians had provided an alternative source of labour to that of slaves, who, after emancipation in 1833, disdained, whenever they could, the back-breaking work of cutting cane. A booming sugar market in Britain, with the fact that cane was well-suited to the semi-tropical coast of Natal, annexed in 1843, offered some prospect of a remunerative crop to that colony's fledgling white settler community. Natal had never possessed a slave economy. Confronted by the powerful Zulu state, and with ample thinly populated tribal land available in the interior, the colonists had no hope of coercing the resident African population to submit to the discipline of plantation labour. So, enviously eyeing their neighbours in Mauritius, they campaigned for the right to import Indian labour until finally their entreaties met with success. The prospect of prosperity at last lay before this impoverished British colony, annexed with no visible objective other than to keep it out of the hands of the Boers.

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Numerous studies, following Hugh Tinker's pioneering *A New System of Slavery* in 1974, have assessed the recruitment of Indians for labour on colonial sugar plantations.¹ These works have, for the most part, examined the treatment of labourers on the plantations, or else, on the basis of ship lists, they have assessed the caste and regional backgrounds of emigrants. As a result, we possess substantial information about the individuals who were recruited, including for some even their height and family status. Efforts have been made as well to correlate socio-economic well-being, and the cycles of prosperity and scarcity in Indian agriculture, with the propensity to migrate. Despite the contributions of this scholarship, the working of the recruitment enterprise in India has been surprisingly neglected. At best, as in Brij Lal's *Girmitiyas: The Origin of the Fiji Indians*, we have descriptions of the administrative structure through which emigrants were processed for shipment. For most sugar colonies, this involved the establishment of emigration agencies in Calcutta and Madras. These agencies supervised 'upcountry' subagents, who in turn employed recruiters hired locally to sign up potential emigrants. Whether this operation involved the abduction and deception of innocents, or whether it provided opportunities willingly grasped on the part of desperately poor Indians—the subject of an enduring and intense debate—cannot be resolved on the basis of available documentation, and we do not endeavour to do so here.

What is feasible, but has not so far been attempted, except in a limited but suggestive fashion by Marina Carter for the early years in Mauritius, is to ask how the recruiting agencies went about their task of securing labourers. By a close examination of the recruiting activities undertaken by one colony, that of Natal, this article seeks to provide a window into the way recruitment took place on the ground in India. How, we will ask, were Natal's recruiters selected, remunerated, and disciplined? What criteria did they use to decide whom to recruit? Which castes, and regions, were favoured, and which disfavoured, and why? How successful were Natal's recruiters in fulfilling the colony's objectives, and how does Natal compare in its recruiting operation with other comparable colonies? Above all, this article endeavours to bring to life, not the intending emigrant, but Natal's staff of recruiters as individuals trying to fill quotas and earn money. Throughout, the

aim is to understand the practices and perceptions which informed the day-to-day working of indentured labour recruitment. In doing so, we will help to illuminate the enduring role of India as a source of labour, and of prosperity, for Britain's colonial territories, and hence for Britain itself.

The article is largely based upon letter books in the Kwa-Zulu Natal Archives that contain copies of day-to-day correspondence between the Natal Emigration Agents in Calcutta and Madras, their superiors in Durban, and their subagents scattered throughout interior India.² Although this archive makes this study possible, at the same time its omissions restrict it in significant ways. Above all, within India only the outgoing letters from Calcutta and Madras to the upcountry subagents, not their replies, have been preserved; and the archive contains no letters between the subagents and the village level recruiters whom they employed. Hence much must be inferred, and much cannot be known at all. Despite their wealth of data on policy matters, the Government of India's emigration proceedings pay little attention to the recruitment procedures of individual colonies. A few special investigative reports on colonial emigration, however, among them most notably George Grierson's *Report on Colonial Emigration from the Bengal Presidency* (Calcutta, 1883), offer useful insights and will be cited as appropriate.

I

To inaugurate Natal's indentured labour recruitment, W.M. Collins, the colony's postmaster-general, appointed as special agent, set out for India in early 1860. Not surprisingly, on the way, he stopped off at Mauritius, where indentured immigration had begun in 1834. There, as he wrote back to the Natal colonial secretary, he toured several of the island's sugar estates, and so 'had the opportunity of personally inspecting the system upon which the general treatment of Indian labourers is conducted at Mauritius'. With the letter, he enclosed a number of Mauritian forms and documents relating to the treatment of Indian immigrants. Mauritius was always to stand forth as precedent and model for Natal. From Mauritius, Collins went on first to Madras, and then to Calcutta. In each place, he appointed an emigration agent to take charge

of 'coolie' recruitment (as it was then called) for the colony. The Madras agent was Henry Burton. Already acting as agent for Mauritius, Trinidad, and British Guyana, Burton simply added responsibility for Natal to his work for these other colonies. For each adult coolie shipped to Natal, Burton was to receive a personal remuneration of three rupees. His recruiters were to receive four rupees for each adult. In Calcutta, Collins appointed Hunt Marriott, since 1858 the emigration agent for British Guyana, as Natal's agent as well.³ As we shall see, even as they reduced each colony's expense, these overlapping responsibilities were to prove a continuing source of friction.

Emigration commenced almost at once. The first emigrant ship, the *Truro*, left Madras in October 1860 with some 342 individuals on board, and dropped anchor in Durban on 16 November. The *Belvedere*, with 310 passengers from Calcutta, arrived shortly thereafter.⁴ During the subsequent five years up to 1866, a total of some 5400 indentured Indians arrived in Natal. Indian immigration then came to a temporary halt. Subsequently, complaints of mistreatment by the first batch of returned Indians in 1871, after the completion of their ten-year indenture contract, provoked an overhaul of the system. This included appointment of a Protector of Indian Immigrants in Natal, and an Indian Immigration Trust Board. In 1874, indentured emigration from India to Natal recommenced under these new arrangements.⁵

We will start by looking at the operation in northern India, which, though that region supplied only one-third of Natal's immigrants, is better documented in the archival records. As the old Natal agency had been closed down in 1866, the Colonial Office, with the concurrence of the Natal government, in 1874 appointed H.A. Firth, emigration agent for British Guyana, to act as emigration agent in Calcutta for Natal as well. With the prospect of renewed emigration, Firth at once requested his subagents 'upcountry' to collect recruits. According to the government's regulations, each batch of 100 emigrants had to include forty women. Hence, as Firth told his subagents, whenever men were sent without the proper proportion of females they would be returned. 'I can pay only', he wrote further,

for those who are shipped and all expenses of whatever nature must be borne by you for recruiting, registration, license fees, brass badges,

printed forms, railway fares, and for the cost of returning rejected coolies to their homes. Two-thirds of the amount agreed on for each adult I will pay three days after arrival in this [Calcutta] depot, and the balance three days after embarkation. ⁶

The rates of remuneration requested by the different subagents varied between 16 and 20 rupees per adult male, with usually an additional two-rupee bonus payable for females.

Firth's subagents, following customary practice for colonial recruitment in northern India, were mostly appointed to districts in the eastern Gangetic plain, from Lucknow to Bihar. The initial appointees, the areas where they were to recruit, and the number of emigrants each was to send down to Calcutta were:

D.H.R. Moses	Ghazipur	250
Nursingh Pershad Chatterjee	Ghazipur	100
Munshi Muzaffar Ali	Faizabad	250
Babu Gopal Chander Mookerjee	Jamalpur	75
Babu Triluckonauth Nandy	Dinapur	100
Messrs Andrews and Hindry	Calcutta	200
R. Hendry	Bankipur	200
Ramjaum Khan	Unao	150
Awazali	Lucknow	150
A. Reuben	Gorakhpur	50

In May, two additional individuals were added to the list of subagents:

James W. Lowther	Mirzapur
Babu Chander Cant Chatterjee	Benares

During May and June, as recruiting proceeded, Firth kept in close touch with his subagents. Sometimes he simply urged them on, as when he told Muzaffar Ali on 13 May, 'I hope you will be able to send me plenty of coolies'. The major problem was that of poaching. Twice, Reuben complained that D.H.R. Moses was recruiting in the district assigned to him, that of Gorakhpur. By June, Muzaffar Ali had also begun to grumble about Moses' activities, alleging that Moses had hired away one of his recruiters. Sternly, Firth told Moses such proceedings were 'quite improper and irregular', and ordered him to cease employing other agents'

recruiters, and to stay out of their districts. Things could go wrong even in Calcutta itself. As an exasperated Firth wrote to Gopal Chander Mookerjee on 21 May, 'Your *chuprassee* [escort] it appears allowed five men of your last *challan* [batch] to go to the Bazaar in Calcutta just after their arrival here. Three of these men have not since returned, and I certainly shall not pay for them.' By the end of June, the subagents were told to stop sending emigrants, as the funds available to reimburse them—some £3800—had been exhausted. During the course of that year, some 4310 Indians, by far the largest number to that date, arrived in Natal from Calcutta.

By 1876, despite an increase in the rate of commission, now ranging from 25 to 30 rupees per adult, the number of emigrants dispatched from Calcutta had begun to lag behind the colony's requirements. That year saw a mere 754 arrivals, and the next 1089. (For year-by-year figures, see Appendix 1.) As a result, F. Colepeper, clerk in the Natal Protector's office, was sent to India to see what could be done to improve recruiting. What Colepeper saw was not encouraging. 'It is astonishing', he wrote in dismay, 'to see the number of chimnies smoking day and night in Calcutta and its vicinity. The Hoogly begins to resemble the Thames'. As a result, he said, 'it has become a common practice with coolies to allow themselves to be recruited merely in order to get to Calcutta', where they then 'desert at the first opportunity'. In the interior, despite the extension of recruiting operations so far inland that railway fares of up to 12 rupees were being paid to send recruits to Calcutta, overseas emigration was deterred by the 'immense impetus given to cultivation and the employment of labour by the railways, irrigation and other public works, and [by] the abundance and cheapness of the various food grains of late'. In addition, there was the competition provided by the tea gardens of Darjeeling and Assam, whose demand for labour 'is practically unlimited'.⁷ At no time, as Natal was only beginning to discover in 1877, were colonial recruiters ever able to disregard the powerful attractions of such nearby destinations as Assam, and Calcutta itself.

To deal with this problem, Colepeper put forward a number of recommendations. They included a further increase in recruiters' pay, a possible reduction in the term of indenture to eight years from ten, and holding out to potential recruits the ease of obtainin

a plot of ground for cultivation in Natal at the end of the period of indenture. He further urged an end to the joint recruiting agency with British Guyana. This arrangement suited both colonies, for recruiting could take place for Natal during the months in the first half of the year when West Indian recruitment was prohibited, and thus the recruiting staff kept fully employed. Nevertheless, in Colepeper's view, this union was an 'unholy alliance', the 'most expensive way in which we could have attempted not to gain our end'. Colepeper preferred establishing an independent Natal agency, or, if that were deemed too expensive, a joint operation with Mauritius, under which, unlike that with Guyana, Natal would no longer be restricted to a limited recruiting season each year. In a further report the following year, James Caldwell reiterated the advantages to be secured from a joint agency with Mauritius. The problem lay, as he saw it, with the upcountry recruiters, who 'dictated terms to the agents in Calcutta by playing one [colony's] agency against another to enhance their prices'.⁸ The Natal government instead determined to reduce costs by closing down the Calcutta agency altogether in favour of a single office in Madras.

After two years with few new immigrants arriving from northern India—0 in 1879, and 505 in 1880—Natal decided to reopen its Calcutta agency. The old arrangement with British Guyana was re-established, and H.A. Firth resumed his position as Emigration Agent for both colonies. Firth argued on behalf of the joint scheme that there was 'ample time' in the interval between the annual recruiting seasons for the West Indies to get some four ships a year off to Natal, and that it would be far more economical to use 'my recruiters', who are 'at hand ready to take up the work at once whenever Demerara [Guyana] closes', rather than to recruit a fresh staff. The Natal authorities also found another argument persuasive. 'It is not desirable', the Indian Immigration Trust Board noted, 'to confine the importation of labour to one agency alone, on the grounds that to prevent combination amongst the labourers on the estates, it would seem expedient to have a mixture of Indians, viz., Bengalees and Madrasees.'⁹ The imperatives of 'divide and rule', and of economy, conveniently went hand in hand in support of Firth's proposal.

II

Before resuming large-scale recruitment for Natal, Firth sent one of his Calcutta staff, Khetta Mohan Chatterjee, on a tour of the emigration depots of northern India. Chatterjee's daily inspection reports of these depots, where emigrants were collected before being sent to Calcutta, give us a glimpse of the continuing process of 'coolie' recruitment. After spending a few days at Bankipur and Dinapur in Bihar, he went on to Allahabad. There he found only six males in the depot, and the subagent full of excuses. The agent said, Chatterjee recounted, that 'he would exert his best and urge on his recruiters, but the cheapness of living at present, owing to the abundance of crops, is a great drawback to the supply of a large number' of emigrants. With depots for Trinidad, Jamaica, and Natal, situated side by side, each supplying no more than twenty recruits a month, Chatterjee left Allahabad convinced that 'affairs are at present very gloomy here'. Two days later, moving rapidly 'upcountry', he found himself at Meerut. Asked to wait, in the 'excessive cold' of a north Indian winter, until the local subagent, Ilahibux, returned from accompanying some coolies to Calcutta, Chatterjee refused. 'I shall not undertake to travel 38 miles where there is no railway communication [to Bulandshahr] merely to help him in collecting half a dozen more people, at the sacrifice of my health.' Returning by way of Cawnpore, Lucknow, and Benares, Chatterjee found everywhere unfavourable recruiting prospects, due to the cheapness of grain, and great competition from other colonial agencies. From Benares, for instance, he reported that 'Mr. D. Moses, who is recruiting for Jamaica, had five depots here; Mr. Joshua for Trinidad two depots; and the French subagent has a depot also, besides our own.'¹⁰

While some subagents remained in place from the 1870s, employed by British Guyana during the intervening years, the resumption of Natal recruitment also involved the hiring of new subagents and substantial shuffling of posts. The opening of the 1882 season was, for instance, announced by circular notice sent to the following individuals:

J.R. Moses	Allahabad
Nursingh Prasad Chattarjee	Ghazipur
Shaikh, Ghoorah	Buxar (Baksar)

Meer Abbas	Lucknow
Babu Birbul	Cawnpore
Ahmed Khan	Faizabad
E.M. Emerson	Benares
Nobin Chunder Roy	Baliaghatta
Babu Kandhyalal	Benares
Babu Premchand Bannerjee	Dinapur
Deeplall Singh	Bankipur

The intense competition among agencies, with the animosities and poaching of recruits that resulted, spurred a move to tap new areas outside the established recruiting grounds in the eastern Gangetic plain. This region, comprising Bihar and the easternmost districts of what became the United Provinces (UP), had long drawn colonial recruiters because its dense rural population and deep poverty increased the likelihood of successful recruitment. To move outside this region, while attractive in principle, threw up obstacles which could not easily be overcome. Firth encouraged plans to set up a subagency at Agra, but he was less enthusiastic about moving north and west into the Upper Doab and the Punjab. He warned Emerson, for instance, in March 1882 not to recruit toward the Punjab 'because women cannot be had there'. The following year, he reiterated this warning in a letter to his newly appointed Meerut subagent Kunj Behari. 'I beg you not to recruit at Amballah because women are very scarce at that place and I have always found the men to be very troublesome.' Kunj Behari paid no attention, and opened recruiting at Amballah. Firth sternly told him, 'Having done so you must accept the consequences. These Punjabees give no end of trouble and create discontent amongst the other peaceable coolies in the depot.' Part of the problem arose from their description by the British as a 'martial race', and their subsequent recruitment, from the 1870s, for colonial military and police service. They were, as Firth wrote, 'quite unfit for field labour' as they 'expect to be employed as soldiers or policemen'.¹¹ Similar concerns had caused the Natal government in 1874 to abandon a plan to form a contingent of Sikh Pioneers for military service and road making in the Colony. As W.M. Mcleod wrote at the time, 'I feared that the Sikhs enlisted as Pioneers would not consent to perpetual road-making, and would not consider occasional drilling as military service.'¹²

In the case of other regions, not Natal, nor its recruiting officers, but the Government of India posed obstacles to recruitment. One such prohibited group were Nepalis. Initially, as Firth wrote to Deeplall Singh in 1883, 'I believe plenty of Nepaulese are to be met with at Durbhunga and Muzufferpore. These people are so very much stronger than other coolies that I am anxious to get as many as possible.' He had even secured a female recruiter, who 'intends to recruit only Nepaulese, especially women, and speaks their language fluently'. Anxious to preserve its supply of Gurkha recruits for the military, the Indian government refused to permit such recruitment. Again and again, into the 1890s, the emigration agent had to remind recruiters that they were not to enlist Nepalis. Nor did the Natal recruiters have any better success with a proposed recruiting centre at Kurseong in the north Bengal hills. As the officiating emigration agent wrote to Durban in 1884, 'The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal has prohibited me from recruiting coolies from the Kurseong and Darjeeling districts where the climate is cool all the year round, as he says that the tea estates in the neighbourhood are already suffering from a scarcity of labour.'¹³

More contentious was the matter of recruitment from the Ganjam district along the coast south of Orissa. This district, of Telegu speakers, though it lay within the Madras Presidency, was easily accessible from Calcutta by sea. Hence, in 1882, Firth awarded licences to eleven recruiters there. By the following season, these men were busily 'engaged in various villages in the interior of the district, where owing to the distress which at present prevails there are plenty of labourers eager to emigrate'. He anticipated that half of the 1200 coolies requisitioned by Natal for 1883 would be secured from Ganjam, and that these 'would form a most valuable acquisition to the labour force of the Colony and being in families are more likely to become permanent settlers'. But the Indian authorities insisted that recruitment from the Madras Presidency must take place through the agencies located in that presidency, and so, with the end of the 1883 season, put a stop to this operation.¹⁴

Interior central India still remained open, and this encouraged Natal's recruiters to move in that direction as well. From 1882, recruiters were working in Jabalpur, and the following year Firth urged R. Moses to set up a recruiting station in Bilaspur under the

direction of his son Jacob. The distance from Calcutta, however, enforced higher payments to recruiters—three rupees additional per head for Jabalpur over Allahabad, and a further one rupee for Bilaspur—and so made substantial recruitment in these thinly peopled tracts impractical. Hence, by the end of the 1880s, Natal's subagencies were confined almost exclusively to the traditional recruiting grounds of Bihar and the eastern districts of the UP. An attempt at the turn of the century to revisit the Central Provinces produced no better result. As the emigration agent wrote to the Immigration Trust Board in 1904, 'The principal subagent at Raipur in the Central Provinces sends barely a dozen emigrants at a time, and those at Jabalpur, Hoshangabad, and Bilaspur are doing absolutely nothing.'¹⁵ Fiji, it might be noted, impelled by the same imperatives, did no better in its efforts to recruit in the Punjab and Central Provinces; and it too was shut out of Nepal.

Objections were continually raised, usually from Natal itself, to the recruitment of certain categories of individuals. Among these the most prominent were Brahmins and Muslims. Brahmins, as Firth wrote to all the subagents in March 1883, 'are constantly giving trouble in the depot, so on no account whatever must you send any more Brahmins. They also give much trouble in the Colony and are strongly objected to'. Equally problematic was the recruitment of Muslims. Although Muslims had been included among the emigrants from the time of the first voyages, those of the *Truro* and *Belvedere*, as time went on, opposition to their recruitment began to surface in Natal. In 1889, when Muzaffar Ali at Faizabad asked permission to send 'two Mahomedan married couples who are strong healthy agricultural labourers', the emigration agent, now R.W. Mitchell, reluctantly refused. The 'instructions from the Colony', he said, 'are positive ... I cannot act'. Rather disingenuously, however, a few days later when R. Moses inquired about taking on some Muslim women, Mitchell replied, 'Nothing is said about sex. I fancy you may send a few Mahomedan women but no men.'¹⁶ In 1893, the emigration agent again reminded his subagents, as he set out their recruiting quotas for the coming season, that 'Natal will take Thakoors and Chettris ["martial" high castes] but no Musalmans'. By 1896 Mitchell's informal exemption of Muslim women from this prohibition had become official. 'Mohamedan female emigrants can be accepted',

the emigration agent now told his subagents, 'if they have *hard hands* and have *worked as labourers*'. More generally, agents were instructed, 'You may pass all females of 18 [years] and over no matter whether Mohamedan or of other than the lowest caste, *provided* they have reasonably hard hands and are not beggars, devotees, or dancing girls'.¹⁷ Finally, in 1903, anxious to enlarge the emigrant pool, the Natal government relented, and gave Mitchell permission to allow 'Musalmans to be recruited, of the *labouring class* only, men who have hard hands and have worked always in the fields'.

The wide range of prohibited categories—of castes, communities, and regions—did not please the recruiters in India. Such restrictions, after all, made their work just that much more difficult. After receiving instructions from Natal, for instance, that 'no residents of towns are to be recruited on any account', Mitchell immediately protested to Durban that a desirable immigrant is 'usually one who has succeeded in rising above the ordinary tiller of the soil and owes his robust habit of body to better food, shelter from the weather, and the less laborious life of a gatekeeper, messenger, or body servant'.¹⁸ Despite their common interest in seeing the indenture system flourish, inevitably the recruiters' interests were not the same as those of Natal's planters. The one wanted to meet his annual quota of emigrants as quickly and as economically as possible; the other wanted individuals whose caste, gender, and residential background offered the strongest assurance that they would, or so the planting community thought, set energetically to work upon arrival.

Patience was most sorely tried, on both sides, when so-called 'ineffectives' were sent back from Natal, for here a substantial expenditure of time and money were at stake. Acknowledging, to the protector in Natal, that 'I can fully understand how annoying it is' to receive unfit men, still, Mitchell insisted, the proportion of 'useless' emigrants was very small. As regards those returned from the ship *Sophia Jackson* in 1885, he wrote as follows:

I find the pot maker is a 'Kahar', one of the best labouring castes; the man marked 'Brahmin' who never worked is a Thakur and in this caste many excellent labourers exist. The two beggars certainly should not have been shipped, but when you see two sturdy men, and beggars are unusually so, with hard hands produced at the local recruiter's by a

judicious course of wood chopping, one is apt to overlook the question of caste.¹⁹

These self-imposed restrictions, over the years, took visible shape in a marked reduction in the numbers of Brahmin and Muslim recruits. Caste data compiled by Surendra Bhana show a decline in the numbers of Muslims, as a percentage of Natal's north Indian migrant stream, from a high of 19 per cent in the early 1880s to no more than 2 to 3 per cent annually by the end of the century. Brahmins, never more than 4 per cent of the north Indian total in the earliest years of recruitment, fell away to 1 per cent or less as time went on.²⁰ Still, given the colony's labour requirements, a rigorous prohibition could never be sustained. Other colonies, as we shall see, had no better success in restricting undesirable high caste and Muslim recruitment.

III

As time went on, the staffing and operation of Natal's Calcutta recruiting agency became increasingly regularized. Mitchell, as emigration agent, remained in charge of the office, shared with British Guyana (Demerara), from 1884 until the termination of indentured recruitment in 1911. A few subagents likewise were employed for long uninterrupted terms in areas where emigrants were most readily available, and these individuals did much of the colony's work. About these individuals we possess some, but mostly scattered and fragmentary, information. Although local Hindus were widely employed as well, Muslims, Jews, and educated Bengali *bhadralok* seem to have been disproportionately represented among Natal's north Indian subagents. Some subagents rose through the ranks from initial employment as ordinary recruiters. Those who succeeded in doing so, as Grierson noted, were men 'superior in intelligence and honesty to the average recruiter', and had as well 'while recruiter, managed to save some money', for some capital was required to set up a subagency. Sheikh Ghoorah, for instance, subagent at Baksar (Bihar) in the 1880s, impressed Grierson as 'a good example' of the subagent who had 'risen by ability and superior honesty from the ranks of recruiters'. Ghoorah, Grierson reported, was born in Demerara. He returned to India as a boy with his mother in 1858, only to return to Demerara under

indenture in 1861 with her and his uncle. There he learned English and served as a hospital assistant. On his mother's death in 1872, he came back to India once again and settled at Baksar where he was taken on first as recruiter, then as subagent, for Natal and Guyana.²¹

Not infrequently, family connections served to tie individuals effectively to the recruiting operation. Muzaffar Ali, for instance, taken on as Faizabad subagent when emigration resumed in 1874, remained, with an extended interruption during the early 1880s, on the Natal register until 1901. His son Mohamed Sarfaraz Ali then took over the post. This change, however, was not wholly successful, for Sarfaraz was subjected to repeated criticism for a variety of offences, among them working on behalf of Fiji instead of Natal, employing debarred recruiters, and claiming as his own emigrants recruited for other subagents. Most striking perhaps was the case of the Moses family, whose members played a central role in Natal recruiting for some forty years. Sometimes on his own account, and sometimes together with one of his three sons, R. Moses headed the Ghazipur subagency throughout the 1880s and 1890s. The eldest son, David H.R. Moses, who began recruiting at Ghazipur in 1874, operated a subagency at Benares during much of the 1880s, and worked at Calcutta from 1892 to 1894. The second son Jacob set up a subagency at Allahabad in 1881, and in 1883 moved on to try his hand at recruiting in Bilaspur. Although, as the emigration agent wrote to the father, 'I think it can be worked if only your son Jacob will exercise a little courage and determination', that agency had in the end to be abandoned. Subsequently, Jacob appears to have worked as a recruiter under his father. The third son, M.E.R. Moses, held a recruiting licence in Ghazipur during the mid-1890s, and managed his father's business affairs. On his father's retirement in 1903, M.E.R. Moses succeeded to the charge of the Ghazipur agency. As Mitchell wrote, approving the appointment, 'I hope you will make as efficient a subagent [as your father]'.

Despite their employment on a regular long-term basis, Natal's subagents continued to participate in the abuses commonly associated with labour recruitment. Of these, the most prominent were those of poaching emigrants from territories assigned to other subagents, and surreptitious recruiting for colonial agencies

other than Natal. Complaints of poaching never ceased, but for men such as Mitchell, anxious to keep up a steady flow of emigrants from Calcutta to Natal, the most exasperating practice was the diversion of recruits to other colonies. Such practices, or the threat of them, were of course attractive to subagents because they enhanced the local agent's income, and with it his bargaining leverage.

Among the worst offenders were Muzaffar Ali and his son at Faizabad. In 1899 Mitchell discovered that Muzaffar was sending recruits to the Surinam agency, at a rate of some 250 in a month. This was a matter of some consequence, for Muzaffar, whom Mitchell referred to as his 'head subagent', regularly supplied more Natal emigrants than anyone else. Mitchell was, he acknowledged, 'unfortunately quite powerless to punish him in any way'. So he resorted to scolding him like a schoolmaster with an errant child. 'This sort of thing cannot go on.... You are tempted by the high commission offered by the Surinam agency to desert an agency for which you have worked for years past. Have you no sense of shame to act in this manner?' When Muzaffar protested his innocence, Mitchell retorted angrily, 'I know all that goes on so you may save yourself the trouble of trying to throw dust in my eyes'. Informing the Protector in Natal of this incident, Mitchell acknowledged, 'I could of course increase my commission and so obtain the coolies he is now supplying elsewhere, but it would not be advisable to do so, as I find that once the commission to a contractor is increased, it is impossible to reduce it again'.²² Matters did not improve when Sarfaraz Ali took charge. In 1902 Mitchell chided Sarfaraz, 'This is one of the worst lots of people you have ever sent me. It is quite clear to me that owing to the higher rates Fiji gives you are making over all the best people to them! If you don't want to work for Natal why don't you say so, and be done with it?' On this occasion, however, Mitchell had to concede defeat. Two days later he informed the Natal subagents that they would all henceforth receive Fiji rates.²³

Of course, more than one could play this game. Muzaffar Ali was himself victim as often as victor in the continuing scramble for 'coolies'. In the midst of the controversy over the diversion of emigrants to Surinam, Muzaffar Ali complained bitterly that the subagent Ezekial Solomon had been recruiting in the districts

reserved for him; and that Solomon had, in particular, 'secretly removed' a female recruit, originally registered by him at Faizabad, to his (Solomon's) Bahraich depot, where he had her re-registered. Like Mitchell, Muzaffar too was at the mercy of his underlings. Three of his own recruiters, posted at Cawnpore, he complained to Mitchell, had 'been supplying coolies collected by them to Jamaica and they have not given him a single coolie since the last two months'.²⁴

Among the abuses associated with indentured labour recruitment undoubtedly one of the most common was mistreatment of intending emigrants. It is not the intention of this article to assess how intending emigrants fared at the subagents' depots or on the subsequent journey to Calcutta. Evidence is, in any case, scanty. Grierson for one praised the arrangements in several Natal depots, including those of Sheikh Ghoorah at Baksar and Deeplall Singh at Bankipur. Of the latter, he said, 'The building is a commodious one, and has ample accommodation, with a well in the courtyard The building was clean and tidy...[with the emigrants] given each day as much uncooked food as they can eat.' Of the journey to Calcutta, he asserted that the emigrants get 'sufficient clothing to keep them warm and decent', with 'ample railway accommodation, reserved compartments, one to every eight coolies'. Grierson did admit, however, that some depots were 'worse than this description'.²⁵

The recruiting staff had, of course, little interest in taking notice of instances of mistreatment. When on occasion protests did surface, however, Mitchell at least felt obliged to investigate them, if only to avoid getting into trouble with the Indian government. When one 'Mungroo, a carpenter by trade' complained on arrival in Calcutta in December 1892 that the recruiter who had accompanied him had 'kept back his tool chest and a small lotah valued at Rs 8.8.0 on the plea that they could not go on the train with him', Mitchell wrote to D.H.R. Moses, as the subagent in charge, asking him to inquire into the matter. Complaints by emigrants, Mitchell noted, 'are almost invariably true, and if the man does not get satisfaction at once I shall bring him before the protector, in which case an investigation will be conducted at Benares. In the meantime the man cannot embark, and you are deprived of the commission'. Moses managed to recover only a few of the man's

tools; the recruiter, he was told, should make good the difference, some seven rupees, and should further be penalized a month's wages, another seven rupees, as some compensation for Mungroo's inability to embark on the ship for which his passage had been booked.²⁶ Another incident in 1900 involved four emigrants recruited in Cawnpore, who complained of being robbed of a total of 10.13 rupees; in addition, the one female member of the group claimed that she had been beaten and separated from her family. The woman was sent back at the Cawnpore subagent's expense, and the district magistrate notified, for, as Mitchell wrote, 'it is impossible such frequent complaints, the like of which come from no other sub-agents, can be without foundation in fact'.²⁷

The success of the recruiting operation depended, in the final analysis, on those who went out into the villages to sign up men and women for labour in Natal. About these village level recruiters we know very little. They were hired and paid by the subagents, to whom they were responsible. Before commencing work, however, they had to secure recruiting licences from the local district magistrates. These had to be renewed annually, and were occasionally denied, or even withdrawn after issuance. Most frequently such cancellations involved recruiters caught working for another colonial agency when licensed to recruit only for Natal. More serious was the cancellation in 1895 of the licence issued to Wazir Ali, one of Muzaffar Ali's recruiters, who was 'reported to be a notorious *badmash* [crook] and to use the depot as a gambling hall'. The most active subagents, employed year after year, usually employed the largest number of recruiters. Even with the cancellation of Wazir Ali's licence in 1895, Muzaffar Ali still received recruiting licences for himself and fifteen others. In 1889 he had had twenty-three recruiters in his employ; in 1896, he employed thirty; while in 1902 his son Sarfaraz Ali had some forty recruiters working for him. Not surprisingly, R. Moses at Ghazipur and D.H.R. Moses at Benares also employed annually recruiters ranging in number from fifteen to thirty. Men like Sheikh Ghoorah at Buxar made do with ten to fifteen recruiters, but were asked to send down to Calcutta proportionately fewer emigrants.

These local or village level recruiters were often disproportionately Muslim. Brij Lal's data, for Benares district in the 1880s, indicate that Muslims comprised some 40 per cent of that district's

recruiters for all colonies, well in excess of their share of the population.²⁸ Similar proportions existed for Natal's recruiters. Of Muzaffar Ali's twenty-three Faizabad recruiters in 1889, for instance, fifteen were Muslims. R. Moses that same year employed ten Hindus and seven Muslims, while his son D.H.R. Moses had six Muslims and nine Hindus on the rolls. In 1896, Muzaffar Ali's thirty-four recruiters included twenty-one Muslims; while R. Moses that year had eighteen Muslims of a total thirty-two, and Babu Behari Lal fifteen of thirty-nine. A wide variety of castes nevertheless appeared as registered recruiters. Indeed, Grierson described them as men 'of all castes'. Many, he wrote, 'have been recruiting all their life, but others have been shopkeepers, peons, domestic servants, shawl or cloth-sellers, or even labourers'. The range of previous occupations is vividly apparent in Grierson's listing of four of Sheikh Ghoorah's men. One, formerly an orderly peon to a European zamindar [landlord], had been recruiting for eight years when interviewed; a second had been a servant to a merchant; a third had been a market weighman before taking up recruiting; while a fourth was an emigrant who had returned three years before from Mauritius.²⁹

Natal's recruiters rarely included returned emigrants, nor did recruiters for the most part have personal experience of the colonies for which they recruited. Sheikh Ghoorah himself was an obvious exception. Grierson attributed his taking up recruiting to his 'personal regard' for the European agent, whom he had known in Demerara. Grierson also recounted the extraordinary case of Jhumman Khan, who worked as a recruiter for Mauritius for eight years, and then recruited himself. After five years in Mauritius, he returned to India and began recruiting again. The situation of Mauritius, however, is somewhat exceptional, and will be taken up later. More common was Natal's disastrous experiment with returnee recruiting. In 1883, the Protector in Durban sent two Indians—Sumshoodin and Vencatachellum—back to India, where they were informed of the recruiting regulations, offered £1.10 monthly as salary plus railway fare and commission, and sent off to recruit in six Madras districts. They announced their presence in each village by beat of tom-tom, and read out the recruitment notice, only to return to Madras discouraged after touring Chingleput alone. They complained, the Madras agent reported,

'that they were unable to collect any cooly', and had 'no mind to waste government money by fruitless trials' in other districts. They returned to Natal on the first ship out of Madras.³⁰ In Grierson's view, it was not the employment of returnees as recruiters but their presence in the locality that most effectively facilitated recruitment. In Shahabad (Bihar), where there was 'a healthy inflow of returned emigrants', emigration was so popular, he argued, that potential migrants searched out recruiters. A successful returnee, that is, might inspire others to emigrate, but he himself would be 'too rich' to undertake the unrewarding task of actual recruiting.³¹

It is well known that success in recruitment, for the most part, had less to do with the number or energy of the recruiters than with the state of the seasons in India. Years of scarcity produced an outpouring of potential emigrants, while years of plenty brought recruiting nearly to a halt. Sometimes, as a result, the Natal agency correspondence took on a rather macabre quality. In 1903, for instance, Mitchell wrote to his subagent in Raipur, 'I see the scarcity is much increased in Raipur, so you should easily get large numbers of migrants'. Or, two years later, 'At Benares the principal subagent assured me that emigrants would be plentiful in another month at the farthest, owing to the destruction of the crops by the late frost'. Mitchell was not altogether happy about this conjuncture of dearth and labourers. As he reported sadly to the Natal Immigration Board in 1905, 'It is no pleasure to any one that "famine pine in empty stall where herds were wont to be"; all the same the Indian peasant will not emigrate though living on the verge of an empty stomach, unless pressed by want.'³²

In times of plenty, to keep up emigrant numbers, Mitchell was driven to increase the rates offered to subagents, and to expand the number of staff. Neither of these expedients, however, in his view, was wholly successful. Higher fees, he pointed out in 1903 to a Natal desperate for Indian labourers, only encouraged fraud on the part of the recruiters, who pocketed 'the extra money without doing much in return for it', while the employment of reliable subagents was 'an exceptionally difficult matter, as the most capable men are not by any means the most reliable'. So long as harvests remained 'bountiful', with an 'abnormal cheapness of food', matters did not improve. In 1904 Mitchell wrote to Natal,

'I am employing three times as many subagents as I did a few years ago, but the results are not encouraging. I have offered an extra ten rupees per statute adult embarked, but the large increase in the rate has made very little difference in the supply of emigrants.'³³

Part of the anxiety over keeping up emigrant numbers arose from the substantial fixed costs, especially in Calcutta and at the upcountry depots, which had to be met no matter how many individuals were sent to Natal. In 1902, for instance, Mitchell reported the following items of expenditure.³⁴

Office and depot charges-

Agent's salary	Rs 7500	
establishment	6101	
rent	3600	
blankets and clothes	2525	
depot surgeon	2138	
hospital	2692	
total		29,074

Cost of rations in depot 7785

Charges for collection of emigrants-

commissions to recruiters	Rs 73,271	
subagents' salaries	1600	
fees for emigrants shipped	8721	
medical exams	4033	
total		87,625

Charges for dispatch-

clothing for voyage	Rs 10,316	
tin ware	1046	
blankets	5629	
total		11,991

As the Calcutta agency that year sent off 2770 adults, Mitchell calculated the cost per adult at 11.7 rupees against office expenses, 32 rupees for collection, 3.6 rupees for rations, and 4.11 rupees for dispatch, making a total of 51.8.0 rupees cost for each adult dispatched.

IV

The system of recruiting in southern India, which provided the bulk of Natal's labourers, differed substantially from that in the north. Initially, the agency at Madras was established on the same basis as that at Calcutta. Henry Burton, who had set up the agency in 1860, was followed as emigration agent in 1878, after resumption of emigration, by George Hope Ross, formerly chief sanitary officer of the Madras municipality. Determined to keep costs down, Ross dispensed with paid contractors and recruiters. Instead, 'constituting himself his own contractor and recruiter, [he] moved daily among the people and encouraged them to enlist'. He proudly reported that, in his first six shipments, he thereby saved Natal some 20,000 rupees on commissions. This was, however, not a very efficient way to conduct a large-scale recruiting operation spread across a number of districts. As the number of emigrants underwent a steady decline into the early 1880s, Ross, desperate, entered into a contract with a local merchant, who guaranteed a regular supply of a shipload of 300-350 emigrants quarterly. The contractor engaged recruiters, and the number of emigrants embarked for Natal turned upward. In the first nine months of the 1883 recruiting year, more emigrants were dispatched than in either of the two previous full years. The Natal authorities were still not satisfied. In October 1883, they terminated Ross's employment, and awarded the recruiting contract to the agency house of Messrs Parry and Co.³⁵

As a large commercial firm, handling many lines of business, Parry's was at once better, and worse, suited for emigration work than an individual agent. As the *Natal Mercury* newspaper noted apprehensively when the appointment was first announced,

A mercantile firm of long standing and repute possesses a certain amount of prestige of value in the commercial world, but it is almost certain that in assuming the functions of an emigration agent its large business transactions will be a distracting element. The heads of a leading local mercantile firm...are hardly likely to bring to this work the undivided attention which a gentleman selected from among a number of applicants for the post could give.

Parry's retorted that no individual agent 'could hope to bring the same power to bear on recruiting that we can, as he has no branches of his business in each of the different districts'.³⁶

At the outset, to avoid disruption, Parry's kept on the same contractor, P. Balasoondrum Moodilly, whom Ross had engaged during his last year in office. Soon, however, dissatisfied, they 'swept away all the old recruiting arrangements', and started afresh on their own. Dividing the presidency into a number of subdivisions, they appointed in each one an agent, in almost all cases a European, with a remuneration ranging from five rupees per adult shipped, in the northern districts, to two rupees, for those near Madras and on the railway line. These agents in turn supervised some 140 recruiters; these were reimbursed at the rate of 10 rupees for each adult male embarked, and 8 rupees for females. Parry's urged Natal not to send recruiters from the colony, for the local recruiters, jealous of such rivals, would 'try to put every obstacle' in their way, and so prevent them from getting emigrants, as had happened with the two hapless recruiters sent over in 1883. By the end of 1884, Parry's proudly claimed that the new arrangement had begun to bear fruit, with the shipping of some 1800 adults in seven months. Pleased, the Natal Immigration Board chairman noted that the new Madras agents were supplying immigrants at a substantially lower cost than their Calcutta counterparts.³⁷

Under Parry's management, criticism was levelled primarily at the remuneration and behaviour of recruiters. Parry's practice was to advance one-third of the commission due to the recruiter when a 'coolie' was admitted into the depot. This advance would enable the recruiter to continue working while arrangements were made for the shipment of those collected. Once a 'coolie' was passed as medically fit and had embarked, the recruiter would then be paid the remaining two-thirds of his commission. These funds were retained until sailing to cover the not infrequent rejection of intending emigrants, who would then have to be returned to their home districts at the recruiter's expense. The recruiter was similarly held responsible for recruits who disappeared from the depot before sailing. Although this delay in payment helped to prevent loss to the agency, it had the effect, so one Natal observer charged, of encouraging recruiters in need of funds to hand over recruits

to the Mauritius agency, which offered a lower commission but paid in cash on the spot. Outside observers were frequently critical as well of the 'energy' recruiters put into their work. 'Many of them', as one wrote, 'do not seem to be very keen on the job'. Another caustically asserted that 95 per cent of intending emigrants presented themselves to the recruiter at the sub-depot. As a result, 'the recruiters never stir out of the town where he [sic] has his subdepot situated. It is much easier work for them to sit in the verandahs of their subdepots, and wait for the coolies to come...rather than tramp the country asking people if they would like to hear the terms offered for emigrants to Natal'.³⁸

As was true in northern India, some districts in the south, most notably North and South Arcot, produced more emigrant labourers than others. Some years too were more productive than others (for the annual figures see Appendix 1). Similarly, the recruiters for Parry's encountered many of the same obstacles, and took advantage of the same opportunities, as did their brethren to the north. Reporting in 1899, for instance, on the prospects for the far northern districts of the presidency around Vizagapatnam, Parry's told Natal,

The East coast railway is practically completed, and in consequence a large number of labourers are thrown out of employment and these people, when other work fails, are favourably disposed towards emigration. These districts too were formerly drained by Assam who now will take only khonds (or hillmen) because as a result of living in malarious districts they are able to stand the feverish climate of Assam.³⁹

In the winter of 1907-8, in the waning days of indentured labour recruitment, yet while demand for 'coolies' remained strong in South Africa, A.R. Denning from Natal toured some 3000 miles throughout southern India. He visited some 115 subdepots, and interviewed 176 recruiters. Denning's report provides therefore a last glimpse into the recruiting of Indians for Natal. Already, nationalist opposition to such recruitment was, visibly and forcibly, making its presence felt. Recruiters, Denning wrote,

are opposed by the influence of the swadeshi [self-rule] and Congress movements and have to spend money on all sides. They are also discarded by others as, in a manner, receivers of blood money. In many recruiting centers the swadeshi movement is opposing the work of the

recruiters as much as possible. I have myself experienced the Swadeshi spirit shown in two or three instances.

Denning singled out the Kistna and Godavari districts as centres of 'swadeshi action'.⁴⁰

Parry and Co. still held charge of the overall operation, but recruiting activities were in the hands of a number of subagents. Among these were Messrs Simson Bros, who acted as subagents for a large tract that included Rajamundry, Cocananda (Godavari), and Vizagapatnam. An Englishman named Clark looked after the emigration work on Simson's behalf, although, as Denning noted, 'many of the recruiters in these localities were selected by Mr V.M. Rajah Mudaliar, who started depots here some years ago'. North Arcot and part of South Arcot were under the charge of P.N. Jumbulinga Mudaliar, 'a reliable and influential man', who was also a municipal councillor at Vellore. R.K. Srinivasan, 'an energetic influential young man' had charge of Nellore, while T. Hart, in Bezwada and Guntur, was 'hard working' but had 'a difficult district to deal with'. Commission payments to recruiters had now risen to 45 rupees per adult. Three years later, in a desperate final bid for emigrants, rates were further raised to 50 rupees for men and 85 rupees for women. In 1911, after fifty years, and the shipment of over 152,000 Indians, indentured labour recruitment for Natal came to an end—the victim of intense nationalist hostility in India, together with the increasing availability of free Indian and black African labour in Natal.

V

With half-a-dozen colonies jostling each other for labourers, one must ask whether, and how, the Natal recruiting operation differed from that of other colonies. In the absence of study of local records, which can alone provide this kind of information, it is hard to assess in detail the recruiting patterns of the various colonies. Exceptional is the work of Marina Carter, whose *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers* provides a close study of recruitment for Mauritius, as well as of life in the colony, in the mid-nineteenth century. To be sure, the years she examined, from 1834 to 1874, overlap only slightly with the period studied here. Nevertheless, she has identified, as a 'distinct feature' of Mauritian recruiting, the use of

time-expired labourers (returnees) in place of the practice of commercial contracting. Such a recruiting strategy, Carter argues, in which 'old Mauritius men' were given money to go into the interior, often returning to their own home areas, enabled the colony to secure entire kin groups as migrants, and at the same time eased the not uncommon apprehension felt by potential migrants as to their fate in an unknown land across the sea. Returnee recruiting, she concludes, 'helped to maintain the popularity of Mauritius, overriding the market mechanism in labour procurement'.⁴¹ As we have seen, returnee recruiting was rarely employed for Natal in either northern or southern India. Part of the reason for the more successful employment of this system for Mauritius, surely, is to be found in that island's comparative closeness to India. This made possible easy movement between the two, which, together with the early introduction of indentured labour, in 1834, made the island familiar to Indians contemplating overseas migration. Parry's, for instance, after its first year of operation in Madras, prided itself on having 'far exceeded Mauritius with all its popularity and long standing'.⁴²

Natal, nevertheless, shared with other colonies, including Mauritius, fundamental elements in its system of indentured recruitment. The workings of supply and demand affected all equally. All colonies found it easier to secure emigrants during seasons of Indian scarcity, which drove supply; and all were equally subject to the fluctuations of the world economy, which drove demand. Always, the critical determinant in labour recruitment was colonial demand; and this, in turn, was set by the world demand for sugar. When sugar prices were depressed, plantation owners required less labour. Such fluctuations in demand created problems for the recruiting agencies in India. Not only were they often hard pressed to find recruits when demand rose, they also found it difficult to contract their operations when demand fell. No sooner, for instance, had Parry and Co. set up their new recruiting operation in south India than Natal, citing the depressed state of the sugar market, told them to cut back. Protesting, Parry's replied that 'an order such your letter contains means that we must destroy what we have created ... Once we disperse our recruiters... we shall in the first instance break faith more or less with them ... and to reorganize once more should your wants increase again will be most difficult'.

Self-interestedly, they suggested that, instead of contracting their own operations, the Calcutta agency be closed down altogether.⁴³

The Indian government, furthermore, established the framework within which all colonial recruiters were obliged to operate. With minor variations over time, the Indian authorities remained committed to the encouragement of indentured emigration. Such emigration would, in their view, help to relieve crowding in overpopulated districts in India; it would offer opportunities for economic advancement for the individual Indian migrant; and, of course, it would help to alleviate the labour shortages faced by colonial planters during a period of generally increasing demand for sugar.⁴⁴ Despite the close ties which existed between them, it is important not to regard the Indian authorities as captives of the colonies, much less of their planting communities. The periodic stoppages of indentured migration at times of complaints of abuse, as in Mauritius in 1839 and in Natal in 1871, are evidence of a continuing concern for the welfare of migrants.

The system of Protectors, too, both in the Indian ports and in the colonies, standing between the planters and the 'coolies', enshrined the principle that the British empire was responsible for securing its subjects from abuse. How much 'protection' these 'Protectors' actually afforded emigrants is, to be sure, a matter of contention. A certain degree of scepticism is no doubt appropriate, especially once emigrants had been placed on plantations in the colonies. Still, the Protectors took care not to identify their interests directly with those of the colonial planters. As the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal wrote in 1861 with regard to those posted at the Indian ports,

The Protector should initiate no action. His authority should be limited to the checking of any abuse: to seeing that the laws and regulations in force are properly observed; and to securing the coolies from deception or violence....The [Emigration] Agent should see to the interests of the colonies; and the Protector to those of the coolie.⁴⁵

Whatever its failings, this regulatory system, linking India and the colonies under the umbrella of the British empire, stands in sharp contrast to the wholly commercial recruitment of Chinese, by British agencies and others, for overseas labour.

As they established regulations for indentured emigration, the Indian authorities took care to keep their own interests in view. As we have seen, they declined to permit recruitment of Nepalis, whom they wanted to retain as potential soldiers. They endeavoured to steer colonial recruiters away from tracts specially favoured by recruiters for domestic industries such as the Assamese tea plantations. Apart from occasional intervals, the entire Bombay Presidency was kept closed to colonial recruiting. This was done in response to the demands of local Indian industrialists, who won the support of the provincial government for their insistence that 'the labouring population of the presidency is not sufficient for its wants', and hence should not be encouraged to emigrate. Protectors adamantly refused to judge the suitability of intending emigrants for agricultural labour, confining their examination to questions of health and fitness for travel. Local district magistrates, too, on their own initiative sometimes blocked recruiting operations by harassing recruiters. As Mitchell reported to Natal in 1903, 'Where the magistrate is opposed on principle to emigration out of India, as some of the younger and less experienced are, it is quite hopeless to attempt collecting emigrants in the district as the recruiters are certain to be run in by the police'.

Colonial recruiters shared with each other, and with most officials in India, a set of racial and ethnic stereotypes that shaped patterns of recruitment. Certain caste and regional groupings, above all those of high caste, were universally disfavoured, while others, especially those of lower agricultural and artisanal castes, were sought out. The preference for these latter castes was based on the presumption that, as people used to manual labour in the fields in India, they were more willing to undertake such work overseas, and more fit for it. Mitchell described the preferred emigrant, in a letter of instructions to his travelling agent Babu Benoy Krishna Gupta. Himself a member of an 'unsuitable' higher caste, Gupta was to tour the various Natal subdepots and 'to see that no emigrants are recruited except such as belong to the agricultural castes, with hard hands, sound healthy bodies, ample chests, and muscular limbs'. Although the heights of migrants were always carefully recorded, height as such played no role in determining who was fit for indentured recruitment, and there is no reference to it in the Natal agency correspondence.⁴⁶

Throughout these various directives to recruiters, there existed always a tension between caste status and individual physique. We have seen how ambivalent the Natal authorities were about accepting Brahmins and Muslims. Similar anxieties accompanied the recruitment of 'martial' caste groups such as Rajputs. As Mitchell wrote to his subagent Behari Lal in 1901, 'I will take the thakurs you have already recruited if they are *paka labourers* but don't collect any more if you can get lower castes'. Yet, on the ground, as recruiters scrambled for migrants, such prescriptions often gave way. Marina Carter's case study of migrants from Calcutta to Mauritius, for instance, is headed by Muslims and untouchable Chamars, and includes among its top ten caste groupings both Rajputs and Brahmins. The roster of UP migrants to Fiji from 1891 to 1911 was headed by Muslims at 15 per cent followed by Chamars at 13 per cent; but Rajputs and allied castes made up 10 per cent of the total, while Brahmins contributed 3.7 per cent. As Lal noted, there was a broad correlation between the numerical strength of these groups in the UP population and their contribution to the emigrant stream. Surendra Bhana's study of ships' registers of indentured emigrants to Natal over the period from 1860 to 1902 shows roughly similar results. From Calcutta, the leading caste groups were untouchable Chamars (15.8 per cent) and agriculturist Ahirs (12.2 per cent), but Muslims comprised some 5.5 per cent of emigrants and the Rajput/Thakur/Chattri grouping some 8 per cent.⁴⁷ In the final analysis, bodies, especially those with 'hard hands', mattered more than caste taboos.

A regulated indentured labour migration, then, marked out visibly, in the bodies of those recruited, the centrality of India within the British imperial system. The interconnections of the empire provided a way of at once facilitating and, in principle, protecting emigrants, while India furnished a reservoir of individuals willing to take up the opportunities they saw, or hoped they would find, in British colonies overseas. Had not India been part of the British empire, recruitment of labour for colonial plantations would have been random, less organized, with the provision of fewer protections for migrants; in sum, more comparable to that from China. It might also have enforced a more widespread recourse in the colonies to the employment of indigenous peoples, from Zulus to former slaves, and at a higher cost. With India as an

imperial 'centre', British colonies across the tropical world could be assured of a reliable economical supply of plantation labour. The British, on their part, could assure themselves that, by regulating this migratory traffic, they had fulfilled their obligations as imperial rulers, while Indian diaspora populations—from the West Indies and South Africa to Mauritius and Fiji—stand to this day as a living testimony to British Indian 'coolie' recruitment.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery* (London, 1974). Among the more recent accounts are Marina Carter, *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers: Indians in Mauritius, 1834–1874* (Delhi, 1995); K.O. Laurence, *A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guyana* (London, 1994); Brij V. Lal, *Girmitiyas: The Origins of the Fiji Indians* (Canberra, 1983); and Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 1998).

2. Indian Immigration [II] Letter Books, Kwa-Zulu Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg. Within India, only the outgoing letters from the Calcutta and Madras emigration agents to their upcountry subagents, not the incoming replies, have been preserved. Full footnote citations are given only for extended extracts from this correspondence.

3. Collins to Colonial Secretary, 26 April 1860; to H. Burton, 18 August 1860; to Colonial Secretary, 15 September 1860, 17 October 1860, and 5 February 1861, Kwa-Zulu Natal Archives, E.I. [East India] file 55. See also Y.S. Meer (ed.), *Documents of Indentured Labour: Natal 1851–1917* (Durban, 1980), 48–51.

4. For the lists of passengers on these first two ships, see Meer, *Documents*, 54–79.

5. For the relevant documents, including enactments and regulations in Natal, see *ibid.*, 172, 176–7, 211–38.

6. Firth to subagents, 31 March 1874, Natal Letter Books IIB/1/14. In practice, the prescribed sex distribution was rarely maintained with the proportion of males commonly reaching 65 per cent. See Surendra Bhana, *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal 1860–1902* (New Delhi, 1991), 19–20.

7. Report on Emigration from Calcutta by F. Colepeper, 5 March 1877, II 1/3/53.

8. Memoranda by James Caldwell of 15 and 17 September 1878, *ibid.*

9. Indian Immigration Trust Board meeting of 19 March 1880, Natal Letter Books II 1/6/73; Firth to Protector of Immigrants Natal, 30 June 1880, II 1/7/875.

10. Khetta Mohan Chatterjee Inspection Reports, especially from Allahabad (25 December 1880), Meerut (27 December 1880), and Benares (3 January 1881), II B/1/12.

11. Firth to Kunj Behari, 15 February 1883, 6 March 1883, and 10 March 1883, II B/1/16.

12. W.M. Macleod to Colonial Secretary Natal, 3 August 1874, in Meer, *Documents*, 204-5. For a discussion of reluctance to recruit Punjabis, see Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 53.

13. Firth to Deeplall, 12 February 1883; Officiating Emigration Agent to Protector Durban, 22 January 1884, II B/1/16.

14. Firth to Protector of Emigrants Calcutta, 3 March 1883, *ibid.*

15. Mitchell to Secretary Indian Immigration Trust Board, 23 January 1904, II A/2/1/96.

16. Mitchell to Muzaffar Ali, 11 February 1889, and to D.H.R. Moses, 16 February 1896, II B/1/18.

17. Mitchell to subagents, 3 November 1896, and to B.K. Gupta, 6 November 1896, II B/1/22.

18. Mitchell to subagents, 21 November 1895, and Protector of Immigrants Natal, 22 November 1895, II B/1/21.

19. Mitchell to Protector of Immigrants Natal, 1 June 1885, II B/1/17.

20. Bhana, *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal*, 77-82.

21. Grierson, *Report on Colonial Emigration from Bengal Presidency* (1883), 10, 12; and Diary, pp. 33, 40, India Office Records, V/27/820/35.

22. Mitchell to Muzaffar Ali, 9 January and 21 January 1899; Mitchell to Protector Natal, 20 January 1899, IIB/1/25.

23. Mitchell to Sarfaraz Ali, 10 March 1902, and to all subagents, 12 March 1902, II B/1/28.

24. Mitchell to Solomon, 3 December and 14 December 1898; Mitchell to Magistrate Cawnpore, 17 February 1899, II B/1/25.

25. Grierson, *Report on Colonial Emigration*, 7-9. See also the description of the subdepot in Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 27-30.

26. Mitchell to D.H.R. Moses, 5 January and 7 February 1893, II B/1/20.

27. Mitchell to B.E. Hoff, and to Magistrate Cawnpore, 5 March 1900, II B/1/26.

28. Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 23.

29. Grierson, *Report on Colonial Emigration*, 12; and Diary, pp. 40.

30. Emigration Agent Madras to Protector Natal, 21 February and 2 March 1883, with enclosure of 26 February from recruiters, II 1/12/246 and 302.

31. Grierson, *Report on Colonial Emigration*, 15; and Diary, p. 9.

Deeplall of Bankipur had one returnee working as recruiter under him, and knew of two or three others, *ibid.*, Diary, p. 11.

32. Mitchell to Indian Immigration Trust Board, 17 April 1905, II 1/133/168; Mitchell to Indian Immigration Trust Board, 24 June 1905, II A/2/8/282. For general discussion, see Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 25–6, 55–6.

33. Mitchell to Protector Natal, 17 February 1903, and to Indian Immigration Trust Board, 23 January and 18 February 1904, II A/2/1/96.

34. Report on Calcutta Agency Expenditures for 1902, II 1/121/2272.

35. Ross to Protector Natal, 27 December 1882, II 1/12/93; Ross to Indian Immigration Trust Board, 21 July 1883 and 12 March 1884, II A/3/2. The internal correspondence of this firm with its recruiting staff and other agents in the interior is not available. Hence, even though the south supplied twice as many Natal-bound emigrants as the north, we know much less about the recruiting operation in southern India as compared to that through Calcutta.

36. *Natal Mercury* (Durban), 14 January 1884; Parry and Co. to Protector Natal, 20 December 1884, II 1/22/1563.

37. Parry and Co. to Protector Natal, 20 February and 1 March 1884, II 1/19/501; Parry to Protector, 18 March 1884, II 1/20/625; Parry to Protector, 20 December 1884, II 1/22/1563.

38. Parry and Co. to Protector Natal, 14 November 1892, II 1/61/145; W.R. James to Protector Natal, 16 April 1903, II 1/117/832.

39. Parry and Co. to Protector Natal, 24 April 1899, II 1/94/877.

40. A.R. Denning to Indian Immigration Trust Board, 13 February 1908, II A/2/15/54.

41. Carter, *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers*, 66–7.

42. Parry and Co. to Protector Natal, 20 December 1884, II 1/22/1563.

43. *Ibid.*

44. See Minute by Lieutenant-Governor Bengal, 11 September 1875, National Archives of India, Bengal Emigration Proceedings, November 1875, No. 9–19. The Indian authorities doubted that emigration on the scale envisioned would have any considerable effect upon Indian poverty.

45. Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Note of February 1861, cited in Carter, *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers*, 83.

46. Mitchell to Benoy Krishna Gupta, 30 September 1896, II B/1/22. For discussion of heights of emigrants, see Lance Brennan, John McDonald, and Ralph Shlomowitz, 'Toward an Anthropometric History of Indians under British Rule', *Research in Economic History*, 17 (1997), 185–246. They make clear that, though heights of emigrants were measured, height was not used as a measure of physical ability, and there was no minimum height restriction (194–6).

47. Carter, *Servants, Sirdars, and Settlers*, 302; Lal, *Girmitiyas*, 69-70; Bhana, *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal*, 77-82.

APPENDIX 1 Indentured Labour Recruitment to Natal

Year	Calcutta	Madras	Total	Year	Calcutta	Madras	Total
1860	312	601	913	1891-2	1043	2140	3183
1861	240	359	599	1892-3	588	2293	2881
1862	0	0	0	1893-4	1095	1538	2633
1863	0	668	668	1894-5	1722	1728	3450
1864	384	1857	2241	1895			
1865	0	984	984	(6MO)	0	982	982
1866	0	864	864	1896	1974	1977	3951
1867-73	—	—	—	1897	2922	3129	6051
1874	4310	0	4310	1898	1863	4076	5939
1875	2057	0	2057	1899-			
1876	754	0	754	1900	1570	5169	6739
1877	1089	1173	2262	1901	816	6199	7015
1878	1722	3576	5278	1902	2119	4373	6492
1879	0	1116	1116	1903	2312	2804	5116
1880	505	1168	1673	1904	n.a.	n.a.	7691
1881	1703	909	2612	1905	n.a.	n.a.	7914
1882	872	753	1625	1906	3855	7786	11641
1883	1457	947	2404	1907	474	6012	6486
1884	1337	1626	2963	1908	823	2351	3174
1885	389	850	1239	1909	0	2487	2487
1886	0	227	227	1910	n.a.	n.a.	5858
1887	0	941	941	1911	2714	2928	5642
1888	0	942	942				
1889	699	2670	3369				
1890	1108	3432	4540				
1891				<i>Grand Total</i>			
(6 MO)	1912	537	2449		50,716	101,468	152,184

N.B. These figures have been compiled from reports of the governments of India and of Natal. Small discrepancies in the numbers reported exist within these reports and between them and other compilations such as that based on ships' lists in Surendra Bhana, *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal 1860-1902*.

Sikh Recruitment for Colonial Military and Police Forces, 1874–1914

During August of 1873, Captain T.C.S. Speedy, sometime Lieutenant in the 10th Punjab Regiment, recruited some 200 Sikhs and Pathans in the Punjab on behalf of the Mantri of Larut, a petty chieftain in Perak (Malaya), who planned to use them to subdue the growing power of the Chinese clans in the state. The next year, with the advance of British authority into Malaya after the Pangkor Engagement, Speedy was appointed assistant resident at Larut, and his force was taken into government service as the Perak Armed Police. Subsequently reorganized as the Perak Sikhs, and then, after the creation of the Malay federation in 1896, as the Malay States Guides, this force remained the premiere body of armed police in Malaya until 1919, when it was finally disbanded. In Hong Kong as well, the late 1860s and early 1870s saw the recruitment of Sikhs for the colonial police. Together with Punjabi Muslims, these Sikhs constituted the predominant element in the colony's police until the mid-twentieth century. In 1922, there were 435 Indians in the Hong Kong police; in 1939, 774.¹ The same tale of recruitment and policing can be told of the Chinese treaty ports, of the Straits Settlements, and, with the British conquest after 1890 of East and Central Africa, of Nyasaland, Kenya, Uganda, and Somaliland. By the end of the nineteenth century, across a great arc ranging from Zomba to Tientsin, Indian, predominantly Sikh, contingents subdued, patrolled, and policed the British empire. In doing so, these Indian policemen made visible a larger reality—

that India was not simply a colonial territory, but itself an imperial centre whose power and influence radiated out to define an empire, peopled not only by Indian police but by Indian labourers and merchants and administrators, as much Indian as British.

This essay asks why and how Indians were recruited for service in the colonial police and military; why Punjabis, above all Sikhs, were singled out for such recruitment; and what it meant to transport not only men, but also some of the shaping ideas and institutions of the late Victorian Raj, such as the theory of 'martial races', to colonial territories around the Indian Ocean. No attempt is made here to provide a comprehensive survey of this vast subject. Rather the object is to illuminate, by discussing several individual cases, the central role of the India of the Raj in the ordering of the larger British empire. I do not propose that Malaya, say, or Nyasaland, were reshaped in India's image. The differences, as well as the similarities, matter. The colonies were never India; but, I would argue, neither were they wholly separate from it. This essay assesses how patterns of military and police recruitment defined the relations between India and the colonies from the 1870s to World War I.

We can conveniently begin with Tristram Charles Sawyer Speedy (1836–1910). Born in Meerut, son of James Speedy, a lieutenant in the 3rd Regiment of Foot, Tristram Speedy was commissioned into the Indian Army in 1854. By 1860, posted first in Meerut and then in Peshawar, Speedy had risen to the position of adjutant in the 10th Punjab Regiment. In that year, restless, he gave up his commission, and commenced a life of wandering adventure. This took him first to the court of King Theodore of Abyssinia, where he also served for a time as British vice-consul in Eritrea; then to New Zealand, where he enlisted in the local militia fighting the Maori; and ultimately back to Abyssinia, when Lord Napier summoned him to act as interpreter and adviser for the 1867–8 campaign that was to culminate in the siege of the fortress of Magdala and the death of King Theodore. After the Magdala campaign, Speedy took charge of Theodore's orphaned infant son Alamayu, whom he brought with him to England, and subsequently to India, where Speedy secured the post of District Superintendent of Police in Sitapur (Oudh). After two years in India, Speedy moved on to the Straits, where in 1872 he took up

the position of Superintendent of Police in Penang. After little more than a year, in July 1873, he resigned from this post, at less than a month's notice, to take up service with the Mantri of Larut. A month later he was on his way to Lahore.²

Speedy's recruiting strategy was simple enough. Returning to an area with which he was familiar from his army days, he signed up, within a few weeks, around 200 men: some residents of Wazirabad and Gujranwala, others Pathans and men from the hill tribes. As the District Superintendent of Police in Lahore later wrote of Speedy's activities, 'He would not enlist residents of towns or cities, but villagers only. Each man received one rupee on enlistment as bounty, and was to receive three annas a day until the date of leaving Calcutta, their [sic] pay would then be rupees 20,25, and 30 respectively; they were informed that they were going across the water; that the Government were going to abandon the Andamans as a penal settlement; and that some other "tappoo" or island had been selected; and that they were being enlisted for service there. ... the men were dispatched from Lahore in small parties daily, and their expenses paid to Calcutta'. (Whether deception was employed on this occasion is an open question. Clearly the financial incentives were substantial, and the senior police authorities doubted that Speedy had in fact implied that the Andamans were to be abandoned. Still, as he was recruiting on behalf of the unknown ruler of an unfamiliar state, Speedy may have found some judicious 'bending' of the truth helpful.)

Speedy had not bothered even to inform the Government of India of his recruiting mission, much less take its permission. Hence, when his recruits were discovered milling about on the docks at Calcutta, the government, suspicious of this seemingly surreptitious venture on behalf of a foreign power, delayed Speedy's departure, and sought explanations for his behaviour from both the Punjab and the Straits authorities. The Punjab Inspector-General of Police somewhat disingenuously replied, 'As there are no orders on the subject of enlistments, and it being no uncommon occurrence, the maharajah of Cashmere constantly having agents enlisting men, and in regard to crossing the sea, agents from both China and the Andamans have lately been in Lahore, no notice was taken by the police.'³ Singapore, on its side, said that the Larut Mantri was a ruler with whom it had friendly relations, and

that they had no desire to interfere with his effort to regain control of his country from the Chinese. Speedy too insisted that the Mantri had turned to India for police 'as he had neither faith nor trust in the inhabitants of his own province, as the Malays instead of keeping order often sided with one faction or the other, and thereby only enhanced disorder'.⁴ Consequently, on 25 September, Speedy embarked for Penang with the 100 of his recruits who remained.

From Speedy's enterprise, a number of consequences followed. A furious Government of India discovered, to its surprise, that, as the Bengal secretary wrote, 'so long as the government cannot prove *belligerent* intention against a friendly power any one, be he who he may, may come and raise soldiers in India without leave or license....A coolie to till the land may not be taken without very special precautions, but a soldier may be taken without any precautions 'whatever'.⁵ As a result, by Act IV of 1874, the Indian government reserved to itself the power to prohibit, or to regulate, subject to any conditions it might impose, the 'obtaining or attempting to obtain within India recruits for the service of any foreign state in any capacity'. Although, as we shall see, this act did not conclusively settle the question of how colonial recruitment was to be carried on, it did subject all such activity to government scrutiny, and so put an end to recruitment by 'rogue' adventurers such as Speedy.

In Malaya, Speedy's troopers received an enthusiastic welcome, and not only from the Mantri of Larut. After the Pangkor Engagement, and even more after the Perak War, precipitated by the assassination in November 1875 of Speedy's superior, the British Resident in Perak, the British were anxious to secure the presence in Malaya of a force sufficient to quell potential unrest, to control the Chinese tin miners and secret societies, and, more generally, to sustain the authority of the Malay sultans in whose name the nominal sovereignty of the country still resided. Units of the Indian Army were brought in to suppress the 1875 rising, but this force could not be retained indefinitely in what remained constitutionally a 'foreign state'. Speedy's militia pointed the way to a solution. As the colonial secretary in Singapore wrote to Calcutta in November 1874, 'Great difficulty has been found in procuring Straits men properly qualified to serve as guards for the Residents and as

military police, but a number of Siekhs serving for some time in Perak...have given so much satisfaction...that Sir Andrew Clarke [the Governor] considers it would be very beneficial for the service if a well selected body of men of that class could be procured from India'.⁶ The resulting request for 100 men met with the sanction of the Indian government. These recruits, however, scattered across the country in small groups, and lacking, after Speedy's transfer to civil employment, an officer who could communicate with them in their own language, remained ill-disciplined and so of little use. After the Perak War, the Governor Sir William Jervois renewed, now more urgently, his predecessor's request for an Indian police, and decided as well to organize the force more efficiently.

Dissatisfied with the remnants of Speedy's recruits, whom he derided as 'of low caste and bad character', Jervois proposed 'to keep only the best of them to form the nucleus of the Resident's Guard', and to procure the remainder from India, from among 'Sikhs of good character who have been discharged from Punjab regiments'. This force of about 200 men he proposed to employ as sentries at residencies, jails, and public offices. It is unclear how far either Speedy or Jervois operated, in their recruiting activities, from a theory of Indian 'martial races'. Elements of the larger post-Mutiny military cast of mind certainly did exert their influence. Using troops drawn from one community to control another—the doctrine of 'divide and rule'—had clear Indian, as well as imperial, precedents. Speedy preferred Punjabis not only because he had served in that province but because, ever since John Lawrence had turned to them in the dark days of 1857, Punjabis were perceived as loyal and trustworthy. Speedy's preference for villagers also anticipated a continuing theme in the recruitment for the Indian Army. Yet Speedy clearly had no scruples in taking on board almost anyone who would join. With Jervois, the focus on 'Sikhs' as the best material began to take shape, but, as in India at the time, a good deal of uncertainty existed about what made Sikhs especially attractive. Only in the early 1880s, as David Omissi writes, as the 'bias of Indian Army recruiting shifted to the Punjab and Nepal', did the theory of 'martial races' become fully elaborated, above all in the recruiting handbooks whose essentialist prescriptions defined Indian practice.⁷

As we shall see shortly, for colonial recruiters, terms like 'Sikh', set apart from their Indian context, often existed as little more than floating signifiers of martial ability.

Once the decision had been taken to employ Sikhs in Malaya, there remained the question of discipline. Above all, Jervois insisted, the force had to be 'under the superintendence of an officer who can speak Hindustani and who can understand their habits and prejudices', and who could also speak Malay. The choice fell upon Lt Paul Swinburne, an officer of the 80th Regiment of Foot who had served in both India and Malaya.⁸ A cousin of the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne, Lt Swinburne took charge of the Perak Armed Police in December 1876, and set out to discipline it on an Indian military model. In this endeavour, he received the hearty support of the Indian government, which for some years had been concerned about the way such recruits were treated by the local authorities in the colonies. In particular, the Indian government was anxious to avoid a recurrence of the events of 1863, when some 1000 Punjabis 'of the superior military classes' had been recruited to form what they were led to believe was a Pioneer Corps of sappers and miners attached to the Ceylon Public Works Department. When they arrived in Ceylon, the Indians found themselves called upon to do the work of labourers, breaking stones on the roads; insisting they had been recruited as soldiers, the men refused to work and in the end all had to be sent back to their homes. The government's concern of course was not wholly disinterested, for 'the unfortunate result of this experiment', it wrote, 'may exercise an injurious result on the temper and behaviour of a valuable class of men whenever they may be required by government for service beyond the sea'.

Much to be preferred was the strategy employed by the Hong Kong government, which, when it sought Indian recruits in 1867, had supplied detailed terms of service, with rules, regulations, and grades based on those in force for the Punjab police. The term of engagement was set at five years with a free return passage to Calcutta at its termination, and the opportunity of re-enlistment. All of this was meant, as the Indian government acknowledged, to reassure the men that the force was in fact raised for police duties. Further, the Hong Kong government had hired an officer of the Punjab police, a district superintendent from Multan, one

Mr Creagh, to enlist the men required and then to accompany them to Hong Kong, where he took up the permanent position of superintendent of the Indian contingent.⁹ Although Swinburne was not a Punjab officer, and he recruited the bulk of his men locally, nevertheless the Hong Kong regulations shaped the structure of the Perak force, which in 1878 numbered some 247 Sikhs.

Despite the imposition of discipline under an Indian-trained officer, the Perak Sikhs, like their counterparts in Hong Kong, did not fit easily into colonial society. They were not meant to. The disaffected Emily Innes, whose husband, in Perak service, had been exiled to the obscure post of Durian Sabatang, described the police there, Sikhs and Pathans, as 'too sacred to be made of use in any way that was not strictly military. These lordly beings therefore confined themselves to marching up and down below the house, gun in hand, as sentries, and begging for brandy whenever they saw me, under pretext of drinking to my health'. Somewhat more sympathetically, the traveller Isabella Bird, from the comfort of the Perak residency, described the Indian police she met, 'splendid looking men with long moustaches and whiskers' wearing 'large blue turbans, scarlet coats, and white trousers', as 'to all intents and purposes soldiers, drilled and disciplined as such'. Their joy, she wrote, 'would be in shooting and looting, but they have not any scent for crime'. They are 'devoted to the accumulation of money, and very many of them being betrothed to little girls in India, save nearly all their pay in order to buy land and settle there. When off duty they wear turbans and robes nearly as white as snow, and look both classical and colossal. They get on admirably with the Malays, but look down on the Chinese, who are much afraid of them....I have been awoke each night [at the Residency] by the clank which attends the change of guard, and as the moonlight flashes on the bayonets, I realize that I am in Perak'.¹⁰ A near total linguistic isolation reinforced this social distance. The overwhelming majority of the Indian police, Punjabi speakers, in Malaya as in Hong Kong, with little incentive to learn Malay or Chinese, could communicate with no one apart from their comrades and commandant.

These social barriers did not much trouble the British. The solving of crime was the task of the Malay police, some 220 strong, on land and water, in 1878; while rural policing fell to the

lot of the village headman (*penghulu*). Similarly, in Hong Kong, the 177 Indians on the force in 1874 were complemented by some 110 Europeans and 204 Chinese constables. The Indians were there in large measure simply to overawe and intimidate the local population, in part by their sheer physical size. Isabella Bird told of seeing 'a single Sikh driving four or five Chinamen in front of him, having knotted their pigtails together for reins'. Many resident Europeans, especially among the non-official community, considered the Perak Sikhs a 'useless extravagance', while their arrogance excited widespread comment. Even a senior official like Hugh Clifford could write of the Sikh that 'he is possessed of as absolute a conviction of his own superiority to the men of any other race—Europeans alone excepted—as is the White Man himself. He is quite frank about this opinion, and he is accustomed to act upon it at all times. To other Asiatics he is as arrogant and overbearing as can well be conceived, and he displays none of the tact which helps to make a European less hated for his airs of superiority than he might be'.¹¹ Despite, perhaps indeed because of this behaviour, the usefulness of the Sikh policeman remained unimpaired.

As time went on, the arena open to Sikh employment widened, and their numbers increased. In Perak itself Swinburne was replaced as commandant of the Sikh police in 1879 by Capt., later Lt. Col., R.S.F. Walker (1850–1917), an officer who had served in India with the British Army and had participated in the suppression of the Perak rising. Walker set out to strengthen and reorganize the force. In 1883, he recruited a troop of cavalry, consisting of fifteen *sowars* drawn from Fane's Horse, to patrol the roads at night. The following year he reconstituted the force, rather grandly, as the 1st Battalion, Perak Sikhs (at no time was there ever a 2nd battalion), and at the same time increased the size of the force to 701 Sikhs, together with 175 Malays and the fifteen troopers.¹² In 1884 as well, a Sikh contingent of forty men was formed for Perak's southern neighbour, the state of Selangor. When initially established, in 1875, with a superintendent, H.C. Syers (1853–97), who secured the post even though he was only a 22-year-old private in the 10th Regiment of Foot, the Selangor police had consisted primarily of Malays, whom Syers recruited from Malacca. For years, Syers resisted the employment of Sikhs or other north Indians. Similarly,

unlike his neighbours in Perak, Syers did not concentrate his force as a strategic reserve at the residencies, but rather dispersed most of it throughout the interior to check crime. In part, no doubt, this strategy reflected the fact that, unlike most of his police contemporaries, Syers had never served in India or in the Indian Army. Hence, he did not possess their unwavering confidence that Sikhs alone could be disciplined into an effective force. Nevertheless the pressure to employ Sikhs was unrelenting. As early as 1879, F.A. Swettenham as resident was arguing that 'it would be more advisable...to employ as in Perak a proportion of Sikhs'. Behind this preference lay also a belief on Swettenham's part that to place police on civil duty in villages would undercut the village headman by setting up a rival source of authority. In the end, a compromise was reached, in which Syers agreed to accept Indians as 'semi-military guards' for the residency and other public buildings, while retaining his force of some 300 Malays.¹³ By 1894, the Sikh contingent in Selangor comprised some 210 men.

In 1889, a Sikh contingent of 100 men followed the extension of British authority across the Malay peninsula into the eastern state of Pahang. On this occasion, both the incoming Resident J.P. Rodger, and the Pahang sultan opposed the introduction of these men into the state. The sultan, Rodger wrote, 'strongly objects to the importation of Sikhs into Pahang saying that they are rough and ignorant of Malay customs', while Rodger concurred that Sikhs were 'out of place in a purely Malay state' such as Pahang. None of this altered the governor's conviction that a Sikh Guard was required in Pahang as elsewhere. Putting the best face on the decision, Rodger concluded that 'the main, if not the only, objection to the Sikhs is that so few of them can speak Malay, but the Pahang force is called upon to perform a comparatively small amount of purely police work'.¹⁴ Two years later, in 1891, the Pahang Malays rose in rebellion. Mobilized jointly, the Selangor and Perak Sikhs took the lead under Syers in containing the uprising. One encounter, however, ended in disaster, when in June 1894, portions of both the Selangor and Perak forces, surprised in the jungle, commenced firing wildly, and in the confusion shot and killed a British officer. The resulting inquiry, by Major-General H.T. Jones-Vaughan, which called into question both the

recruitment strategy and the organization of the Indian forces in Malaya, helped bring about their complete reconstitution in 1896. Concurrent with the inauguration of the Federated Malay States, the Perak and Selangor Sikh police were consolidated into a new Malay States Guides under Colonel Walker, while Syers became commissioner of police for the Federation. Syers' force was composed mostly of Malays, together with a few Sikhs brought over from the disbanded Perak force. (Syers retained his new post for only one year, for in July 1897 he was killed by a wild beast he had wounded while hunting in the jungle.) Walker's 'smart little troop' of mounted cavalry, now twenty-three in number, alone survived the upheaval. Although, as the Perak resident acknowledged, 'with the development of roads, telegraphs, and railways, the necessity for the "Troop" as a practical working body has nearly disappeared', and the road patrols were now entrusted to Malays on bicycles, nevertheless, as the sultan was 'much attached' to them, these troopers were retained as his ceremonial bodyguards.¹⁵

In the Straits Settlements too, after a long and agonizing debate, a Sikh contingent of 165 men joined the force in 1881. Through the 1870s, the Straits police consisted of almost equal numbers of local Malays and Klings (south Indians). Opposed to outside recruitment on the model of Hong Kong or Perak, the police inspector-general in 1876 insisted that 'the present force is one recruited without expense from the population of the Straits Settlements, and the wages paid do not exceed the ordinary rates of household servants and coolies. They all speak Malay, the common language of the inhabitants of these settlements'. Nevertheless, as the evidence given before the 1879 police commission made clear, there existed much dissatisfaction with Malay and Kling alike, together with a tendency to counterbalance 'the truthfulness and sobriety' of the one against the 'greater intelligence and activity' of the other in the endeavour to secure an effective force. The Chinese, distrusted because of their ties to the secret societies, were perceived as 'too dangerous' to employ in any number, and so were excluded from the force altogether except as detectives. Hence, guardedly, the 1879 commission recommended introducing a 'certain number' of Sikhs. Within a year of their arrival, the inspector-general, impressed by their

'very remarkable aptitude for acquiring a knowledge of military exercises', was already, despite their possession of an 'overbearing' disposition, clamouring for an enlargement of the Sikh contingent.¹⁶ By the late 1890s, over 300 Sikhs were employed in a Straits police force some 2000 strong.

Throughout these years, who was to be recruited, and where, remained contentious questions. From the beginning, derived from post-Mutiny Indian practice, there always existed a consensus that Sikhs were to be preferred as soldiers and policemen. But, unlike the Punjab itself, where from the 1880s, castes and 'tribes' were always carefully enumerated and their military qualities precisely defined, on the fringes of empire categories such as 'Sikh' and 'Pathan' were often uncertainly comprehended and could be in practice surprisingly inclusive. In much of South-east Asia, a 'Sikh' was someone of the appropriate physique who wore a turban and called himself a Sikh. As the British Commissioner of Police in Siam noted in 1905, "Sikh" is, in this part of the world, a grand name for all kinds of Indians. I have seen Madrasi Pariahs and Gonda Barwars masquerading as Sikhs'. Jones-Vaughan commented similarly of the Selangor Sikh Police, half of which was not Sikh at all but 'Pathan', that its 'Pathan' Company was 'composed chiefly of so-called Pathans, who were really no more Pathans than I am, coming from the southern Peshawar district'. In fact, these men, like most 'Pathans' in the 'Sikh' Police forces, were Punjabi Muslims.¹⁷ Perhaps the most extreme instance of this uncertainty was found in far-off Africa, where in 1892, Sir Harry Johnston requested the service of a contingent of Sikhs to aid in the conquest of Nyasaland, but acknowledged that 'I am afraid I derive most of my ideas of the Indian Army from the works of Rudyard Kipling'(!).¹⁸ To confound confusion further, Sikhs, and north Indians more generally, were popularly known in Malaya as 'Bengalis' because they embarked at Calcutta—and so were the carefully constructed ethnic stereotypes of British India turned upside down.

Commonly, for Perak, the Straits, and Hong Kong, once a police force was constituted by officers and men brought from India, subsequent recruitment took place from among those who offered themselves for enlistment at headquarters. In 1885, 251 men endeavoured to join the Perak Sikhs in Taiping; three years

later, in 1888, some 365 trooped up to the enlistment desk. On average, of these men usually about one-third were taken on, and the remainder sent away. Most had found their way to Malaya on their own, drawn by the prospect of employment. Some of them—thirty-seven of seventy-two recruits in 1884, and twelve of 129 in 1888—had seen service in the Indian Army, while others were actively recruited by members of the Perak force, who were, as Swettenham wrote, encouraged ‘when on leave in India, to bring with them on their return to duty men selected by them, many of them being their own friends and relatives’. On occasion such recruiting activities were officially sponsored. In July 1887, for instance, Subadar Chanda Singh was sent on a tour of the Punjab, from which he returned with fifty recruits averaging, as he proudly reported, 5 feet 10½ inches in height and 34¾ inches in chest measurement. (Height and chest size were always seen as signifiers of appropriate fitness.) Col. Walker, an enthusiast for recruitment in India, believing that it would thus be possible to ‘secure a much finer body of men’, himself undertook a recruiting tour of the Punjab in 1884, and the district recruiting officer in Amritsar was subsequently empowered to enlist men for service with the Perak Sikhs. For the most part, however, the Perak authorities, with their neighbours in Singapore, preferred to do their recruiting at home, where recruits could be secured much more cheaply and as easily as in India. Those who were rejected rarely returned to India, but rather took up employment as ‘carters, gharrymen, syces, and watchmen’ in Malaya, or struck out in search of greener pastures in Borneo, Sumatra, or China.¹⁹ Labuan and British North Borneo alone provided employment for over 200 Sikhs, Punjabis, and Afghans by 1898, while Sikh migration to China, and from there to Russia, and even Canada, was, as we shall see, to provoke a crisis in the first years of the twentieth century.

The colonial authorities wrestled too, like their counterparts in India from the time of the 1858 Peel Commission onward, with the vexed question of whether different ‘classes’ should serve in mixed units or be kept apart. The ultimate dividing lines of race were never crossed. Malay and Chinese units were always kept rigorously separate from those manned by Indians. But, particularly given the small numbers, and the often rather vague notions of Indian ethnicity held by many in South-east Asia, it was uncommon,

despite the increasingly 'class'-based organization of the Indian Army, to separate 'Sikhs' from other Indians. One such experiment was that carried out in Selangor in 1893 when the so-called Sikh contingent was divided into one company of 'Sikhs' and another of 'Pathans'. After the 1894 disaster, Jones-Vaughan argued strongly for the elimination of the 'Pathan element' altogether. The Pathan, he said, 'at best and when obtained from the best districts is unreliable in time of need, gives a great deal of trouble especially as regards the women of this country (as he is a Mohammedan), [and] requires a strong hand and constant supervision'. Echoing most contemporary colonial opinion, he insisted that 'military considerations are greatly in favour of a homogeneous force which would be free from jealousies and would be animated by a common bond of brotherhood in the field'. As constituted after 1896, the Malay States Guides, under Walker's leadership, comprised some 540 Sikhs, together with a vestigial group of eighty Pathans and Punjabi Muslims.²⁰ Always, the objective was to make colonial police forces as much 'Sikh' as possible.

With the apparent success of Sikh police in South-east Asia, as the British moved into east and central Africa after 1890, they began to clamour for Sikh police and military units of their own. Under the umbrella of British rule, especially during the two decades before World War I, as Indian labourers, merchants, and clerks as well as soldiers flocked to East Africa, the region became almost an extension of the India of the Raj. Descending from the first ascent of Mt. Kenya in 1899, after a number of uneasy encounters with the indigenous people, Halford Mackinder crossed an unexpected border. 'Suddenly', he wrote, as he approached Nairobi, 'one passed out of Africa into Asia, out of Bwana country into the Sahib country! There was a bazaar, with turbaned sallow Punjabi coolies, and Masai women....There I found a man paying wages....I came back to civilization'. Indeed, so extensive were its opportunities for Indians that Sir Harry Johnston saw in East Africa, as he wrote in a memorable phrase, 'the America of the Hindu'.²¹

The introduction of Indian police into East Africa followed close upon the heels of the organization of the Imperial British East Africa Company, the British government's chosen agent to administer those territories, north of German Tanganyika, which

it had reserved for itself. Ignoring the Indian Secretary's refusal to permit such recruitment, Colonel J. Pollock, a former officer of sappers and miners in Burma now employed by the IBEA, brought back with him from Bangalore to Mombasa in 1889 some 100 pensioned soldiers, artisans and sappers, to begin construction works.²² Subsequently, the Company secured permission to recruit 200 police from among non-Sikhs in the Haryana districts of the Punjab; these men, recruited for a three-year term, sailed from Bombay in June 1890 with A.S. Rogers, a young assistant district superintendent of police in Lahore. Before the three years were out, however, in July 1893, the East Africa Company, near bankruptcy, abandoned its government of the coastal districts around Witu and Lamu. To preserve some order from the chaos, the territory was made a Protectorate under the Sultan of Zanzibar, and placed under the charge of Rogers as administrator. With his police about to return to India, Rogers, with his superior Rennell Rodd, the Consul General in Zanzibar, pleaded desperately for more Indians. As Rodd wrote to the Indian government, 'The utter debacle of the Company has rendered the situation all along the coast extremely critical.... I am at my wits end where to find men; the Arab irregulars cannot be relied upon [while] the Swahili troops are unseasoned and not very courageous'. A force of 100 sepoys, as Roger reported, 'is more valuable than three or four times that number of Swahilis'.²³

The Indian government, for reasons we will presently assess more fully, did not receive this request with enthusiasm. As one official in the military department wrote, 'what is objected to is the frittering away of Indian soldiers, actual or potential,—and Punjabis especially—in these regions', while another argued forthrightly that 'the proper field' for the recruitment of troops for Africa was in Africa itself. The request was denied.²⁴ Once the British government had itself taken over the administration of East Africa, however, with the formation in 1895 of the East Africa Protectorate, the Indian authorities were in no position to refuse to supply men when called upon to do so. In February 1896, some 300 Punjabi Muslims set sail from Bombay in response to an urgent telegram from the Foreign Office for volunteers from the Indian Army 'to go at once to Mombasa'.²⁵ Although the Indian government still grumbled about this 'drain' on the 'best classes of our native

soldiers', they had already, some five years earlier, in 1891, when Capt. C.M. Maguire, as commandant under Sir Harry Johnston, had been given permission to recruit from the Indian Army for service in Central Africa, opened the door to an ever-widening involvement in Africa.

As Commissioner in charge of a British Protectorate (subsequently Nyasaland, now Malawi), Johnston was on much firmer ground in claiming assistance from India, as the Indian government itself acknowledged, than was a mere chartered company or the Sultan of Zanzibar. Indeed, since the 1870s, the Indian government had consistently denied the independent, though British, 'White Rajas' of Sarawak authority to recruit in India. Throughout the discussions with Johnston, the Indian Army was itself of two minds about the value of such overseas service. As one military secretary wrote, 'From the point of view of the army, it appears expedient that such highly paid employment, especially when calculated to foster an adventurous spirit among the men, should be placed within their reach as it is within that of their British officers'. Yet, at the same time, the military department continued to worry about whether such recruitment might not 'materially weaken our military resources'.²⁶ Both with regard to Central Africa, and in the simultaneous discussions over the formation of a regiment for Hong Kong, the government sought a way out of this conundrum by excluding Punjabis from such service. In their initial reply to the War Office, the Indian authorities recommended that the Hong Kong battalion be composed of south Indians, while the Indian secretary suggested the use of Hindustanis in Central Africa.²⁷

Yet, in the end, neither proposal could be accepted, for they were too much at odds with the ethnic stereotypes on which the post-Mutiny Indian Army was constructed. As one military official wrote, urging reconsideration of the ban on Sikhs for Central Africa, 'assuredly no other natives of India will be fit for the work'. Hindustanis and south Indians, he continued, 'are predestined to failure in a service of the kind proposed. It was found in the case of Burma that the Hindustani with his pots and pans, his prejudices, and his prostration as soon as removed from his own country, his own diet, and his native "ab-o-hawa" (climate), proved himself not only a lamentable failure but a grave difficulty

to the administration. And if he failed in Burma, how much more, and more disastrously, would he fail in Africa? The same objections, but intensified, would exist to taking men from Bombay, Madras, or the Hyderabad Contingent'. Ultimately the Hong Kong regiment was composed largely of Punjabi Muslims, while Captain Maguire secured fifty Mazbi Sikhs, together with a few lancers from the Hyderabad Contingent which he had one officered, for service in Central Africa.²⁸

Within a year Johnston was back, begging for more recruits from India. Great Britain, he insisted, 'can only maintain her supremacy in these countries of Central Africa by the employment of Indian troops'. During the campaigns of 1891, until Maguire's death in December, whenever 'our skirmishing force of Zanzibaris was repulsed by the enemy or temporarily disappeared, the Indians always saved the day'. If we cannot, he said, 'be allowed, for the next few years, to maintain a force of from one to two hundred Indian soldiers, we had better retire from Nyasaland altogether and allow the slave trade to go on unopposed'.²⁹ Such threats had their intended effect. One hundred Sikhs were dispatched from India to Central Africa, under Lt C.A. Edwards of the 35th Sikhs, in February 1893. A few months later, a second draft of a further 100 followed, under the command of Lt W.H. Manning of the 1st Sikhs. When, after two years, the term of this contingent came to an end, Johnston's request for replacements met with but little objection, Lord Kimberley at the Foreign Office commenting simply that 'the further engagement of a Sikh force would greatly facilitate the task of administering the Protectorates'.³⁰

The levy of the Sikh contingents for Central Africa from among the soldiers of the Indian Army, together with the raising of the Indian regiment for Hong Kong on the same pattern, announced a radically new mode of recruitment, markedly different from the earlier signing up of Sikhs within the colony itself or sending recruiters through the towns and villages of the Punjab. Under this new system, recruits were secured by the commanding officer of the proposed colonial unit. As the Adjutant-General described the process in a circular, 'Lieutenant C.A. Edwards is authorized to visit regiments and personally select volunteers....[He] will send to the Commanding officers of the regiments from which he desires to obtain volunteers, a statement in the vernacular detailing the

conditions of service in British Central Africa, and the commanding officers are requested to be good enough to have these read to their regiments at three successive roll calls'. Usually no more than twenty or so men could be taken from any one regiment, so that such units, even if composed of only one class, such as Jat Sikhs or Punjabi Muslims, might still be drawn from twenty or more different Indian regiments.³¹

A number of considerations drove forward this new recruitment strategy. Troops were often required, in the case of East and Central Africa, 'a strange, thickly populated country', for immediate deployment in campaigns of conquest and pacification. For such purposes, there existed, as the Indian government recognized, an 'especial need for trained and disciplined men'. Time did not permit the luxury of an extended period on the parade grounds of Mombasa or Zomba.³² Further, officials such as Johnston, keenly aware of the Indian government's reluctance to sanction recruitment for Africa, were anxious to avoid any appearance of 'rivalry' with the Indian authorities, 'who very naturally raise an objection to Agents of what may be termed Colonial Police Forces offering superior inducements to Sikhs'. As Johnston said, he would 'willingly' have recruited his own 'raw' Sikhs, for he could then have gotten more men more cheaply and engaged them for longer periods of service. But he thought it preferable to ask for that which 'it would be easier for the Indian government to grant'. On no account was Johnston prepared to give up his Sikhs. Even in peacetime, he said, the Sikh was invaluable. Not only was his 'demeanour toward the native invariably conciliatory', but he 'makes himself useful in road making, in the construction of bridges, in the organizing of telegraphs, and in all work where an acute intelligence is needed'.³³

For its part, the Indian government was sufficiently mollified to permit African recruitment to continue on this basis. After all, it enabled them to regulate such enlistment, and so prevent 'unfair competition' with their own recruiting; while recruitment from within the army might even, so they hoped, 'enhance the popularity of the Indian Army by giving highly paid openings to well conducted men of adventurous spirit'.³⁴ But fundamental problems, as the Indian government saw them, remained. One was the differential rates of pay offered for Indian and for colonial service;

the other, the sheer number of available Sikhs, for those men taken away even for short terms of colonial service had to be replaced if the Army was to be kept up to strength. The pay differential could be substantial. The Indian Army offered recruits seven rupees a month, with rations to be paid for out of this sum, leaving a 'take home' remainder of some three rupees and eight annas. The African colonies, by contrast, offered ordinary sepoy 18 rupees a month, together with free rations and a gratuity of some 100 rupees at the end of the two to three year term; while the Hong Kong regiment offered 15 rupees and free rations. The Hong Kong Sikh police averaged 32 rupees per month, while those in Malaya, in units such as the Perak Sikhs, earned from 18 to 22 rupees. Under such conditions, as the military department noted in 1896, 'It is not to be wondered at that the men are eager to enter colonial employment.' Nor was the loss confined to those individuals who signed up for colonial service; for, as one official pointed out, it was necessary to consider 'the effect on the minds of possible recruits who absolutely refuse to enlist on seven rupees a month when once they know their brothers have gone off with a party offering 20 rupees'. With a vast force under arms, the Indian Army could not hope to match the colonial terms, but as a step toward reduction of the disparity, they increased their own pay to nine rupees in 1895.³⁵ At the same time, as we shall see, they sought to extend the restricted system of recruiting, run by the Indian Army, from the African to the Asian colonies, where, apart from the Hong Kong regiment, it had hitherto not been in force.

Throughout the 1890s, the Indian authorities agonized at length over the question of whether the recruiting grounds of the Punjab, especially as they affected Sikhs, were becoming depleted, and, if so, how far colonial recruiting was to blame. As the Commander-in-Chief grumbled in 1893, 'It is absolutely impossible to obtain Sikhs and Punjabi Muhammadans of the old class, and it will be suicidal to admit further demands from Africa and elsewhere on our exhausted recruiting grounds'.³⁶ The facts, of course, were elusive, and subject to conflicting interpretation. In 1896, and again in 1898, the Indian government endeavoured to assess the current demand for Sikhs in the military, in India and elsewhere, against the available numbers. These calculations revealed that

something like one in ten of the entire Sikh male population of military age, or 39,598 of 482,500, were employed by the Indian military; of these 28,146 were Jats, 2452 Mazbis, and the remaining 9000 of other classes. Among Punjabi Muslims, 21,000, or some per cent of those eligible, were in Indian military service. On colonial service, including both volunteers from the Indian Army and those recruited independently, the government in 1898 counted a total of 5000 men. Of these 2554 were Sikhs (scattered from Hong Kong across Malaya to Central Africa and Uganda), 1548 Punjabi Muslims (mostly in Hong Kong and East Africa), and 893 others (in Hong Kong, Ceylon, and Mauritius).³⁷

What these numbers meant for colonial recruiting policy was at best inconclusive. The Indian government itself chose to read from them the message that in future 'we should not be called upon to supply Sikhs except in very small numbers', but that other classes might continue to be recruited. Others, in the military department, regarded the whole furore as 'exaggerated', and pointed to the very few Sikhs enrolled for non-Indian corps in any one year. According to one 1896 calculation, the annual total was no more than 100; a later count, of Sikh migrants to eastern Asia, produced an estimate of 600. In this view, the presumed shortage might be overcome by widening the recruitment pool to include non-Jat Sikhs, of whom the Sikh district recruiting officer claimed that he could supply 200 to 300 a year. After all, as one officer wrote, 'Sikhism is only maintained by us, and at present we are tending fast to maintain it in only a portion of the Sikh community'. Indeed, as the Indian Army by its demand for soldiers sustained the 'vitality' of the Sikh religion, any shortfall in numbers could easily be met by the creation of more Sikhs! Most outspoken perhaps was Col. B. Duff, who insisted that 'The more Sikhs we employ in India the more Sikhs there will be in the country....Even the demand for Sikhs in the Far East has the same tendency. So long as it pays to be a Sikh, so long will Sikhs increase and multiply'. A.H. Bingley noted too that, though few of those who were called 'Sikhs' in the East were 'real Sikhs', there was 'nothing to prevent them becoming so, as indeed they do when they join corps such as the Malay States Guides'. Of course, not everyone was so sanguine. As A.P. Palmer wrote in reply, 'By taking short Sikhs, Lobanas, Brahmin Sikhs, etc., we have lately tapped a fresh

source of supply, but the proper stamp cannot be held to the unlimited extent that Colonel Duff would seem to imply. There is a limit to fecundity'.³⁸

Despite this ongoing controversy, Sikh recruitment continued to grow throughout the years at the turn of the twentieth century. In 1898, at the urgent request of the Foreign Office, the Indian government supplied, reluctantly, a contingent of 400 Sikhs for Uganda. Three years later, in 1902, the British unified their forces throughout the region, Indian and African alike, into the King's African Rifles (KAR). Its first commander was an Indian officer, Lt Col. W.H. Manning, who had come to Africa with the Sikh contingent of 1893. Commonly the Indians were used to 'stiffen' African troops. The 185 Sikhs in Nyasaland in 1898, for instance, comprised one company in the British Central Africa Rifles. The six others, totalling 800 men, were formed from the local Atonga, Yao, and Marimba peoples. The Sikhs were 'distributed to the various companies so that each garrison of a fort is able to move out a complete force of Sikh and native troops to any point. About one hundred Sikhs are stationed in Zomba ready to march out at a few hours' notice.' In addition, the Sikhs supplied the senior non-commissioned officers (NCOs) for the African companies, acted as drill instructors, kept the accounts of stores and rations issued to the men, and took charge of all escorts, guards, detachments, posts, and forts in the absence of British officers.³⁹ Sikhs from Central and East Africa were further employed, sometimes in company with troops sent from India, on punitive expeditions in the area, most notably those, on several occasions in the years after 1900, against the so-called 'mad mullah' of Somaliland. In 1905, a contingent of 400 men was recruited in India especially for service in Somaliland.

Meanwhile, far away in South-east Asia, another controversy was brewing. This time the focus of British anxiety was not just that, by leaving the country Sikhs were 'draining' India of potential troops, but that, by taking service with foreign powers, they posed a threat to British security. As most colonial forces in South-east Asia recruited from among those Sikhs who presented themselves for employment, and there was always an 'ample supply' of applicants, the British anticipated that disappointed job-seekers might look for work elsewhere in the region. Already, in 1894, the

Straits authorities were reporting that 'increasing numbers of Sikhs' were emigrating from that colony to Sumatra, Borneo, and Siam in search of employment as police or watchmen. The Indian Immigration Agent in Penang, for instance, told of a conversation he had had with a sergeant-major of the Sikh Police, who had heard that some Sikh emigrants to Sumatra 'have already been enlisted in the Dutch Police and it seems probable that they will be enlisted in the Dutch Army'.⁴⁰ By 1902, these job seekers were reportedly taking service with the 'Siamese, French, Dutch and Germans, at Bangkok, in Tonkin, Sumatra, and Kiauchou'. Indeed, a few Sikhs were even spotted heading for Russian Asia, where they found employment at Port Arthur and on the Manchurian railway.

Not everyone, to be sure, was alarmed by this apparent growth in foreign service on the part of India's Sikhs. The British police commissioner in Siam, who had in his own force some 177 Indians, including ten Sikhs, when asked in 1905, replied that the 'few Indians' he knew who were employed by foreign states were mostly in Java, and the remainder were in Chinese employ in Swatow. 'All I know are watchmen. They all come from the United Provinces and are all, incorrectly, known as Sikhs'. Some, like the adjutant-general A.H. Bingley, committed to the principle that Indians should be free to 'carry their services to the best market', argued too that 'the savings which these Punjabi emigrants remit to their homes in India must add much to the prosperity of their villages, and constitute an indirect, but very substantial, gain to India'.⁴¹ Others sought to make a distinction between those powers which posed no threat, such as the Dutch or Siamese, to whose colonies emigration should not be discouraged, and potential rivals, most notably the French and the Russians.

Nevertheless, the fears aroused by the existence of an unfettered military emigration fed upon themselves. As Curzon wrote in 1903, unleashing his imagination, 'We may have at any time to fight one or other of these [European] powers, perhaps more than one in combination. I think it is a most serious thing that we should possibly be confronted by our Indian subjects whose brothers and cousins and kinsmen are in the ranks of the Indian Army. If men are to be enlisted from India to fight against us, the solidarity of India as a political factor in the East is gone; and I

would take any steps however strong to prevent so ruinous a consummation'. Further, so the British conceived, their very success in mobilizing Indian troops abroad, visibly demonstrated in the suppression of the Boxer rebellion, had aroused the envy of their rivals, who now sought Indians for themselves, so that what had formerly been a minor 'evil' had now become a 'growing one'.⁴²

To cope with this presumed danger, the various colonial and home authorities put forward an array of palliatives. One was the reclassification of Punjabis in the Straits Settlements, through which much of the eastward movement took place, as members of 'agricultural classes'. In this fashion, they could be brought under the Indian Emigration Act which, with its Straits counterpart, regulated the employment of 'labourers' overseas, and restricted their mobility to an enumerated list of colonial destinations. Of course, as several critics pointed out, Sikhs in Malaya were rarely employed in agricultural labour, and were 'well able to take care of themselves'; hence they did not require the elaborate mechanism for their 'protection' that justified restraining the movement of indentured Indian labourers. Still, alleging that most Sikh migrants had been at one time, in the Punjab, engaged in agricultural labour, the Straits government in 1905 by notification included them, with all other Punjabis, within the terms of the Indian Immigration Ordinance.⁴³

More far-reaching was a proposal to end local recruitment altogether. Instead, colonial recruiting would be conducted in India through the Army's recruiting agencies, and the recruit's term of service would end with compulsory repatriation back to India. There would then be no longer any occasion for Sikhs to wander through the Far East in search of employment, while those whose terms of service had expired would be safely back at home, out of reach of foreign recruiters. Schemes of this sort, as a means of 'regularizing' recruitment for colonial police and military forces, had been floated by the Indian government as far back as 1892. In 1903, and again in 1905, they reiterated their conviction that the 'surest means of arresting this flow of fighting men' to foreign service was to insist upon recruitment in, and repatriation to, India. On occasion the government even claimed that repatriation was in the interests of the men themselves. As Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief, wrote, condescendingly, in

1904, 'it will save them from the risk of being left out of work, and perhaps destitute, in a distant country'.⁴⁴

These proposals evoked but little enthusiasm in the colonies. Much of the objection centred on questions of cost. After a year's trial, in 1908, the Governor of Hong Kong reported that the colony had spent some 8152 rupees during the previous year on recruitment in India, in addition to the delays and correspondence the scheme required, while there had been 'no decrease at all in the number of eligible recruits who offer themselves locally'. It was, he concluded, 'of no practical value for this Government to refuse to enlist men locally so long as hundreds of eligible recruits reach the colony and seek employment on the railway or in private capacities as watchmen, etc.' In the Straits Settlements likewise, F.A. Swettenham as Governor saw no point in upsetting a system that had worked well 'for a good many years' in favour of one that was both 'more expensive' and 'less satisfactory'. Nor did the Straits authorities see repatriation as a boon to retired policemen, many of whom had made their homes in Malaya and had no desire to leave.⁴⁵

In the Chinese treaty ports, however, more was at stake than money. At the outset, the Foreign Office had worried that the adoption of these restrictions might 'discourage the employment of natives of India at places such as Shanghai and Tientsin, and lead to the employment of foreigners instead, to the possible detriment of British interests'. Such concerns were not wholly imaginary. In Shanghai, for instance, in 1903, some 40 per cent of the foreign population was British, and the municipality employed 200 Sikhs in its police force. In addition, there were 180 Sikhs employed as watchmen by private firms and individuals, and a further 40 in search of employment.⁴⁶ Loss of Indian police could therefore adversely affect Britain's 'predominance' in this crucial commercial centre. Indeed, as the political situation within China deteriorated, most visibly by a riot in Shanghai itself in December 1905, which shook the European community, the Municipal Council, unwilling to trust its Chinese constables in a contest with their own people, determined to increase the size of its Indian police force to a total of 1000 men.

The Government of India was willing to make available volunteers from the Indian Army for such an enlarged force. Even

the ever sceptical Duff admitted that 'we have undertaken an obligation to British administrations and cannot now repudiate it'. In the end, however, the negotiations collapsed over the question of discipline. The Indian government insisted that these troops must be placed under military discipline, by embodying the Indian Articles of War in the Shanghai Police Code, while the British authorities in China, anxious not to give cause for suspicion to the Chinese or the other European powers, wished to make clear that this was 'strictly a police force, not a small standing army which does police work'. Hence they demanded that the courts of the international settlement should exercise jurisdiction over the disciplining of the force. In May 1907, the Indian military, disgruntled, withdrew its offer of troops. Ordinary recruitment in Shanghai, however, together with one batch of 160 recruited in India under the old terms, sufficed to bring the Indian portion of the police up to a total of 500 by 1908. (The force also included 800 Chinese and 120 Europeans.)⁴⁷

In July 1909, confronted with the unanimous opposition of the local authorities, a disillusioned Indian government abandoned the entire effort to regulate recruitment for the colonial police.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the larger climate in which emigration took place, for the Sikhs and the British alike, was fast changing. Increasingly, Sikhs sought more attractive arenas for employment than those provided by colonial police work. Above all, they were drawn to the alluring shores of British Columbia, California, and Australia. The Indian government did not in principle object to such migration, and did not attempt to prohibit it by legislation. In these states dominated by white settlers, however, the Sikhs promptly ran afoul of their exclusionary legislation, which forced them back into India, most notably in the famous 'Komagatu Maru' incident in 1914, when some 300 Sikhs tried—unsuccessfully—to land in Vancouver. Such treatment forced the Indian government, in order to avoid embarrassment, to discourage emigration, and helped generate nationalist resentment among Sikhs, alike in Canada and America and in India.

From their side the British, by the early twentieth century, found the style and manner of the Sikh policeman increasingly less attractive. Initially, as we have seen, what the British saw as

Sikh 'arrogance' toward other races was at worst an annoyance, and may even have enhanced their appeal. As this arrogance grew, however, its disagreeable features became ever more apparent. As the Indian government wrote in 1908, on behalf of a proposal to widen the base of recruitment for the African contingents, 'The political effect of allowing the Sikh to imagine that he is indispensable has been unfortunate, and the high rates of pay he receives abroad has made him discontented at home and inclined to grumble and be troublesome, while imbuing him and the Punjabi Musalman with an exaggerated idea of their own superiority to other classes'.⁴⁹ In September 1906, over half the Indian constables in Shanghai struck work for higher wages. While this episode was, so the British believed, not motivated by political grievances, still it had the immediate effect of discouraging too ready a resort to a vastly enhanced Sikh police force. A month later, the British Minister in Peking cut in half—from 1000 to 500—the number of additional Sikhs he was requesting from the Indian Army. In the discussions regarding the supply of these troops, one Indian officer, anxious to 'guard the interests' of the Army, even argued that, 'From a political point of view we might do well not to encourage soldiers of the Indian Army to go abroad and mix with the heterogeneous and democratic crowds in our colonies and elsewhere'.⁵⁰ Overseas experience, even with high pay, the British had begun to realize, could generate a sense of nationalist resentment at colonial rule.

To alter the class composition of the Indian contingents was not easy. As on previous occasions when such proposals had been mooted, the theory of 'martial races' kept getting in the way. By the first decade of the twentieth century, not just the Indian but the colonial authorities had been trained to believe that Sikhs, with Punjabi Muslims, were 'the best material', and hence alone 'worth their while to take'. Nevertheless, from the Indian side, opinion was beginning to shift. As the commanding officer at Peshawar wrote in 1907, 'The practice of calling for volunteers [for colonial service] from certain classes of men only is invidious, and is regarded as a slight by those excluded, while other classes, like Sikhs, get an exaggerated idea of their superiority'. The following year the Indian government, anxious to 'increase the fighting strength of those classes which we know to be most loyal

to the British Government', proposed opening up colonial service to Rajputana Rajputs and Jats of all provinces. The Home government, in reply, saw no point in stopping short with merely those two additional groups. So in 1909, a vastly extended list of eligibles was promulgated, including UP Rajputs and Muslims, Deccani Marathas and Muslims, Konkani Marathas, and Dogras. Madrasis, Pathans, and Gurkhas were alone excluded: Madrasis because they were not considered 'suitable' for service of this sort; Pathans for the political reason that to let them serve would 'result in an eventual increase of the fighting strength of the border tribes by a considerable number of well-trained soldiers possessing ample money for the purchase of arms'; and Gurkhas, who were rarely supplied to colonial contingents, because (it would seem) the Indian authorities did not want to give others access to this valuable class of soldiers, who were in any case presumed to be 'not suited to the African climate'.⁵¹

None of this, however, in the short term had much effect on actual recruiting patterns. In 1911, Sikhs were recruited for the Fiji Constabulary, while in the previous year, when the Indian authorities sought to supply a contingent for Uganda composed of UP Rajputs, the Colonial Office insisted that the time was 'inopportune' for such a change. Grudgingly, the Indian government accepted a compromise in which the Uganda contingent, part of the 4th Battalion KAR, would be composed of half-Sikhs and half-Rajputs. At the same time they agreed to defer any consideration of change in the class composition of the Nyasaland and Somaliland contingents.⁵² Nevertheless, an era was coming to an end. For some years, senior officers in the KAR had been lobbying for the withdrawal of the Indian troops, mainly on the grounds of expense, together with a conviction that the Sikh units were 'cumbersome' and immobile, and so of little use in field operations. Fearful of an African rising, the colonial government delayed taking action. By 1912, confident at last of the reliability of their African troops, the East African governments decided they could do without Indians. The last contingent to serve in Nyasaland left Zomba for India in December 1912, while the last Uganda Contingent left in February 1913, and was replaced by a new company of Baganda.⁵³

In South-east Asia as well, by the time of World War I, the days of predominantly Sikh police forces were fast running out. In April 1915, a battalion of Punjabi Muslims posted in Singapore mutinied, killed their officers, and went on a two-day rampage throughout the city. By the end of the war, the increasingly important role Sikhs had begun to play in Indian nationalism, fuelled in large part by their overseas experience, from the Ghadr movement to the protests culminating in the Amritsar massacre, raised fresh doubts about the reliability of Sikh recruits. In 1919 Walker's crack Sikh force, the Malay States Guides, was abolished. Increasingly, in the years that followed, the colonial government sought to encourage Malay recruitment into its police and military forces. In doing so, the British began a process of accommodating and sustaining a growing Malay nationalism. Although Sikh immigration to Malaya did continue, by the interwar years the newcomers sought opportunities more and more in commerce and entrepreneurship rather than in government service.⁵⁴ Change came more slowly in Hong Kong and in the Chinese treaty ports. Nervously eyeing a China in turmoil from outposts precariously situated along its rim, the British felt much greater need of the reassurance supplied by an Indian force. At the outbreak of the World War II in 1939, Indians still comprised some 35 per cent of the Hong Kong police. Still, the war, and then Indian Independence, set in motion a slow process of attrition that brought South Asian recruitment to an end by the 1960s.⁵⁵

Between them, then, colonial and Indian nationalism put an end to this early, but by no means exceptional, global network of migration, shaped and structured by the British empire, but, like that of indentured labour, with India at its centre. Indeed, one might even find, in embryonic form, elements of the post-modern world, where national boundaries count for little, in this spread of Sikh soldiers and police constables across the face of Asia and Africa. Nor, despite the 'green revolution', has the Punjabi compulsion to emigrate by any means died. Why, *The Times of India* wondered recently, are rural Punjabis, especially young Sikh men, so 'desperate' to seek their fortunes abroad that over 100,000 passports were issued in a year by the Jalandhar office alone? The majority, after all, the newspaper reported, are not poor by Indian standards. 'They live in *pucca* homes that boast status symbols

like colour televisions and refrigerators'. The answer, *The Times* conclude, must be sought in the fact that families in these farming communities which receive remittances from abroad are even more prosperous, 'living in palatial villas with their own satellite dishes, Marutis and Tata Sumos parked at their doorsteps'.⁵⁶ Emigration, that is, produces prosperity at home in the Punjab, as well as for the migrant abroad, and this in turn fuels further migration in an ever-widening circle of linked migration and prosperity. Perhaps some of the first glimmers of this vision can be seen in those young men who followed Captain Speedy to Perak, and some of its first fruits in the remittances and reports they sent back to the Punjab.

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Empire Recentred: India in the Indian Ocean Arena*

Nowadays world history has become quite fashionable. Schools and colleges have begun to offer courses in it and to demand that applicants for jobs be prepared to teach it. A world history journal and association, of which this volume is a product, have come into existence. Unfortunately, the history of the entire globe is too vast to be effectively grasped, let alone studied with the care historians customarily require. But neither, on the other hand, can historians committed to national histories simply dismiss as inconsequential the larger issues that link the world together across the usual regional specializations. A good start has been made with recent studies focused on ecology, disease, and the like. I would like to argue that one exceptionally rewarding way of making history global is to focus upon issues of imperialism and colonialism. Of course, in practice, the historiography of imperialism has been, to a very large extent, hardly less Eurocentric than the traditional accounts of Western civilization. You simply add on Vasco da Gama or the exploits of Clive, or else, following Immanuel Wallerstein, you construct a 'world system' emanating out of the European heartland. Such histories conventionally either devise theories of European expansion, or they detail the policies that shaped the patterns of conquest and rule—why here? not there?—

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in particular times and places. In these accounts, each colony is assumed to exist only in its relationship to the imperial centre. These studies, in effect, conceive of the British empire as a set of strings—or better yet, as a network of telegraph wires—running from each colony to the metropole. Nor is the problem resolved by studying colonial nationalism or, for that matter, the doings of the now famous ‘subaltern’. In such accounts, each colonial struggle or subaltern movement is inevitably enclosed within the confines of its own territory. It is, one might say, as if each colony’s national leaders were tugging on their own string, to free it from imperial Britain. The colony’s history is written in isolation from that of its neighbours.

So what are we to do? In my opinion, we need to find a way of thinking about global or world history that includes Europe but does not place it, in the manner of a Wallerstein or a conventional imperial history, at the centre. We need a history that remains sensitive to nation and state, whether in Europe or elsewhere, but is not bound by the conventions of national history writing. One suggestive strategy is focusing not upon continents—the organizing principle of standard area studies during the last half-century—but upon oceans. This approach was pioneered, of course, by Fernand Braudel, who looked at the Mediterranean Sea not as a barrier demarcating Europe from Africa, Christendom from the Islamic world, but rather as comprising a set of linked pathways for trade, ideas, and the movement of the peoples along its shores. Venice, as an example, with an artistic tradition that eclectically joins Gothic and Saracenic architecture, Byzantine mosaic work, and Renaissance painting, admirably represents such a Mediterranean world. In recent years, other oceans have emerged into view. We now have the ‘black Atlantic’, though this is primarily a device for studying the African diaspora, and the ‘Pacific Rim’, the latter primarily a creature of contemporary trade and politics. But what about the Indian Ocean? It has, for the early modern era, its Braudel in K.N. Chaudhuri, who has exhaustively studied the trading world of the Indian Ocean from 1400 to 1800.¹ Could such an approach, if applied more broadly and to the modern as well as the early modern era, help us think anew not just about trade, but about larger currents of history?

I propose to bring together the British empire, India, and the Indian Ocean during the heyday of the Raj, from 1860 to 1920, and to ask whether we might thereby learn something fresh, if not about the whole world, then at least about a rather large chunk of it. What I envisage is, essentially, a new way of imagining the British empire. In this vision, India is not just a colony, or a periphery, or a land of 'subalterns' who are acted upon. Instead, it is made to be an imperial centre, from which peoples, ideas, goods—everything that makes empire possible—radiated outward and so transformed a vast region of the globe. For much of South Africa, especially Natal, for Central and East Africa, for the Arabian and Gulf coasts, for the islands of the Indian Ocean, for the Malayan peninsula, for the China coast from Hong Kong to Shanghai, the threads of the empire ran, one might say, not only to London, but also to Calcutta, Bombay, Madras.

To be sure, the British established and directed this vast imperial enterprise. It is essential, obviously, to insist upon this. The Union Jack fluttered from a thousand flagstaffs from Cape Town to Shanghai and so announced to the world that this was a *British* empire. But the conquests on the ground were the work of Indians—as sepoys in the Indian Army, as troopers in colonial police forces. The exploitation of the resources of this colonial empire was the work of Indians—as indentured labourers in the cane fields, as enterprising traders along the arc from Zanzibar to Singapore. Apart from the top-level civil servants, who were recruited in Britain for the colonial service, the empire was run by Indians and by Britons trained in India, using, for the most part, even when they contested them, ideas and administrative structures devised in British India.

What, we must ask, are the implications of 'recentring' the British empire in this fashion? What new insights can we gain into its working? Or, for that matter, into world history? In thinking about this question, it is important to keep in view two different kinds of streams of Indian influence. One is that of institutions and ideas. In India the British elaborated ways of ordering and ruling—from Macaulay's penal codes, through notions of race and ethnicity, to conceptions of indigenous rulership—that from India found their way overseas. Though creations of the British, India—not Britain—was the imperial 'centre' from which they emerged. A

second influence was provided by the migration of Indians themselves—sometimes employed as agents of the British, at others moving abroad on their own to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the empire. The young Mohandas Gandhi, practising as a lawyer in South Africa, is, of course, a classic instance of the latter. These two strands of influence—of ideas and of people—are distinct, though often connected. As we will see, for instance, belief in the existence of ‘martial races’ in India facilitated and encouraged the migration of various groups of Indians. For the most part, this essay will examine the spread of British Indian ideas and institutions, and only secondarily Indian migration itself.

The Indian connection with Malaya provides a useful point of departure. In part, this is because India’s links with British colonialism in South-east Asia go back to the East India Company’s early annexations of Penang (1786), Singapore (1819), and Malacca (1824). These, the so-called Straits Settlements, were governed as part of British India until 1867, when they were constituted a separate Crown Colony. Inevitably, during the years of Company governance, much Indian influence flowed into these port cities, along with the Tamil merchants who settled in them and the Indian convicts who were transported to them. The ending of this administrative subordination obviously much reduced the Indian connection. The convict settlement, for instance, was removed to the Andaman Islands. Nevertheless, India remained a source of ideas and personnel, upon which the new Straits government could, and did, draw.

Most striking, perhaps, was the controversy over the drafting of law codes for the new colony. In 1861 the Indian Legislative Council, after some twenty years, finally enacted into law Macaulay’s famous penal code. Due to the impending transfer to the Colonial Office, this code was not at that time extended to the Straits Settlements. The local authorities, however, soon began pressing for its adoption on the grounds that it would be desirable to have a ‘single, simple, and intelligible code’ in force in the Straits. As the ‘attorney-general put it, introducing a draft of the Indian code into the local legislature in 1869, there would be a great advantage’ in having the whole body of the criminal law ‘in a shape easy of access, easily to be comprehended, and...more efficient than the criminal law of England’.²

But matters were not so simple. Hong Kong had recently adopted a set of English acts consolidating the criminal law, and the members of the Singapore bar, with the judges of the Straits court, urged the legislature, now that the colony was free of India, to follow the same path—to make, that is, English, not Indian law, the law enforced in the Straits Settlements. The simplified Indian law, they argued, while appropriate perhaps for the magistrates of the Indian Civil Service who decided cases in Indian *mofussil* (rural) courts, was not needed in a colony where the judges were trained in English law and chosen from the English bar. Furthermore, as one barrister wrote, the English criminal acts offered ‘the advantage of a continued series of decisions of the most eminent judges who have made law the study of their lives’. Better, the Chief Justice reiterated, to abide by a familiar system of law, ‘perfectly understood’ by the English lawyers who practised in the Singapore courts, than to substitute an unfamiliar one full of ‘novelties’. Outside the legal community, such objections did not evoke much enthusiasm. As one official noted wryly, ‘Lawyers, like other people, do not like to make useless, knowledge which they possess, and create a necessity for knowledge which they have not’.³ In 1870 the Straits ‘cast off from the English law’, as the attorney-general described it, and enacted in its place, with only a few local amendments, the Indian Penal Code.⁴

Once this deed was done, other consequences followed, above all adoption of the Indian code of criminal procedure, which came into force in the Straits in 1871. As time went by, the desirability of ‘imitating Indian procedures’ was brought under ever more critical scrutiny. One sceptical official pointed out in 1892 that none of the members of the original drafting committee had had any ‘practical acquaintance’ with the working of magistrates’ courts in India, while the attorney-general a few years later insisted that, although the code was drafted on an ‘excellent model’, that model was nevertheless ‘specially adopted for India’, not for the ‘exigencies of Singapore’.⁵ Still, in the end, after a lengthy process of legislation, little was changed. The revision of 1900, as the attorney-general acknowledged, involved not ‘amendments of principle, but of details of procedure’.⁶

Meanwhile, other elements of Indian administrative practice had found their way to Malaya. In the 1870s, drawn by the tin of

Perak and determined to quell the disruptive disputes of its Chinese miners, the British began to involve themselves in the affairs of the peninsular Malayan states. So early as 1872, G.W.R. Campbell, acting governor of Penang and a man with extensive police experience in Ceylon, reflecting upon the 'marvellous' accomplishments of even a 'single well-selected British officer' in India's princely states, urged the appointment of a 'carefully chosen discreet man with a good knowledge of the people and their language' to the court of the sultan of Perak.⁷ Two years later, the 1874 Pangkor Engagement imposed first upon Perak, and then subsequently upon other Malay states, the Indian practice of a Resident posted to the ruler's court. Following Indian precedent, the Engagement specified that, on all matters other than 'those touching Malay religion and custom', the sultan's administration of his state was to be regulated 'under the advice' of the Resident.⁸ The introduction of this system into Malaya was not, however, to be a straightforward or simple matter.

As they struggled to come to terms with the ordering of Malay society, the British turned almost inevitably to ways of thinking shaped in their earlier encounter with India. There, two views of indigenous rulership contested for supremacy. The first, associated with the writings of Alexander Dow in the 1770s, argued that India's rulers were 'Oriental despots', participating in an ancient tradition of unbounded personal rule common throughout the East, especially in Muslim countries. The second, elaborated by James Tod during the conquest of Rajputana in the 1820s, asserted that India's princely order was equivalent to the feudal system of medieval Europe, with its hierarchy of rights and obligations based on military service.⁹ Though these two views of 'Oriental' rulership were fundamentally incompatible, both survived into the Victorian Raj as descriptions of the 'traditional' Indian political order, and from India both found their way to Malaya. The senior civil servant Hugh Clifford, for instance, denounced the Malay sultan as a man whose 'lightest word brought death, swift and inevitable', and whose passions were 'given to him to satisfy to the full, not to curb or restrain'. Yet, at the same time, Clifford insisted upon the feudal character of Malay society. To live under a Malay sultan, he asserted forthrightly, 'is to live in the Europe of the thirteenth century'. As with the Rajput states of India, so too in

Malaya, the British believed, time had stood still for 'some six centuries', as raja and *raiyat* (peasant) lived in unchanging mutual dependence.¹⁰

The Colonial Office, endeavouring to bring into force the Pangkor Engagement, envisaged for Malaya, the customary Indian arrangement whereby the Resident, though instructed to give 'influential and responsible advice' to the ruler, was to confine his intervention to such advice, leaving the 'direction of the government of the country' to the native ruler. Yet the officials on the ground in Malaya were from the outset reluctant to inaugurate a wholly Indian system of indirect rule. Indeed, article 10 of the Engagement itself, drafted by the Straits governor Sir Andrew Clarke, opened the door to a more interventionist governance, for it stipulated that 'the collection and control of all revenues, and the general administration of the country' were to be regulated 'under the advice of these residents'. Clarke's successor, Sir William Jervois, in his turn disdained 'Indian experience' as 'not necessarily a qualification for forming a judgment on the relations between our officers and the chiefs of the Malay states'.¹¹

Why should the British in Malaya have felt the need for a more expansive definition of 'advice' than was common in princely India? In part, surely, this decision reflected the larger, late Victorian disillusionment with the abilities of 'native' peoples. As Clarke wrote in justification of his proposal, 'The Malays, like every other rude Eastern nation, require to be treated much like children, and to be taught; and this especially in all matters of improvement'.¹² Clarke was further clearly anxious to avoid the post-Mutiny state of affairs in India. There, with the threat of annexation removed after 1858, the imperial government possessed but few levers with which to move its princes, with the result that their governance rarely reached British standards of 'efficiency'.

And there was, finally, the sheer hubris of imperial self-confidence. The colonial secretary J.W.W. Birch rapturously predicted, 'The moment a British officer takes up his residence...we shall find an immediate influx of Chinese and even of Malays from other states; the revenues properly collected on fixed principles will naturally increase; justice will be administered and oppression prevented' and so on.¹³ Appointed first British resident in Perak, the enthusiastic Birch was assassinated in 1875, after a year in

office, as Perak rose in rebellion under its disaffected sultan. Faced with this threat to their authority, the British poured troops—from India—into Malaya and so brought the 'Perak War' (one of Queen Victoria's numerous 'little wars') quickly to an end. A new sultan of Perak was appointed, but it was in practice impossible to re-establish the *status quo ante*. The determination of the local officials to take effective control of the reins of government could no longer be denied. Reluctantly, the Colonial Office in 1876 made residents directly responsible for the 'maintenance of peace and law, the initiation of a sound system of taxation, with the consequent development of the general resources of the country, and the supervision of the collection of the revenue'.¹⁴

In the end, the sultans remained in place, and Malaya was not formally annexed to the British colonial empire. The sultans thus retained the authority awarded them at Pangkor over Malay religion and custom—and these were not unimportant matters—but, with the day-to-day administration of the country in the hands of the British residents, no more than a ghostly reminder of the Indian princely system could be found in Malaya. Yet the India of the Raj did not cease providing a model for the country's governance. Rather, the model was now to be found in the directly ruled districts of British India. Perak, for instance, was divided into four districts, each under the charge of a British official designated by the Indian term 'collector and magistrate'. But it was in the courts that Indian influence was most pronounced. To be sure, for some years the Indian codes provided little more than informal guidance. As one official wrote of Selangor in 1889, though the Indian civil procedure code was 'nominally in force', civil procedure was in fact 'in its infancy'. Nor was the situation much different on the criminal side. In Perak, for instance, magistrates followed 'either the English or the Indian procedure, each according to his own taste and fancy'. Nevertheless, by 1900, the Indian penal code, and with it the codes of criminal and civil procedure, had been enacted into law for the states that, from 1896, formed the Federated Malay States.¹⁵

The staffing of the new Malayan administration, too, was heavily dependent upon Indian, or more generally South Asian, personnel. Indeed, below the top British level—of residents, magistrates, and the like—the service was almost wholly South Asian. Educated

Ceylon Tamils, for instance, with limited employment opportunities at home, streamed into Malaya. Only in 1890, W.E. Maxwell reported, after he had obtained from Ceylon a chief clerk 'of some experience', did he make an effort to 'to enforce the due carrying out of the Indian Civil Procedure Code' in Selangor.¹⁶ The employment of South Asians in lower-level secretarial and clerical positions was in no way unique to Malaya. Indeed, educated Indians, often Bengalis, commonly followed in the wake of imperial conquest, first 'up the country' to the Punjab and then overseas, where they secured for a generation or so a near monopoly of subordinate posts.

But Malaya differed profoundly from India itself in that no effort was made to provide English language education for its indigenous peoples. In the British vision, Malaya was to be a land of two societies, existing side by side but remaining separate. One was that of its immigrant communities, Chinese and Indian, miners and entrepreneurs; the other was the 'traditional' world of the Malays under their sultans, expected to remain in their villages, practising subsistence agriculture, walled off from the commercial and administrative changes that were taking place around them. The British experience of Bengal, and of Bengalis, helped drive forward this policy—though as an example to be avoided. Above all, the Malay must *not* become a replica of the detested Bengali babu, a person, as Frank Swettenham wrote, 'who is always asserting himself, airing grievances, and clamouring for rights'. A contented Malay peasantry required only vernacular village schools.¹⁷

Malaya not only had to be ruled, it had to be policed. In 1873, as turbulence mounted among the Chinese miners in Perak, the Mantri of Larut, one of the subordinate chieftains of the state, decided to recruit a body of troopers from India. To accomplish this he turned to one of the more remarkable British adventurers of the time—a man by the name of Tristram Charles Sawyer Speedy.¹⁸ Born in India, son of a lieutenant in the Royal Army, Speedy was himself commissioned into the Indian Army in 1854, serving in the Punjab. Restless, he resigned his commission in 1860 and commenced a life of adventurous wandering. In New Zealand, he joined a local militia fighting the Maoris; from there he went to Abyssinia, where he served as an adviser under Lord

Napier in the 1867–8 campaign that culminated in the successful siege of the fortress of Magdala—a campaign, it is worth noting, organized from India and employing Indian troops, one of many occasions when the Indian Army was deployed overseas in the service of the larger empire.

After Magdala, Speedy returned to India, where he secured the position of District Superintendent of Police in Sitapur (Oudh). Ever restless, after two years in India, Speedy moved on to the Straits, where in 1872 he took up the post of superintendent of police in Penang. When the summons came from Larut a year later, he at once abandoned the settled life in Penang and set off for the Punjab frontier. There, surprising an Indian government that knew nothing of his activities, he signed up within a few weeks some 200 men, promising them substantial pay and bonuses to serve the unknown ruler of a distant state. By the time Speedy and his troopers had returned to Perak, however, the local situation was fast being transformed—first by the Pangkor Engagement and then, in the following year, by the Perak uprising. As a result, Speedy's troopers received an enthusiastic welcome, and not only from the Mantri of Larut. Although units of the Indian Army were brought in to suppress the 1875 rising, they could not remain posted indefinitely in what was constitutionally a 'foreign' state. Yet after 1875 the British felt obliged to shoulder responsibility for imposing order upon Malaya's unruly tin miners and secret societies, and more generally for sustaining the authority of the sultans with whom the nominal sovereignty of the country still resided. Speedy's militia pointed the way to a solution. So soon as November 1874, before the Perak revolt, the Straits colonial secretary had written to India, 'Great difficulty has been found in procuring in the Straits men properly qualified to serve as guards for the Residents and as military police, but a number of Sikhs serving for some time in Perak...have given so much satisfaction...that Sir Andrew Clarke [the governor] considers it would be very beneficial for the service if a well selected body of men of that class could be procured from India'.¹⁹

From these small beginnings emerged the first colonial Indian police force, the Perak Sikhs. In 1878 some 247 in number, the force had grown by 1884 to a total of 701 Sikhs, together with fifteen Indian cavalry troopers. Speedy was soon replaced by a

succession of Indian officers, who disciplined the force on an Indian model. After 1896, with federation, the contingent was reorganized as the Malay States Guides. It was finally disbanded in 1919. But the questions remain: Why should the Malayan authorities have recruited colonial police in India? And why especially from among the Sikhs of the Punjab? Reluctance to employ the indigenous Malays was in part a product of British notions of Malay character. Malays, so the British conceived, though attractive people, were indolent by nature. Inherently lazy, they were, as the long-time colonial official Frank Swettenham wrote, creatures of a warm climate that 'inclines the body to ease and rest, the mind to dreamy contemplation rather than to strenuous and persistent toil'.²⁰ Unlike the tough Punjabi or Pathan, bred in the harsh landscape of north-western India, Malays were simply not a 'martial race' and thus not suited for the discipline of police work. Further, as Speedy noted at the very outset, Malays, as natives of the country, 'instead of keeping order often sided with one faction or the other, and thereby only enhanced disorder'.²¹ Divide and rule, or policing one community with members of another, was never far from the concerns of the imperial administrator.

The preference for Sikhs was at one level the logical extension of the 'martial races' ideology, devised by the British in India after the 1857 uprising, which saw in the members of this community the ideal army recruit.²² The soldier best suited for India's army was obviously the one most desired by colonial recruiters too. But outside India, in places like Malaya, where notions of Indian ethnicity were often rather confused, anyone sufficiently tall, and possessed of a beard and a turban, might well be accepted as a Sikh. A 'lordly' style of dress enhanced this imposing appearance. The traveller Isabella Bird in 1883 described the police she met at the Perak residency as 'splendid looking men with long moustaches and whiskers', wearing 'large blue turbans, scarlet coats, and white trousers'. Off duty, clad in 'turbans and robes nearly as white as snow', they looked 'both classical and colossal'.²³ A near total linguistic isolation reinforced this social distance. The overwhelming majority of the Indian police, Punjabi speakers, ignorant of Malay and Chinese, could communicate with no one apart from their comrades and their commandant.

None of this much troubled the British. The Sikhs were not meant to catch criminals or solve crimes—for this there existed Chinese detectives and Malay constables. Rather, their purpose was to overawe and intimidate the local population, in part by their sheer physical size. Isabella Bird saw 'a single Sikh driving four or five Chinamen in front of him, having knotted their pigtailed together for reins'.²⁴ Even some Europeans were troubled by these displays of arrogance. Hugh Clifford wrote that the Sikh

...is possessed of as absolute a conviction of his own superiority to the men of any other race—Europeans alone excepted—as is the White Man himself. He is quite frank about this opinion, and he is accustomed to act upon it at all times. To other Asiatics he is as arrogant and overbearing as can well be conceived, and he displays none of the tact which helps to make a European less hated for his airs of superiority than he might be.²⁵

Despite, perhaps because of, this behaviour, the attractiveness of the Sikh as colonial policeman remained unimpaired.

Much the same tale could be told of Singapore, of Hong Kong, of Shanghai and the other Chinese treaty ports, for which Sikh police were recruited in the thousands. But India's reach did not extend only eastward. To the west, Indian law and administrative practice, with Indian migrants, helped shape Britain's African empire. Although Indians had established themselves as traders in Zanzibar for decades, it was only in the 1890s, as the British moved in force into East Africa, that Indians flocked to the region in substantial numbers. As indentured labourers they built the railway to Uganda, and then as traders they developed a commercial economy along its route. The origins of Nairobi are telling. Initially just a railway encampment, the settlement was transformed with the coming of Indian traders. As the British commissioner wrote, 'previous to 1898 the Government kept stores of trade goods', strings of beads, lengths of cloth, and the like, which 'formed the entire medium of exchange with the natives'. With the opening of Indian bazaars, the government 'began to close down their stores, and payment began to be made in rupees and pice; and now station trade goods are unknown'.²⁶

In British eyes, indeed, Kenya for a time appeared almost as an extension of the India of the Raj. Descending from the first

ascent of Mount Kenya in 1899, after a number of uneasy encounters with the indigenous peoples Halford Mackinder imagined himself crossing an invisible border. 'Suddenly', he wrote, as he approached Nairobi, 'one passed out of Africa into Asia, out of *Bwana* country into the *Sahib* country! There was a bazaar....There I found a man paying wages....I came back to civilization'. So extensive, indeed, were the opportunities opening out to Indians that the explorer Sir Harry Johnston described East Africa, in a memorable phrase, as 'the America of the Hindu'.²⁷ As time went on, of course, the British had second thoughts, so that these opportunities became much restricted, especially with the reservation of the fertile highlands for European settlers after 1904.

Not surprisingly, the apparent success of Sikh police in South-east Asia encouraged the British in East Africa to set up a clamour for them as well. As the consul-general in Zanzibar wrote to the Indian government in 1893, requesting a contingent of Sikhs, 'I am at my wits end where to find men. The Arab irregulars cannot be relied upon, while the Swahili troops [Africans of the coast] are unseasoned and not very courageous'.²⁸ The same year Sir Harry Johnston in Central Africa, begging for a steady supply of Indians, wrote, 'Great Britain can only maintain her supremacy in these countries of Central Africa by the employment of Indian troops....Whenever our skirmishing force of Zanzibaris was repulsed by the enemy or temporarily disappeared, the Indians have always saved the day'. The British preference for an Indian force was not confined only to the initial conquest. In peacetime, Johnston insisted, the Sikh was invaluable. He 'makes himself useful in road making, in the construction of bridges, in the organizing of telegraphs, and in all work where an acute intelligence is needed'.²⁹

In East Africa as in Malaya, the recruitment of Indian police went hand in hand with the adoption of Indian administrative and legal forms. The subject is too complex to develop fully here, but the basic developments can easily be stated. From 1884, the consular court at Zanzibar was constituted a district of Bombay, with an appeal to the Bombay High Court. The Indian Penal Code, together with the Indian codes of civil and criminal procedure, was promulgated to guide the court's jurisdiction. A second court was set up at Mombassa in 1890, and, with the

establishment of the East Africa Protectorate in 1895, collectors and magistrates began to adjudicate cases in the interior. Following Zanzibar's lead, these courts were instructed to exercise their jurisdiction in accordance with the procedure of the Indian codes. These were supplemented by an array of Indian acts, some thirty altogether by 1908, which were introduced into the Protectorate. Indian law did not exercise uncontested sway. On the coast, judges were meant also to take Islamic law into account and, in the interior, to consult tribal custom. After 1904, with the constitution of a separate court of appeal for the whole of East Africa, appeals to Bombay were disallowed. The Indian origin of Kenya's legal system over time became overlaid too by a frequent citation of English case law and precedents and by the introduction of special privileges for different groups (for example for European settlers, trial by jury instead of by a judge with assessors). Furthermore, after an intense controversy, in 1930 the Indian Penal Code was replaced by an English-based code. Nevertheless, the basic structure of the East African judicial system, for nearly the first half-century of colonial rule, was drawn from India; and, even when re-enacted locally in later years, much legislation, bulwarked by the continued citation of Indian cases and commentaries, remained Indian in all but name.³⁰

One could easily detail other instances of India's central role in shaping the British empire throughout the Indian Ocean region and even further afield. Instead, it might be useful to conclude by reflecting upon the fate in the twentieth century of this Indian subimperial system. Simply put, it fell victim to the growth of nationalism, both in India and in the colonies. Early Indian nationalists, of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had taken pride in India's membership in the worldwide British empire and had cherished the opportunities it provided for Indians overseas. A central issue for the fledgling Indian National Congress was the treatment of indentured Indians in the colonies, and this mattered precisely because the harsh treatment meted out to these Indians was perceived as shamefully illiberal and unBritish. Indian opposition helped bring indentured labour recruitment to an end by 1920. At the same time, however, with Gandhi's return from South Africa to India, nationalist enthusiasms were increasingly focused upon India itself. From 1920 to 1947, little else mattered

than bringing the Raj to an end. After Independence, too, India's energies were focused upon itself, as the country sought economic development by isolation from its neighbours.

The rise of a mass Indian nationalism also soured Britain's perceptions of its Indian subjects. This was the case above all with the Sikhs. Their participation after 1910 in the Ghadr movement, and in Indian nationalism more generally, aroused a British suspicion of their reliability as colonial police. Sikh arrogance directed against native peoples was one thing; a sense of grievance, especially visible overseas, that fuelled a nationalist opposition to the British was another. Increasingly, what moved Sikhs (and Punjabis) to leave India was not imperial service, but a dream of freedom and opportunity in lands that, like Canada, all too frequently slammed the door in their faces. Sikh, and British, disillusionment was paralleled by a growing resentment in the colonies. From Malaya to East Africa, native peoples asked why these foreigners from India should receive such favoured treatment when they settled abroad. During the 1920s, recruitment of Indian police was brought to an end everywhere outside Hong Kong and the Chinese treaty ports.³¹

As time went on, African and South-east Asian peoples found in their resident Indians a convenient way of marking out, by a process of opposition, the 'imagined communities' of their own new nations. A Kenyan was a black African, a Malayan an ethnic Malay. Others did not count and could even, as in Uganda, be forcibly expelled. As the barriers between nations went up, the space of the Indian Ocean arena emptied out. From the 1930s onward, trade, migration, the sharing out of ideas in the region, dwindled away nearly to nothing. Only in the last few years, with economic liberalization, renewed Indian migration (now to the Persian Gulf), and the opening of South Africa with the end of apartheid, has this vast region of the world begun to stitch back together the ties that bound it 100 years earlier, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Imperialism, then, is not just something that has to do with the interaction of the European metropole and the colonial subaltern. It also hurried on in the later nineteenth century a worldwide transformation that brought peoples everywhere closer together—an era marked out by the steamship, the telegraph cable, and

unprecedented movements of people. These years might be called the first era of global integration. The twentieth century by contrast drove people apart, as they sought solace against the crises of world war and economic depression in a resurgent nationalism. As Jagdish Bhagwati at Columbia wrote recently, 'After the First World War we had a massive interruption and reversal of the long-term trend'. One might even argue further that the high imperial era of 1900 can be seen as a precedent, or parallel, for our own times. Levels of international trade and investment, for instance, as a proportion of economic output, have only in the last few years begun to approach those of a century ago. 'To me as an economic historian', Alan Taylor of Northwestern University noted in 1999, 'it was really the nineteenth century that represented the birth of the global economy....These days it's just getting back to where it was 100 years ago'.³² In the realm of culture, too, the Internet is only now beginning to tear away the barriers nationalism had erected and so make possible once again the connectedness of the late Victorian years.

The dominant power at the heart of the contemporary global order is, to be sure, not the imperial Britain of Queen Victoria's time, but the United States; and the United States possesses no empire equivalent to the Raj in India. Still, it does have far-flung bases, B52s, McDonald's, the Gap, and so on. I find it revealing that in the nineteenth century uncontested British predominance meant that British postage stamps alone, among those of all countries, did not require the name of their issuer printed on them for identification. Now, in the era of e-mail, American predominance means that the United States is the only country whose dot.com and other e-mail messages circulate without an identifying country tag, a 'dot.us'. World history and imperial history inevitably intertwine, forcing us to reflect on the past and on the present.

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This essay is based upon research into the PRO Colonial Office files on Malaya (CO273 series); the Foreign Secret, External, and Political Proceedings, Emigration Proceedings, and Military Proceedings of the Government of India from 1860 to 1914, National Archives of India, New Delhi; Straits Settlements records in the Singapore Record Office;

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