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The year 1911 was a momentous one for the British Raj in India. A new viceroy with tremendous foreign policy experience, diplomatic tact, and powerful intellect was bringing his skills to bear in his first full year in turbulent India. Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India from 1910–1916, was the perfect high official to navigate the Government of India through India’s troubled waters. With his long experience as a diplomat in some of the era’s most difficult foreign policy arenas, such as Egypt, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Russia, he had learned to seek solutions that satisfied opposing viewpoints while maintaining his country’s primary requirements. His special skills were needed now more than ever in an India divided by anti-colonial agitation that threatened British security in the region. Problems had been exacerbated greatly by Lord Curzon’s 1905 partition of Bengal, which communally divided the province into a Hindu west and a Muslim east. Hardinge’s appointment as viceroy hinted that India’s disastrous colonial status quo would soon undergo modification, perhaps as early as the end of the year when a significant event would occur. George V, the new king-emperor, planned to travel to India for an extremely rare royal tour that would culminate in a grand imperial durbar, a royal assemblage, held in the ancient city of Delhi. Two previous durbars – Victoria’s in 1877 and Edward’s in 1903 – had been staged in the city because it was popularly recognized as one of India’s most important historical seats of empire. But George’s would surpass them both in size and pageantry.¹ For the first time in the history of Britain’s Indian Empire, a reigning British monarch would personally receive homage from his Indian subjects and, perhaps more importantly in the existing political climate, bestow gifts on them in return for their loyalty.²

A special durbar committee was set up to plan the event and to make arrangements in the Delhi District – 25 sq. miles to the north
New Delhi: The Last Imperial City

of Delhi were set aside to house the 233 camps that contained nearly 200 ruling Indian princes and chiefs, representatives of British-Indian provincial governments, 70,000 to 80,000 British and Indian troops, special guests and sightseers. Infrastructure had to be built to handle the massive influx of people, which approximately doubled Delhi’s normal population of 250,000. Enough tents were raised to cover 10 sq. miles in canvas; 60 miles of new roads were built, 26.5 miles of broad gauge and 9 miles of narrow gauge railway were laid, 24 new railway stations were erected, and 50 miles of new water mains were set with 30 miles of pipeline for distribution in the camps. Markets, butchers, dairies, parks, gardens, and polo, football and review grounds were arranged. Enough electricity to light the towns of Brighton and Portsmouth was directed into the area. The actual durbar site and amphitheatre where the ceremony would take place had enough seating for 4,000 special guests, 70,000 people on a raised semi-circular mound, and space for 35,000 marshalled troops. The total cost for the durbar after the resale of tents and other reusable equipment was £660,000.

George V’s imperial durbar offered the perfect opportunity to reset colonial relations in India. Throughout 1911 and with strong support from George V, Hardinge, his executive council, and Lord Crewe, Secretary of State for India, crafted a broad new policy that offered colonial reforms and administrative changes to the Raj. Using the spectacle of a grand imperial durbar and George V as their voice piece, they introduced a new direction in colonial India that would have far-reaching consequences. Held in December of that year, the durbar ceremony (Figure 1.1) came off with only a few blemishes. A controversy surrounding the king’s crown, his less than spectacular state entrance into Delhi, and the Gaekwar of Baroda’s perceived insult to the royal couple were far outweighed by the king’s final proclamation. At the end of a long list of boons to his Indian subjects, George V offered his greatest gift of all. He declared that it was his royal wish to transfer the imperial capital from Calcutta to Delhi and, because of this great change, to reverse Lord Curzon’s 1905 partition of Bengal as recompense for that province’s loss of the imperial seat. According to Hardinge, the king’s announcement ‘came off like a bombshell … there was a deep silence of profound surprise, followed in a few seconds by a wild burst of cheering’. Due to the great secrecy surrounding the new scheme, few officials either in Britain or in India knew that the king, the Government of India, and the India Office were planning such a significant change in colonial policy in India.

The grand announcement initiated a new colonial building project that would consume massive human, material and financial resources
Figure 1.1 King George V (1865–1936) and Queen Mary (1867–1953) at the Delhi Durbar, India, 1911
for the next two decades. It also generated a great deal of soul-searching and subsequent heated debate amongst colonial and elected officials and interested observers concerning the meaning and purpose of empire. For the building of the new capital was far more than a shift of where the Government of India did its business; it formalized and put an official stamp of approval on a decentralizing trend in the administrative structure of the British Raj where responsibility over certain government decisions was transferred from the central government to local provinces. As a response to specific historical conditions in India in the first decade of the twentieth century, the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi was designed to be ‘a bold stroke of statesmanship.’

**New Delhi as a symbol of coercion and consent**

The transfer of the capital and its related reforms represented the intersection of early twentieth-century imperial culture, imperial politics, and imperial economics as reflected in the colonial built environment at New Delhi, a remarkably ambitious imperial capital built by the British between 1911 and 1931. Hardinge, the man most responsible for transferring the capital, initiated a building project that came to represent a multifaceted vision of the late colonial state in South Asia where colonial reforms that were intended to give Indians greater political freedom simultaneously bound them more closely to the British Empire. As Indian resistance to British rule became greater in the twentieth century, older colonial methods of domination and control became increasingly less effective in dealing with Indian nationalists. British police officials could stop a demonstration with policemen armed with *lathis* (steel tipped canes), for example, but how could they stop Indians from making cloth at home as part of an anti-colonial boycott of British goods? This powerful form of colonial resistance pressured British officials to begin thinking of new ways to assert Britain’s colonial authority in India. India’s changed political conditions, exacerbated by previous colonial policies like Curzon’s partition of Bengal, demanded a new approach to an India which was undergoing tremendous political, social and economic transformations caused by its long interactions with Britain. The new capital symbolized Britain’s attempt to resolve the contradictory goals of giving Indians greater political power while at the same time strengthening Britain’s paramount power in India. As an important pivot of empire that constituted a significant percentage of Britain’s worldwide direct investment, India’s security had become essential to the economic health of Britain’s imperial world system, a fact
not lost on those very Indian agitators who called for boycotts of British manufactured goods.

The transfer and building of a new capital at Delhi was an important response to the global challenges of a new geopolitical reality in which Britain was just one among many powerful industrial states, and not the best positioned one in regard to its supply of natural resources as the famous historian, John Robert Seeley, had noted in the early 1880s. Seeley claimed that states blessed with abundant natural resources such as the United States and Russia were destined to outpace Britain in the next century unless Britain changed its view of the empire and of itself. What was needed was a genuine and broad appreciation by the British people for the importance of empire, what it had done for Britain, and how it was central to Britain’s status as a world power. Britain needed a new imperial worldview, a ‘Greater Britain’ as he called it, based on communities of religion, race and economic interests shared by Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. This new political, social and economic order, which combined the human and natural resources of Britain and its great dominions, would save Britain from slow decline in the face of foreign competition by more populated and resource-rich states. The role of India in this Greater Britain was always an uncomfortable fit for Seeley because it did not share with Britain a sizeable community of race or religion, but officials like Hardinge, Edwin Montagu, Undersecretary of State for India, and especially Fleetwood Wilson, Finance Minister to the Government of India, saw economic and political opportunities to better unify Britain and India.

The new capital’s grand neo-classical architecture and its rigid geometric town plan with multiple traffic circles and intersecting avenues has encouraged scholars to see the city as an expression of Britain’s attempt to control India by reimposing its coercive authority in the first decades of the twentieth century. Anthony King, for example, rigorously detailed New Delhi’s layout and the architectural styles employed by its two primary architects – Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, two of the most gifted and celebrated architects of the era – who physically rendered the colonial social order and its world through the colonial built-environment. The power structure of colonialism and its culture determined the spatial and symbolic relationship of objects within the capital and of the capital itself to the existing Indian city of old Delhi, or Shahjahanabad as it was officially known. Robert Grant Irving also focused on Baker and Lutyens, arguing that the design of their city reflected Britain’s unification of an extremely diverse South Asian continent through the Raj’s material superiority. Metcalf’s intellectual history
of British architecture in India, on the other hand, convincingly showed that New Delhi represented the culmination of a long history of experimentation in colonial architecture that ended with the building of New Delhi as a symbol of Britain's power and permanence in India. Stephen Legg's historical geography of the Delhi District showed how the physical built environment and its policing could be read as a colonial discourse that both represented and created relationships of power within and between new and old Delhi's colonial landscapes. The studies above, in short, focus on New Delhi as a site of imperial coercion.

Yet there is a deep and important disconnect between what one sees in the built environment and what one reads in the archives. While this study certainly accepts the assertion that New Delhi was used to symbolize Britain's power over India, it sees this as only half the story. Using Antonio Gramsci's Marxist interpretation of hegemony, it argues that the new capital also was meant to encourage Indian consent to Britain's colonial domination. Much as Gramsci argued that capitalist states use powerful forms of manipulation to encourage subjects to consent to their coercion, the Government of India offered political reforms to win Indian consent to continued British colonial rule. At this critical moment and as the pre-eminent symbol of British rule in India, New Delhi crucially displayed a double narrative of promised liberation and continued colonial dependence. Britain's last imperial capital in South Asia was certainly a site of traditional imperial authority, but it was also a symbol of Britain's willingness to address, and thus hopefully control, the political demands of its Indian subjects. As this study shows, the language of the most important colonial officials who crafted New Delhi's new vision of empire reflected a willingness to engage educated Indians through political reforms. Even George V, as F. A. Eustis and Z. H. Zaidi long ago argued, desired a greater effort on the part of colonial officials to conciliate Indians. Metonymically and allegorically, the new capital may have projected imperial power and permanence, but it also symbolized the underlying strands that connected British political reform with the reinforcement and reaffirmation of continued British rule. If the new capital was meant to symbolize a new direction in British-India, it also was intended to show the absolute inseparability of the two peoples and their nations. This message, rich in ambiguity, created tension between a government intent on satisfying Indian demands for political reform with its equally important need to maintain its absolute authority.

Thus, in many important ways, New Delhi and its builders reflected the 'high modernism' that James C. Scott describes in Seeing Like a State.
Though grounded in the Enlightenment’s celebration and elevation of natural law as the shaper of human destinies, Scott suggests that high modernism was more of a faith than a science. It was never the handmaiden of any one government or culture but, ‘as a faith’, according to Scott, ‘it was shared by many across a wide spectrum of political ideologies’.  

Like other high modernist cities, such as Brasilia, the building of New Delhi was a lesson in the state’s simplification of extremely complex socio-economic conditions in the Delhi District as well as what can only be called a gross vulgarization of the area’s history. The government’s massive acquisition of lands in the district for the new capital was one example of this simplification. The building project gave the local government freedom to transfer privately owned Indian lands into government controlled public lands, simplifying the tax revenue system in the process. What had been a rather confused jumble of property tenures and tenants exhibiting a richly textured social organization became a much more simplified system with the Government of India serving as the largest landowner in the Delhi District.

Historically, the Delhi District’s rich past, which could be traced as far back as the ancient Mahabharata, became recodified as a mere backdrop to British imperial rule. The architectural remnants of past Hindu and Muslim empires, which were scattered throughout the selected building site, were incorporated into the new capital’s town plan as sites of interest or as vista points. The neighbouring Indian city of old Delhi became a simple foil, a site of unplanned disorder against which the new capital could be favourably compared. The planners’ tremendous focus and concern with Delhi’s history represented a marked divergence from other high modernists such as Le Corbusier who tended to negate any history perceived as representing inferior forms of social, political, and economic order.

In contrast, New Delhi’s town planners and architects embraced those aspects of Indian history, both human and architectural, that could be reshaped to reinforce their new vision for British-India. Still, as a high modernist city, the new capital served to remake Indian society in ways that were more measurable, easier to predict, and easier to manipulate. As a symbol of political devolution, New Delhi encouraged Indians, who were being rewarded with political reforms, to remake themselves as productive rather than counterproductive members of Britain’s Indian empire.

The building of New Delhi exemplified the colonial state’s use of the built environment to project a high modernist vision of itself to its subjects, both Indian and British. At the heart of this vision was
a mathematical sense of universal truth, which town planners and architects championed in their designs. Hardinge and his architectural board, made up of Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, sought to capture what Scott calls techne, the settled knowledge of ‘self-evident first principles’.20 These were truths that exist outside humanity ‘regardless of what human beings do and say’.21 A circle, for example, would always be 360 degrees, whether the builder was an ancient Greek or a modern engineer. With its love of natural order, the Enlightenment became intertwined with the western classical tradition in a neo-classicism that equated a uniformly laid out city with a strong state. Intellectually and artistically shaped by this long western building tradition, Baker and Lutyens found it impossible in their architectural designs to escape from this neo-classical western tradition with its strong sense of geometric techne. In a famous letter to The Times, Baker even quoted Christopher Wren’s famous dictum that good architecture must have the ‘attributes of eternal’.22 Indian architecture’s predilection for curves, ornamentation, and pointed arches could never satisfy these men because they believed it lacked the universal truth and settled knowledge of the western classical tradition. Of the two, the far more intellectual and politically savvy Baker gave Indian architecture a long and studied look, but in the end he largely failed to find a solution that would combine both great building traditions in a truly meaningful way.23 For his part, Lutyens made his views clear when he described the process by which Indian builders designed and erected structures, ‘Set square stones and build childwise … Before you erect, carve every stone differently and independently, with lace patterns and terrifying shapes. On the top, build over trabeated pendentives an onion.’24 Ironically, the whimsical Lutyens, who stubbornly resisted Hardinge’s repeated pressure to give the government structures an ‘oriental motif’, designed a Government House that seamlessly unified Indian and British architecture in such a way that he created a unique style of architecture that represented a new British-India.25 If Calcutta was the enclave for British commerce and British residences, a symbol of Britain’s foreign presence in India, then Lutyens’ magnificent and novel dome atop his neo-classical structure symbolized a new British-India where Britain not only belonged but also was essential to India’s political and material development.

Much like Scotts’ Le Corbusier, who ‘was expressing no more, and no less, than an aesthetic ideology – a strong taste for classic lines’, Lutyens and Baker were seeking to connect the universal truth of classicism and the science of the Enlightenment to the spirit of British rule.26 The often impassioned and lofty rhetoric used by designers and proponents of the
new capital connected British rule to these universal truths, which they believed Britain was handing down to India. Hardinge and his allies were absolutely confident in the British Empire’s ability, if not destiny, to be a force of progress that used the values of the Enlightenment to help modernize and develop India’s political life, its material culture, and its economy.

Baker and Lutyens’ unification of architecture with the Enlightenment was incredibly important to an empire that considered itself an enlightened despot. Yes, Britain had conquered India by the sword, but as officials commonly noted, it was a different kind of empire because its rule was based on reason rather than autocratic will. The underlying principle behind the permanent settlement of land in India, for example, was the notion that private property was a necessary precondition of human self-improvement much as Adam Smith and other Enlightenment economists had argued. Britain’s political economy, which had spurred India’s material development, was based on what the British believed were the natural economic laws of the free market. Similarly, Britain’s Indian subjects were bound by a unified rule of law and judicial system that made no distinction between the prince and the peasant. The sword of the autocratic had been beaten into the pen of the civil servant and district judge who oversaw the administration of the rule of law and justice. Hardinge, his town planners, his architects, and the government bureaucracy he created to oversee the building project captured in stone and bronze the meaning of what they believed was Britain’s gift to India: the rule of law, good government, and now political reforms that would lead India toward greater responsible government. Thus, the capital was not simply a symbol of colonial coercion, a powerful emblem of British dominance, but a city that modelled a British paternalism that rewarded Indians for good behaviour. This was later evidenced by the placement of placards on Herbert Baker’s Secretariats that read, ‘Liberty does not descend to a people … It is a blessing that must be learned before it can be enjoyed.’

As such, the new capital symbolized Britain’s absolute authority over India’s political evolution. For while political reform concomitantly encouraged greater Indian consent to British rule, it also reaffirmed the existing colonial order and colonial power structure. What resolved this seeming contradiction was the very nature of liberal reform in India. As Barry Hindess argues, before colonial subjects could be given greater liberty, they needed to undergo ‘extended periods of discipline’ because, as British officials believed, they lacked the ‘capacities required for autonomous conduct’ due to their long history of autocratic rule.
New Delhi and its related politics of devolution served as what Uday Mehta calls a ‘liberal strategy of exclusion’ where Britons and Indians alike were reminded of who was privileged and who was not, who was politically advanced and who was politically backwards in the context of liberal forms of government. The differences in Britain and India’s political history could ‘be redressed only through the instrument of political intervention and in the register of future time’. As Thomas Metcalf has argued, British colonial assumptions about India derived from this ‘creation of difference’. It was clear that Britain and India shared a deep past with each other, as Sanskrit scholars such as William Jones had shown, but the two cultures had diverged markedly over time. To many contemporary observers, India’s cultural and political evolution had been arrested by a faulty ethos or by invasion. Britain, in contrast, had continued to advance along stadial lines that inexorably led to a superior material, political and economic order. If the very notion of imperialism posed significant problems for the British who prided themselves on their own progressive history and its driving force, the pursuit of liberty, India’s supposed historical, political, and cultural inferiority justified its domination by Britain. Any guilt about the colonial project could be alleviated if British imperialism brought material and social benefits to India that outweighed the costs of domination. Certainly, giving Indians a greater voice in provincial government meant opening the doors to the passage of legislation that potentially weakened the empire, but political reform benefitted the British by encouraging Indian consent to British rule, by drawing off support for the Indian nationalist movement while fracturing its unity, and by shifting the focus of the Indian independence movement from the Raj’s political centre, now at Delhi, to the provinces of British-India. Most colonial officials who strongly supported Indian national aspirations remained staunch supporters of empire. They never doubted that it was Britain’s role to lead India by the hand toward responsible forms of government because Indians simply lacked the history and political culture to do it on their own. Thus, liberal reform took on an authoritative nature in India’s colonial context, leading to an ironic condition where Indian independence became possible only through continued British domination.

New Delhi: a British imperial story set in India

Other than Donald Ferrell’s 1969 PhD dissertation, Stephen Legg has provided the most substantial book-length analysis of New Delhi’s
connection to the liberal imperial project. The current study diverges considerably from Legg’s analysis, however, in its breadth, its approach, and in the questions it asks. Where this study devotes itself entirely to examining New Delhi as a building project driven by the antipodes of coercion and consent, Legg’s analysis, though wonderfully rich, is only partially concerned with the illiberalism of the liberal imperial project. More importantly, whereas Legg grounds his study solidly in Foucauldian post-structuralism, this study uses a Marxist interpretation to understand why New Delhi was so important to Britain’s global empire. A discursive analysis is incredibly helpful if one wants to read New Delhi’s colonial built environment as a cultural or intellectual narrative, but the questions that can be asked become limited to how the city performed empire or what its impact was on the local community. In contrast, using the historical-material model of hegemony to approach a study of New Delhi provides greater historical texture and allows one to ask a broader range of questions. Not only can we ask how and what but why. Why was the transfer and building of a new capital so important at this precise historical point in Britain’s Indian Empire? Why was the project so essential to Britain’s global empire and economic world system? Why did the city, if it was so important to the health of the empire, fail in its original purpose to keep India within the British Empire? And perhaps of greatest importance to the historiography of British-India, why did the British spend such time, such care, and so many resources on a new capital for an Indian Empire that seemed to be unravelling?

These questions are answered by focusing on New Delhi as a site of hegemony where new colonial reforms, which expanded Indian involvement in colonial government, intersected older forms of colonial domination. By approaching the building of New Delhi from this perspective, the study raises important questions about the historical models we use to understand the imperial project in India. While considerable and often exceptional historical work has been done on the history of British-India in general, much of it has been done by historians specialized in South Asian rather than British history. The problem here is two-fold. South Asian historiography, because of its often subaltern orientation, leaves little room for analyses of the liberal imperial project and subsequent attempts at conciliation because it is so focused on the coercive aspects of British imperial rule. Second, these studies often encourage us to lose sight of the forest for the trees. We learn a great deal about the disruptive impact that British rule had on local Indian communities, but we learn little about the relationship of India
to Britain’s *world* system as well as the larger concerns and debates that shaped the general thrust of colonial policy. This is not to say that Lord Hardinge and his town planners and architects crafted a new vision of empire that was any less oppressive than Ranajit Guha’s description of colonial rule as a ‘dominance without hegemony’. In fact, their vision was likely more insidious in that it encouraged Indians, by offering political reforms, to discipline themselves as more loyal colonial subjects. This reading of New Delhi suggests the development of a far more powerful type of colonial ideology wherein colonial subjects willingly consented to their colonial dependence. But this historical process is difficult to examine and understand in the absence of British historical models.

Thus, this study examines the building of New Delhi as a British imperial story set in India. It does so by using Peter J. Cain and Antony G. Hopkins’ ‘gentlemanly capitalist’ thesis to better understand the criticism generated by the transfer of the imperial capital from Calcutta, a city built for and by maritime commerce, to Delhi, a city rich in Indian imperial history but lacking significant commercial and financial importance. In particular Cain and Hopkins are used to understand why the major criticism of the policy emerged within the business community in Calcutta and amongst certain Parliament members who were tied either to the old colonial system or to commercial and financial communities in Calcutta and London. Much of their concern had to do with the manner in which the building of a new capital transformed the business of British rule. Cain and Hopkins argue that London-based financiers, who were heavily engaged in imperial investments, drove both imperial expansion and the reasons for having an empire in the first place. Because England’s aristocracy saw finance capitalism as a respectable way to spend one’s time and money, many members of London’s financial community were either drawn from England’s landed elites or shared similar public school educations and other cultural affinities. Thus, London’s masters of finance were deeply intertwined with a powerful *rentier* class, which had served as local and national political figures at least since the revolutionary settlement after 1688.

The study also draws inspiration from John Darwin’s conclusions that in the early twentieth century Britain’s primary colonial concern was consolidating those regions that were essential to the British world system. The proponents of the transfer of the capital and its related political reforms were the kind of officials who, as Darwin argues, ‘equated empire with the exercise of global power and treated their formal empire of dependent territories as components of a world system.
strategically dependent on Britain, economically complementary to Britain and culturally under its influence’.38 As such, colonial officials accepted, ‘sometimes grudgingly’, that ‘building up the Commonwealth as a system of worldwide influence required some deference to the anti-colonial opinions of its non-white members’.39 This deference, always partial and given with certain safeguards, led to a central contradiction that plagued the British empire in this era of rapid colonial development and subsequent political disruption. In the House of Common’s East India Budget debate of 1913, Noel Buxton wonderfully captured this basic paradox when he claimed, ‘the great test of the future ... is the reconciliation of democracy and imperialism’.40 Hardinge and others were trying to resolve that issue in India with the decision to transfer the capital, to end unpopular colonial policies such as partition, and to include greater numbers of Indians in the colonial administration. Yet Buxton’s declaration remained as unfulfilled in 1947, when India received full independence, as it did in 1913, suggesting that empire systemically lacked the capacity to reform itself. Perhaps Gandhi’s greatest inspiration, if I may, was his realization that empire, no matter how reformed-minded its officials may want to be, must always maintain a monopoly over the state’s most coercive powers, and that this alone erodes any possibility of true democratic advancement.

The ‘old dispensation’ and the men who changed it

The transformation from a post-rebellion colonial vision to a new colonial vision for the twentieth century is at the centre of the history of the building of New Delhi. Thomas Metcalf long ago argued that Britain turned to a more conservative approach to governing India after the Sepoy uprising in 1857 when anti-British sentiment boiled over in northern India.41 Blaming the event on reforms in land tenure as well as misconceived interventions into the social, political, cultural, and even religious life of India, a generation of post-rebellion colonial officials moved away from the liberal project in India. Even after half a century, many British military and administrative officials still carried memories and fears tied to this transformative moment. These memories continued to shape the assumptions of old-India hands who saw the subcontinent and its peoples through mutiny-tinted lenses.42

Scholars have looked at a variety of causes for the Indian unrest that exploded in 1857. Indeed, Thomas Metcalf believes that no other event in Indian history has ‘provoked more impassioned literature’.43 The morale of the East India Company’s vaunted Army of Bengal, which
underpinned British rule in India, began to deteriorate when British recruiters started to seek fresh troops from new ethno-religious groups such as Sikhs, Pathans, and Gurkhas. Subsequently, traditional Sepoy families increasingly found it more difficult to place their sons in the service of the company. Adding to these grievances, Sepoy pay was not keeping pace with India’s rising cost of living, and they had lost extra pay for foreign duty with the annexation of large parts of northwest India. Furthermore, British officers and the company in general had become increasingly contemptuous of their Indian soldiers and their socio-religious beliefs. E. I. Brodkin points to the General Service Enlistment Act, which required Sepoys to serve abroad, as a major culprit of Sepoy anger with company rule. Many Sepoys were outraged by the act since military campaigns or service that took them across the Bay of Bengal or the Arabian Sea represented a loss of caste.

Sepoys were not the only Indians to reject British rule in northern India. A large swathe of non-Sepoys from across Oudh and Rohilkund joined them. This uprising of non-military castes, according to S. B. Chaudhuri and Thomas Metcalf, was caused by the East India Company’s reforms in land tenure. Metcalf, in particular, argues that these reforms represented a ‘wholesale agrarian revolution’ aimed at promoting the interests of poor farmers, but in reality they simply empowered moneylenders who seized control of lands when these farmers could not meet their debts. For Metcalf, the rebellion can be explained by Oudh’s traditional landowning class’s desire to take back what British land reform had taken away. Building on Metcalf, Brodkin claims that these disempowered traditional landowners were ‘instrumental in originating and maintaining the state of rebellion’. Similarly, Ira Klein sees the rise of Indian antagonism to British rule stemming from colonial attempts to reform India through indirect means. Here, the invisible hand of economic modernization, officials believed, would transform Indian society by promoting the individual over traditional socio-religious organizations, namely caste allegiances. This attempt to socially transform India led to perhaps the most famous reason for the uprising, the introduction of the new Enfield rifle, which used heavily greased cartridges. From this perspective the uprising reflects a religious element where Sepoys rose up to fight for their various religions in response to over-zealous Christian missionaries and evangelical government policies.

The events of 1857 had long-lasting effects both on British colonial policies in India and on British views of Indians in general. The most obvious change was that company rule ended and crown rule began with a cabinet member serving as Secretary of State for India. A new
viceroy in council led a much more centralized Government of India where colonial policy was dictated from the centre and used the supposed natural leaders of Indian society, the princes and landed elites, as liaisons between the colonial government and the people. Caution in the pace of reform became the watchword, thus ending years of liberal experimentation in India. Indeed, reform became a dangerous word on the subcontinent.

Perhaps the greatest impact of 1857 was the broadening and quickening of British suspicions of Indians as alien and unpredictable, even capable of rising up against those who sought to improve their lives. Brodkin argues that the often faulty labelling of Indians as loyal or rebels determined later behavioural patterns amongst Indians themselves. In reality, as Brodkin suggests, ‘the vast majority of the Indian population ... cannot be designated accurately as either rebel or loyal’ since many Indian leaders, including the Mughal Emperor, pragmatically responded to dangerous local conditions caused by either the absence of British authority or the direct presence of rebellious Indians. Similarly, Hugh Tinker’s assessment of the rebellion problematizes whether or not the uprising was a ‘prelude to the nationalist movement’ since so many Indians continued to support the British. Tinker reverses the equation of rebel and loyal by asking the question, ‘Can one equate support for the rebels with patriotism and support for the British with disloyalty?’ Dan Randall has studied how mutiny narratives became foundational in Britain’s imperial mythology. Using a series of sermons concerning a national day of fasting in England on 7 October 1857, Randall argues that a ‘misapprehended Mutiny became firmly fixed in the British public imagination by highly public sermons that consolidate[d] existing patterns of thought and emotion’. Thus the sermons became a way to ritually communicate an event that most people had not witnessed first-hand. This ritualization was an important part of what Ranajit Guha has called ‘the prose of counter-insurgency’. With marked xenophobia, ‘the sermons work[ed] to demonize Indian culture and Indian colonial subjects’.

Yet India’s rapid economic development at the turn of the century and the subsequent social and political transformations that encouraged Indian national aspirations began to erode this post-mutiny model of government. A new breed of pragmatic colonial official who realized that Indian national ambitions could no longer be ignored began to move into positions of power. Powerful officials like Lord Hardinge, Fleetwood Wilson, and Edwin Montagu – who were at the heart of the Government of India and the India Office – began to formulate a new vision of empire to meet India’s changing political landscape.
Wilson was a highly effective Government of India finance minister from 1908 to 1913, the senior-ranking member of the Viceroy’s Council, and even became interim Viceroy of India for a short period during Hardinge’s convalescence after an assassination attempt. In some ways, he shared the same colonial hubris of many colonial officials who believed in the power of the British Empire, if properly employed, to improve the lives of colonial subjects. On his visits throughout upper India he always made sure to pay homage at the various mutiny sites. And like many other Englishmen, he too used India as a way to prove his manhood and his mettle, especially through such rites as the hunting expedition. Upon leaving England, Wilson claimed, ‘I made up my mind to shoot at least one of every kind of the dangerous wildbeast [sic] family in India’, a boast he more than lived up to.

Yet Wilson was a different kind of imperialist as well. Raised in Italy until the age of eighteen, he never went to British public school or to Cambridge or Oxford and thus missed much of the indoctrination that helped shape the imperial attitudes and predilections of many of his peers. His lack of a traditional English boyhood and his limited economic means also meant that he never quite fit in with his fellow high-ranking colonial administrators. Most importantly, as the son of British ex-patriots living in Florence, he came of age during Italy’s Risorgimento. This transformative experience influenced the way he saw India, its peoples, and their national aspirations. For him, the post-rebellion view of India and its peoples was precisely the cause of Britain’s recent problems in South Asia. His friendship with Gopal Gokhale, who he called the ‘Gladstone of debate’ in India’s Legislative Assembly, showed his desire to work with Indian moderates who he believed would stay loyal if Britain paid attention to their national ambitions. Wilson even invited Gokhale to stay at his Simla residence, Peterhof, for a week. Gokhale said to Wilson afterwards, ‘When I go to England I am invited to stay with distinguished men of the political, academic, and literary world, but yours is the first Englishman’s roof in India under which I have been invited to sleep.’

When describing Indian members at their first session of the reformed legislative council, Wilson wrote, ‘They … devour with avidity any remarks illustrative of the House of Commons methods, for a Parliament is their ideal, a Parliament they mean … to get, and a Parliament in the end they will possess.’ Just as he had witnessed as a boy in Italy, the forces of nationalism meant that India, one way or another, was going to have self-government. The question was whether India would choose to remain or to leave the British Empire. Would Britain follow the lead of the
old Indian guard and make the mistakes of the Austrian Empire, which he considered the quintessential model of autocratic brutality, or would it listen to the will of the Indian people? For this very reason, Wilson believed that British conciliation with Indian nationalists would have to occur in the near future before moderates like Gokhale were turned away forever.

Montagu was a talented undersecretary of state who dominated the annual East India Revenue debates while he held that position. Even J. D. Rees, member for Nottingham East in the commons and a vocal critic of New Delhi and its related reforms, applauded Montagu's ability to satisfy members of his own party while beating back the attacks of the opposition, leaving him in sole 'possession of the house'. Montagu was a strong supporter of Indian political advancement and travelled to India twice to study the problem, once as Undersecretary of State for India and again as Secretary of State for India. As undersecretary he even claimed in the House of Commons that race no longer applied in India and that Britain need not fear the proponents of Indian agitation against British rule. Indeed, he suggested that these men had a reason to be upset with a status quo that denied them from more fully participating in the colonial government. His most significant piece of legislation in this regard was the 1917 Montagu-Chelmsford Agreement, which outlined further political devolution. The agreement became the road map for a new Indian constitution passed as the Government of India Act of 1919. The Act divided up government responsibilities – known as reserved and transferred subjects – between Indian provincial governments and the Government of India.

Charles Hardinge, Viceroy of India from 1910–1916, was the most significant proponent of the transfer and building of a new imperial capital at Delhi. He came from a family whose members had served in high military and diplomatic offices, but his own immediate family had limited means. Still, his father earned enough as Undersecretary of State at the War Office to educate his five sons, of which Hardinge was the second, at some of the best schools in England. Hardinge began his education at Cheam, a fashionable and expensive school that channelled students into the top public schools in England. He entered Harrow at fourteen and Trinity College, Cambridge when he was eighteen. It was at Cambridge that he first met Curzon who was on break from Oxford. Their lives and careers would intersect, often in antagonism, for the next half century. Hardinge took his degree in January 1880 and joined the Foreign Office in May of the same year. He would stay in the diplomatic service for nearly 43 years, holding the highest positions offered by the
service and in the process becoming one of the most decorated officers outside the royal family in British history.75

His appointment as viceroy of India was one of two crowning career achievements, the other being his appointment as ambassador to France. Lord Knollys first asked Hardinge in January 1909 during a visit to Windsor if he would accept an appointment as Viceroy of India.76 Hardinge immediately said that he ‘would do so without hesitation since it was [his] highest ambition to go to India as Viceroy’.77 However, King Edward, who relied on Hardinge to be his eyes and ears in the Foreign Office and who had grown extremely fond of Hardinge, was strongly against the appointment.78 Thus, one of Hardinge’s most important allies became his greatest obstacle for the nomination. The death of Edward in May 1910, however, changed the entire picture. A little over a month later, while Hardinge and his wife were waiting for the arrival of Edward’s funeral procession, Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India, again asked Hardinge if he would accept the appointment, which he did on 10 June 1910. Lord and Lady Hardinge and their daughter, Diamond, arrived in India on 18 November of that year.

Hardinge was party to some of the most important foreign policy decisions made by the British government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.79 Yet the man and his tremendous career have been largely overlooked and under-examined. Some have suggested that his viceroyalty, though promising, was marred by deep personal loss.80 His wife, Winifred Selina Hardinge died in London on 11 July 1914 while on leave from India and was followed almost six months later by their son, Edward, who died of wounds suffered on the front.81 This suggestion of failure due to personal loss seems less than cogent. His most important decisions as viceroy – the reversal of Curzon’s partition of Bengal and the transfer of the capital from Calcutta to Delhi – were made before the deaths of his wife and son. It should also be added that he ended his Indian career by achieving extremely important initiatives after their deaths. He oversaw the culmination of his wife’s dream to build the Lady Hardinge Medical College, which was the first of its kind in India to train female Indian doctors. He also pressured the Home Government to end the practice of Indian indentured labour in the colonies and even went so far as to publicly state in Madras, a major indentured labour recruiting area, that his government was in ‘deep and burning’ sympathy with Indian demands for better treatment in South Africa.82 Hardinge also pressured the British government to abolish the excise duty on Indian cotton goods, which had been imposed to protect Lancashire’s textile industry, because it ‘exposed the British
Government to the accusation that India was being governed in the interests of Lancashire rather than India'.

Hardinge’s support of progressive causes, however, should not belie his deeply held loyalty to the king and his love for the empire. He was a pragmatic imperialist who practised a kind of ‘old diplomacy’ learned from Lord Dufferin who he worked under as private secretary in Istanbul and Cairo. He considered this time the ‘most profitable and most happy years’ of his career. At the centre of this diplomatic strategy was an emphasis on finding balances of power to achieve security in the British Empire even if its realization meant conciliation. Under Dufferin, Hardinge learned that Britain’s position in the world had been strongest when its diplomacy had been an ‘iron fist in a velvet glove’. His Indian viceroyalty, which often seemed to send mixed messages, must be seen in this light. For example, his correspondence at the time and his memoirs abound with astonishing examples of his Anglo-centric chauvinism. After describing Sir Pertab Singh, the Maharajah of Idar, as a man who ‘did not know what fear meant’, Hardinge concluded that ‘he was truly a white man among Indians’. The right kind of Indian, for Hardinge, was as loyal as a faithful pet. When he visited a hospital in Bombay for wounded Indian soldiers, he met a mortally wounded young man. Describing the encounter in his memoirs, he wrote, ‘as I stood by his bedside I placed my hand on his forehead, and I shall never forget the smile of happiness that lighted up his face, and I remained with him till he died, smiling’. Hardinge concluded after this moving moment, ‘The simple Indian has a most attractive and lovable nature.’ In true Kipling-esque fashion, which divided the world into the orient and the occident, Hardinge claimed, ‘The working of the Hindu mind is really beyond anybody’s comprehension.’ Yet as a diplomat Hardinge was willing to set aside these assumptions of Indians and to cede specific points to those across the table from him as long as they did not undermine Britain’s security on the subcontinent. As he proudly claimed in his memoirs near the end of his viceroyalty, ‘It was a source of satisfaction to me that I was able to hand over my charge to my successor with the knowledge that India ... was absolutely quiet and loyal ... the situation was infinitely better than when I arrived in India.’

Hardinge was also a man of intellect and art. Throughout his diplomatic career, he showed great capacity for finding elegant solutions to difficult problems. He had little regard for clumsy diplomatic manoeuvres. This trait was on display with the decision to build a new capital at Delhi. What Hardinge understood better than any previous viceroy was that sustainable British rule in India meant including more Indians.
in the governing process and that security in India was essential to the health of the larger empire. He did not create the notion of political devolution in India, but he certainly understood its importance in maintaining Britain’s rule in India. Much later, as an old man looking back on his Indian viceroyalty, he wrote:

It is interesting now to look back on the fact, now that Dominion Status had been declared by Lord Irwin as the ultimate goal of political development in India, that I endeavoured to impress upon the Imperial Legislative Council [a body in India that consisted of appointed and popularly elected officials, many of whom were Indians] that the self-governing institutions existing in the Dominions had been achieved not by a sudden stroke of statesmanship but by a process of steady and patient evolution.92

The political process that he began in 1911 was reaching its fulfilment under Lord Irwin’s and Lord Willingdon’s Governments of India in the early to mid 1930s. Hardinge’s vision fused a stadial narrative based on material and political development in the colonial world with India’s profoundly important place in Britain’s world system. The building of New Delhi and the subsequent debates it engendered not only in India but also in the halls of Parliament provides a window into the contradictions and limitations inherent in this new direction in imperial government.
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