

THE SYMBOL OF BRITISH INDIA- THE COMPLEX OF THE NEW IMPERIAL CAPITAL, DELHI

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❖The overall view from the southeast, New Delhi in 1973 (all photographs by author)



❖The Assembly Hall, New Delhi in 1964



❖The North Wing of the Government House in 1964



❖North elevation of the South Wing of the Government House, New Delhi in 1964



The author first visited New Delhi in 1962, 15 years after Indian independence. Thirty odd years after tree plantation, the large luxuriant trees along the streets presented a view befitting its name of the garden city. From the British imperial times, city maintenance has continued, offering an impression of a neat, tranquil and dignified city. British imperial period customs like enjoying tea on the lawn and the English-joke were retained within the Indian life style. Then, to the east of the King's way (presently Rajpath) is the India Gate, towards the east of which is a white marble statue of King George V. Meeting this is a gentle slope leading towards the architectural complex on Raisina Hills (photo 1). Exaltation as the magnificence comes into view is a distinctive planning feature of this city.

Creating a new capital is very rare. For this purpose the Royal Institute of British Architects nominated architect Edwin Lutyens. The foremost theme regarding planning in the Indian subcontinent was coping with the severe natural environment. The second theme was how to symbolize in the architectural design of the Imperial capital, the colonial rule over a heterogeneous socio-cultural country. The former was solved by methods of garden city planning. For the latter, design of an architectural complex, namely the Viceroy's House, the Assembly Hall and the Government House, as a symbolic central core for the entire city was considered, expressing the position of British rule over India. For achieving this, co-operation from architect H.Baker was sought.

By locating the architectural complex on the rise of Raisina Hills, while emphasizing dignity in British control over India, it simultaneously demanded a beautiful view from the design. For this purpose, Lutyens weighed his plan with considerable logic, and with the awareness that it must withstand the passing of a few centuries. For an architectural planning model, he referred to the classical Greek temple architecture, the ancient Roman Colosseum, modern architecture in Europe, Akbar's palace architecture etc, in any case, all sublime architecture of the grand past. As a result, the architectural style that dominated various European cities from the 18th to the 19th century, namely, an aesthetics tending towards a bold classical revivalism was used. By minimizing ornamentation of the exterior of the whole complex, and by using stone produced in north India, formed architectonic beauty and dignity to the whole. Soon after starting construction (in 1913), partial changes were unavoidable for economic reasons, due to the World War. However an architectural space displaying a majestic appearance appeared on the top of Raisina Hills.

Considering British experience in India for about 180 years, the new imperial capital was planned and built over 18 years (finished in 1931). 16 years later India became independent and the British withdrew from India. The function of the architectural complex as symbol of imperial British rule of India was not altered and it became the government office of the capital of independent India, displaying the misappropriate authoritative appearance of the British colonial period.

(English text translated by Vasanti Menon Nii)

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