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ART AND POLITICS: BRITISH PATRONAGE IN DELHI (1803–1857)

The British established their foothold in India after Sir Thomas Roe, the English diplomat, obtained permission to trade for the English East India Company from the Mughal emperor Jehangir (1605–1627). By end of the seventeenth century, the company had expanded its trading operations in the major coastal cities of India. The gradual weakening of the Mughal Empire in the eighteenth century gave the East India Company a further opportunity to expand its power and maintain its own private army. In 1765, the Mughal emperor Shah Alam II (1759–1806) was forced to give the Grant of the *Dīwānī*¹⁾ of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company. However, it was in 1803 that the company became a formidable power when Shah Alam II accepted the Company's authority in exchange for protection and maintenance. The British Residency at Delhi was established. This event completely changed the age-old political and social dynamics in Mughal Delhi. The event symbolised the shifting balance of power in Mughal politics. The real power belonged to the Company and was exercised by its residents. A substantial amount of funding was at the disposal of the British residents of Delhi who were directed by the Company's government to maintain a splendid court of their own to rival the court of the Mughal emperor²⁾. Thus, a parallel court was set up alongside that of the Mughal.

It was the Kashmiri Gate of the Shahajahanabad (the Mughal imperial city) and the area beyond it on the northern side up to the ridge that became

¹⁾ Right to collect revenue.

²⁾ Bayley (1980: 21–22).

the focal point of the activities of European community (Fig. 1). Here the British Residency came into existence along with a church, mansions for important European officials, a cemetery, and a number of other significant buildings required for the needs of the growing European population. Some of the residents/ agents such as Sir David Ochterlony (1803–1806), Sir Charles Metcalfe (1810–1818), William Fraser (1829, 1832–1835), and Sir Thomas Metcalfe (1835–1853) were great patrons of art and architecture. Apart from the residents, there were other British officials who exercised considerable influence in contemporary society and were active patrons of art and architecture, for example, Colonel James Skinner (1778–1841).

Colonel Ochterlony (later Sir David) was appointed as the first resident of Delhi in 1803 and remained in charge till 1806. In the very first year of his tenure, the Marathas besieged the imperial capital. Ochterlony gallantly defended the city and forced the Marathas to vacate the Mughal capital. This event, however, prompted Ochterlony to carry out a systematic repair of the fort walls and made additional bastions and martello towers to check further invasions. These were the first architectural contributions by the British to the imperial city.

Initially, the British residents were allocated old Mughal buildings which they renovated to suit their needs. The first British resident Sir David Ochterlony was given the ruined library of Dara Shikoh as his residency. He retained the main structure of the building – for instance, the façade of the central hall with five cusped arches resting on baluster columns. But from the outside he masked the Mughal building through the addition of a porch consisting of imposing European style pillars. The rear of the building is also embellished with European architectural features – for instance, the door and half-moon shaped window. These additions suggest that right from the beginning of their arrival in the imperial capital, the British were determined to project their distinct identity in official architectural projects.

The distinct British identity was also conveyed in the Mughal court as can be attested by the *darbār* scenes of the time. For example, in an inscribed painting (Fig. 2), from the collection of the National Museum, New Delhi, the Mughal emperor Akbar II (r. 1806–1837) is shown seated on a high throne. The setting for the painting is the *dīwān-i-khas* of the Red Fort, Delhi. On either side of the emperor, the first four courtiers are royal princes as indicated by their turban aigrettes. Other courtiers are standing according to their ranks. Of all the courtiers the one man who stands apart is the British resident Ochterlony dressed in his official attire and cocked hat. He is shown standing

according to the court decorum with both his hands resting on a staff. Here one may note that the gazes of all the other nobles in the painting are within the composition except for Ochterlony who, with his slightly raised chin, confidently looks into the viewer's space. This appears to be a significant day in the Mughal court as a number of copies of this theme were made. A similar painting is in the collection of the British Library, London.³⁾ This is slightly less detailed and the inscription is also not included in this work. Yet another copy of this work is in Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi.⁴⁾

Ochterlony, however, admired the lifestyle of the Mughal aristocracy as can be attested by a painting showing Sir David Ochterlony watching a nautch performance in his house at Delhi (Fig. 3). He is shown smoking a *huqqā* like an Indian *navāb* and enjoying a nautch performance at his harem. In front of him is a dancer along with singers and musicians. On either side are elegantly dressed ladies. These women might be the wives of Ochterlony as he married native girls. Apparently he had thirteen wives and they belonged to different castes and religions. The fusion of the Mughal and British lifestyle can be seen in the interior decoration — for example, the Indian material culture is contrasted with the picture rail displaying portraits of Ochterlony's ancestors. The chamber is the Residency building as it can be identified by the door surmounted with the half-moon shaped window which still exists.

The British residents also constructed private bungalows in famous Mughal gardens. Most of them have either been adapted or no longer exist. A depiction of the garden house patronised by Ochterlony is in the Delhi Book of Sir Thomas Metcalfe.⁵⁾ It represents a synthesis of British and Mughal architectural traditions. The polygonal dome over the central building and the doors are a characteristic feature of British buildings from the later Mughal period. The main façade, flanked by turrets, as well as the layout are typical Mughal features.

In 1806, Colonel Ochterlony was transferred from Delhi and in his place arrived A. Seton who remained in charge till 1810. A. Seton was succeeded by Sir Charles Theophilus Metcalfe who served as a resident for nine years.

³⁾ Durbar at Delhi of Akbar II, inscribed with the names of Mughal princes, courtiers and Sir David Ochterlony, c. 1820, Watercolour, British Library, London, Add.Or. 3079.

⁴⁾ Durbar at Delhi of Akbar II, c. late 19th century. Bharat Kala Bhawan, Varanasi, Acc. No. BKB-SRI 234.

⁵⁾ Bayley (1980: 181).

From this point onwards, the Metcalfe family was to play a vital role in court politics in Delhi. It was during his tenure that the gradual fading of benevolent British despotism began. This is also attested by paintings of the time. In the rich settings of *dīwān-i-khas* of the Red Fort, Delhi, one can see Sir Charles Theophilus Metcalfe standing immediately on the left side of the Mughal emperor Akbar II (Fig. 4). This close proximity of a British resident to the Mughal emperor hints at the increasing power of the Company. Unlike Ochterlony who stood in the court like a courtier, Metcalfe is shown standing authoritatively. In this painting, the emperor is shown seated on a golden throne against a bolster with a rosary in his left hand. The rosary indicates that the emperor claims spiritual authority to rule over his empire rather than political. This further indicates the British ascendancy. Like Ochterlony, Charles Metcalfe married an Indian lady. He also constructed a grand country house for himself at Shalimar Bagh, north of Delhi and kept his Indian wife and family there. From a painting of his house (Fig. 5) by the artist Sita Ram, it appears that his settlement was spread to a large area which was enclosed by a boundary wall and consisted of several European style buildings in the compound. Also the European style horse carriage entering from the main gate indicates the growing preference for European material culture.

William Fraser was among the last residents who admired the Indian lifestyle and had a very close relationship with the native population. His admiration for the Indian mode of life is also reflected in his portrait⁶ that shows him seated against a subdued blue background on a European chair holding a huqqā mouthpiece. This fusion of indigenous and British tradition is also reflected in his costume. Fraser spoke several Indian languages and was fond of native traditions, although this aspect of his personality was not appreciated by some of his countrymen. ‘When Lady Nuget, the wife of the Commander-in-Chief, met William and his friend she was shocked by their beards and the fact that they had given up eating pork or beef. She reproved them for being ‘as much Hindoo as Christian’ and reminded them of the ‘religion they were brought up to.’⁷

Similarly, Colonel James Skinner had to face prejudice for his mixed racial origin as the son of a Scottish father and a Rajput mother despite being among

⁶ Portrait of William Fraser, c. 1820–1825, British Library, London. Shelfmark Add. Or.4474.

⁷ Archer, Falk (1989: 16).

the well-known personalities of Delhi.⁸⁾ With the gradual ascendancy of the Company's control over the Mughals, the cordial relationship between the locals and the British was declining and the British started distancing from the indigenous culture. In this context, the construction of St. James Church (Fig. 6), the first church in Delhi, by Skinner could be perceived as an attempt to demonstrate his affiliation with the British. He built this church at the Kashmiri Gate in Delhi opposite his house which was also inspired by the classical Grecian architecture of the Doric order.

The church which Skinner commissioned had great importance in the life of the Christian population of the city because prior to the its construction (of this church), the '... only provision for Christian worship was a deserted bungalow, where a chaplain held weekly services.'⁹⁾ The (construction) building of the church began in 1826.¹⁰⁾ It took ten years to complete and was consecrated on November 24, 1836.¹¹⁾ 'After the consecration, the whole European society of Delhi met at Colonel Skinner's hospitable abode and expressed their deep gratitude to him.'¹²⁾ The church is cruciform in plan and is constructed on an east-west axis. The high altar is on the eastern side. On either side of the high altar are two stained glass windows dating back to the nineteenth century. The north window depicts the ascension of the Christ and the south window has depiction of the Crucifixion theme. Before the high altar is the chancel. After his demise, Colonel Skinner was buried in the chancel. Preceding the chancel, the main body of the church, in the centre, is octagonal in plan and is surmounted by a dome supporting the orb which is surmounted by a cross. From outside, the church is provided with three elegant porticos with a triangular pediment on its western, northern, and southern side. The altar wall on the eastern side is emphasised from outside by the pilasters framing the two windows and a triangular pediment. The church is elegantly built but it lacks ornamentation. It was in the courtyard of it that the tomb of William Fraser was constructed after he was murdered in 1835. The tomb was demolished in the first war of Independence in 1857.

⁸⁾ He raised a regiment called the 'Skinner's Horse' or the 'Yellow Boys' which served the Company. This became the most famous regiment of light cavalry at that time.

⁹⁾ Holman (1961: 232).

¹⁰⁾ Nath (1979: 71).

¹¹⁾ Bayley (1980:14). Another account says that the church was consecrated on November 22, 1836.

¹²⁾ Holman (1961: 233–232).

However from the drawings, it appears to be a curious blend of Indian and European artistic traditions.

Of all the British residents in Delhi, it was Sir Thomas Metcalfe whose patronage to art and architecture manifested the wealth and power he possessed during his tenure in Delhi. He constructed a magnificent house for himself called Metcalfe House on the bank of the Yamuna to the north of the city, parallel to the Red Fort, Delhi. At a time when the walls of the imperial fort were crumbling, the Metcalfe house might have awed the Mughal emperor himself with its splendid garden, library, Napoleon gallery, which was filled with memorabilia of Napoleon Bonaparte, spacious rooms, and a swimming pool. The round arches, elaborate column capitals with volutes, fire places, paintings hanging on the walls as well as a dining table, and other furnishings, seen in the drawings of his house in his *Delhi Book*,¹³⁾ clearly demonstrate his taste for the European lifestyle. This house was seriously damaged in 1857. ‘The House of Sir T Metcalfe is a complete ruin; the fine trees of the gardens and grounds have all been levelled, and the house may be now be seen from any point of the road to the cantonment.’¹⁴⁾ At present Metcalfe house is included as part of the office of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) situated in north Delhi.

Thomas Metcalfe built yet other magnificent residence, about 150 meters south-east of the Qutub complex, called Dil Khuś (or Delight of the Heart) after converting the tomb of Muhammad Quli Khan.¹⁵⁾ The graphic description of this residence is given in the accounts of Emily Metcalfe, his daughter. This residence set in the picturesque surroundings of a vast garden with elegant pavilions and the Qutub complex in the vicinity spoke of the wealth and power which Thomas Metcalfe enjoyed during his tenure as the agent of Governor General. There could be two reasons why he chose the vicinity of the Qutub complex as a location for his house Dil Khuś. During his tenure, an attempt was made to uproot the Mughal royal family from the imperial palace and shift the titular imperial seat from Shahjahanabad to Mehrauli. It could be possible that Metcalfe foresaw the Qutub area as a probable centre of future political activities and hence, an apt location for his grand palace which would envy the Mughal emperor himself. Furthermore, by this time

¹³⁾ Bayley (1980: 202–203).

¹⁴⁾ Delhi: As It Is, Delhi December 21st. The Delhi Gazette, 2 Jan–30 May, 1858, 4.

¹⁵⁾ Quli Khan was a general and foster-brother of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556–1605). His tomb was made in the early 17th century.

the British were determined to assert their superiority over the Mughals. The Qutub complex marked the beginning of Muslim rule in India. The historical site could have been opted by Sir Metcalfe to suggest the beginning of yet another regime, under the control of the British.

At present Dil Khus is in complete ruin. From the drawings in the Delhi Book¹⁶⁾ of Metcalfe, Dil Khus appears to be a two-storied building surrounded by a veranda. The height of the rooms was greater than the surrounding veranda. Some sides of the veranda had three semi-circular arches while others had only two. These arches were fitted with a wooden balustrade. In the drawings, one can also see doorway of one of the rooms topped by a half-moon fan-shaped window. Such a doorway was also seen in the building of Sir David Ochterlony (Fig. 3).

Of the Metcalfe's constructions on the upper storey, only one of the intermediary walls, which connected the two sides, has survived. Around Dil Khus, Metcalfe created a terraced garden. The remnants of the garden can still be seen. There were several pleasure pavilions. The concept of terraced garden with pleasure pavilions seems to be influenced by the romantic gardens of his own country. One such pavilion is presently known as *caumukhā*. It consists of a circular roofless chamber with four entrances. Originally the building had a wooden roof which no more exists. The walls of the chambers are fitted with shelves. There is also a decorative fire place. This chamber is surrounded by a circular corridor consisting of eight openings with pointed arches. To relieve the monotony, the walls of the corridors are designed with circular openings at few places.

From this level, the lower levels of the gardens are approached by a staircase. In the middle of the staircase is a water cascade which is in alignment with a pavilion known as the Boat House. This appears to be an older building to which Metcalfe made several additions. Metcalfe's innovations can clearly be distinguished from that of the older building. One can descend beyond this level through staircases. It may be possible that there existed some sort of water body around this pavilion because of which it came to be known as the 'Boat House'. Metcalfe added several other buildings in this complex. Apparently, Sir Thomas Metcalfe also bought the tomb of Adham Khan which also lies in proximity of the Qutub complex. It was probably purchased by him to prevent anyone else from replicating the concept of Dil Khus.

¹⁶⁾ Bayley (1980: 200).

It is intriguing to notice that while Metcalfe was preparing a road map to shift the Mughal royal family from the Shahjahanabad to the Qutub area (Mehrauli), he too had to vacate his official Residency as it was to become the government college. He was asked to shift the Residency to another building which was known as Ludlow Castle (Fig. 7). The building no longer exists as it was pulled down somewhere in the 1960s.¹⁷⁾ This building was built in Civil Lines by Samuel Ludlow (d.1853), a surgeon with the Bengal establishment of the East India Company. When Metcalfe shifted his office to this building, it became a spectacular stage of display for the Company's power and its agent. A fine illustration of this building is in the Delhi Book. The visual elements in the painting were certainly manipulated to evoke awe of the immense power the Company's agent enjoyed vis-à-vis that of the Mughal rulers. The presence of a standing army and other paraphernalia were probably to rival the grandeur of the Mughal emperor. The closed doors and windows of the building further make it a formidable structure whose spaces could not be violated. From the illustration, it is evident that Ludlow Castle had two stories with a magnificent entrance and castellated Gothic battlements which enhanced its overall impressiveness.

Here, one may note that despite maintaining Ludlow Castle in a grand manner, Metcalfe could not forget the removal of his office from the original Residency building. He wrote in his Delhi Book, 'The Proper Residency hitherto in the occupation of the Chief Authority at Delhi has lately been appropriated to the purpose of an Anglo-Indian College, greatly to the surprise of the native community, and consequently in their opinion somewhat to the discredit of the ruling power.'¹⁸⁾ Here, Metcalfe was indirectly expressing his frustration on the decision to remove his office from the original building using the objection from the native community as a pretext.

To sum up, it may be said that the advent of the British, in the first half of the nineteenth century, contributed to the fashioning of a new genre of art and architecture in the imperial capital. Their buildings reflected the memories of a classical and European legacy which, when intermingled with the indigenous architectural traditions, added a new dimension to the urban fabric of the Mughal capital. British patronage of architecture was also aimed at announcing their distinct identity from that of the natives. Initially, when

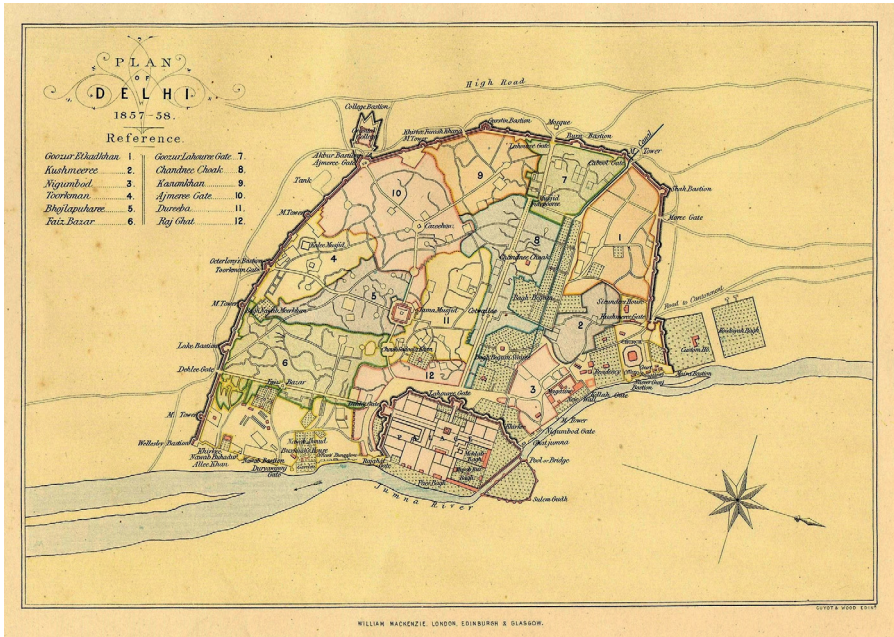
¹⁷⁾ Ludlow Castle, Delhi., British Library, London. Accessed on January 4, 2011. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/l/019pho000000193u00007000.html>.

¹⁸⁾ Bayley (1980: 17).

the British were allocated old Mughal buildings as their residences, they made a definite attempt to mask their Mughal features by adding a façade. The paintings, patronised by Company officials, are the visual documents of the British taste for the native lifestyle during the early phase of the Residency period. They also demonstrate the growing power of the British – for example, in the durbar scenes the British officers initially stood like any other courtier at a reasonable physical distance from the Emperor. Gradually, one finds them standing next to the emperor at a place usually reserved for the royal princes. It can be deduced from the study of the art and architecture patronised by the British that visual art played an important role in communicating the changing attitude of the British towards the Mughals in terms of their political ascendancy.

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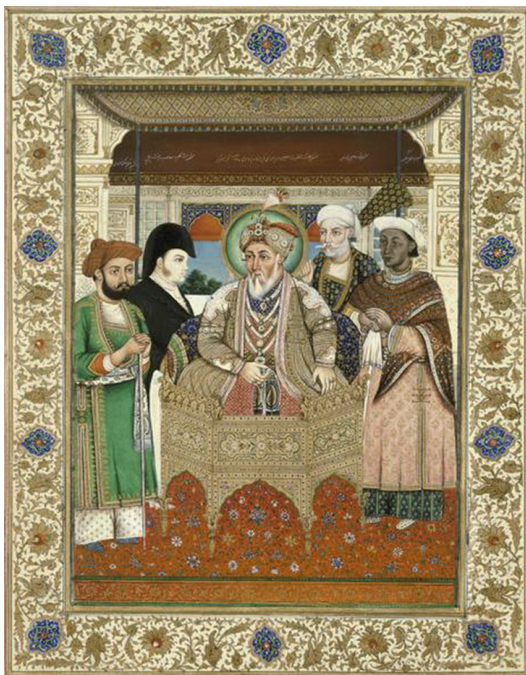
▲ Fig. 1. Plan of Delhi 1857–58 engraved by Guyot & Wood, published by William Mackenzie, Edinburgh, about 1860. <http://www.antiqueprints.com/images/ah3/h3593.jpg>



◀ Fig. 2. The Court of Mughal Emperor Akbar II, c. early 19th century. Watercolour and gold on paper. National Museum Collection, New Delhi. Acc. No. 76.559.



▲ Fig. 3. Sir David Ochterlony (1758–1825) in Indian dress smoking a huqqā and watching a nautch in his house at Delhi. c. 1820. Watercolour. British Library, London <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/addorimss/s/largeimage54784.html> (accessed August 5, 2015)



◆ Fig. 4. Akbar Shah II with an East India Company officer in attendance. c. 1830. Victoria and Albert Museum Collection. 289–1871. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O18429/portrait-of-akbar-ii-with-painting-unknown/> (accessed August 5, 2015)



Fig. 5. Charles Metcalfe 's establishment at the Shalimar Gardens north of Delhi. Artist: Sita Ram (fl. c.1810–1822). c. 1815. Watercolour. British Library, London <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/addorimss/c/019addor0004806u00000000.html> (accessed August 5, 2015)



Fig. 6. St. James Church. c. 1826–1836. Kashmiri Gate Delhi

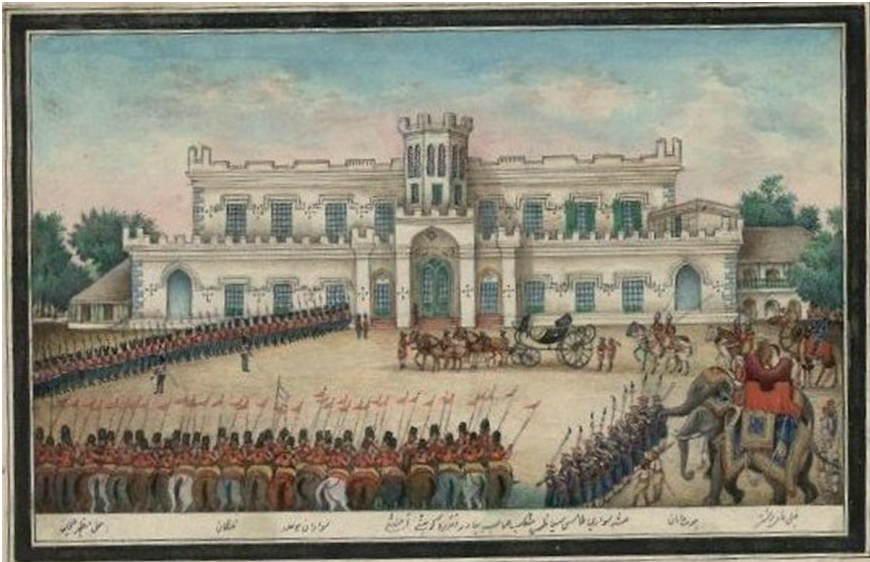


Fig. 7. *Ludlow Castle*. c. 1843, from 'Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi, British Library, London https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludlow_Castle,_Delhi#/media/File:LudlowCastleDelhi1843.jpg (accessed August 5, 2015)