

## DELHI IMPROVEMENT TRUST (D.I.T)

### **Introduction: ambivalence, antagonism, biography**

On 3 August 1935 Arthur Parke Hume (1904-65) was commissioned by the Government of India to write a report on the relief of urban congestion in Old Delhi. The transfer of the capital of British India from Calcutta had led to a population influx that New Delhi was unable to accommodate. The recommendations of Hume's report were accepted and on 2 March 1937 the Delhi Improvement Trust came into being. Hume served as the Chairman of the Trust until 1941.

Hume's relationship with the Government of India was wrought with tension and feelings, at times, of utmost disgust. This came to a peak in 1941 when the government effectively blocked Hume's plans to institute a system of conditional rehousing before slum demolition. His argument in favor of heightened governmental responsibility towards the urban poor repeatedly met with the response that the system had to be self-financing, which effectively disabled the proposals. These tensions could focus on colonies as places of illiberal practices such as slavery or excessive violence.

The most influential postcolonial studies of this colonial ambivalence have explained it as a reaction to the difference of race. The racial ambivalence was very much a situated ambivalence that arose from the attempt to position Indians as simultaneously governable, in terms of modern calculation, and less civilized, in terms of colonial Orientals.

Ambivalence was a product of language, a failure of naming that led to acute discomfort, anxiety, and indecision. Bauman claims that ambivalence relies upon the effective discovery of proper technologies of ordering, and that modern ordering must be as much about practice as about thought: what Bauman termed the 'gardening' activities of the state. It was this urban trimming, planting, and planning that Hume was interested in, and from which his tensions emerged.

Hume's he was ambivalent about his own race and practices on the ground. Hume remained committed to the idea of Empire and the practice of working for the ICS. Yet, simultaneously he often held the embodiment of the Empire in India and the head of the ICS, the Government of India, in complete contempt. Indeed, at times his vacillating ambivalence towards the government descended into outright antagonism. While Hume's general ambivalence did concern issues of race and categorization at times, it was much more about the applied problematic and realities of rule.

One stance on the issue of 'colonial development' suggested that it should benefit local populations in terms of a 'sacred trust', taking in economic growth, social provision, nutritional standards, and labor protection. Alternative perspectives favored bringing colonies into the world trade system to further benefit the British economy whilst also developing their own. While the "interwar years would see pressure mount on Britain to adopt more welfare-centered approaches in its Empire, the economic depression also placed colonial governments under financial pressures.

One way to approach this new biography is to focus on three approaches to life writing that are by no means incompatible. These approaches will be referred to as chronological, analytical, and genealogical. The chronological approach has structured the tradition of biography writing. This approach has the benefit of a detailed focus on the individual that can

allow evolutions in thought over time to be traced, and can be enriched by nonlinear eruptions of memory or trauma. This emphasis can, however, undervalue the influence of context, external events, other individuals, or societal norms.

## DELHI IMPROVEMENT TRUST

1940.



**Standing First Row**—Mr. Shanti Sivan, Mr. M. S. Ramayyar, Mr. Ganpat Rai, Pt. Khairati Lal, Mr. Raghbir Singh, Mr. Bakhsh Ilahti, Mr. G. B. Deolalikar, Mr. B. C. Sircar, Mr. M. Z. Khan,  
**Standing Second Row**—L. Kali Ram, Mr. M. K. Sen Gupta, Mr. Zahid Hussain, S. B. Sardar Sobha Singh, K. B. Mohd. Sulaiman, Mr. S. Rahmatullah, R. B. M. S. Mathur,  
Mr. H. P. Sinha, Mr. Om Prakash.  
**Sitting**—Major W. H. Crichton, Mr. G. K. S. Sarma, R. B. L. Harish Chandra, Mr. A. P. Hume, Lala Shri Ram, Mr. A. W. H. Dean, K. B. S. M. Abdullah.

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The analytical, or archaeological, approach focuses on discourse, whether as external to the individual or as the discursive norms that have become apparent in an individual's conduct. Such an approach may have to eschew chronological conventions in order to draw out discursive regularities over time.

This approach can also be traced in Gerry Kearns's (1997) comparative study of the imperial subjectivities of Mary Kingsley and Hal ford Mackinder. Kearns showed that geographical discourses were used in personal subjectification, but in ways specific to each individual's self-willed conduct. As such, the individual negotiation of the broader and overlapping discourses of geography, race, sexuality, and gender was traced through the life narratives of a masculine imperialist and a female explorer. The genealogical approach seeks to provide a history of the present, working back from an event through time and across space to denaturalize a phenomenon and expose its multiple origins. As an approach to an individual's life, this method bears much in common with an analytical approach, but is aligned to historical investigation and a more complicated narrative. Genealogy must tack back and forth between a present and the multiple pasts that inform it.

Some chronology would be required to chart the life within which actions or events occurred, which can be illuminated by a genealogical investigation, while each genealogy will be tracing an object, event, or opinion with its own discursive formations. As such, the three approaches are not mutually incompatible but, rather, can serve to highlight particular parts of an individual's life.

This paper will articulate these approaches in combination to shed light on the origins and development of Hume's antagonistic attitude towards the Government of India and its effects on the ground. Firstly, chronological and analytical approaches will be combined to examine Hume's early life and the rhetorical tropes of his personality. Secondly, chronological and genealogical analyses will be combined to frame his preparation of the report and the operation of the trust. Thirdly, analytical and genealogical approaches will be combined to review Hume's clash with the government over the issue of rehousing the poor.

## **Imperial circuits: Hume 1904-37**

### **Chronology**

Collection D724 of the India Office Private Papers, housed in London's British Library, contains the deposit of the Hume family. The collection holds over 7000 items—namely, letters, diaries, personal papers, scrapbooks, news cuttings, and photographs from Andrew Parke Hume, his parents, and his sister.

Hume's rage and ambivalence was to a degree structured and institutional, but not everyone put this structural space into voice and action.

On Hume's recommendation, the Delhi Improvement Trust was formed under his chairmanship later that year. It is the raw openness of Hume's letters that allows us some insight into his negotiation of the contested discursive terrain of colonial India.

## **Analysis: reactions to Delhi**

This preliminary scout of Hume's personality covers the period from January 1935, just after his arrival in Delhi ahead of his deputy commissionership, until March 1937. As such, the analytical categories adopted here seem most relevant to Hume's emplaced mode of perception and action in this period and place. It was there and then that he refamiliarised himself with Delhi.

### Government

One of the greatest benefits to emerge from the confluence of geography and biography is the emphasis on the formative influence of place and the often mobile connections between dwelling and identity. Hume's did speak of his admiration for New Delhi's layout, squares, and towers. But he also questioned whether such lavish expenditure was justifiable or desirable in the postwar years when the tax burden had been rising. Four days later he wrote home again in a foul mood, complaining of the "depressing atmosphere everywhere" The new city was written off as a "white sepulcher itself like a plaster city built up in some Hollywood studio to be knocked down by an earthquake as a scene in a master-cinema production a vast city of deserted streets and avenues." On August, 4<sup>th</sup> 1935 Hume claimed that the old city was hemmed in on all sides and had been over congested for years, but that the government had failed to devise a policy for Old Delhi, lavishing all its interest and money on the new city. On 18 August, Hume claimed that he would have no qualms about informing the government while it poured out its gold into the imperial new capital. He was further maddened when the Government refused to fund an air survey of the city for a few thousand rupees, writing on 16 February 1936 that when it came to New Delhi the government talked in terms of crores (tens of million) not thousands.

Hume regarded a future chief commissioner's respect for the Government of India (GOI) as 'unwholesome'.

Hume came to work in closer collaboration with the central government, his disdain spread from its performance to its practice. One stand of this distaste concerned governmental finances and cost cutting. He noted in a letter of 4 August 1935 that the congestion report was not to be given any special monies and would have to be funded by cuts in Delhi's budget.

In terms of administration, Hume became increasingly disillusioned.

As he tried to organize the formation of the trust he expressed his amazement, on 12 October 1936, at the irresistible temptation of the Government of India to interfere and make things as complicated as possible. Even in his own attempts to procure a house in New Delhi, he announced his usual tedious fights with "bone-headed bureaucrats" (1 December 1936). In his writings it is the Government of India that figures as an emblem of what Hume felt he had to fight against, causing huge tensions within the functioning of the Delhi Improvement Trust. These tensions would certainly increase as Hume attempted to put his plans into action, but he also at times expressed contempt for his Indian colleagues and the occupants of the city he was to work on.

Hume also despaired of Indian capabilities in administration, Shortly after arriving in Delhi he claimed, that the history of the Indian nationalist movement showed that Indians could not yet manage to work together. He also wrote of the customary amusement at the nationalist

Congress Party members

obstructing the Legislative Assembly, yet concluded that: "On the other hand, it is to creatures like this land" (17 January 1935). These views seemed to be confirmed in his future dealings with the Delhi Municipal Committee (DMC).

Many of Hume's most comments were committed to his personal diaries. On 18 April 1935 Hume chaired a meeting of the DMC, He noted in his diary that The DMC offices were filthy, decaying, overcrowded, and terrible. The diary entry of 25 April 1935 clearly demonstrated the debasing and naturalizing rhetoric of Empire that Spur (1993) described:

"The futility of these birds, with brains like liquid manure which dribbles through a spout is sometimes past endurance. For sheer inefficiency and utter incompetence the Delhi Municipal Committee must be quite unsurpassed. We are to blame: we have allowed them to think they can do something: they themselves know they can't"

Here, Hume hints at discomfort with municipal mimicry of roles and performances obviously, in his eyes, best left to the ICS. Yet, this ambivalence resurfaced at the higher echelons of government when Hume was faced with an Indian superior. G S Bajpai. Bajpai was a harsh critic and often forced Hume to change his plans to make the report, Hume continued to meet Bajpai into the next year and confided in his diary that he hoped he would not have to do it often:

Hume was heavily Christian and his belief pervaded his criticisms of those around him, and his aspirations for the work of the trust. In his writing of the report Hume also claimed on 12 December 1936 to be guided by Providence, and, when the trust office was finally opened, he wrote on 14 March 1937 that the Ten Commandments were hung on the wall.

### **Genealogies of the report: Hume 1936-37**

Hume was obviously part of a long tradition emanating from European town planning. He was inspired by 20<sup>th</sup>-century advances in housing provision and urban technologies. Yet, Hume's work also fits into particularly Indian trajectories. The two brief genealogies outlined here refer to an urban planner of whom Hume wrote with admiration, and the ideas of two Indian advisors to the municipality who worked with Hume himself. All three people managed, in different ways, to convey to Hume that an alternative model of improvement to the sanitation-based and engineering-based solutions of the past would be possible.

### **J P Orr, Patrick Geddes, and the Bombay Improvement Trust**

On 6 February 1936, Hume wrote in his diary that he was reading Orr's lectures on Bombay slum clearance and the Improvement Trust, and that he felt the broad principles seemed good. In 1898 the Bombay Improvement Trust had become the first trust to be founded in India, in response to the threat of plague and disease in one of the country's foremost ports. However, the trust failed to learn the British lesson with regards to the necessity of housing provision rather than just demolition. It was forced to prioritize profit making over working-class rehousing, causing an actual exacerbation of existing conditions between 1903 and 1913 as inflation forced workers to subdivide tenements in order to survive.

It was in this context that Patrick Geddes arrived in Bombay with his exhibition on "cities and town planning". Like Hume, Geddes reacted against New Delhi's lack of spirituality and

the cost of construction, and proposed his own techniques of diagnostic survey and conservative surgery to improve traditional towns. Geddes did provide a radically different approach to urban improvement than the sanitary engineering tradition of urban clearance and Western infrastructure.

Geddes and Orr Both authors argued against viewing spatial organization as being separate to social relations, Orr's opening argument was that "slum reform must follow social reform". Like Hume, Orr's task was to solve congestion. He identified this congestion as being of two types: house in an area; and people in hoses (page 19). Orr recommended not only legislation, but also the fermentation of social discontent that would demand and promote higher standards. While unhygienic houses should be demolished, without rehousing this would simply move slums around the city. As such, Orr's guiding principle was that preventative measures must precede remedial measures. In existing areas, Orr conformed to Geddes's conservative surgery by recommending the enforcing of minimum standards rather than demolition, and only evicting inhabitants of unfit buildings when they had somewhere else to live. While this rehousing would necessitate a financial loss, Orr (1918, page 7) argued that the increase in health and decrease in crime would recoup these costs from hospitals and the police.

### **K S Sethna, Sohan Lai, and urban health**

"sohan Lal" and "Sethna" visited him.<sup>(9)</sup> had been working on the technical surveys during Hume's leave Sohan Lai had an established career history of involvement in urban planning In 1927 the Government of India made funds available for modest schemes of improvement in the city, and Sohan lal was asked for his recommendations.<sup>(11)</sup> he responded with a list of twenty-one recommendations, which he summarized in the following six points: improved drainage; slum removal; public gardens; city extensions; more land for building; and housing provision for the poor and middles classes through cooperative societies.

While focusing on traditional sanitarian responses to congestion like slum clearance and drainage, Sohan Lal emphasized that expensive street widening was not the answer. His solution lay not in the streets or bye lance but in the houses where disease, especially tuberculosis, was rampant. The houses were built densely, but it was overcrowding in houses that was the real problem. Inflation had pushed up rents but not wages, leading to subdivision of apartments. The only answer was expansion of the city, although particularly bad slums could be demolished. To rehouse those living in slums cooperative societies were recommended, which would build houses in which the rents paid would contribute to the eventual house purchase. These recommendations, so like those of Geddes in many respects, were agreed upon in most senses by the Deputy Commissioner at the time, but received no funding. It was only when medical evidence was provided of the domestic health crisis in Delhi that action was taken,

Sethna had worked out the average space occupied per person in each home. Sethna would make a complete house-to-house survey of two wards to calculate a more complete average space per person per house. Sethna also contributed indirectly to the congestion report through the health reports other capacities Sethna had been working on public health in Delhi.

Sethna was obviously passionate about public health in Delhi and continually worked to

pressure the central government into action. The congestion continued to grow in intensity in Delhi, as the health standards continued to fall. Sethna produced annual reports that chart the transition of barren lands into thickly crowded beasties (slums). His report for 1929 claimed that the overcrowding had "worsened the living conditions of the people dwelling in surroundings most unfavorable to the sustenance of human life". These conditions were related specifically to the urban infrastructure, in terms of the conditions the poor were forced to live in. These one-room tenements, which often housed several families, had little ventilation and unsanitary houses and surroundings. Six years before Hume's commission, Sethna had been insisting that a systematic, regular, and well-chalked-out plan of improvement was required. In concluding his report, Sethna listed forty-two needs of the city. Many of these points conformed to traditional sanitary engineering: ten referred to drainage and nine to sewerage. Yet, the other points hinted at a wider conception of public health, referring to cleaner markets, green spaces, city extensions, hospitals, and schooling.

This movement to a more social conception of health was continued in Sethna's report for 1930. Tuberculosis was explicitly stated to be a "social disease" or "house Disease" that was connected to overcrowding and bad ventilation. Sethna acknowledged that much had been done for the city in terms of drains, markets, and roads, but that public health was still not being protected and that "ignorance, prejudice and ingrained habits and customs opposed to sanitation have to be surmounted." Sethna claimed that the cost of preserving public health was great, but that it was less than the costs of disease and that spending should target prevention. Public health had evolved from prevention of diseases to the positive appeal for health, and he insisted that this appeal should begin in the home.

Sethna had appealed to the government to improve the city extensions and relieve congestion. These themes were directly taken up by Hume's report. Yet, he also argued for a deeper and more complex form of urban governance that would be influential in Hume's guidance of the trust. In appealing for this he was making more elaborate claims for Sohan Lai's insistence on moving people out of the city, and on providing means for them to be housed. This was a policy that Hume eventually adopted. Hume launched the Delhi Improvement Trust in 1937.

### **Conflicting government mentalities: Hume 1937-41**

The form of Hume's report on the Relief of Congestion in Delhi Charted the 'town conditions', relaying how the mismanagement of the land had led to gross congestion, which was followed by the 'Town planning suggestions' that formed the basis of the Delhi Improvement Trust. The congestion was portrayed through an analysis of the 'population', in which the surveys that Sethna and Sohan Lal had contributed to were used to estimate the excess population, based on density in houses. The report echoed Orr in its analysis of 'houses on land and people in houses'. This emphasis on the home was in line with the previously outlined genealogies, yet the report did not significantly consider housing provision nor did it sufficiently consider the other diagnostic factors such as communication, water supply, industry, or culture.

The trust itself focused on schemes of city extension and relatively restrained slum demolition. However, the Delhi Improvement Trust did not involve itself in social reform, and its greatest failing came with regards to poor-class rehousing. Hume did push for projects of this sort, but found the government less and less willing to subsidize these projects. This was especially the case in the financially stringent war years, despite the increased congestion brought about by the flocking of bureaucrats and the military to the capital. This led to

intense frustration for Hume as his quest as an administrator. And Christian, was thwarted.

### **Analysis: from ambivalence to antagonism**

#### Government

Even when debating the foundation of the Delhi Improvement Trust in February 1937, Hume blamed the government's "lack of guts" and "fear of offending" for curtailing the trust's powers of notification (to forcibly acquire land) and insisting on the retention of a large degree of financial control. Hume claimed a success for the very poor were a public responsibility. An entertainments tax was created which would subsidize rehousing from slums, which was claimed to be a first in British India. In October 1939, Hume was looking forward to the next year when the poor-class housing would be built at 50% public expense, and would also be available for hire-purchase. Hume wrote on 19 November 1939 that he had succeeded in getting the government to agree to an English-style rehousing policy:

He boasted of Delhi's superior approach and insisted, upon the need for a "wider sociological standpoint of slum clearance and providing proper accommodation for the very poor." However, the government immediately started pressuring Hume to make the houses cheaper after 137 model houses had been constructed. Financial backing was delayed and by October 1940 there had still been no progress; yet Hume was confident that 5000 poor-class houses would be built the following year, which would mean that "a new epoch has opened in the history of housing for the poor of Indian cities" However, there was still little progress, with only seventy-two families rehoused in November 1940, and thirty-two planned to be rehoused for January 1941. Even this slow development was blocked on 10 January 1941 when the government insisted that no more houses would be subsidized. Hume reacted furiously to this decision, which put an end to his plans for housing provision, and caused the stalling of the slum demolition schemes that depended on rehousing.

This marked the end of hopes not only for a large-scale rehousing of the poor in Delhi, but also for Hume's career in Delhi.

Hume remained committed to his Christian faith, although these sentiments were more in evidence during his rationing work of 1944, during some of the darkest times of the war. Many of his comments during his Chairmanship, however, were racially inflected.

It is clear that Hume's conception of race and religion influenced his work. His brand of imperial Christianity welded together a particular complex of race, class, and gender assumptions into a modus operandi that produced extraordinary efforts to benefit poor Indians, yet extraordinarily rude and offensive statements to be made about the Indian administrative elite. Amongst all this Hume did remain committed to the idea of Empire, despite his fundamental conflict with the colonial government mentality he faced while in Delhi.

### **Genealogies of economic and biopolitical rationalities**

The Depression of the 1930s put pressure on the British Empire to defend its colonies from recession, to contain socialists and communists, but also to keep colonial finances sound. Development was seen as much as part of this attempt as it was part of a longer tradition of humanitarian and philanthropic work in India.

Initial years of the Delhi Improvement Trust's activity saw Hume shift towards a defense of the biopolitical rights of slum dwellers to affordable accommodation, a right that was discussed in terms of statutory obligations, moral consciousness, and duty. The denial of these rights infuriated Hume. Hume's antagonism towards the government was born of a deeper tension between rationalities of colonial government mentality: the need to make profit, and the need to maintain a healthy workforce.

Governments make life, and the duty of liberal government mentality is to conduct the conduct of their population so as to regulate life in its most beneficial state. The refusal to invest sufficiently in the lives of its people was made clear to Hume by the comparison between English and Indian town planning. Hume's antagonism was brought forth by the tension between economic and biopolitical rationalities. While Hume's emotions do indicate something to us of the tensions of Empire, they also speak to the tensions of a government mentality structured to benefit the bungalow residents of the New Delhi, not the slum dwellers of the old.