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M.N. Buch

Lutyens' New Delhi—yesterday, today and tomorrow

Lutyens designed New Delhi when it was decided to shift the capital of India from Calcutta to the city which has traditionally been the capital of Hindustan. But New Delhi is more than just an imperial city. It is the capital of ancient India, that in its own way makes a statement of grandeur which even Washington cannot make on the same scale. A Republic needs a symbol of pride; and Lutyens' New Delhi makes precisely that statement, establishes precisely that symbol for the Republic of India.

Every northern empire in India made Delhi its capital. Indraprastha and Hastinapur of antiquity, Qila Rai Pithora, Tughlakabad, Feroz Shah Kotla, Shajahanabad—all were imperial cities from which the rulers governed Hindustan. Shajahanabad was, perhaps, the first complete city as understood in the parlance of modern town-planning. In some senses Lutyens' New Delhi forms a continuum with Shajahanabad, though in an idiom far removed from the vernacular. The Red Fort and its imperial quarters were as different from Fatehpuri of the walled city as was Lutyens' New Delhi from Chandni Chowk. The historicity of Delhi and the place of New Delhi in the Delhi metropolitan continuum, both in the physical and the historical sense, make this city unique amongst all world capitals. Even Athens and Rome did not have such a rich overlay of cultures, creeds, architectural styles, ideologies and even ethnicities.

The whole of Delhi, of which New Delhi is an integral part, is not only representative of an unparalleled heritage, but it offers a constant voyage of discovery in which the past fuses into the present and is projected into the future. The historian, Dr.Narayani Gupta,

says, "Various histories that make up Delhi make it a tale of many cities and endless games of discovery". Lutyens' New Delhi, therefore, is as much a part of that voyage of discovery as Indraprastha and Hastinapur. It must be approached with the same reverence as with the cities of the past; unfortunately this has not always happened because of the stupidity of man and the cupidity of developers.

Lutyens did not select the site of the new capital unadvisedly. The foundation-stone of the city was laid in the year 1911 at the Delhi Durbar; but because it formed a part of the Yamuna flood plain, it was abandoned as the site of the new capital. Talkatora, also a low lying area, was also abandoned. After a detailed reconnaissance, Lutyens selected Raisina Hill, as the apex of the city; he gave it two axes: west to east from Raisina Hill upto Purana Qila (Rajpath) and north to south from Connaught Place upto Lodi Gardens (Janpath). The Willingdon Crescent forms an arc running from south to north which cradles Raisina Hill and runs parallel to the Ridge, thus dividing New Delhi from whatever lay beyond the Ridge.

Lutyens design of the city should be of great interest to those who talk of and believe in the ancient Indian science of *Vastu Shastra*. Whether accidentally or by design, Lutyens created the new capital in the exact shape of the traditional *Vastu Purusha*, whose head lies on Raisina Hill and whose feet rest at the Purana Qila. The Janpath north and south of Raisina forms the '*bhujas*' which, if swung in an arc above the *Vastu Purusha*'s head, forms the trajectory of Willingdon Crescent. Thus this most imperial of cities, this symbol of the British Empire, this statement of the superiority of the Anglo Saxon breed is in fact Edwin Landseer Lutyens homage to India: his final design of the city forms the *Vastu Purusha* of ancient India.

New Delhi has an integral logic. The centre or main focal point, the capitol hill, call it what you may, is Raisina Hill with Rashtrapati Bhawan and the North and South Blocks of the Secretariat. The Parliament building had not been originally envisaged; and it was Herbert Baker, Lutyens colleague and *bête noire*, who designed the building and located it in a triangle below and to one side of Raisina Hill. Rajpath became the line of definition, dividing the city into northern and southern segments. The north of Rajpath and upto Connaught Place is the main high-value commercial centre, though some bungalows, especially of the Executive Councillors, were located on the road parallel to Rajpath, now called Dr. Rajendra Prasad Marg. Beyond Connaught Place and upto the foot of the Northern Ridge

were located Gole Market, the common man's shopping centre and the beautifully designed precincts which form the quarters of clerical and other staff. This was the Indian part of Lutyens' New Delhi; and it also contained New Delhi Railway Station.

South of Rajpath was the true Imperial New Delhi, with roads such as Akbar Road, Aurangzeb Road, Safdarjung Road, and Prithvi Raj Road, being the sites of the large bungalows of the senior officers. The Lodi Estate, also south of Rajpath, was developed for junior officers and clerical staff. Large plots were also reserved for some of the bigger princely states in Princes' Park. The entire city was beautifully landscaped by Grierson, Mustoc and Walter George, and so designed that movement to and from residential areas to offices was possible by bicycle and on foot. Despite its beautiful avenues and the feeling of openness, Lutyens' New Delhi is a very compact city. He designed all his rights of way to accommodate vehicular traffic, pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders in their own segregated spaces. It is this planning which has enabled our modern town planners to widen roads to eight lanes without having to cut down a single tree. I cannot think of any city in the world which comes anywhere near Lutyens' New Delhi in planning foresight.

II

When we talk of Lutyens' New Delhi in the context of the whole Union Territory of Delhi, we have to remember the contextual perspective. The Union Territory of Delhi has a total land area of 1486 square kilometers, or 14,86,000 hectares. The whole of Lutyens Bungalow Zone consists of about 2800 hectares, which comes to 1.88 per cent of the total area of the Union Territory, thus it constitutes only 0.88 per cent of the whole. The area for government bungalows is only 400 hectares and for private bungalows is 150 hectares. Thus the total area under government and private bungalows which have large compounds constitutes just 0.37 per cent of the entire Union Territory of Delhi.

The rest of the 2800 hectares includes Rashtrapati Bhawan, Central Vista, Parliament House, parts of the Southern Ridge, gardens such as Lodi Gardens and Nehru Park, the area under roads and other public spaces, various government offices, the Supreme Court of India and historical sites such as Purana Qila. These spaces cannot be

touched and, therefore, the entire focus of attention narrows down to the 550 hectares, which is occupied by bungalows, constitutes 0.37 per cent of the land area of Delhi. It is this which is eyed by real estate developers, land sharks, corrupt officers and politicians and various shades of vested interests. Even if all 550 hectares were given over to high-density, high-rise construction approximating to a slum, it would not solve the problem of housing in Delhi. But it would destroy what constitutes the finest, most beautifully designed urban form in India or, for that matter, anywhere in the world.

Moreover, Lutyens' New Delhi is an oasis of green in the midst of what is fast developing into perhaps the most blighted urban landscape in the world, becoming worse day by day because of the rapid dynamics of change and growth. To get some idea of what these 2800 hectares of land means, Delhi has to be approached by air. The flight path from Bhopal to Delhi, a route I often take, comes over the Badarpur Power Station with its chimneys belching smoke and succeeded by a vast sea of faceless blocks of flats rising match-box-like from the land whose dominant colour is either burnt sienna or a dusty khakhi. It is only as one flies over the Tughlakabad forest and then the Rose Garden at Hauz Khas that one gets a glimpse of the green which constitutes New Delhi. The contrast is striking. I am sure an approach from the north over Jehangirpuri and Azadpur Sabzi Mandi would also present a similar contrast. New Delhi is the saving grace of the national capital. It is the lungs of Delhi, the symbol of its pride, the show-case of everything that is beautiful. This is not an area which deserves destruction. This is an area which needs to be treated as hallowed ground.

The Lutyens Bungalow Zone has been shrinking visually and physically. The segment north of Connaught Place has been almost totally destroyed, and that between Connaught Place and the Central Vista has been changed beyond recognition. In 1974 NDRAC prescribed norms which led to the organised destruction of the character of the northern part of Lutyens Bungalow Zone, and also isolated Connaught Place visually and functionally from the rest of the city. The influx of refugees after the partition caused Delhi to grow exponentially, resulting in almost an overnight change of the fields and orchards of Karol Bagh, Shalimar Bagh, Pusa, Sarai Rohilla, Sabzi Mandi, and so on, into densely built-up zones. Unable to stop the rot, planners treated the northern part of New Delhi, formerly a well integrated part of Lutyens Bungalow Zone, as an alien city. Thus the

area around Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital (Willingdon Hospital) has been built up and excluded from Lutyens Bungalow Zone, as if no planning norms need apply. The whole of the Gole Market area and Baba Kharak Singh Marg (Irwin Road), have been subjected to ad hoc planning and frequent change of norms, resulting in the proliferation of some of the ugliest buildings in Delhi.

Connaught Place, the old central business district of New Delhi, was designed on a hub-and-spoke basis. The radial roads were designed as traffic arteries which moved people swiftly in and out of Connaught Place. Now these rapid transit roads have been totally commercialised and carry a huge load of terminating and originating traffic. Parliament Street was designed to link the new capital with the old city. Now it contains major offices, a number of banks and the massive complex of the New Delhi Municipal Committee exactly opposite Jantar Mantar, thus suffering from almost terminal arteriosclerosis. This has happened to Kasturba Gandhi Marg (Curzon Road), Barakhamba Road and adjoining areas. The permissible Floor Area Ratio (FAR) has been raised from 2.00 to 4.00 in total disregard of the needs of traffic, parking and fire safety, leading to the total disruption of urban basic services. When we link this up with what has happened to the old Circular Road, now called Jawaharlal Nehru Marg, Minto Road, Rouse Avenue and Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg where the bungalows have disappeared to be replaced by institutions and offices and hospitals, one finds that the whole of northern Lutyens Bungalow Zone has changed for the worse and is beyond recognition.

By excluding all the area around Willingdon Hospital and along the Irwin Road and Gole Market from the planning norms of New Delhi, Lutyens Bungalow Zone has lost over a thousand hectares of land. Even the Central Vista which flanks Rajpath has not been spared. The large bungalows of the members of the Viceroy's Executive Council on Rajendra Prasad Road north of Rajpath and Maulana Azad Road, south of Rajpath have disappeared; and in their place have been built massive government offices, National Archives, and the National Museum. The latest addition to this list will soon be the office of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the building meant to house the Ministry of External Affairs across the road from the National Museum. The greensward of the Central Vista, whose horizons originally stretched upto the Northern Ridge and south upto Safdarjung is now entirely hemmed in.

The width of the Central Vista still ensures that some proportion of buildings to open space is retained, but the immense load of commuters and wheeled traffic has adversely affected the original movement design. One prime example of this is the area around the north face of North Block and the land between it, Parliament House and Church Road, which was designed as an entry forecourt to the North Block. Now this has become a huge bus terminus which has eaten up the open space right up to the boundary of Rashtrapati Bhawan. When we superimpose on this the full development of the metro rail system, we would completely destroy the entire circulation plan of Lutyens even more effectively than Indore has done to the original development plan prepared by Sir Patrick Geddes and the movement and transportation plan prepared by Stamper. It is in order to promote ad hocism that the boundary of the Lutyens Bungalow Zone has been changed to exclude areas, and has made the configuration of the zone odd in shape instead of the original quadrilateral.

III

In June 1998, the Government of India constituted a committee to review the present situation in New Delhi, in particular Lutyens Bungalow Zone, of which I was made Chairman. The proposal of the Ministry of Urban Development was that the entire area under bungalows should be brought under high-density, high-rise development in order to make the most economical use of the land, promote housing and generally bring about an egalitarian culture in what was deemed to be an elitist city with an imperial hangover. Behind this proposal was a powerful lobby of builders and developers who greedily eyed the 550 hectares of prime land. The Lutyens Bungalow Zone Committee has commented on Delhi as below:

New Delhi is not a new city in the sense of Islamabad, Chandigarh, Gandhinagar or, for that matter, Milton Keynes ... (it is) but one small element of a very large city, whose influence spreads over the entire 38000 square kilometres of the National Capital Region. It is a part of an urban inheritance which qualifies the whole of Delhi, including Lutyens' New Delhi, as a World Heritage City. Critics state that the individual bungalows in New Delhi have no great architectural merit and this point is conceded. Nevertheless,

despite the fact that these bungalows cannot be defined as monuments by themselves, collectively New Delhi is certainly covered by the definition given to architectural heritage by the National Commission on Urbanisation.

... entire groups of buildings, even if they do not include a single example of any outstanding merit, may have a quality and atmosphere which gives them a value which makes them worthy of conservation.

(NCU Vol. II, Part IV, Chapter 12 para 3.312.2.5).

What is the visual effect of Lutyens' New Delhi ? Viewed from the air or the top floor of a tall building, the whole of Lutyens Bungalow Zone seems to nestle under a canopy of green. Somewhere this canopy is in straight lines because the trees are planted along roads. Elsewhere the canopy is in clusters because the trees are in the compounds of houses. But for a few tall buildings which have now intruded on the urban landscape of Lutyens' New Delhi, the trees so beautifully cover the built space that the whole city gives the prospect of a garden.. The Taj Man Singh hotel, Lok Nayak Bhavan, the tall buildings north of Rajpath and some of the constructions south of Rajpath, all stick out like sore thumbs and are indicative of what will happen to this garden city if we abandon the bungalows and allow high rise construction. One tries as far as possible to conserve a natural landscape. But where man has created a landscape which is in tune with nature, should that landscape also not be conserved ?

One of the main criticisms of the bungalows of Lutyens' New Delhi is that they are reminiscent of an anachronistic, élitist, imperial past. It is said that in socialist India there can be no room for ministers and government servants enjoying several acres of open space around their bungalows whilst millions of people live in overcrowded slums. Here it is worth quoting a paragraph from the Lutyens Bungalow Zone Committee Report.

Privilege has no place in democracy, but privilege is often not an enjoyment of office but the price to be paid for office. When New Bhopal was under construction the question of the location and size of bungalows for ministers came up for consideration. There was a strong lobby which pressed that flats be built for ministers. When a study was made of how ministers live, it was found that on the one hand they have no privacy because of the constant stream of visitors and on the other they only use a small portion of the bungalows, the rest being given over to visitors and guests. Comparisons with how ministers live in Britain and France are

invidious because in these countries people do not come to the minister's house for transaction of business. An Indian minister is virtually under siege, not only on account of people seeking favours but also on account of constituents visiting him with genuine complaints. Therefore, in Bhopal the bungalows for ministers were designed to have a built area of about 4500 square feet for the personal part of the house and another 2500 square feet for the bungalow office, visitors reception area and dormitory for constituents who might want to stay overnight. Accommodation also had to be provided for personal staff and police personnel on guard duty, in addition to the above. Naturally the bungalow compounds had to be large in order to accommodate these buildings. The permissible ground coverage and FAR is somewhat higher than in New Delhi, but nevertheless there has been no escaping large compounds and large bungalows. The nature of the job almost mandates this. This point is made because whereas the study as done on the bungalows is detailed and logical, perhaps the reality of the situation faced by ministers and high officials in the very core of Lutyens' New Delhi may require solutions other than just densification.

Even if this argument is rejected, the fact remains that these bungalows and their large compounds create gardens in the midst of a city which is already overcrowded; and even if these gardens are not open to the public they do create the essential lung space which keeps the city alive. If there is objection to these bungalows being occupied by senior officers and ministers an alternative could be to reserve certain areas, such as Lodi Estate, as a single housing compound and build very compact residences for senior officers and ministers in each one of these compounds. The bungalows then could be converted to public use with suitable modifications with, say, the whole of Akbar Road right up to the Hexagon becoming a kind of Smithsonian Institute, with each bungalow housing a particular activity and the gardens being merged into a continuous public park. Under no circumstance should the buildings be demolished, and replaced by high rise structures which would completely destroy the ambience and environment of Lutyens' New Delhi.

The Lutyens Bungalow Zone Committee has made twenty five recommendations, each one of which merits the most serious consideration and a firm decision. The committee has recommended that the green spaces of the Lutyens Bungalow Zone should be conserved, improved and enhanced and the landscape features be given proper signage. No new office should be allowed to be

constructed in and around the Central Vista, all ad hoc construction should be removed, particularly in Rashtrapati Bhawan and the Central Secretariat and dilapidated structures should be replaced, keeping in mind the design and texture of existing structures. The committee recommended that the Hexagon be restored as a magnificent green of public resort. Those plots which have barracks such as Jamnagar House and Jodhpur House, or additional construction such as Baroda House, Bikaner House and Patiala House, should be cleared of all ugly structures and the original buildings should be improved and retrofitted for socio- cultural use. The committee strongly recommended that the National Stadium Complex should be completely restored and renovated, all the barracks around it removed and the National Sports Club should be merged into it. No high rise profile should be constructed in the Lutyens Bungalow Zone, nor should any more commercial or office buildings be constructed in and around Connaught Place. The entire traffic plan must be reviewed. There should also be a comprehensive landscape policy and the whole of this region should be brought under a highly professional special area management agency.

The report of the Lutyens Bungalow Zone Committee was highly appreciated by Professor K. T. Ravindran of the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture. Speaking in his dual capacity as Professor and Member of the Urban Arts Commission, he publicly acclaimed the report as the first real environment friendly document on urban development. The then Minister for Urban Development, Shri Jagmohan, accepted the report, which seemed to be in order because it is the Ministry of Urban Development which had set up the committee. However, distinguished planners such as S. S. Shafi feel that the report should have been placed before the Council of Ministers and an Order-In-Council obtained so that the report would be binding on all government agencies. Shri Shafi feels that by not obtaining such an order, the Ministry has left the Lutyens Bungalow Zone vulnerable to future vandalism. Personally I feel that the Ministry's decision in this matter is adequate, but there would have been much good done if the imprimatur of the Council of Ministers had been obtained. In the absence of such a Council Order, there would be a tendency for ad hoc decisions being taken in future also and the Bungalow Zone being nibbled away.

IV

The latest cause of worry is the guidelines for the Delhi Master Plan 2021, issued by the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation to the Delhi Development Authority. In the foreword to the booklet issued by the Delhi Development Authority, the Lieutenant Governor of Delhi has made it clear that the guidelines are not governing rules; and that DDA would welcome comments and suggestions on the guidelines because the next plan of Delhi would be formulated through a process of extensive consultation and participation. Nevertheless the fear is expressed that the guidelines would be used as an excuse to destroy Lutyens Bungalow Zone.

I have gone through the guidelines in detail and I am less pessimistic than some of the thinkers on the subject in Delhi. First and foremost, the guidelines call for a review of the policy to acquire land en masse. Instead government has suggested that alternative methods of land pooling, making farmers partners in land development and/or using the private sector in a regulated manner are all methods which could be considered. Similarly the guidelines call for a much more dynamic National Capital Region Plan. To quote the guidelines, "The synergy between the NCR Plan and Delhi's Master Plan has to be strengthened." One can hardly object to this.

Delhi has long followed a policy of regularisation of unauthorised developments under political pressure. The guidelines call for such regularisation to be done in a planned manner, with adequate provision for infrastructure, both physical and social and facilitating obtaining of building permissions. The guidelines also call for a more liberal approach to additions to and reconstruction of flats, especially those built by the DDA. For this purpose the incentive of a higher FAR may also be considered. In the same vein it is suggested that old degraded areas may be redeveloped while taking care to protect and conserve buildings of heritage value. There can be discussions on redevelopment and partial redensification, but by and large that which upgrades degraded areas or structures should be encouraged.

A major area of conflict is the suggestion to do away with segregated land use and replace this it by flexible land use. The guidelines would like to extend mixed residential and commercial use to almost the whole of Delhi, allowing commercial use of industrial premises and permitting industry to be retained in those areas where

over 70 per cent of the land has been converted to industrial use. These are three areas in which one must tread with great caution because obviously the guidelines have been prepared in a spirit of despair. It is felt that regardless of rules, people will put their property to the use which yields them maximum profit. It may not be possible to restore Karol Bagh to its original residential use and one may be forced to live with the present chaos. Even here I have a different opinion because I do feel that even such areas can be redeveloped so that markets are moved within the locality to premises which are located and designed specifically for commercial use and can sustain heavy traffic loads, whilst restoring the rest of the locality to intensified residential use. If there can be a process of conversion of residential houses into commercial use, there can be a reverse process whereby adequate commercial space with all conveniences is provided, to which commercial activity would shift. Unfortunately planners take the easy way out on the thesis that if one is being raped one might as well lie back and enjoy it. Therefore, they are only too willing to accept a given situation, however untenable it be and incorporate it into the plan. The possibility of restoration or change is not even considered. It is this defeatism of the planners, administrators and politicians which I find unacceptable. Every businessman would like to do business at a location where his clients find it convenient to come, find adequate parking space and are able to move around conveniently and comfortably from shop to shop. That is the great advantage of the American shopping malls. Therefore, we must try and plan for redesigning some of the areas which have been destroyed by unplanned mixed land use and create in them commercial complexes which free the rest of the land for more leisurely use.

There is one proposal in the guidelines which has made my hackles rise; and that is to allow massive commercial development up to a depth of half a kilometre with a high FAR along the metro railway track, the length of which is about seventy kilometres. Because such development is to take place on both sides of the track, we would then end up with huge, massive structures seventy kilometres in length and one kilometre in depth. The argument is that this would ensure the best use of the synergy between transportation and urban development. What has been forgotten is that Delhi is not a linear city, and its great strength is that it has depth. The linear commercial development along the railway track would have far-reaching consequences on the residential and other colonies which lie beyond,

because these structures would attract huge crowds of shoppers and office goers who would travel along lateral roads to reach the railway track. This would create a veritable traffic hell on these roads, compared with which the situation on the Connaught Place radials would look positively heavenly. Whoever has made this suggestion should have a very special place reserved for him in the lowest pit of Dante's *Inferno*, to be guarded by the most ferocious devils imaginable.

Fortunately the guidelines make no mention of Lutyens Bungalow Zone. I would suggest that the report of the committee on Lutyens Bungalow Zone be the only guideline for this very special part of Delhi. The city within a city, which is a garden and a forest, lending a grandeur to Delhi and enabling ceremonial functions of our nation's capital, must be conserved at all costs.

Let me end by a quotation from the Lutyens Bungalow Zone Committee Report which would prove my point that we must not tinker with New Delhi. The committee states,

These wide expanses of green obviously have to remain inviolate, not only because they give New Delhi an almost unique urban character, but also because they are now an oasis of nature in the midst of a vast urban desert... Delhi can survive only if it lives under a huge canopy of trees which absorb carbon dioxide while at the same time acting as windbreaks to slow down the dust-bearing summer winds.

This is the function which New Delhi performs and, therefore, it needs that vision which has preserved and protected great national capitals such as Canberra, Washington, the heart of Paris and the core of London. It needs the Lutyens Bungalow Zone in all its green glory.