



Reclaiming the Raj?

**A Case Study pursued through the representation
of Parliament House, New Delhi, Stamp Issues and
Postmarks 1931-2007**

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Occasional Publications are intended for all our members, but especially for those who have only recently been bitten by this sub-continental philatelic bug. They are written to provide an introduction to Indian culture and the context for collecting. They seek also to suggest ideas and insights into the possibilities and fields of study and to raise awareness of the pleasures opened up and the excitement this will generate. They are designed to be simple, a pleasure to read and provide interesting experience across the field by coupling cultural *and* philatelic insights.

This Publication, entitled ‘**Reclaiming the Raj?**’ is written by Owen Heathcote, an academic working at the University of Bradford who has been a stalwart member of ISC and of the group which meets annually at the Northern Gathering in Eldwick Village in West Yorkshire every June. In this paper Owen tackles the uncomfortable period of transition and change which followed the disorderly retreat of the British from the sub-continent in 1947. This period has left many scars and memories on all sides. In this paper Owen begins to bridge the yawning gap apparent in the output of ISC between ‘Imperial Philately’ and the philately of the new emerging world power of India. Owen wishes to thank Bruce Gillham for his interest and his expertise in the preparation of this paper.

The Emergence of a new Capital City for India

India was still in 1931, despite many rumbles of discontent and agitation for Independence. a long way from achieving it at the time of the Inauguration of New Delhi and the issue of the postage stamps which commemorated it. In some senses this was a portent of and a prelude to Independence.

Nowadays, New Delhi is the capital of India and one of the city’s eleven districts. Thus, although Delhi and New Delhi are often used as if they are

interchangeable, they are in fact two entities, *New Delhi* being a small part of the whole city.

Delhi Regains its Former Glory

Delhi has served as the political and financial centre of several large empires, including the Mughal Empire from 1649 to 1857. During the early 1900s, a proposal was made to the British administration to shift the capital of British Indian Empire – as India was then named – from Calcutta (Kolkata), which was deemed not to be central enough, to Delhi.

So it was that on the occasion of the Delhi Durbar, George V, the Emperor of India and Queen Mary laid the foundation stone for the new capital of the Raj. Large parts of New Delhi were designed by Edward Lutyens and Herbert Baker who were both leading 20th Century architects. Construction really began after the conclusion of the First World War and was finally completed in 1931. The city, later to be dubbed '*Lutyens Delhi*' was inaugurated in ceremonies beginning on the 10th of February 1931 by the Viceroy of India Lord Irwin. It came to embody Britain's imperial aspirations. All this was commemorated postally by a set of stamps issued in February 1931.

The One-Anna stamp shows clearly that the Parliament House was – and still is – one of the principal buildings in the New Delhi complex:



**The Circular *Council House*
with the Dome appearing at
the Centre**

**A used copy of the One-Anna
stamp postmarked February
11th 1931 – the second day of
the Inauguration Ceremony for
New Delhi. The building itself
was opened on January 18th
1931**



Lutyens and Herbert had designed this structure in 1912-13 but building work did not start until 1927. The opening ceremony for the building, which at the time was called the *Central Legislative Assembly* or the *Council Building* was performed by Lord Irwin on January the 18th 1927.

Subtle Straws in the Wind

The shape of the new building is circular based on the *Asoka Chakra* or *Wheel* - a design which is also found at the very centre of the Indian national flag. The perimeter of the surrounding large gardens is fenced off by sandstone railings modelled on the *Great Stupa* – or burial ground – at *Sanchi*. Thus from the very outset, the building incorporated, and the stamp reflected, Indian-inspired features suggestive of change, in its embodiment of imperial power. This was both subtle and prophetic.



Parliament House with the flag of Independent India flying overhead

Indeed, the later transfer of colonial power to the *Provisional Government* under Nehru, in 1947 and the framing of the *Constitution* by the *Constituent Assembly* both took place in the *Central Hall* of the Parliament. Nowadays, the dome of the circular Central Hall is widely regarded as one of the most magnificent domes in the world.

Parliament House remains a symbol of Indian democracy

Again, somewhat ironically, the building is now suffering from a lack of stability and space and there have been calls for it to be replaced. However, Parliament House remains emblematic of the city and indeed of the whole country. However much it is a creation of former imperial power, the building also embodies the continuity of India's history and the country's prestige as the world's largest democracy.

Celebrating the Republic

The founding of the *Republic of India* has celebrated by the postal service on a regular basis.

This cover was sent to Poona on *Republic Day* – 26th of January 1950.

As the *New Constitution* had been framed by the *Constituent Assembly* in the *Central Hall of Parliament* it is appropriate that the books featured in the cover design

and which contain the New Constitution, should appear in company with a drawing of the Parliament building. The design on the front of the first volume is the *Asoka Chakra*, which is echoed in the circular design of the building. The choice of designs for the stamps is, in itself interesting. It is clear that India is beginning to look forward to a golden future and the country's development as a new and vibrant democracy with flourishing industry, agriculture and all the arts.





Special postmarks appeared on many items of mail at the time of the Third Anniversary. The postal strikes featured Parliament House and were in black and sometimes in violet. There is also a hint that there is some desire to maintain a residual continuity by

juxtaposing features of the new Indian identity with the former Council Chamber under the Raj.

One of the covers chooses to resurrect the Independence Day stamps issued in 1947, whilst the others choose to connect with Indian culture through its poets and the Asokan Capital.



The largest of the covers also features the Peacock and the Sitar as important symbols.



Republic Day was also celebrated on January 26th 1962 by marking the existence of the oldest system of local government in the whole of southern Asia. The word *Panchayati* means an 'assembly of five'. The word *Raj* simply means 'rule'. Then, looming at the top of the design is the *Parliament Building* itself.

Thirteen years later in 1975, a more photographic stamp was issued and again it depicted the rather elegant *Parliament Building*.

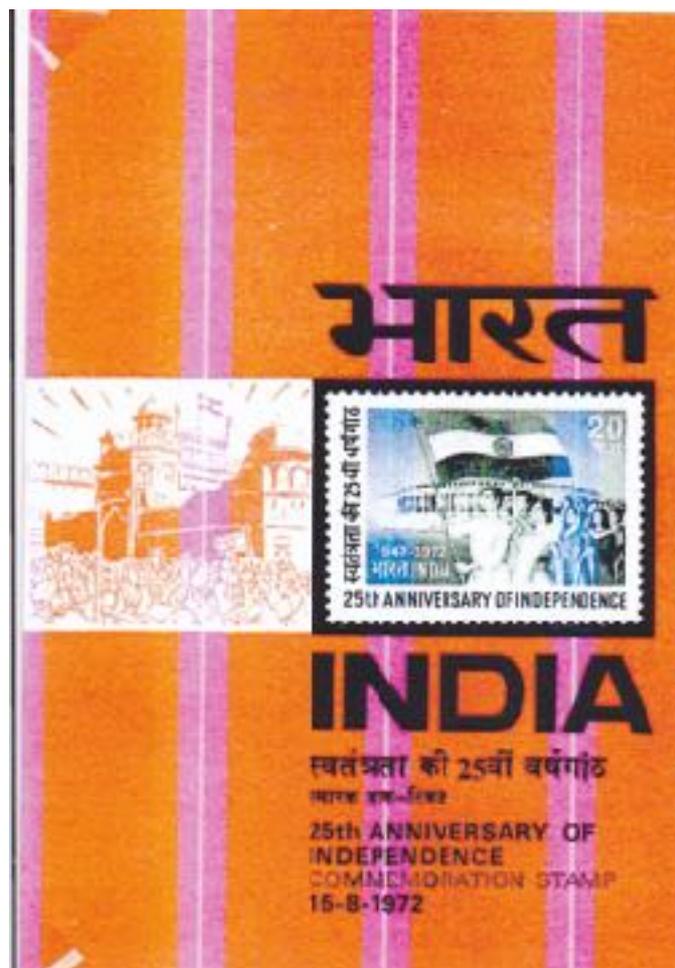
Twenty-Five Years On

Twenty-five years later, after the date when India became free on August 15th 1947, following over a century of British rule there were naturally great celebrations and time for reflection. It was indeed, one of very few occasions when a great foreign power had voluntarily yielded control non-violently to an emerging nation and India was very fortunate to have had *Mahatma Gandhi's* leadership during this difficult stage in its history. The new nation was also fortunate in having *Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru*, a true visionary, as its first Prime Minister.

Naturally, this was all recognised in the philatelic output of the time with special stamps and brochures to commemorate the anniversary.

On this auspicious occasion the *Posts and Telegraphs Department* paid its tribute to all those who struggled valiantly, first to achieve Independence and then to develop the country to achieve self-sufficiency. A special postage stamp was issued and a special aerogram.

The stamp shown on the adjacent graphic depicts the people engaged in celebrating Independence Day in jubilant celebration by holding aloft the National Flag of India in front of



Parliament. This brochure also shows on the left, the Red Fort which was intimately associated with the struggle for Independence.

Parliamentary Development Continues

Philately continues to mark the progress of Indian democracy in the issue of postal items up to the present day. It is like a shorthand map of the way in which the Institutions of government are still developing and maintaining their integrity.

In October 1969 an attractive cover was designed to accompany a stamp issued for the *57th Inter-Parliamentary Conference* in Delhi. It showed the Indian Parliament Building apparently at the centre of the world and was accompanied by a commemorative postmark.



Later, in April 1993 another stamp issue celebrated the *89th Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference* which had been established in 1889. The missing years in the sequence since establishment of this organisation are accounted for by the intervention of wars and other

world events.

In addition to these major events, separate aspects of the work of the Indian Parliamentary System were featured, too. So, in June 1977 the establishment of the Upper House, the Rajya Sabha was marked by a stamp design showing the impressive Chamber and Podium.



Later still, in December 2003 it was able to record the 200th session of the Upper House with another stamp issue.

The achievements of significant figures in the Parliamentary sphere have also received the attention of the postal authorities as the briefest overview of India's stamp output will testify.



These significant Parliamentarians have include the original architect of the Indian Constitution, *B R Ambedkar*; a renowned parliamentarian, *G I Mavalankar*; and a famous politician, *M Scindia*.



Many other great individuals modern Indian stamps and the will be a challenging area for



have featured on background to this further study.

Continuity is Important to Indian democracy

Continuity lies at the heart of Indian democracy and many later issues of postage stamps and covers have reflected this.

For example, the 60th Diamond Jubilee Anniversary of the establishment of New Delhi was featured on this splendid pair of stamps in 1991.



Then, a decade later, the 50th anniversary of the Indian parliament was celebrated on May 13th in 2002

Even more recently, in September 2007 an elegant cover and stamp were designed to mark the 53rd Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference when it was hosted in New Delhi.



Mapping History and Change through Modern Philately – Where from here?

This brief and selective exploration of modern Indian philately hopefully shows that the British Imperial Raj and the works of Rudyard Kipling are a long way from defining the limits of the *'interesting turf'* to be studied.

The political, social and cultural aspects of Indian society can be mapped through philately. This could include many areas like the survival of caste distinctions, technical achievement, 'the position of women in Indian society and the whole field of the Arts. Many have been reflected in Indian postal productions. It remains to us as collectors of Indian stamps to see what they might tell us of Indian history, politics, culture and society. For example a study of women on Indian stamps might be well worth exploring. A tall order perhaps, but what an exciting prospect for us all!