

Mughals, Music, and “The Crown of India” Masque: Reassessing Elgar and the Raj

published in *South Asian Review* 31.1 (November 2010): 13-36.

Abstract

Edward Elgar’s 1912 masque, “The Crown of India,” was written specifically for the music hall in celebration of the crowning of King George V and Queen Mary at the Delhi Durbar in 1911. This work has been addressed by musical and postcolonial scholars, and has been appropriated by two factions: those who wish to claim Elgar as an unrepentant imperialist, and see that manifested in this work, and those who wish to see him as a beacon for anti-imperialism, who see evidence of this in the cuts that he made to the libretto, written by Henry Hamilton. What has been lacking in this discourse is a vehicle to address those cuts from a literary perspective, citing actual support from the two versions of the libretto (with and without cuts). This paper will reassess the masque in light of these libretti, and offer a new assessment of Elgar’s imperial tendencies at that point in time, and the imperialism of the Raj.

Article

The Great Delhi Durbar of December 12, 1911, the third, final, and most spectacular of all the Imperial Durbars, was, according to all accounts, a spectacle of unheard-of opulence and extravagance. In it, King George V and Queen Mary were presented as Emperor and Empress of India, and, in their coronation robes, accepted presents from and the fealty of over 200 Indian princes. Amidst all the pomp, some matters of great import were decided at the Durbar. George announced his decision to move the Indian capital from Calcutta to Delhi. While this ignored over a century of Indian, or rather British Indian, tradition, it did serve well as a convenience for the British, for Delhi was the commercial center of the Raj. Perhaps of more significance was George’s announcement of the reunification of Bengal, which had been partitioned in 1905 by the Viceroy. This announcement was kept such a secret before the event, and had such significant implications for British rule in India, that it shocked almost every listener at the Durbar. The colossal event, with its capstone announcement, occupied a space of over 25 square miles just outside of Delhi (the royal tents alone took up over 25 acres). The state entry of George and Mary into Delhi was accounted in the British press to be a scene “for which there was no precedent in the long history of Asia.”

Hyperbole aside, this appropriation by the British Raj of what was historically a state council within the Mughal Empire captured the attention and imagination of the whole of the Empire. It was followed carefully both in India and in London. While tens of thousands of Indians were employed or otherwise engaged in creating and bringing off this function, the *Times* of London ran no fewer than 87 articles on the Durbar during the month of December 1911 alone. A documentary film, “With Our King and Queen in India,” one of the first ever in color, was made of the day of the Durbar, and was rushed through editing, post-production, and distribution quickly enough that it was released in England by February 2, 1912.

A month later, on March 11, 1912, Edward Elgar, the composer of “Land of Hope and Glory” and “The Coronation Ode,” two works filled with pride at the functioning and extent of the British Empire, brought to the London stage, and to a public which could not get enough of the Imperial spectacle, a masque entitled “The Crown of India,” a “superior pot-boiler” which strove to present, in two tableaux, the crucial political happenings behind all the pageantry

(MacDonald 52). “The Crown of India” was a huge success, playing over 50 times during its first and only run. Elgar himself conducted the orchestra on opening night and during the first two weeks of the run.

Henry Hamilton was the librettist, an actor turned playwright who was best known for his words to the song, “Private Tommy Atkins,” although he also produced pantomimes, original plays in English, and adaptations from the French and the Hungarian. While it seems that Elgar did not have an undiscovered moment in his life, Hamilton’s life remains shrouded in mystery. He is absent from most of the standard reference works, and does not merit an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His *New York Times* obituary is barely one inch of column length. Contemporary correspondence, along with reviews of three of his plays by G.B. Shaw, classifies him as little better than a writer of doggerel. Nevertheless, Elgar fashioned Hamilton’s words into twelve pieces for alto, bass, chorus, and orchestra. But it is this process of setting the extant words, and Elgar’s significant editing of those words, that has generated much heat in both postcolonial studies and Elgar studies.

The masque was presented as one of eleven entertainments which made up the evening at the Coliseum Theatre, but the masque was the event people came to see. It ran about an hour, and was chock full of the type of music people came to expect from Elgar: celebratory, sometimes bombastic, nostalgic, sensitive, and, above all, British. Unbound by the strictures of opera, with its necessity for recitative as opposed to the spoken word, Elgar was free to paint a soundscape underneath the spoken words which did far more than accompany them. At various times it commented on them, criticized them, reinforced them, and even laughed at them.

The masque itself was conceived and presented in two tableaux, “The Cities of Ind,” and “Ave Imperator!” *The Musical Times* offers a succinct summary:

In the first tableau India (Miss Nancy Price) holds a court of her twelve chief cities. Delhi pleads her past glory and summons four Mogul Emperors as witnesses; Calcutta pleads her present greatness, her world-wide commerce, her ‘glorious yesterday,’ summoning John Company and her 18th century heroes. St. George (Mr. Harry Dearth) arrives, and on the announcement of the coming of the Emperor and his consort, he urges Delhi and Calcutta to be hand-in-hand in loyalty, and yields his position as arbiter. In the second tableau, representing a scene at the Durbar, His Majesty decrees that Delhi shall be the Capital and Calcutta the Premier City of India. (257)

Perhaps the most apt comment on the text was recently offered by Peter Reed, in his review of the first recording of the masque.¹ He remarks that Hamilton’s text “has fixed the work in the area of high Victorian, lofty, overblown rhetoric, written at a time when the English treated as much of the world as possible as one big, robust and stern public school.”

Elgar’s own comments on the work are inconclusive. In one letter to his friend Frances Colvin he offers that “the thing [the masque] was to be mainly pantomime and now the dialogue will be cut out -- it is an inoffensive thing and some of the music is good.” On the other hand, he continues later in the letter to note that, “When I write a big serious work e.g. *Gerontius* we have had to starve and go without fires for twelve months as a reward: this small effort allows me to buy scientific works I have yearned for and I spend my time between the Coliseum and the old bookshops: . . .” (Moore 244). Elgar offers a pithier comment on Hamilton’s work in a note in his sketchbook while he was developing the musical ideas for the masque: “N.B There is far too

much of this political business E.E.” These scant lines have been chewed over, digested, and spun for decades, with diametrically opposed results.

Those invested in condemning the bogeyman of the Raj position Elgar as an aider and abettor of the project of the Empire, or at least its most vocal cheerleader. They point to the mere existence of this work as evidence of Elgar’s championing of imperial aims, with all the negative connotations they can attach to this assessment. Nalini Ghuman, for instance, offers this assessment:

The masque is a fascinating work of imperialism: historically illuminating and often musically rich, it is nevertheless a profoundly embarrassing piece -- a significant contribution to the orientalized India of the English imagination. We might hear it, in some ways, as the realization of British imperialism’s cumulative process: the control and subjugation of India combined with a sustained fascination for all of its intricacies. (278)

She is not alone; similar judgments, claiming support in the music, are rendered by musicologists like Corissa Gould, who claims that,

Elgar was apparently sympathetic with the imperialist ideology inherent in the libretto is demonstrated by more than his written comments on the work; he also endorses it on the musical level. In his score, he renders the binary opposition of East and West through the juxtaposition of a quasi-Oriental style of writing to represent India, with ceremonial pomp to represent St. George and the King. (154)

Those who would rescue Elgar from what they see as an unfair assessment of both his political leanings and his intent in composing this piece offer the argument that yes, this may be a celebration of the Empire, but you should have seen how bad it was before Elgar cut it. They argue that the significant cuts which Elgar made in the libretto are evidence of his forward thinking, and his distaste for the imperial project. According to them, Elgar removed the most offensive parts of Hamilton’s text, and settled for only the bare minimum of revelry in the Empire which the circumstances warranted. Percy Young, as early as 1955, claims that the text “filled Elgar with some alarm on account of its political emphasis” (355). Robert Anderson, in both his forward to the performing edition of the masque and his significant work, *Elgar and Chivalry*, hangs his hat on Elgar’s sketchbook note and his letter to Frances Colvin. In another tack supported by Elgar’s letters, Diana McVeagh concentrates on the financial pressures which Elgar was under when he took the commission for this work. The Elgars had just moved to an expensive house, and, as Elgar noted above, his bigger works really didn’t pay all the bills. So the masque was done as a work for hire, Elgar playing to the popular sentiment of the day in order to get a big payday.

Straddling the middle ground in all this are critics like Jeffrey Richards, who claim that Elgar was an unabashed imperialist, but that’s not so bad. Richards says: “Elgar’s vision of Empire . . . is a vision of justice, peace, freedom, and equality, of the pax Britannica and of the fulfillment by Britain of its trusteeship mission, to see the countries in its charge brought safely and in due course to independence -- a far from ignoble dream” (51).

The crux of the arguments on all sides is the interplay between Elgar and Hamilton's text. The critics divide on their assessment of Elgar's intent in editing and setting the text, and his situation within a particular historical milieu. Did Elgar think beyond his time, and find Hamilton's glorification of the imperial project offensive, or was he a child of his time, and his cuts were for dramatic principles, not political ones? The simple solution here is to actually look at the cuts Elgar made and offer an analysis of them, something which has not been done yet in the literature. This glaring lack seems to be the reason why there is much heat around this issue, but not a lot of light. Although Anderson comes the closest to this textual analysis, there is still a long way to go in considering the original text, reconstructing the arguments behind the cuts, and looking at the final performing text.

To begin, the cuts were made over a series of days or even weeks. Elgar made many cuts during the composition and rehearsal process, and then other cuts after the first performance. The only notations we have of these cuts are in a copy of the text owned by May Grafton, Elgar's niece. The full text of the masque was printed before the first performance, with the notice that "Much of the verse is necessarily omitted in the representation." Since it is impossible to know when individual cuts were made, we will take them as a whole, and compare the text as it was when it was first presented to Elgar, and then as Elgar presented it to Oliver Stoll, the owner of the Coliseum Theater, a week after opening night, when we know that all the cuts were finalized.

The cuts were extensive, to say the least. The original opening tableau had 666 lines. Elgar cut 321 of these, paring the original by almost half (48%). The original second tableau had 108 lines, and 35 of them were cut. The remainder equaled about 2/3 (67%) of the original. In total, the masque began with 774 lines, and 356 of them were cut. That means that almost half of the original (46%) text didn't make it into the final performance. There are two kinds of cuts: dramatic (caused by the music, or some other inherent structural need) and thematic (caused by distaste for the sentiments expressed in the libretto). We are concerned only with the latter, for we are not questioning Elgar's musical abilities, but his nationalist sensibilities.

Categorizing the dramatic cuts is as easy as categorizing the thematic cuts is thorny. The dramatic cuts consist of lists, dialogue, repetition, and expansion. Elgar could easily dismiss the lists, the repetition, and the expansion and further explanation of something already stated. These are, in effect, the dramatic low-hanging fruit, for they serve little purpose, and do not further either the argument or the plot of the masque. The dialogue, however, is another matter. Since the masque itself is so static, and lacks a narrator who can offer exposition to the audience, the dialogue carries the dramatic load. Yes, there are many lyrical moments which expound on some theme or event, but the dialogue, especially between India, Delhi, and Calcutta, is the meat of the masque.

The political cuts deserve our scrutiny, so the following will offer some perspective on the first of these. All the cities have been gathered in the presence of India, who remarks on the absence of her two major cities, Delhi and Calcutta. Here Hamilton's marginal commentary notes that "India recalls the distracted state of her Empire previous to its Peoples being welded into one beneath the British Raj and panegyrises. The Pax Brittanica." First the original text²:

India

My thanks, O Agra; sweetly dost thou sing:
And sweet the homage, daughters, that ye bring,
Making the glory gladder that ye share.
(*To Agra*) Well dost thou say that East and West upbear
The throne of Ind. Oh, Children of the East,

We know what clashing claims of prince and priest
Have rent our India: Eastern hands imbrued
In eastern blood, race-rancour and the feud
Of rival factions, and contending sway
Of conqueror and tyrant; but to-day
Each man reclines in peace beneath his palm.
Brahman and Buddhist, Hindu with Islam
Into one nation welded by the West,
That in the Pax Brittanica is blest.
Princes and peoples into one renown
Resplendent linked by one majestic Crown,
And one Imperial wearer o'er them set,
Beneath whose scepter East and West are met
With hands conjoined and with hearts content.
This then the reason of my summons sent;
For know, ere long in radiance on our skies
The Sun of India shall himself arise.
Be yours, O Daughters! To prepare his way,
To hail the advent of his destined day,
And speed the jocund tidings far and near.
Though true it is we lack two Cities here,
And those our chiefest, fitly to complete
Our conclave

(Indicating)

At my right and left a seat
Calcutta waits and Delhi; -- not their wont
To slight our summons.

Benares *(smilingly)*

Nor the edge to blunt
O Mother! Of their rivalries sharp-set
Which ever spur them -- when for counsel met
With *us* -- to *combat* with each other.

India *(sighing)*

True!
Delhi her rights of old maintains, her new
Calcutta; would the discord we might heal
Giving to *both* content.

Now the text in its final form:

India

(To Agra) Well dost thou say that East and West upbear
The throne of Ind.
This then the reason of my summons sent;

For know, ere long in radiance on our skies
The Sun of India shall himself arise.
Be yours, O Daughters! To prepare his way,
Though true it is we lack two Cities here,
And those our chiefest, fitly to complete
Our conclave
(*Indicating*)

At my right and left a seat
Calcutta waits and Delhi; -- not their wont
To slight our summons.

True!

Delhi her rights of old maintains, her new
Calcutta; would the discord we might heal
Giving to *both* content.

Obviously these two serve the same dramatic function, but the original offers us an admittedly skewed historical background and assessment of the present situation in India. It seems that the subcontinent is positioned as the peaceable kingdom, and Great Britain is the occasion of such peace and prosperity, the Good Shepherd who ensures such domestic tranquility. The final version removes most of this claptrap, focusing instead not on the internecine warfare which characterized the Western view of India in pre-colonial times, but on the fact that the two most important cities in India are not yet present. The historical commentary is cut while the sense of drama is actually enhanced. These cuts seem to support the notion that Elgar is in fact embarrassed by Hamilton's obvious tub-thumping. Elgar sharpens the dramatic tension while avoiding a degrading assessment of the entire subcontinent.

The next political cuts are far more severe, and require us to look at them both separately and in tandem. They occur during the argument between Delhi and Calcutta, where Delhi calls upon several of the great rulers of India to support her claim to preeminence. Akhbar, Jehangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurungzebe, together with their courtiers, guards, and other followers, are all paraded forth, and all support Delhi's claim. The original text plays this out in 77 lines. As each ruler appears Delhi praises him and recounts the great deeds from his reign. But Elgar reduces this spectacle to 11 lines, removing 85% of the lines, and all mention of the greatness of these men and their empires.

The original text:

ENTER FROM ARCH THE MOGUL EMPERORS, AKHBAR, JEHANGIR, SHAH JAHAN, AND AURUNGZEBE, EACH ATTENDED BY A RETINUE OF COURTIERS, GUARDS, &C. WHEN ALL ARE IN THE SCENE AND HAVE TAKEN THEIR PLACES

India

Approach, I pray thee, Akhbar, Flower of Kings!

AKHBAR ADVANCES IN FRONT OF INDIA'S THRONE AND SALUTES HER

Whose name's mere mention to the memory brings
Thy lustres! – Beacon-Light to all thine Age,

Far-faméd Sovereign, Ruler just and sage;
'Akhbar the Great'! – Yet greater still we find
Thy People's name, 'The Guardian of Mankind.'

Delhi (*kneeling to AKHBAR
and kissing his hand*)

Beloved lord! Once more on bended knee
Thy Delhi does thee homage!

India

Illustrious Emperors!
India that knew thee great in peace and war
Greet thee. Say, was she,
Delhi, they seat Imperial from of old?
Since others claim her place to-day: behold
Calcutta!

CALCUTTA ADVANCES AND SALAAMS. AKHBAR SCANS HER FROM HEAD TO FOOT, TURNS
WITH A GESTURE OF REPUDIATION FROM HER TO THE STILL-KNEELING DELHI, ON WHOSE
HEAD HE PLACES HIS HAND AS IF IN BENEDICTION, AND THEN RAISES HER

Delhi

Gratitude, O gracious lord,
That dost they favor to me yet accord.

AKHBAR RETURNS TO HIS POSITION. DELHI TURNS

Jehangir! Next of thy renowned race
That ruled me; hear, and do thy handmaid grace
As thou wast wont!

JEHANGIR ADVANCES AND SALUTES INDIA. DELHI MEETS HIM AND MAKES
OBEISANCE TO HIM

India

Illustrious Emperor!
India, that knew thee great in peace and war
Greet thee Jehangir!

Delhi (*kneeling*)

While they Delhi kneels
And in the name of Nur Mahal appeals
To thee who loved us both. The first wast thou
The English to thy court to welcome; now
They rule wide Ind: and lo! Where yonder stands
A city of their foundling that demands
My seat – my lotus chaplet! What, oh Lord,
Say'st thou?

JEHANGIR LOOKS SCORNFULLY AT CALCUTTA, TAKES A RING FROM HIS HAND AND

PUTS IT UPON THE FINGER OF DELHI, WHO SALAAMS LOW TO HIM

Delhi

For this thy grace and thy award
My lowly thanks.

Rising as JEHANGIR passes his place

And now, beloved a name
That leaps triumphant to the lips of Fame
When glory is the theme: a name to thee
O Agra! Dear, as even unto me.
None better loved since first my Jumma ran
Nor more remembered. Deign, O Shah Jahan,
To bear me witness that have known thy love.

SHAH JAHAN ADVANCES AND SALUTES INDIA. DELHI COMES AND KNEELS ON ONE SIDE OF HIM. AGRA DESCENDS FROM HER SEAT AND MAKES OBEISANCE ON THE OTHER

India

Now welcome to thee all they Line above
O Shah Jahan! Whose memory Agra keeps
Dear as they Taj Mahal or hers that sleeps
Beside thee there.

AGRA KISSES SHAH JAHAN'S HAND

Delhi

Lord of the Peacock Throne
Thou that wast Delhi's as she was thine own,
By thee anew in ancient splendor clad
Islam still hails me as Jahanabad.
Yet one new-risen claims as due to *her*
Indicating CALCUTTA
That crown thou didst of old on *me* confer.
Look, lord, upon us and declare *thy* choice.

SHAH JAHAN FROWNS UPON CALCUTTA, AND TURNING FROM HER, HE TAKES SOME ROSES FROM A BASKET, CARRIED BY AN ATTENDANT AND GIVES THEM TO DELHI, AND A STEM OF WHITE LILIES WHICH HE GIVES TO AGRA, WHO AGAIN KNEELS IN HOMAGE TO HIM

I kiss they feet that dost my heart rejoice
Rising, as SHAH JAHAN moves away
Now last on thee, Aurungzebe do I call.

THE EMPEROR AURUNGZEBE ADVANCES AND SALUTES INDIA

India

Aurungzebe, Hail! – Though of thine Empire's fall

Forerunner, thou its sun at zenith saw
That on the Deccan didst impose thy law,
Sikh and Mahratta, vanquished in the fight,
Confessed thy conquering arm, and felt thy might.

Delhi

I was the seat, Aurungzebe, of thy fame.
Dost thou remember how the English came?
How thy son Azim, for their traders' gold,
His delta of the Hooghly to them sold,
A sorry village for a sorry sum?

AURUNGZEBE *assents*

Pointing to CALCUTTA

Behold her now, to such a greatness come
That she disputes *my* place. – Vouchsafe a sign,
Victorious lord, whould such a choice be *thine*
Of Capital?

AURUNGZEBE REPUDIATES CALCUTTA BY A GESTURE AND TAKING A ROPE OF
PEARLS FROM HIS OWN NECK THROWS IT ROUND DELHI'S

Aurangzebe! From a heart
Faithful and full, I thank thee. Now my part
O Mother, of petitioner is played.
Thou know'st that of the greatest to mine aid
I might have called a legion such as these,
But I have done. Now hear Calcutta's pleas;
And from her yester-yore command her bring
One famous conqueror, one single King,
One solitary legend mine to crown!
So! Let her lift the gauntlet I fling down.

This extensive passage gets reduced to:

ENTER FROM ARCH THE MOGUL EMPERORS, AKHBAR, JEHANGIR, SHAH
JAHAN, AND AURUNGZEBE, EACH ATTENDED BY A RETINUE OF COURTIERS,
GUARDS, &C. WHEN ALL ARE IN THE SCENE AND HAVE TAKEN THEIR PLACES

AKHBAR ADVANCES IN FRONT OF INDIA'S THRONE AND SALUTES HER

India

Illustrious Emperors!
India that knew thee great in peace and war

Greets thee. Say, was she,
Delhi, they seat Imperial from of old?
Since others claim her place to-day: behold
Calcutta!

Delhi

Now hear Calcutta's pleas;
And from her yester-yore command her bring
One famous conqueror, one single King,
One solitary legend mine to crown!
So! Let her lift the gauntlet I fling down.

We must address the obvious first: although the stage directions are cut in Ms. Grafton's copy, the reviews of the production commend this "March of the Mogul Emperors" as one of the musical highlights of the show. It is filled with the typical musical orientalism of the time³ (and is written in triple meter, which makes it an odd, lumbering, elephantine march), and it supports the pantomime of all the action covered in the stage directions in the original text. However, to the audience, this stage business would merely appear as if four different retinues reinforced the primacy of Delhi. In effect, Indian history has no voice, and the English audience is left to marvel at the spectacle but wonder at the meaning and import of it all. These four great champions of India are muted, and the English audiences look but do not learn. Instead of Delhi reciting the glories of these rulers, which may have been a historical awakening for the original audience, her dramatic function in this scene is reduced to merely introducing Calcutta and her arguments. Reviewing this mute march in the light of the voices that follow gives us a significant new understanding of the two sides of this argument. Akhbar, the longest-reigning and arguably the greatest Mughal Emperor, his son Jahangir, Shah Jahan, the creator of the Taj Mahal, and Aurunzebe, the second-longest reigning Mughal emperor, have no power greater than Elgar's pen, and are silent before the crowd.

After Delhi makes her arguments and is supported by these four great men, Calcutta comes forth to offer her arguments. India has a couple of transitional lines, and then Calcutta brings forth her champions. Instead of historical rulers, she calls upon the factotums of the East India Company:

Calcutta

Now foremost do I call – 'John Company'!

ENTER 'JOHN COMPANY' AS PERSONIFYING THE HONOURABLE EAST INDIA COMPANY
– WITH MERCHANTS AND OTHERS, FOLLOWED BY GENERALS, GOVERNORS,
SOLDIERS, ETC., AS CALCUTTA SPEAKS THE APPROPRIATE LINES

That from thy London Counting-House mad'st War
Or Peace with Princes. Thou whose Standards bore
Thy magic letters 'H.E.I.C.S.'
Through many a stricken battle's storm and stress
To triumph. Never hers Imperial Rome
-- To found such empire far across the foam --
Advances as thou and this. Nor *hers* to guess

-- Who gave thee first thy charter – Good Queen Bess –
That, with the hand which took it from her, thou
Should'st give a crown to her Successor's brow.
What! Thou that wast my Founder art my friend?
And little like *thy* common sense to lend
To legends. Good John Company, reply
Shall Delhi be thy Capital – or I?

'JOHN COMPANY' IN PANTOMIME EXPRESSES HIS CHOICE OF CALCUTTA, WITH
WHOM HE SHAKES HANDS, AND HIS REJECTION OF DELHI, TO WHOM HE BOWS

I thank thee, John. And now thine Agents – ye
That shook vast Ind – and the Pagoda-Tree!
Come Clive, of Plassy victor and thy self,
Who, at thy moderation as to pelf
Did'st so astounded stand! Approach, Come, Monro,
That conquered Oudh and Shah Alam laid low!
Come Warren Hastings, first to me that gave
The seat of Government! Cornwallis brave,
And Wellesley and Lake and Minto! – Famous band
Of Statesmen and of soldiers, not an one
Of all your cohort but hath dared and done.
Note thou, Lucknow, thy Lawrence in their list,
And Havelock strong with Outram to resist
The rebel rout that ringed thee round; and sweet
The bagpipes' echo and the tramp of feet
As Colin Campbell comes!

EACH OF THE PERSONAGES DESIGNATED ENTERS IN THE ORDER OF MENTION AS
CALCUTTA NAMES THEM

What need the goodly galaxy to swell
Of noble names or on their deeds to dwell?
When Glory's trumpet-tribute hath declared
Their worth to all the world! – and ye have shared
Great India, sister-cities, in the fruit
Of all their feats.

Turning to JOHN COMPANY, STATESMEN, SOLDIERS, etc.

Now let your acclaim my suit

Endorse.

All (*Of CALCUTTA's faction*)

Calcutta!

Calcutta

Mark! How of their ranks

Not one cries Delhi (*To* SUPPORTERS)

Friends of old, my thanks!

To INDIA *and* CITIES

There spoke *my* 'Past' judge *ye* if it be dumb!
In *these* my claims I centre and I sum.

Delhi *Two* centuries of famous men! – while mine
Fill *forty*! – Whose the greater Past then?

Cities Thine,
O Delhi!

Calcutta (*scornfully*) Be it here! But Sisters, say
To whom belong the Present and To-day!

Cities To thee, Calcutta!

Calcutta Then for *me* decide.

Delhi Not so! Her Present pales with all its pride
Before the prestige that my Past doth give.
Not in hard facts of Life alone we live.
The glorious Past informs the Future's goal.
Hers the utility but mine the *soul*
Of Ind! And Britain ever seeks accord
With *that* in every land which owns her lord.

The cut version:

Calcutta Now foremost do I call – 'John Company'!

ENTER 'JOHN COMPANY' AS PERSONIFYING THE HONOURABLE EAST INDIA COMPANY
– WITH MERCHANTS AND OTHERS, FOLLOWED BY GENERALS, GOVERNORS,
SOLDIERS, ETC., AS CALCUTTA SPEAKS THE APPROPRIATE LINES

That from thy London Counting-House mad'st War
Or Peace with Princes. Thou whose Standards bore
Thy magic letters 'H.E.I.C.S.'
Through many a stricken battle's storm and stress
To triumph. Good John Company, reply
Shall Delhi be thy Capital – or I?

'JOHN COMPANY' IN PANTOMIME EXPRESSES HIS CHOICE OF CALCUTTA, WITH

WHOM HE SHAKES HANDS, AND HIS REJECTION OF DELHI, TO WHOM HE BOWS

I thank thee, John. And now thine Agents – ye
That shook vast Ind – and the Pagoda-Tree!
Come Clive, Come Warren Hastings, Cornwallis brave,
And Wellesley and Lake and Minto! –
Note thou, Lucknow, thy Lawrence in their list,
And Havelock strong with Outram to resist
The rebel rout that ringed thee round; and sweet
The bagpipes' echo and the tramp of feet
As Colin Campbell comes!

EACH OF THE PERSONAGES DESIGNATED ENTERS IN THE ORDER OF MENTION AS
CALCUTTA NAMES THEM

Turning to JOHN COMPANY, STATESMEN, SOLDIERS, etc.

Now let your acclaim my suit

Endorse.

All (*Of CALCUTTA's faction*)

Calcutta!

Delhi

Not so! Hers the utility but mine the *soul*
Of Ind! And Britain ever seeks accord
With *that* in every land which owns her lord.

The original 60 lines have become 22, so Elgar has cut 63% of the text here. He has been careful (or, what is more likely, Ms. Grafton paid closer attention) to keep the stage directions. While this too may have been nothing but a dry history lesson to the typical panto crowd, the men portrayed here were the spearhead of the British Imperial project in India for several centuries. Instead of the finery of Emperors, most of them would be clothed in uniforms. Rather than riches, their props would include the trappings of war. Calcutta's calling upon them is a subaltern move, full of mimicry and ambivalence. And they respond, not just in dumbshow, but in one voice, proclaiming their support for Calcutta's primacy.

If we compare the two arguments, for Delhi and for Calcutta, we see that, in terms of personages on stage, the Imperial company puts twelve people on the stage, three times as many as the entire history of India does. And these twelve are, for the most part, military men, known either for their association with the East India Company or their work in putting down the Indian Rebellion of 1857. The four men of India who preceded them were great statesmen, builders, empire-makers and defenders; the opposition of the two groups couldn't be more obvious. The most obvious difference between the groups, however, is their vocality. The English men speak, while the Indian men remain mute. Their voices have been suppressed by those who would impose their will upon the subcontinent through the force of sheer numbers and military might, both amply displayed on the stage. These cuts, working in parallel, demonstrate the side of Elgar which seems to support Hamilton's over-the-top imperialism.

The final two political cuts come in the second tableau, during India's long speech of obeisance to the Emperor and Empress. After they process in and are seated in state, India begins:

India

(approaching the Dais, and first salaaming, then prostrating herself)

Kaisar-I-Hind! The splendor of thy light
Our day ennobles and redeems our night.
Goal of our hopes, Protector of the poor,
Beneath thine ægis India rests secure.
Thou not on one thy presence dost bestow
But on *all* lands that fealty to thee owe.
Wherever lifts thy standard to the breeze,
Thy foot has fallen. Not by mere decrees
The burthen of thine empire dost thou bear,
But by desert and deed. Along the air
Thy stirring 'Wake up, England!' lingers yet
Dull sloth to whip and dear resolve to whet,
Imperial pilot, still thy Ship of State
To safeguard, waking early, watching late;
By thy reveille roused thine every Realm
Must 'wake' and work whilst thou art at the helm!
Here, whilst our Ind thy Puissance doth grace,
Discord is dumb and Faction flees thy face.
Thy very Presence Treason bids 'avaunt!
And of the Providence shall Famine gaunt
Confounded be, and internecine War
Outworn and worsted crouch thy Throne before
Into a land – Thy loving kindness leads –
Of flowing rills and flower-enamelled meads,
Where Peace may tend her flocks and fold her sheep,
And Plenty sow, secure that she shall reap.

To the EMPRESS

And Thou, Illustrious Lady of our Love,
Crowned with delight and Sceptred with the Dove,
Who to our swooning Indian heats dost bring
The fragrant freshness of a Northern Spring,
The breath and beauty of some woodland way,
A daisied meadow or an English – May!
All hail, O Grace, that doth benignant blend
With Glory softer radiance to lend!
One Crown to wear, one Majesty to make,
One rapturous welcome through wide Ind to wake;
One Pair, beloved, belauded. (*To* EMPEROR) Gracious Sire,
In whom our eyes behold our hearts' desire,

Sum of our wealth and Chart of all our ways,
Low at thy feet thy loving India lays
Her loyal homage.

Elgar here removed some interesting lines. His final version reads thus:

India

(approaching the Dais, and first salaaming, then prostrating herself)

Kaisar-I-Hind! The splendor of thy light
Our day ennobles and redeems our night.
Goal of our hopes, Protector of the poor,
Beneath thine ægis India rests secure.
Thou not on one they presence dost bestow
But on *all* lands that fealty to thee owe.
Wherever lifts thy standard to the breeze,
Thy foot has fallen. Not by mere decrees
The burthen of thine empire dost thou bear,
But by desert and deed. Along the air
Thy stirring 'Wake up, England!' lingers yet
Dull sloth to whip and dear resolve to whet,
Imperial pilot, still they Ship of State
To safeguard, waking early, watching late;
By thy reveille roused thine every Realm
Must 'wake' and work whilst thou art at the helm!
To the EMPRESS
And Thou, Illustrious Lady of our Love,
Crowned with delight and Sceptred with the Dove,
Who to our swooning Indian heats dost bring
The fragrant freshness of a Northern Spring,
The breath and beauty of some woodland way,
A daisied meadow or an English – May!
(To EMPEROR) Gracious Sire,
In whom our eyes behold our hearts' desire,
Sum of our wealth and Chart of all our ways,
Low at thy feet thy loving India lays
Her loyal homage.

Although the second passage stricken from here is merely repetitious of the greatness of the Emperor and Empress, the first passage carries significant weight, and its sentiments are not duplicated anywhere else in the speech. Elgar removes all mention of problems within India, either historical or concerning the Durbar. While the original passage maintains that all these political difficulties have vanished, merely naming them calls them to mind, and questions could arise. Discord, faction, treason, famine, and war: these are all part of the British history in India, but Elgar strikes them, even though he must then also strike mention of the imposed Pax Britannica that the Emperor has created in the subcontinent. The irony is that, in the larger

scheme of things, the presence of the British king and his minions in India actually gives rise to this discord, faction, treason, famine, and war, even though Hamilton would like to assert the exact opposite. This is a touchy subject, and Elgar doesn't want to remind his audience of British complicity in such negative cultural and historical forces.

After the Emperor's solomonic decision to claim Delhi as the capital and Calcutta as the premier city, India speaks to him, calling down blessings upon him and reminding him of her loyalty:

India O liege and Lord! Thy loyal Empire prays
Peace be Thy portion, Health and Happy Days!
Salaaming
'May the King live for ever!' – Nor in vain
We pray it, King, that ever shalt remain
A living Memory unto me and mine
Whose every heart this day thou makest – Thine.
A loving people and a loyal Land
Commend thee unto Him within Whose Hand
Are set the shining destinies of kings;
To gain that Throne Love lend our prayers wings
To find fulfilment far beyond our ken –
That cry – 'God save the Emperor! – Amen!'

But in the shortened version, something is missing:

India *Salaaming*
'May the King live for ever!' – Nor in vain
We pray it, King, that ever shalt remain
A living Memory unto me and mine
Whose every heart this day thou makest – Thine.
'God save the Emperor! – Amen!'

Elgar removes the reminder (as if the Durbar itself were not sufficient) that India is a loyal colony, one who would never think treasonous or rebellious thoughts. He also removes some specifically Christian references, so there are no prayers which commend the king to the care of the divine, just a commonplace line whose incessant repetition may rob it of all meaning. In this instance Elgar is particularly delicate, avoiding presenting India as sharing the faith of the British. So these final two political edits seem to be a wash; Elgar removes reminders of British hegemony and India's colonial status, along with a particularly thorny religious offering.

After all the cuts have been tallied and assessed, what we are left with is an Elgar that is far more complicated than any faction in this fight presents him. He has removed passages which would glorify Indian history, but has also taken away passages which offer a skewed, pro-British view of Indian history. He has averted mention of the realities of Indian rebellion against British rule, but he has also removed sections which would demean India by imposing a foreign faith upon her. We could say that this is even-handed and therefore inconclusive, but this is an unsatisfying result.

If we weigh all these considerations, we find that the most significant cuts occur in the “March of the Moghul Emperors.” Almost the entire narration of the glories of India’s past is stripped away, while the companion piece to this march, the account of the history of the East India Company, is not treated quite as shabbily by Elgar’s editing pen. The type and number of characters presented on both sides, along with their silence and speech, is telling. Considering the primacy of space, the notion that Elgar gives the most lines to the ideas that he ultimately supports, we find that we must obviously place him in the pro-Empire camp, but with certain provisos. Yes, he is the child of his time, and yes, he creates an exotic, orientalized, and ultimately demeaning entertainment. However, given the ambiguity of his letters and the almost even-handedness of these cuts, it is difficult to piece together a full and conclusive consideration of Elgar’s mind and intent.

What we do know is that Hamilton gave Elgar a text which reveled excessively in the glories of the Empire. Elgar molded that text for both dramatic and political ends. Overall, the effect of Elgar’s work was to tone down Hamilton’s stridency and recast several sequences, but this is not enough to resituate him as an anti-Imperial composer. In 1912, he does not have the prescience, attributed to him by later critics, to foresee the attempt on the life of the Viceroy later in the year, let alone the fall of the Raj in 35 years. On the other hand, this is not the “Coronation Ode” or “Caractacus,” obvious celebrations of Empire. It is, in the end, a far more nuanced consideration of the state of both England and India during the last great hurrah of the Raj.

Relying on the text, we see that critics on both sides are no longer safe in making sweeping statements about Elgar’s support for British imperialism. He is neither an unapologetic supporter of the British colonial project nor an abject isolationist. His support for the imposition and celebration of British rule is tempered with an awareness of local circumstances, resulting in a project which balances the desires of the audience with the necessity of remaining true to his own vision of history. While his oeuvre as a whole demonstrates a great love for Britain, he is, in the end, a meliorist, standing firm between two extremes.

Notes

1. The original orchestral score for the masque has been lost since the 1970s. The only surviving score from 1912 is a piano-vocal score. However, the masque was orchestrated for the Elgar Society by Anthony Payne (who also orchestrated Elgar's Third Symphony) in 2008. It was recorded in 2009 on the Chandos label by the BBC Philharmonic, conducted by Andrew Davis.
2. All quotations from the libretto are taken from the folio of *The Crown of India*. London: Elgar Society Edition Ltd. in association with Novello, 2004. Print. Foreword by Robert Anderson.
3. Both Gould and Ghuman offer significant and insightful musicological analyses of this work.

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