

**“Influential Centres of Disaffection”:  
Indian Students in Edwardian London and the Empire that Shaped Them**

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## Introduction

“Those who use this hostel will have a special responsibility for interpreting to their friends in this country the feelings and aspirations of India. I am sure they will bring the best of India to us and we must hope that they will see and admire what is best in this country...India has learned her urge for freedom mainly from England. Her students have read our literature of freedom, have met our modern apostle of freedom and have broken the legend of the unchanging East.”<sup>1</sup>

–Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, September 1946

The subtext would have been hard to miss for those who watched as Britain’s final Secretary of State for India stood on the steps of the Indian Students’ Union and Hostel in downtown London and reminded his audience of the connections between India’s freedom and a British education. By the end of 1946, India’s independence was inevitable, with only a few details to be worked out. On one side of the negotiations had sat the British; on the other, a cadre of British-educated Indians. Mohandas Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Mohammed Ali Jinnah had all studied in Britain, whether as students at Oxford or Cambridge or in hopes of being called to the bar at the Inns of Court in London; the Indian National Congress was similarly full of Indians who had been educated in the heart of the British Empire.

Pethick-Lawrence’s speech was also one of conciliation, a remarkable note considering the tension that had long existed between Britain and the aspiring intellectuals of India. Less than half a century earlier, many Britons had been ready to ban Indian students from entering the country outright. Fearful of miscegenation, violence, and the gradual erosion of their empire, Britons had for decades regarded Indian students with suspicion. It hadn’t always been this way; until around 1910, the two groups had overcome sporadic tensions to coexist and interact as nominal equals in the imperial metropolis.

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<sup>1</sup> OIOC IOR/L/I/142 file 17/20: “Indian Students’ Union and Hostel.” British Library, St. Pancras. Archival sources are hereafter cited using their reference numbers.

This thesis is the same story told three times, each with its own point of view and implications. The common strand is India House, a radical group of nationalist students based in suburban London who advocated anti-British violence and around whom swirled no shortage of popular intrigue and horror. One story is that of the students themselves, both within India House and without. For them, the group was a breath of fresh air from the restrictive intellectual climate of the Raj; though most of India House's members stopped short of carrying out its militant plans, their ability to talk freely about issues of nationalism, Indian heritage, and freedom was itself a liberating experience.

Another perspective is that of the British public. For the nameless faces in the hordes that filled London's streets, India House was a sinister mystery just up the street. Though the outspoken radicals on the edge of town left many ordinary Britons unsettled by their presence and proximity, the unconscious contours of Britain's liberal society prevented its citizens from punishing them in the absence of any crime. India House exposed uncomfortable truths about British society and the amorphous intersections of liberalism and empire in the minds of its normal people.

And finally, the third recurring voice in the history of India House is that of the British government, particularly its India Office. "Empires thrive on bureaucracy" began the foreword to Arnold P. Kaminsky's *The India Office, 1880-1910*, a blunt reminder that for all the popular reimaginings of the British Empire as either a uniform and disciplined behemoth or a demi-mythological institution that transcended the very discourse of institutions, at its official core was little more than a group of decidedly mortal and indisputably fallible people doing the best they could with the resources they had.<sup>2</sup> Even as generally well-organized and

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<sup>2</sup> Robin B. Winks, "Foreword" from *The India Office, 1880-1910*, Arnold P. Kaminsky (New York: Greenwood, 1986), xi.

tightly run as it may have been at its peak around the turn of the nineteenth century, the empire suffered from the same administrative issues that plague any complex institution, with effects as far-reaching as the Indian subcontinent but as close to home as Kensington and Cromwell Streets in central London.

There has been a surge in recent historiography that questions who and what comprised the British Empire, the history of which superficially extends across every continent on the globe yet upon closer examination breaks down into an uncoordinated morass of businessmen, missionaries, and explorers all moving in different directions and with varying goals. It's important to point out that the India Office – or any official agency at all, for that matter – is not a wholly accurate synonym for the British Empire. Historian John Darwin has gone to great lengths in the last decade to distance the empire as a whole from its administrators in the metropole: “[T]he conventional image of imperial rule, in which mustachioed titans in shorts impose their authority on resentful populations by sheer assertion of will is an agreeable (or disagreeable) fiction...[it] creates the illusion of a standardized apparatus of power whose command and control were centred in London.”<sup>3</sup> This may have been true for the empire at large, but for the purposes of this thesis, with its cast of characters and plot set squarely within the confines of Britain's global metropolis, the mustachioed bureaucrats of Whitehall merit some deeper consideration.

London was a fundamentally imperial city in the first decade of the twentieth century, and just as the British Empire seems to fall apart under too close of an examination, so too does London of a century ago strain under the constant tensions at play in a cosmopolitan metropolis. Though its independence was a distant dream decades away from realization, the

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<sup>3</sup> John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 189.

seeds of Indian nationalism had been sown early on and took root among some of the most politically inclined Indians studying at British universities around the turn of the nineteenth century, particularly those in the imperial capital. The transplanted students most willing to listen to the then-extreme ideas of nationalism and imperial resistance were also those most willing to carry out real acts of aggression against the British government, and they coupled this ideological willingness for political violence with enough external financial backing to make it a reality.

Despite the dangers posed by these radical Indian students – the group that captured the imaginations of the British public and that forms the basis of this work, if not the majority of their Indian colleagues in Britain – relatively little was done about them for years until 1909, when a young Indian shot the Secretary of State's political aide-de-camp at point blank range on the steps of the Imperial Institute in London. How this assassin was able to plan and carry out his attack was the immediate focus of the storm that followed, but the question of how he had become so radicalized in the first place required a much deeper look into the counter-terrorism measures in place in the imperial metropolis. This was the culminating moment of a unique strand in the larger narrative of British-Indian imperial relations: political resistance through violence was nothing out of the ordinary on the farthest reaches of British India, but for a group of displaced, free-floating foreigners to coagulate, ferment, and quite literally explode in the very heart of the empire was something different entirely.

As sophisticated and streamlined as Britain's political intelligence agencies were able to conduct their surveillance and countermeasures against agitators in India, the parallels that existed at home could hardly be called comparable. The flash of Madan Lal Dhingra's

revolver on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1909, illuminated nearly a decade of dysfunction within Britain's imperial bureaucracy, exposing both the typical symptoms of a bloated institution – insufficient communication, interdepartmental jealousy – and a profound misunderstanding of its imperial subjects. Though the latent dangers posed by these radicals were fairly well understood, Britain's liberal attitudes towards its citizens – whether imperial subject or Briton by birth – at home provided a barrier just thick enough to effectively separate the governing from the governed; as the bureaucratic machinery in Whitehall clogged and slowed, the radicals were allowed to plan their acts of resistance unimpeded just miles north in suburban Highgate.

This lack of action wasn't due to any particular lack of foresight. In the years preceding Sir William Curzon Wyllie's assassination, members of the India Office were wracked by anxieties regarding Indian students in Britain but had little real idea on how to curb the 'problem' or recourse to implement any solution. Hamstrung by a lack of better options, the India Office's only real strategy was the collection of as much information as possible about these students, and although the presence and dangerous potential of the aforementioned radicals and aspiring revolutionaries was an undeniable reality, officials were unable to do much about them until Wyllie's death in 1909. This tactic – the obsessive gathering of any and all information, however tangentially relevant, in an effort to create a nebulous network of knowledge – was an imported imperial strategy, born in the minds of British field officials and developed in the Indian hinterlands and other Crown-held territories before the India Office attempted to bring it back home to London. As a social force, information defined the government's actions towards foreign students and provides a



conceptual anchor within an evolving set of policies, even as it continually proved less deployable in Westminster than on the Indian subcontinent.

The British concern about Indian students was hardly confined to the imposing buildings of Whitehall. Small numbers of Indian students had sought higher education in Britain for decades before the India House came to prominence, and the public had been well aware of their presence in universities ranging across the island from Edinburgh and Oxford to the center of the capital city. Though the vast majority of arriving Indians posed no threat whatsoever to the empire or its citizens and had few real intentions beyond returning to India three or four years later with a prestigious British degree, constant British fears of immorality, miscegenation, and occasionally terrorism placed enough of a spotlight upon the foreigners from their earliest arrivals that the India Office took note and paid them an unduly large amount of attention. The story of Indian students in Britain hardly belongs only to the radicals; indeed, British reactions to the generally inoffensive domestic presences of ordinary young imperial subjects reveals plenty about both the British public and, by extension, those who governed them.

Despite the generally mundane lives of these early Indian students, Britons constantly – if misguidedly – manufactured sinister undertones and possibilities where they rarely existed, and the perpetual grasping for validation of these fears made the few instances of real danger that much more memorable for both the public and the imperial government. As such, the events of July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1909 – unconnected though they were to all but a handful of Indians – captured the attention of politicians, intellectuals, and the working class, as well as the majority of historians responsible for the later scholarship on the period. The night was a turning point for both attitudes and policies towards Indian students as a whole and serves as

a useful entry point to the shifting British perspective towards these foreigners. What followed the murder was a centralization of the intelligence networks that had failed to prevent Wylie's murder. Counterintuitively, increasing structure corresponded with even less effectiveness; nonetheless, cooperation with the British public prevented the rise of any similar radical groups.

The first chapter will introduce the framework for understanding the India Office's subsequent policy towards Indian students: the information order. British field officers had been harnessing and manipulating the flow of information in India to monitor and crush dissent for decades with a general degree of success – the 1857 revolt obviously notwithstanding – and India Office bureaucrats used Wylie's imperial expertise in an attempt to replicate that model to monitor Indian students in Britain. Anxious about growing nationalist sentiment, the India Office turned to the information order as a way to counter anti-British feelings. However, implementing the same scheme in London as in India was impossible, and the India Office was forced to make several crucial changes that hampered its effectiveness. British-India relations in India will be established as constructed colonial encounters, infrequent in nature and unfailingly reinforcing the imperial hierarchy.

The chapter will comprise a brief history of India House culled from secondary literature in an attempt to chart the group's arc in its own right. This chapter will profile the group's two leaders, Shyamji Krishnavarma and Vinayak Savarkar, as well as Madan Lal Dhingra and his assassination of Sir William Curzon Wylie. The history of India House in this chapter is that which has been most often repeated and compounded throughout the past century: teleological, tidy, and severely lacking. Nonetheless, a more involved construction necessitates an understanding of the basic facts that outline India House's story.

The third chapter will examine imperial topographies, turning to the British public in an attempt to explain why anti-British radicals were allowed to operate in the heart of the empire for as long as they did. The chapter will outline several subtle tensions at work in a liberal empire that extended back to its metropole. A subject Indian population had crossed the geographical boundary into Britain; what boundaries separated the governing from the governed in liberal London? Indian students occupied a unique and vexing place within British society; London was a legal haven within which revolutionaries were allowed to function unimpeded. This chapter will revisit the India Office, explaining its inability to initially act on India House and then chronicle the government's coordinated crackdown on the group following Dhingra's shooting.

The fourth chapter will cede the narration to a pair of student writings, looking for insights within the journals of two students who lived in London from 1906 to 1909. Jagminderlal Jaini and M.P.T. Acharya were opposite personalities, and although they took different paths to get there, they both left London as staunch Indian nationalists. Colonial encounters in London, far from the uniformly repressive interactions in India, were unavoidable and liberating for students as they mingled with ordinary Britons, reforming their opinions of the British. This chapter will hear voices from the opposite side of the conflict in an attempt to humanize the students that the India Office so often regarded with ceaseless suspicion.

The final chapter will return to the imperial government, examining what became of the India Office's final attempt to actively control visiting students. The Bureau of Information for Indian Students remains an understudied institution that reveals a surprising amount about the government's attitudes towards these students; namely, its shifting

functions and relevance are treated as emblematic of the India Office's changing role within a new global network of intelligence. The Bureau of Information was the empire's spirit made flesh, the endpoint of an intelligence trajectory that began as amorphous information networks in India's Northwestern Frontier and concluded as a single concrete building in downtown London. As the India Office incrementally centralized, systematized, and made manifest its information network, it became less useful. It's a counterintuitive narrative: more active attempts at control and influence corresponded with less real power. Why the India Office's methods failed is perhaps a testament to John Darwin's decentralized view of empire, as explaining the department's ineffectiveness requires an understanding of how it functioned within its place in a larger British society.

As well as a miniature historiography of India House, this thesis is a study in colonial encounter gone wrong. While interactions between Briton and Indian in British India could be carefully constructed and regulated to produce an optimally imperial solution, London allowed for organic encounters between foreign students and ordinary Britons. This social liberation coupled with the intellectual freedom Britain offered led to a collective colonial encounter that could no longer be controlled, though the India Office continually tried. India House was the ultimate manifestation of this collective misencounter, and Sir William Curzon Wylie was the casualty when it spiraled too far out of control.

As the established historiography goes, the events of July 1, 1909 were the apparent culmination of collective misunderstandings and bureaucratic obstacles. What seems simple to diagnose in such a telling as the failures of one institution is, as usual, much more nuanced and difficult to trace from the ground level up. For a story couched in such abstractions as empire, nationalism, and political protest, it can be useful to first turn to the concrete – from

monotonous visions of bureaucracy to examine instead the individuals who comprised it. The plot of this thesis begins moments before a murder, as the assassin waits on the edge of the stage with his nickel-plated revolver tucked out of sight somewhere in the folds of his grey suit jacket. Slightly out of focus behind his unkempt black hair, he is not yet the martyr who will star in countless adoring folk histories nor the treasonous villain whose name will find itself splayed across the column inches of newspapers worldwide by this time tomorrow. He is, for the moment, an unnoticed presence within the celebration around him, and his eyes, gazing across the crowd of Britons and Indians alike gathered this evening in the metropolitan center of the empire, have locked on the tall, mustachioed man who has just made up his mind to head home for the night.

## **I - Information Order, Information Panic**

“The real and only object is to have some control over native students in London.”<sup>1</sup>

– M. Finucane, 1898

If not for the bullet that entered his brain one summer night in downtown London, Sir William Hutt Curzon Wylie would likely have been little more than the most marginal of footnotes in the history of the British Raj. That is hardly to say his lifetime of work in the service of the British Empire was unimportant; indeed, to remember Wylie solely for his death outside of the Imperial Institute at the hands of a disgruntled Indian student is to ignore the larger role he played in British-Indian student relations. Understanding his significance in the early stages of the India Office’s attitudes and policies towards students is central to tracing the trajectories they continued to arc across after his death, but such historical pursuits were of little interest to the newspapers worldwide that lavished the assassination with a macabre mix of lovingly sensationalist details and grimly stoic condemnation. In the minds of the newspaper readers in 1909 that followed the incessant media coverage, the Members of Parliament who demanded accountability and justice for the assassin in the name of Her Majesty’s Government, and the unfortunate Indian students whose existences in

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<sup>1</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/515, file 1381 “Finucane to Daly.”

Britain would come to be defined by the fatal shooting, all that was worth knowing about Sir Curzon Wyllie was that he died.<sup>2</sup>

Befitting a man remembered only for dying, accordingly few satisfying accounts exist of Wyllie's earlier life, which in and of itself ran fairly parallel to the course of early India Office relations with Indian students. The picture that emerged in obituaries and memorials was one of a fairly typical army officer turned bureaucrat, if a bit more distinguished than most of his colleagues. Born in 1848 and educated at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, Wyllie followed the career path of his father, a British general in India, and spent the next thirty-four years on the colonial subcontinent.<sup>3</sup> After three years of combat duty, Wyllie joined the administrative ranks of the British Raj, serving in various secretarial and commissioned positions, eventually shifting from the thoroughly imperialized territories considered 'British India' – land under the direct British rule – to the princely states of India, hundreds of discrete political territories that nominally retained their independence while heavily reliant upon and informally controlled by the British.

Wyllie became one of the most prominent British rulers in a handful of western princely states, cultivating what his British biographers imagined to be a great deal of respect among the residents on the basis of his decades-long tenure, good nature, and effective

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<sup>2</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/947, files 2409 & 2410

<sup>3</sup> F. H. Brown, "Wyllie, Sir (William Hutt) Curzon (1848–1909)," rev. Roger T. Stearn, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, September 2010

measures of governance.<sup>4</sup> His administrative successes on the fringes of British control and reputed popularity among Indian princes translated into a position back in England as the political aide-de-camp for Secretary of State for India John Morley in 1901. It was in this official capacity that Wyllie spent the remaining eight years of his life and the one that brought him into contact with the growing number of Indian students in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

Chief among these students in terms of eventual personal significance for the India Office bureaucrat was Madan Lal Dhingra, the young engineer from an upper-class family in Amritsar who would eventually assassinate Wyllie in 1909. Dhingra's early gravitation towards the radical India House group upon his arrival in London – he had lodged in the group's headquarters for six months during 1908 – and accompanying newfound nationalistic sentiments left his loyalist parents unsettled.<sup>6</sup> Having met Wyllie on several occasions during his tenure in India, they turned to him again to steer their son away from India House's radical influence.<sup>7</sup> Whether or not Wyllie and Dhingra ever came into direct contact before July 1, 1909 is unclear, but the two certainly knew of each other. The possible connections between them will be discussed in more depth in the second chapter.

Wyllie is a useful entry point for looking at India House because his is the name etched into memorials from London to Rajasthan, but the larger story of this chapter – not entirely discrete from that of the man himself – is that of the broader imperial government both in India and in London. Acting as an interpreter to the British bureaucrats who governed

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<sup>4</sup> "The Murder of Sir Curzon Wyllie," *The Manchester Guardian*, (3 July 1909): 1.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, "Wyllie, Sir (William Hutt) Curzon (1848–1909)."

<sup>6</sup> Alex Tickell, "Scholarship Terrorists" in *South Asian Resistances in Britain: 1857-1947* ed. Rehana Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 8.

<sup>7</sup> Rozina Visram *Asians in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 159



India without their having ever set foot in it and the subcontinent's local administrators, Wyllie was a critical link in Britain's chain of global communication, but understanding his usefulness as a conduit requires an explanation of the information he conveyed.

Indians in London commanded an outsize share of attention from the Britons that surrounded them, including the India Office. By 1898, the flow of students to the metropole had become a strong enough current to stir some anxiety into the Government of India, forcing members of the India Office to acknowledge two unpleasant truths: the importance of these students to the future of the empire as well as the imperial government's woeful lack of information about them.<sup>8</sup> The bureaucrats of London turned to the administrators of India in their search for an informational foothold about who these students actually were. What followed was an attempt to import basic elements of the models of intelligence and information gathering that had been developed by British ICS officers in the subcontinent and transpose them onto a British setting; it was the most effective method of controlling students that the India Office had at its disposal. Handicapped by a lack of enforceable power in London, the India Office during this period put in place prototypical methods of information collection, surveillance, and social influence that began as fairly subtle and unobtrusive practices modeled on imperial practices in India. They were designed just as much to assuage public worries as to curb any real problems but would later – both in history and in this thesis – take on a far more conspicuous role in the collective experiences of Indian students.

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination" (Undergraduate Thesis: Wesleyan University, 2012), 44.

## Watchful Eyes and Blind Spots

The methodological roots of the India Office's approach ran thousands of miles long and nearly a century deep from London at the turn of the century to the northern reaches of British India during its period of commercial rule at the hands of the East India Company. The origins of both formal and informal intelligence networks on the subcontinent preceded British colonizers and began with the Mughal Empires that combined strong local presences with fairly well-archived elements of government, a model that the British would later attempt to replicate and expand upon. The topic is best addressed in C.A. Bayly's *Empire and Information*, a thorough and penetrating study into the evolution of the British Empire's approach to what he termed the 'information order,' the changing ways by which Britons obtained, organized, and employed the data they were able to gather.<sup>9</sup> Though Bayly's narrative ends well before the presence of Indian students in Britain was significant enough to merit any lengthy consideration, takes place almost entirely in India, and makes no direct mention of any of the actors connected to this thesis, it provides a crucial framework for understanding why the India Office approached the issue of Indians in Britain that way that it did.

For Bayly, the information order was a social force on par with that of capitalism in the extent to which it affected the transformation of British India, less a tangible thing than an omnipresent swirl of ideas. Colonization wasn't made possible only by the technologies, armies, and revenues of the East India Company; rather, "the subcontinent was straddled by complex and highly sophisticated information system and the British had learned the art of listening in on these internal communications." Tuning in to these informal networks of

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<sup>9</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Information and Empire: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6.

decentralized local communications, “by controlling newswriters, corralling groups of spies and runners, and placing agents at religious centres, in bazaars, and among bands of military men and wanderers,” the British were able to monitor dissent and dissemble resistance movements in their infancy.<sup>10</sup> They attempted to weld this unofficial system of regionalized intelligence with their own highly organized records about government and institutional activity, resulting in a disjointed effort to apply the same archival and organizational methods to information that was only available through often-unreliable local conduits:

The British were by no means wholly ignorant of the society they were ruling. Conversely, the formal structures of information gathering did not necessarily give them a coherent insight into its workings. Their knowledge was patchy, incomplete and liable to atrophy. They were better at picking up warnings about insurrections than understanding the inner workings of Indian institutions. Colonial knowledge, far from being a monolith derived from the needs of power, existed on different levels which were imperfectly linked.<sup>11</sup>

This British approach was fundamentally vulnerable, and colonial rulers relied extensively upon those who could connect the distinct perspectives. The key figure in maintaining a functional chain of information was the interpreter – sometimes literal and sometimes cultural – who acted as the channel between the governors and the governed, processing information gathered in city streets, private conversations, and printed newspapers into a coherent and digestible form for the ‘archivists’ of British institutionalized knowledge. The agent of Bayly’s description was sometimes an Indian in the employ of the Raj and other times an experienced Briton – the “old India hand” – who had spent a long time in the subcontinent and was sufficiently attuned to locals to act as a cultural interpreter. Both entailed a degree of uncertainty: while the former often felt pressure from both Indians and

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<sup>10</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 97; Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 167

Britons, the latter's judgments were often regarded with the suspicions that the informant had become too deeply imbued with the sentiments of his Indian surroundings.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, the interpreter was known as such only to those above him on the chain of information; he would hardly be useful as an intelligence collector if those he was monitoring knew it. The intangibility of the intelligence network to those under its watch made it all the more effective. An "intelligence agent" at the local level in British India was rarely an ICS officer; think Rudyard Kipling's eponymous Kim rather than a khaki-clad pukka sahib. Thus what proved effective for British rule in India with regards to the information order was not so much a disruption in the flow of information but instead an unseen monitoring of it.<sup>13</sup> It was a passive approach: listening in on ordinary conversations and reading vernacular tracts and publications were the most common modes of surveillance. The passivity was generally effective, as it allowed the colonizers to collect organic information without arousing the suspicion that might accompany more active British forays into subaltern circles.

The importance of the interpreter as a conduit in geographical terms is another critical point for understanding the eventual difference between British manipulations of the information order in India and in England. Beyond simply bridging two cultures, interpreters were the links between local activity and centralized British authority who transmitted in stages from hinterland to village, village to town, and town to city. "[The British] chain of surveillance was at its most vulnerable where the body of elite, literate officers stretching down from the district town linked up with the hereditary servants and information collectors of the village," Bayly claimed, accentuating the network's fragility.<sup>14</sup> While fairly effective

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 102-3.

<sup>13</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 8.

at collecting enough information to suppress imperial threats at the local level, an increasing distance between source and system corresponded with an increasing risk of communication breakdown, misinterpretation, or misevaluation of a danger.

As gaps in the system inevitably appeared along the weak connections between nodes in the intelligence network, India's imperial rulers were plagued by occasional 'information panics.' A term coined by Bayly to describe moments of British awareness of breakdowns in the chain of information from ground to government upon which their ability to control the region depended, information panics induced fervent efforts to make up for missing knowledge. "In each case, officials believed that a threatening power beyond British India's borders was in secret communication through religious intermediaries with disaffected powers," and in response they attempted to modify their intelligence networks to account for the perceived threat.<sup>15</sup>

Such information panics had a way of expanding the scope of British intelligence. Both Bayly and Popplewell identify the 'thuggee' violence of the early nineteenth century as the initial impetus for centralizing their information-gathering practices. Unbeknownst to colonial officials, roving bands of Indians – 'thugs' as they came to be known – had murdered hundreds of travelers in northern India, occasionally within a mile of a British colonial office.<sup>16</sup> These marauders went unknown and unchecked by the British for years, and the governors' sudden realization of the threat in 1810 necessitated an upgrade in intelligence to deal with the 'thugs' specifically and other, more latent threats. Still, the solution remained largely localized, with no central body receiving, processing, and distributing intelligence until the 1830s; districts had been alerted of the 'thuggee' danger but

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 149.

<sup>16</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 11.

left to their own devices to handle it. The rush to collect information about this sinister force was the first widespread information panic in British India, and this kind of anxiety— “the feeling of the fledgling colonial administration that it knew nothing of local society and that the locals were combing to deny it information” – would set in decades later in London, again as the result of unfounded British fears about Indians.<sup>17</sup> Information panics produced stronger local webs of colonial intelligence but also established connections – if not always especially strong ones – between disparate regions.

Such was the state of information collection and interpretation at the Indian Rebellion in 1857, which many Britons attributed to a severe breakdown in political intelligence.<sup>18</sup> In the revolt’s aftermath, the now state-run Government of India was slow to reinforce the existing intelligence structure; the number of rural policemen and intelligence collectors didn’t begin to rise until 1863.<sup>19</sup> Even after the eventual uptick, the empire still “would continue to depend upon an uneasy cooperation between the thinly-stretched constabulary and village officers who were under the influence of landowners.” While the number of police went up, according to Bayly, “It would be wrong, however, to assume that the police became markedly more efficient.”<sup>20</sup> The outward image of post-1857 intelligence networks may have been more aggressive, but they remained essentially the same fundamentally vulnerable chains as before, bound to the ideology of information collection as a uniquely critical component of control. The increase in police figures also signaled a shift towards official authority and systemization of information networks and away from the employ of local, informal interpreters. Though additional manpower yielded – to borrow a phrase from

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<sup>17</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 174; Paul Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 44.

<sup>18</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 317.

<sup>19</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 334.

economic thought – diminishing marginal returns due to the systematic limitations on effectiveness, the increase in intelligence agents had implications for the scope and direction of the networks going forward. While the information orders of India’s cities had long been the focus of British attention at the expense of the imperial fringes, a renewed emphasis on the less well-known patches of Indian society, particularly the princely states, and the Northwest Frontier, brings Bayly’s story to a close as a familiar character enters, sporting his still-fresh credentials from Sandhurst.

Though there is again hardly enough biographical material about Sir Curzon Wylie to form a satisfactorily concrete picture of his life as an administrator in India, his very presence there in the sort of intelligence systems that Bayly and Richard J. Popplewell describe allows for a degree of guesswork and informed inference. He served as the India Office’s human connection between knowledge about India and its later attempts at dealing with Indian students in Britain, in effect becoming Bayly’s ‘old India hand’ transposed onto a British context. Wylie was both the embodiment of imperial intelligence systems and their trans-national extension.<sup>21</sup>

Wylie spent thirty-four years in India, arriving ten years after the 1857 Rebellion<sup>22</sup> when memories of the revolt were still fresh across the country and in the imperial government, where the consensus remained that it had been due to a particularly severe

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<sup>21</sup> The idea of citing a specific India Office figure’s imperial experience as a factor in his approach to policy is one that Paul Schaffel used with regards to William Lee-Warner and T.W. Arnold a few years later. He argued that imperial careering and information panic were conflicting impulses and that it wasn’t until the Bureau of Information that the India Office started taking peripheral experiences into account. I contend that the framework is correct albeit a decade earlier: Wylie was an active proponent of the certificate of identity scheme while he was still abroad, and his Indian experience played a large role in his approach. He was the figure that not only allowed for information to flow across metropole-periphery lines, but he introduced the whole information-gathering system to the India Office in the first place. Wylie – though not yet a direct part of the India Office’s administration – had a seminal effect on what it would become, and identifying his experiences in the periphery are key to understanding the shape that subsequent policies took.

<sup>22</sup> Brown, “Wylie, Sir (William Hutt) Curzon (1848–1909).”

breakdown in the chain of information.<sup>23</sup> The climate into which he entered was increasingly that of an apparent police state, where the imperial government was in the aforementioned process of attempting to systematize the previously fragmented information chains that had plagued efficient intelligence gathering at the local level.<sup>24</sup> It is hardly difficult to imagine that Wyllie's Sandhurst training dealt extensively with the still-recent mutiny and that the young officer was eager to approach his service on the subcontinent with a set of ideas and methods fresher than his senior counterparts who might have put into action the very faulty system that made the Rebellion possible in the first place.

At the same time, the increasing paranoia that the British, and presumably Wyllie, displayed in their response to the revolt actually focused very little on their Indian subjects and more towards fears of amorphous and undefined external threats. Popplewell writes that historical conceptions of a 'mutiny complex' in the post-Rebellion Raj are misplaced, rather, the British adopted a fairly complacent attitude toward Indians and instead turned their intelligence capabilities towards religious extremists – notably a radical Wahhabi sect of Islam in the 1860s – and competing foreign powers, particularly Russia.<sup>25</sup> 'The Great Game,' as the existential conflict between Britain and Russia that played out in northern India came to be known, was probably the main impetus for Britain's imperial intelligence reorganization and development during the second half of the nineteenth century. Though the revolt had done deep psychological damage and taken a frightening number of British lives, it had never had any real chance of succeeding in overthrowing the imperial government; if that rebellion had been the most drastic exercise in Indian revolutionary activity, the Raj had

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<sup>23</sup> "Suffice it to say that [the Rebellion's causes] were extremely complex and that the British had anticipated none of them." Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Bayly, *Empire and Information*, 334.

<sup>25</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 14-16.



little concern about Indians themselves damaging its imperial hold on the country.<sup>26</sup> The lapses in intelligence systems that the revolt had exposed were an important problem that the British worked to correct, but with an eye towards India's borders rather than its heart.

The early locus of the Great Game was modern-day Afghanistan, which Britain considered a buffer between its Indian holdings and the newly Russian-controlled territory in central Asia. Tensions and paranoia ran high in 1878 just as William Curzon Wyllie arrived as a military assistant in Baluchistan; a series of diplomatic crises in Kabul triggered the Second Anglo-Afghan war and forty thousand British soldiers, Wyllie among them, eventually claimed Afghanistan as a puppet state in 1880.<sup>27</sup> Wyllie's first involvement in the Great Game was hardly his last; he spent seventeen years as a high-ranking administrator in the princely states that comprised the northwestern region of Rajputana and five additional years in Nepal. Shrouded as British India was in paranoia that an external threat was constantly planning attacks on its territory, it doesn't seem too much of a stretch to imagine that this sort of ceaseless suspicion rubbed off on Wyllie during his more than thirty years of service that coincided almost exactly with the classically defined period of the Great Game, which definitively ended with the Triple Entente of 1907.<sup>28</sup> Though speculative, it seems reasonable that these deep-rooted concerns about latent foreign threats to imperial stability, entrenched by decades of stressful governance, would have accompanied Wyllie home in 1901 and continued to color his judgment even after disembarking in London.

One particular encounter late in Wyllie's Indian service had a particularly long-lasting personal significance for the officer: a dispute with an England-returned Indian

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Brown, "Wyllie, Sir (William Hutt) Curzon (1848–1909)."

<sup>28</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 44.

leader. At some point during Wyllie's stint as the Resident of Udaipur from 1894 until 1898, he blocked a young Indian with an Oxford degree from employment in the Udaipur Court and publicly reneged on his promise to introduce the man to Viceroy Elgin during a visit to the state.<sup>29</sup> The young man, previously a leader in the small princely state of Junagadh, had circumvented British interests and run his district in direct opposition to imperial directives; another ICS officer had alleged that he "was a dangerous person and further suggested that 'all States and all Residents should be warned against him.'"<sup>30</sup> Personally humiliated, professionally damaged, and thoroughly disillusioned with abuses of British rule, Shyamji Krishnavarma resigned his position within the government and left for England. His story comes later.

### **Question Marks Across London**

Wyllie was a key figure in the discussions about Indian students even before his return to London. In 1898, the first symptoms of an information panic on the topic cropped up in Whitehall as India Office bureaucrats began to acknowledge two things: the growing presence of Indian students in Britain and the government's utter lack of information about them.<sup>31</sup> The office had learned that students were being brought under vaguely nationalist influences from their first moments in England; rumors alleged that radical Indians were meeting these students on the docks of arriving steamboats to whisk them away to seedy

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<sup>29</sup> V.N. Datta, *Madan Lal Dhingra and the Revolutionary Movement* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1978), 46.

<sup>30</sup> T.R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1979), 3

<sup>31</sup> Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination," 44.

lodgings populated by fiercely anti-British discontents.<sup>32</sup> The veracity of these claims is questionable, especially given the demonstrated British propensity to extrapolate and project danger from an unsubstantial sample size both at home and in India, but they had undeniable, if less extreme, roots. The London India Society, headed by the pioneering Indian politician Dadabhai Naoroji, placed advertisements in metropolitan Indian newspapers offering to provide students with information about courses of study in Britain and a contact to meet them upon arrival in the metropole.<sup>33</sup> The India Office was keenly aware of Naoroji's influence on incoming students, sending informants to the group's meetings and collecting newspaper clippings with its advertisements.<sup>34</sup>

Anxious about the effect of anti-imperial forces on newly arrived students, a small number of government officers drew up a plan that would start to replicate the empire's intelligence gathering systems currently in place in India. Their most basic concern was that of sheer numbers; for historians, the lack of any precise census of Indian students before the twentieth century is an annoyance, but for members of the India Office who had been brought up in the information-obsessive culture of the Raj, it was a critical shortcoming. The first step in "[enabling] the India Office to exercise some supervision and control over Indian students who intend to compete for public services"<sup>35</sup> was the issuance of certificates of identity. Short forms for incoming students to complete upon their departure from India that included a basic set of information, the certificates required the student's name, age, place of Indian residence, the date of his departure from India, the object of his visit to Britain, and

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<sup>32</sup> Shompa Lahiri, *Indians in Britain: Anglo-Indian Encounters, Race and Identity, 1880-1930* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 123.

<sup>33</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/515 file 1381, "Certificates of Identity," 1

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Schneer, *London, 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 187.

<sup>35</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/515 file 1381.

his nationality –whether he came from a British province or princely state – as well as his father’s name, caste, and job.<sup>36</sup> These certificates would be for students only; although initially proposed as a requisite for all Indians travelling to Britain, officers didn’t want to effect any ostensible barriers to the inter-empire travel afforded all imperial subjects while simultaneously attempting “to prevent Indian students, from setting out without leaving any official trace at all.”<sup>37</sup>

The bureaucrats responsible for these early designs apparently considered Wyllie an expert on the matter, treating him as the link between Indian periphery and colonial center. They forwarded him their communications and drafts of their proposed certificate templates and took his advice against making the certificates mandatory on the grounds that it would be perceived as an “unnecessary interference with the liberty of the subject.”<sup>38</sup> Wyllie also recommended hiring an experienced India Office employee to act as a counterpart to Indian nationalists who would meet students upon their arrival and encourage a relationship with the government going forward. In the same letter, he admitted that a complete counterbalance of supposed radical forces was practically impossible, as there might always be “a certain number of disappointed and discontented youth who will give voice to their feelings in disloyalty and sedition.”<sup>39</sup>

All parties involved agreed that the certificates were a useful tool and that their implementation – voluntary but strongly encouraged for students – would be a fairly simple process. Wyllie elicited the cooperation of the princely states in the scheme and the forms

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<sup>36</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/808 file 1196.

<sup>37</sup> Radhika Singha, “The Great War and a ‘Proper’ Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50, vol. 3 (2013), 297.

<sup>38</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/515 file 1381, “Curzon Wyllie to Daly.”

<sup>39</sup> *ibid*

were circulated as early as 1901.<sup>40</sup> As practical instruments of intelligence, the earliest incarnations of these certificates of identity didn't amount to much beyond the most basic practical and symbolic functions. The information they gathered was minimal and the certificates' non-mandatory status prevented the India Office from coming much nearer to an exact census of the student population than they had been before. Appropriately little information exists about how many students actually completed these forms – the India Office Records in the British Library are littered with them until as late as 1916 but there's no way to know what percentage of received certificates were archived – or how seriously they were regarded among students.<sup>41</sup> Despite the racially-tinged pronouncement of Sir Steuart Bayley – for whom a statue in Calcutta stands as a monument to his friendly and respectful relationships with the Indians he governed<sup>42</sup> – that “the well-known predilection of Indians for a certificate of any kind, would probably lead the majority of visitors to apply,”<sup>43</sup> the scheme was an “abysmal failure” according to historian Shompa Lahiri and was a useless tool for the government of the time and for historians that followed.<sup>44</sup>

As well as a means “to have some control over native students in London,” the certificates were also a symbolic measure in response to public anxieties about the burden posed by Indian students.<sup>45</sup> They were just as much an attempt to appease emerging public fears about Indians in Britain as they were a reaction to the students themselves. By 1900,

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<sup>40</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/515, file 1381, “Certificates of Identity.”

<sup>41</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/1433, file 1233 “Certificate of Identity granted to British Indian Mr. H Dikshit.” “...it was only in March 1917 when the passport became compulsory for all travellers by sea, that the certificate of identity was formally terminated as a travel document.” Singha, “A Proper Passport,” 298.

<sup>42</sup> P. C. Lyon, ‘Bayley, Sir Steuart Colvin (1836–1925)’, rev. Katherine Prior, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004.

<sup>43</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/515 file 1381, “Bayley to Finucane/”

<sup>44</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> OIOC IOR L/PJ/6/515 file 1381, “Finucane to Daly.”

enough rumors about immoral Indian students running amok in London had taken root in the public mind that citizens began to make calls for reform. Fears of miscegenation comprised a common anxiety, but the more pressing issue was that of destitute students: having bled their savings dry, students' return voyages to India were subsidized by Britons through their government. Though such cases were extremely rare, they provoked enough of an outcry that the India Office was forced to take notice. Aside from the obvious purpose of attempting a census of students, Lahiri argues that the certificates of identity were intended to "weed out individuals who could prove to be a financial burden," arguing that the earliest India Office policies regarding the students were designed with the twofold purpose of countering a nascent problem – bankrupt Indians in England – and persuading a concerned public convinced of its urgency that the issue was under control.<sup>46</sup> Per Radhika Singha, the forms put a subtle onus on Indians to assuage British responsibility: "The distinctive feature of the certificate of identity was a column headed 'Social or pecuniary status of father or guardian', inserted to make families shoulder the cost of repatriating destitute students."<sup>47</sup> These certificates were the India Office's first organized policy about the growing bloc of students in the country, but it didn't take shape until public pressure mounted around the financial issue of visiting students. The continuing role of the public in both procuring and approving government sanctions on students will be explored more fully in the third chapter.

Though the certificates of identity were practically useless, they were the first real sign that the India Office was attempting to manipulate the information order in London similarly to how the imperial government had in India, but also an indication of the divergent path the Britain-based policy would take from its subcontinental roots. Unlike the informal

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<sup>46</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 71.

<sup>47</sup> Singha, "A Proper Passport," 297.

and intangible ways in which the British tapped into the Indian information order, India Office bureaucrats in London were jettisoning subtlety in an attempt to give a formal structure to their methods of intelligence gathering. Not content with a shaky chain of shadowy communication, but, as will be covered later, simultaneously bound by liberal ethics that kept spying off the table, the Office asked Indians to voluntarily submit to government oversight, even if ‘surveillance’ seemed too strong a word for what the certificates of identity hoped to accomplish. Nonetheless, the certificates’ physicality was a key departure from the intangible manipulations of the subcontinental information order and became a primary factor in rendering them ultimately unhelpful.

## **Conclusion**

Unlike in India where harnessing the information order was a way to prevent crime and crush dissent that involved passively listening in on existing flows of information, its earliest replication in England indicates that it was meant to ultimately influence its subjects rather than surveil them for purposes of punishment. Facing the still-vague specter of nationalism among Indians in England, the India Office’s earliest attempts to utilize information were primarily a mode of identifying potential troublemakers who merited additional monitoring and who might otherwise become “influential centres of disaffection” upon their return to India.<sup>48</sup> For reasons that will be addressed in the third chapter, the India Office didn’t have much in the way of recourse for problematic students; the most it could really hope do was to get to them before radicals did and win them over to a positive view of England. Thus not only the methodology – increasingly tangible manipulations of the

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<sup>48</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/808 file 1296 “Memorandum by East India Association, 1907.”

information order – but also the aims of the India Office’s intelligence collection differed from the subcontinental mold. This became a pattern in the following decade – and will be examined in the following chapters – and helps explain why the India Office’s attempts to curb student nationalism were so ineffective.

Wyllie’s role shouldn’t be downplayed in the shape that this early policy took, especially upon his return to Britain in 1901. His involvement in the design and implementation of the certificate scheme had been largely editorial, offering suggestions and revisions to the London-born drafts and serving as the sort of conduit between decentralized local data in India and organized governmental knowledge in Britain that featured heavily in the information order in Bayly’s depiction of early British India. Wyllie continued to act as the expert on Anglo-Indian relations after his move home, both in his official capacity as political aide-de-camp – a position that focused on entertaining visiting Indian dignitaries – and in his work with Indian students. His return from India was a symbolic one for the direction of India Office policy towards students: as the experienced officer returned with his wealth of knowledge about the subcontinent, so too was the imperial model of British intelligence crossing the globe. Both were shaped by British minds, forged in the subcontinental crucible, and returned to Britain to apply their experiences. For Wyllie, this included a knighthood, professional respect, and a handsome salary.

For the model of British intelligence, the transition was hardly so smooth. According to Popplewell, it may have been outdated before Wyllie had even arrived back in London: when George Nathaniel Curzon assumed the Viceroyalty in 1899, he made police intelligence reform a priority, citing an ineffective formal system that had failed in its aim to preempt and reduce crime. The modernizing infrastructure in India had made crime more



mobile than ever, and even the newer, post-1857 incarnations of the information order were too localized to handle the information flow in a region crisscrossed by telegraphs and railroads.<sup>49</sup> These amorphous iterations of the information order in general functioned effectively, if not always efficiently, in the half century between the revolt and Curzon's reforms, but that success had always been decentralized. The British were more or less unable to systematize the subcontinental information order as a whole because it functioned best on a local level in response to local threats. "[T]he trend of British 'policy' ... was to accept wide local variations and leave much to the discretion of its men on the spot. To do anything else would have been very difficult given the inadequate means to superintend events on the ground" wrote historian John Darwin, accentuating the administrative and technological limitations facing information systems.<sup>50</sup> As the twentieth century drew nearer, threats could take to the rails or telegraph lines to spread beyond the boundaries of small communities and could no longer be contained by the decentralized intelligence methods of the past. If the colonial intelligence systems were already antiquated in the subcontinent, it's no surprise that London, the pinnacle of global modernity, would have proved far too much for them to handle. The story ends in tragedy; by the end of the decade, failure to successfully replicate the India-based model in its new London setting left the man who had crossed the world alongside it dead in the center of the empire.

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<sup>49</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 42-43.

<sup>50</sup> Darwin, *Unfinished Empire*, 192.

## II - The India House Phenomenon

“What can we expect of the rising generation of young Indians if we allow their minds to be poisoned at the fountain-head in our own country by such open incitements to crime?”<sup>1</sup>

– ‘Corruptio Optimi Pessima’ in a letter to *The Times*, February 13, 1909

“Innocent of all offence, a devoted public servant, courageous and gentle, of a winning courtesy and constant self-denial, he was loved by the Princes and people and died, as he lived, in the service of India” reads the inscription hewn into a stone slab in the basement of St. Paul’s Cathedral. A guest, perhaps attending one of the frequent corporate receptions held in the church’s crypt, wanders over and through the dim lighting squints to study the sculpted visage that sits atop the memorial. As they have for over a century, the man’s marble eyes stare downward past a thick stone mustache, averting his gaze from the fate that seemed written in stone long before it was spelled out here: “Assassinated July 1st 1909 while attending an assembly of his Indian fellow subjects at the Imperial Institute in London.”

Wyllie’s earthly end itself was fairly straightforward as far as assassinations go. He and his wife were attending an ‘At Home’ held in the Imperial Institute in South Kensington, an event organized by the National Indian Association that, complete with authentic food and music, attempted to replicate an Indian social gathering. Madan Lal Dhingra, who had not attended the party, arrived on the scene around eleven o’clock as Wyllie was leaving; their paths crossed on the steps outside the Institute and Dhingra fired five shots at point blank range. Wyllie died immediately along with Cawas Lalcaca, an Indian doctor who had been

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<sup>1</sup> Corruptio Optimi Pessima. "Indian Anarchism In England." *The Times* (13 Feb. 1909): 10.

shot in an attempt to intervene. Dhingra made no attempt to resist arrest, submitting to the crowd that engulfed him and the officers who took him into custody.<sup>2</sup>

Speculation about Dhingra's motivations for the killing was rampant throughout the press, the public, and the government. Some cited a personal feud stemming from Dhingra's embittering prior encounters with Wyllie and a disdain for his parents' insistence that Wyllie rescue him from radical influences. Others chalked it up to a degree of coincidence, wondering if Wyllie, a fairly nondescript bureaucrat, had actually been the intended target; a small number of historians conjectured that Dhingra had either confused Curzon Wyllie with former Viceroy Curzon or had meant to instead assassinate William Lee-Warner, who was not present at the gathering, and spontaneously settled on Wyllie instead. A more complete explanation integrates Dhingra's personal backstory with the history of India House and its demagogues, notably Shyamji Krishnavarma and Vinayak Savarkar. Dhingra fit the bill as an assassin perfectly: a student suitably imbued with anti-imperialist feelings to justify the killing and enough of a personal motive to put it into motion.

### **The Teacher and His Protégé**

By the time that the India Office began to consider them a significant cause of concern, Indian students had been in Britain for over half a century. Dating back to the arrival of four Bengalis in 1845 who completed medical degrees in London and returned to India within five years, more highly qualified than any of their colonial peers.<sup>3</sup> Though the flow of students that these four began was little more than a trickle for the following decades,

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<sup>2</sup> Harindranath Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years: Savarkar in London* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1983), 146-7.

<sup>3</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 3

they represented the starting point for what would become a hugely influential group both in Britain during their stay and in India upon their return. The earliest of these so-called ‘England-returned’<sup>4</sup> carved out a new space in Indian society that drove increasing numbers of young men – and eventually women – from the imperial periphery to seek a Western education. The prestige of a British degree far outweighed any Indian credential and ensured both higher pay and a higher place in Indian society for such returning students compared to their peers who had never left.<sup>5</sup> Though Indian attitudes towards Western credentials would gradually lose this early adoration, it provided a key impetus for the pioneering early students.

It proved a powerful incentive. Though no comprehensive records were ever created as to the number of students that crossed the globe to seek an education in Britain’s world-renowned colleges and universities, the National Indian Association estimated that the population increased from fifty students in 1875 to 336 in 1900 and nearly a thousand by 1910.<sup>6</sup> It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that Indians began to write about their experiences abroad, a genre whose later incarnations will form basis for this thesis’s fourth chapter. *Four Years in an English University* was written by Samuel Sathianadhan during his studies from 1870-4 and form a baseline picture of college life for the earliest cadre of visiting students.<sup>7</sup> Sathianadhan provided both a narrative of his own experiences at Cambridge and an outline of how students should go about applying to British universities. The increasing Indian interest in international education didn’t always translate into a smooth

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<sup>4</sup> Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities: the England-Returned* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> A.K. Singh, *Indian Students in Britain: a Survey of Their Adjustments and Attitudes* (New York: Asia Publishing, 1963), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Lahiri *Indians in Britain*, 5

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Sathianadhan, *Four Years in an English University* (Madras: Lawrence Asylum, 1890).

process of application and acceptance. Many students had little to no idea of how the British admissions processes worked; university officials noted with frustration the large numbers of foreign students who arrived unannounced at colleges expecting to enroll without ever having applied.<sup>8</sup> Saththianadhan's book was written in conjunction with a handful of dons and administrators at Oxford and Cambridge, who probably would have liked to use it as a vehicle to correct misconceptions so as to head off uncomfortable situations like those. It was never a problem that universities were able to solve; the Bureau of Information for Indian Students that anchors this thesis's final chapter was established in 1909 in part to distribute the same sort of literature and information as Saththianadhan.

The main paths of study for Indian students abroad were medicine, law, and government, as well as a small section pursuing degrees in industry and engineering. Possibly the single most sought-after consequence of a British education was entrance into the Indian Civil Service (ICS), a position attainable only with a university degree and successful completion of a rigorous examination process held in London. Those who completed the requirements joined the ranks of a predominantly white, British government organization that conferred a prominent, if strange, place in Indian society back on the subcontinent. A.K. Singh described Western education as the single most powerful social force in twentieth century colonial India, but many older Indians opposed the growing number of England-returned students, accusing them of renouncing their cultural heritage in becoming imperial mimics.<sup>9</sup> Students also began to sow political discontent upon their return from Britain, espousing Western ideas of liberalism and exposing the apparent contradictions of universalism and empire.

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<sup>8</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/845 file 233, "Oxford to India Office."

<sup>9</sup> Singh, *Indian Students in Britain*, 25-6.

It was in this developing current of opposition that the primordial roots of the India House group began to take hold. Among the earliest Indians admitted to Oxford University was Shyamji Krishnavarma, the son of a poor family from Western India and the beneficiary of a government scholarship to cross the globe in his pursuit of the kind of education unattainable on the imperial periphery. In 1882 Krishnavarma became the first Indian to take a bachelor's degree from Oxford and was called to the Bar two years later. Krishnavarma amassed a considerable fortune upon his return home, but his widened perspective on the imperial dynamics at play in India stoked the anti-British flames that had smoldered since his years in England; he returned to London as the nineteenth century was coming to a close.

There's a subtle yet compelling bit of historiography at play in almost all the secondary literature of India House about why Krishnavarma left India in 1897, and it has more bearing on the group's larger history than it usually gets mentioned for. The details of Krishnavarma's employment in British India after his return from Oxford vary from source to source, but there is enough overlap to form a general timeline of his activities. Between his 1884 arrival in India and 1893 he practiced law and ran the businesses that made him his fortune, after which he took a seat on the Council of Udaipur.<sup>10</sup> He left early in 1895 to serve as the Diwan of Junagadh, a small district in the neighboring state of Gujarat. This is the part of the story in which he ran up against imperial problems: according to subsequent bureaucratic correspondence in September 1895, Krishnavarma had governed his district in direct opposition to orders from ICS officers and was removed from his position in the colonial government, since "the defiant attitude of the *Diwan* of an Indian State could hardly be tolerated by the British Government of India, who had always regarded not only the

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<sup>10</sup> A.C. Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad* (New Delhi: ICHR, 2002), 9.

princes but all their functionaries as sub-servient [sic] to the Resident or the Political Agent.”<sup>11</sup> Such is the narrative in all Krishnavarma’s biographical sketches, but they diverge after this point. Some cite this removal as the incident that lit Krishnavarma’s anti-British flame,<sup>12</sup> pointing the finger at A.F. Maconochie, an ICS officer that Krishnavarma had known at Oxford and who, as Srivastava hinted, only held his position in Gujarat thanks to Krishnavarma’s help.<sup>13</sup>

The more intriguing story comes from the sources that detail Krishnavarma’s attempts to get back into colonial service. After two years spent in private practice following his dismissal from Junagadh, Krishnavarma asked to return to his old position on the Council of Udaipur,<sup>14</sup> a decision left up to the state’s Resident: Sir William Curzon Wyllie.<sup>15</sup> Maconochie’s internal ICS pronouncement that Krishnavarma “was a dangerous person and further suggested that ‘all States and all Residents should be warned against him’”<sup>16</sup> led Wyllie to block his request to return. As if to add insult to injury, Wyllie reneged on an earlier promise to introduce Krishnavarma to Lord Elgin during the Viceroy’s visit to Udaipur in 1896.<sup>17</sup> These events more than those of Junagadh seem to have lent the definitive shape to Krishnavarma’s anti-British ideas and caused him to realize that the Raj was an unforgiving regime in which transgressions were not easily forgotten; his troublemaking past would limit his future in British India. Partially because of that and partially because of his

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<sup>11</sup> T.R. Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Alex Tickell, “Krishnavarma, Shyamji (1857–1930),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press), September 2012; Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> P.N. Chopra, *Indian Freedom Fighters Abroad* (New Delhi: Criterion, 1988), 89; B.S. Maighowali, *First Indian Martyr Executed in Pentonville Prison* (Hoshiarpur: V.V.R.I. Press, 1980), 71.

<sup>16</sup> Sareen, *Indian Revolutionary Movement Abroad*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Chopra, *Indian Freedom Fighters Abroad*, 79; V.N. Datta, *Madan Lal Dhingra and the Revolutionary Movement*, 9.

loose connection with imprisoned seditious printer and politician Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Krishnavarma sailed for England in 1897, never to return.

If this thesis is the story of India House as a colonial encounter that spiraled out of control, its founder's own origin story forms a fitting prologue. Krishnavarma's interactions on the subcontinent with both Maconochie and Wyllie could have been typical colonial encounters in which the British rulers put the insubordinate Indian subject back in his place, but Krishnavarma's move to England complicated the dynamic. This familiar story of the Raj reasserting its dominance was the impetus for Krishnavarma's resistance movement; instead of silencing dissent, it provoked even more, and it was an unusual moment in which a small colonial interaction gone awry eventually produced a larger one. Addressing the obvious implication here, it would be too simple to assert that by driving Shyamji Krishnavarma from India, Wyllie signed his own death warrant over a decade before the sentence was carried out. More than anything, it was fittingly emblematic of how far out of hand India House became. But that's jumping ahead a bit.

In London, Krishnavarma approached imperialism somewhat counterintuitively by offering several scholarships to young Indians wishing to follow in his steps of British study. Krishnavarma was a philosophical anti-imperialist, acutely aware of the unevenness of the British morality that awkwardly welded liberalism at home with repression and subjugation abroad. His style of nationalist action was to expose those incompatibilities to a British audience with the help of well-educated young Indians. The scholarships he endowed were given to prospective students "so as to equip themselves efficiently for the work of spreading among the people of India a knowledge of freedom and national unity"; Krishnavarma's



apparent intent was to use students as catalysts of discontent upon their return to India.<sup>18</sup> To the grants he attached an important stipulation: upon completion of a degree in Britain, their recipients agreed not to enter the ICS, eliminating a prominent motivation for many would-be students.<sup>19</sup> The Indians who received Krishnavarma's scholarships, then, were those who tended towards a negative view of British imperialism from the start.

As if to provide the vessel for fermentation, Krishnavarma purchased a large house several miles north of the River Thames for his beneficiaries. Located at 65 Cromwell Street in London's Highgate suburb, India House, as it became known, served both materially as a hostel for students during their English stay and intellectually as a conversion site where students already imbued with Krishnavarma's radical spirit could sway newcomers and add to the ranks of disgruntled imperial subjects. Krishnavarma founded the Indian Home Rule Society and its mouthpiece, the *Indian Sociologist* during his residence at the hostel. A periodical that exemplified his intellectual anti-imperialism, the *Indian Sociologist* became a prominent object of scrutiny for the larger British population, raising questions about the motives and intentions of the foreigners at the center of its empire. What in India would have certainly been considered a seditious publication from a potentially dangerous group was tolerated in Britain as a matter of press freedom, and its very existence was a testament to the topography of empire.

The imperial centrality of Krishnavarma's approach remains one of the most interesting elements of the India House story. As historian Nicholas Owen observed, revolutionary figureheads were nothing new to London. The city had provided safe haven to anarchists, socialists, and persecuted nationalists of all stripes: Marx, Lenin, Garibaldi, and

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<sup>18</sup> James C. Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-1917* (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1973), 174.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," *Past and Present* 220 (2013), 148-9.

plenty of other exiles had all used the metropolis as a liberal shield against their pursuers. That sort of radical refugee had been an escape from repression elsewhere within Europe; what was new in the case of Krishnavarma and his India House followers was their inward direction, “centripetally, to the heart of the empire that repressed them.”<sup>20</sup> The question of why Britain remained so tolerant of a group advocating anti-British measures remains a bit of a puzzle as well as an issue to be dealt with in the following chapter. For now, it simply sets the curious stage for a unique story.

From its opening in July 1905, India House assumed a prominent place in the world of Indian radicals abroad. As it gained notoriety, great numbers of anti-British and anti-imperial ideologues flocked to the hostel to deliver radical lectures, engage in debates about the fate of India and the British Empire, and to join in the increasingly devious schemes that the hostel’s ringleaders planned. Chief among these radical organizers was Vinayak Savarkar, a law student who “had already attracted attention to himself by his political activities in India.”<sup>21</sup> An early recipient of one of Krishnavarma’s scholarships, Savarkar came to London in 1906 to study at Gray’s Inn in the hopes of being called to the bar. Savarkar’s pre-England biography was one of ominous extremism, having worked with his brother Ganesh in India through the secretive Abhinav Bharat society that organized nationalist protests against imperial rule.<sup>22</sup> Upon his arrival in Highgate, he became a sort of divergent protégé under Krishnavarma, founding the Free India Society (FIS) as a militant alternative to the Indian Home Rule Society. Unlike Naoroji and Krishnavarma, Savarkar repudiated cooperation with the British and advocated total and immediate Indian

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, 144.

<sup>21</sup> Rozina Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars, and Princes* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 105.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

independence by any available means, which quickly led him to embrace the use of political violence.

This militant style was a change of pace for the Highgate radicals. Krishnavarma himself hesitated to embrace violence as a means to further the nationalist cause; rather, his *modus operandi* was to demonstrate Britain's historical commitment to ending tyranny and then to cast India's colonial plight in that same shape, in effect reworking British liberalism as a tool against British imperialism.<sup>23</sup> Krishnavarma left Highgate for Paris in the spring of 1907 in fear of legal action against *The Indian Sociologist*, and the intellectual approach he favored left the mansion with him.<sup>24</sup> Savarkar's resulting takeover of the India House leadership signaled a shift in the group's tactics towards outspoken renunciation of all things British and a violent drive to make its vision of an independent India a reality.

It was through Savarkar's Free India Society that many of the most sinister actions for which the India House is remembered were conducted. Under his direction, members of the organization authored and distributed manuals on bomb making to Indians returning to the subcontinent.<sup>25</sup> They shipped loads of revolvers and other weapons back to India and were loosely implicated in several resulting Anglo-Indian murders.<sup>26</sup> Though definitive proof eluded later investigators, several witnesses claimed that one such revolver, rather than making the passage back to India, found itself in the hands of Madan Lal Dhingra on the night of July 1, 1909, allegedly gifted by Savarkar himself.<sup>27</sup> In the popular imagination,

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<sup>23</sup> Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 149; Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 146.

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *The British Left and India: Metropolitan Anti-Imperialism, 1885-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65.

<sup>25</sup> Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 149-50.

<sup>27</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 151.

India House – Savarkar and all his revolutionary cronies – were the ones responsible for Sir William Curzon Wyllie’s death.

This is the usual imagining of India House, but such an orientalist tale of an omnipotent, sinister terrorist den is overly simplistic. The FIS conducted its share of minor militant actions, but excepting the Wyllie murder, it never truly justified the palpable dread with which it was commonly viewed. Paul Schaffel presents a more nuanced history of the group in his “Empire and Assassination,” in which he shows that rather than a tightly knit band of ruthless murderers, the true membership of the Free India Society didn’t extend far beyond Savarkar himself. Schaffel notes that while the FIS had replaced Krishnavarma’s moderate Indian Home Rule Society in 1907, the composition of its nominal membership had remained the same, implying that while India House’s mission statement had changed, it was the same group of foot soldiers – who had until then advocated cooperation with British interests – that composed the main.<sup>28</sup> Savarkar’s militancy alienated most of the hostel members, and the India Office’s intelligence supports this: by 1909, reports trickled out that India House meetings were “very poorly attended,” mentioning the “growing distrust and disunion” and its “marked abatement of activity.”<sup>29</sup> In this context of disintegrating support, declining membership, and a general disinclination from radical action, Schaffel chalks Wyllie’s assassination up to a sort of last stand for Savarkar and the Free India Society, an attempt to prove it was capable of backing up its inflammatory rhetoric with substance.<sup>30</sup> That provides an equally compelling narrative of India House’s end; rather than the flick of

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<sup>28</sup> Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 39-41.

<sup>29</sup> CID Reports quoted in Owen, *The British Left and India*, 72-3.

<sup>30</sup> Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 83.

the wrist from a powerful terrorist organization, Dhingra's shooting was the panicked last gasp of a radical group that had been dying for years.

### **Amritsar's Resentful Son**

Accounting for Madan Lal Dhingra has been a bit of a challenge for historians, and his motive, intention, and backstory are still subject to conflicting descriptions and explanations. As a personality, Dhingra seems lost to history; variously described as "tall, handsome and hefty...a dynamic patriot" by his hagiographers and an unspectacular and quiet youth – always of a brooding temperament – by more neutral observers.<sup>31</sup> There are three recurring explanations that weave in and out of India House's secondary history: the attractive ideology and personal magnetism of Savarkar, Dhingra's fermented hatred of the British, and a vendetta against Wylie common to Krishnavarma, Savarkar, and Dhingra. The three certainly aren't exclusive and indeed work well when pieced together. Savarkar had a profound effect upon Dhingra, true, but that influence required a strong anti-British foundation that had been in place long before the two first met.

Madan Lal Dhingra's name has become one and the same with Indian nationalism, but relegating him to the status of political pawn – or elevating him to political martyr – misses his compellingly human story. Paul Schaffel argued that the majority of India House students declined to act out Savarkar's militant fantasies because they came from upper-class families and feared losing their place in Indian society; Dhingra came from a similar

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<sup>31</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 148; Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities*, 96-7; Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya*, 92.

background but wound up on an entirely different trajectory.<sup>32</sup> His willingness to carry out the assassination in spite of its obvious consequences can only partially be explained in terms of India House. Madan Lal Dhingra's personal history – and what it reveals about imperialism – is crucial to understanding July 1, 1909. He came from a wealthy family in northern India with close ties to the imperial government. His life in India was an unremarkable one, attending elite schools at the insistence of his parents and lacking any indicators of latent extremism. Schaffel noted an incongruous divergence from the typical biographies of India House residents: before coming to London, Dhingra had worked as a lascar – a menial laborer typically from the lower strata of Indian society – aboard a steamship.<sup>33</sup> Here he had come into contact with the crudest elements of British society, exposed to the racism that underlay the Raj's well-meaning veneer. Schaffel and others indicate that it was his interactions with openly hateful Britons – both his coworkers and those traveling on the ship – formed the basis for his hatred of Englishmen.<sup>34</sup>

For a fairly nondescript bureaucrat, William Curzon Wyllie had the bad luck of independently ending up on the wrong side of almost everyone in India House. His feud with Krishnavarma has been mentioned earlier and his punishment by proxy for Savarkar will be covered shortly, but his relation to Dhingra was perhaps the most poignant of the three. Wyllie had established a strong connection with Dhingra's loyalist parents during his tenure in the Northwestern Frontier and his brother wrote to Wyllie in 1908 out of concern with his involvement in India House. Wyllie attempted to contact Madan Lal but, as touched on previously, whether or not Dhingra ever responded is a mystery. One chronicler of India

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<sup>32</sup> Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination," 39-40.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Maighowalia, *First Indian Martyr*, 54; Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 158-9.

House mentioned that Wyllie made several unsuccessful attempts to bring Dhingra into the fold as an India Office informant, going so far as to send a young woman “to bewitch Madanlal and elicit secrets.”<sup>35</sup> Rozina Visram argued that Madan Lal, by that point imbued with Savarkar’s ideology, came to view Wyllie as “the embodiment of the power of the occupier, under whose rule he, like so many other Indians, suffered.”<sup>36</sup> Just as Wyllie had become the personification of colonial intelligence in his work for the India Office governors, so too had he come to personally represent the ills of imperial repression in the mind of at least one of those he governed.

Why Dhingra shot Wyllie out of all the figures in the imperial government has been a question around which no shortage of historical intrigue has swirled, but this personal history offers a key nuance to the narrative. While some historians have suggested that Dhingra mistook Wyllie for either George Nathaniel Curzon or William Lee-Warner, his family’s history with Wyllie makes it hard to believe that Dhingra had confused him with another.<sup>37</sup> Wyllie was the perfect target; he satisfied both personal and political aims. As Schaffel covered extensively, Savarkar had run into trouble moving his ideological followers to action. Resentful towards the Englishmen who mocked him, the empire that followed him across the globe, and the parents who constantly pressured him into a career that didn’t interest him, Dhingra was the rare student willing to carry out the kind of violence Savarkar desired, and Wyllie provided enough of a personal motivation for Dhingra to follow through. July 1, 1909 was the ultimate colonial misencounter, in which the subject threw the imperial hierarchy into chaos.

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<sup>35</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 148-9.

<sup>36</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 159.

<sup>37</sup> Malwinder Waraich & Kuldip Puri, *Tryst with Martyrdom: Trial of Madan Lal Dhingra* (Chandigarh: Unistar, 2003), 45.

Dhingra's end came almost as swiftly as Wyllie's. His guilt was undeniable and he declined a legal defense, rendering his trial moot. The judge blocked him from reading a statement before the court, but it was published shortly after in the *Daily News* and cast his act as one of political justice and retribution for the ills visited upon India by Britain's empire.<sup>38</sup> At the urging of John Morley, who sought to avoid a prolonged legal timeline that would draw further attention to the assassin and provide him a public platform for anti-British views, Dhingra's trial moved quickly and he was sentenced to death on July 23.<sup>39</sup> Less than two months after murdering Wyllie, Dhingra was hanged at Pentonville Prison in northern London. Despite the attempts to expedite Dhingra's trial and execution, the politics of his action merited notice and reflection from many Britons. Winston Churchill himself famously remarked that Dhingra's last words – “The only lesson required in India today is how to learn how to die and the only way to teach it is by dying ourselves” – were “the finest ever made in the name of Patriotism,” exposing an uncomfortable overlap of condemnation and admiration in the British psyche.<sup>40</sup> Dhingra's body lay buried in the prison yard for decades until it was exhumed and returned to Amritsar in 1976.

## Conclusion

India House was a multi-layered story of colonial encounter gone awry. With its genesis in an administrative dispute in western India and its demise in the wake of an assassination, the group continually veered outside of the established template of controlled

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<sup>38</sup> Originally from David Garnett's *The Golden Echo*, recounted in Srivastava's *Five Stormy Years*, 167.

<sup>39</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 165.

<sup>40</sup> “Dhingra, Madan Lal (1883–1909),” Leena Dhingra in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, September 2010.



imperial interaction. It is at times difficult to avoid taking a teleological approach to India House and explaining the group solely in terms of how its story culminated with Wyllie's murder, especially given how closely entwined his life's story was with India House's. The popular narrative of a malevolent band of swarthy murderers whose lives were spent single-mindedly planning this lone moment of violent, patriotic glory is too tidy. Wyllie's death remains the most glaring event in the group's history, but it is most useful as an entry point rather than a be-all, end-all.

India House didn't exist in a vacuum. Britons after the murder were split between perceptions of Dhingra as a lone extremist madman and as a pawn in Savarkar's larger plans, but the public scrutiny soon after that fell on India House led to its disintegration. How India House was dismantled is an interesting story in itself, and one in which the India Office and Scotland Yard play only ancillary parts. Understanding the group's fall requires the conditions of its rise, which have been only explained from one perspective so far. The following chapter will attempt to explain how the anti-British India House was allowed to thrive in London for so long and then detail why it finally ended.

### **III - British Liberalism and the Diffuse Metropolitan Imperial Authority**

*“Inspector MacCarthy, the next in position to Mr. Quinn, I believe, said during our conversation that it is easier to police all India than to rule London City.”<sup>1</sup>*

– M.P.T. Acharya, July 1909

Even if Viceroy Curzon was correct in his 1899 conviction that the informal imperial information systems in India were obsolete, the myriad forces at play that allowed the influence of India House to expand and that failed to prevent William Curzon Wyllie’s assassination went far beyond that of a slightly outdated intelligence model. The two years before Wyllie’s death were littered with opportunities to take action against the obviously dangerous radical group, limited less by ignorance than a combination of tangled bureaucratic and legal jurisdictions as well as the complicated set of political attitudes that comprised Britain’s social liberalism. Indeed, the very discourse of failure isn’t entirely accurate in chronicling the interplay between Indian students and their host country, or at least their imperial government; Wyllie’s death wasn’t a failure on the part of the India Office so much as it was a consequence of Britain’s diffuse societal responsibility for the radicals.

Counterintuitively, the metropolitan center of the British Empire was the safest location for the headquarters of an anti-British resistance movement; how this was allowed to happen is one of the most complicated and fascinating elements of the India House story as well as a prologue for the narrative of post-India House students. It also has a way of demonstrating the unique importance of Indian students to the history of the empire: the

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<sup>1</sup> Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya: Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary* (New Delhi: Anmol, 1991), 98.

implications that followed from the legacy of India House were implications about the very essence of empire and the modes of imperial power. This was a singular period during which students – albeit a small and perhaps unrepresentatively extreme portion of them – briefly transcended their position in British society and served as a medium through which crucial imperial discourse was forced to flow. In doing so, India House members left an unfortunate and indelible legacy of public distrust for their peers to carry. That will come later in the chapter, exploring how what Alex Tickell termed the “repressive legal topography of empire” affected the larger student population and the India Office’s ability to monitor and influence them.<sup>2</sup> The introductory story – how not only the India Office, but Britain as a whole failed to curb India House’s rise and Wyllie’s assassination – is multi-layered and first requires a look into British liberalism.<sup>3</sup>

### **Social Citizenship and the Liberal Benefit of the Doubt**

The very existence of the British Empire seems couched in a bit of a philosophical conundrum, as the institutionalized subjugation and exploitation of human masses the world over appears squarely at odds with a society thoroughly steeped in the liberal, Lockean ideas of natural rights, essential equality, and social contracts. “How did ideas of equality, liberty and fraternity lead to empire, liberticide, and fratricide? Similarly how did a commitment to toleration lead to such patronizing and unsympathetic characterizations of the ways in which strangers lived their lives?” asked Uday Mehta, whose *Liberalism and Empires* sought to

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<sup>2</sup> Tickell, “Scholarship Terrorists,” 9

<sup>3</sup> The liberalism at work in this chapter is that of philosophy rather than politics. Though the early twentieth century was the British Liberal Party’s heyday and its views largely aligned with those developed centuries earlier by Locke and Hobbes, I use liberalism as a largely subconscious social force rather than a set of political tenets.

bridge the apparent gulf between liberal British attitudes and the repressiveness of its empire.<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Pitts reiterated the dissonance: “The endorsement of radically different political standards for different people implied by imperialism requires theoretical justifications that form an often unexpected and indeed uncomfortable element in liberal thought in the nineteenth century,” with reverberations that lasted well into the twentieth century and the course of this thesis.<sup>5</sup> The philosophical chasm evidently wasn’t as wide as might be imagined. Mehta and Pitts both keyed on liberalism’s progressive nature in resolving the ideological conflict: imperialism in the name of improving subaltern lives was considered an admirable liberal aim. It was an approach that necessarily discredited Indian experience and history as Britain sought to remodel Indian society in a Western image – progress warranted paternalism. Liberal imperialism marginalized the distinct identities of its subjects and conflated ideas of Britishness with objective superiority over Indianness, but the end goal of a rebuilt India was enough of an incentive to pacify most critics of the process.

While liberalism and empire were resolved fairly easily on the colonial periphery, the presence of colonial subjects in the metropole was another matter entirely. If there was a legal topography undergirding maps of the British Empire by 1900, there had been a moral counterpart alongside it for over a century. In 1788, Warren Hastings was brought before Parliament to face charges of impeachment over his management of the East India Company. The trial went unresolved for seven years, but it began with opening remarks from Edmund Burke, the larger than life statesman whose politics came to define modern conservatism. In his address, Burke repeatedly made reference to a “geographical morality” that typified the

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<sup>4</sup> Uday S. Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 190.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4-5.

Company's imperialism; this was a topography in which liberalism's 'universalist' principles of equality hardly extended beyond the shores of Britain and were unrecognizable in the colonial periphery.<sup>6</sup> Burke found the uneven morality troubling, and argued throughout the trial that what constituted a crime in Britain should be likewise condemned in India. Though Hastings was eventually acquitted, Burke's iteration of geographical morality outlined the discourse that India Office officials and members of the British public would later draw from as Indian students flocked to London.

The dilemma was dredged up from parliamentary annals to the forefront of British thought with the arrival of Krishnavarma and the radicals of his ilk: what rules applied to Indians in Britain? The English public and government had an intuitive sense that the newcomers were outsiders, but along what lines was that division drawn, and what kind of treatment were they entitled to?<sup>7</sup> It wasn't strictly a geographical delineation wherein everyone existing in the British Isles was free and everyone existing on the subcontinent was subjugated; that made no exceptions for travelers whose intra-empire movement was a right of citizenship. It wasn't exclusively a racial divide either, as the fundamental principles of liberalism at play in England, if not in India, allowed for equality regardless of race.<sup>8</sup>

Unraveling imperial dichotomies like these has been a tricky pursuit for historians in recent memory, with several attempts to explain the dynamics at play with regards to both Indians in London as well as a broader imperial context. As Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper wrote in the foreword to their seminal *Tensions of Empire*, "The most basic tension of empire

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<sup>6</sup> Pitts, *A Turn to Empire*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Sumita Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities*, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 146. "Colonial rule at the metropole could be neither comfortably left to the workings of 'invisible' self-discipline, nor governed by the racial differentiation employed in India."

[was that] the otherness of colonized persons was neither inherent nor stable; his or her difference had to be defined and maintained.”<sup>9</sup> Particularly true in this specific setting, the incongruous juxtaposition of liberal Western attitudes with imperial subjugation was an awkward contradiction that didn’t resolve naturally in Britain and required a mechanism to quiet the dissonance. Historian Nicholas Owen later expanded on one such delineating apparatus that defined the uneasy boundary between different populations in London by proposing that Indian students could be treated as equals in the metropole provided they conformed with British norms. Residence in Britain offered them political protection from the kind of persecution they would face for illegal actions in India, but acceptance into British life was a revocable privilege doled out by private intermediaries. Owen wrote that “The celebratory accounts of resistance that dominate the secondary literature [of India House] go wrong because they assume that colonial rule at the metropole was simply racially formed before arrival...Because colonial rule at the metropole held out the possibility of acceptance, however conditionally, it placed Indians in a dilemma too.”<sup>10</sup> This was a fluid characterization of imperial acceptance that goes a long way in explaining both why India House radicals were initially allowed to flourish and also why they were eventually driven away. He describes life in London for these students – and by extension, their less radical counterparts – as a sort of probation in which the British public greeted them with a liberal benefit of the doubt, but their moral character was under constant assessment; within this framework, the Wyllie murder was the impetus for the revocation of what might be best described as their *social citizenship*.

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick Cooper & Ann Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony,” in *Tensions of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire,” 147.

This informal membership into British society extended the protections afforded all Britons to Indian visitors on a provisional basis while maintaining an underlying imperial hierarchy. It allowed for the resolution of geographical imperial dissonance by superficially placing Indians and Britons on roughly the same societal standing in the metropole while also reinforcing the more powerful underlying imperial strata by leaving the power to determine social citizenship in the hands of the British.<sup>11</sup> Situating liberalism within imperialism isn't a new concept; indeed, the two may be more compatible than initially seems possible. Uday Mehta's "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion" in *Tensions of Empire* explored the feasibility of imperial repression within a superficially universalist philosophy: "...behind the capacities ascribed to all human beings there exist a thicker set of social credentials that constitute the real bases of political inclusion...What is concealed behind the endorsement of these universal capacities are the specific cultural and psychological conditions woven in as preconditions for the actualization of these capacities."<sup>12</sup> While Britons treated Indians as nominal equals in the metropole, their difference was undeniable, if hard to pin down; simply put, ordinary British citizens knew that Indians were different from them but remained unsure of how to vocalize that difference within the discourse of liberalism. Social citizenship gave them a mechanism to act as liberal endorsers while simultaneously reinforcing the hierarchy they sat atop. It was a reincarnation of Burke's detested geographical morality, assigning social privileges to Indians in London to a degree that far exceeded what the same individuals would have received in India.

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<sup>11</sup> "In Britain civil liberties were not enforceable rights, but privileges which, for their full value, required endorsement by British intermediaries." Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 181.

<sup>12</sup> Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion," in *Tensions of Empire*, ed. by Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, 61.

This is an important nuance in chronicling the integration of official and unofficial powers in the oversight of foreign students. Richard J. Popplewell wrote that “The British government and British law effectively protected the Indians in London from the justice administered by the Government of India, a strange anomaly which was largely attributable to a strong attachment to ‘liberal’ values within British governing circles.” This was a fair assessment of the philosophical barrier between imperial government and subjects abroad that he unnecessarily characterized in his subsequent claim that “This was the single most important cause of the failure by the authorities to respond to the threat which the nationalists posed.”<sup>13</sup> Liberalism had implications on both official and unofficial fronts in Edwardian London, and while it weakened the government’s ability to formally control Indian students, it strengthened the English public’s informal control over them. Popplewell was correct in emphasizing the imperial government’s powerlessness in dealing with extremists, but he neglected to account for the role of Owen’s private intermediaries that dictated how seriously to take the nationalist threat; in turn, Owen stops short of examining what powers the imperial government was allowed to utilize against a group whose members’ actions had implicitly renounced their social citizenship in England. The two narratives work best when put into dialogue – when Popplewell picks up where Owen leaves off – which is one of the aims of this chapter.

This historical guideline within the confines of liberalism – societal acceptance contingent on adherence to British norms – is particularly effective at explaining the rise and fall of India House, but also sets up well for eventually charting attitudes toward typical, non-militant students after 1909. The role of liberalism in Owen’s account of India House forms

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<sup>13</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 126.



an almost literal narrative arc of its own, tracing the initial acceptance and private support the students enjoyed on their protected upswing and then the reversal and downward slide toward persecution and exile. On the surface, the tipping point for India House appears to have been the evening of July 1, 1909, but momentum against those students had been building within official circles for some time before then.

### **Highgate's Social Shield**

Before delving into how Owen's unofficial intermediaries finally brought India House down, it's worth noting how liberalism protected the radicals in the first place. "The India Office found it could do very little about what Secretary of State John Morley termed 'these nests of *diablerie*.' In London, basic liberal freedoms of movement, expression and association and the right to a fair trial could not be suspended for Indians" wrote Owen, noting that the protection afforded to the students had a counter effect on the government's ability to officially control them.<sup>14</sup> Liberal norms constituted a key element of the difference between governmental attempts at surveillance in Britain and in India. While the Indian Penal Code was largely unbound from these sorts of restrictions on what constituted acceptable methods of collecting intelligence, policing the same people in Britain required a different approach.<sup>15</sup> While some in the India Office were in favor of a heavier police focus on Indian dissidents in London, their boss was not. Morley, a staunch Liberal, strongly

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<sup>14</sup> Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 150

<sup>15</sup> [Morley] felt that there should appear to be no need for repression at home just when liberal measures were being introduced into India itself." Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 128, referring to the 1909 Indian Councils Act that expanded India's legal capabilities towards self-government.

opposed the kind of explicit surveillance that characterized intelligence on the subcontinent and forbid the use of spies under the formal purview of the India Office.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the official crackdown that finally split India House in 1910 was only possible after the revocation of their provisional citizenship voided their liberal protection; until Wyllie's death, private British society had been superficially warm towards at least the idea of the radicals' presence in London and wielded more imperial power than the government itself. A crucial element of England's appeal to radicals was the evident confusion within official circles regarding what rules applied to colonial subjects and who would enforce them. Per Owen,

Power was not concentrated in the hands of the state, but dispersed among many non-state institutions, actors, and associations that stood apart from the state...Although the state did not control them, they were nonetheless governed by internally enforced codes of behaviour...Being a 'reasonable litigant' in court, a 'respectable lobbyist' at Westminster, a 'responsible journalist' in Fleet Street or a 'good chap' at university was a necessary condition for equal treatment. Furthermore, full entitlement to civil liberties could not be obtained by Indians directly, but only via British intermediaries.<sup>17</sup>

These intermediaries – Owen cites MPs, editors, college tutors, and the benchers at the Inns of Court as prime examples – had more influence in deciding a foreigner's status than the imperial government, forming a largely impermeable social shield along liberal philosophical lines that protected colonial subjects, whether they were loyalists or dissidents. This can also help to explain the widespread public anxieties that, among other things, sparked the

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<sup>16</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 127. William Lee-Warner, though often characterized as a staunch defender of student autonomy and liberal privilege, was one of the foremost advocates for traditional espionage against India House. "Sir William Lee-Warner, who had governed in India itself, itched for a more imperial style of policing, using surveillance and close control...Morley refused to allow the infiltration of India House or the shadowing of students. Lee-Warner wrote privately to India in 1907 to ask the government of India to go behind Morley's back, but they did not dare." Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 157.

<sup>17</sup> Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 162.

certificate of identity scheme in the first place: unofficial British bodies had an extraordinary degree of influence over foreigners in the metropole. Early in the history of Indian students, the few who had become destitute or violated British social codes were the impetus for the first reforms, due in large part to their relation to private English life. For the majority of ordinary students between 1900 and 1909, however, the difference between being judged in official and unofficial circles was academic; most had committed no mistakes of substance that would have been grounds for either governmental or private rebuke.

If it was the benchers and press editors of London that wielded actual influence over foreign students, the city itself set a perfect, quintessentially imperial stage.<sup>18</sup> Recall Jonathan Schneer, who argued that “imperialism was central to the city’s character in 1900, apparent in its workplaces, its venues of entertainment, its physical geography, its very skyline; apparent, too, in the attitudes of Londoners themselves...the imperial metropolis was not so much a machine for making money as it was, at least potentially, a machine for making imperialist-minded citizens.”<sup>19</sup> In this vein, those tasked with soft imperial power were not only aware of their influence, they were imbued with it by virtue of the city they inhabited. This fits together nicely with Owen’s argument to form a picture of London through a student’s eyes as a place where harsh colonial laws no longer applied but where the empire’s influence was unavoidable. All in all, as Owen suggests, “Britain [was] more a stifling than a

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<sup>18</sup> This is a discussion that could most likely be applied to most of Britain but that I, for the sake of centrality and relative brevity, will confine to London. The poignancy of the metropole makes for compelling history, and most of the literature on the topic focuses likewise on the city; while the same diffuse and informal imperial authority may have been exercised across Britain, nowhere was it more evident and omnipresent than London.

<sup>19</sup> Schneer, *London, 1900*, 13.

supportive place,” a legal and intellectual safe haven that nonetheless reserved the ability to turn limitless social power against dissidents.<sup>20</sup>

London had played host for decades to moderate Indian nationalist voices. Dadabhai Naoroji was chief among them. The British Committee of the Indian National Congress and other organizations of its ilk were anti-imperial groups in the metropole, yes, but their nationalism was contingent upon engaging with British rulers in an attempt to demonstrate their ability to self-govern.<sup>21</sup> Nationalism by emulation was much more tempered than that which India House represented. This was a societally acceptable discourse for Indian nationalism and the public pushback was minimal; Naoroji’s social citizenship was never truly in danger.

The members of India House were the first Indian students to truly take advantage of London as a patch of legally unmonitored freedom for explicitly anti-British, rather than simply anti-imperialist, ends. “We were always expecting a raid accustomed as Indians were to such possibilities, nay certainties, in India. But the Police in London was more circumspect than in India, since they were unable to raid unless they had certain evidence that something terrible was being perpetrated” recalled one student, expressing a degree of incredulity at the freedom afforded to him and his peers at the Highgate hostel.<sup>22</sup> Even such a cursory grasp of British restraint as his empowered India House members; a more nuanced understanding of the British laws in action confirmed the leaders’ senses of security. As Alex Tickell described it, “Krishnavarma and Savarkar both trained as lawyers and were keenly aware of disparities in the repressive legal topography of empire; in fact their greater freedom

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<sup>20</sup> Owen, “The Soft Heart of the British Empire,” 181.

<sup>21</sup> Schneer, *London, 1900*, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya*, 85.

from prosecution and censorship in the metropolitan centre, beyond the powers of the Indian Penal Code, was one of the immediate attractions of a base in London.”<sup>23</sup>

Almost by accident, Krishnavarma had found a weak spot of the British Empire...Attachment to liberal values at home meant that even as repression was visited on Indians in India, there was much less restriction on their activities in England. The press was largely free to publish what it wanted...Political meetings on Indian questions were sometimes attended by India Office officials, but were not subject to the surveillance or bans deployed in India. In India, postal censorship had been a common nuisance for Extremists, but there was little of it in England.<sup>24</sup>

This awareness of imperial loopholes played more into Krishnavarma’s philosophical anti-imperialism than Savarkar’s militancy, but putting Tickell into conversation with Owen leaves readers with a sense that both of India House’s leaders had perhaps overvalued British headquarters. They had leaned too much on its legal merits and neglected to consider their own slipping social standing.

By the time that unofficial opinion was turning on India House, Krishnavarma had long since departed for Paris and Savarkar now bore the full brunt of British dissatisfaction, unaware of – or perhaps unconcerned with – the shifting pressure. This is where Paul Schaffel makes an important contribution to understanding the pre-assassination decline of India House: by 1909, Savarkar’s commitment to violence had alienated almost every member of India House and had left him nearly alone in his disregard for public opinion. By assuming that his legal immunity in Highgate translated into complete societal autonomy, Savarkar missed what had long been evident to even the hostel’s more outspoken radicals: seditious behavior had the potential to damage their personal prospects. “These [common members of India House] were not like Savarkar: they and their families made up the social

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<sup>23</sup> Tickell, “Scholarship Terrorists,” 9.

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *The British Left and India*, 64.

and intellectual elite of India, and although they were willing to discuss revolution, to actually act out against the British was a risk that most were not willing to take...For most members of India House, either law or medical students, even a minor offense...could have jeopardized an entire career.”<sup>25</sup> Predictably, Savarkar’s aggression caught up with his own societal aspirations: he was blocked – partially on the recommendation of none other than Curzon Wylie<sup>26</sup> – from being called to the Bar early in 1909.<sup>27</sup> “[Savarkar and one other radical] have been accused of being concerned in the propaganda which is said to have its headquarters in this country at ‘India House’...It is alleged that the two Indian students of Gray’s Inn have frequented ‘India House’ and that one of them has been one of the ‘managers’ of that institution” read an announcement in *The Times* in May 1909, a condemnation of Savarkar that implicitly marked India House as an entity capable of conferring guilt by association.<sup>28</sup> The Inns of Court were clearly turning on the group by then; in addition to postponing Savarkar’s call to the Bar, Krishnavarma had officially been disbarred less than two weeks prior for quoting the *Indian Sociologist* in a column he penned for *The Times* in February 1909.<sup>29</sup> The legal education system and the British press were prominent unofficial intermediaries responsible for deciding social citizenship, and India House had very publicly lost their collective blessing even before Dhingra’s shooting.

Printed India House propaganda had long been tolerated in Britain as a matter of press freedom, but by early 1909 even that tie was fraying. Krishnavarma had never run up

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<sup>25</sup> Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 39-40.

<sup>26</sup> This is a multilayered moment in that it shows a government official influencing one of the unofficial bodies that wielded soft power over the students. Still, Gray’s Inn was an independent institution that made the decision to not call Savarkar to the Bar of its own volition; it is consistent with Owen’s argument.

<sup>27</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 131.

<sup>28</sup> “Calls To The Bar Postponed.” *The Times* (7 May 1909): 4.

<sup>29</sup> “Indian Anarchism: Mr. Krishnavarma Disbarred,” *The Times* (4 May 1909): 4. Savarkar wasn’t permanently blocked from the Bar; rather, befitting this liberal narrative, his call was postponed until an investigation into his alleged seditious activity provided a definitive conclusion.

against the problem of finding an avenue for publishing his moderate nationalist literature during his time in England; his opinion pieces were regularly printed in *The Times* and even the more radical *Indian Sociologist* had backers in the form of British Leftist publishers. Savarkar's more inflammatory propaganda had already strained relations with his publishers, however, and his attempts to publish his newest book, *The Indian War of Independence*, were the breaking point. An extremist retelling of the 1857 sepoy revolt as a thoroughly nationalist attempt at revolution against British rule, the manuscript was condemned by the India Office and banned in British India even before its publication, rendering it untouchable for British printers. M.P.T. Acharya – one of Savarkar's few truly dedicated lieutenants whose story will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter – described the process of trying to publish it, demonstrating the group's awareness of both imperial topography and its members' own social citizenships:

Since it could not be published in India in Marathi, Savarkar wanted it to be published abroad even in English. In England no firm would print it, although the materials were culled from books and documents published in England itself. If any Indian undertook to publish it in England or Europe, he was likely-nay, certain to be prosecuted...Many of the students who did not sympathise with [Savarkar's] views of independence or even were afraid of association with him were willing to contribute funds for the publication...All were afraid that their studies and career would be ruined if their names leaked out in that connection. We found a German agent for a Continental printing firm and he undertook to get it printed. But when he saw the contents and showed it to a lawyer, he said his business would be ruined if the firm is known to undertake such works.<sup>30</sup>

The strain that Savarkar's quest for publication placed not only on printing firms but on his own followers was intense, and doubtless contributed to India House's attrition by 1909. His pushes for action cost Savarkar his physical space within India House itself; following a

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<sup>30</sup> Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya*, 91.

falling-out with Harran Singh in May 1909, Savarkar left the hostel and conducted the activities of the FIS off site.

Dhingra's murder forced students' hands: either condemn India House and attempt to hold on to their provisional citizenship or remain outspoken extremists and suffer the societal consequences. "Ironically the British public opinion though avowedly committed to the intrinsic worth of freedom of expression and open debate, the hallmark of a liberal society, started resenting such ventilation of feelings and ideas by Indians" wrote Malwinder Waraich of the palpable shift in British attitudes following the shooting.<sup>31</sup> The press became a medium for anti-nationalist diatribes, peppered by columns from ex-government officials condemning Indian nationalism in all its forms. Extremist and moderate alike were deemed seditious and pressured to immediately adopt pro-imperial views at the risk of losing their social citizenship. Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, an outspoken revolutionary who had co-edited the *Indian Sociologist* during his stay at the Highgate house, penned an editorial in *The Times* criticizing this homogenization of perceived anti-Britishness; less than a week later, he had been disbarred from the Middle Temple.<sup>32</sup> As a column published on July 6, 1909 demonstrated, anything less than complete renunciation of nationalist sentiments would lead to a suspicion of complicity with the murder: "If the Nationalists...act up to their professions [of innocence] and strenuously exert their undoubted influence to discourage the gospel of sedition and violence...we shall put faith in the assurances we receive that no underground links exist between the open and the secret movements."<sup>33</sup> Statements like these strongly

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<sup>31</sup> Waraich & Puri, *Tryst with Martyrdom*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian Anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21-2.

<sup>33</sup> "The Indian Murders." *The Times* (6 July 1909): 11.



implied a larger conspiracy in the Wyllie murder, referring to the “undoubted influence” of organized nationalists that could move impressionable young Indians to violence.

The public’s fear of conspiracy paved the way for the India Office to take action against India House by connecting the group with the actions of one of its members. Retired ICS officer F.A. Steel authored a letter to *The Times* in which he decried John Morley’s plodding, deliberate measures in retaliating against India House:

The remarks of many [Liberals] force me to implore the British public no longer to allow itself to be hoodwinked by the feeble, maudlin drivel with which it is sought to confuse the issues in India...I say it advisedly as one who has tried to touch the Indian temperament, and I am sure all with experience of that temperament will bear me out, there is no line of demarcation in the minds of the millions of Indians between the ‘unrest’ which produces a crop of disloyal questions in Parliament or edits a paper like *India* and the anarchism which wantonly murders a friend simply because he is an Englishman. Life is very simple to the ploughman at his plough; he cannot differentiate between disloyal deeds. Why should we?<sup>34</sup>

The vitriol of Steel’s letter stood in marked contrast to the tempered response of the India Office and presented a clear boundary line for students, claiming that disloyalty to any degree was tantamount to conspiracy to murder. If Indian students had until then enjoyed the British public’s liberal benefit of the doubt, Steel’s insistence that Britons should treat them with unrelenting suspicion showed that such patience had eroded completely. This kind of reaction put an unfair pressure on the India Office: previously hamstrung by liberalism’s protection of India House, Morley and his bureaucrats were harangued almost immediately after Wyllie’s death for not acting swiftly enough to bring India House down. This public pressure allowed the India Office to change its policy towards students more generally, as will be covered more extensively in the final chapter, but it took cooperation from multiple

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<sup>34</sup> “The Murder Of Sir Curzon Wyllie.” *The Times* (6 July 1909): 10. Partially quoted in Waraich & Puri, *Tryst with Martyrdom*, 41.

imperial agencies and the formation of a new intelligence network to fully topple India House itself.

### **Liquidating India House**

This is the point to strike a balance between the histories of Nicholas Owen and Richard Popplewell and acknowledge that however powerless the imperial government had been in preventing the rise of India House, the revocation of the group's social citizenship also had consequences for how the India Office and Scotland Yard could attack it. Absent the protection of liberal Britain, the agencies – increasingly in coordination with authorities based in India – were able to employ more traditional modes of espionage and pressure against the radicals. The imperial government was able to manipulate the empire's topography against them; while India House members had stood atop a protected legal peak in London, they began to slide back towards danger after Scotland Yard chased them out of Britain. The on-the-fly yet effective integration of multiple policing agencies in the aftermath of the Dhingra shooting demonstrated the restrictive power of the empire's official bodies that had bubbled underneath the India House situation for years but had been restrained by liberal norms until Wyllie's death.

The official crackdown that finally split India House was the result of a new partnership between the India Office and Scotland Yard, coupled with cooperation from the Criminal Intelligence Department (CID) in India. Previously separated by petty bureaucratic disputes over jurisdiction and the difficulties of including a department on the other side of the globe, the agencies begrudgingly joined forces following Wyllie's death; the India Office

acted as the brains of the operation and Scotland Yard and the CID provided the manpower and policing experience. With no real precedent, their combined response was largely improvised, rather than as cohesive or meticulously planned as some have suggested.<sup>35</sup> By the end of August 1909, the CID had sent a pair of Indian agents for the purpose of infiltrating India House in conjunction with India Office and Scotland Yard efforts to prove the hostel's connection to the since-executed Dhingra. Most of the students in Britain had by that point either denounced India House or renounced their social citizenship, and the official aim was to demolish the remaining radicals through legal means rather than continuing to leave their fate to liberal social forces..

Morley initially sought to establish Dhingra as a lone actor as an attempt to discredit his political motivations, but the opportunity to connect him to India House – and in doing so allow Scotland Yard to finally split the group – proved a more enticing approach. These new methods weren't immediately effective and demonstrated the lingering restrictions of liberalism that hampered police action. While Dhingra was tried and executed with unusual speed, establishing the direct link between him and India House that would allow the government to take action against the group proved difficult. As the virulent columns that peppered *The Times* and other newspapers showed, Morley's cautious approach was neither popular nor effective. Rather than prosecuting students outright, the agencies' first move was a more implicit threat. "As the Scotland Yard could not prevent movements of any person in the name of preventing crime, they asked [my friend] to induce me to leave for America" wrote one India House member in the days immediately after Wyllie's death when the

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<sup>35</sup> Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination," 103.

agencies were still organizing their efforts.<sup>36</sup> Days later, the same student, M.P.T. Acharya, assaulted an English barrister at a public meeting about Dhingra and was detained by the police: “I was taken into a separate room by secret police and I thought they were going to take me into a lock-up that night. But they simply asked for my name and address and let me go. I was surprised and learnt that in England beating a man is a private civil affair and the aggrieved party had to go to court.”<sup>37</sup> Acharya’s record of events is a fascinating counterview against Popplewell’s assessment of the crackdown, as it shows what effect the governmental efforts actually had on India House members. In a follow-up visit to Scotland Yard offices from the assault at Caxton Hall, the police chief attempted to enlist Acharya’s help as a spy: “He told me if I cared, I could have help for study if I found out if there was any conspiracy and who were in it. I declined to do such a job as it was neither of my liking nor in my interest.”<sup>38</sup> This intimation was one of the first instances that any branch of the government had attempted to place an informant within Indian student circles; there had been several casual informants who passed information along to individual members of the India Office, but none under the direct auspices of government.<sup>39</sup> Morley had largely forbidden spying on students as a matter of liberal principle; Acharya’s exchange with the head of Scotland Yard suggested that protection along that line and others like it was vanishing almost immediately after Wyllie’s murder.

In the absence of liberal norms, Scotland Yard and the India Office increasingly employed traditional methods of espionage to prove India House’s malfeasance. Scotland

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<sup>36</sup> Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya*, 92

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, 94-5.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, 97.

<sup>39</sup> Most notably Lee-Warner, who Popplewell mentions had a spy named Fazlbhoy within “seditious circles.” *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 127. Recall Lee-Warner’s proclivity for surveillance and close control detailed in note 16.

Yard was ill-suited to the task; there hadn't been any major terrorist activity inside Britain since the 1880s, and the cultural and linguistic divides between Britons and Indians were an enormous obstacle in attempting to monitor the radicals.<sup>40</sup> By August 1909, the India House mansion in Highgate was vacant, but many of its former lodgers and members of the FIS were still in London.<sup>41</sup> Scotland Yard enlisted many of their landlords as informants and tasked detectives with following prominent FIS members day and night.<sup>42</sup> Establishing a link proved slow going, but the presence of spies in the group's midst had made FIS members extremely paranoid by 1910; Savarkar, now lodging above a dingy restaurant in Holborn, had cut himself off from almost all his former friends and allies. He had been under constant indirect assault since July: his brother had been sentenced to life in prison, his father-in-law had been fired without cause, and his sister was constantly harassed by police in India.<sup>43</sup> To make the attack even more pointed, the CID sent a seasoned detective from India to assist detectives in London. John Wallinger spoke three Indian languages and had broken up several revolutionary plots in princely states; he was the first bond in an inter-agency connection that would become the Indian Political Intelligence Office. The reach of this shadowy organization will be further explored in the final chapter.

Though the spies and informants failed to yield evidence of a direct conspiracy stemming from India House or the Free India Society, the authorities were nonetheless able to prosecute many prominent members by exploiting a familiar topography. Absent any direct, convincing connection between Dhingra and a larger conspiracy, the India Office and Scotland Yard sought to scare students out of Britain, often back to India where they might

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<sup>40</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 126.

<sup>41</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 193.

<sup>42</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 132-3.

<sup>43</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 191-4.

be subject to harsher laws. “Accepting that it was impossible to police Britain as they did in India, the authorities now sought to ensure that Indian agitators were subject to Indian rules, and enjoyed no benefit from the freer atmosphere of Britain” wrote Nicholas Owen; in an ironic twist, the same legal unevenness that had protected radicals in London was reversed as they were pressured to return to India and its repressive laws. B.C. Pal, publisher of a notorious anti-British journal, found that the Raj had outlawed its distribution in India. His income dried up and London’s expenses forced him to return to the subcontinent, at which point he was immediately arrested for sedition.<sup>44</sup> Even Britons sympathetic to the radical cause found themselves in trouble; the *Indian Sociologist*, long a focal point of British criticism, was similarly shut down. Though it was written by radicals in Paris, its distribution was significantly hampered following the successful prosecution of two of its British publishers in late 1909.<sup>45</sup> The nationalist cause was dwindling: most Indians had renounced it and the remaining proponents had been driven out of the country and imprisoned, and, its views had been suppressed in the press. This was only made possible with the implicit approval of Britain’s private intermediaries; until Dhingra gave the government a tangible reason to act against agitators, Britain’s liberal society had prevented the kind of espionage and harassment that finally brought the group down by mid-1910. The empire’s legal topography had inverted under the radicals’ feet and now worked against them to enable their prosecution away from Britain.

## **Conclusion**

The difference between the impotence of the India Office and the integrated, well-organized crackdown that finally toppled India House was its tacit acceptability in the wake

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<sup>44</sup> Owen, *The British Left and India*, 73-4; “The Soft Heart of the British Empire,” 155.

<sup>45</sup> James D. Hunt, *Gandhi in London* (New Delhi: Promilla, 1993), 139.

of revoked social citizenship. India House's members had either scattered or been arrested; Savarkar was no exception. Scotland Yard and the India Office had been able to formulate a sufficiently strong case for his extradition to India by the time he fled Britain in January 1910 to join Krishnavarma and another group of nationalists in Paris; he made an ill-advised return trip to London several months later and was promptly arrested.<sup>46</sup> He was put on a ship destined for India to face harsher sedition and conspiracy charges, but as the steamer made a stop at Marseilles, Savarkar leapt from a porthole and swam to the French shore. What followed was a legal nightmare: despite his apparently successful stunt in an attempt to claim asylum, a French policeman turned Savarkar back over to the British.<sup>47</sup> An appeal at The Hague upheld Savarkar's extradition and he was sent to India as planned, where he received two life sentences in prison.

The government had dismantled India House's leadership, but the public took care of the rest. "True, only Savarkar had been removed in handcuffs. But the rest had been shaped and directed by power of a softer kind, exercised in multiple and dispersed way, and only loosely co-ordinated, if at all, by the state,"<sup>48</sup> wrote Nicholas Owen. While interdepartmental cooperation had set the tone for a more effective official global network, the newly hostile public opinion would continue to dictate the status of Indian students in England; this will be explored more deeply in the final chapter.

As far as the general student population went, this kind of exceptional counter response was never necessary; however, its lessons about the effects of liberalism and imperial geography had broader implications. Even those who professed themselves

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<sup>46</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 217-9.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, 242-5.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, "The Soft Heart of the British Empire," 181.

moderates following Dhingra's murder were subject to increased scrutiny. They may have retained their social citizenship, but they had decisively lost the public's benefit of the doubt. Dissent of even the smallest degree no longer enjoyed liberal tolerance in post-Wyllie Britain, as Britons now tended to lump nationalists of all stripes, Moderate or Extremist, into the same unwelcome category. London, initially a safe haven for anti-imperialist Indians, contained more traps than Savarkar and his followers had anticipated.

This chapter speaks emphatically to the theme of colonial encounter that spans this thesis, even if it bubbled beneath the surface. The following chapter will examine London encounters from students' perspectives in greater detail, but colonial interactions cut both directions. For students, London may have been the first site of encounter with ordinary British people; as will be discussed shortly, interactions in the metropole were largely free of the official repression that characterized interactions on the periphery. Similarly, these students were the first Indians that many Britons had ever met; encounters in the metropole offered colonial subjects a chance to prove they belonged but also to reinforce negative stereotypes. London was a social minefield for visiting students, upon which many tread unaware of its existence. Failure to conform to British norms was grounds for suspicion and ill treatment, especially in a world no longer inhabited by Sir William Curzon Wyllie.

To say a few final words on Wyllie, history seems torn between irony and aptness to categorize his death. That a man who devoted his working life to Indian students – although whether for their benefit or repression is fair game for interpretation – had it ended by one such student is a finish to his arc that almost appears scripted. Among the hagiographers of India House, the writers who published semi-researched histories of the group and made legends of its leaders, the murder was an unsurpassably fitting end to a life that personified



imperial hubris and control. “Wyllie, eulogized by *The Times* as a lover of ‘justice and fair play,’ was not seen in the same light by the Indian students. They found his arrogant behaviour ‘obnoxious.’” wrote Rozina Visram decades later; even unbiased chroniclers understood the radicals’ disdain for the man.<sup>49</sup> For historians without personal vendetta against a long-dead bureaucrat and an eye towards the longer term story of colonial students in Britain, the murder may also seem symbolic, if in a slightly less vindictive manner. Wyllie’s bloodied body underscored the impossibility of the empire’s goal of suppressing nationalism, but whether that task was fundamentally unattainable from the start or if it was only made so by the zeal of its opponents forms a historiographical debate that seems unresolvable between the two sides.

In a sense, the myriad jingoistic obituaries and memorials that followed July 1, 1909 were right: Wyllie was a martyr after all, though not for Britain or for the empire as they imagined it. Placing the blame for his death squarely on the India Office’s shoulders is an unfair and incomplete assessment. India House succeeded in rising to prominence because it put the imperial government’s policy in a position that it was never intended to navigate in the first place; with no recourse to tangible action before the assassination because of Britain’s liberal stance on the students, the India Office had no real choice but to continue its information collection tactics. If anything, it was this obsession with information that would eventually allow the India Office and its governmental cooperators to prove beyond a liberal shadow of a doubt that India House was an unacceptable element in British society. Perhaps liberalism required someone like Wyllie to die in the way that he did before a complete

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<sup>49</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 159.

unofficial severance of ties with the radicals made an official crackdown possible, his death unleashing the system that he had worked for decades to build.

## **IV - Different Shades of Nationalism: Student Perspectives**

Many famous names form part of this roll call of British-educated elite: Gandhi and Jinnah, both law students, Nehru, who spent seven years in Britain, first at Harrow, then at Cambridge and finally at the Inner Temple, and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, who was at Somerville College, Oxford. There were hundreds of others, less well known. Some have left us records of their experiences, but the majority are merely names in the registers of their universities, or sometimes in official government records.<sup>1</sup>

– Rozina Visram, *Asians in Britain*

For all of the attention paid by contemporaries and historians alike to the few radicals that left the most explosive impressions on the collective British mind, the history of Indian students is hardly comprised solely of the militants, the agitators, and the aspiring revolutionaries. Similarly, though even the years before Sir Curzon Wylie's assassination were peppered by anxieties about domestic terrorism stemming from Indian students, fears of overt violence form only a portion of the larger narrative of British attitudes towards this group of foreigners. Britons had been wary of India's hopeful intellectuals since they first stepped off arriving ships in the nineteenth century for reasons ranging from a general unease with the presence of such potentially influential imperial subjects to more acute concerns about supposed Indian characteristics that clashed with British self-perceptions.

### **Public Perceptions of Indian Students**

Though the radicals who comprised the history of India House were a tiny minority of the total population of students, they attracted an outsize share of attention and cast the mold against which the rest of the students would be judged. Despite a fairly uneventful history, the overall population of Indian students – even without the radicals – commanded plenty of

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<sup>1</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 86.

influence in England whether they wanted to or not, especially in the empire's metropolitan heart. As Jonathan Schneer put it a century later,

“India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, occupying a vital space in the imaginations of Londoners. Consequently India's children in the capital city had a role to play disproportionate to their numbers. They were active not so much in local affairs as in helping to shape the emerging ambiguous and much-qualified discourse of anti-imperialism.”<sup>2</sup>

That is to say that the early Indian students – roughly those who arrived before 1910 – were immensely significant for the ways in which Britons imagined their amorphous empire, not so much as result of anything that they did but rather by virtue of their presence. The British response – both public and official – to these generally unobtrusive students' presence is telling about the larger imperial attitudes of Britons as well as how those attitudes were formed and how they could evolve; recall Nicholas Owen's argument about the imperial soft power of private British intermediaries. Britons were fairly receptive judges, and their pronouncements on the acceptability of Indian students were in general in response to students' actions rather than exclusively defined by preconceived notions borne out of racism or xenophobia.

Far from existing in a vacuum, students who came to Britain from India were quickly subject to scrutiny from the Britons with whom they shared their lecture halls and city streets. Initially treated as objects of curiosity for fashionable English society,<sup>3</sup> the increasing flow of students to Britain humanized them in the eyes of their peers, though not always positively. Testimony provided for an India Office committee in 1907 suggested that prejudice along

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<sup>2</sup> Schneer, *London, 1900*, 184.

<sup>3</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 153.

racial lines indeed existed between Britons and Indians, but that its roots were counterintuitively found in classism rather than racism. Per historian Sumita Mukherjee, “although racial prejudice existed, class prejudice was more noticeable in the universities against Indians who were deemed to have adopted the characteristics of the lower classes.”<sup>4</sup> Inherent biases against Indians students were therefore less important than how Indians behaved in relation to British social expectations. This fits tightly alongside the earlier argument drawn in the previous chapter from Nicholas Owen’s “The Soft Heart of Empire” that visiting foreigners in general – and students in particular – were afforded social citizenship until they proved themselves unworthy in British eyes. In as class-conscious of a society as Edwardian London, association with the working class of the city constituted acceptable grounds for revocation; this was a transgression stemming from ignorance rather than malice, but it was a mark against students regardless.

### **The Slow Burn of Jagmenderlal Jaini**

The biographies of the brightest-burning England-returned are numerous and thorough enough to render much exploration of them here redundant, but the majority of Indian students didn’t return from Britain on a Gandhi- or Nehru-esque trajectory towards revolution and immortality. For all their prestige and advantages, most of the returning students led fairly normal lives but carried interesting experiences from their time in Britain that reveal much about life in the imperial center and a unique qualification to tell their stories. Plenty of England-returned students penned memoirs later in their life about their

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<sup>4</sup> Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities*, 58.

British reminiscences, almost all of which were written following independence and undoubtedly muddled by the passage of decades. More true to reality and more relevant to this work are the few student works that were written during their time abroad; though not much of these sort of literature has ever been unearthed – let alone published – a small few are available to modern readers.

Perhaps the most interesting, relevant, and comprehensive account is that of Jagmanderlal Jaini, an Indian who lived in England for three years from 1906 to 1909. His journal was lightly edited and published posthumously in 1934, and though his entries are sporadic and often follow indiscernible tangents, it provides a fascinating character study of a student who seems fairly representative of his peers. A close reading of *Fragments of an Indian Student's Note-book* is firstly an examination of Jaini himself, but it also works as a basic template for understanding the student experience. By no means was his stay in England the exact same as that of any other student, but it's not difficult to see the same kinds of characteristics in Jaini what one might expect to see in any other apprehensive and overwhelmed foreigner in the empire's center. His intelligence and introspection would have been common among his contemporaries, and his anger, confusion, and occasional inability to bear the weight of colonialism are the traits that make his candid memoir so striking as a piece of literature and so useful as a historical source.

Aside from this published journal and a small treatise on the finer points of Jain philosophy that he authored later in his life, there is nothing about Jaini to be found in the historical record. No biographies exist and few scholars of Indian history even mention his account, let alone explore it, so fleshing out Jagmanderlal Jaini as a character independent of what he writes about himself is an impossible task, but perhaps that makes his journal all the

more appealing of a source. How readers interpret his writing and the ways that they envision him is itself an exploration of how these students interacted with the world and, indeed, a history beyond themselves.

Jaini's notebook begins in 1903 in Allahabad, India as an undergraduate at a university there. His earliest entries are a Western-influenced miasma of intellectualism, quoting Descartes, Benjamin Franklin, and secondary analyses of Shakespearean plays, and he seems acutely aware of India's intellectual climate compared to that of Europe. At the behest of one of his college principals, he has dinner with two newly returned students from England and is immediately awed by their Western mannerisms and conduct, sparking his own plans on traveling to Britain for further education. That evening, he wrote,

...in fact the good impression that was given to my mind of the behavior and English of these two [England-returned teachers] leads me to think, that minus the many fools who go to England, mostly after having taken 'French leave' of their parents and others in India, hunt girls there, walk like so many big-grown children of a simpleton caste, and return as so many unhatched, or new-fledged Barristers to their mother country to bring shame to it, and to the undeniable better culture of the true Englishmen – that minus these, any intelligent India, preferably of a strong moral character, and with a frank and open, receptive mind, would be infinitely benefited by a residence in England.<sup>5</sup>

This is an important passage for beginning to understand the conflicting pressures facing Indian students like Jaini. The intangible aura of the England-returned captivated many on the subcontinent; British degrees in 1903 commanded an unmatched intellectual authority among Indians who were still just beginning to trickle into universities overseas. At the same time, there was a possible disconnect between English and Indian sensibilities that couldn't be bridged simply by visiting the imperial center – one had to absorb the English manners that Jaini wrote constituted the “undeniably superior culture” of the English and

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<sup>5</sup> Jagminderlal Jaini, *Fragments from an Indian Student's Note-book: a Study of an Indian Mind*, edit. M. Amy Thornett (London: A.H. Stockwell, 1934), 28.

return an improved man rather than just a credentialled one. Jaini was by no means an Indian ‘mimic man’ in search of imperial approval over all else, which makes his obsession with English culture all the more interesting.

While still an undergraduate, he wrote that, “The British, however well-meaning, just and humane their Government, are still foreigners. Their ultimate interests cannot be identical with ours...India is rising in agitation,”<sup>6</sup> flashing early signs of his nationalist sentiment that would flare up later. When he debated traveling to England for study, it was a combination of England’s promise of self-satisfaction and India’s limitations that led him abroad: “Whatever you want to do or become, begin at once in practice persevere in your line of work with an honest zeal and with no regard for the praise or blame that others may feel inclined to visit your work with. For my present task I can take up two lines of work. In fact I have only two alternatives, going to England or staying in India. Taking the first, I must read law...I have to please my ideals, my truest self, and no one else.”<sup>7</sup>

For young Indians first stepping off steamships after weeks at sea, London was a shock to the system. It was the single most dominant city in the world, a bustling mass of humanity pulling the global strings of finance and culture. Jonathan Schneer wrote that at the turn of the nineteenth century, “London was the empire’s capital, and the imperial metropolis of the world...[the British] intended to instruct, perhaps even to rule, the world. And the British megalopolis, London, was their Rome.”<sup>8</sup> According to the central thesis of his *London 1900*, the city was fundamentally imperial; both the Britons it molded into colonizers and the colonial subjects it attracted reinforced its cosmopolitanism and its seat of global power, producing a city defined by its superiority to the world beyond the River Thames.

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<sup>6</sup> Jaini, *Fragments* 40-41.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, 46-47.

<sup>8</sup> Schneer, *London, 1900*, 4.



For the Britons of London, the city was a self-reinforcing testament to their divinely ordained empire; for visitors from that empire's farthest reaches, it was an overwhelming experience and a constant reminder of their second-class status. "London is big and complex, and most visitors get lost in it, not only physically but also intellectually...I am sure that if I had to live continuously in London, I should be crushed"<sup>9</sup> wrote a visiting student, reiterating the collective sentiment of countless students before him. "I leave the description of London, its streets, its buildings, its shops, and its multifarious inhabitants, representing almost all the different nationalities of the world, for the future...it was a new world to me, and I was bewildered in such a large city"<sup>10</sup> reads the travel account of B.D. Basu, one of the first Indians to visit England as a sort of reporter and whose narrative was published in India to encourage further imperial movement.

Jagmenderlal Jaini split the three years he lived in Britain mainly between London and Oxford, and he enjoyed the liveliness of the former much more than the studiousness of the latter. Although constantly mindful against becoming one of the Indian students in "a London circle of youngsters, with whom, concentrated exertion is a sin, and solid-argued studied opinion an unwelcome stranger,"<sup>11</sup> Jaini took in the sights and sounds of London like any other wide-eyed tourist.<sup>12</sup> "The roar of this alien town – London – is in my ears. The spirit of poetry hovered about me...and drew me closer to the heart of humanity that flowed through the giant streets of this centre of the world"<sup>13</sup> he wrote of the city, admiring its

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<sup>9</sup> Nirad Chaudhuri, *A Passage to England* (New York, St. Martin's, 1959), 56.

<sup>10</sup> B.D. Basu, *My Sojourn in England*, (Calcutta: R. Chatterjee, 1927), 36.

<sup>11</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Jaini's journal describes a visit to Madame Tussaud's, where the waxworks seem to have gotten a little more tame since 1903; he mentions facsimile recreations of military battles, half-starved and tortured princes imprisoned in the Tower of London, and the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots that seem outrageous compared to the pop culture icons on display today.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, 122.

peoples and its endlessness. Often overwhelmed by the vastness of the city that engulfed him, Jaini anchored himself in what nature the city had to offer. His journal is littered with descriptions of flowers, trees, and gardens that he encountered in England, and he seemingly made a point to write about the natural world as often as he did about the human one. This may have had something to do with his spirituality; in his introduction to the book, Jaini wrote that “Indeed there is nothing good or desirable in the world, which to some extent or other is not locked up in the arms of its contradictory...[the way to escape] is to recognize the reality of this den and of the flowerful glade of real roses outside. Till the rose glen is gained, the dark den must be tolerated.”<sup>14</sup> Nature was an escape from the weight of the city and the weight of his identity for Jaini; acutely aware of his status as a colonial subject in the imperial capital, he used flowers and gardens as a reminder of what he was ultimately working for.

London was also the site of many young Indians’ first normal interactions with British people, differentiating the metropole from periphery in social as well as legal terms. “Most Indians had very little contact with British society in India. They were aware of the British presence in India and many had dealings with British Government officials, lawyers or teachers, but hardly socialized with them”<sup>15</sup> wrote historian Sumita Mukherjee, creating a contrast with the openness of British society in London. While interactions with the aforementioned groups in India would have almost invariably constructed to reassert colonial hierarchies – whether of power or knowledge, but always with a Briton at the top – encounters in Britain would have been much less calculatedly repressive, instead offering Indians a chance to mingle freely with ordinary Britons outside the normal framework of

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, iii.

<sup>15</sup> Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education, and Migrant Identities*, 54

colonialism. Imperial tensions wracked the metropolis, yes, but Britons would have treated foreign students less as ‘conquered slaves’ and more as ‘fellow subjects.’<sup>16</sup> While everyday interactions between Indians and Britons in India were almost nonexistent, Indian students in Britain were expected to participate fully in English life, whether by making English friends, attending theatre performances, or playing soccer and cricket with their British classmates. Shompa Lahiri quoted a pair of early Indian students’ thoughts on their national hosts: “The British people take a pride in being kind to strangers. The manner of an Englishman, however, undergo some change when he is outside his own country...he is proud and somewhat disdainful,” and another observed that “The very affable and obliging manners of the English ladies and gentlemen ‘at home’ ...are in full contrast to the blunt and cold manners they assume in India.”<sup>17</sup>

Moderate Indian nationalism’s central thesis was Dadabhai Naoroji’s pronouncement that British India was subject to un-British rule, and for newly arrived students it would have seemed that there was a cultural corollary as well. Compared to what they were experiencing in Britain, the conduct of Britons in India might have seemed very un-British as well. This was exactly what worried the India Office so deeply about the visiting students: in the unstructured, unguided British environment, these Indians would doubtless realize the discrepancies between the liberating social life of Britain and the repressive one of her Raj. Unassuming interactions between students and Britons were still colonial encounters, but in London they were nearly impossible to structure so as to constantly reinforce imperial hierarchies.<sup>18</sup> The most basic fear of the India Office was that as a result of all these new,

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> T.N. Mukherji and Haffiz Ahmed Hassan, quoted in Shompa Lahiri’s *Indians in Britain*, 153-4.

<sup>18</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 155. She quotes R.C. Dutt: “There are hardly any traces [in Britain] of that baneful patriarchal system on which every institution in our country may be said to be based.”

uncontrolled colonial encounters, students would come to see themselves as equals to the British people that nominally ruled them.

This is not to imply that colonial encounters in Britain produced universally positive results for Indian students. As discussed earlier, ignorance of British etiquette was often reason enough for Britons to discriminate against Indians, as class prejudice begat racial prejudice. Just as interactions in India were meant to reinforce British superiority, interactions in which Indians in Britain acted – usually inadvertently – out of line with English customs could serve to reinforce Britons’ unconscious tropes of Indian inferiority. While ordinary encounters with British people in London could dispel students’ feelings of being second-class citizens, the same interactions had the potential to do just as much harm by justifying that same imperial hierarchy.

There are several key moments in Jagmenderlal Jaini’s narrative where his life intersects with a larger history, and though they can slide innocuously by in the course of a cursory reading, they are crucial to understanding both Jaini’s life abroad and the attitudes of his peers in England. In November, 1907, Jaini was invited to tea with a retired ICS officer working for the India Office whose name he omits but who seems to be acting in the same sort of semi-official manner as William Curzon Wyllie as a friendly emissary to students. “He invited us to tea to win us over to his Anglo-Indian views, or to try to damp our patriotism! The ball of Indian Nationalism seems to be impossible of being checked in its onward course of progress and freedom by these methods!”<sup>19</sup> By late 1907, Jaini had become enamored of the nationalist cause; though he had always harbored some resentment towards the British Raj, it was during his stay in England that it fermented into bitterness and full-on revolutionary sentiment. The timing of the ICS officer’s visit was hardly coincidental;

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<sup>19</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 122.

historian Nicholas Owen marked the spring of 1907 as the starting point for “the new Indian nationalism” characterized by unabashedly seditious rhetoric and the unrelenting rejection of British cooperation in the immediate liberation of India.<sup>20</sup> Embodied in the 1907 Surat Split between the Extremist and Moderate factions of the Indian National Congress, this was the strand of nationalism that produced the India House, and the British government was anxious to stamp out its sparks while they were in their infancy. Informal visits with Indian students were an often-utilized move by the India Office to keep tabs on possible troublemakers and to persuade them to ignore the fiery extremism that was proving more enticing to young Indians than the ineffective parliamentarianism of late nineteenth century nationalism.<sup>21</sup>

Though Jaini was studying for the Bar under the tutelage of an Oxford don, mentions of his studies after 1907 take a backseat to near-constant written attacks on British rule. “The reactionaries in the Government [of India] have called forth the Extremists in the people. The suspicious – unjustly, unwisely, suspicious – eye of the Government has infused the poison of suspicion into a section of the Indian people, and turned them into Extremists”<sup>22</sup> read one accusatory entry, displaying a weariness of imperial surveillance and a latent paranoia born out of a disconnect between the governed and the governors. Jaini’s nationalism was on full display by the middle of 1908 in a handful of journal entries that deserve to be quoted verbatim for their anger and poignancy:

August 4: Affairs in India have taken a serious turn. Thousands of men have their minds full of ideas of Western political liberty and demands of rights based on these. It will be indeed a blessed day in India when the death-knell of despotism and autocracy is tolled in my Motherland!<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Owen, *The British Left and India*, 88.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 104.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, 144

August 7: Patriotism is killed by being labelled sedition and treason and then hanged! Independence is stifled under the garb of insubordination! Truth is suppressed in politics, in public offices, and everywhere, and then the Indians are said not to love the Truth! Meanness and inhumanity could not go further.<sup>24</sup>

August 24: India has lived and may live again; but now it is almost dead! England was not when that Aryan warrior killed the inoffensive deer with his exact arrow; England may not be in the future when India's sons are honoured, where they are scantily honoured now.<sup>25</sup>

September 30: In Indian Politics every Indian, Hindu or Mohammedan is a latent extremist. This is only natural, if by an extremist we mean an Indian Nationalist...Foreign control, foreign interference in the essential concerns of the Indian people is bound to be tolerated less and less every day, and it is useless to try to suppress it.<sup>26</sup>

Though Jaini never mentioned interacting directly with any prominent members of the India House group or visiting the Highgate mansion, he was drawn independently towards the same nationalist conclusions and at least once was in the same room as some of them. On October 16th, 1908, he wrote of attending an extremist meeting at Caxton Hall where “there lay the pure Indian fire with its depth and with its intensity.”<sup>27</sup> This assembly shows up elsewhere in the historical record: an India Office memo by William Curzon Wylie entitled “Disloyal Behaviour of Indian Students at Caxton Hall” in which he wrote that “There can be no doubt that the feeling of disloyalty among the Indian Students is growing day by day, and the majority of the Students in London are neither afraid nor ashamed to openly manifest their disloyalty...I have no hesitation in saying that the root of the disaffection in India is to be found among the Indian Students in this country.”<sup>28</sup> Though Jaini wasn't affiliated with any particular extremist groups, he was still the type of student that the India Office was intent on monitoring; if Jaini was indeed emblematic of his Indian peers in England, it

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<sup>24</sup>ibid, 144-5

<sup>25</sup>ibid, 147

<sup>26</sup>ibid, 156-7

<sup>27</sup> ibid, 159-60.

<sup>28</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/903 file 4223 “Disloyal Behaviour of Indian Students at Caxton Hall.”

quickly becomes apparent how daunting such a task would have been for the imperial government.

On the topic of Curzon Wylie's assassination a few months later, Jaini was less explicit. "An Indian student shot Sir Curzon-Wyllie at an 'At Home' in the Imperial Institute yesterday! How suggestive and how terrible. Nature is red-toothed"<sup>29</sup> reads his entry from July 2nd, 1909, which ends coyly with "Is there anything nobler than Archimedes killed on his theorem?" Perhaps this was the latest iteration of Jaini's convoluted views on imperialism and Britain; though he clearly detested British rule in India, he maintained a respect for Englishmen and their culture, and Wylie's death may have struck a macabre balance between the two. The assassination was a tipping point for how far Jaini was willing to go for the nationalist cause and set the stage for his climb down from the extremist zenith. A gentle man by any reading of his journal, bloodshed seems to have turned Jaini sour on the reckless approach of the London radicals and caused him to rethink his anti-British views. The about-face may have also been motivated by concerns about his place in British society; as mentioned earlier, the Wylie assassination created an environment in which vocally nationalist students were lambasted on official and unofficial fronts. Nirode Barooah's previously mentioned *Chatto* detailed the levelling effect this had on the former India House members, and it's reasonable to assume that Jaini – even as unconnected as he was from the group – would have been just as motivated to present himself as wholly cooperative with the British.<sup>30</sup>

A few short months after the murder, Jaini was set to return to India; by having been called to the Bar and avoiding any tainting association with the India House, he was well-

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<sup>29</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Barooah, *Chatto*, 21-2.

positioned to succeed back home. As his departure grew nearer, he reflected again on the complicated differences between the British and their empire: “The nearer I feel the time of my departure, the heavier grows the regret at the impending parting with England. In sun-burnt, ‘conquered’ India, all that makes life living here is missing there. True independence with all its fullness...all these things, alas, will be left behind! An atmosphere of liberty and peace will be replaced by one of slavery and disquiet.”<sup>31</sup> “The extremist propaganda is so gloriously patriotic and so irresistibly logical. The policy of the British is so stupidly short-sighted, and drives us against our will, at least tends to drive us, to become extremists...But what about this sadness in me at the thought of leaving England? Shall I ever come back again to this London?”<sup>32</sup> he mused in his last entry abroad.

This final entry is open to a variety of readings, but it foremost serves as a reminder that the empire’s topography was multifaceted. Studying in Britain was a liberating experience for Indians both intellectually and socially; in India, the ideas didn’t flow as freely and the Britons weren’t as friendly. Many other students echoed Jaini’s conflicting desires of returning to their homeland but also of retaining the freedoms of England. Lahiri reprints the accounts of two women, one of whom returned to India and another who stayed in Cambridge: “‘We all want so much to return to England. We miss the free life we led there, here we can hardly go out to the limits of our garden’” wrote one after a short period back on the subcontinent, while the woman who remained in England wrote “There is a popular saying that even a slave becomes free as soon as he steps on the soil of England. I myself can feel very well that there has been a significant change in my attitudes and values since I started to breathe in the open air of England and to live with the free people of that

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<sup>31</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 178.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* 185-7.



country.”<sup>33</sup> The contrasts between India and Britain were especially stark for them as women; Jaini wrote in his first journal entry while in England that “The range of information and the readiness with which they make use of it, is an admirable thing in the Western woman... Would the Indian women also were to have her emancipation likewise!”<sup>34</sup>

The prestige of a British degree was often accompanied by a crushing social burden upon return to India. Sociologist A.K. Singh wrote that Western education, by “separating the Western-educated elite from the people of the country, made the modern Indian a ‘marginal’ man, living between two cultures.”<sup>35</sup> Though they enjoyed prominent positions within society and commanded high salaries, many were treated with scorn and resentment.

[Their] entire society neither had opportunities nor inclination to educate itself with the new Western values. Their private life was divorced from their public life. Their intellectual life was dominated by Western ideas and values, but their social life was resigned to traditions and customs of the old society. They learned European theories and practices in the colleges, but put them away, with their European dress, when they crossed the threshold of their homes.<sup>36</sup>

Western education is often credited with the emergence of a new Indian upper-middle class, but upward mobility often came at the cost of personal happiness and intellectual consonance.<sup>37</sup> Though the England-returned were a critical force in creating discontent within India, not everyone was willing to listen to their ideas; the rejection that many students faced in India was often not quite so different from the tepid acceptance they had experienced in Britain.

Jagminderlal Jaini’s story is ultimately a sad one. Inspired to study in Britain by the pair of England-returned students he met years ago, his own return to India was far less

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<sup>33</sup> Toru Dutt and Krishnabhabani Das, quoted in Shoma Lahiri’s *Indians in Britain*, 156-7.

<sup>34</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 52.

<sup>35</sup> Singh, *Indian Students in Britain*, 31-2.

<sup>36</sup> Report of the Calcutta University Commission, 1919; recounted in Singh, *Indian Students in Britain*,

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<sup>37</sup> Mukherjee, *Nationalism, Education and Migrant Identities*, 137.

welcoming. Two years after leaving London, he lamented that “My life is a woe. Am not sure if I was right in being persuaded to come back to India...Painfully uncomfortable is the Indian soil<sup>38</sup> under my feet. Camillus and Themistocles could not have found ungrateful Rome and Athens more teasing and expelling than I find India at the present time!”<sup>39</sup> He found his job as a barrister miserable and had no friends, as most Indians mocked him as a ‘Brown Englishman’ who had turned his back on India in search of Western approval. He ceased writing angry diatribes about imperialism, conceding that “By wild flaming and precipitate impulsiveness, based on the ugly and suicidal policy of hating the English, India can only hurt herself and delay her own discharge [from the empire].”<sup>40</sup> He eventually moved back to London a few years after leaving, at which point his journal ends. Though he returned to India and spent the last part of his life as a judge in Indore, any further construction of Jaini’s life is impossible. The narrative his journal forms, however, is a unique piece of literature in what insights it provides into the student experience in England. Jaini was a young man acted upon by many conflicting pressures, and the themes that emerge from his story – the search for an education, a sense of meaning, and a home on the other side of the world – comprise an ultimately human account.

### **M.P.T. Acharya: Powder Keg**

“The ugly and suicidal policy of hating the English” that Jaini referred to was likely a retrospective jab at India House and provides a segue into a contrasting case study: M.P.T.

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<sup>38</sup> The recurring allusions to the world underfoot in student accounts do a lot to further the sense of geography that permeates this thesis. Jaini’s “painfully uncomfortable” Indian soil contrasts sharply with Das’s (n. 34) liberating English soil and “open air,” lending an earthly physicality to the divide between Britain and India that was also social and racial.

<sup>39</sup> Jaini, *Fragments*, 200, 213.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, 237-8

Acharya. His autobiographical account of India House and beyond has been cited previously in this thesis, but it merits closer examination by illustrating several manifestations of India Office policy as well as offering an alternate path to nationalism from the philosophical one that Jaini followed. An active agent for Savarkar's FIS and a star in the so-called "Gallant Galaxy" of Indian agitators abroad, London was the first in a series of Leftist stops across Europe for Acharya.<sup>41</sup> His status as a student in England seems to have been more a façade of respectability than any real attempt at an education; if anything, he spent his time at the Highgate mansion learning the revolutionary techniques that he would take with him on socialist endeavours to Paris, Istanbul, Stockholm, and Moscow in later years.

Shortly after his departure from England in 1909, Acharya authored an account of his time in London, providing a voice from inside the radical group at key moments during the India House saga and a counter-perspective against which to view India Office actions towards students. In 1991, Indian historian B.D. Yadav published Acharya's narratives alongside a biographical sketch drawn from archives across several continents that served as context and extension of the original account; *M.P.T. Acharya: Reminiscences of an Indian Revolutionary* is an incredibly useful book for historians seeking to explain India House

Yadav's biography of the author is twice as long as Acharya's actual text, and it's interesting in its own right as a prime example of the hagiography that has sprung up around the heads of India House in the decades since its closing. Madan Lal Dhingra has become the subject of a biographical catalogue in his own right, as adoring Indian writers in the years since 1909 – and especially following India's independence – have rehashed his story to the point of unrecognizability, enshrining Dhingra as a nationalist saint and an essential figure in early Indian nationalism. The works cited throughout this thesis – like those by Datta,

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<sup>41</sup> Srivastava, *Five Stormy Years*, 15.

Waraich & Puri, Maighowalia, Sareen, and Srivastava – are more often than not they are little more than volumes of thinly-disguised hero-worship, occasionally useful for the barest facts of establishing India House’s history. Most writings in this genre aren’t wholly reliable as objective histories, placing an even greater importance on the primary writings of students themselves.

As for Acharya, his text reveals a man crusading for Indian independence very differently than Jagmenderlal Jaini. For Jaini, Indian nationalism began as an amorphous dislike of foreign interference in Indian affairs and only took on a personal bent after his English experiences. Throughout his arc, Jaini remained pro-British, anti-imperialist, and maintained that Indian independence was a struggle unconnected to any larger, global history. In contrast, Acharya was more of an itinerant political troublemaker, living “anywhere I could live cheaply and also do some nationalist work.”<sup>42</sup> Indian nationalism in Acharya’s writing was important but not all-consuming; he considered it more of a first step in a global Leftist revolution than the be-all, end-all it was in Jaini’s journal.

The story of how Acharya ended up in London to begin with is example enough of Nicholas Owen’s convoluted geography of imperial freedom. Politically active from a young age, he was driven out of British India by charges of sedition stemming from political cartoons and articles in a periodical he co-authored. Even French Pondicherry wasn’t safe haven enough for Acharya to carry on in the subcontinent, and he left for Europe in 1905.<sup>43</sup> His flight from India was much like that of Krishnavarma’s from London in 1907, driven by the promise of safe haven beyond the reach of sedition charges.

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<sup>42</sup> Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya*, 98.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, 68.

Acharya came to the India House destitute but willing to play an active role in the group's mission. Paul Schaffel observed that since Savarkar's militancy alienated the students concerned about future career prospects, most of FIS's actions were carried out by those who depended on the hostel for food and shelter; this description fits Acharya precisely.<sup>44</sup> By the time Acharya arrived in Highgate, the hostel was on the decline; "It was like a lepers' home...none but the most reckless Indian student would dare to visit the India House or have anything to do with the Indian fellow students there, for he may be disbarred from institutions on account of even his chance visits."<sup>45</sup> Such a description adds evidence against the traditional historiography of India House as a tightly-knit terrorist den; it was instead an underpopulated group on its last legs by the time that Dhingra shot Wylie. In return for a place to live, Acharya became a primary fundraiser and organizer for the group, responsible more for the logistics of its plans than the ideas behind them. Savarkar was the brain of the FIS, and Acharya was one of the few limbs that would actually carry out his commands. This draws a foggy outline of Acharya's nationalist picture: drawn towards extremism less by its tenets than by Savarkar's allure and the FIS's promise of excitement, he was more henchman than mastermind. Acharya was only nominally a student in London; he took photoengraving classes at a technical school to maintain his pretense of innocence, but the Free India Society was his primary concern. By several accounts, it was nearly Acharya's finger that pulled the trigger on July 1, 1909 and his name that went down in infamy. Savarkar, ever on the watch for young Indians willing to follow through with acts of political violence, constantly pressured Acharya to martyr himself until the eve of Dhingra's

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<sup>44</sup> Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination," 40.

<sup>45</sup> Yadav, *M.P.T. Acharya*, 83.

shooting.<sup>46</sup> In June 1909 he declared himself ready to avenge the atrocities in British India, and if not for Madan Lal Dhingra he very possibly would have been the one to gun down Wyllie days later.<sup>47</sup>

Acharya's revolutionary nature was perhaps less ideologically substantive than Jaini's anti-imperialism, but it was the same brand that attracted Madan Lal Dhingra. Both were drawn to Savarkar's magnetic personality and powers of oration more than they were attracted to nationalist ideas themselves. Acharya and Dhingra had both felt the empire's repressiveness in India; Acharya had been chased out by sedition charges and Dhingra had experienced racial abuse while working on an P&O steamboat before coming to England.<sup>48</sup> Savarkar capitalized on personal grievances to enlist both of their help, perhaps reminding Dhingra of how his parents had asked the imperious William Curzon Wyllie to steer him straight, and Acharya of his childhood friend rotting in a jail cell on the Andaman Islands as a result of their seditious periodical. Their nationalism was an intensely personal one, partially manufactured by Savarkar but with its roots in colonial encounters gone wrong. In contrast, Jaini's nationalism had begun as an impersonal distaste for an abstract empire and only acquired its hostility upon his realization of how affected by imperialism his freedoms actually were.

## Conclusion

For a group whose manners, accents, and clothing were all so thoroughly scrutinized at the time, considering how Indian students reacted to British treatment – and how those reactions in turn shaped British attitudes – is a key element of the story of India House. Even

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<sup>46</sup> Chopra, *Indian Freedom Fighters Abroad*, 167.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *The British Left and India*, 71.

<sup>48</sup> Leena Dhingra, "Madan Lal Dhingra," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* online.

students unaffiliated with the hostel had a role in influencing what the public thought of its inhabitants. Colonial encounters in the metropole were liberating for students by virtue of their normalcy compared to interactions with Britons in India, but they carried the risk of unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes and hierarchies by neglecting to conform to British etiquette. The changing attitudes of the British public will be addressed in the final chapter, and understanding how Indian behavior affected those views is crucial to making sense of the turning tide.

Jaini and Acharya seem to have shared little in common, but contrasting their experiences lends some insight into the roots of student dissent and the appeal of nationalism. In Britain's intellectually liberating climate, realizing the scope and unfairness of the empire's repression was often a staggering burden for students; an English education opened their eyes to Western freedoms but also to their own deprivations thereof. Whether in the form of ideas, employment, or surveillance, imperial topographies and unevenness served to embitter and disillusion students who experienced life on both sides of the empire.

## V - The Three Bureaus of Information

*“I cannot help feeling a little worried about Indian Students in this country and Cromwell Road...”<sup>1</sup>*

– E.S. Montagu, Secretary of State for India, 1920

Millions of historically-minded visitors to London pass by it every year, but the unassuming building at the corner of Cromwell Road and Cromwell Place is hardly a sight that sticks in the minds of the city’s tourists. The Natural History Museum across the street captures most of their attention, and the French flag hung outside the cornerhouse that ripples lazily at the light touch of a cool August afternoon’s breeze registers as little more than a momentary break in the sea of Union Jacks that surrounds it. 21 Cromwell Road is still a bustling government hub these days as the location for France’s consulate in England; situated deep within the affluent borough of Kensington, it stands only about two blocks south of the site where Madan Lal Dhingra and Sir William Curzon Wylie had their deadly encounter. A blue plaque on its eastern exterior wall marks it as the longtime residence of nineteenth-century architect and philanthropist Charles James Freake, but the building has a significance beyond this official designation of historical heritage. The four-story building that blends seamlessly into an imposing row of identical off-white facades that stretches down the street was once the seat of another government agency, a branch of the India Office that for a few short years occupied the premises during its last attempts to establish a measure of active control over Indian students. Within its walls were private offices, a government bureau, and twenty-five beds, forming a thoroughly strange imperial space situated somewhere within the dissolving boundary between metropole and periphery. The

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<sup>1</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/1707 file 6900, “Official Correspondence.”



significance of this space in the years between 1910 and 1912 has been lost on historians as completely as it is on the few passersby who glance momentarily at the unassuming, unrelated blue marker as they hurry along the sidewalk; this chapter is an attempt to bring some meaning to 21 Cromwell Road and the ghosts of its inhabitants.

With the execution of Madan Lal Dhingra, the imprisonment of Vinayak Savarkar, and the dispersal of the remaining revolutionary students who had vocally supported its extremist cause to varying degrees, the India House had effectively been demolished by 1910. The British public still regarded Indian students with a distrustful eye, but the absence of any similar groups or high-profile events did a great deal to calm official British anxieties about the students as a whole. This absence was less a conveniently unfilled void than an actively inhospitable England; the tolerant safe haven of years past had been replaced by a decidedly unwelcoming and discouraging environment. This chapter is in part an examination of the forces that ensured another India House never took hold, and it requires backtracking to a point where Sir William Curzon Wyllie – and not just his memory – was still an active figure in Indian student affairs.

As discussed in Chapter III, the latent danger posed by the India House didn't go unnoticed by bureaucrats in the India Office. In 1907, two years before Wyllie's assassination, the Secretary of State for India appointed Sir William Lee-Warner to head a commission to investigate the condition of Indian students living across Britain. Tasked with quantifying the student population, identifying their problems as well as the problems they seemed to attract, and to formulate some possible solutions, the three heads of the committee spent three months travelling the island visiting universities and interviewing students, faculty, and people with a special knowledge of the issue. Upon submission of their

subsequent report, its inflammatory language and provocative assessments of the problems raised concerns within the India Office about its power to galvanize educated Indians both in Britain and on the subcontinent. The report was left unpublished for over a decade, only appearing as an appendix to the report of a similarly tasked commission headed by Lord Lytton in 1922; the India Office, however, carried out most of its major recommendations. Though the commission itself was conducted in 1907, its most important effects wouldn't be seen until after Curzon Wylie's death and should be considered a singularly important document in the history of India Office policy towards students, with its roots in the begrudging hands-off mentality before July 1909 and its more active effects in the years afterwards.

In particular, one implemented recommendation from the committee's report especially illuminates both the changing role and strategy of the India Office between 1907 and the outbreak of the First World War: the Bureau of Information for Indian Students. Proposed as a paternalist arm of the India Office that would ensure students received accurate information about British education and were subtly imbued with pro-British sentiments, the Bureau's function vacillated over the its four years of operation and its subsequent reconstitution in 1912. Rather than an agency with an unwavering mandate, the history of the Bureau of Information is composed of three discrete chapters that form a narrative arc of their own, as its functionality quickly reached a practical zenith after Wylie's assassination and then experienced a prolonged slide into ineffectiveness in the years after, due in part to the benevolent ideology of the man at its head<sup>2</sup> as well as to its increasing irrelevance in both an empire now straddled by an integrated intelligence network and a London no longer favorably inclined toward Indian students. Paul Schaffel argued that the Bureau of

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<sup>2</sup> Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination," 11.

Information failed because of a linear shift in ideology from mistrust to benevolence, but this misses the underlying point: at its core, the Bureau was too reactive to succeed in a pre-Dhingra London, too voluntary to gather any meaningful intelligence afterward, and too tangible to contribute effectively as a surveillance agency within the empire's shadowy new global information order.

It is this last point – the Bureau's physicality – that signaled the end of the India Office's own policy arc regarding information and Indian students. What was initially inspired by a nebulous and informal network in the Indian hinterlands had by 1912 become a single agency with a lone man in charge, located in a building in central London that advertised its presence to the very students it was intended to surveil. The India Office had systematized its own intelligence network and informally incorporated a handful of private English intermediaries with similar missions as part of its drive towards centralization. By creating its own constructed information order that was highly visible to all students but voluntary to engage with, it unavoidably exposed its own intentions and rendered itself fundamentally ineffective from the beginning.

The history of the Bureau of Information draws on all of the major themes established earlier in this thesis: the restrictiveness of liberalism, manipulations of the information order, and the role of privately-held soft power in allocating social citizenship to colonial subjects in the metropole. Its story is the story of both Indian students and imperial attitudes toward them, told in miniature; the building that it occupied in South Kensington, simultaneously home to the Bureau's offices and private English groups as well as a temporary hostel for students, was a microcosm of the imperial dynamics at play between the three parties

throughout their stormy decade-long interaction and a fitting conclusion to the India Office's active attempts to control students.

### **The Lee-Warner Committee and its Imagined Bureau**

Alongside Lee-Warner on the 1907 committee were William Curzon Wyllie and Theodore Morison, the latter of whom would go on to chair his own commission in 1913 regarding Indian students seeking industrial education and employment in Britain. Beginning in May 1907, the committee heard testimony in London before moving across the country to hold meetings at the universities in Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh, interviewing ninety-nine people across the span of their inquest.<sup>3</sup> The committee was well-staffed – Lee-Warner and Curzon Wyllie shared a history of administrative service in India; Morison had spent nineteen years as a professor at a college in India and was regarded as an expert on Indian education reform<sup>4</sup> – well-funded, and enjoyed a large pool of interviewees and documents with which to guide their work, and yet “the findings of the Lee-Warner Committee...were so embarrassing and likely to offend Indians that the publication of the report was prevented. In 1908, the Viceroy of India Lord Minto thought the publication ‘would no doubt put fat into the fire again.’”<sup>5</sup> “Much bitter feeling would be aroused, resulting in angry discussion and agitation, which would discredit any arrangements which Government might make for protecting and helping Indian students in England, to such an extent that no student would take advantage of them...it would be nothing short of disastrous to publish the report”<sup>6</sup> he

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<sup>3</sup> India Office, “Report of the Committee on Indian Students” (London: 1922), 73; hereafter cited as “Lee-Warner Report.”

<sup>4</sup> Batho, G. R.. “Morison, Sir Theodore (1863–1936).” G. R. Batho in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., edited by Lawrence Goldman.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Weber, *Our Friend, The Enemy: Elite Education in Britain and Germany Before World War I* (Stanford: Palo Alto, 2008), 218.

<sup>6</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/845 “Minto to Morley” March 13, 1908

wrote in a telegram, fearing pushback against both the imperial government as a whole but also against the committee's specific recommendations that, despite the inflammatory report, were generally considered sensible and fit for implementation.

The majority of the report is fairly inoffensive and dull reading. The committee presented the first official estimate of the Indian student population's size – approximately seven hundred, with over half residing in London – and the bulk of the report's first few chapters doesn't amount to much beyond hazy depictions of the student experience in Britain. An early chapter reiterates public anxieties about Indian immorality and natural inclination toward vice, relaying a handful of vivid examples of young Indians who became

absolute wrecks, the short story of whose life in England consists of running with unabated energy one uniform course of the coarsest and most vicious pleasures, procured by means that would disgrace the cruellest savage, by bullying and frightening an ignorant and indulgent parent out of his last penny on earth and then rewarding his kindness by breaking his heart and ultimately sending him to his untimely grave.<sup>7</sup>

Such passages stand in stark contrast to the committee's official verdict on these types of stories: "...although the number of wrecks is not unimportant they constitute the exception...the majority of Indian students get through their time in London without disastrous results,"<sup>8</sup> setting the tone for a report chock full of backhanded compliments aimed at students. The imperial capital was home to the most worrying subset of the population. With its abundance of experiences unavailable in India and its myriad temptations, London could suck in any visiting student, whether an Indian from Bombay or a young Englishman from Birmingham. While students at Cambridge and Oxford fell under a great deal of university supervision, most students in London were studying for the Bar, a fairly self-motivated course of work that necessitated little in the way of frequent contact with educators

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<sup>7</sup> Lee-Warner Report, 76

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

who felt little need to intervene in students' affairs unless they affected their academic standing.<sup>9</sup> They by and large lived freely and away from official eyes, a troubling prospect for a government now keen on monitoring them closely.

Among the report's stated consequences of the government's inability to exercise an ideal amount of control over these semi-disappeared students was their increasing political radicalization, and it was the contents of the report's fifth chapter – "Indian Students and Politics" – that drew most of the Viceroy, Lord Minto's, justification for the report's non-publication. "We feel justified in asserting that a considerable proportion, probably a majority, of the Indian students who come to this country are imbued before leaving India with the political opinions of the advanced section of the Indian Opposition, and are animated by a feeling of discontent with British rule; and that these political opinions and this discontent are usually strengthened by their residence in England"<sup>10</sup> the committee asserted, describing a "blood and thunder" type of Indian "dead set in his deep-seated and long-fermented hatred of everything British. For this, the committee assigned only a modicum of blame to the British government; rather than students' experiences with imperialism in India or mistreatment during their stay in Britain, it was allegedly the prominence of party politics in Britain and the 'discord within harmony' model that confused students who – unable to distinguish party rhetoric from concrete promise – were swept up in a tide of what appeared to them as political conflict."<sup>11</sup> Even then the committee placed hardly any blame upon Britain itself and rather determined that it was the – possibly unavoidable – naiveté born of an unfamiliarity of the workings of a democratic society that was causing the polarization among these foreigners, a paternalist pronouncement for the ages.

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, 74

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* 101

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

Aside from the cursory pseudo-blame that the report allocated to British society, the majority of the problem resided with the “representatives of Extremists of Indian politics [who] spare no pains to win adherents to their cause among the Indian students as soon as the latter arrive in this country.”<sup>12</sup> Clearly aware in 1907 of the existence and prominence of the India House and the widespread reach of the *Indian Sociologist*, the committee wrote with a pained tone that “while there is an active organization to create hostility against the British Government, there is no agency in existence in London which takes so much pains to get hold of Indian students or to counteract the effect of this political propaganda.”<sup>13</sup> Torn between the British liberalism described in chapter III and the desire to quash the spread of extremism, the committee flirted in several places throughout the report with recommending a ban on any Indian students at all coming to Britain before settling back into a familiar impotence: “Grave, however, as we recognise the situation to be, we have no specific remedy to propose,” instead issuing a minor recommendation about raising the age required for Government scholarships on the basis that older students would find less of a tendency toward political volatility. Ultimately, the committee had tacitly admitted defeat in the face of Indian extremism at home by admitting the scope of the problem – “the men educated in England constitute an important section of the educated classes of Indian society, and their permanent alienation from the British Government would be a disaster” – while dithering powerlessly around a series of solutions it was too scared to officially recommend and ultimately concluding that the best course of action was essentially to hope that student hotheads would mellow out with the passage of time.<sup>14</sup> Signed, Sir William Curzon Wyllie.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, 102

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

While the committee's final report was quickly and unsurprisingly suppressed from public view, it did have some significant effects on India Office policy moving forward. Not all of its recommendations were of the 'ban all Indian students' variety, and most of what the report proposed was put into action within a couple years. Its three major proposals were all branches of the same general idea: subtly counteract anti-British influence by projecting goodwill in an official capacity. To achieve this, the report recommended the creation of both an Advisory Committee in London made up of Indians and Englishmen alike that students could contact with any needs or questions as well as the Bureau of Information for Indian Student that would serve as a liaison between British universities and students to ensure that prospective students were adequately equipped to apply for admission and well-prepared to adjust after enrolling. Additionally, it recommended that a pair of prominent private English clubs – the Northbrook Society and the National Indian Association – work together to focus their efforts and avoid redundant overlap. To further concentrate the coordination between all involved parties, the report proposed the purchase of a building that would house the Bureau of Information, provide an office space for the three private groups – though they would receive a significant government stipend – and serve additionally as a short-stay hostel for newly arrived Indian students in need of temporary lodgings and information about further adjusting.

This plan eventually took form in the shape of 21 Cromwell Road, a standalone building in South Kensington across the street from the Natural History Museum and within minutes of the Imperial Institute. T.W. Arnold – the man appointed Educational Adviser to head the Bureau – had used the space as early as June 1909 as a venue for public receptions



in the ‘at home’ style for students.<sup>15</sup> The India Office and the private societies settled on the building as their shared permanent space not long after. In part the location was reportedly chosen for its proximity to established Indian student neighborhoods; a *Times* article announcing the building’s leasing to the government claimed that “Many young Indians live in the Western suburbs, and the house is nearer their homes than Westminster, or than the eastern end of Piccadilly, where the Northbrook rooms have hitherto been situated.”<sup>16</sup> In a strange quirk of London geography, the new location bore an eerie similarity to that of none other than the India House, the radical hostel at 65 Cromwell Avenue in Highgate; the two were separated by roughly seven miles and occupied entirely different streets that happened to share a name. Within its confines was the coexistence of Indian students, British government, and private English life; 21 Cromwell Road served as a unique physical space wherein three distinct spheres collided in an often uneasy balance of influence and independence. The three stages of the Bureau of Information’s history alluded to at the beginning of this chapter can each be characterized by the general conception of the Bureau in official circles at the time; this first stage was that of the ‘Imagined Bureau’ in which the new agency was a reactive body, a remedy for growing student unrest that functioned as a replication of existing hostile information structures. After Wyllie’s death, the Bureau would take on a more aggressive tone before finally lapsing into irrelevance after 1910.

Though bureaucrats would have been loathe to admit it, 21 Cromwell Street was conceived of as a government-sanctioned India House. While the India Office’s efforts had previously hinged on simply collecting information about students, India House had demonstrated that putting information in their hands was a more effective tactic. Even though

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<sup>15</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/945, File 2294 “Proposed Reception of Indian Students by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee to be held at 21 Cromwell Road.”

<sup>16</sup> “Indian Students In England.” *The Times* (2 June 1910): 6.

Savarkar's demands for active militancy eventually drove nationalist students away, they retained the leftist political views that the Free India Society had drilled into them, and that was perhaps more important than the few tangible actions that the group was able to carry out. The imperial government, clearly attuned to the value of information, had long recognized the importance that these England-returned students had on Indians upon their return, but had previously avoided official involvement for fear of stoking suspicion and instead left such responsibilities to private English clubs. In this light, perhaps the street address of the India Office's 1908 physically-grounded attempt to establish a constructed information order wasn't coincidental after all: a pro-British information hub on Cromwell Road to match the anti-British one on Cromwell Avenue.

That the Bureau would dictate an artificial, constructed information order in reaction to India House was its imagined goal. In the subcontinental setting from which the India Office had drawn its inspiration for its intelligence strategy, the information order was an organic force; the ICS officers who used it to rule passively listened in on streams within the larger structure, rarely influencing it themselves. In contrast, the India Office's newest efforts required them to create a new system of information flow – a constructed information order – that they not only had the ability to manipulate but that they had total control over. The shape of their constructed information order was expressly pro-British and flowed in two directions, both towards and away from students. Just as Savarkar could influence what information entered into, spread throughout, and left India House, so too was the India Office attempting to create a manipulable space where bureaucrats could ensure that anti-British ideas travelled in only one direction: from nationalist students to the surreptitiously surveillant government officials who could mark them for additional monitoring.

Information within the Bureau's constructed order was designed to travel outward to students through several media. Most literally, it came published in a handbook. The National Indian Association had been putting out a series of handbooks for incoming students since 1893, offering information about Britain's different universities and courses of study, as well as the processes of applying to them; they also emphasized seeking out the NIA's help upon arrival in London for help in acclimating to English life.<sup>17</sup> These guidebooks were widely read and had to be reprinted almost a dozen times by 1908, at which point the Bureau of Information co-opted the idea and published jointly-authored handbooks in the years after.<sup>18</sup> While the handbooks explicitly offered to imbue students with a positive idea of English society, the Bureau's other primary avenue of outward information flow – guardianship – was a subtler approach to the same destination.

The idea of guardianship as a mode of controlling Indian students had long percolated throughout India Office thought. Groups like the NIA had previously offered to place students in surrogate English homes to keep them out of nationalist circles and expose them to a sunnier side of British life. The Bureau of Information offered the India Office an institution to systematically direct students towards private guardianship rather than simply hoping that students would voluntarily submit to private supervision; 21 Cromwell's third and fourth floors would be dedicated to the Indian Students' Hostel. Run directly under the Bureau's auspices, the hostel's twenty-five beds were temporary lodgings for freshly-arrived students where they could stay until they made long-term arrangements.<sup>19</sup> T.W. Arnold kept

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<sup>17</sup>OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/845 file 233 "Bureau of Information."

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* After the Bureau's dissolution in 1912, the India Office continued to sponsor the handbooks through the Indian Students' Department.

<sup>19</sup> "Indian Students' New Hostel," *The Daily Mail* (20 Oct 1910): 3.

a list of government-approved private homes on file at the Bureau,<sup>20</sup> and the obvious hope was that students would transition from the government hostel to an English home that could act as a government proxy. In effect, they would remain under surveillance – or at least the possibility of it – for the entire duration of their stay.

Constrained by the familiar contours of liberalism, however, the converse inward information flow was largely impossible. Morley had forbidden the use of officially-sanctioned spies within seditious circles and insisted that “the whole scheme is of a purely voluntary character.”<sup>21</sup> Although several India Office bureaucrats made efforts to gather information about the group, their constructed information order fell short of its goal because of the glaring gaps in its knowledge about its radical opponents. Lee-Warner was acutely aware of this shortcoming and wrote that “[the Educational Adviser] cannot do this if, for fear of being called a ‘spy’, he keeps himself ignorant of...the black sheep. Notorious sedition-agents he should certainly know.”<sup>22</sup> This was easier said than done; despite attempts to unofficially infiltrate India House, the India Office’s picture of the group remained incomplete and its constructed information order only succeeded in a distributory function.<sup>23</sup>

Aside from its surveillance aims, a student hostel was hardly a new idea; it was only made possible in 1908 as public patience wore thin with India House. In 1903, the India Office had hosted a series of public gatherings at the Imperial Institute about the possibility

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<sup>20</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/845 file 233 “Bureau of Information.”

<sup>21</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 127-30; OIOC IOR/L/PJ/845 “Morley to Minto.”

<sup>22</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/1020, “Minute by W. Lee-Warner,” quoted in Katherine Watt’s “T.W. Arnold and the Re-Evaluation of Islam,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36 (Feb. 2002), 76.

<sup>23</sup> “Succeeded” is lofty praise for a Bureau that is universally panned as ineffective, but it really did have some success in making contact with students, even if it was unable to glean much information about them for its surveillance aims. Schaffel estimates that nearly two-thirds of all Indian students between 1909 and 1911 visited the Bureau, and the India Office admitted that the agency’s ceiling was probably at around ninety per cent of students. Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 71; OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/1120.

of opening a government-run hostel for Indian students.<sup>24</sup> This was before Krishnavarma had established India House and was born more out of the type of amorphous public anxieties that had precipitated the certificate of identity scheme a few years prior. Still, opinion was divided on both official and unofficial fronts. A London correspondent for *The Times of India* reported a general distaste for the idea in July 1903:

...[T]here was a consensus of opinion against the provision of a hostel, and some division in reference to Sir William Lee-Warner's suggestion for the establishment of a club. The dominant note of hostility to the plan of gathering Indian sojourners here under a single roof ran through the earlier speeches of [the previous meeting] and it was not until [today] that we heard a single word in favour of a hostel.<sup>25</sup>

Lest he slip out of view for too long, Wyllie was an important voice in this early discussion. “The hostel was said to be Wyllie’s idea” claims Rozina Visram, citing his paranoia about students’ growing disloyalty; she argues that he proposed it out of a “need for an Indian hostel to ‘make them loyal’, in other words, under control and compliant.”<sup>26</sup> Though history perhaps vindicates Wyllie’s worry, the 1903 public rejected the idea out of fear that it would stoke suspicion among Indians. This was a predictable outcome within the established framework of British liberalism: a public ill at ease with the presence of indefinably troubling foreigners yet iller at ease with the idea of limiting their freedoms. Since unofficial anxieties at this point were founded primarily on rumors and unrepresentative samples, Indian students were allowed to hold on to their social citizenship and avoid potentially restrictive oversight.

Calls for a hostel reemerged several years later as India House was gaining notoriety, this time with more effect. A rash of newspaper editorials in British India supported expanding the cooperation between the India Office and private societies in response to

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<sup>24</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 89

<sup>25</sup> “Indian Students in England: The Proposed Hostel,” *The Times of India* (11 Aug 1903): 4.

<sup>26</sup> Visram, *Asians in Britain*, 159

Highgate's influence. "The proper means of counteracting the pernicious teaching...is to provide more wholesome centres for these students" wrote one op-ed, insisting that "it is time that the proposal for a hostel for Indian students was reconsidered in earnest."<sup>27</sup> Another complained that "A systematic campaign is waged with the view of poisoning these students the moment they arrive in Europe" and advocated government subsidies for private societies.<sup>28</sup> A third questioned the usefulness of an expanded government presence in solving the larger issue of nationalist discontent: "A 'Glorified Northbrook' cannot, and will not, remove the cause of disaffection among the Indian students in England...none of [the private societies] offers any real facilities for the study of Anglo-Indian problems of the day. Is there any wonder that the poor Indian youth...falls back upon questionable sources of information for his political guidance?"<sup>29</sup> As the shadow of Highgate stretched further across London, the British public was more willing to listen to ideas about restricting student freedoms, even at the cost of offending liberal sensitivities. Wyllie's death opened the floodgates for more aggressive measures, and the Bureau of Information was one institution that benefitted from increased public acceptance after 1909.

### **The Aggressive Bureau**

The Bureau's first evolution, shifting from an 'Imagined Bureau' to an 'Aggressive Bureau,' came on the heels of Dhingra's shooting and lasted until the end of 1910. Situated within the increasingly cohesive global intelligence network, the Bureau seemingly had the

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<sup>27</sup> "An Indiscreet Question," *The Times of India* (1 Aug 1907): 6.

<sup>28</sup> "Indian Students in England," *The Times of India* (3 Sept 1908): 6.

<sup>29</sup> S.M. Mitra, "Indian Students: What is to be Done?" *Pall Mall Gazette* reprinted in *The Times of India* (1 Dec 1908): 7.

potential to play a critical role and more aggressively expand its influence.<sup>30</sup> Without the liberal benefit of the doubt protecting students, the attempt to enact a constructed information order within the confines of the Bureau that would feed into the larger network seemed a real possibility. That had been the goal for a while but was hampered by liberalism; without the public protecting students, the Bureau could both gather information more aggressively and put its files to use.

The 1909-10 crackdown against India House was the first step in establishing a new global imperial intelligence network in which the Bureau of Information played a key role. Wyllie's death was the impetus for increased communication and cooperation between the European agencies and the Criminal Intelligence Department in India; what began with John Wallinger's transfer from Simla to London blossomed into the Indian Political Intelligence (IPI), a secretive new agency that integrated information inputs from India and Britain and coordinated with police agencies that could take action on it. The IPI has been mislabelled as the Indian Secret Service in earlier works; before its files were made public in 1998, even its name was a mystery.<sup>31</sup> A short history of the organization authored upon its closure in 1946 reveals that it worked in conjunction with Scotland Yard, MI6 and the India, Colonial, and Foreign Offices. It was created in direct response to Wyllie's death:

The wave of violent crime connected with the intensification of the Indian Nationalist Movement during Lord Minto's Viceroyalty included the murder of [Wyllie]. This led to the deputation from the Central Intelligence Department of the Government of India in the Home Department of an Indian Police Officer for attachment to the India Office. He was charged to co-operate with the Home Security organizations in detecting subversive activities among Indians here.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kaminsky, *The India Office*, 177-8.

<sup>31</sup> Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* and Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination" both refer to the "Indian Secret Service"; as far as I can infer, they both refer to the IPI.

<sup>32</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/12/662 file 1681/44 "Origin and Development of the IPI," 127.

The IPI's mandate included gathering intelligence about security threats to British India across the empire as well as in Britain, including compiling dossiers about notable nationalist personalities and their activities. The Bureau of Information had plenty to offer within this cooperative new system: during a 1911 review of the agency's work, Educational Adviser T.W. Arnold reported that he kept a file on every student who visited, including correspondences between students and universities, a copy of his certificate of information, and his reported expenses.<sup>33</sup> Arnold may have sold his own intelligence files short; a student who visited the Bureau found that the official he met with already had a thick file on him despite having never been to 21 Cromwell Road before. "Apparently my every movement had been recorded" he later wrote.<sup>34</sup> Arnold acknowledged that in addition to the aforementioned official records he kept on each student, "I receive information about [radical] students from the Secretary of State's department as well as from [presumably CID] officers in India; notes are also sometimes attached to certificates of identity." These red flags were used to designate specific students for additional surveillance, Arnold continued: "In the case of such students...it has been found advantageous to place them in lodgings in a district not usually frequented by Indians, under conditions favourable to the formation of friendships with English persons."<sup>35</sup> This can easily be read as an attempt to transpose the structured colonial encounters in India into Britain; by isolating potential troublemakers from like-minded dissidents and putting them into exclusive contact with "good English life,"<sup>36</sup> the Bureau intended to reinforce ideas of British cultural superiority while controlling the range of Indian interaction.

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<sup>33</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/1120 file 4173 "Indian Students in England."

<sup>34</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 171.

<sup>35</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/1120 file 4173 "Indian Students in England."

<sup>36</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/808 file 1296, "Memorandum by East India Association, 1907."



Arnold was not always met with as much warmth by Britain's universities as the India Office would have hoped. Though he was able to set up contacts at every major university he needed for the Bureau to function effectively, Oxford perpetually proved unsupportive, if not entirely uncooperative. The university's vice-chancellor saw the establishment of the Bureau of Information as an implicit encouragement for Indians wishing to study in Britain and rarely missed an opportunity to voice his disagreement with the idea. "How far it is good general policy, or for their advantage to encourage them to come to this country and to reside and study at Universities here rather than to provide them, if it can be done, with all they need in their country, is a wider question which I think ought to be seriously considered," adding that Oxford University was, at least by his estimation, home to a disproportionately high number of Indian students already and that the last thing he needed was to sift through the unqualified applications of hundreds more each year.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the university's bluster, the India Office intended for the arrangement to work in favor of both parties and hinted at the Bureau's primary objective immediately following Wyllie's death. "By means of this agency it is hoped that the Education Adviser will be able to obtain all information regarding individual students which may be desired by the University and other authorities regarding individual students, and thus to meet what is understood to be a need which has made itself felt for detailed and trustworthy information as to the position, means, and character of Indian applicants"<sup>38</sup> wrote one bureaucrat in July 1909 to the contacts at Oxford and Cambridge in a particularly telling message about the disguised function of the Bureau of Information. While the new office publicly projected an image of benevolence and an outward flow of information to help students, the intelligence

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<sup>37</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/845 "Oxford to India Office."

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, "Campbell to Pargiter and Candy."

continued to run the same direction it always had: from colonial periphery to imperial core, but this time within the confines of Britain itself. The information about these students was useful for the developing global surveillance network and also for university admissions; by effectively weeding out applicants deemed unsuitable by Bureau findings, it simplified the decision process for universities supposedly inundated by unqualified Indian applications.

The Bureau's function had thus already been altered in the short time since its opening: while it had been conceived of during a period in which students were afforded the liberal benefit of the doubt, Madan Lal Dhingra had opened up the possibility of the Bureau as an acceptable surveillance agency that could add consequence to its information. Spies and informants were increasingly in use by the time the Bureau moved from Whitehall to Cromwell Road, and the new Bureau opened a new avenue to intelligence gathering by providing a presumably safe space for new students that in turn capitalized on their resulting openness by surreptitiously gauging their compatibility with British society and identifying any potential troublemakers. This new approach was worked out during the weeks that followed the Curzon Wylie assassination and doubtless reflected the newly validated paranoia that had until recently been little more than unsubstantiated anxiety.<sup>39</sup> While the CID and Scotland Yard were taking direct action against India House itself, India Office bureaucrats did their part to prevent any future recurrences in the way that they were most familiar with: harnessing the information order. This slightly more sinister function of the Bureau of Information, obviously never publicly acknowledged in any official releases about

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<sup>39</sup> Lee-Warner had at least a pair of informants within the India House that reported directly to him for some time before the Curzon Wylie murder, and India Office records detail the expenses related to several other Indians employed to infiltrate potentially hostile student groups. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 127; OIOC IOR/L/PS/8/67 "Employment and Expenses of Indian Informant Sajani Ranjan Banerjea, alias Sukasagar Dutt, to Watch Indian Students in London." This British Library file is an extremely interesting one as it details the employment of a student spy named Suksagar Dutt from 1909 until 1913; suspiciously, an active member of India House before 1909 was named Sukh Sagar Dutt. Paul Schaffel also noticed this eerie similarity and concluded that the two were different people. Schaffel, "Empire and Assassination," 107.

the new India Office branch, secretly defined the office's role for the few years of its existence and is a lens through which the Bureau needs to be viewed. It was a unique arm of the growing global intelligence network, feeding information about potential troublemakers to the IPI. While attempts to construct an artificial information order before July 1909 had been thoroughly underwhelming, its shifting role within the new network lent it a tone of aggression; its connection with the IPI gave it teeth to back up the information it gathered and the means to collect even more valuable intelligence. It was an important and useful element of imperial surveillance for a little over a year following Wyllie's death, but that role shrunk rapidly after 1910; it had been instrumental in helping the IPI get off the ground but had less of a part to play once it had become an established organization.

### **The Irrelevant Bureau**

By 1911, 21 Cromwell Road was home to an Irrelevant Bureau; by the end of 1912, the Bureau had quietly been scrapped altogether. Part of the office's rapid fall from grace was the divergent ideology of its head, and part of it was due to a shrinking niche within the empire's global intelligence network. During the immediate aftermath of Wyllie's death and the coordinated official crackdown on India House, T.W. Arnold had acted as a facilitator of information from student to government, passing along intelligence to authorities who could carry out actions on its recommendation. Arnold complied with government directives to make this kind of surveillance work possible, but he may not have been entirely comfortable with it; by 1911, less was being asked of him on that front and he used the lull to steer the Bureau back toward liberal shores.

With the CID and Scotland Yard coordinating efforts within the newly established IPI, the Bureau of Information wasn't especially useful by the end of 1910. Savarkar had

been arrested and extradited to India, the Highgate mansion had been resold, and the few remaining outspoken radicals had left England for either the United States or the European continent. The vitriol and pushback – both official and unofficial – following Dhingra’s shooting had temporarily scared potentially dissenting Indian students straight, and no new nationalist organizations were springing up in London. The explanation for this was twofold: global intelligence communication allowed the imperial government to more closely monitor the movements of troublemakers and apprehend them before they could do damage, and public opinion in Britain no longer extended the liberal benefit of the doubt for students. Though not entirely unwelcome in Britain, students no longer enjoyed the uneasy tolerance that had allowed India House to take root. As such, there simply wasn’t much intelligence to be gained from students in London; those who knew anything about revolutionaries kept quiet, but most of them actively tried to distance themselves from those anti-imperialists.

No longer pressured to spy on trusting students, Arnold had free reign to remodel The Bureau in his own image and settled on one of well-intentioned paternalism.<sup>40</sup> “His efforts as Educational Adviser to promote students’ interests were genuine” wrote historian Katherine Watt, and Arnold gradually renounced his role as an intelligence agent and returned to the style he was most familiar and comfortable with: the teacher.<sup>41</sup> The Lee-Warner Report had recommended the Bureau be governed jointly by an Educational Adviser and an advisory committee; while Arnold took his position seriously, the same could hardly be said of the committee members. They met only a few times in the Bureau’s history and by 1910 Arnold was effectively running the Bureau by himself.<sup>42</sup> He used this new power to work for students rather than against them, advocating on their behalf to officials at Oxford and

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<sup>40</sup> Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 72.

<sup>41</sup> Watt, “Thomas Walker Arnold and the Re-Evaluation of Islam,” 78.

<sup>42</sup> Schaffel, “Empire and Assassination,” 67, 74-5

Cambridge and in doing so uprooting the Bureau's earlier efforts to gain the universities' favor with information. Watt writes that "His attitude towards students, whom he saw as 'his babes', was sincerely sympathetic to their ambitions and the prejudice they faced," arguing that Arnold had been against student surveillance all along and had complied with India Office orders to do so only as long as he was asked.<sup>43</sup> He had occasionally complained about what was required of him, but still passed along information that was used to monitor suspicious students. Thus, the Bureau didn't become irrelevant because Arnold decided to operate in opposition to India Office directives as Schaffel argues, but rather changed course after it had already been rendered obsolete by the more effective methods of the IPI. Arnold's actions were a response to a decreasing role in the global intelligence network rather than its cause.

A subtle yet notable feature of the 'Irrelevant Bureau' was its harmful co-optation of the two private societies. The Lee-Warner Committee's recommendation had included the National Indian Association and the Northbrook Club (rebranded afterward as the Northbrook Society) adopting office spaces within the confines of the new building, a prospect that not everyone in the groups found ideal. In particular, a representative of the Northbrook Society wrote in 1908 to the India Office that the club was concerned about a loss of autonomy but that its members on the whole "are not averse from a scheme by which the overlapping and duplication of work would be avoided, while each society retained a separate and distinct existence."<sup>44</sup> The societies' reservations aren't difficult to imagine: much as the India Office was moving to focus and streamline its process for dealing with Indian students in an effort to better keep them under supervision, so too might the office be

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<sup>43</sup> Watt, "T.W. Arnold and the Re-Evaluation of Islam," 79.

<sup>44</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/845 file 233 "Bureau of Information."

making an attempt to exercise some influence over the groups doing similar work and ensure a uniform approach to the problem. Per the committee's recommendations, the India Office would pay half of the organizations' rents for their spaces in 21 Cromwell Road and provide additional subsidies as necessary; coupled with the centralized office spaces, it would have been reasonable for the pair of private societies to stay fairly wary of the potential for the government to extend its influence over their own missions.

By subsidizing the private groups and housing them under the same roof as the Bureau of Information, the India Office had however unwittingly cost them their legitimacy as private intermediaries in the minds of students. Having been lumped in with the increasingly repressive imperial government, they ceased to function as the well-meaning alternatives to official agencies they had been prior to 1910 and became one and the same with the India Office. Indians looking for friendly Englishmen to advocate on their behalf in a London where private support for students was dwindling no longer considered the Northbrook Society and the National Indian Association viable options; their legitimacy had been compromised by the government's tainting touch and no longer wielded the same power to confer social citizenship upon visiting students. "[A representative] of the National Indian Association was aware that students she befriended were regarded as spies. Two representatives at Cromwell Road believed it was the government connection that was at the root of the problem"<sup>45</sup> wrote Shompa Lahiri, providing evidence that the organizations' leadership was aware of the government's harmful influence. The new location also had practical drawbacks for the organizations; even with India Office subsidies, rent in Kensington was astronomical, and an inability to keep up with the required payments – due

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<sup>45</sup> Lahiri, *Indians in Britain*, 171.

in part, no doubt, to a decreasing membership within student circles because of their new suspicion – was one of the factors in the NIA's decline by 1920.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

In looking at the history of Indian students after 1909, public opinion was a force perhaps even more powerful than the government in dictating the status of Indian students. After 1909, Indian students were increasingly subject to racial prejudice and their presence in universities was increasingly met with British resentment, largely on the grounds that they were stealing seats from better-qualified English students. This is at least partially explained by the collective partial revocation of their social citizenship – India House had cost them the liberal benefit of the doubt. During a 1911 India Office investigation into the Bureau's effectiveness, a student spoke on the recent uptick in unofficial prejudice. He claimed that ten years earlier, racism had been nearly nonexistent in the student experience, but in 1911 “The financial difficulties of some, the extreme political views of others, the commencement of anarchic crime in India and England, the hostility towards students of a certain section of the Press in both countries have contributed to the same result,”<sup>47</sup> namely, a growing alienation among Indians in Britain. His testimony touched on the newfound hostility of several private British intermediaries: the press, his university classmates, and even his teachers had all been defenders of Indian students' social citizenship before the Wyllie shooting, but afterwards had become decidedly less welcoming.

This wholly moderate climate that emerged in 1909 doesn't mean that English education didn't produce nationalists as it had earlier; rather, it produced more nationalists of

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<sup>46</sup> “21 Cromwell Road,” Making Britain Database, <http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/content/21-cromwell-road> (accessed 17 March 2015).

<sup>47</sup> OIOC IOR/L/PJ/6/1120, “Note by K.M. Singh, 1911”

the Jagmanderlal Jaini variety and fewer like Acharya. The Jainis of the student body followed in the moderate nationalism that Naoroji had pioneered while its Acharyas had run out of liberal goodwill in England. This is an explanation that works in harmony with the role of global intelligence in ensuring that no future India Houses ever took hold in England: both the public and the government held power over students in London, and neither party was willing to afford them as much tolerance as India House had received.

21 Cromwell Road in itself was the physical manifestation that signalled the tail end of the transformative arc of the India Office's use of the information order. What had begun in India as a nebulous network of native informants and tenuous chains had become a single building with a single man at its center; incorporating the private groups effectively signalled their end as alternative avenues and centralized the controlling influence over students in a single location. Common sense would support the India Office's approach: an increasingly systematized and structured network intuitively lends itself to more effectiveness. The mistake was in believing that information could flow both directions through a single hub; in the minds of students, the information that the Bureau was meant to spread hardly justified interacting with what was obviously an institution designed to keep a close watch on them, especially when things like the handbooks made visiting the Bureau unnecessary. The Bureau may have had an element of well-intentioned paternalism that T.W. Arnold brought out during his tenure, but it was fundamentally an attempt to collect intelligence that pretended unconvincingly not to be.

The Bureau of Information for Indian Students was the India Office's final attempt to actively intervene in the lives of India's cosmopolitan intellectuals. When the Lee-Warner Committee's Report was finally published, it was as an appendix to a similar report



conducted in 1921 under the chairmanship of Lord Lytton, the son of the former Viceroy Lytton. That the investigation was conducted by the son of a past Governor-General seems apropos, as the tone of its report was a marked change from that of Lee-Warner's in 1907 befitting a generational shift in approach. Rather than recommending thinly-veiled surveillance measures, Lytton's report keyed on the importance of developing India's own education system. A thoroughly liberal solution that cast an eye towards preparing India for its increasingly inevitable independence, the committee's report represented the end of the imperial government's efforts to control students in Britain. The India Office maintained a presence in 21 Cromwell Road's successor – a hostel sponsored by the Y.M.C.A. that opened in 1920 and still operates today – but never made any pretense to running its operation.

## Conclusion

“I have exceedingly great affection for the India Office and I am as pained to witness its passing as I am to see the partition of the Punjab.”

–Unsigned memo from an India Office bureaucrat, dated July 30, 1947.

To end this thesis where it began, recall *The India Office*'s pronouncement that “Empires thrive on bureaucracy.”<sup>238</sup> In most cases, this is probably a fair assessment: on the colonial periphery in India, bureaucracy and systemization were crucial, if not entirely all-encompassing, elements of effective imperial governance. In India, colonial encounters could be fairly well constructed and regulated by official authority, but in the metropole no such possibility existed. For transplanted colonial subjects, interactions with Britons and interactions with the imperial government were no longer one and the same; the influence of private British actors – and Britain itself – was stronger than that of the India Office. Similarly, exposure to anti-British ideas that were easily suppressible in Asia was commonplace in London. Aware that these uncontrolled encounters with British life and its detractors had stoked the embers of nationalism among visiting Indian students but limited by liberalism in what action it could take, the imperial government attempted to regain a degree of control by constructing encounters that would produce pro-British sentiments instead. The empire's bureaucrats found Indians in London less controllable than Indians in the subcontinent, but their constant attempts to influence them regardless revealed a set of deeply-entrenched attitudes about Indian character and imperial hierarchies, even within Britain's nominally liberal empire.

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<sup>238</sup> Robin B. Winks, “Foreword” from *The India Office, 1880-1910*, Arnold P. Kaminsky, xi.

## **Watchful Eyes and Blind Spots Redux**

Though the modes of surveillance shifted dramatically in the span of a couple decades from the amorphous networks in India to the concrete Bureau of Information in London, there remained a set of characteristics common to both. Both the ICS officers in India and the India Office bureaucrats in Britain believed information gathering to be their most useful tactic in clamping down on subaltern dissent, and both were plagued by information panics when their intelligence supplies ran dry. Britons in the metropole and periphery both engaged with the local information orders as a means of gaining some control over Indians.

The different locations bred different solutions and approaches. In India, information panics led to an expansion of the existing intelligence network and a shoring-up of the existing bonds between nodes; in London, the creation of the Bureau of Information was an attempt to streamline and centralize rather than branch out. District officers on the subcontinent passively tapped into existing channels of Indian communication in their efforts to monitor troublemakers; London bureaucrats created forms for travelling students and actively encouraged them to seek out British influences during their stay in the imperial center. The India Office spent over a decade looking for a way to keep watch over students in London that would both work as well as methods in India but also adhere to the contours of liberal British society. It was a balance the India Office never completely struck, constantly shifting its tactics in response to changing dangers and the public's assessment thereof.

Though the India Office was fairly powerless in matters of surveillance for the duration of most of its efforts, the British public played a role in unofficial surveillance that was unique to the metropolitan setting. Private intermediaries – landlords, teachers,

newspaper editors, and others of the ilk – constantly trained a wary set of eyes on the visitors and exercised a peculiar influence that the government never could. The India Office constantly found its hands tied by the counters of liberalism, but those same restrictions on governmental action were conversely privileges for private society, and individual Britons in the metropole could make life difficult for colonial subjects if these intermediaries thought the visitors had overstepped their boundaries.

Thus, while surveillance in terms of official intelligence was an apparent failure in Britain, the subtle cooperation of the government with the public actually had a greater effect than the outright governmental repression in India. The subcontinent was too vast and too diverse for the small number of imperial governors to ever come close to getting a stranglehold on, and revolutionary plots were a common feature of British India until independence in 1947. There were almost no comparable private intermediaries in British India to pick up the slack where the government was unable to, and the result was a colony that could never be completely controlled. In contrast, after Sir William Curzon Wyllie's death in 1909, Britain no longer played host to any of the radicals that had previously enjoyed its protection, and no groups sprung up in India House's wake. This wasn't a lucky accident for the rest of the mid-level bureaucrats of the India Office; rather, it was the combination of government scrutiny with public intolerance. Governmental intelligence in London may have been less effective than its subcontinental counterpart, but the larger liberal machinery of the imperial capital ultimately proved more stifling than the thoroughly repressive Raj.

## Colonial (Mis)Encounters

This hostile Britain that emerged after Dhingra's shooting was the nadir of Anglo-Indian relations in the metropole and represented far deeper British attitudes than the reaction to a single murder. The presence of Indian students in London provided the context for a new type of colonial encounter, one that had the potential for both liberating and repressive effects. The Britons who populated British India were there for almost exclusively imperial ends; the British people that Indians would have encountered in the subcontinent were usually government officers, lawyers, teachers, or occupied other positions of power over natives. In contrast, the Britons that Indians interacted with in Britain were normal people, nominally their equals. This seemingly provided an opportunity for upending the imperial hierarchy: if British and Indian people were equals in London, what changed when the same interaction was transposed onto Calcutta or Delhi? This was the root of the India Office's concern about visiting students, but – like it had with surveillance and monitoring – the British public subtly preserved the template of colonial encounter. The *social citizenship* described in chapter iii allowed Indians to feel free in Britain, but the fact that this freedom was a privilege granted by Britons rather than an inherent right reinforced the same imperial hierarchy at work in India.

While the numbers of students never flagged in response to decreasing British acceptance after 1909, the hostile public catalyzed insularity among them. Within an increasingly large population, Indian students generally made fewer attempts to blend in with British society or befriend British peers, choosing instead to associate more exclusively with other Indians. Sumita Mukherjee has argued that this insularity led to an inflated estimation of their own self-reliance from Britain that upon their return to India translated into stronger

calls for independence. In an ironic twist, students after 1920 controlled their own imperial encounters in London much as the British had controlled colonial encounters in India.

### **Lessons from a Surveillance State**

Extrapolating from history is a tricky business. The India Office itself learned this the hard way when it first began to develop its intelligence systems to monitor students in Britain: what worked well in one context was far from guaranteed to work in another. Attempting to map historical lessons onto the present is a similar minefield of qualifications and uncertainties, but this particular history has the potential to lend itself to an understanding of the world today. For an age when no mainstream news cycle seems complete without some frightening rumor of terrorist sleeper cells nestled inside Europe, of Britons returning from ‘jihadi’ training camps in the Levant, or of the National Security Agency’s apparent attempts to monitor every facet of Americans’ lives, the story told in this thesis is perhaps a relevant one. Through constant surveillance and mistrust, agents of imperial Britain – mustachioed bureaucrats and ordinary Londoners alike – created and exacerbated the very dangers they sought to avoid. The usual tempers of projecting history apply here, and the narrative of India House doesn’t map perfectly onto present conditions, but the implications are clear. Whether the world has learned from its past is another matter entirely.

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