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Title: King George V's second visit to India: The Durbar of 1911 and the royal hunting expedition in Nepal
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Issue: 2/2014

Citation style: Tamás Kloska. "King George V's second visit to India: The Durbar of 1911 and the royal hunting expedition in Nepal". ÖT KONTINENS 2:33-44.

<https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=540757>

Tamás Kloska

King George V's second visit to India: The Durbar of 1911 and the royal hunting expedition in Nepal

Abstract

Queen Elizabeth II's grandfather, King George V visited India twice. Firstly, in 1905 as the Prince of Wales, secondly in 1911 when he travelled to British India then as King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. 12 December 1911, at the Great Coronation Durbar in Delhi he and his wife Queen Mary were proclaimed as Emperor and Empress of India. During the ceremony George wore the newly made Imperial Crown of India, which was fabricated exclusively for the occasion and for him, no other British sovereign wore it later ever again. During the tour, George also moved the capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi. After the coronation, the King-Emperor took part in an almost two-week-long hunting expedition in Nepal, during which George hunted down many exotic animals.

Keywords: George V; British Empire; United Kingdom; British India; Delhi Durbar; British history;

India at the turn of the century

The word „*Durbar*” is a Persian term that was adopted in India to refer to a ruler's court. In British India, the name was attached to formal imperial assemblies called together to mark state occasions. The Delhi Durbars were coronation of British Monarchs as empress or emperors of the British Raj. There were three Coronation Durbars in British history: in 1877 (Queen Victoria's), in 1903 (King Edward VII's), and in 1911 (King George V's). The Durbars included homage by maharajas to the British monarch, military reviews, musical performances, sport events, public entertainments, garden parties etc.¹ In this study, we will focus on the third, the Durbar of 1911.

India, the Jewel in the British Crown at the turn of the century showed the image of tranquillity. The contemporaries believed that the English domination had never been so stable as before and the

¹ CODELL, Julie: *On the Delhi Coronation Durbars, 1877, 1903, 1911.* (http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=julie-codell-on-the-delhi-coronation-durbars-1877-1903-1911) (Retrieved 29 November 2016), 1.

British supremacy would remain to exist in the long run. The British Empire's great power position was significantly laid on the foundation of the possession of India. After the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (also known as the Sepoy Rebellion), the Government of India Act was passed by the Parliament in 1858.² Therefore the territories of the British East India Company and their administration were transferred to the direct rule of the British Crown through a Secretary of State for India. In 1876, Queen Victoria was proclaimed as Empress of India and the all-time Governor-General of India became the head of the local administration, who became known as the Viceroy (though it never was statutory authority.)³

About two-third of the Indian Empire was controlled directly by British administration; before the turn of the century, this covered three main areas such as the Bengal, Bombay and Madras Presidencies. Besides that, one-third of the area was ruled by about 600 different Rajas, Maharajas, Nawabs and Nizams. They reigned over areas of various sizes and they had varying degrees of internal autonomy. These small administrative units' foreign and military affairs were under the direct management of British political agents.⁴

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Bengal – with its 80 million inhabitants – was the largest province of India. The area was the centre of the Indian cultural and political life, and its capital, Calcutta was the capital of British India as well. In 1905, the British Government of India announced the division of Bengal, which was divided into two parts: East- and West-Bengal. With this, a new age has begun: the more than four-decade-long struggle of the British colonial rule and the birth of the Indian national movement.⁵ Such was the situation of India when the later George V first entered the country.

The Prince of Wales and the Jewel in the Crown

Queen Victoria's grandson, Prince George visited India first in 1905 with his wife, Mary of Teck (May). They undertook a long royal trip to India and Burma and during the almost five-month tour, they

² BALOGH András: *A brit korona ékköve: India*. História. Vol. 23. 2001, No 3. 16.

³ *Imperial Gazetteer of India. The Indian Empire*. Vol. 4. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909, 16.

⁴ BALOGH: 17.

⁵ *Ibid*, 19.

visited Bombay, Jaipur, Agra, Gwalior, Lucknow, Calcutta, Rangoon, Mandalay, Madras, Bangalore, Mysore, Hyderabad and Karachi. Because of the quarrel with Lord Kitchener (who at that time was the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of India), Governor-General Lord Curzon resigned as Viceroy of India just in November 1905, his successor was Lord Minto⁶, who took his office while the royal tour was in progress, and this gave birth to some tense moments during the event.⁷ The princely couple's ship – called *Renown* – landed at Bombay 9 November. The Prince and Princess spent eighteen weeks in the country while they travelled around nine thousand miles by train.⁸ The legend about the later king's alcoholism, which pursued him for a long time was also born on this trip. The myth lacked any kind of truth, Prince George was a very abstemious man, although as the following quote illustrates, he did like a glass of wine after dinner. Lord Minto's wife, Mary Caroline wrote the following about George's Indian trip in her diary:

*"I heard from England the other day that the night of the Calcutta illuminations the Prince dined with Lord Kitchener; this is quite true, as I sat next to him. The story went on that both the Prince and Lord Kitchener were so drunk that they couldn't appear after dinner. [...] The Prince knows about these reports and spoke to me about them; he said I suppose they think the same thing in India because over one of the triumphal arches was written 'God help the Prince'... I think it is cruel, especially as he hardly touches any wine, no Champagne or liqueur, only a light Moselle."*⁹

During the journey Prince George and Princess May were fascinated by the country. They set sail for Europe 19 March 1906 with an experience they never forgot. Thereafter George had to wait almost six years to see once again the Jewel in the Crown of the British Empire.

Emperor of India

Succeeding his father, the late King Edward VII 6 May 1910, George was crowned as King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain

⁶ Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, Gilbert John (1845-1914): the 4th Earl of Minto. He was the successor of Lord Curzon. Lord Minto served as Viceroy and Governor-General of India between 1905 and 1910.

⁷ CANNADINE, David: *George V. The Unexpected King*. Penguin Books, London, 2014, 28-29.

⁸ ROSE, Kenneth: *King George V*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1983, 61.

⁹ Cited in: ROSE: 81.

and Ireland 22 June 1911. 6 February 1911 in his first speech to Parliament the new king announced that he was planning a visit to India in the next winter, then as the Emperor of the country.¹⁰ The plan became reality in the same year, for the trip George was accompanied by Queen Mary, the Prince of Wales (his eldest son, the later Edward VIII) and his only daughter, Princess Mary. The king noted with pride that the whole Indian journey was only his own.¹¹

When planning the monarch's visit to India, it became a burning question whether in which crown King George should appear in Delhi? Should he wear the Imperial State Crown or St Edward's Crown? Should he crown himself as Emperor in the sight of his people or a simple proclamation will be enough? Randall Davidson, the Archbishop of Canterbury stated that in a land of Moslems and Hindus a Christian rite would not be appropriate. An agreement was reached: the king will arrive at the Durbar with a crown already on his head. But in which crown? The British laws do not allow the Crown Jewels to leave the shores of England, thus a new crown was made exclusively for the occasion and for King George V himself. Garrard & Company Ltd was entrusted to make a new headdress for the value of £60 000, that was the Imperial Crown of India.¹² The crown weighs 920 grams and it contains emeralds, rubies, sapphires and 6.100 diamonds. In the centre of the front cross, is a very fine Indian ruby and on the top cross, a large fine emerald.¹³ It has not been used since King George and it is now part of the Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom. The crown is located in the Jewel House at the Tower of London.

11 November 1911, the king and his company embarked the RMS *Medina* (which was therefore commissioned as the Royal Yacht), which 2 December 1911 – after a three-week-long voyage – at about ten o'clock anchored about two miles from Indian shore. Firstly, Viceroy Hardinge¹⁴ came aboard to greet the king and he was

¹⁰ FORTESCUE, J.: *Narrative of the visit to India of their majesties, King George V. and Queen Mary, and the coronation durbar held at Delhi, 12th December 1911*. Macmillan and Co., London, 1912, 79.

¹¹ ROSE: 132.

¹² ROSE: 133.

¹³ YOUNGHUSBAND, Sir George – DAVENPORT, Cyril.: *The Crown Jewels of England*. Cassell & Co., London, 1919, 21–22.

¹⁴ Hardinge, Charles (1858–1944): Viceroy and Governor-General of India between 1910 and 1916, who in the meantime replaced the Earl of Minto.

followed by the Governor of Bombay, the Commander-in-Chief of the East India Squadron and other officials. After half past three the royal couple left the ship „amid a salute of one hundred and one guns”.¹⁵ After that the King-Emperor and his wife advanced to a small pavilion where two thrones were prepared for them and hundreds of people were gathering to greet the couple. In his speech, George said that „feel myself no stranger in your beautiful city” and the crowd applauded him many times. At this event, the king wore the white uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet, with the ribbon and star of the Order of the Star of India^{16,17}

Each Coronation Durbar provided multiple directories and guidebooks for the attendees, such as the *Official Directory 1911*¹⁸, therefore we can get further information about the official events from that, and the account of the military historian Sir John Williams Fortescue¹⁹ who accompanied George to India as King's Librarian.

The King-Emperor's State Entry to Delhi took place 7 December and it lacked any splendour. The Emperor and Empress arrived from Bombay by train at the Selimgarh Bastion of the Delhi Fort where a special station for the reception of the Imperial couple was built. (A piquancy that gentlemen were not allowed to wear military uniform for this occasion.²⁰) The Indian dignities had advised the king the use of elephants which were the symbols of imperial rule in India for centuries. Ultimately George was riding on horseback to Delhi, despite of he was not a trained horseman. The Emperor wore the uniform of a British Field marshal and a white tropical helmet, which covered most of his face, thus he could easily be mistaken with a member of his military escort. Many did not recognise him from the crowd, on that day they went home disappointed.²¹

8 December the late King-Emperor Edward VII's memorial was

¹⁵ FORTESCUE: 106-107.

¹⁶ The Most Exalted Order of the Star of India: a British order of knighthood established by Queen Victoria in 1861, the senior order of chivalry associated with the Indian Empire.

¹⁷ FORTESCUE: 108.

¹⁸ Vid. *Coronation Durbar Delhi 1911. Official Directory with maps*. Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta, 1911.

¹⁹ Fortescue, John Williams (1859–1933): British military historian. Between 1905 and 1926, he worked as the Royal Librarian at Windsor Castle.

²⁰ Ibid, 7–9.

²¹ ROSE: 134.

unveiled by King George and Queen Mary. The memorial took the form of a bronze equestrian statue of Edward, on a pedestal of red Agra sandstone. Its sculptor was Sir Thomas Brock.²²

Four days later, 12 December the grand spectacle compensated the disappointed people of Delhi. It is important that King George V was the first British monarch who actually was present at his own Coronation Durbar. In 1878, the actual Viceroy Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Earl of Lytton read Queen Victoria's 1858 proclamation²³ in front of British officials and Indian maharajas, who then „paid ritual homage to the Crown, presenting gifts and bowing to Lytton seated before a large portrait of Queen Victoria in 1877”²⁴. King Edward VII's Coronation Durbar of 1903 differed from the previous one in that instead of Lytton the new Viceroy Lord Curzon was present at the ceremony.²⁵

The preparations for George V's Durbar had been going forward for many months. It became clear at the beginning of the preparations that the King-Emperor and the Queen-Empress should be sitting in the open air, instead of any building being appointed or constructed for the occasion. This was because the organizers kept in mind that as many spectators could see the Imperial couple as possible. George indicated that a semicircle with a pavilion in its centre should be formed, as a way of Indian dignities and other privileged individuals could sit curved around the Royal pavilion, the Shamiana. That was settled, the coronation scene was installed according to the king's request. The pavilion itself „rose from a broad base in three tiers, ascended by broad stairways, to a central structure supported by four slender columns and surmounted by a huge gilt bulbous dome”.²⁶ Fortescue also notes in his account that the dome was typical of late Mohammedan architecture.²⁷

The morning of 12 November was clear and cloudless despite the

²² *Coronation Durbar Delhi 1911*. *ibid*, 22.

²³ Queen Victoria's Proclamation of 1 November 1858: it declared that thereafter India would be governed by and in the name of the British Monarch through a Secretary of State.

²⁴ FRYKENBERG, Robert E. (ed.): *Delhi through the Ages*. Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, 232. Announces: CODELL: 1.

²⁵ *Ibid*.

²⁶ FORTESCUE: 143.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 39.

previous day's different forecast.²⁸ At 10:15 a.m. the arena was already more than three parts full, amongst the crowd were the British troops in red tunic who emerged nicely from the black and white mass with their scarlet uniform. This durbar incorporated European music by Handel and Meyerbeer (Barringer 181) played by massed bands.²⁹

Meanwhile George began his day with holding a Council, after that at half past eleven, he and his wife left their camp in an open landau drawn by four horses and just before noon, they arrived at the scene of the event saluted by one hundred and one guns. The King-Emperor wore the same robes as he wore on his coronation at Westminster Abbey back in June, with additional pieces of purple velvet bound with gold. George also wore the collar of the Garter³⁰ and the star of the Order of the Star of India. As we previously mentioned, the King-Emperor was not crowned at the ceremony on purpose, instead he arrived to the scene with the Imperial Crown of India already on his head. Although George did not like the official court events, yet he stated that the Durbar was the „*most beautiful and wonderful sight I ever saw*”³¹, nevertheless he complained about the heat and the weight of the crown.

When the imperial couple arrived, the huge crowd stood up. Viceroy Hardinge came forward to receive them and before King George and Queen Mary took their seats on their thrones at the Shamiana, they bowed right and left to the spectators. Then the Master of Ceremonies asked the Emperor's permission to open the Durbar, which was being granted. After that, King George read a short welcome speech.³²

The whole event was no longer than an hour, during the ceremony George was introduced to over one hundred maharajas.³³ The event had no central theme but contained some surprises: the

²⁸ Ibid, 145.

²⁹ CODELL: 4.

³⁰ The Most Noble Order of the Garter: English order of knighthood founded by King Edward III in 1348. The highest British civil and military honour, which is obtainable. The monarch alone can grant membership, and he or she is the Sovereign of the Garter.

³¹ ROSE: 135.

³² FORTESCUE: 151-153.

³³ FRYKENBERG: 232.

Emperor announced the reversal of Lord Curzon's 1905 partition of Bengal to appease the Bengali sentiment and he also announced that the new capital of British India is Delhi, instead of Calcutta. An interesting fact, that when George and Mary left their thrones under the Shamiana, many Indians rushed from the amphitheatre to kiss the thrones and the ground on which the imperial couple had stood.³⁴

The Times reported the following about the great event:

„The Great Coronation Durbar, which has occupied the thoughts of India for more than a year, has involved the most elaborate preparation, and has brought a quarter of a million people together from every part of the Indian Empire [...]. Enthroned on high beneath a golden dome, looking outwards to the far north whence they came, their Majesties the King-Emperor and Queen-Empress were acclaimed by over 100,000³⁵ of their subjects. [...] The Monarch sat alone, remote but beneficent, raised far above the multitude, but visible to all, clad in rich vestments, flanked by radiant emblems of authority, guarded by a glittering array of troops, the cynosure of the proudest Princes of India, the central figures in what was surely the most majestic assemblage ever seen in the East. [...] It was a sight which will remain indelibly engraved upon the memory.”³⁶

The Hungarian Media also reported about the Durbar:

„The Indian Coronation.

Delhi, 12. Dec. The Coronation Durbar held today at noon English King George V was ceremoniously proclaimed as Emperor of India. The Imperial couple was greeted by Viceroy Lord Hardinge in the front of the ceremonial tent. The orchestras were playing the coronation march. Then came the proclamation by a herald, the imperial couple listened to his words standing before the throne. Hardinge then put forward a number of cases of grace, and various donations, including the imperial couple's five million rupees gift for the purposes of public education. Shortly before the end of the Durbar the king also announced that the Indian Empire's capital will be transferred from Calcutta to Delhi.”³⁷

³⁴ CODELL: 4.

³⁵ According to Viceroy Hardinge, a mass of 250 000 people gathered for the event. Vid. HARDINGE, Lord: *My Indian Years, 1910–1916*. John Murray, London, 1948, 42.

³⁶ *The Times*. 13 December 1911.

³⁷ *Budapesti Hírlap*. Vol. 31. 1911, N^o 296. 7.

The royal hunt in Nepal

After the Durbar the King-Emperor attended a nearly two-week hunt in Nepalese Terai. He awaited this event with much more enthusiasm than the Great Coronation Durbar itself. George told the following to Hardinge about the event:

„As probably this will be the last and only time in my life when I shall get big game shooting of this kind, I naturally want to have as many days in Nepal as possible.”³⁸

Although the king of Nepal, Maharajadhiraja Prilhivi Bir Bikram Shah Deva suddenly died 11 December 1911, it was decided to proceed with the preparations. King-Emperor George V arrived in Nepal at 10 a.m. Monday, 18 December.³⁹ He was met by the actual ruler of Nepal, Prime Minister Maharajah Chandra Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana⁴⁰ who was the main host of the event. He spent months with the preparations: he put 600 elephant and more than 14,000 beaters and other retainers at George's disposal.⁴¹ Besides, every night, baits were put out for tigers over a large area of the country: oxes were driven to the edge of the jungle, in advance to lure tigers to the surrounding area. Along the valley of the Rui River a 13-mile road was constructed only for the occasion, which the King travelled through by car. Here, George was met by the second son of the Prime Minister of Nepal and they went after elephants in the jungle where the king shot his first two tigers. A good number of miles later, at 5.30 p.m., the royal party reached the camp at Sukhibar where a bungalow was built exclusively for George and it was fitted with electric light.⁴²

During the hunt, George's most successful day was Thursday, 21 December, when he hunted down four tigers and one bear.⁴³ On

³⁸ Cited in ROSE: 135.

³⁹ ROOKMAKER, Kees (et al.): *The royal hunt of tiger and rhinoceros in the Nepalese terai in 1911*. Pachyderm, 2005, N° 38. 89-90.

⁴⁰ Chandra Shumsher Junga Bahadur Rana (1863-1929): the fifth Prime Minister of Nepal. He became maharaja in 1901, and he received King-Emperor George V in 1911.

⁴¹ ROOKMAKER: 90-91.

⁴² Anonymous: *The historical record of the imperial visit to India, 1911, compiled from the official records under the orders of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India*. John Murray, for the Government of India, London, 231. Announces: ROOKMAKER: 89.

⁴³ ROOKMAKER: 91.

Sunday, 24 December, Christmas day was opened with a small divine service in the morning. In the afternoon, the king inspected over 70 kinds of animals, which were presented to him by Prime Minister Shumsher. A rhino calf which was presented to George left Calcutta 1 April 1912 and was transported to England, to the London Zoo. In the evening the Maharajah was decorated with the insignia of a Knight Grand Commander of the Royal Victorian Order⁴⁴. 27 December, George shot one tigress, the 20th since the start of the expedition. One day later the king and his company travelled 12 miles by car and on the way back to the train, George shot his last tiger, the 21st.⁴⁵

During the hunting expedition, the King-Emperor and his and his company hunted down 39 tigers, eighteen rhinoceroses and four bears, of which George shot personally twenty-one tigers, eight rhinos and one bear.⁴⁶ „A record, and I think will be hard to beat.”⁴⁷ – he said about his hunting successes.

While her imperial husband was hunting tigers, elephants and bears, Queen-Empress May went sightseeing to Agra, then to Rajputana. After that, she rejoined George in Calcutta where the royal couple spent their last week in India.

At the end of the tour, 10 January 1912, George held his farewell speech in Bombay (now Mumbai). The King-Emperor was slightly touched by the farewell because he knew that there was little chance that he would see India ever again. In his speech he said: „To you, the representatives of Bombay, who have greeted us so warmly on our arrival and departure, I deliver this our loving message of farewell to the Indian Empire. Here the King's voice broke, and for some seconds he was unable to speak further. Then collecting himself, he read on: „May the Almighty ever assist me and my successors to promote its welfare and to secure to it the blessings and prosperity of peace.”⁴⁸ Before boarding the *Medina*, George could not stand not to make a sarcastic remark to Governor-General Hardinge: „You seem very pleased, Charlie, to be getting rid of us!”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Royal Victorian Order: a British order of knighthood established by Queen Victoria in 1896, to reward personal services rendered the monarch.

⁴⁵ ROOKMAKER: 92.

⁴⁶ CANNADINE: 50.

⁴⁷ Cited in ROSE: 136.

⁴⁸ FORTESCUE: 244.

⁴⁹ Cited in ROSE: 136.

According to Fortescue, the success of the Durbar was above all to the „*sympathetic bearing and perfect dignity of Their Majesties*”.⁵⁰ Six days later, when Viceroy Hardinge made his first State Entry to Calcutta, an assassination attempt was carried out against him. Hardinge was seriously wounded and his personal attendant was killed in the incident. This attempt indicated that the British rule in India had not been as stable as the British thought.

To understand the relationship between George V and his Empire, we need to clarify the following. On the one hand, due to George's naval upbringing he did not receive the education deserved for a crown prince and he did not like official court events either (as he stated to his personal assistant, Arthur Bigge: „*We sailors [...] never smile on duty.*”⁵¹) Even in his elder years, his favourite pastime remained hunting and philately. On the other hand, he took his duties and responsibilities seriously which entailed with reigning: he was the monarch of the whole British Empire, not just Great Britain's. During his reign after the Great War – as David Cannadine highlights – George was noticeably strived to maintain a more personal relationship with his subjects and he knew that more publicity should be given to the royal family's provincial visits and imperial tours. The Great War raised many problems within the Empire because the Dominions for aiding the mother country in return demanded a corresponding word in the policy-making. In India, the nationalist agitation for independence frighteningly increased. George V, who saw the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian, the German and the Ottoman Empire believed that the key to the survival of the British Empire lies in becoming a „*national and imperial*”⁵² sovereign. Although George's second visit to India achieved its goal to strengthen the support for British rule in the country, with a new generation of nationalist leaders, like Mahatma Ghandi, who led a campaign of civil disobedience against the British rule between 1920 and 1921, the dissolution of the British Empire became only a matter of time.

⁵⁰ FORTESCUE:167.

⁵¹ Cited in ROSE: 169.

⁵² CANNADINE: 67.

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