SUMMER HILL: THE BUILDING OF VICEREGAL LODGE

Susan Visvanathan

Purchase of Properties, Costs of Building and Electrification of Vice Regal Lodge.

In a letter to the Marquis of Salisbury, who was Secretary of State for India, Lytton and his team wrote that the Municipal committee of Simla had been expanded for purposes of conservation and improvement. For this purpose, he said a new order of bureaucrats had been appointed, and these officers were primarily, one Superintending Engineer and two Executive Engineers with supporting staff, who were under the direct control of himself and his staff. These men were now busy checking the details of water and drainage projects, and were preeminently hired to make sure that accommodation would be made ready for the "coming season." He adds that,

"The general instructions to the Superintending Engineer will be found in our letter to that officer, No 383 M, dated November 7th, 1876, which is also one of the enclosures of this dispatch."

These houses and the other buildings on the estates which were planned, would eventually serve for several of the public offices. In the mean time, until a residence for the Viceroy could be built, they were intent on making certain additions and alterations to the building called "Peterhoff", at an estimated cost of about 10,000 rupees. Lytton argued that this would not only give a necessary increase to the accommodation that was required for the public offices, but would, render the house more suitable and convenient for occupation. However,

These additions and alteration will not however make "Peterhoff" a really well arranged or suitable residence, and it is necessary to build an entirely new house, and as will be understood from the 3rd para of our Resolution, measures have been taken for securing the only eligible site which the limited space in Simla affords, and for purchasing at a cost of about 7,000 rupees the surrounding private estate.

The expenses connected with the arrangement will be in addition to the sums of 10,000 rupees and 50,000 rupees set down in the 3rd para of our new Despatch. No I dated 14th January 1876 as the probable outlay that may be anticipated on

general sanitary improvements, public offices and clerks' quarters. The precise addition will be duly reported after the necessary plans and estimates have been submitted, but we may here notice that on the estates which we have acquired during the current and past years there are various houses (occupied for the most part by the Viceroy's staff) for which rents are paid, so that a considerable portion of the outlay incurred is even now remunerative.

Nothing has yet been definitely settled in respect to the financial arrangement which will have to be entered into with the Muncipality, nor as to the precise share to be borne by that body in the execution of the several works, but these points will receive our attention during the ensuing season at Simla, and as desired by Her Majesty's government, we shall take care that every project is fully scrutinized in detail in view to ensuing the utmost economy.

Signed Lytton, H.W.Norman, A. Hobhouse, C.Bayley, J.Arbuthnot, A.Clarke, John Strachey

It is stated (see No 34. Public Works date March 15 1877) that while Peterhoff was being expanded and renovated, steps were afoot to procure more land,

As to permanent arrangements, it is under consideration to build a viceregal residence on the "Observatory" or "Bentinck Hill" between the present Observatory House and Squires Hill. But whatever precise site is ultimately selected it will be necessary to acquire the other estates on Bentinck Hill.

Pamela Kanwar in her detailed study, *Imperial Simla: The Political Culture of the Raj* (2005) gives us a detailed report on locations and historical configurations of the early years of colonizing Simla. She writes that Simla was first sighted and recorded by two officers who were mapping the terrain. It was Captain Charles Pratt Kennedy, who was posted as Garrison Officer until 1821, and then became the Political Agent with supervisory powers over the hill states, who first built a residence. Kennedy is described as being a dandy who was quite at home dominating over the local elites, even sending them to prison and fining them, or hanging them when he thought it necessary. For fourteen years he made Simla his 'royal estate' and contributed to the town's growth. He is associated with the introduction of potatoes in the hills.

Kennedy's house, according to the journalist Vipin Pubby, was the first retreat for those looking for a change of routine. (Pubby 1988:20) The town was later in demand among those who saw it as sanatorium. Land for house construction was leased 'free of rent' from the rulers of Keonthal or Patiala, depending upon the site chosen. "Begarees (landless forced labour), building material and wood were also secured from them, and the transactions recorded in Kennedy's office." (Kanwar 2005:16). Begar or forced labour was finally abolished in 1929 through the work of

Samuel Evans Stokes, who was close to Mahatama Gandhi. (Pubby 1988:87)

Lord Amherst had chosen Simla, in 1827, for his summer camp, and he spent two months there, leaving before the rains. Pamela Kanwar writes that he came with an entourage and 1700 coolies. Much of the colonization of the hills was also about the networking of roads. Coolies were often not paid, and there were complaints of non-payment of wages from local zamindars. The subjugation of hill territory depended on the making of these roads.

This road was not permanent because it takes several years before paths cut into hillsides can stabilize into roads. The monsoons often wash segments down into khuds while landslides carry stones and segments down on to the roads. While Kennedy did much to laying down roads, and this was noted by the administrators, he was refused a request for a special allowance. He was also responsible, as we saw, for introducing potatoes into the villages of the hills. (Kanwar 2005: 23)

Kennedy had been host to Lord Amherst and many others Jacquemont, a visitor is quoted by Kanwar as writing that they were well fed and received champagne, hock and delicious Mocha coffee at dinner, as well as receiving the Calcutta journals at breakfast. (ibid 23) Kennedy's work is reported to have taken only one hour after breakfast, but it was his imagination that unfurled, that saw the houses, bazaars and roads as they came to be. (ibid 24). The British officers saw Simla as a sanatorium, but then, it must be remembered that foot passengers, horses, mules, ponies or cattle, travelled over 41 miles of mountain road. Coolies were rounded up, but even with sedan chairs and porters, the hill climb to Simla was extremely difficult. (ibid 25) Captain Mundy, an aid de camp, wrote that in 1828 hundreds of mountain laborers and coolies were employed for cutting timber, laying blocks of stone and erecting buildings. (ibid 17). There were often scuffles with the Raja of Keonthal and his men, who did not want their forests cut. The Raja said "If I give all my trees how will my subjects be able to live in my country?" (ibid 17)

In 1837, with the Afghan question, Lord Auckland saw the significance of Simla politically and moved there. The trips were not yet official, but Auckland's visit was not a holiday trip, for his staff travelled with him. In 1838, Emily Eden, his sister, wrote in her journal on Good Friday, April 13th,

This dear Simla! It snowed yesterday, and has been hailing today, and is now thundering in a cracking, sharp way that would be awful, only its sublimity is destroyed by the working of the carpenters and blacksmiths, who are shaping curtain rods and rings all around the house. It has been an immense labour to furnish properly. We did not bring half chintz enough from Calcutta, and Simla grows rhododendrons and pines, and violets, but nothing else – no damask, no glazed

cotton for lining – nothing. There is a sort of country cloth – made here, wretched stuff, in fact, though the colours are beautiful – but I ingeniously devised tearing up whole pieces of red and white into narrow strips, and then sewing them together, and the effect for the dining room is lovely when supported with the scarlet border painted all around the cornice, the doors, windows etc. and now everybody is adopting the fashion. (Eden 1978:127,128)

In yet another note, dated April 22nd, she writes,

I am quite well again now, thank you, and have begun riding and walking again, and the climate, the place, and the whole thing is quite delightful, and our poor despised house, that everybody abused, has turned out the wonder of Simla. We brought carpets, chandeliers and wall shades from Calcutta, and I have got a native painter into the house and cut out patterns in paper, which he then paints in borders all round the doors and windows, and it makes up for the want of cornices. Altogether it is very like a cheerful middlesized English country house, and extremely enjoyable. I do not mean to think of the future (this world's future) for six months. It was very well to keep oneself alive in the plains by thinking of the mountains or to dream of some odd chance *that would take one home – there is no saying the inventions to go home that I had invented – but now I do not mean to be imaginative for six months.* (ibid 128,129)

The relief at being in Simla was patent. When she had arrived after the interminable journey, she exclaimed,

Well, it really is worth all the trouble - such a beautiful place – and our house, that everybody has been abusing, only wanting all the good furniture and carpets we have bought - to be quite perfection. Views only too lovely; deep valleys on the drawing room side to the west, and the snowy range on the dining room side where my room also is. Our sitting rooms are small, but that is all the better in this climate, and the two principal rooms are very fine. The climate! No wonder I could not live down below! We never were allowed a scrap of air to breathe – now I come back to the air again, I remember all about it. It is a cool sort of stuff, refreshing, sweet, and apparently pleasant to the lungs. We have fires in every room, and the windows open, red rhododendron trees in bloom in every direction, and beautiful walks like English shrubberies cut on all sides of the hills. God! I see this to be the best part of India (ibid 125).

In the website of "Exhibitions at Victoria Memorial Hall, Calcutta" which chronicles the achievements of Emily Eden, drawing from her letters and paintings, it is established that, Emily Eden's paintings are preserved at the Victoria Memorial at Calcutta. J. Dickinson published her paintings. Emily Eden was the author of two novels, *"The Semi Detached House"* (1859) and "*The Semi-Attached Couple.*" According to the website, on "October 21st 1837, Lord Auckland accompanied rather reluctantly by his sister, set out from Calcutta on board the 'Megna' a flat or long barge towed by a steamer. They alighted at Benares and went on foot to Simla."

Emily Eden writing of the servants accompanying them on the barge from the Sunderbans describes the nights on the barge as very hot and sleepless.

The native servants sleep any and everywhere, over our heads, under our feet, or at our doors; and as there are no partitions, but green blinds at the sides and grating above, of course, we hear them coughing above. (Eden 1978:5)

In Simla too, the servants were often ill. In the entry for April 29th 1838, she writes,

All the natives servants are, or have been sick, and I do not wonder. We have built twenty small houses since we came, and have lodged fifty of our servants in these outhouses. Still, there were always a great many looking unhappy, so I got J to go round to all the houses and get me a list of all who were settled, and of those whose houses were not built, and I found there were actually sixty seven who had no lodging provided for them. I should like to hear the row English servants would have made, and these are not a bit more used to rough it. There is not one who has not his own little house at Calcutta, and his wife to cook for him; so they feel the cold and their helplessness doubly, but they never complain. (144)

Indira Ghose in one of her chapters in her book *The Power of the Female Gaze: Women Travellers in Colonial India*, (1998) discusses Lord Auckland's sister, Emily Eden who set sail in October 1835 to assist him in his duties when he became Governor General. The narrative of "Up the Country" describes a political journey made by Auckland in the company of his sisters from Calcutta to Simla between 1838-1840. Ghose writes that Emily Eden's hallmark was irony, and describes the march to Simla.

Accordingly, a vast imperial machinery was cranked into action for the tour, with a cavalcade ten miles long led by the Governor-General and his sisters on elephant and on horse-back, followed by armies of elephants, the camels and horses and their grooms; next the British members of the party, on horse-back in carriages or in palanquins; then came bullock carts loaded with household goods; eight thousand soldiers in all and trailing at the end, crowds of camp followers, including fakirs and robbers. (Ghose 1998:73)

Fanny Parks who joined the cavalcade had said the cost to the exchequer was 70,000 rupees. Emily finds the march uncomfortable with 12,000 people with tents and elephants, camels and horses, but says, "What can one do?" (ibid)

It was in Simla that Emily Eden found herself to be supremely happy. (website .victoria memorial-cal.org/rx eden Exploring India: The travels of Emily Eden 1837-1840) Other viceroys and their families were to follow. Ellenborough and Hardinge visited Simla in 1842 and 1846. (Kanwar 2005:260)

Ellenborough, before his visit, released funds for the improvement of roads. Lord Dalhousie found Simla overrated, though the five day journey did not seem such a chore. He too was overwhelmed by the festivities and balls, concerts and entertainment available in Simla, though he saw that it had a "wonderful political advantage as administrative views went." (Kanwar 2005: ibid 27).

Vipin Pubby quotes one of Dalhousie's letters of 1851.

We have had a terrible fortnight of festivities. Balls without numbers, fancy fairs, plays, concerts, investitures – and every blank day filled up with a large dinner party. You may judge what this "hill station" has grown to when I tell you that 460 invitations were issued for the last ball at Government house, and most of them came.

Further, Dalhousie wrote,

Balls here, balls there, balls by the society; amateur plays, concerts, fancy fairs, investitures of the Bath and co and co. I quite sigh for the quiet of Calcutta. (Pubby 1988:24)

The summer palace was necessitated however by the need for continuous work, where five days of work in the plains was equivalent to one day in the hills. Ian Stephens writes, "The memory that sticks in my mind is of those coolies pulling and humping terribly heavy loads on their backs up-hill slopes." The exodus involved tonnes of baggage, heaps of files and dispatch boxes besides the families of the officials. (cited in Pubby 1988: 42) Further, Andre Wilson describes the passage of officials as "there were colonels and clerks of departments and other men so tremendous in their spheres. Assistant Deputy Commissioners, still relatively unburdened with the cares of highest office, cantering lightly along parapet-less roads skirting precipices, and the ton weight of a post office official requiring twenty groaning coolies to carry him." (ibid 42)

The increase in population after the opening of the railway was 24 percent. In 1899, it was 24,179 and in 1898 it was 30,405. (ibid 44) The Reservoir was constructed in 1880. Prior to 1880 there were only the natural springs or baolis. The Church reservoir which lay below the ridge held 1,200,000 gallons, the Sanjauli Reservoir carried 1,00,000 gallons. A third reservoir was built at Saog in 1904. The cost of these reservoirs was Rs 606000. A pump installed then, was still in use when Vipin Pubby wrote his book. Rain water storage was made compulsory by the British. The Europeans received 25 gallons each and were allocated 1,000,000 gallons. The Indians received 5 gallons and totalled 1,80,000 gallons. Major General Beresford and Mr Pook suggested pumping water from the Sutlej, but this was refused. The cost then was Rs 25 lakh. Pubby writes that the idea was revived at the cost of 35 crores. Incinerators were in existence, which not just burnt the garbage, it provided steam and electricity for

heat. (ibid 46) The number of houses increased from 30 houses in 1830 to 290 in 1866. The number of occupied houses in Simla in 1881 was 1,141. (ibid 20)

The details of planning and building were closely documented by administrators in their dealing with bureaucrats and engineers.

A Letter from Maj General W.A. Crommelin to W. Smith says that the

The Resolution of the Government of India in the Public Works Department dated 3rd November 1876 a copy of which is enclosed, will make you acquainted with the general scope of the duties which will devolve upon you, and of the works which will have to be carried out in connection with the superintendence of the new Circle of Public Works which may be styled the "Simla Imperial Circle."

The Circle was to be under the direct orders of the Government of India, and Mr W. Smith was expected to correspond directly with the Secretary to the Government of India in the Public Works Department.

The works to be engaged could be summarized as follows, according to Maj. W.A. Crommelin,

Additions to "Peterhoff" to render it a more convenient temporary Viceregal residence, until a permanent structure can be provided.

The construction of a permanent Vice Regal residence on the Observatory or Bentinck Hill

Water supply for the whole settlement.

Quarters for public offices and clerks.

Certain major works for the improvement of the drainage and conservancy of the settlement.

Peterhoff, Inverarm have been acquired. Negotiations are on foot for Landsdowne House, Squire's Hall, Morvin

You will understand from the Resolution that a sum of 2 lakhs has been authorized to meet immediate requirements, and that the accounts are to be dealt with by the Examiner of Military Works Accounts who is located at Simla. It is desirable that you should arrange with the Examiner for the subdivision of the above and subsequent grants under certain main heads of outlay such as:

Purchase of house
Improvement to property
Original Works
Repairs
Establishment
Tools and Plant.

In the carrying out of the tasks with regard to the 'formation of the new circle' the duties of the Executive Engineer of the Provincial division were not to be interfered with. The specific interest was to "*transfer to your charge the house which have been purchased already for the Government of India*

and which are at present under the charge of the Provincial Executive Engineer, but this will not be done until your arrangement are fully matured."

In a document at the National Archives, New Delhi, referred to as No 35 Public Works Fort William, March 15 1877, it is recorded that Lytton writes to Marquis of Salisbury,

Referring to our Despatch No 34 P.W of this date, on the subject of the proposed improvements at Simla we have the honour to inform your Lordship that we have selected Captain H. H. Cole to prepare the designs for the new Government House and the other public buildings and offices.

Captain Cole, after inspecting the sites has gone home on leave, and will be in London, at the time when this Despatch reaches your Lordship; he proposes to prepare certain of the designs during his stay in England, and we request that, if your Lordship sees no objection, he may be allowed to employ a draftsman to aid him in the manual part of this work, and to leave him more free, than he would be without this aid, to employ his own time in the most useful way. We enclose for your Lordship's information, copy of a report by Captain Cole on several points of detail relating to the Vice Regal residence, with the remark that, the suggestions of this officer are generally approved by us.

Captain Cole has also requested permission to purchase some books on architectural subjects. (Signed Lytton et al.)

The British Government of India had decreed that,

"Simla shall be for the greater part of the year, the Head quarters of the Supreme Government. It is indispensable that the present make-shift and unbecoming arrangements should cease."

Till then, houses were rented for accommodation, but these were expensive.

Summer residence for the Vice Roy was to be built at a cost of over 13 lakhs of rupees. 13 lakhs and 20,000 rupees was asked for. "Peterhoff" where the Viceroy stayed previously was unhygienic and too small. Three members of the Viceroy's family fell ill there due to typhoid. When Native Chiefs visited Simla in the summer, it was believed the Viceroy would require a space in which to interact with them. They had been put up in tents, which inhospitality to local chiefs was thought to be unbecoming of the British in India.

Accusation of extravagance came from the home office. Lytton was forced to write,

We presume that you refer to the appointment of a Superintending engineer. Our object in making this appointment was to have an executive officer of experience who, besides conducting our own work, would be associated with the Municipality,

and advise that body on the important actions which they are about to undertake: we shall take care that the appointment does not last longer than is absolutely necessary. (Signed Lytton, P.P Haines, R.C Bayley, A.J Arbuthnot, A.Clarke, E.B. Johnson, B.B Johnson, W. Stokes.)

Lord Dufferin, who was to be in time a resident in Simla, wrote to the Home Government:

The total cost of the new house (excluding the furniture and mural decoration) and its accessories completed as sanctioned by us was estimated at Rs 6,05,131, and on the strength of this estimate work was commenced; but unexpected difficulties were met with in securing the foundation which have entailed an additional expenditure of Rs 54,798 owing to increased depth and massiveness; and of Rs 12,306 in retaining walls for securing the approaches to the house.

The cost of furniture and murals was thought to be Rs 2,00,000. The letter was signed Dufferin, Roberts, Ilbert, Hope, Colvin, Chesney.

(See Reply to the Governor General London 23rd December 1886)

There was stiff resistance from Viscount Cross, that he had not been informed in time.

Dufferin in his letter of March 15, 1887 records his regret that formal sanction was overlooked while pursuing the matter of congenial accommodation for the Viceroy.

Electrification of Vice-Regal Lodge

The correspondence of August 26 1887 (in the National Archives, Delhi) from Simla communicates the anxiety of the planners about whether to use gas, candles or electricity while lighting the building. Installation of electric light was seen to be more economical with regard to maintenance. Lord Dufferin wrote to Viscount Cross,

"We have decided that the most satisfactory arrangement is that the house should be lighted by a full installation of electric light; and it appears to us that besides the advantage of coolness and cleanliness, the employment of electricity may be considered to a great extent as an insurance against accidents by fire, which would be more likely to occur if the house was lighted by gas, kerosene or candles.

Since no provision for expenditure on this was claimed earlier it is now requested. The sum of one lakh and a half would, it was thought, cover the entire cost including freight, carriage in India, erection of all machinery, lamps and appliances connected with the installation. Dufferin requested the participation of the electrical engineer of Buckingham Palace, Mr Massey to supervise the contract with manufacturers.

In another document, titled *No 50 Public Works Simla Sept 2 1887* and available in the National Archives, Delhi, and addressed to Viscount Cross,

who was Majesty's Secretary of State for India, we receive the following information:

My Lord,

In the 7th paragraph of your Lordship's Despatch No 61 P.W of the 23rd December last, a request was made that copies of the designs and estimates of the New Vice regal Lodge in Simla should be forwarded, for the information of Her Majesty's Government. We regret the delay which has occurred in complying with this request, it has been mainly due to certain alterations in the design which have suggested themselves as the work went on, and which have rendered it necessary from time to time to amend the estimate and to alter the plans.

In paragraph 5 of our dispatch No 45 P.W of the 27th September 1886 we stated that the estimated cost of the building was 6,87,051. The estimates which we now forward show the manner in which that total was reached in juxtaposition with each of the items which go to make up that sum, the corresponding items, as they now stand, have been shown. The total of the present estimate which is comparable with that mentioned in our dispatch of September last is 8,69,676

The excess of 1, 82,625 on the entire estate may be divided as follows

Excess on "works"	*1,22, 287*
On establishment	*53,032*
On tools and plants	*7,306*
	1,82,625

Passing over the first of these items for the present we should explain that the excess on Establishment is almost entirely due to the fact that the building has taken a longer time in construction than was anticipated. It was at first thought that it would be completed by the beginning of the current season, but it is now certain that it cannot be ready for occupation by His Excellency the Viceroy before next year. To a certain extent the extra work, to which we will presently refer, have tended to increase the establishment charged.

The excess to the cost of the Lodge itself is to a great extent, due to a strike among the cartmen which has entailed increased expenditure in the delivery of stone. It is essentially due also to a variety of petty causes which led to excess either of quantity or rates on some of the sub-heads.

Lord and Lady Dufferin's New House.

In Raja Bhasin's lucid account, *Simla: The Summer Capital of British India*, we find an entry by Lady Dufferin in her journal entry dated 15th July 1887.

D took Hermie and me all over the house in the afternoon. We climbed up the

most terrible places, and stood on single planks over yawning chasms. The workpeople are very amusing to look at specially the young ladies in necklaces, bracelets, earrings, tight cotton trousers, turbans with long veils hanging down their backs and a large earthenware basin of mortar on their heads. They walk about with the carriage of empresses, and seem as much at ease on top of the roof as on the ground floor; most picturesque masons they are. The house will really be beautiful, and the views all around are magnificent. I saw the plains distinctly from my boudoir window, and I am glad to have that open view, as I shall not then feel so buried in the hills. (cited in Bhasin 1992:55,reference cited from Marchioness of Dufferin and Ava, Our vice regal life in India 1884-1888.Vol 11, London, John Murray 1889)

Doz, described by Raja Bhasin as being the most amusing of diarists in Simla, says the summer palace was "The spacious medieval stronghold of greystone on Observatory Hill, which is both a joy and an expense forever."

Raja Bhasin documents Lady Dufferin's views. She was the first occupant, and shifted into the palace on 23 July 1888, describing it as follows,

The entrance hall is the great feature of it. The staircase goes up from it, and there are stone pillars dividing it from a wide corridor leading to the state rooms, and both hall and corridor are open to the top of the house, three stories. This gives an appearance of space and height which is very grand. The corridor opens into the ball-room with a large arch; and a similar arch at one end of the big drawing room, which is a lovely room. Furnished with gold and brown silks, and with large bow-windows, and a small round tower recess on it. Sitting in it you look down the ballroom the colouring of which is a lighter yellow. It is a very fine room, and outside the dancing space there is plenty of room for sitting, as the wall is much broken up into pillars, leaving a sort of gallery around it. At one side is one of these high paneling of teak, along the top of which are shields and arms or the coronets of all the Viceroys, and of the most celebrated Governor-Generals, and above that Spanish leather in rich dark colours. The curtains are crimson. There is a small drawing room, furnished in blue. These are all one side of the hall.....My views are, as I have said, quite splendid. D's room is rather dark and serious looking. The colouring of mine is a bright sort of brown, and it has a very large bow window, and a tower room recess, which is nearly all glass, like the one in the drawing room. The girls will have a similar sitting room above me, and all our bedrooms are equally nice. (cited in Bhasin 1992:57)

Parties had been a routine of life in Simla quite early. The Lawrences well known for their quiet and companionate marriage, found the routines giddy. John Lawrence's wife has documented this,

There is not much to say about our domestic life at Simla. To me it seemed one long round of large dinner parties, balls and festivities of all kinds. My husband did not, at Simla, go for the long early rides of which he had once been so fond, and

which he still kept up when he was in Calcutta. It seemed strange to us to be once more together here at Simla for it recalled many happy memories...Few of the friends of those days were left, and a different generation had sprung up. (Bhasin 1992:46)

Transport of Valuables and People

The road to Simla was a hard one, and Raja Bhasin's book describes the nature of the transport used. Transporting all that the British needed for their comfort is a matter for cultural analyses. However, as late as 1904, Sir Frederick Treves describes the scene on the Hindustan Tibet road,

It was on this road that I met the man with the planks . They are the hill men of the poorer sort who carry planks of sawn wood into Simla... The men are ill-clad and the sun and rain have tanned them and their rags to the colour of brown earth. They bear the planks across their bent backs, and the burden is grievous. They come from a place some day's journey towards the snows. They plod along from the dawn to the twilight. They seem crushed by the weight of the beam and their gait is more the gait of a stumbling beast than the walk of a man. They move slowly. Their long black hair is white with dust as it hangs by each side of their bowed down faces. The sweat among the wrinkles on their brows is hardened into lamentable clay. They walk in single file, and when the path is narrow, they need must move sideways. In one day I met no less than fifty creeping wretches in this inhuman procession. Each dull eye is fixed upon the scuffled road or upon the plank on the stooping back that crawls in front. To the beams are strapped their sorry possessions – a cooking pot, sticks for a fire, a water gourd, and a sheep's skin to cover them from the frost at night. If there were but a transverse beam to the plank, each one of these bent men might be carrying his own cross to a far-off crucifixion. (Ibid 34,35)

Ferdnand Braudel in his classic *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip* writes that mountains are often described as half wild, their residents are hardy, the villages always semi-deserted, for people have to leave to find work. Men carrying loads described so vividly in the preceding paragraph, appear even today. In the 19th century, one of the most significant problems was of course the question of labour, "begar" being the appropriate title for the kind of appropriation of work from the surrounding hills. How were goods and materials transported? Pamela Kanwar has some interesting motifs in her book on Simla.

The British had created many hill stations, the largest number in the foothills of the Himalayas. (Kanwar 2005: 35)

In 1864, 484 persons were transported from Calcutta to Simla for six months. Four lakh rupees incurred in the transportation was not thought to be a great sum. John Lawrence believed that one day of work would

equal five days in the plains. The town expanded with the years as Viceroys and Governments continued to visit Simla every year. A Railway line was constructed in 1869 (ibid 39). There was a cart road from Kalka to Simla through Dharmapur and Solan. The Ambala Kalka link was extended in 1891; twelve years later the first passenger train arrived at Simla on 9 November 1903. (ibid 40).

Simla transformed itself from being a sanatorium and holiday town into becoming an official town. While there were questions about extravagance, by 1880, Pamela Kanwar argues that the British saw Simla as a certainty in terms of seven months of real bureaucratic time. (ibid 45). The town grew according to the needs of the people living in it, or what she calls "the exigency of time" and of "Vice regal direction." Lower bazaar was seen to be untidy and ugly. It was a residence for Indian clerks, camp followers, shop-keepers, carpenters, cloth merchants, cooks, bakers, artisans, domestic servants, coolies and porters (ibid 57). In contrast to Lower Bazaar, was the Mall, which was a public area for the British, and this was cleared of sweepers and coolies every evening from four to seven. (ibid 63). Along with the maintenance of roads, sewage networks, water supply and the maintenance of forest cover of rhodendron and oak, was the sustained conservation measures for the water sources(ibid 65). This would be re-read by Kanwar in terms of the fluctuations of population in the summer months and winter months (ibid 132)

Raja Bhasin cites Rudyard Kipling writing to his Aunt Edie, a letter from Lahore, dated 14th August 1883,

Privilege leave, as I may have told you before, gives you the pleasant duty of enjoying yourself in a cool climate for thirty days and being paid 20 pounds for that duty. The month was a round of picnics, dances, theatricals, and so on – and I flirted with the bottled up energy of a year on my lips. ..Simla is built around the sides of a mountain 8444 feet high, and the roads are just ledges.

Yvonne Fitzroy who accompanied Lord and Lady Reading as a member of their retinue, was not a camp follower in the uncritical sense. She writes,

Simla must be the meanest of Imperial capitals. Seen from a distance between April and June, before the rains have worked their annual miracle, it clings to a mangy hill side, a forest of tin roofs, rickety wood and discoloured plaster. The gothic crime of the Secretariat dominates the centre, the Victorian ardour of Viceregal Lodge its western limit. The forests of pine and deodar have been very largely destroyed, and the houses crowd as thick as the trees they have supplanted. The northern hills are bare and brown, and the ultimate snowline contributes the Himalayan touch with which we exiles dazzle the envious hearts of Pimlico. (Fitzroy 1926: 90)

Later, her impressions are even more complex,

At a discreet distance Viceregal Lodge possessed a cathedral like silhouette, rather impressive, but on near approach it revealed all the eccentricities of a Scottish haydropathic. It sat on a peak, the views it commanded became, in due course, superb; it was built of grey stone, quite porous, an idiosyncrasy of which we reaped the full benefit during the monsoon. Within, I do believe it was really far uglier than it looked. You could have found fault with it to eternity and then not have reached with the limit of its crimes; on the other hand it was so large, so gilded, so perfectly complacent, than in the end you grew near to accepting it at its own valuation! (ibid 191)

She complained that,

Simla, in particular is little more than a vast boarding-house every bit as depressing, and its houses owe nothing to humanity in its building, and little in the living. (ibid 191)

She called it the "dislocation of English life in England" (ibid 192)
Writing from the vantage point of the 1920s, Yvonne Fitzroy says,

I never heard a scandal worth remembering, and a few worth believing; tongues were busier in malice than in wit, and its record of wickedness would be found tedious by the average flapper. Which is not to deny there was scandal in plenty, what else would you expect of a community with hardly any interest in life but the social.(193)

There were odd sorts of dances and balls, memberships in eccentric clubs of those who dared to consort with the unworthy publicly, such as Knights of the Order of Black Hearts. She continues,

The summit of achievement was, I think reached only last year in the great Chinese ball given by Their excellencies to cheer the monsoon-laden minds of Simla. As a spectacle I have never seen its equal in either hemisphere, and even the monsoon abetted by dropping a grey veil over the exterior eccentricities of Lord Dufferin's Scottish stronghold. Within, the entire house was transformed, lit only by countless lanterns with a dias of imperial yellow, and two huge red lacquered pailows or gateways. The walls were adorned with panels on which Chinese dragons raged and curled, and the costumes were limited to those of China, Japan and Burma. Indian guests were present, such as the Maharajah of Patiala. The Indian servants were reviled for being slow and cunning.

Preparations for any and every party were always incredibly complicated by the Indian servants, who though they sometimes by force of numbers achieved miracles, are never to be hurried, and above all things, reverence the brain saving device of habit. They are engaging enough even if of a mentality that defeats the understanding, but for their proper appreciation you should lead a life of leisure. (ibid 195)

Yvonne Fitzroy was on the staff of Lord and Lady Reading's retinue, and she described her time in service as that of a "hurrying life, the living of which was so like running backwards on a moving staircase; you were always at the top, however desperately you tried to get to the bottom!"

Barbara Croisette in "The Great Hill Stations of Asia" writes of the Viceregal Lodge that ,

At the time it was built, however, it quickly became symbolic of Simla's hierarchical professional and social system. A summons to a viceroy's reception or dinner was something to die for. Once in possession of the engraved invitation card and starchly outfitted in formal evening clothes – and medals if he could muster a few – an ambitious officer or colonial administrator of middling ranks would travel the three or four miles from Simla town to the viceroy's baronial hall in both hope and trepidation, aware that a casual remark or the wrong answer to a viceregal quest from him or his wife could ruin a career. Commenting on the serious social climbing that went on at such formal events, the journalist William Howard Russel described the Simla scene as 'ball after ball, each followed by a little backbiting.' (Croisette 1999:56)

Since the fear of proximity and mixture always existed, the caste, class and race systems were jam packed with taboos. Croisette writes,

At the top were the Brahmins and maharajas, who also bought property at Simla until the British began to fear they were amassing too much of it and tried to stall the process with red tape. Indian rulers paid formal calls on the viceroy or a lower official befitting the ruler's perceived place vis-à-vis the imperial hierarchy. Gifts were exchanged. Indian professionals and rich merchants from several higher Hindu castes bought homes and became influential in the affairs of the town as their numbers grew, although most local business were relegated to the Lower Bazar which still tumbles down the cliff side below the Mall. (ibid)

Yvonne Fitzroy writes, that there was 'much mutual entertainment,' and that they would each represent their communities. "We in India, may not be the flower of our kind, but by us will our kind be judged"(Fitzroy 1926:214).This mutual entertainment was clearly in terms of the acceptance of colonialism by the upper castes, from whom too the National Movement found its propagators. Madame Blavatsky was a guest in Simla of the founder of the Indian National Congress, and there is a record of this in the Theosophical Society archives.

In the last section, I present a short story written by me during an Asia Pacific Writer's workshop, hosted by IIAS Simla and IIT Delhi in October 2008. I was invited there as an instructor at a creative writing workshop. I wrote the story while Robin Hemley, another instructor, asked participant writers to close their eyes and imagine their grandmother's kitchen. It was a case of moonlighting on my part, while the rest were busy with the assigned task of using the reality principle to

create backdrops for writing fiction. (October 13th 2008)

Voices in the Morning

The council sat around the table. Lord Dufferin had just had the worst nightmare of his life. He had stumbled down the stairs, his dressing gown tassels caught in the complex web of wood. The man had stood there facing him. His face was quite the most warped, like the rough and pitted texture of old wood which had not been polished and planed. He stood for fear and death and the terrible litany of labourers' woes. He had not been paid for the winding staircase. He had not been paid for the paneling. It went on and on. The labourer was of course a ghost. Lord Dufferin had no doubt about that. Labourers never met him. They always met the bailiff.

The Council looked at Dufferin. They wanted to know about the actual cost of electrification of the Lodge. They enquired about the new estimates for the cost of the gardens.

Upstairs Lady Dufferin was getting dressed to meet the Council. She could hear their voices,

"Gentlemen, I assure you, the costs will be met from the money allocated."

"The Chandeliers, sir, are too fragile. You must do with Burmese glass, not Belgian ones,"

Sometimes she got quite nervous hearing their voices, rising from a steady burr to a constant crescendo. They were men with some power, these accountants. Who were they but impoverished Scots. She often thought of the sky at home. How different, how grey, how full of tears. And here the sun blazoned, and at night the sky was burnished with stars. Of course silly Duff was beginning to see things. They all did that. After a while, the heat melted their brains, specially those hot white days of light in autumn.

Last night he had floundered into her room. He had that puzzled look which was typical of men who see death. What was it?

"The workers! They want payment!"

"Well, its fine work. You should pay them. We can cancel dinner for the Council and let them eat in their lodges."

"Lodges! The Council! My dear, do you really believe that I can permit you to even think of such a thing?"

"The kitchen is in disrepair. The ceiling is crumbling. It will fall into the soup."

"Think of another place in the Lodge to cook then."

"If you don't pay the workers they will die and haunt me. The children

can hear them weeping. It's true that they have nothing to eat."

"We'll discuss this tomorrow. For the moment, my dear Lady, can we now think of what you will cook for the Council."

"It's too early to discuss with the staff. And not if you look at me like that, with hollow eyes, with smoke billowing out of your ears."

The children were sleeping of course, while the argument over what was to be made for the Council continued. Their voices were raised and the children woke up. It was a strange space of complete annihilation. Lady Dufferin walked out, and the mountain seemed to be as shadow in the glow of the autumn sun. It seemed to darken in the haze of the oncoming heat. She walked for miles, full of that odd and wary sense of loss of being which followed every quarrel. Sometimes she thought that life was an abyss, when all she had to do was appear in a space of tranquility which was consumed by all.

The labourer sometimes appeared as a coffin carrier to Lord Dufferin. Curiously, he recognized him in the oddest circumstances as heralding death. Fear would rise like the sea in an endless ebbing, a threat of return, a lost country. The labourer spoke to him in a dream from which he never quite awake. That's how he once realized that in the language of dreams, nothing need to be said.

Lady Dufferin woke up sometimes in her room knowing that the house was haunted. It didn't frighten her. The labourer was Duff's visitor. Hers were different. She would open her eyes, and Duff was somnambulently standing over her bed.

"What did he say, darling?"

"The same thing as yesterday."

"Not being paid? Don't you have any other conversations?"

"No."

She would wake him up, as he stood blinking at her. They would kneel and she would pray, in her clear soft voice. She was used to him, his eccentricities never bothered her, every one laughed at him – his rude speech as they called it, his monosyllables to hide his accent, his constant excuses and apologies to those who were more powerful than him.

"You must not be afraid of him. See him as Jacob's angel, wrestle with him, I'm sure the ladder to heaven will be yours."

"I'm sick to death. If only we could go on furlough."

"But the wiring is still being done. The electrification is what you have always wanted. Do not give up now."

The air was cold and swirled around them. It was a world which was familiar to them, and yet they felt sealed inside in glass, as if it would break and destroy them. They had traveled so far, by sea and by road. They had met one another as shadows in the odd circumstances of their

marriage. Deposited by history, charmed by fate. The large canvas of their dreams in the sharing of power. She the constant chatelaine, and he the keeper of keys. It was curious that while she was the quiet one, afraid of company, afraid of people, she would take guests around this great stone castle. It was a place where people loved to gather, to eat, to drink, to talk, to dance, and it was only by invitation. There was no occasion when any one could come uninvited. No moment thus went unsupervised. It seemed to her that they were prisoners of their own invention, prisoners of a grandeur which was so hollow it left them enchanted and removed from real things.

She had her ghosts too. They spoke to her in her head. Some of them were cruel, mocking her for her simple faith. She knew that her language was different from theirs and yet she had learnt to speak it. Sometimes she forgot her own language, she thought now in images. Pictures floated in her mind, always within the frame of the baywindow, where she sat for long hours. Peterhoff floated in the images of the past; how uncomfortable it had been, the khansamas always cross. Here it was the same. However hard she tired, she could never get away from the peeling ceiling. Everything was perfect, till the new coat of paint began to detach itself and fall into the food. They had not noticed it at first, imagined that it was crystallized salt, but then suddenly one evening, her son had crunched on mortar. And on days of unutterable crises such as those, she would appear, the lovely Lady Samantha. She was the perfect embodiment of lazy afternoons in Simla. She was the gentlest of people, with grey blue eyes, and the streaked gold brown hair. She lived in a turret in one of the older building near Lower Bazaar. The turret was rented to her by a writer who made it clear that he wanted no favours, only her friendship. Samantha Sutton, with her wealth, and misplaced title, and her Cockney accent, over which she had a veneer of languor and affectation. She drove Lady Dufferin mad, though she was forced very often to include her in their parties because everyone liked her. But now back to the immediate question, What time was lunch?

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NOTES

1. This paper uses the documents on microfilm at the National Archives, Delhi, titled No 34 Government of India,Public Works Department, Civil Works ACC no 1480 R no 535. My thanks to Peter Desouza, Ashok Sharma, Manas Ray, Saagar Tiwari, Vasavi Gowda and Anil Nauriya for advice or criticism on first drafts of the paper and to the Librarians of National Archives, New Delhi, NMML New Delhi, IIAS Simla, CPRI Simla, and JNU, New Delhi, and specially Dr Jaya of the National Archives, Delhi for helping me with the microfilms.