

Instrumentality of the Labor: Architectural Labor and Resistance in 19th Century India

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19th century British historians, while glorifying ancient Indian architecture, legitimized Imperialism by portraying a decline. To deny vitality of native architecture, it was essential to marginalize the prevailing masons and craftsmen – a strain that later enabled portrayal of architects as cognoscenti in the modern world. Now, following economic liberalization, rural India is witnessing a new hasty urbanization, compliant of Globalization. However, agrarian protests and tribal insurgencies evidence the resistance, evocative of that dislocation in the 19th century; the colonial legacy giving way to concerns of internal neo-colonialism.

For native building crafts, Globalization has brought a 'technological civilizing'. Facing technology that competes to replace rather than supplement, the resistance of labor has remained unheard, and marginalized. Imported techniques necessitated by globally manufactured parts, engender a sense of lagging behind in skills, while bemoaning a loss of craft skills and building traditions, and yet supplying cheap labor for the global north.

This situation is ripe for exploration in alliance with the Subaltern studies group, who critique post-colonial studies as being a vestige of, and hostage to, colonialism. Instead, they have prioritized the task of de-colonialization by reclaiming colonial history for the subaltern – the non-elite or subordinated social groups. Initiating a similar study in architecture, this paper proposes an enquiry anchored on F.S. Growse's, 1883 book, "Bulandshahr: Sketches of an Indian district." The book is opportune, for it argued that Indian architecture retained its vitality, especially identifying the agency of labor, and thus inviting Imperial wrath.

This study would focus on situating the architectural subaltern, not as timidly transitioning or transforming, but in dignified confrontation with colonialism; thus establishing the continued vitality of non-metropolitan Indian architecture by legitimizing the role of labor. It highlights British administrators facing similar resistance, and questions if a working compromise then established can be a guiding light now.

AGENCY OF LABOR IN RETAINING VITALITY OF INDIAN ARCHITECTURE

In a significant departure from 19th century British commentary on Indian architecture, Growse admits that Indian architecture remained a living art. Growse's significance lay in identifying contemporary critiques as characterising Indian

architecture for being ancient and old only, lacking apparent rules, Hindu style corrupted by Islamic influence, and profusion of ornament corroding the simplicity of the ancient. But again, the admittance of an occasional beautiful building in the countryside by the same critics, validates Growse's claims of vitality.

That the Indians themselves were unaware of this progress of national sentiment, often utilized by the British, was for Growse because of naturalization. Instead of laws and principles of Architecture, the guild based masons' system relied instead on customs of building and an oral tradition, this progress was ceaseless and articulated the "involuntary adaption to varying circumstances of modern life."

The state of Indian architecture, that the British inherited, was assigned as the Saracenic style. According to Growse, the Islamic influence, essentially the introduction of the arch, became naturalized in its fusion with the older indigenous style. The architecture at Ahmedabad, and at Jaunpur, are evoked by Growse to showcase this conflict of an older style with new ways, which ultimately resulted in a picturesque hybrid. Growse posits the development of such architecture to the agency of Hindu craftsmen: For, beyond the typical ambitions of the Mohammedan court to "embellish its capital and display its devotion," the hard fact remained that execution ultimately required the employment of local craftsmen. The hybrids of that marriage in Mughal architecture, according to Growse, was interesting, but criticized for the "intrinsic incongruity in component parts." This was supposedly seen as a defect, toned down and caused the style to lose its charm – doomed to an early decay with no reproduction leading to decline.

The example of rebuilt old Hindu pilgrim cities of Mathura and Brindaban, along the Yamuna, evidence this hybridisation. As observed by Growse, the recreated temples had a similar space planning and proportions, which may be understood for their scale and massing matching earlier specimens. Curiously, the introduction of the arch and vaulted ceiling thus, reduced the heavy masonry structure required to keep the temple erect. As the Gothic had done for the Romanesque, interior space opened up, and arched arcades replaced the mass of load bearing masonry walls. The allusion to decorative spandrels of these new arched intercolumniation may be assigned to the need for ornament – in celebration of these new archetypal element's incorporation in traditional built forms.

Further examples of Hindu temples featuring Islamic architectural temples such as domes, cupolas and arches, and similar trabeated panelling that feature mouldings and surface carvings, elaborate this assimilation. Similarly, Hindu structures constructed in Mathura were constructed for occupation by Mohammedans. By showcasing the irrelevance of religious affiliations as architectural elements of Islamic origin became incorporated into the Indian architecture, through the middle ages, Growse makes two observations. First, that the evolution of architecture by assimilation of foreign influence, makes way for naturalization over time; even though the initial hybrids may display incongruity and lack of integrity in application of component parts, composition and proportions, when compared to their original predecessors. The other point being, that to highlight the existing proof that the resistance of the Indian labor to foreign ideologies and practices, need not be understood as obstructive nuisance, but rather as his narration of the historical evolution of Indian architecture showed, was to be tolerated and guided – for through it is the path of naturalization of foreign ideals in India; by way of assimilation of construction techniques and acceptance of archetypal component parts in compositions.

The story of decay in Saracenic architecture is unsupported by any evidence from Growse, and reads more as a British colonial commentary, consistent with their 19th century narrative of decline in Indian architecture. But, by portraying this decline, and identifying the ignorant dismissal in “incongruity of component parts,” typical of hybrid architecture, Growse is creating the space for a British model of architectural practice in colonial India. As an administrator, he realizes that Hindu craftsmen will be employed for Imperial projects in India, and their adherence to traditional techniques will produce works that will feature incongruities, especially in the evolutionary early phase. As if in anticipation of a critique based on incongruity thus, Growse elaborates the failure of the Mughals as a warning against cynicism, and in favour of his practicable solution.

But more importantly, the agency of labor in the continuity of traditional indigenous architecture of India is thus elaborated, not just during colonial times, but even through naturalization of Saracenic architecture – in its fusion with native sensibilities through the inexplicable requirement of employing native craftsmen. This assimilation and development of architecture, being not the capitulation of one style for another, and the resistance of labor being rather creative of an evolved response to rearranged circumstances.

STATE OF PRACTICE

Growse’s observations of the native trader community’s engagement with building is an apt description of architectural practice in non-metropolitan India of the 19th century, that perhaps still remains true in the 21st century.

Even though Growse identifies the qualifications for engaging the mason to be based on habit, or custom, and repute, he denies involvement of any artistic considerations. The repute of the concerned mason in the neighbourhood must be a reflection of his artistic acumen, and what is described as habit, is established societal understanding of how works of art mean. For a foreign officer such as Growse, who admits that traditional taste was inexplicable and innate amongst the natives, this appreciation and confidence in traditional art and taste, thus comes off as being born of mere habit.

The patron chooses the site, decides the program, and supplies the materials in part, or in whole. Beyond this, the mason is left to his own devices and given the confidence of design and execution. Freed of creative constraints imposed by the patron, the mason proceeds to produce his work for the ultimate evaluation in built form. His reputation depended on the appraisal of his finished work, and reflected upon how he interpreted the requirements of the patron, on the specific site, within constraints of time and resources made available.

Growse finds this system most efficient, for it ensures economy in material and labor, and ease of business as in other mercantile transactions. After the mason delivers his work, the patron assumes control of its possession and regains his agency to modify the construct as and how he deems fit, thereon. Growse idealizes this native way of architectural practice, for the minimal involvement required of the patron, confidence and freedom of creativity of the mason involved – sensitivity and appropriate artistic quality guaranteed by adherence to traditional ways.

In contrast, the heterogeneity of the Indian subject comes forth by way the rich native gentleman conducted his business of building. For Growse, the landed gentry’s affluent but monotonous lifestyle ensured that building for him was rarely born out of any real requirement, but was often an amusing sport. This degradation of the Landed gentry’s enterprise ensures that the built works of this only class of natives, who could match the imperial elites in affluence and influence, is relegated instead as wasteful exercises in vanity; aimed at matching the British, rather than strategically planned as an efficient economic endeavour assuring maximized profits. If the efficiency and economy of the traders was critiqued for the patron’s reluctance to engage, as a mark of lack of artistic taste, the opposite indulgence of the landed gentry was marked as extravagance, unbecoming a man of taste. Either way, Growse does not recognize the pursuit of artistic excellence, and its proper appreciation in the native population. While this ensures that Indians cannot be trusted as responsible patrons of art and architecture, the space was created for the British to claim sole patronage of the art, for the responsible guidance, and continuity of traditional skills and values.

Consequently, the, even as the landed gentry retains a native architect to carry out his wishful building activity, this architect is restricted to the imitation of plain, boorish utilitarian PWD's examples. He is warned against influence of customary Indian architecture. Growse identifies this fascination with the PWD's architecture, as a show of allegiance to the ruling administration. Moreover, even if unacknowledged by Growse, the PWD architecture promoted European archetypal elements, such as the bell turret atop the school at Bulandshahr. These were novelties for the native population, and in combination to seem aligned with the powerful, the emulation of PWD architecture still followed the natural process of fusion and hybrids that had proved in the successes of Saracenic architecture, just a generation or two back.

SUBALTERN STUDIES AND MARGINALIZATION OF LABOR THROUGH SUBJECTIVISATION

Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," identifies the concealment of geo-political implications in Subjectivisation. Spivak argues that by ignoring the question of ideology, the construction of a coherent narrative becomes counterproductive, for the networks of power, desire and interests are heterogeneous. She calls into focus the desiring subject, which if homogenized, becomes susceptible to the dominant powers' slippage to create the effects of desire – power produces positive effects at the level of desire, and also at the level of knowledge. As an example, she brings forth the non-Jewish German population in Nazi Germany, where the masses were not deceived, but actually desired a fascist regime. This is ideology creating a false consciousness.

Interpreting Marx, Spivak posits that class consciousness is artificial and economic, and that the economic agency or interest is impersonal because it is systemic and heterogeneous. Class consciousness does not operate towards the goal to create an undivided subject where desire and interest coincide, but rather divide and dislocate the subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other.

She explains this dislocation by using the term 'representation', as variously spelled in French. Representation that is *Vertreten* means speaking for (like a political leader), whereas representation spelled as *Darstellen*, means interpretive depiction (as in arts and philosophy). They are related but dislocated, showcasing the difference between consciousness and conscience.

It is thus pertinent in this study to engage in an understanding of the negotiation Growse's narrative offers through a typical Foucauldian lens, for that negotiation will reveal the ideological production at play.

For its application in an architectural history, this paper relies on the Foucauldian understanding of thinking, that can also simulate the process of design thinking. A summary of this articulation maybe as follows: When the knowledge of the past works on a

practical stratum, influenced of outside forces, within a set of laws defined by power relations, gaps and hopes of un-fulfilment appear. This is where our aspirations of the future, our dreams and goals reside in the present – still in the situation but new. The past and the future interact in praxis to become the present. For Foucault, as interpreted by Deleuze, this is thinking.

This paper reveals this distinguishing realignment of values in:

- a. The practical stratum: i.e. The prevailing condition then,
- b. The forces, political and economic ideologies at play,
- c. Knowledge of the past and the present, and
- d. Aspirations for the future, seeded in the text.

Thereon, the thinking behind creation of that present situation will evolve, and the production of the subaltern labor subject, will be revealed. The following is then an interpretation of Growse's book for how it evidences the process of Subjectivisation.

THE PRACTICAL STRATUM

Growse critiqued village housing for its floor levels of huts being below the ground level, leading to problems of sanitation and public health. However, regular flooding caused annual siltation, raising the ground level over time, and the poor household incapable of expensive regular building activity thus featured lower floor levels over time. Again, lack of ventilation in houses was linked to increased diseases. But, a hot dry continental climate with cold winter draughts, meant that compact housing with courtyards were rather desirable. Growse's unsympathetic use of English situations and contemporary scopes to critique Indian conditions, thus lay exposed. Rather, the native's sophisticated architectural appreciation is evident of Growse's appraisal of ornamentation and varied design vocabulary, even in a poor man's hut.

Appreciating the evolution of Saracenic architecture, an historical precedent of foreign influence naturalizing through fusion in a hybrid architecture, established the scope of British influence. The agency of labor resistance in creating that successful hybrid, established the creative scope of labor struggle – an inevitability that could thus be encourage to profit.

The trading class continued to follow the traditional practice of directly employing masons. Creative freedom in design and execution was guaranteed against confidence in traditional craft and aesthetics. The rich native gentleman, however, maintained a native architect, albeit restricted to emulation of the PWD's works. These show the heterogeneity amongst Indian subjects for their varying interests. In either case, artistic appreciation by the patron was denied, allowing the British the scope to monopolize patronage for responsible guidance and preservation of the arts.

On the other hand, the poor execution of the PWD's

homogenized, typologically distinct design was posited to British engineer's lack of artistic originality. The Indian labourers was equally blamed, for their inexperience and insensitivity to modern construction appliances and mechanical finishing, that distinguished post-industrial European designs.

THE FORCES: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC IDEOLOGIES AT PLAY

The new Colonial laws and systems were out of sync with what people wanted. Developed from outside, and secure of any feedback, they were guided by economic and political advantages for the British. Growse's appropriation of representation as *Vertreten*, to self-appointed advocate and facilitator, showcase the translation of his magisterial position to *Darstellen* – a titular tool alone.

The quality of education in government schools was evaluated by how much the graduate earned, and changed his life. Government jobs were made secure and most lucrative for the natives, thus establishing their aspirational value. English medium schooling being the sole criteria for such jobs, secured the popularity of British run schools, putting knowledge transmission and production securely under British control.

Denying large infrastructure projects to Indians restricted the scope of Indian practices. In the civic architectural sphere, the PWD established a monopolistic practice, further pushing Indian architecture and building crafts to work as manual labor alone. That too, was pushed under exclusive British patronage into niche emporiums and trade fairs, where their work was showcased to the ruling elites, as Oriental curiosities – impracticable on a larger scale, unsuited to daily societal application and appraisal.

To further assure European success in creating a hybrid architecture, the influence of Greece was traced in ancient Indian architecture. Foreign influence being practically manifest through a negotiation with the subaltern labor, thus came about as a critical agency for hybrid architecture – forming the core of Growse's proposed model of practice. To the same end, the top down approach of the PWD is critiqued, and grounds for the labour's resistance, but negotiated execution made. The examples of economic efficiency and political ease evident in the trader's employment of the mason, seemingly inspiring the Growse model.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Growse's appreciation of native "instinctive propriety of taste," evidence traditional knowledge being relegated to the marginalia as "instinctive." Craft and Architecture, especially of the Subalterns, were thus marginalized, not appropriated for the elite. In a way, this helped retain their vitality in isolation and neglect – marginalization limiting their ideological corruption.

The other point of contestation in the production of knowledge is the creation of desire for government jobs, at the expense of hereditary traditional occupations. This restricts the accumulation of past knowledge by dis-incentivizing its utility and scope of practice for reproduction in the present. Moreover, it produces that aforementioned scope for appropriation of past knowledge by foreign powers and ideologies, to suit their own ends. Traditional skills kept beyond the realms of popular British schooling, pushed that visual realm of knowledge to the margins. But the, knowledge of the past stayed imbibed in the architecture of the past, in art and craft, and continued to inspire the subaltern labor. This is the genesis of the resistance to foreign ideological architectural design. Growse complains of under skilled supervisors and yeomen, thus refer to this mismatch and rather wilful ignorance of this 'other' knowledge.

The appropriation of agency in authorship of architecture as knowledge, and the forced marginalization of vernacular architects evidence the rearrangement afoot in society. The relation of architecture as a repository of truth, that selves can relate to across time, make them invaluable to accumulation and perpetuity of societal values and wisdom. By disrupting the continuity of such production through government interference, the Imperial regime sought to appropriate this knowledge for reinterpretation in its own terms, for its own gains.

Growse relegates the Hindu Shastras, and treatises as scarce, corrupted and of ritualistic intention: thus doubting their suitability for guiding principles in the present. Moreover, the site and surrounding specific translation of such principles was evidenced as lost reverence and thus vitality of Indian architecture. Whereas the translation of written texts from Vernacular languages to English was already afoot, the translation of oral and customary knowledge was thus initiated to aid ideological corruption, essential for Subjectivisation of the agents involved. The built forms of this knowledge, and manual skills associated, were however difficult to appropriate. Thus these were instead compromised with to gain control and exclusive patronage rather. The recognition of labour's agency evidence that compromise.

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The native gentlemen's affection for the PWD betrayed his aspirations to align with the ruling elites. This helped maintain his status in society, even as his influence dwindled. When Growse observes that, Indian lifestyle be aligned to Europeans for political emancipation, this subject making seed of desire can be witnessed being laid in place.

For the marginalized traditional labor salvation was laid in Emporiums and local industry and district shows of art and manufacturing. Indian building crafts of the past, 'through judicious patronage of the British government', would thus

THE NEW HOUSE

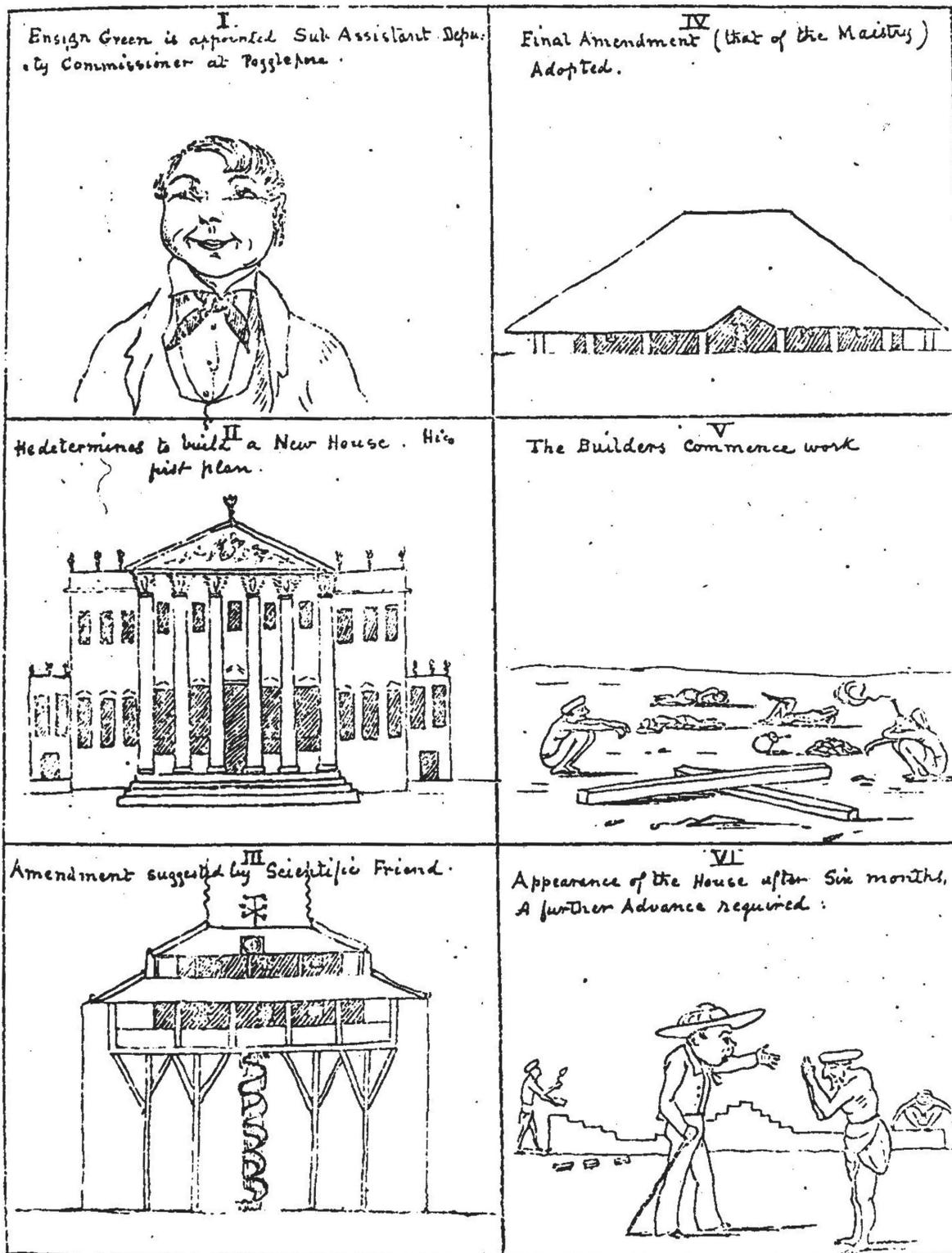


Figure 1: The New House part 1: Shows the problem and resistance British builders faced with local labor. From, The Delhi Sktchbook, Vol IV, 1853.

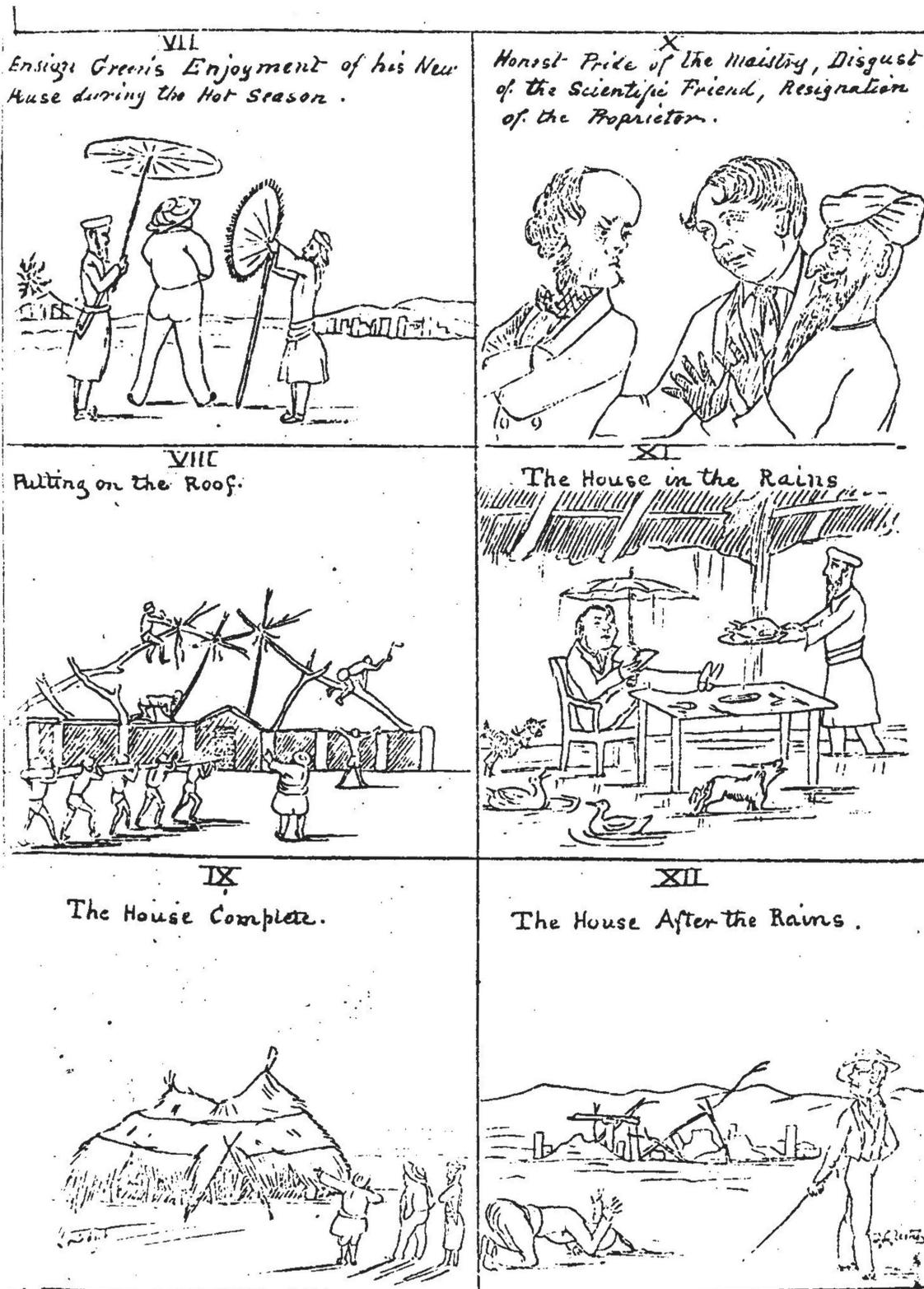


Figure 1: The New House part 2: Shows the problem and resistance British builders faced with local labor. From, The Delhi Sktchbook, Vol IV, 1853.

thrive under the watchful supervision of the colonizer. By creating a sense of tribal, primitive, and exotic to architectural practices bearing allegiance to the past, desire for the future was limited for the Mistri to niche entertainment venues for the elite, distinct of daily application, and appreciation of the local, by the locals. The resistance of labor, on the other hand expound the continued reverence of traditions and belief in a future for such practices, knowledge, and appliances. Even as government jobs were made desirous, the necessary act of building ensured the vitality of this aspiration through Colonial times, being still evident in non-metropolitan architecture of India.

CONCLUSION: THE THINKING THAT EVIDENCE SUBJECTIVISATION

The dominant power here is the British colonial enterprise, who critiques and by that produces a set of laws and systems, aided by contemporary norms of reading architectural significance, to marginalize Indians. In this power structure, written and executed by the dominant power, Growse is part of this problematic himself, for he takes upon the agency of the native labourers, not to liberate Indians, but to maximize Imperial profitability by showing exploitability of the agency of the labor.

The Indian labor is defined as it interacts within although against, these dominant and negotiated set of rules. In doing so, it brings into play its knowledge of the past, i.e. the Indian's shared history, amongst themselves, and with the colonial regime. This historied knowledge exists in the form of the spoken and written word, and in the visualized cultural products and civic artefacts: in art, craft and architecture, the established norms of the built environment. And then again, the British have a similar and overlapping spoken and visualized knowledge, providing it with a historical sense of identity.

When writing on Indian architecture, these sets of knowledge (of both the various forms of Indians and British) negotiate a terrain of established and negotiated building norms to produce architecture of the present – the production of knowledge now. This present production of knowledge is influenced by a variety of forces, that Deleuze says are outside powers, such as colonialism, economic theories and political science theories. These forces working within rules and acting with a knowledge of the past, work in a stratum: the situation in Bulandshahr, the problems Growse faces in execution, profitability in administration, and so on.

In Growse's writings, his critique, and proposed model of architectural practice are embodiments of this thinking. As a model of practice, Growse's proposal identifies the inescapable agency of architectural labor as a repository of knowledge, skills, and building traditions. This remains instructive and relevant for Indian architecture today.

But, Growse's aims, or desires for such a practice, evidenced through the unpacking of his thinking thus, is essentially exploitative, and unsustainable in the long run. As such, to escape neo-colonialism, whereas Growse's model stays suitable, the parallel constraints of knowledge production, relation of engineers, supervisors and labor with local architects, and equitable distribution of the profits for a rejuvenated Indian labor subject, remains problematic.

The history of caste system in India, and the legacy of colonialism thus, would only be resolved when the operative colonial dictum and capitalist exploitation is reframed for a new labor subject. This would require craft and skills as only embodied in niche decorative exotic arts, to be essentially released of representation as *Darstellen*; Growse's legacy being to recognize the labor in architectural production, albeit with dignity of labor, as the representative for this new agency, as *Vertreten* appropriate.

ENDNOTES

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10. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Routledge, 1995, 70.
11. "The reproduction of labor power is not only a reproduction of its skills, but also at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and the reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression; so that they too will provide for the domination of the ruling class, in and by words." Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 1971.
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