

Through Subaltern Eyes: Shivaprasad at Simla, 1846-1852

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'It was the best part of my life',¹ Raja Shivaprasad, C.S.I, wrote in his memoirs in 1894. The seventy-one-year old was referring to the years 1846 to 1852, which he had spent in Simla as a *munshi* working for the East India Company government. These were his formative years in education, preparing him for his future role as a people's educator and mediator of imperial education policy. Raja Shivaprasad of Benares (1823-95), eminent Indian educator, man of letters, and public intellectual, was an influential presence in the colonial public sphere of north India after 1857. His rise from subaltern *munshi* to being the first non-British Inspector of Schools in the Education Department of the North-Western Provinces illustrates the opportunities available to the first generation of English-educated Indians under British rule. A polarizing figure, Shivaprasad is best remembered as a vociferous participant in the charged Hindi-Urdu debate, as the author of the first modern history of India written in Hindi, and as a prominent opponent of the Indian National Congress. While at Simla, he was still Babu Shivaprasad, an ambitious young man in his twenties employed as secretary in the Foreign Department of the Government of India.

This essay depicts life and work in early imperial Simla from the perspective of an Indian subaltern. In exploring Shivaprasad's work relations with his British employers, it both confirms and qualifies the standard narrative of Simla as a place of rampant imperial racism. The British expatriate elite has generally been portrayed as an imperialist community that ignored, despised or mistreated Simla's Indian population. As Pamela Kanwar has argued, there was 'no intermediate position' between British 'contempt' and indigenous 'servile obedience'.² While her observation is largely true for Simla's domestic servants, menials, and petty traders, it seems less accurate for the public sphere of administration, where

professional relations between the colonizers and their Indian subjects were governed by more complex dynamics. I argue that, for all its power structures and chains of hierarchy and command, the mundane domain of administrative practice opened up a space for cooperation, Indian knowledge, and intellectual engagement between British civil servants and their Indian subordinates. I illustrate my point by outlining the pioneering joint effort of William Edwards, Superintendent of Hill States, and Shivaprasad, his *munshi*, to introduce popular education in the Simla Hill States.

Popular imaginings of Simla have centered on the imperial summer capital of the Raj, a site of British leisure and pleasure, convalescence and recreation, 'a bitter-sweet memory of home'³ invoked in innumerable British accounts and immortalized by Rudyard Kipling. This limited image has been challenged by recent scholarship that charts the socio-political and symbolic functions of British hill stations as sites of empire and highlights their pivotal role in imperial policy making.⁴ Simla, India's foremost hill station, was more than 'the resort of the rich, the idle, and the invalid' evoked by French traveller Victor Jacquemont in the 1830s. Simla was a centre of political and military power, 'the quintessence of Empire and Britain's imperial dream'.⁵

When Shivaprasad arrived in Simla in May 1846, he found a hill station of nearly 400 houses, two extensive bazaars, European shops, hotels, a bank and an unfinished church. Spatially separated from the Englishman's Simla was the Indian part of town, home to the majority of Simla's population. Shivaprasad kept silent on the town's social landscape, but commented on the natural one. He thrived in his new surroundings. Breathing in the crisp mountain air that Emily Eden had pronounced 'English and exhilarating', he found Simla pristine and pleasurable: 'Everything required for a life

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of pleasure is available here; the purity of the air and water exceeds perhaps even that in heaven',⁶ he enthused. Over the next six years, he would witness the annual imperial pilgrimage to Simla. By April, some four hundred Europeans would arrive in Simla, escaping the heat and dust, and the perils of mind and body, of a summer in the plains. Over the next months they would keep the town spinning in a whirl of amusements—balls, dinners, amateur dramas, picnics, fancy fairs, *fêtes champêtres*, and sports competitions in the valley of Annandale. By late October, they would return to the plains. Simla became all quiet again. 'Rather dull', as Rudyard Kipling had it.

For all its entertainments, Simla in the late 1840s was only a foretaste of Kipling's future playground of 'the Little Tin Gods'. Shivaprasad was, of course, excluded from the splendid social life of Simla, an 'oversized English club'⁷ in which Indians were not allowed. The British enclave in the hills was a place of rigid social attitudes and racial segregation. To his British employers Simla meant 'strenuous work and strenuous play';⁸ to Shivaprasad it was all work. Yet it was precisely in the domain of work that the boundaries of race became permeable.

Shivaprasad had entered colonial service in December 1845, at the outbreak of the first Anglo-Sikh war. He had been hired by William Edwards, Under Secretary in the Foreign Department of the Government of India, and a fervent evangelical. Shivaprasad's first summer in the hills was spent working for a government much preoccupied with consolidating control over its new territories in the Punjab. To maintain the precarious peace, Governor General Lord Hardinge had to pacify the regions still in turmoil, quell insurrections at Kangra and in Kashmir, and closely monitor the Lahore Durbar. The Durbar's instability and neglect of state affairs confirmed Hardinge's resolve to bring the Punjab under indirect rule. By December 1846, he had manipulated the Sikh chiefs into acquiescing to British regency. Shivaprasad and Edwards accompanied the Governor General to Bhairawal, on the banks of the river Beas, where, on 26 December, the treaty that transformed the Sikh kingdom into a British protectorate was ratified. In the negotiations preceding the Bhairawal Treaty, Edwards relied heavily on Shivaprasad. His *munshi*, he noted, 'rendered himself very useful from his knowledge of the Sikhs and their language'.⁹ They returned to Simla in March 1847. Within a month, Shivaprasad was assigned the post of personal secretary to the new Foreign Secretary to the Government of India—Henry Miers Elliot.

MUNSHIS AND MASTERS

At 39, after twenty years in India, Henry Miers Elliot had finally landed the high position he thought himself entitled to. He had held a series of assistant positions at Bareilly, Delhi, Meerut, and Moradabad, and worked his way up in the revenue department in Allahabad and Agra. Out of his work grew a scholarly interest in Indian revenue and agricultural history and, subsequently, Indo-Muslim history.¹⁰ At the time Shivaprasad entered his service, Elliot was revising his *Bibliographical Index to the Historians of Muhammedan India*, a compilation of Indo-Persian histories that came to form the first volume of the monumental *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*. Elliot did not live to see the publication of this magnum opus, a celebrated landmark in colonial historiography. It was edited, augmented, and published by John Dowson in 1866-77.

Elliot was not known for acknowledging the contribution of those who assisted him in compiling and translating his Persian sources. When his *Bibliographical Index* was published in 1849, several disgruntled English collaborators came forward to voice their claim to translatorship. Elliot's Indian assistants were not in a position to do so. Shivaprasad was one of the nameless *munshis* whose expertise silently entered the pages of the work that raised its British compilers to fame.

Elliot found his new secretary doing excellent work. To Shivaprasad, their working relationship was a mixed blessing. Elliot, an imperious workaholic, made use of his services in a way that bordered on exploitation. There was no question of regular working hours. 'He ordered me to come in the morning', Shivaprasad recalled, 'and in the evening, when I asked for permission to leave, he handed me some papers to be translated, and told me to return them the next day. First it was one page, then two—to the point that I had to translate all night. His Honor never asked whether I ate and slept or not.'¹¹ He devised strategies to cope: whenever Elliot left to have breakfast, he would sneak out through the study's window, have a quick snack and be back in his place before his master returned. He would have late suppers and sleep after midnight. He felt overwhelmed.

Shivaprasad's memoirs offer a rare reversal of the imperial gaze. From his subaltern position—'I used to sit on the floor in a corner and silently take dictation'—he keenly observed his British employers' habits. He found Elliot extremely parsimonious. 'He would keep used envelopes under a paperweight on his desk. When the time came to write drafts he would ask for one of

them'.¹² Elliot hated to be disturbed at his work. The door to his study remained tightly shut; visitors were announced by the peon's call and only allowed to enter at the sound of Elliot's bell. The room did not invite guests to linger: 'There was no chair in his study. His writing desk was high, reaching up to his neck; whoever came to meet him had to do so standing up. I felt very sorry for an old, potbellied gentleman like General Eckford',¹³ Shivaprasad wrote.

Elliot was a difficult man to work for. An imperialist to the core, haughty and exacting, he expected strict compliance with his orders. Shivaprasad was struck by the idiosyncratic interview routine aspiring *munshis* were subjected to: The candidate was handed a manuscript, Elliot would place his finger over a word, hiding the first half of it, and order the *munshi* to start copying from there. If the candidate used his brains and wrote down the complete word, he was called a fool and dismissed. A no less bizarre test of obedience was devised for those seeking employment as humble orderlies: On a rainy day, they would be handed a piece of waste paper, instructed as to how to carry it in their hands, and sent on a trial errand to the Under Secretary's house. The latter would report back on the condition in which the paper had reached him. Those who delivered a dry paper—having carefully wrapped it in their shawls—failed the test.

For all of Elliot's eccentricities, Shivaprasad could not help but admire the man. Elliot's industry and single-minded devotion to his work deeply impressed him. 'I have never met anyone as hardworking as Sir Henry Elliot',¹⁴ he remembered in old age. The work stimulated his intellectual curiosity. He read his way through Elliot's fast growing collection of Indo-Persian sources. As new manuscripts kept arriving on Elliot's desk, one of Shivaprasad's tasks was to peruse the texts for cross-references to other Persian histories. He would cull his list of titles; Elliot would place a search advertisement for them. The collection thus grew to more than 300 manuscripts.

Elliot was explicit about the academic and imperialist purposes of his *Bibliographical Index*.¹⁵ His academic concern with preserving the source materials of Muslim India for posterity did not mean that he valued their content. He found little intrinsic value in the histories but dismissed them as mere 'annals'. Real history, he held, was only written in modern times, 'when the full light of European truth and discernment begins to shed its beams upon the obscurity of the past'. The native Chroniclers were 'for the most part, dull, prejudiced, ignorant and superficial'.¹⁶ If Elliot conceded value to the chronicles, it was in the context of his political agenda of contrasting the intolerance of the Muslim rulers with the benevolence

of British rule. In making 'our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule', the Persian histories had a direct bearing on the contemporary political scene, especially the signs of disaffection in Bengal. 'We should no longer hear bombastic Baboos, enjoying under our Government the highest degree of personal liberty, and many more political privileges than were ever conceded to a conquered nation, rant about patriotism, and the degradation of their present position',¹⁷ Elliot wrote in the direction of the 'idle vaporers' of Young Bengal. He painted a bleak picture of Muslim despotism and the brutal subjugation of India's Hindu population. The British, he asserted, had rescued a people plunged 'into the lowest depths of wretchedness and despondency' by Muslim rule.¹⁸

Elliot introduced Shivaprasad to the Western historical method and the practices of colonialist historiography, while also inculcating in him a colonialist view of India's past. In the process, he gave further nourishment to Shivaprasad's already pronounced anti-Muslim sentiments. Unlike future nationalist historians, Shivaprasad saw no distortion of historiography in Elliot's views but assimilated his master's lessons. Later, an attitude similar to Elliot's would inform his own chief contribution to Indian history, *Itihas timir nashak* ('History as the Dispeller of Darkness', 1864-73). In the preface to the work, Shivaprasad described himself as 'a pupil and admirer of the great scholar and statesman'.¹⁹

For all the interest he took in his work as *munshi*-turned-historian, Shivaprasad was relieved when William Edwards returned to Simla in November 1847 as the newly appointed Superintendent, Protected Hill States, and magistrate and collector of Simla and its dependencies. The office of the Superintendent had replaced that of the former Political Agent; it was subordinated to the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab. Edwards was keen to promote Shivaprasad to the position of head secretary (*mir munshi*) of the Simla Agency; Elliot, who was about to accompany the Governor General to Calcutta, wanted to retain him in his personal service. Why bury himself in the hills, Elliot reasoned with Shivaprasad, when Calcutta offered much better career prospects? Given the choice between the overbearing Elliot and the affable Edwards, Shivaprasad quickly made up his mind. Besides, Simla readily agreed with him.

The mountainous tract between the Sutlej and Jumna rivers Edwards had come to preside over covered a vast area. The Protected Hill States (later renamed Simla Hill States) comprised four principalities, 30 states and a population estimated at over half a million. In his

manifold political, judicial, fiscal, and civil duties, Edwards relied on his *mir munshi* in more than the conventional sense of a secretary and translator. Shivaprasad found himself assuming the role of 'principal assistant' to Edwards. To be at his master's beck and call, he had moved into a small cottage perched upon the southern slope, just above Edwards's bungalow and facing the Simla court house or *kutcherry*.

The way Edwards performed his duties as civil judge elicited Shivaprasad's comment. His employer settled legal disputes 'just like a *panchayat*', he noted approvingly. Edwards liked to dispense rapid justice, solving cases—a total of 15 original suits and 76 appeals in 1849—within an average of eight days.²⁰ His British judicial assistant, by contrast, showed alarmingly little interest in the court proceedings. Worse still, the man was corrupt. Shivaprasad discovered him and the court *sarrishtadar* manipulating cases and extracting bribes from plaintiffs and defendants. He reported the matter to Edwards. Justice, in this case, was dispensed quickly, if unfairly: the British assistant was fired, the Indian *sarrishtadar* put in jail.

Upon assuming his duties as *mir munshi*, Shivaprasad found the office of the Simla Agency in complete disarray. The Agency files, he noted wryly, looked like 'waste paper in a grocery store',²¹ not a surprising comment given the conditions under which the flood of paperwork produced by the colonial bureaucracy was generally stored. Rearranging the records occupied much of his time, but the painstaking labour paid off. In the summer of 1847, John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner of Jullundur Doab, visited Simla. There was to be an inspection of the Agency office.

On becoming Viceroy of India in 1864, John Lawrence would make Simla the official summer headquarters of the Indian government. An energetic and efficient administrator, Lawrence was respected and feared by British and Indian subalterns who described him as curt, blunt and 'brusque of speech': 'He certainly had what is called a rough tongue then, and the Sirdars had a wholesome dread of him'.²² This dread was shared by the record-keeper of the Agency office, who, prior to the inspection, presented himself to Shivaprasad, letter of resignation in hand. Sir Lawrence was known to be extremely hot-tempered and foul-mouthed, the man confided, in tendering his resignation he was trying to save his honour. Sympathetic to his subordinate's plight, Shivaprasad granted him a day's leave. The next day, Shivaprasad gave Lawrence a proud demonstration of office organisation. He had meticulously rearranged the records by states and classified them into military, revenue and fiscal files. Lawrence was satisfied. The

inspection concluded with the opening of an old box that revealed a jumble of files, mostly unsigned, dating to David Ochterlony's time as Political Agent. This was the state he had found the entire office in, Shivaprasad informed Lawrence. He asked what to do with the papers. Given his own diligence, he must have been startled by Lawrence's reply: 'Burn them'.

The second encounter with the Chief Commissioner was a baptism of fire for the young *mir munshi*. Shivaprasad had been asked to step in for Lawrence's head clerk. The document Lawrence asked him to translate was badly written and almost illegible. Besides, it abounded in Pashto words. It concerned a local dispute over water supplies in the border region of Peshawar. Tenants of the British had stopped providing water to their Afghan neighbours who had appropriated the water by force, re-routing the irrigation canals to their fields. Several people had been killed in the altercation; Lawrence's permission was requested to have the Afghan 'insurgents' hanged. Lawrence must have been impressed by Shivaprasad's *ex tempore* translation, for he consulted him on how to resolve the matter. Shivaprasad took the side of the 'poor Afghans'. They had a hereditary right to the water, their livelihood depended on their fields, and they were largely ignorant of British laws. Lawrence concurred. Later, Shivaprasad learned that the Afghan peasants he had so valiantly defended had been spared.

The episode illustrates the *munshi's* mediating power. Shivaprasad was a model of the new class of *munshis* emerging under British rule: polyglot, diversely erudite, conversant in English, more or less anglicised. The professional class had successfully reinvented itself. The new *munshi* of the colonial period doubled as culture specialist and cultural broker. He acted as guardian of political and diplomatic culture, intermediary and local informant. *Munshis* had become indispensable to the makers of the British Empire. Yet their status vis-à-vis their British employers, at once masters and pupils, remained ambivalent. British dependence on Indian linguistic and cultural expertise did not sit well with notions of social and racial superiority. The complex relations between master and *munshi* formed the subject of much social satire in colonial writing. Sometimes, lasting friendships were formed—Shivaprasad and Edwards are a case in point. More often, the *munshi's* power caused anxiety. He was depicted as a venal creature, obsequious flatterer and clever forger of documents. 'They are very adroit, these moonshees, discovering, with the particular quickness of the native mind, exactly what is required, and not hesitating any means likely to gratify their employer', *Sharpe's London Magazine* explained the *munshi's* wily character to British

readers. The journal warned of *munshis'* ways to trick the European, but concluded blithely: 'Still the moonshee must be respected, for he is the doorkeeper to all the interest and real acquaintance the sojourner in the East can hope to gain, connected with the people and their land; and the successful aspirer to distinction, whether civil or military, is ever the man who, day by day, has hailed with pleasure the advent of his "moonshee"'.²³

Other representations romanticized the *munshi*. Charles Doyley's drawing of 'An European gentleman with his moonshee or native professor of languages', published in *The European in India* (1813) and made familiar to modern readers by C.A. Bayly's *Empire and Information*, pictures a European gentleman seated at a writing table and taking dictation from his *munshi*, sitting close to him, yet at a respectful distance. Both figures are seated on armed wooden chairs, their legs crossed in a posture of relaxed concentration. Both are elegantly dressed, the European in a white jacket, white trousers, and shiny black boots, the *munshi*, a venerable white-bearded and turbaned figure, in a white tunic with cummerbund, *churidar* pajamas, and white socks. The equality between native teacher and European pupil suggested by the spatial arrangement and dress code of the image is deceptive. It had little to do with Shivaprasad's reality. His place was visibly more subordinate—he would sit on the floor, on the carpet, in a corner of the room, at his British masters' feet. There is no indication that his spatially inscribed subalternity gave him a sense of inferiority. To him this was the *munshi's* rightful place; he occupied it proudly and with dignity. Shivaprasad had inherited a professional ethos dating to the Mughal era and based on the traditional Persian ideal of the *munshi-e haqiqi* or 'real *munshi*', at once a skilled specialist, master of style and diplomacy, servant, and boon companion. Trust, diligence, an ethics of service and personal loyalty were all part of it.

At Simla, Shivaprasad experienced the collective identity of a close-knit professional group. At the time, most *munshis* and clerks working at Simla were Bengalis. He enjoyed the male comradeship of men often separated from their families, thrown together by a parallel life of service and bound together in solidarity. *Munshis* hung out together and helped each other out. Shivaprasad fondly remembered his colleague Radhakishan, *mir munshi* at the Ambala Agency, who liked feeding his fellow *munshis* with an endless supply of dal and chapatis prepared by his Brahman cook, and would not give up this 'daily distribution of alms' even when rebuked by his British employers.²⁴

While Shivaprasad was diligently serving the Company government, Indian resentment of the British

presence in the Punjab had turned into open rebellion. It suited the expansionist designs of Lord Dalhousie, Hardinge's haughty young successor. 'I can see no escape from the necessity of annexing this infernal country',²⁵ Dalhousie wrote to Sir George Couper in September 1848. Five months and four battles later, the British had defeated the Sikhs in the second Anglo-Sikh war. The Sikh empire had ended. On 29 March 1849, the Punjab was annexed to the growing British dominions in India.

Shivaprasad's first-hand experience of the Sikh wars, and his study of historical sources, sparked his interest in writing history. While at Simla, he wrote *Sikkhom ka uday aur ast* ('Rise and Fall of the Sikhs'), a political history of the Sikhs from the decline of the Mughal Empire to the annexation of the Punjab. A beginners' work in the 'rise and decline of rulers' tradition, it is most notable for its mass of empirical detail. Shivaprasad drew on the recent *History of the Sikhs* (1849) by J. D. Cunningham, whose sharp critique of Hardinge's Punjab policy had cost him his job as political agent at Bhopal. Unlike Cunningham, Shivaprasad however, steered clear of any criticism of British conduct in the Sikh wars. He condoned British policy in the Punjab as a necessary, indeed natural, consequence of the state of anarchy reigning in the Punjab after Ranjit Singh.²⁶ Published from Benares in 1851, *Sikkhom ka uday aur ast* holds importance as one of the first works of modern history in Hindi.²⁷

AT THE GRASSROOTS

Shivaprasad and Edwards shared a concern with education, the prerequisite to all social and material progress. On assuming office in 1847 Edwards had found the hill people 'totally ignorant and barbarous'. There were 'no schools of any description',²⁸ he noted. Transactions were carried on 'by Brahmins and other adventurers from other parts of the country', persons 'of not very high character and respectability'.²⁹ Edwards set out to empower the hill population. In his efforts to introduce popular instruction, he found an ardent collaborator in Shivaprasad.

Simla marked the beginning of Shivaprasad's lifelong preoccupation with elementary education. It was there that he gained the initial field experience vital to his future career in the Education Department of the North-Western Provinces. His first-hand experience of the Indian grassroots and exposure to rural poverty would permanently shape his views on the goals and methods of education. Edwards introduced him to the educational philosophy of the civilizing mission, in which Western scientific learning and Christianity intersected in various tangible and intangible ways. Shivaprasad learnt about

utilitarian ideas of useful knowledge and observed earnest evangelicalism in action.

Their first project, and arguably the first educational institution in Simla, was a teacher training school. Having secured financial support from the hill chiefs, and a headmaster from Alexander Duff's mission school in Calcutta, they opened a school in a building below the Cart Road. The boarding house attached to the Central School, as it came to be known, quickly expanded as students began to be drafted from far-away district schools. The school mainly attracted students from the agricultural class; some belonged to 'the higher ranks', four were the sons of petty chiefs. They came from all castes except the Dalit community. 'We could not succeed in admitting persons of this class into the school',³⁰ Edwards noted.

The more daunting task awaiting the two men was to bring education to the isolated hill areas surrounding Simla. For Shivaprasad, the Benares-born urban intellectual, it was a startling experience. He knew little about the lives, customs, and beliefs of the tribal communities he proposed to educate. Shivprasad observed them with the curious gaze of a colonial ethnographer. He internalized standard British representations of the hill folks as noble savages, commenting on their innocence and simplicity.³¹ On tour with Edwards, he came to Punar in Keonthal; the place struck him as 'very wild and much cut off from the civilised world'.³² He was amazed to find people living 'in caves or in double-storied houses without any gate or other access except hanging staircases which they had drawn up at our approach'. The tribals, he noted with incredulity, did not know how to count, but were 'very honest': 'When they went to Junaga to pay rent or revenue to their Raja, they took with them small parcels of pieces of stones and pebbles, the representatives of so many rupees, which they had paid from time to time during the year to the Raja's men, to settle the accounts'.³³

Shivaprasad's clerical experience had little prepared him for work at the grassroots of rural India. His experiment to set up primary schools for the hill people was considered doomed by most: 'When I persuaded them to educate their children and gave them a teacher, everybody except Mr. Edwards laughed at me.'³⁴ He would prove everyone wrong. By dint of perseverance, support from the hill chiefs and government funds, the village schools began to thrive. The system was self-perpetuating: the best students were drafted into the Central School at Simla and given scholarships; some would return to the village schools as teachers.

As Gyan Prakash has argued, the colonies were 'underfunded and overextended laboratories of

modernity'.³⁵ This is certainly true for education. British India functioned as a vast experimental ground. Rooted in eighteenth-century ideas of charity, reformation, and social control of the poor, the modern concept of popular education was implemented in India as early as the 1850s. Elementary mass education in the Simla Hill States started almost a decade before John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* radically proposed compulsory education for every citizen, and over two decades before the 1870 Elementary Education Act was passed in Britain.

As Edwards and Shivaprasad were dotting the Simla hills with schools, a similar experiment was carried out in the plains by James Thomason, Lieutenant Governor of the North-Western Provinces from 1843-1853, and the doyen of a school of Christian administrators who carried out their public duties with a sense of evangelical mission. Thomason and Edwards represented the Haileybury-trained elite of civil servants who championed popular education in North India. Thomason's fame as a revenue administrator was closely linked to his pioneering schemes of vernacular education, which provided both a formula for national mass education and a model of primary instruction for British India. The system of government village schools he initiated in several *tahsils* (revenue divisions) of the Agra district relied heavily on indigenous cooperation and support. Thomason observed the progress of education in the hill states over the course of several summers spent in Simla. He was much impressed. Edwards would later claim that it was his system that Thomason had introduced—'with some few modifications'—in the Agra districts. In any case, their experiments came to bear on the Education Despatch of 1854, which, in redirecting the focus of colonial educational policy from the educated elites to the Indian populace, provided the ideological underpinnings of vernacular mass education. The Despatch was in part indebted to Edwards's educational scheme which he presented to a British parliamentary committee in 1853. Edwards stressed the need to give popular education 'an industrial character as much as possible' and insisted that the peasant classes must be instructed in 'the best mode of agriculture' and 'the common elements of knowledge... so as to enable them to carry on the transactions of their daily life without the intervention of others'. He also used the opportunity to refute British stereotypes about Indian apathy to education. Rural parents in the hills, he asserted, showed 'very considerable anxiety' to secure the benefits of education for their children. As for the children, they appeared 'very intelligent' and certainly 'as far advanced in useful knowledge as any children of their own age as I have seen in schools in England or in Scotland'.³⁶

Interestingly, his *Reminiscences* give a very different, more candid picture, evoking 'a rude and ignorant people, who were perfectly apathetic on the subject of the instruction of their children'.³⁷

Edwards drew inspiration from popular education projects back home: like English and Irish elementary schools, the hill schools imparted a 'practical' education in the three 'R's—reading, writing, arithmetic—, supplemented by basic instruction in geography, mensuration and, of course, morality. To the proponents of the civilizing mission, the moral improvement of their imperial subjects was paramount. The hill schools taught 'the broad principles of morality', inculcating in students the 'great principles of duty'—'lessons of truth, justice, prudence, and industry; and hatred of lying, dishonesty, dissension, and dissipation',³⁸ Edwards explained. Shivaprasad, the future author of *Manavdharmas*, a popularizing Hindi digest of the *Manusmriti*, concurred. The enlightenment belief in education as both an intellectual and moral institution was nothing alien to South Asian traditions or, for that matter, Indian educators of his generation.

Edwards was sensitive to the needs of the agricultural classes. He argued that instruction in the hill schools must be 'of practical, substantial and immediate utility, so as to raise a feeling in favour of education in the minds of the parents, and place the advantages to be derived therefrom in a new and striking light'.³⁹ For all his respect of local tradition, Edwards saw education as an evangelical endeavor, blending Western learning with Christianity. Like most evangelical administrators, he thought it the government's duty to provide elementary education to its Indian subjects. In advocating a general system of national education, 'simple in its working and practical in its character', Edwards envisioned a *nation* of the educated, 'a powerful educated caste in themselves' able to throw off the shackles of caste and tradition. Popular prejudice and custom formed 'the great bar to the evangelization of India, to which alone we can look for any real or lasting improvement'.⁴⁰ Education, clearly, was a matter of faith.

The biggest frustration for the two grassroots pioneers was female education. In what was to become a recurring pattern in Shivaprasad's career, efforts to implement female education got off to a good start but later fell apart. They had succeeded in opening a girls school with the assistance of the wife of one of the hill chiefs who lent her authority and financial support to the cause. The woman died, and with her, any hope of continuing the project.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Shivaprasad had conceived of another means to further their educational efforts—a printing

press. The village schools needed textbooks, and the hill population a newspaper. Like most intellectuals of his generation, Shivaprasad welcomed the new technology of print, a tool of enlightenment and social progress. He was keen to try his hand at printing and journalism.

A NEWSPAPER AND SCHOOL BOOKS FOR THE HILLS

It is little known that Simla has a place on the map of early Hindi journalism. In 1847, Sheikh Abdullah, a learned Muslim, launched the weekly *Simla Akhbar*, the first Hindi (that is, Nagari-script) newspaper in the hill states, and one of the first in the north Indian Hindi heartland. *Simla Akhbar* was well received: official opinion ranked it the best paper in the provinces published 'under purely native management'. But it went the way of most vernacular papers of the period. Within one year, the Sheikh's account books were in the red; within two, publication of *Simla Akhbar* had to be suspended. When Shivaprasad acquired the Simla Akhbar Press in 1849, the small lithographic print shop was in deep financial waters.

As the new press proprietor, Shivaprasad set about reviving *Simla Akhbar*. He retained Sheikh Abdullah as manager and assumed the editorship of the paper, now published as a bi-monthly.⁴² The two men likely shared the burden of filling the paper's columns. The new *Simla Akhbar*—part newspaper, part scientific journal—was lauded for its informative content, not least because it carried commercial news and tables of market prices. In quantitative terms, its initial impact was small, with only 44 Hindu and eight European subscribers. An equal number of copies was distributed free of charge.

Edwards patronized the press and the paper. On his recommendation, the government subscribed to seven copies of *Simla Akhbar*. By 1851, circulation had increased to 97, a remarkable number. The introduction of news and information on Europe further enhanced the paper's reputation. 'There is a very good news paper published at Simla, called the *Simla News* (*Simla Akhbar*)',⁴³ reported *Ledlie's Miscellany*. 'Most creditable articles, of the Useful Knowledge order, are brought out in this journal, and on the whole it must be admitted to be the best publication of the kind in the Provinces'. To this British observer, Shivaprasad's paper provided a welcome change from the 'undevidingly inaccurate, trivial, behind-hand and ridiculous' fare of vernacular newspapers.⁴⁴

Simla Akhbar covered a wide range of topics, reflective of Shivaprasad's catholic interests. One of his first pieces, published on 1 May 1849, and reprinted in English translation in the *Delhi Gazette*, recounted the history of the Koh-e Noor diamond, recently taken from the Sikhs'

treasury and added to Queen Victoria's crown jewels. It shows Shivaprasad's concern with scientific information, historical fact and empirical detail. 'It is generally believed that this diamond belonged to the Pandus, but Tavernier says that it was dug out of the mine of Koor, which is about four days' journey to the west of Masulipatam, in the Nizam's territory, on the banks of the Godavaree, and it was presented to Shahjehan by Meer Jumla, who was the first commander-in-chief of the King of Golkonda's army, and afterwards of that of Aurungzeb',⁴⁵ he wrote. 'The Koh-ee-Noor is 319 ruttees in weight and its value was estimated at the time of Shahjehan at Rs. 78,15,525.' Other articles reflected Shivaprasad's scholarly passion for archaeology. He had recently made the acquaintance of Alexander Cunningham of the Archaeological Survey of India. Happy to discover Shivaprasad's 'informed interest' in Indian archaeology, Cunningham quickly tapped into his linguistic expertise, forwarding two rare inscriptions from a Baijnath temple in Kiragram to his Indian 'friend', who prepared and published a translation in *Simla Akhbar*. In another article, Shivaprasad discussed a copper plate inscription Cunningham had discovered at a temple in Kullu district, which gave the genealogy of the Mandi Rajas.⁴⁶

The more pressing task for the small press was to produce vernacular textbooks for the newly opened village schools. Shivaprasad and Edwards concurred on the necessity of acquainting pupils with textual knowledge: the local teachers could not be relied on. The few existing textbooks in Hindi were unsuitable or defective. Edwards looked to European models: 'There appeared to me to be no reason why the books found most useful for children in Great Britain and Ireland might not be equally fitted for the minds of Asiatics, who are no less intelligent or capable of receiving sound practical instruction'.⁴⁷ A set of textbooks published by the Irish Kildare Place Society was procured. Shivaprasad was assigned the task of translating and adapting them 'to suit local circumstances'.

The first book issued from the press in 1850 was an alphabetical primer titled *Varnamala* or 'Garland of Letters'. Shivaprasad printed versions in Hindi and Urdu (300 and 200 copies, respectively), priced at one *anna*. *Varnamala* is notable for its attempt to introduce Indian children to modern print technology. Under the letter 'c' Shivaprasad inserted an illustration of a handpress (*chape ki kal*) amidst the familiar drawings of animals and vehicles. Next, Shivaprasad produced a story book titled *Larkom ki kahani*, a mathematical primer, and several religious works. The little booklets sold well. At the end

of 1851 he boasted an income of Rs 1,276, a welcome supplement to his *munshi's* salary.

Shivaprasad's textbooks came to the notice of James Thomason who ordered Henry Stewart Reid, the Visitor General of Schools, to introduce them in the village schools in the plains. Reid found Shivaprasad's school book series 'extremely valuable', especially *Malumat* and *Bhugol vrttant*, two primers on natural science and geography, based on Chambers's *Rudiments of Knowledge* and Pearce's *Outlines of Geography*.⁴⁸ Reid had the primers augmented and printed in one volume under the title *Vidyankur* or 'Shoots of Learning'. The publication of *Vidyankur* in 1851 marked a significant step in Shivaprasad's fledgling career as a textbook author. It was the first of his textbooks published under official aegis, in thousands of copies, and under the imprint of the prestigious Sikandara Orphan Press of Agra. *Vidyankur* was adopted as the standard textbook in natural philosophy, soon also in an Urdu version, *Haqa'iq al-Maujudat*. Read by generations of students, it would be hailed in educational circles as 'one of the most useful and popular school books in the country'.⁴⁹

ABOLISHING BEGAR

Edwards's educational efforts were part of a struggle to eradicate the fundamental social evil in the Simla hills: the system of unremunerated forced labour known as *begar*. The ancient practice of *begar* was deeply intertwined with the revenue system. In 1815 Sir David Ochterlony had made the provision of *begar* and construction of roads a part of the hill chiefs' treaty obligations in return for British protection. The system suited the needs of the Raj: thousands of local porters were yearly required for the conveyance of an ever-increasing number of people, documents, construction materials, household requisites, supplies and merchandise up the narrow tortuous paths to Simla and the neighbouring sanitarium, and—several months later—for the journey down to the plains. The hill men were forcibly dragged from their homes and families to serve as coolies for the British seasonal caravan. Edwards was indignant to find a modern form of slavery that was not only tolerated by his compatriots, but also systematically exploited by the government. 'I have had to furnish to the extent of 15,000 men in one season to carry the baggage and records of the Government of India, the Governor-general, the Commander-in-Chief and the Lieutenant-governor',⁵⁰ he reported. The labourers were detained from home for weeks, 'in seed-time or in harvest, when their presence was most required'.⁵¹ To Edwards,

begar was 'nothing short of an insupportable and fearful system of serfdom'; it inflicted 'extreme misery and hardship' on 'the poor inhabitants' of the Hills. Edwards proposed two ways to curb the practice: education and the improvement of lines of communication. He had already decreed that parents who sent their children to the new village schools would be exempt from *begar*. The measure proved popular: attendance at the Simla boarding school alone had risen to 100.⁵² Building a road, however, required the Governor General's support.

Lord Dalhousie first visited Simla in 1849. He would spend three consecutive summers there. Plagued by gout, a lame foot and nose bleeding, Dalhousie did not take to Simla. 'This place has been greatly overrated in climate and everything else',⁵³ he complained to a friend. All through the first summer, Edwards tried to bring the evils of the *begar* system to Dalhousie's notice. *Begar* was cruel and degrading, he argued. It was also expensive, a burden on the government budget. The hill stations needed a road practicable for wheeled carriages and beasts of burden, so that animal carriage could be substituted for human porters. His arguments fell on deaf ears. The scheme might not have materialized had Edwards not found a staunch supporter in Colonel Pitt Kennedy, the military secretary to Commander-in-Chief Charles Napier and one of the Indian empire's foremost engineers. Kennedy surveyed the land and determined a line of road from the plains by which Simla could be reached by a gradual and easy ascent. 'The next thing was to induce the Government to accede to its construction; but all my proposals for this purpose were looked on very coldly, and I almost despaired of success',⁵⁴ Edwards noted. It was Kennedy who finally found a way to persuade the Governor General. With the help of ninety prisoners from the Simla jail put at his disposal by Edwards, Kennedy opened out 'a piece of perfectly level road' parallel with the steep path leading to Dalhousie's residence on Strawberry Hill.⁵⁵ The private pathway achieved what words could not. In the spring of 1850 Dalhousie sanctioned the construction of the road and ordered work to commence immediately. A grand imperial scheme was taking shape in his mind: the Hindustan-Tibet Road would not only obliterate *begar* and improve communication between Simla and the plains, it would also open up direct commercial intercourse with Tibet and Western China, entailing both economic and political advantages.

The Hindustan-Tibet Road was a triumph of modern engineering. 'Constructed upon true scientific principles, through a country unrivalled in natural difficulties',⁵⁶ the 12-foot wide road covered a distance of 78 miles from Kalka to Simla. In one of the grotesque contradictions of

empire, the road designed to eliminate *begar* was built by thousands of *begaris* (80,966, to be precise, or an average of 1,730 labourers per mile).⁵⁷ To be sure, the British paid them for their work—Edwards personally surveyed the distribution of wages (2 *annas* per diem) among the constricted labourers. But these wages regularly ended up in the local chiefs' coffers.

Shivaprasad supported Edwards's campaign against *begar* through *Simla Akhbar*. He was optimistic about having the abominable practice abolished. In an article published in 1850 he outlined the commercial and social benefits of the new road:

There are two other great advantages to be derived, which will accrue from opening the new road; the cheapening of grain in Simla—for when it comes on camels it must fall in price, and when grain is cheap everything will be cheap—and the total abolition of the *begar* system in the district; because, when the road is practicable for camels and elephants, neither the camps of the great men in the empire, nor the gentlemen, will require the aid of *begarees* for carrying up and down their luggage. The *begar* system is the greatest evil in these Hills; and the sooner it is abolished the better: while the people of the country are forced to serve *begar*, they will never be able to improve their condition under the present regulation.⁵⁸

In October 1851, Dalhousie went to inspect the progress of construction work. Shivaprasad and Edwards travelled in the Governor General's entourage, accompanied by 'guns, camels, mules, &c., laden for the purpose of trying and opening the road'.⁵⁹ By that time Dalhousie had made the project completely his own. As he wrote to a friend in November: 'I returned to Simla by the new road which I commenced one year ago and which, when it shall be finished, will not be surpassed, I flatter myself, by any mountain road in the world... My project is to extend it to the Chinese frontier'.⁶⁰ He added: 'I should feel a right to feel a little proud of it'.

The inspection tour was one of many similar excursions that brought Shivaprasad in close contact with high representatives of the colonial state. Depending on the size of the entourage, such tours on horseback temporarily loosened the strict behavioural code of office buildings and bungalows, enabling more personal transactions between Indian subordinates and British officials. During the trip up the Hindustan-Tibet road, Shivaprasad had a memorable encounter with the Governor General. They had stopped at a *dak* bungalow for the night when Dalhousie, returning from an evening stroll, came upon Shivaprasad on the bungalow's terrace, engrossed in reading Major's *Physiology* in the dim light of a candle. The sight of the Simla Agency's studious *mir munshi* did not fail to impress him. Before long, Shivaprasad received a gift of two English volumes on

physiology sent from the Governor General's Calcutta office.⁶¹

Shivaprasad's time in Simla came to an end in late 1852. Edwards had been granted two years furlough. He pressed Shivaprasad to accompany him to England. Although it meant leaving his job and family, Shivaprasad handed in his resignation to accompany 'dear Mr. Edwards' to the country he much longed to see. His decision met with the approval of the Lieutenant Governor. Anticipating Shivaprasad's future usefulness, Thomason took a personal interest in their subordinate: 'I think Shiva Pershad is quite right, never to enter the service of the Government if he can live (comfortably or uncomfortably) without it',⁶² he wrote to Edwards in September. 'He has far greater means of being useful to his countrymen as an independent gentleman amongst them, than in the employ of Government. If he goes to England, so much the better. He will be the more valuable man when he returns.' Thomason was explicit about the expediency of patronage: 'As an author he may be invaluable to us. We will publish or help to publish any good books, which he may prepare.'

In the end Shivaprasad did not go to England, nor did he turn into a book-composing independent gentleman. Instead, he rose to become an Inspector of Schools and a key player in vernacular education in north India, occupying diverse and often conflicting roles as a people's educator and mediator of colonial educational policy. Simla had prepared him for it.

At Simla, Shivaprasad experienced imperial authority and a variety of racializing practices, from outright racist superiority to self-interested patronage. Yet, as his professional relationship with William Edwards demonstrates, day-to-day interaction, a common purpose, and the shared burden of work also engendered mutual trust, appreciation and affection. To acknowledge the complexity of personal and intellectual rapports in the colonial domain of work is not to deny the unequal power relations underlying these engagements. The Indian at the head of his office, Edwards asserted, was a man 'not only highly intelligent, but a person to be depended upon in every way.'⁶³ We may read this as a patronising comment coming from a member of the ruling race. But we may as well interpret it as an expression of appreciation for a companion in work.

Notes

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15. The following paragraphs are heavily indebted to Wahi's 'Henry Miers Elliot'.
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