

Accommodating the Raj: The Housing Policy in New Delhi, 1911-1931.

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ABSTRACT: *The announcement of the transfer of capital from Calcutta to Delhi was made at the Delhi Durbar of 1911 by George V. With this decision, the process of making the new capital was set in motion and the next 20 years would see hectic building activity leading to a transformation of barren land to a visual treat. The commanding height of the Government House and Secretariats, the wide roads lined with carefully selected trees and shrubs, the Gymkhana and Chelmsford Clubs, the offices of the bureaucracy and the homes of the officials would all come up to bring to life the new capital. This paper begins by exploring the debate on the question of Delhi being a permanent capital of the British Empire. The next issue facing the administration was that of providing housing to the government officials who would be living and working in New Delhi. This paper has sourced the guidelines and specifications to be followed in allotment of residences from the files and documents at the National Archives of India, New Delhi. These specifications allow us to understand the contradictions in the housing policy of the colonial government in New Delhi from 1911 to 1931.*

KEYWORDS: *cities, New Delhi, housing, British Empire, colonial*

I. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of the new capital of the British Empire at New Delhi was announced in 1911. The plans for the new capital included buildings for offices, residences as well as spaces for leisure. The matter of housing for each level of the bureaucracy was a complex matter. This paper shall begin by establishing the concern about Delhi being a permanent capital, followed by the hierarchies of space according to the rank in the bureaucracy. The main issues confronting the housing plan was that of adequate space, privacy, keeping the homes warm during winter and cool during summer. Juxtaposing the spatial hierarchy with the explicit concern for privacy an attempt will be made to highlight the contradictions fraught in such a plan. This part of the analysis is closely related to Stephen Legg's conception of colonial governmentality.¹ The difference lies in methodology and the interpretation of similar source material. While Legg uses the Foucauldian framework to highlight these tensions, this chapter tries to locate in the visual realm. Thus while Legg sees the question as one of ordering and the failure of the colonial state to regulate social interactions among the natives and the officials, here this theme of privacy is explored from the notion of the native as a spectator to the life of the officials and what was deemed to be fit as to be seen by the natives. The idea of the native as voyeur shall also be explored.

In contrast to the planning of the Government House and Secretariats where the land was acquired in one go, the housing requirements were such that temporary camps and quarters continued to come up and these were finally accepted as permanent housing. Thus, land was acquired at Timarpur, Chandrawal, Wazirabad for the construction of temporary government buildings in 1912.² By 1934, the future of the Timarpur quarters was being debated.³ Similarly, Metcalfe House was acquired in 1912 for the location of the Council Chamber, offices of the Secretariat, the press and residences of additional members of Council.⁴

¹ Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi's Urban Governmentalities*; Blackwell 2007.

² Government of India, Home Department (Delhi) Part A, Nos. 77-79, July 1912. Acquisition of villages of Timarpur, Chandrawal, Wazirabad, in Delhi for the construction of temporary Government Buildings.

³ Government of India, Home Department (Public), Nos. 249/34, 1934. Future of Timarpur quarters in New Delhi

⁴ Government of India, Home Department (Delhi) Part A, Nos. 39-40, June 1912. Acquisition of Metcalfe House in Delhi for the location of the Council Chamber, Secretariat Offices, the Press and residences of additional members of Council.

New Delhi: A Temporary Capital?

At the outset of the move of the government was the question of permanence. What constitutes a capital of an Empire? The aesthetic and opulent buildings were acceptable but what good would they be if they were to be inhabited by a temporary administration? The question of the new capital thus became closely tied to New Delhi being the permanent capital of the Raj. After all what was the use of the new city if there was nobody living there for half the year. "One of the arguments in favour of the proposal for prolonging the stay of the Government of India in New Delhi was that Government having built the New Capital must make every effort to make it a real capital by staying there as long as possible and by locating some of the offices permanently at that place."⁵ It was always a matter of debate which departments should move from Calcutta to Delhi. The shift of more departments implied accommodation to be provided for all of them and by 1929 the housing shortage was such that this question was actively debated. A note dated in 1929 recorded that the problem really was whether the Army Department should move down to New Delhi in the strength now suggested by the Kirke Committee, or "should, until conditions are more established, either move down to Old Delhi in the 1928 strength or remain in Simla. The unsatisfactoriness of a divided establishment is indeed obvious, but is probably less serious in the case of the Army Department than of the Civil Departments."⁶

The rules for the application of allotment of houses reveals a complicated set of rules. Each rule adds a layer to the visual narrative when they are juxtaposed with the design specifications which unravel the anxieties behind such rules. The next section cites a few of the elaborate rules for applications of houses. These will be analyzed in the latter half of the chapter.

The guidelines and Rules regulating the application for and allotment of Office and Residential accommodation for the Government of India in Delhi and Raisina were as follows.

"Curzon House: The quarters will be allotted to married officers without families in order of juniority and one set of quarters only will be allotted to each officer. Single officers may be given accommodation by order of juniority after all married officers eligible for this accommodation have been provided for but they will be subject to 15 days notice of vacation.

Alipur House: The quarters will be allotted to married officers with children in order of juniority and married officers without children or bachelors accompanied by sisters or dependents will only be given quarters or tents at Alipur House if there is no married officer with children requiring the accommodation.

Bungalows at Raisina: where possible houses which can be permanently allotted to officers holding permanent appointments will be so allotted. Officers allotted houses permanently will not be eligible for any other class of accommodation.

Camps in Old Delhi: No camps will be allotted. Camps will only be provided in Old Delhi under very special circumstances and then only when the whole of the accommodation available under items I & iv above has been filled up.

A definite scale of furniture is laid down for each class of accommodation and no additional furniture can be claimed except beds and bathroom furniture if necessary owing to size of family.

Officers will be given the option of having quarters entirely unfurnished or furnished in accordance with the prescribed scale. If furnished quarters are required the full rent for the furniture must be paid whether the full ration of furniture is required or not.

The Estate Officer will not undertake the catering arrangements for bachelor chummeries and it will be necessary for the officers concerned to make their own arrangements."⁷

There were slightly different guidelines for the allotment of accommodation for Officers.

"The accommodation available consisted of : -

- i. Quarters at Probyn Lines.
- ii. Quarters at Raisina.
- iii. Chummeries at Probyn Lines.
- iv. Chummeries at Raisina.
- v. Camps in Old Delhi.

2. The Departments concerned will then allot in detail the accommodation placed at their disposal and intimate the names and salaries to the Estate Officer. Accommodation set aside for a particular class, should not be allotted to any other class without the approval of the Estate Officer.

⁵ Government of India, Department of Industries and Labour, Public Works, Civil Works Buildings, File No. B-45(12) 1931. Policy to be pursued in respect of the construction of further residential accommodation in New Delhi

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Government. of India, Public Works Department, Proceedings no. 35, July 1921. Rules regulating the application for and allotment of Office and Residential accommodation for the Government of India in Delhi and Raisina.

3. Camps as necessary, will be provided for married Superintends single Superintendents married Assistants and single Assistant. No camps will be provided until all the available quarters have been utilized. Single men will not be given accommodation in married camps, unless they have dependents living with them, in which case they will be allotted accommodation after the requirements of married men with families have been met.

4. The Camps will only be pitched in the areas allotted to Superintendents and clerks and no camps will be provided outside their respective areas.

5. Lady clerks and typists will be accommodated in a separate chummary or hostel. Married caps or quarters will only be allowed for Lady clerks and typist having children or other dependents and all application for such special treatment must be submitted through the HOD concerned accompanied by details of the depts.

6. Superintendents and clerks will be given the option of having quarters entirely unfurnished or furnished in accordance with the prescribed scale. If furnished quarters are required the full rent for the furniture must be paid whether the full ration of furniture is required or not.

7. All Superintendents and clerks who have been allotted accommodation should give the Estate Officer four days notice of the date on which they will occupy the accommodation.”⁸

The third part of the guidelines related to the “allotment of accommodation for Indian Superintendents and clerks.

1. The accommodation available consists of : -

2. The available accommodation at Timarpur and Raisina will be allotted to departments as nearly as possible proportionately to their total requirement in respect of each class of accommodation, by the Estate Officer so that each Department will get its due share in respect of each class of quarters at Timarpur and at Raisina.

3. No camps are provided for Indian Super Superintendents of attached offices drawing salaries of Rs.600 and above will for the purpose of allotment of accommodation be considered of the same status as Secretariat Superintendent or Clerks.”⁹

CONCLUSION

Thus, after a survey of the guidelines and specifications of the housing policy to be followed in New Delhi from 1911 to 1931, we can conclude that the imperial vision of a new capital did not confine itself to the physical sense of bricks and mortar, architectural grandeur and opulence of the Government House and Secretariats. The colonial state went into great details to ensure the utmost privacy and, comfort for its officials. For the majority of the residents, the vision fell drastically short on practical considerations.

REFERENCES

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⁸ Govt. of India, Public Works Department, Proceedings no. 35, July 1921. Rules regulating the application for and allotment of Office and Residential accommodation for the Government of India in Delhi and Raisina.

⁹ Ibid.