

WASTING WEeping WILLOWS

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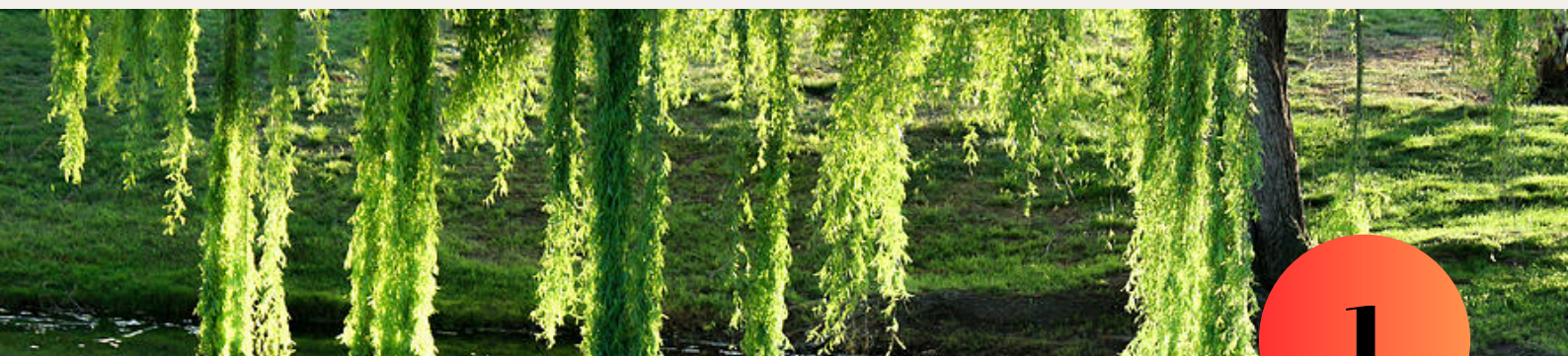
Apart from English connection. Shimla boasts of lesser-known French connection too vis-a-vis weeping willow trees (botanically *Salix Babylonica*, *majnu ka per*) that are a part of town's green i.e. natural heritage. Some of them growing around Shimla... wafting in conifer-scented breeze...have a tale to tell...of their origin...of another time...of another place. that: is—linked to Napoleon Bonaparte France's renowned adventurer-turned general-nay, turned emperor.

What makes weeping willow different from other trees (that grow upwards) are its slender n' long branches that droop downwards. How truly, their eye-catching Cascades have been likened to flowing down of one's tears, thus aptly acquiring their unusual rather poetic name of weeping willows. Commonly grown in graveyards and therefore, called 'graveyard trees,' they give shelter to graves beneath them.

History reveals that these beauties grew besides Napoleon's graveyard. The trees' tale commences when after the debacle at Waterloo, the once formidable Napoleon was taken as famous Prisoner of Europe to..... Remote and storm swept British island of St. Helena in vast roaring water of Atlantic Ocean off West African shores.

Napoleon rightly described this God forsaken place as '*a little rock at the world's end.*' Here in sent Helena Napoleon spent last years of his life as a sick lonely man quite forgotten by the world, till death came to him in 1821, which was '*no longer an event, merely a bit of news.*' Napoleon was given a simple burial in St. Helena's Rupert Valley, where he had sometimes gone on long walks, musing on his once illustrious time. His body was laid to rest in a grave...dug in a secluded valley beside a spring shaded by two weeping willows, 'thus wrote Emil Ludwig in his thick biography entitled '*Napoleon*' was inscribed on stone slabs, where some historians opine that his tomb bore no names, only the words *ci-git* (here lies). Later, Dr. Barry O`meera, an Irish-born English Naval officer, who attended to medical needs of Napoleon in St. Helena, grew a third weeping willow near his grave.

At this time, Dr. Barry O`Meera's nephew happened to live in Simla, the British summer capital of India. A renowned dental surgeon, he had once extracted teeth of Abdur Rehman, The Amir of Afghanistan. Dr, Barry O`Meera sent several cuttings from weeping willows from Napoleon's graveyard to his nephew in Simla.



Creatures of destiny these cuttings travelled all the way from tiny St. Helena around circuitous Cape of Good Hope, then across Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea and finally by land to be planted in strange environment of Indian Soil in Shimla. They were grown in Chadwick Falls (Summer Hill), Ravenswood (now high Court), Bentick Castle (Grand Hotel) and elsewhere too.

Pahadi malis were further multiplied these willows. The ones in Sherwood and kennelworth were propagated from cutting taken from a tree which once stood at the entrance of Bentick Castle says Edward J. Buck. In 1840, 19 years later after napoleons demise in Saint Helena destiny took another turn. his body was dug from his grave and weeping willows (mother tree of these spices in Shimla were axed being replaced by Cyprus and Pine grown by French and English. Napoleon was given a magnificent burial on the banks of Sienne in midst of the French people in accordance to his last wishes. But that is a different story far removed from Shimla.

(Weeping Willows trees are a part of towns green heritage)



willow trees

They show us the way
to survive turbulent times:
Stand tall, be willing to
bend so as not to break
with the winds of change,
trust your own strength
and resilience.