

British Social Life in the Himalayan Hill Stations of India (Nineteenth and Twentieth
Centuries)

By

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Abstract

One important aspect of British colonialism in India that has largely been ignored by historiography is the establishment and development of several ‘hill stations’, i.e., settlements in high-altitude, hilly areas, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These hill stations were initially established in the early nineteenth century as leisurely retreats from the scorching heat of the plains but subsequently served as loci of political power in the British Empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In this thesis, I study the distinctive socio-cultural space of the hill stations which developed through the complex interaction between the colonizers, the natives, and their immediate natural environment, as well as the way in which the acquisition and assimilation of these territories into the British Empire became an avenue for imperial self-fashioning.

The aim of this thesis is to use contemporary narratives from a variety of sources – guidebooks, surveys, and travelogues – to study the transformation of the Himalayan foothills from scantily populated, non-urban sacred spaces to highly urbanized, predominantly British settlements incorporated into the Empire. On the one hand, I use previously underutilized sources to build upon, and in some cases critique, the existing argument that movement towards the hills was initially driven by practical considerations such as for better health management, that they served as an instrument for political and ideological domination by segregating the rulers from the ruled, and that they sustained a specific form of social life reminiscent of bourgeois English society in the metropolis. On the other hand, I argue that this process created many internal contradictions. The hill stations, rather than becoming mere simulations of European country life, developed as complex colonial spaces where the entangled interaction between a stratified British society, its colonial subjects, and the high-altitude hilly environment created a far more curious, intricate and composite colonial experience that has not been grasped in existing literature on the subject.

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Introduction

Introducing British Hill Stations in India

The apogee of the East India Company and the subsequent establishment and consolidation of the British Raj in India after 1858 had enormous consequences for the Indian subcontinent in terms of economic, political and cultural transformations. Research cutting across many fields has studied in detail the impact of British colonial rule in India and has immensely broadened our understanding and appreciation of the complexity with which colonialism shaped Indian society. However, one important aspect of British colonialism in India that has largely been ignored by historiography is the establishment and development of several hill stations in the Indian subcontinent throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These hill stations, initially established as leisurely retreats from the scorching heat of the plains, subsequently served as political and ideological centres of power for the Empire that effectively reproduced, through various institutions and practices, a mirror of bourgeois British social life in the distant colony.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, as the British Empire¹ continued to increase the territory under its direct control, several highlands in the northern part the Indian subcontinent came into the fold of British imperial power. These Himalayan foothills, earlier under control of the Gurkhas, were formally acquired soon after the conclusion of the Anglo-Nepalese war in 1816, following which the hill stations of Shimla, Mussoorie, Almora, Nainital, and Darjeeling were established.² Similarly Mahabaleshwar in west central India

¹ Although during this period, the Indian territories were ruled by the English East India Company, and power was officially transferred to the British Empire only after 1858, I will, for the sake of consistency, use the term British Empire to refer to both the rule of the Company as well as of the Empire.

² Dane Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 12.

was established some years after the defeat of the Peshwa of the Marathas in 1818.³ Settlement in Ootcamund, a hill station in the Nilgiri Hills of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, began in 1818, several years after the defeat of Tipu Sultan from whom these territories were ceded.⁴ Although there is presently no standard qualifications to designate a particular settlement as a hill station, Nora Mitchell in her book *The Indian Hill Station: Kodaikanal* (1972) provides a list of ninety-six Indian hill stations built by the British and more recently by Indians, whereas Dane Kennedy estimates the number to be about sixty-five.⁵

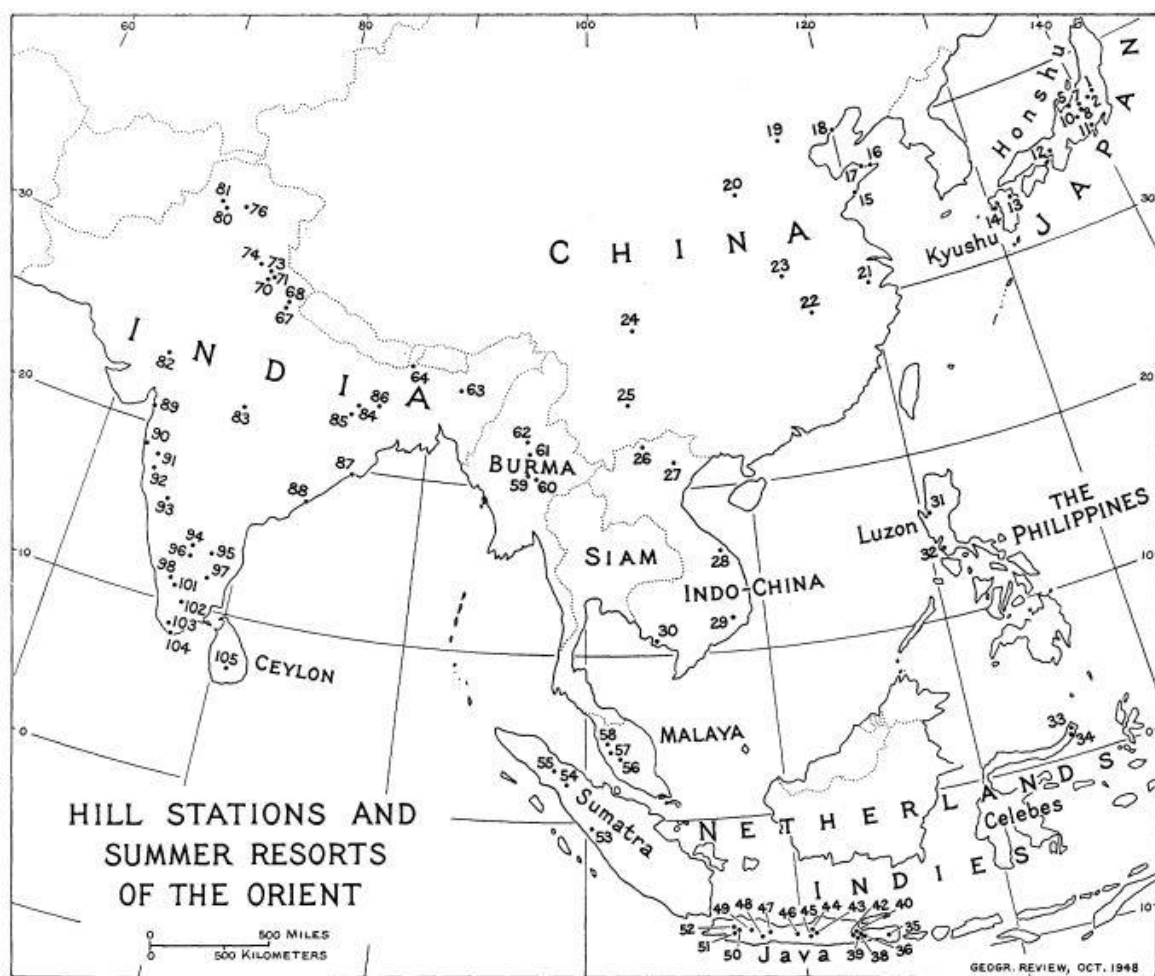


Figure 1. Hill stations in South and South East Asia.⁶

³ Ibid., 12.

⁴ Queeny Pradhan, "Empire in the hills: the making of hill stations in colonial India," *Studies in History* 23.1 (2007): 33-91, 37.

⁵ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 10.

⁶ Joseph Spencer and William Thomas, "The hill stations and summer resorts of the Orient." *Geographical Review* 38, no. 4 (1948): 637-651, 643, fig. 1.

In the early nineteenth century hill stations were sanatoria or convalescent depots for wounded British army officials and soldiers. Soon after, hill stations were also used for the well-being and recuperation of those civil servants who were facing health problems in the heat of the tropics.⁷ The author argues that it was especially after the cholera pandemic of 1817-1820 that “accentuated [British] fear[s] of the tropical environment and a desire for a safe haven from its scourges.”⁸ This observation is in agreement with contemporary medical opinion that deemed climate in higher altitudes more amenable to the health of British officers.⁹ Edward Balfour, a surgeon and environmentalist in India during the 19th century, “summarized the combined results of ‘medical topography’ and statistical surveys and concluded that altitude tended to make for better health.”¹⁰ Contemporary literary sources also point to the general consensus that high-altitude climate was deemed suitable for better health especially amongst the English officers. However, although the hill stations initially developed as sanatoria for British invalids or officers who simply wanted to escape the hot, enervative climate of the plains, they acquired, in the second half of the nineteenth century, important roles as political and strategic centres of command for the Empire.

Besides the cholera pandemic, an important event that accelerated British movement towards the hills was the First War of Independence in 1857 which had led to heightened anxieties about security in the plains and the perception of hill stations as safe-havens.¹¹ After 1857, various centres of colonial governance started to shift from the plains to the hill stations. Most importantly, Shimla became the official “summer-capital” of India in 1860, following

⁷ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ See C. Lucas, “Literature of Hill Stations and Climates,” *The Indian medical gazette* 14, no. 7 (1879): 206–207; and J. D. Ambrose, “Curative Value of Indian Hill Climates,” *The Indian medical gazette* 9, no. 3 (1874): 62–63.

¹⁰ Judith Kenny, “Claiming the high ground: theories of imperial authority and the British hill stations in India,” *Political Geography* 16, no. 8 (1997), 655–673. 659.

¹¹ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 14.

which several other regional governments, viz., the governments of Bengal, Bombay, Madras, Assam, United Provinces, and Central Provinces, converted the hill stations of Darjeeling, Mahabaleshwar, Ootcamund, Shillong, Nainital, and Panchmari respectively as their summer headquarters.¹² The yearly shift of British officials to the hill stations led to the establishment of various institutions and administrative infrastructure to enable and facilitate effective governance from the hills as well as to sustain British social life therewith. Churches, schools, hospitals, courts, marketplaces and residential quarters were gradually constructed to tend to the life of new settlers along with many administrative institutions to manage regional and central level affairs. In this regard, Judith Kenny has observed that “[a]s a derivative of a Western colonial experience, the hill station's institutional complex and morphological images included Christian churches, private schools taught in the English language, the administrative headquarters of district and state government, and the kinds of recreational facilities usually associated with British country life or an English spa.”¹³ Similarly, Kennedy argues that hill stations ultimately became a site for refuge as well as surveillance, where the colonial officers established small, close-knit communities far removed from the harsh climate of the plains, as well from the social and psychological toll of an alien culture.¹⁴

Aim

In this thesis, I study the distinctive socio-cultural space of the hill stations which developed through the complex interaction between the colonizers, the natives, and their immediate natural environment, as well as the way in which the acquisition and assimilation of these territories into the British Empire became an avenue for imperial self-fashioning.

¹² Ibid., 3,

¹³ Kenny, “Climate, race, and imperial authority”, 694.

¹⁴ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 1.

The aim of this thesis is to use contemporary narratives from a variety of sources – guidebooks, surveys, and travelogues – to study the transformation of the Himalayan foothills from scantily populated, non-urban sacred spaces to highly urbanized, predominantly British settlements incorporated into the Empire. On the one hand, I use previously underutilized sources to build upon the existing argument that movement towards the hills was initially driven by practical considerations such as for better health management, that they served as an instrument for political and ideological domination by segregating the rulers from the ruled, and that they sustained a specific form of social life reminiscent of bourgeois English society in the metropolis. On the other hand, I argue that this process created many internal contradictions. The hill stations, rather than becoming mere simulations of European country life, developed as complex colonial spaces where the entangled interaction between a stratified British society, its colonial subjects, and the high-altitude hilly environment created a far more curious, intricate and composite colonial experience that has not been grasped in existing literature on the subject.

Review of Literature

Dane Kennedy's *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (1996) is the only serious attempt towards writing a social history of the British hill stations in India. His work is skilfully balanced between a chronological and thematic arrangement where he explores the establishment and development of hill stations against the backdrop of imperial British rule in India. Kennedy begins by outlining British perceptions of hill stations from their unique position of being outsiders in an alien and often dangerous environment. He analyses in depth the medical rationale that prompted beliefs about the therapeutic value of high-altitude climate that was the initial cause for increasing interest to settle in the hills. Kennedy also argues that the British residents of hill stations considerably altered their environment to suit their specific social needs thereby creating a simulation of exclusive, middle-upper class

British social culture in the colony. The work of other cultural geographers, the author argues, also shows that “the hill station was a unique urban entity, a seasonal site for the recreational activities of a highly transitory expatriate population, whose memories of a distant homeland it lovingly evoked”¹⁵ and hence “the replication of particular features of the natural and social environment of Britain was central to the hill stations distinctive identity.”¹⁶

Towards the end of the monograph, the author outlines the possible reasons that led to the decline of hill stations, as well as important political developments that would ultimately lead to the partition and independence of India. Kennedy’s work is a precious study of the topic and makes use of an abundance of sources to justify his main arguments. However, Kennedy has generalized the character of all hill stations in the subcontinent in a way that makes little room for nuanced considerations of the distinct nature of social life in each individual hill station. There is also a great deal of source material that has not been considered in his study for the simple reason that it aims to provide a general paradigm to interpret the phenomenon of hill stations in the Empire rather than focus on the distinctive specificities of each. The author himself comments that each hill station developed a unique culture of its own that must be understood individually rather than through blanket propositions. His central ideas, nevertheless, are crucial in the discussion about the establishment of a specific kind of discourse surrounding hill stations in the British Raj.

Some studies on hill stations in the Indian subcontinent and South East Asia in general have been carried out in the field of cultural geography and explore the connection between orientalism, colonial discourse, and the practices of exclusion and othering. Judith Kenny in her article “Climate, Race, and Imperial Authority: The Symbolic Landscape of the British Hill Station in India” does a case-study of Ootacamund – the premier hill station and summer

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

capital of the Madras Presidency in southern India – to demonstrate how Ooty, as it was endearingly called, is a good example to understand the ‘creation’ of hill stations as distinct spaces for the practices of imperial authority by means of producing racist and othering discourses about the ‘native’ or the ruled. The author draws upon the theoretical framework of Edward Said and Ashis Nandy to understand discrimination and exclusion as a form of colonial domination. She argues that Ooty “serves as a particularly appropriate context for examining the relations between government practices and discourses of the Other in the shaping of hill station landscapes.”¹⁷ The author proceeds to examine the process of othering through a structural analysis of colonial discourse and demonstrates the unequal power relations that arose by creating distinctions based on race, gender, or any other category of difference.¹⁸ Kenny also argues that “hill stations reflected and reinforced assumptions of social and racial difference, and in so doing naturalized the separation of rulers and ruled.”¹⁹ She concludes by observing that hill stations “served a particular role within the imaginative geographies of imperial discourse” which enabled the colonizer to define their own sense of self by dramatizing their distance and difference from the native in the plains.²⁰ Kenny also relates the idea of separating hills from the plains to classical European theories of climate and race that distinctly characterised zones as being either “torrid” or “temperate.”²¹ These observations create a link between contemporary medical discourse and preexisting beliefs about race in the western intellectual context, and helps us understand the peculiar British attitudes towards the high-altitude hill stations in the Indian subcontinent.

In another article titled “Claiming the high ground: theories of imperial authority and the British hill stations in India” Kenny attempts to understand the reasons behind the

¹⁷ Kenny, “Climate, race, and imperial authority”, 695.

¹⁸ Ibid., 695.

¹⁹ Ibid., 695.

²⁰ Ibid., 696.

²¹ Ibid., 695.

increasing administrative use of hill stations from 1880s onward. The excessive presence of British officials in the hills was met with some degree of internal resistance and required them to provide justifications for why certain administrative instruments should be transferred. She states that “[an] intertwined and evolving set of arguments related to climate, race and imperial authority ultimately justified the practice of government in the hills.”²² The rise of Utilitarianism in the British ruling elite, she believes, led to the formulation of such arguments that would justify the need for British officials to occupy healthier climes to ultimately achieve greater productivity and therefore better governance in the interest of the Empire.

A few articles have appeared in historical studies that deal with some of the questions regarding the establishment of hill stations. Queeny Pradhan’s “Empire in the Hills: The Making of Hill Stations in Colonial India” is an important study that analyzes the transformation, in the nineteenth century, of four hill stations – Simla, Darjeeling, Ootacamund, and Mount Abu – from simple summer stations to important imperial capitals. The main argument in her study is that the process of acquiring the territories and signing land agreements after negotiating with the local elite was not as peaceful or fair as official records claim. Furthermore she argues that the development of the hill stations was carried out with the assumption that British were the superior race, capable of realizing the full potential of these underdeveloped tracts, and therefore “the construction of roads, railways and bridges aimed at showing the ‘awesome’ technological superiority of the English in the eyes of the ‘natives.’”²³ Her study of the four hill stations offers useful details of the manner in which hill stations were perceived by the British officials and reasons for which they became so coveted. The colonial versions of taking over the hills are marked by several examples of misrepresentations and even denigrating comments which characterise the ‘native’ as

²² Kenny, “Claiming the high ground”, 671.

²³ Pradhan, “Empire in the hills,” 33.

undeserving of occupying their land. Pradhan's article is valuable in exploring tendencies in colonial narrative that dehumanize the original inhabitants of these hilly regions and nullify their uses of these lands as well as the traditions associated with them, thus giving themselves a sort of *terra incognita* ready to be recreated with their own narratives. This process not only led to very reductive definitions of hill stations as mini-Europes away from home, but also served as a means for imperial self-fashioning and self-identification mediated by their colonial possessions. The author concludes by presenting a paradoxical image in the development of the hill station – she observes that whereas the British had hoped to establish a space that is akin to England and far removed from the tropical, diseased climate of the plains, what really happened was that, in the commercial development of these hill stations and diversification of occupations (naturally undertaken by 'natives' for the purpose of sustaining British life in the hills) they again became "populated by Indians ..., open spaces disappeared, and congestion appeared as a problem."²⁴ The author's study provides valuable resources to look into the manner in which ideology and discourse interacted with or corresponded to ground realities and actual needs for the urban development of hill stations.

Vinay Lal in his article "Hill stations: Pinnacles of the Raj" mainly engages with Dane Kennedy's conceptualization of hill stations in India and raises some questions that, he argues, were not sufficiently addressed by Kennedy. Lal explores the specific usage of the word 'stations' rather than 'hill resorts' or simply 'hill places', and awkwardly argues that "the hill station was, then, the last station the Englishman arrived at as he bore the cross of the white man's burden, and at long last he could count upon rest and freedom from the burdens of work."²⁵ Lal's merit, however, lies in observing that there is insufficient research done on the social life of British colonial elite. He complains that is a dire lack of comprehensive studies

²⁴ Ibid., 89.

²⁵ Vinay Lal, "Hill stations: pinnacles of the Raj," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 8, no. 3 (1997): 123-132, 127.

on the very institutions – “clubs, gymkhanas, boarding and public schools, sanitarium, homes for the aged, the district collector's office, and the field hospital”²⁶ – that sustained social life in the hills. Therefore, the present thesis also focuses heavily on this issue in its treatment of the sources.

Writing seventeen years after Vinay Lal's complaint, Eric T. Jennings has contributed a chapter titled “Hill Stations, Spas, Clubs, Safaris and Colonial Life” in *The Routledge History of Western Empires* (2014) in what comes across as a most up-to-date and methodologically sound study of the social life of empire in the colonial context. As the title suggests, the author investigates the various social institutions established by colonial officers that become sites of imperial dominance as well as sociability. The chapter “explores links between colonial fragility (death rates, colonial regimens, boredom and the colonial blues, prophylaxis against disease), anxieties and assertions of imperial dominance.”²⁷ The study takes into account such imperial sites established in various colonial contexts beyond the Indian subcontinent and provides an excellent framework with which to approach the research questions of the present thesis. The premise is that colonial empires constituted of “colonial microcosms [which] were by definition segregated, fractured, and incestuous places.”²⁸ Jennings establishes the centrality of distancing the colonized ‘other’ in defining the self and the diverse ways in which this was achieved, such as by literal elevation over the ruled by settling in higher-altitudes.²⁹ However, what is most valuable from this study is the author's skilful demonstration of how these new imperial sites also become areas of contestation and

²⁶ Ibid., 124.

²⁷ Eric Jennings, “Hill Stations, Spas, Clubs, Safaris, and Colonial Life” in *The Routledge History of Western Empires*, eds. Robert Aldrich and Kirsten McKenzie (New York: Routledge, 2014), 346.

²⁸ Ibid., 356.

²⁹ Ibid., 358.

dissent amongst the natives, thus revealing to us a complex of dialectical processes that continually took place in the growth and development of hill stations.

An important source of information on hill stations is a mid-twentieth century publication that surveys the various colonial summer resorts of the British Empire in South and South East Asia. Spencer and Thomas, writing in 1948 in their article “The Hill Stations and Summer Resorts of the Orient”, explicitly define the hill station as “a phenomenon connected with the residence of the Occidental in the Orient.”³⁰ The study is an overview of hill stations ranging from colonial lands in India, China, the East Indies, to Japan where the authors define hill stations as holiday or tourist destinations for British and Dutch colonial officers to escape hostile environments in a foreign land. The language used in the article clearly expresses the preeminence of racial and climatic considerations in the establishment and use of hill stations. The authors argue that about as early as the 1820s the colonial officers in India realised the therapeutic value and healthfulness of staying in higher altitude regions. In the initial period these regions were only appreciated for their ‘restorative’ value, thus classified as sanatoria.³¹ Overtime, the authors contend, the hill stations came to be perceived as not just restorative but ‘preventive’, that is, having the ability to prevent disease otherwise rampant in the more hot and humid climes of the plains. The authors proceed to describe how the hill stations then gradually started becoming attractive also to the natives, ultimately leading to the overcrowding and thus defeating the purpose altogether. This survey is useful for understanding mid-twentieth century British perception of hill stations as well as the socio-economic changes that had been taking place since their establishment.

The rest of the literature on the subject is scattered across different academic fields and is only of ancillary interest to the present thesis. In his article “The Colonial Genesis of

³⁰ Spencer and Thomas, "The hill stations and summer resorts of the Orient," 637.

³¹ Ibid., 640.

Hill Stations: The Genting Exception”, Robert Reed provides a brief overview of how most hill stations in India, Philippines, and Indonesia emerged as a result of the efforts of British or Dutch colonial officers for military, strategic, administrative reasons on the one hand, and health and recreational needs on the other. The main purpose of this article is to trace the unique development of a hill station in Malaysia that was only established ten years after its independence from British colonialism. Robert Weebers and Hanizah Idris in “British Hill Stations in South Asia and Mainland South East Asia: British India, Ceylon, Burma and British Malaya: A Comparative Study” undertake a study of fifteen British hill stations in the respective regions and provide valuable data in terms of the location and size of the hill stations, their distinct purposes, the urban planning and layout, the facilities available, the economic characteristics, as well as details about the architectural styles. Whereas the two articles provide a wealth of facts about the establishment of institutions and urban development of the hill stations, they are limited to being an overview of the facts and lack any critical or historical commentary on the impact of the establishment of hill stations on the overall colonial experience.

Methodology and Sources

There is no lack of historical works that approach colonial history in the Indian subcontinent from a social history or social anthropology point of view. Most recently, David Gilmour’s *The British in India: A Social History of the Raj (2018)* has set new standards for writing a social history of the British empire in India. Gilmour relies on a wide range of archival and secondary sources, and combines them with a biographical approach to narrate the lives of many individuals who lived and constitute the social fabric of the British Empire. The everyday life of British society in the Indian subcontinent is revealed through a series of individual stories and experiences of the diverse, stratified, and minority community that ruled the Empire. Gilmour’s principal focus is on the internal dynamics, tensions, interactions, and

negotiations of the British community itself, not excluding its relation to the complex colonial context within which it was constantly developing. From an anthropological perspective, I am inspired by Christopher Tilley's conception of the relationship between space and the self. In *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments* (1994), Tilley highlights the social construction of space, a dialectical process in which the self not only continuously defines the space around them, but is also defined by the same space. In this sense, spaces are transient, constantly changing, and so is one's conception of oneself. Therefore, I will investigate how the interaction between the British, their preconceived notions of the self and the other, and the hilly landscapes in which they lived and acted, all worked together to create the specific characteristics of hill stations as well British self-perceptions.

Gilmour's approach towards social history, and his riveting combination of a biographical style of writing, as well as Tilley's theories of the construction of space informs my primary research questions and approach to the sources. For the purpose of this study, I will limit myself to the hill stations established in the northern Indian Himalayan foothills. Source material for this study is abundant in terms of books, journals, gazetteers, travelogues, letters, surveys as well as numerous literary works (poems and fiction) produced by British residents of the hill stations. There is a wealth of such primary material that has still not been used in the secondary literature and has the potential to deepen our understanding of how hill stations were perceived by contemporaries and what were the realities of life in the different spatial environments of the Himalayan foothills. Contemporary medical journals published in England that assessed the nature of newly discovered hill stations in India and promoted the appropriateness of high-altitude climate for better health, in addition to a variety of contemporary writings on subjects of climate and race that reflect the attitude of the British towards hill stations and higher climes are also accessible.

The Himalayan Gazetteer is a detailed survey of the Himalayan region and an enormous compendium of information on the Himalayan districts of the North Western Provinces of British India, an area where several hill stations are concentrated. The Gazetteer was compiled by Edwin T. Atkinson, an Indian Civil Services officer, lawyer, and entomologist who was also President of The Asiatic Society (of Bengal) from 1886-87. The document contains information concerning the geographical makeup, social statistics and physical features of the region organized systematically by region and appended with maps and illustrations. *Notes of Wanderings in the Himmalas* is an account of several hilly regions but focused on the hill station of Naini Tal, written by a Pilgrim Barron, popularly known as the first resident of the hill station, having built the first ever house there called ‘Pilgrim Lodge.’ The book was published in 1844 and provides a wealth of information relevant to the present study. Similarly there are several other sources such as *Simla: Past and Present* (1904) by Edward Buck; *From Calcutta to the Snowy Range* (1866), author unknown; *Letters from India* (1872) by Emily Eden; *To Kullu and Back* (1911) M. C. Forbes; and several others which take us into the nineteenth century British colonial gaze of their environment, reveal their attitudes and perceptions, and provide an opportunity to study life in the microcosms of Empire.

Chapter 1 will describe the transformation of the Himalayan hill stations from relatively underpopulated sacred sites to settled provinces of the Empire which sustain British social life. This will be done by firstly studying the infrastructural changes and establishment of several buildings and institutions – administrative departments, hospitals, hotels, clubs, gymkhanas, schools, churches, shops etc. – in the hills, and secondly, by breaking down into categories the population, i.e., persons from different strata of society, that came to inhabit these places. The main purpose here is to see how the physical landscape of the sites were entirely changed through meticulous urban planning and civil engineering undertaken by

British officials. This chapter will be based on sources called ‘guide books’, i.e., succinct, informational books published around the turn of the nineteenth century with the specific aim of providing necessary details about the locale, its short history, and amenities available to British officers, visitors (tourists), as well as potential settlers in such hill stations.

Chapter 2 will explore in depth the functioning of these social institutions in the imperial context. It will highlight issues regarding the nature and composition of British society in the hills, and the internal tensions and conflicts that were characteristic of an unequal and stratified community. Descriptive and analytical accounts of the various social and cultural activities in which the British residents of the town were engaged are provided with critical commentary on the presumed nature of these institutions in existing literature. Overall, this chapter will offer new interpretations of British colonial institutions, and emphasise their nature as specifically imperial formations, thereby challenging erstwhile notions that considered hill stations a mere imitation of country life in the metropolis.

Chapter 3 will define hill stations as unique spaces in the world of empire, different from mainstream cities in the plains, and as perceived *terra incognita* encountered by the colonizer. I define hill stations as complex colonial spaces being, in the initial years, so far removed from the clutches of the imperial centre, that they afforded several avenues of imperial self-fashioning and an endless potential for adventure, exploration, and conquest. In this chapter I will study the lives of two persons – Sir George William Traill and Frederick “Pahari” Wilson – in an attempt to emphasize the variety of unexpected events that can take place in the microcosms of Empire. The accounts related in this chapter are intended as a plea to move away from generalized, all encapsulating explanations of imperial phenomenon and instead focus on the specificities and uniqueness of individual life experiences in our shared past.

Chapter 1

Transforming the Landscape

After the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1816, the Treaty of Sugauli defined the territories acquired by the British and enabled expansion of their authority over the Himalayan hill districts earlier under the control of the Gurkhas. The main reason behind why the British Empire was interested in acquiring these territories was so that they could control the lucrative trade routes through the Kathmandu Valley and eastern Nepal.³² Major General David Ochterloney, the central figure of the war, acquired large territories in the foothills of the Himalayas after a protracted struggle against the Gurkhas of Nepal.³³ The defeat of the Gurkhas was a turning point in the history of these regions because it marked the earliest infiltration of colonial authority in the area, whose impact shapes the character of these places even today. The hills and their surrounding territories, newly acquired by the British Empire, immediately became of interest to official geographical surveys and explorers of a scientific disposition.³⁴

In the early years of the nineteenth century, on the recommendation of military officials, the British government took an initiative to establish sanatoria and military cantonments in these regions. Hyde Clark in his article “On the Organisation of the Army of India, with Especial Reference to the Hill Regions”, published in 1859 details the relevance of hill stations for the settlement of the army and lists the advantages of settling hill stations with British soldiers. He argues that the climate in the hill stations is more suitable to the

³² Richard English, “Himalayan State Formation and the Impact of British Rule in the Nineteenth Century,” *Mountain Research and Development* 5, no. 1 (1985): 61-78. 62.

³³ See F. G. Cardew, “Major-General Sir David Ochterlony, Bart., G.C.B. 1758-1825,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 10 (39), 1931, 40-63.

³⁴ In keeping with the purposes of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, established in 1802, surveying newly acquired territories and publishing detailed maps was a central part of British administration. See James R. Smith and Desmond George King-Hele, “Sir George Everest, F. R. S. (1790-1866)” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 46, no. 1, (1992): 89-102.

health of English officers, and that hill stations were not heavily populated by natives, which made them ideal for English occupation.³⁵ Clark's arguments come across as a plea to the British government to encourage settlement in the hills and provide infrastructural connectivity in the form of railways, with the ultimate aim of establishing an English dispensation of soldiers more reliable than the oft rebellious Indian sepoy recruits in the plains. The eagerness to maintain European troops is possibly a direct response to the turbulent war of independence in 1857 that forced the empire to rethink its strategies in the Indian subcontinent. Thus, part of the reason why hill stations became important to imperial expansion can be attributed to initial attempts of establishing strong military bases therewith.

Doing so required not just the setting up of cantonments, barracks, and training facilities, but an urban infrastructure, administrative institutions, and influx of a civilian population that would eventually sustain British presence in these establishments. Shimla was declared the official summer capital of the Raj in 1864 and by then, "the development of hill stations became a matter of state policy."³⁶ Overtime, as a result of political developments and greater appreciation of the positive effects of high-altitude climate, the pace of development in the hill stations increased rapidly. With the shift of the imperial government apparatuses to the hill stations, their prestige grew, and they attracted several potential residents and visitors who would find relief in the pleasant climate of the now safe, consolidated, and chartered hill stations.

In the following sections will outline the population characteristics, level of infrastructural development, and architectural styles of three major hill stations in this region

³⁵ Hyde Clark, "On the Organisation of the Army of India, with Especial Reference to the Hill Regions," *RUSI Journal* 9, no. 7 (1859): 18-27, 19.

³⁶ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 12.

viz. Shimla, Nainital, and Mussoorie.³⁷ Shimla was incorporated into the British Empire in 1815, and the first *pucca* (permanent) house was built by Charles Pratt Kennedy in the year 1822.³⁸ Similarly, Mussoorie was incorporated into the Saharanpur district of the British Empire by the year 1819. Nainital was first discovered in these territories by Pilgrim Barron in 1841 with the first houses being built only in 1842.³⁹ The chapter is based on Christopher Tilley's treatment of space in *A Phenomenology of Landscape Places, Paths and Monuments* (1994) in which the author argues that the nature of space is continually constructed and changed through the interaction and actions performed on it by those who occupy it. He posits that space is "above all contextually constituted, providing particular settings for involvement and the creation of meanings."⁴⁰ Tilley's conception of space and how it is created is crucial towards understanding British colonialism in the hill stations. The entire process of first encountering these lands, making them accessible through roads, establishing specific institutions, and populating them with the British community, would not only redefine drastically the space of the Himalayan foothills, but would also, in turn, shape the community that would live there.

This chapter primarily relies on a set of sources that are called 'guide books' to the hill stations. Towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, hill stations were marketed in these books as attractive destination for officers and other British civilians as sanatoria and tourist destinations to encourage settlement and growth of the hill

³⁷ Refer to Figure 1, nos. 67, 71, and 74. Secondly, in the sources, Shimla was alternatively spelt as 'Simla,' Nainital as 'Naini Tal' or 'Nynee Tal,' and Mussoorie as 'Mansuri' or 'Masuri.' I will use the modern spelling except when quoting from sources which use the older spellings.

³⁸ F. Beresford Harrop, *Thacker's New Guide to Simla* (Simla: Thacker, Spink, 1925), 17.

³⁹ C. W. Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1906), 31.

⁴⁰ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*, Vol. 10 (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 11.

economy. These books were designed as easily accessible and compact summaries of the hill stations and their environs. They would contain a variety of details ranging from a short history of the settlement to the various services and infrastructure available for visitors and potential settlers. The guide books often contained first-hand accounts of the geographical characteristics of hill stations and their surrounding areas, the level of development and available amenities, as well as details about the various activities, jobs, and businesses performed by the residents, both British and native. As one author himself describes them, the guidebooks were usually introduced as a compilation of “all essential information ... condense[d] into a volume which will fit comfortably and inconspicuously into the pocket.”⁴¹

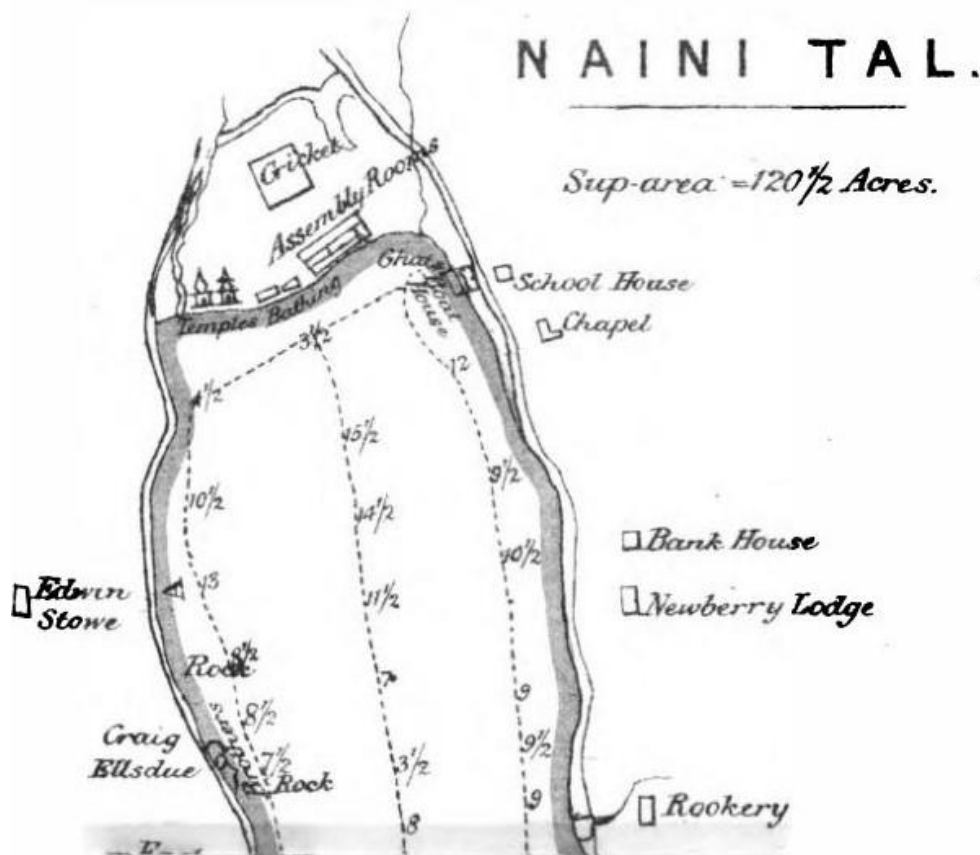


Figure 2. A sketch of the western half of Nainital Lake, its depth, and surrounding buildings, from a fishing guidebook, 1888.⁴²

⁴¹ Foreword to *Thacker's New Guide to Simla*.

⁴² W. Walker, Preface in *Angling in the Kumaun Lakes: With a Map of the Kumaun Lake Country* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1888), 26-27.

The first of these guide books appeared towards the end of the nineteenth century when hill stations had been well incorporated into the empire and several building projects – institutions, facilities, lodgings, road infrastructure, bridges etc. – were underway, and, most importantly, when travel by train to these areas had been made much cheaper through feeder lines.⁴³ They help to trace the urban development of hill stations and their transformation from areas that used to be scantily populated by the natives to well-developed British settlements. To understand the establishment and growth of hill stations this chapter takes a close look at the population that constituted the residents of hill stations, and trace the construction of buildings – churches, schools, houses, lodges, clubs, gymkhanas, marketplaces, libraries, administrative buildings, shops etc. – that ultimately enabled the transformation of sparsely inhabited Gurkha territories to proper colonial hill stations.

Population

In *Guide to Masuri, Landaaur, Dehra Dun, and the Hills of Northern Dehra* (1884), John Northam goes into some commentary about the composition of the population that used to go to the hills. The description of the persons going towards the hills informs us about the complex stratification of British society as well as the natives who populated the hill stations. Northam describes four classes of persons who make their way to the hills for different purposes.

The first mainly consists of aristocratic ladies and their children who “never fail to go every season as regularly and punctually as clock-work.”⁴⁴ Their husbands, being largely occupied with business in the plains, would come only for a couple of weeks to visit. The second class of people consists of women without kids, who would have left their husbands

⁴³ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 14.

⁴⁴ John Northam, *Guide to Masuri, Landaaur, Dehra Dun, and the Hills North of Dehra* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1884), 3.

to their duties in the plains and were often only accompanied by their pet dogs.⁴⁵ There were also women referred to as ‘grass widows’ who used to permanently stay in the hill stations and were associated with ‘licentious behaviour.’⁴⁶ Alison Blunt’s research on ‘household guides’ in which she analyses the establishment of homes in India by British women between the years 1886 to 1925 is useful for contextualising women in the hill stations. Blunt argues that the ‘household guides’ popularly read during the time and shaped the nature of domestic life amongst British homemakers. British visitors to the Empire were expected to be not just “passive viewers of the imperial spectacle or as vicarious travellers” but were encouraged to see the colonies as prospective homes in the near future.⁴⁷ The first two classes of persons described by Northam correspond to the *memsahibs*, or privileged British women who were usually married to army officers and civil servants.⁴⁸ Passages from some letters written by Emily Eden, who accompanied her brother George Eden, the then Governor General of India, suggest that hill stations were seen as appropriate locations for women who were too uncomfortable or unaccustomed to the excessively hot climate in the plains (especially in the then imperial capital, Calcutta). She reports to her sister in one of her letters that she and George had already arranged a house at Shimla fifteen months prior to them actually arriving there.⁴⁹

Blunt’s discussion about the transformation of the home as a space where women could conduct the domestic sphere as rationally and hierarchically as men would conduct the public sphere is relevant towards understanding the role of British women seeking residence in hill stations. Blunt disagrees with the idea that imperial women were expected to live

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 126.

⁴⁷ Alison Blunt, “Imperial geographies of home: British domesticity in India, 1886–1925,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24, no. 4 (1999): 421–440, 421.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 423.

⁴⁹ Emily Eden, *Letters from India*, Vol. 1 (London: Spottiswoode and Co., 1872). 200.

exclusively in English communities and mingle only with their own race without associating with the natives.⁵⁰ Instead, she reimagines the role of the imperial woman as an embodiment of imperial domesticity who would establish complex relationships between themselves and their household servants with the ultimate aim of reifying a ‘self’ and ‘other’ dichotomy necessary to sustain British superiority over the natives. Simply put, “the unequal relationship between British women and their Indian servants reproduced imperial power relations on the domestic scale.”⁵¹ Women in the hills actively conducted their business in the household and engaged with the natives according to the prescribed guidelines, thus consistently shaping their relationship with their subjects in a manner appropriate to British imperial interests. They were, therefore, active agents in disseminating the discourse of colonial superiority.

Secondly, it is also important to take note of the disproportionate number of males to females in the British empire. P. J. Marshall highlights that the male to female ratio in 1861 was 100,000:35,000 and that even by 1901 there were only 384 females for every 1000 males.⁵² Interestingly, however, Dane Kennedy notes that these ratios were not the same for hill stations and that, on the contrary, “the number of women usually equaled and sometimes exceeded the number of men, and children constituted a substantial presence.”⁵³ Blunt also brings our attention to the fact that in the middle of the nineteenth century, “up to 90 percent of British men in India were married to Indians or Anglo-Indians” and that this was curbed through official state legislation and missionary activity only by the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ This is the reason why the population of women in the Empire was steadily increasing, especially in the hill stations. That British men were being encouraged to marry

⁵⁰ Blunt, “Imperial geographies of home,” 425.

⁵¹ Ibid., 429.

⁵² Peter J. Marshall, “British Society in India under the East India Company,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 1 (1997): 89-108, 90.

⁵³ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 7.

⁵⁴ Blunt, “Imperial geographies of home,” 426.

only British women, maintain their distance from Indians and Anglo-Indians, and the relatively equal ratio of British men and women in the hills, suggests the possibility that hill stations were intended to be viable testing grounds to enlarge a racially pure society of colonial superiors at a distance from their subjects. Although the degree to which this was achieved is questionable, what becomes clear is that women played an important role in shaping domestic life and imperial discourse in the hill stations.

The third set of people described by Northam consist of retired military men, “Colonels, Majors-General, Lieutenants-General”, whose families would often acquire quite the local popularity.⁵⁵ The high presence of military officers in hill stations explains establishment of gymkhanas and sporting activities elaborated upon in the next chapter. The fourth set of people are described as merchants, both men and women, who are engaged in various kinds of service provision in the hills, and usually arrive much before the influx of other visitors in order to set up shop – he mentions native general dealers, the sugar boilers, the bakers, the butchers, the crockery-men, toy-makers, *lohi-wallas* (ironsmiths), *kitmatgars* (waiters), bearers, and sweepers among others.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the details of these service providers who contributed to the very basic economy of hill stations is almost entirely absent in the guide books other than being referred to by the services they perform. Thorough demographic details of the native population and anthropological descriptions can be found in official surveys and compilation of gazetteers from many districts. However, since these numbers reflect the demography of the entire province and not specifically the hill stations, it is difficult to ascertain the specific composition of the native population.

⁵⁵ Northam, *Guide to Masuri*, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

Finally, Northam describes the subaltern British officers⁵⁷ who he categorises into two: the “amorous” and the “jolly.” The former are described as hedonistic pleasure seekers who are usually invitees to the Club, participate in balls, dances, and picnics, whereas the latter are regarded as a more respectable lot, playing pool and smoking cigars, “good natured and rollicking specimen of a Queen’s officer, and who has not been weak enough to have his locks shorn by Delilah .”⁵⁸ There is more than just a hint of judgement in Northam’s voice who speaks rather disapprovingly of certain men arriving at the hill stations, but this only forces us to reconsider the notion that British persons in the hill stations are not a monolithic entity, but rather a complex and stratified set of people of different backgrounds, arriving there from very diverse circumstances.

The complex nature of British society in the Indian subcontinent has been studied extensively. The multiple social origins and ethnic affiliations of the British present in the Indian subcontinent prevent us from neatly categorising the types of British persons in the empire. There is a distinction to be made between British officers of the civil services, army officials, domiciled Anglo-Indians, mixed Anglo-Indians,⁵⁹ poorer Europeans, missionaries, vagrants, and prostitutes who, although possessing different identities and levels of social capital, existed cohesively as the ruling ‘race’ in the empire. Marshall argues for at least two types of ‘Anglo-Indias’ before 1857. i.e., “the Anglo-India of the soldiers in the barracks and the Anglo-India of the officials, civil or military.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, David Glimour observes that “Like private soldiers, many British women and children lived in India by accident,

⁵⁷ Subaltern here means officers in the British army below the rank of captain, especially second lieutenants.

⁵⁸ Northam, *Guide to Masuri*, 5.

⁵⁹ The term Anglo-Indian is indeterminate. It can refer to either those British persons who were born in India and whose parents had been living in India for some generations, or it can refer to the descendants of mixed European and native couples. In contemporary usage, the latter meaning is prevalent.

⁶⁰ Marshall, “British Society in India,” 92.

without having chosen to do so; chance or unexpected circumstances had brought them there.”⁶¹ Marshall has conclusively demonstrated the diverse nature of British society in India and its division on the basis of class and ethnicity, and the recurring antagonism, class competition, and differences of opinions amongst the same.⁶² Dane Kennedy’s primary argument is that hill stations acted as the perfect places to unify the British race, institutionalise its cohesiveness, and emphasise its superior nature in contradistinction to the natives. Here, he argues, “newcomers were socialized to the normative codes of colonial society through clubland’s powers to enforce conformity; vagrants, prostitutes, and other social deviants were removed from the scene through incarceration or deportation; whites in general were taught to appreciate the precariousness of their position and the importance of racial solidarity through reminders about the events of 1857.”⁶³ Kennedy ultimately concludes as a result of a multiple factors, the antagonism between different British social classes was superseded by a sense of unity and togetherness best represented in the hill stations. However, despite his awareness of class stratification in British society, nowhere in his monograph is this issue addressed in depth, and we are left with nothing more than a vague image of a certain ‘British ruling elite’ living in the hill stations. While it is difficult to acquire statistics on the various types of British persons residing in the hill stations, it is crucial to bear in mind the internal tensions present within British society in the hill stations, and the weakness of the argument that hill stations successfully melded the category ‘British.’

Infrastructure, Buildings, Houses

In *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaon* (1906), C. W. Murphy goes into great detail about Nainital, the British headquarters of the then Government of the United Provinces. The book

⁶¹ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 2.

⁶² See Marshall, “British Society in India.”

⁶³ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 226.

is designed as a guide for tourists interested in visiting Nainital and surrounding areas for leisurely vacations or excursions, and describes in detail the most appropriate routes to reach the hill station, the level of infrastructural development, the availability of government and private services available to visitors, the rules of conduct and general guidelines on how to make the most out of one's trip to the city. The observations made by the author give us an interesting glimpse of the attitude of the British social elite towards the hill stations and is also a repository of important clues about British social life in the hill stations. The book also helps us understand the transformation of the city from a sacred site of the Hindus to a British town equipped with important administrative centres such as the Governor's House and the district High Court, for it functioned as the principal station of the Kumaon Civil Division, summer capital of the United Provinces, and the permanent headquarters of the Military Eastern Command.⁶⁴



Figure 3. A view of Nainital Lake overlooking the rooftops, c.1875.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ C. W. Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1906), 1.

⁶⁵ Samuel Borne, *Nynsee Tal: The Prince of Wales Tour of India 1875-6 (vol.5)*, 1875-1876, albumen print, 19.1 x 31.2 cm, Royal Collection Trust, London, accessed June,

At the very outset of the book, Nainital has been described as a “favourite hill sanitarium, lying in the Kumaon hills of the Himalayan range.”⁶⁶ The discovery of the town, however, is a matter of controversy. Pilgrim Barron is credited with discovering Nainital and writes in *Notes of Wanderings in the Himmalas* expressing his surprise at the fact that this location was not sooner designated to be converted into a sanitarium.⁶⁷ He observes that the natives actively tried to mislead any Englishman away from this particular site because it held religious significance for them and that they were “anxious to avoid its pollution by strangers.”⁶⁸ Building on this reasoning, Barron believes that the first commissioner of the region, George William Traill, deliberately ordered the natives to conceal any knowledge about the site out of sheer jealousy and disinclination to have European settlers into his province.⁶⁹ He compares similar feelings coming from a Mr. Shore, the resident Superintendent of Revenues at Dehradun (another hilly district), who referred to the influx of European visitors to Mussoorie as a ‘public calamity’ or an ‘invasion.’⁷⁰ What this suggests about British imperial policy in the hills is that it was still only in its formative stages, with no concrete agenda developed as yet. H. R. Neville in *Nainital, A Gazetteer* also states that “up to 1835, the history of Kumaon is inseparably bound up with the biography of its commissioner George William Traill” and that “[he] was practically Supreme in Kumaon, for little was known of the province by the central authorities, and the local officials were given a free hand.”⁷¹ The arbitrary governance of newly discovered sites in the hills in accordance

15, 2020, <https://www.rct.uk/collection/2701842/nynee-tal-prince-of-wales-tour-of-india-1875-6-vol-5>.

⁶⁶ Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun*, 1.

⁶⁷ "Pilgrim" [P. Barron], *Notes of Wanderings in the Himmala* (Agra: Agra Ukhbar Press, 1844), 25.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷¹ H. R. Neville, *Nainital, A Gazetteer* (Allahabad: F Lucker Government Press, United Provinces, 1904), 225.

with the self-interests of its administrators emphasises the lack of universally agreed upon policies or attitudes towards hill stations, contrary to what is argued in existing literature on the subject.

Coming back to the urban development of hill stations, as Murphy describes the route to Nainital, he pauses to describe a nearby town – Haldwani – established in 1834 by George William Traill. Murphy observes that in Haldwani, “the old grass huts in the market place have vanished, giving place to dwelling houses, buildings and shops of masonry”⁷² and that “bungalows and cottages for Europeans have rapidly sprung up on sites set apart for European quarters.”⁷³ Furthermore, Murphy tells us that “post and telegraph offices, police station, *tahsil* (administrative division) circuit house, public works, forest and railway rest-houses, Government offices and Government bungalows for occupation by the canal sub-divisional officer, and by the Superintendent of the sub-division of the district”⁷⁴ had also been established. He reports the existence of the American Mission premises⁷⁵, a chapel, a school, and buildings owned by the Wellesley Girls’ High School.⁷⁶ In Nainital town itself, Murphy reports that great progress was being made in selecting sites for building and actually starting construction of houses by 1846. H. C. Neville reports that by the end of the nineteenth century, Nainital had become a large and populous settlement with houses, shops, schools and hotels springing up all over the town.⁷⁷ Murphy reports the establishment of at least two banking agencies in Nainital viz., the Allahabad Bank and the Bank of Upper India⁷⁸ and several schools for European children viz., St. Joseph’s College, St. Mary’s Convent, Wellesley

⁷² Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun*, 9.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁵ The American Methodist Mission was active in the hill districts of the British Empire as far back as 1857 and is responsible for setting up several schools and religious institutions in the area. See Neville, *Nainital*, 115.

⁷⁶ Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun*, 12.

⁷⁷ Neville, *Nainital, A Gazetteer*, 309.

⁷⁸ Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun*, 51.

School, and All Saints' High School among others.⁷⁹ The oldest church in Nainital, called St John's in the Wilderness, is one of the earliest buildings in the town established in 1846.⁸⁰ There were only two hospitals in the city – Ramsay Hospital and the Crosthwaite. The former was intended for the exclusive use of the Europeans whereas the latter was nothing more than a mere dispensary for the natives.⁸¹

In *Thacker's New Guide to Simla* (1925), P. Berresford writes similarly about the establishment of such institutions in the Shimla hill station. Berresford depicts Shimla almost as a museum, proudly exhibiting all the important buildings and structures erected by its efficient administration. In agreement with Tilley's conception of space, Siddharth Pandey argues that "despite the colonial aspiration to 'fix' Simla's identity in nostalgic versions of England, the town was always engaged in the realities of appropriations, approximations and adaptations, an engagement that continues to this day through a variety of practices."⁸² Thus although Shimla was built with the view of replicating the English countryside, the actual growth and development of the hill station was far more complex and depended on day to day negotiations.

The first permanent residence in Shimla was established in 1822 by a Lieutenant Charles Patt Kennedy.⁸³ In the year 1830, Kennedy had been instructed to "negotiate ... for the acquirement of sufficient land to form a station."⁸⁴ Shimla started to gain a reputation when it became a site of interest of the then Governor General of India, Lord William

⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 57.

⁸¹ Ibid., 60.

⁸² Siddhartha Pandey, "Shimla or Simla" in *Consuming architecture: On the occupation, appropriation and interpretation of buildings*, eds. Daniel Maudlin and Marcel Vellinga (New York: Routledge, 2014), 134.

⁸³ Harrop, *Thacker's New Guide to Simla*. 17.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 18.

Bentinck (1774 – 1839), who had a house built for him known as Bentinck Castle, which he occupied in 1832.⁸⁵



Figure 4. A view of Shimla Bank, earlier known as Bentinck Castle, 1852.⁸⁶

In the years following 1838, Shimla started developing rapidly and became associated with several important political events and visits. A Mr. Barrett, the first merchant to settle in Shimla, established a library, reading and billiard-rooms, “which formed the nucleus of the present Station Library.”⁸⁷ It is reported that this library contained “16,000 volumes [of books]..., two reading rooms, a ladies’ room and two spacious verandahs.”⁸⁸ Other important buildings reported by Berresford include the Gaiety Theatre, the Bandstand, the Christ Church and School, Skating Rink, Cinema, and, most interestingly, the Freemason’s Hall.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁶ W. L. L. Scott, *Views in the Himalayas*, 1852, lithograph, British Library, London, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/largeimage69143.html>.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 26

following is an extract from Berresford that summarises the establishment and growth of Shimla as a hill station,

The history of Shimla, commencing almost at the beginning of the last century, was at first but the narration of the acts of individuals who came up to these hills and laid the foundation of the Mountain City. Under the guidance of these – the pioneers of the present advanced state of the sanitarium – Shimla has grown from a mere village into a large and prosperous town; the queen of the numerous hill stations scattered over the wide range of the Himalayas, the cynosure of all India, having a world-wide fame.⁹⁰

In the case of Mussoorie, Northam reports, between 1823 and 1884 the number of houses grew from 1 to 300.⁹¹ A brewery in Mussoorie was established as far back as 1830 by a Mr. Bohle from Meerut.⁹² By 1835, the European population in Mussoorie felt “strong enough” to establish a church which was finally built in 1836.⁹³ Writing about Happy Valley in Mussoorie, Northam describes some of the activities in which the Europeans partook – cricket matches, gymkhanas, horse races, athletic sports, and dog and horse shows.⁹⁴ Just as the case is with Nainital and Shimla, Mussoorie too had its fair share of schools, churches, libraries and clubs. The Mussoorie Library, established in 1843, was an important landmark in the town which used to have the newest periodicals and newspapers. It was rather like a rendezvous point where people would often meet for gossip and light conversation.⁹⁵ Interestingly, however, unlike in the case of Nainital or Shimla, no major administrative institutions were set up in Mussoorie.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 22

⁹¹ Northam, *Guide to Masuri*, 32.

⁹² Ibid., 32.

⁹³ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 55.



Figure 5. Distant view of the church, Mussoorie, 1865.⁹⁶

From the above sections we see how certain buildings and institutions were the basic ingredients to establish hill stations in the British Empire – houses, clubs, libraries, churches, and schools at the minimum. All of these together evoked the idea of home and provided a simulation of familiar European surroundings, and hill station thus “served expressly as a surrogate for home.”⁹⁷ In *Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj* (1983), a detailed monograph of various British architectural styles prevalent in the Raj, Jan Morris remarks about architectural styles prevalent in the hill stations saying that “Horace Walpole, Pope, Beckford and Nash were all present in spirit at the building of hill stations, and so perhaps

⁹⁶ Shepherd and Robertson, *Distant view of the church, Mussoorie*, 1865, photographic print, British Library, London, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/d/largeimage57410.html>.

⁹⁷ Jennings, “Hill Stations, Spas, Clubs,” 351.

was Marie Antoinette, for the cottage *orné* was everywhere.”⁹⁸ These English manor-style houses, characterised by tilted roofs, wooden framework, chimneys, a large drawing room often opening up into a verandah and a well-kept garden, were abundant in the hill stations and are preserved till date in almost their original forms. Morris has neatly termed the architectural styles present in these regions as the Himalayan Swiss-Gothic style⁹⁹ and observes that both Shimla and Nainital remained “the most evocative concentrations of Anglo-Indian domestic architecture.”¹⁰⁰ Whereas in the rest of the country British architecture often imbibed vernacular architectural influences, in the hills a distinctly European style had emerged having the effect of creating small slices of Europe in the microcosms of Empire.

Conclusion

From the trajectory of the development of these three towns, we see that they all developed at different times, at different paces, and through the efforts of individual men. Rather than viewing hill stations as part of a well-defined imperial scheme of establishing ‘European towns’ all over the Empire, it is more accurate to view their discovery as incidental, and their development as organic. It has already been conclusively demonstrated that the Empire was more interested in the economic integration of these regions and unrestrained access to further markets in Tibet and China.¹⁰¹ Thus, contrary to arguments in existing literature that hill stations were established for the purpose of segregating the ruler from the ruled, it would be a more productive enterprise to systematically uncover the several individual efforts that went into setting up the basic skeleton of these towns, trace their connectivity by road or railway to other major settlements, assess contemporary scientific knowledge of soil, geography, and

⁹⁸ Jan Morris, “Domestic” in *Stones of empire: the buildings of the Raj* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 38-83, 52.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰¹ English, “Himalayan State Formation”, 71

architecture to precisely understand how a town was established and how it subsequently became a cohesive, functional urban space. In this chapter I attempted an urban biography of these three towns and have realised the need to explore in greater depth records that can reveal details about the scientific and technical aspects involved in nineteenth century urban planning and administration in the Himalayan foothills.

Nevertheless, having sketched a basic urban outline of the hill stations – the development of infrastructure such as municipal corporations, administrative institutions, libraries, pool clubs, churches, tennis and polo grounds, shooting ranges, English-style cottages, picnics, and the employment of Indian servants in the British households – it becomes possible to see clearly the transformation of these spaces from sparsely populated Gurkha territories to well-integrated parts of the British Empire. Secondly, having established a trajectory that outlines the development of hill stations and elaborating on the population that came to inhabit them, the following chapter will explore in depth the nature of social life and institutions that emerged in these hill stations in the larger colonial context.

Chapter 2

Defining British Life in the Hills

An overview of the various institutions and infrastructure established by the British in the hill stations discussed in the previous chapter is the starting point towards understanding the nature and development of social life. In this chapter I will argue that social life in the hills bore similarities with that in the rest of the Empire. Institutions for various social activities which could be found all over the Empire – gymkhanas, clubs, theatres, schools, and churches – were also found in the hill stations, and created an exclusive social space for the ruling class. However, I will also argue that the development of these institutions cannot be explained as imitation of bourgeois English social life in the metropolis, but rather should be understood in the unique context and circumstances of the colony itself.

I am motivated by the arguments made by Mrinalini Sinha regarding the establishment of clubs in the British Empire. It is generally believed that clubs were ubiquitous and acted as ‘oases’ of European culture in the colonies.¹⁰² But what kind of ‘European’ culture did they represent? In “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India”, Mrinalini Sinha has redefined clubs not as recreations of British social life in the colony, but as specific types of imperial formations that are unique to the colonial context. She argues that clubs in the Indian subcontinent served as “self-governing voluntary associations [which] are better understood in the context of a distinctive colonial public sphere.”¹⁰³ Contrary to arguments in existing literature that portray these clubs as a mimicry of bourgeois English culture, Sinha argues that clubs in the colony emerged as responses to the specific imperial, administrative, and ideological needs of life in

¹⁰² Mrinalini Sinha, "Britishness, clubbability, and the colonial public sphere: the genealogy of an imperial institution in colonial India," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 489-521. 489.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 491.

the colony, and were thus characteristically different from the clubs present in the metropolis. She demonstrates that in the Indian subcontinent, clubs enabled the unification of the stratified British society thereby creating a “distinct Anglo-Indian community, sharply separated from native society.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, rather than being mirrors of British social life in the metropolis, clubs in the colonies were established with a different purpose: as instruments for the reification of imperial identity (although the extent to which this was achieved is limited.) In the following sections I will reinterpret clubs and other institutions established in the Himalayan hill stations to demonstrate that calling these institutions “reproductions of European life in the distant colony” are erroneous or incomplete at best. This chapter will give an account of the institutions that developed in the hills and highlight their colonial rather than European character, arguing that hill stations cannot be described as attempted imitations of European towns, but rather as products of unique colonial circumstances in the world of Empire.

Gymkhanas

One of the most distinctive features of British social life in the colony is the gymkhana. Gymkhanas are associated with the training of the army and hosting competitive sports tournaments. J. D. Campbell defines gymkhanas as organised military tournaments and athletic meets that became institutionalised in the 1870s.¹⁰⁵ In British consciousness, there was a close relationship between army training and sports where “[s]port has been viewed by historians as a significant means of fostering upper class identity and unity, and these elements of sport clearly apply to nineteenth century Britain’s overwhelmingly gentry-derived officer

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 499.

¹⁰⁵ James D. Campbell, “‘Training for sport is training for war’: sport and the transformation of the British army, 1860–1914,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 17, no. 4 (2000): 21-58. 34.

corps.”¹⁰⁶ Activities such as hunting, shooting, polo, cricket, and football thus not only constituted leisurely activities for British military officers in the hills but were also associated with the development of military discipline – and the gymkhana was where these activities took place. It is for this reason that we see the establishment of gymkhanas in many of the Himalayan hill stations where the British population would often participate in team games as a way to imbibe the spirit of military-sportsmanship, stay physically fit, as well as simply for leisure and entertainment.

As a result of a landslip in Nainital in 1880, a large level field formed on one end of the lake which used to be a small recreation park.¹⁰⁷ After the landslip, this space was enlarged and reconstituted into what came to be known as the “Flats”.¹⁰⁸ For the proper management and public use of the Flats it was handed over to the Gymkhana Committee at a rent of Rs. 1000 per year.¹⁰⁹ The author reports that the Flats eventually developed as a popular playground, “and during fine weather [was] in constant use for polo (three-a-side), football, hockey and cricket.”¹¹⁰ The author also reports that an American lady who had been visiting Nainital while a polo match was ongoing felt homesick because the entire festive arrangement reminded her of Coney Island in New York.¹¹¹ A similar gymkhana was to be found in a place nearby Shimla called Annadale, which is described as a pleasure ground that hosted fairs, races, games and sports as far back as 1839.¹¹² The Annadale Gymkhana Club hosted horse races six times a year, an annual horse show, an annual tennis tournament, and station polo every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. In Mussoorie, the grounds of the Happy Valley Club

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁰⁷ For the Nainital landslip, see C. W. Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun* (Allahabad: Pioneer Press, 1906), 37-42.

¹⁰⁸ J. M. Clay, *Nainital: A historical and descriptive account* (Allahabad: Government Press, 1928), 31.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 32.

¹¹² Harrop, *Thacker's New Guide to Simla*, 168.

could also be used for gymkhana events such as for hockey tournaments, alongside other social gatherings such as picnics or birthday celebrations.¹¹³



Figure 6. A view of Annadale Gymkhana from the road above, 1846.¹¹⁴

The gymkhana, thus, emerged in a specific colonial conquest where it was necessary for the ruling elite to imbibe the qualities of sportsmanship and military capability, while it also served as a platform for healthy competition and leisurely activities. David Gilmour observes that even the British and natives often played sports together, either as individuals or in mixed teams.¹¹⁵ Games between British and natives could also possibly be a means to establish or teach a sense of British military discipline amongst a class of non-British soldiers serving in

¹¹³ *Guide to Mussoorie* (Mussoorie: The Malfasite Printing Works, c.1907), 140.

¹¹⁴ A. E. Scott, *From the Road above Annadale*, 1846, lithograph, British Library, London, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/other/largeimage69254.html>.

¹¹⁵ David Gilmour, *The British in India: A Social History of the Raj* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 248.

the army. Gymkhanas, thus, are an example of a colonial institution unlike any other in the metropolis, and therefore uniquely a result of the specific colonial context in the Indian subcontinent. Furthermore, the very fact that British men were readily mingling with natives in casual sports is contrary to Kennedy's suggestion about the creation of exclusive spaces in hill stations meant to foster British imperial identity. On the contrary, rather, there is greater interaction and, I would argue, even attempts at assimilation of native habits to British notions of military discipline (British affinity to the Gurkhas, who remained loyal supporters even in the revolt of 1857, is well documented).¹¹⁶ Gymkhanas, along with all other institutions in the hill stations, would also witness heightened activities during the period known as 'the Season,' specific to the hill stations.

The Season

The phenomenon of 'the Season' can best be understood as that time of the year when a host of British officials and civilians would shift to the hill stations in order to avoid the extreme heat of the plains. Not only would official business be conducted from the hill stations, but this period would also serve as an opportunity to unwind and rejuvenate from the enervating life in the plains. Records of contemporary official correspondence also reveal that hill stations were deemed beneficial for the officers' productive capacities.¹¹⁷ Utilitarian arguments such as these have been discussed by Judith Kenny.¹¹⁸ Interestingly, units of the armies would also be transferred to the hills for a short amount of time, but not to the 'smart' hill stations such as Shimla or Nainital. Instead they were sent to more obscure settlements nearby the more prestigious towns.¹¹⁹ In general, however, the initial attitude towards this

¹¹⁶ See Lionel Caplan, "'Bravest of the Brave': Representations of 'The Gurkha' in British Military Writings," *Modern Asian Studies* 25, no. 3 (1991): 571-597.

¹¹⁷ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 176.

¹¹⁸ Kenny, "Claiming the high ground", 671.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 252.

movement towards hill stations was mixed. Officials frequently impugned persons taking up their duties in their hills, accusing them of abandoning work for pleasure (although this is possibly a result of pure jealousy at their own inability to visit the hills in earlier times.)¹²⁰ There was, in fact, significant parliamentary debate and unfavourable positions in England regarding the issue of transferring official instruments to the hill stations because of the high costs associated with the same.¹²¹ In short, however, by the middle of the nineteenth century, annual movement towards the hills had become the norm, and these places became popular tourist destinations for many in the Indian subcontinent.

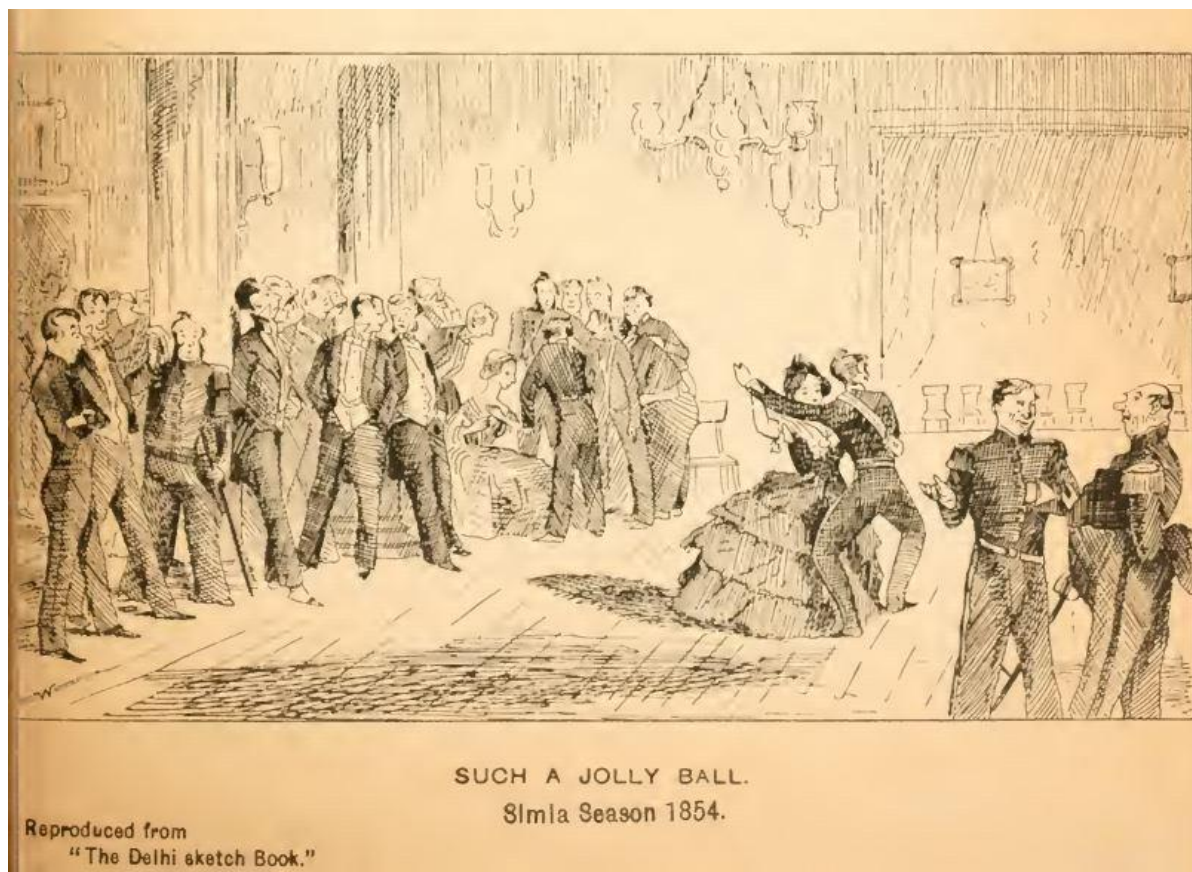


Figure 7. A sketch of a ball dance in the Shimla Club during the 1854 Season.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid., 176.

¹²¹ See Kenny, "Claiming the high ground," 622.

¹²² Edward J. Buck, *Simla Past and Present* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1904), 84-85.

Similar to the tourism season of these Himalayan hill stations in present day, the influx of tourists would magnify during certain months of the year leading to heightened social activity and a general atmosphere of revelry, a period commonly referred to as the 'Season.' J. M. Clay observed that in Nainital, the Season lasted from about the middle of April to the middle of October. A host of social activities were at their peak during this time, and this period attracted many other visitors from the plains. During each week of the season, he reports, various activities such as polo tournaments, tennis, golf, squash and billiards were played competitively.¹²³ Clubs and hotels played an important part during the Season as they were often the epicentre of all entertainment and social activities, providing lodging and living quarters to several visitors. Gilmour has also observed that hill stations held what were called special 'weeks' which would involve a range of activities such as cricket, tennis, fancy-dress balls, dog shows, and even 'ladies-versus-gentlemen cricket matches (where men would reportedly bat left-handed or with umbrellas).¹²⁴

Hill stations during the Season were also sites of much light-heartedness, debauchery, and scandal. The following extract about Shimla from Maud Davis' *The Englishwoman in India* gives us an interesting glimpse of what entailed life at the hill station:

The proverbial relation between Satan and idle hands is too often confirmed in the Himalayas; and for a woman who is young, comely, and gifted with a taste for acting, Simla is assuredly not the most innocuous place on God's earth. Here frivolity reaches its highest height, and social pleasures are, to all appearance, the end and aim of every one's existence. Yet here, in the midst of this throng of busy idlers, the great task of governing the Empire must go forward, come what may.¹²⁵

From the accounts of Rudyard Kipling, Maud Davis, as well as Emily Eden, the picture one gets of life at the hill stations is that of great frivolity and informality. David Gilmour recounts

¹²³ Clay, *Nainital: A historical and descriptive account*, 59-60.

¹²⁴ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 460.

¹²⁵ Maud Davis, *The Englishwoman in India* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1909), 24.

an instance from the autobiography of Harcourt Butler who humorously reports to his friend about a scandal in Shimla which ultimately led to the divorce of a Mr. and Mrs. King (on account of adultery).¹²⁶ Dane Kennedy writes, “with so many British women ensconced in the hills, it is easy to understand why these locales acquired reputations for romance and scandal.”¹²⁷ Kennedy also demonstrates the importance of hill stations as places for setting up marriages, meeting new people, and enriching one’s social circle in a relaxed atmosphere far from the plans.¹²⁸ Scandal and gossip was so central to the hill stations that the main promenade in Shimla was known as Scandal Point, where “the savoury and unsavoury secrets of our society are flashed to the uttermost limits of Simla with all the speed of wireless.”¹²⁹

A fashionable activity during the Season was skating in the rinks. It was in the 1870s that skating or ‘rinking’ started becoming an activity mostly enjoyed by British women in the hill stations.¹³⁰ Enid Smythies, a British girl of Indian origin celebrated her twenty first birthday in Nainital and received roller skates as part of her presents. She is reported to have practiced in the Nainital Rink in anticipation of the skating regatta held there during the Season.¹³¹ The Mussoorie Rink was built in 1890 by the same person who started the Rink in Calcutta, Mr. Kellman. However, after performing poorly in the initial years, it changed ownership in 1894, and since then saw a great measure of success.¹³² In Shimla, ice-skating activities would resume in the winter when the residents would notice “a red pennant on the Station Library flagstaff, denoting that the Blessington Tennis courts have been prepared for skating.”¹³³ Skating was predominantly an activity for women. In fact, owing to a large

¹²⁶ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 318.

¹²⁷ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 125.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹²⁹ Harrop, *Thacker's New Guide to Simla*, 24.

¹³⁰ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 459.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹³² *Guide to Mussoorie*, 142.

¹³³ Harrop, *Thacker's New Guide to Simla*, 141.

population of females in the hill stations, several activities existed for the entertainment of women. Nainital had a whole September ‘week’ dedicated to women with activities such as hockey, boat racing, and cricket.¹³⁴ Enid, however, prided herself for not being part of those women who only talked about “going to the Hills” for the Season.¹³⁵ She regarded Pyinmana, a British town in Burma where she stayed for a considerable time, to be “better than Nainital, or even England.”¹³⁶

There was a lot else to do during the Season besides participate in the social life of the hill stations. Miscellaneous activities that could be done in and around these places included hunting, fishing, and general exploration (trekking) of the surrounding sites. W. Walker in *Angling in the Kumaon Lakes* invites his reader “into the bright sun light on the rippling waters of the Kumaon Lake, instead of spending [their] hard-won holiday on the social tread-mill of a hill station.”¹³⁷ Skating rinks often had stages for theatres attached to them where people would organise dramas, musicals, and plays such as “The Wilderness” (1910), “The Three Little Maids” (1911), “The Arcadians” (1913), and many more.¹³⁸ Clearly, people had a diverse set of interests and there was no limitation on how one could spend their time. Hill life, it would seem, afforded a great deal of opportunities to deal with the boredom of Empire.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 460.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 428.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 428.

¹³⁷ W. Walker, Preface in *Angling in the Kumaun Lakes: With a Map of the Kumaun Lake Country* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1888).

¹³⁸ Clay, *Nainital: A historical and descriptive account*, 51.

¹³⁹ For an academic discussion on boredom in the British Empire, see Jeffrey Auerbach, *Imperial boredom: monotony and the British empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Clubs

A vivid description of the Season at Shimla is found in Edward J Buck's *Simla Past and Present* (1904). Buck draws on the writings of a Dr. Russell who spent about six weeks in Shimla and documented the evening atmosphere of the town during the season. He describes a lively scene with well-lit bungalows, men and women shopping in the main promenade (known as the Mall), people playing billiards, or spending time in the library. The Club, he observes, was the centre of all activity where the "servants are hurrying in to wait on the *sahibs* (masters), who have come to dinner from distant bungalows."¹⁴⁰

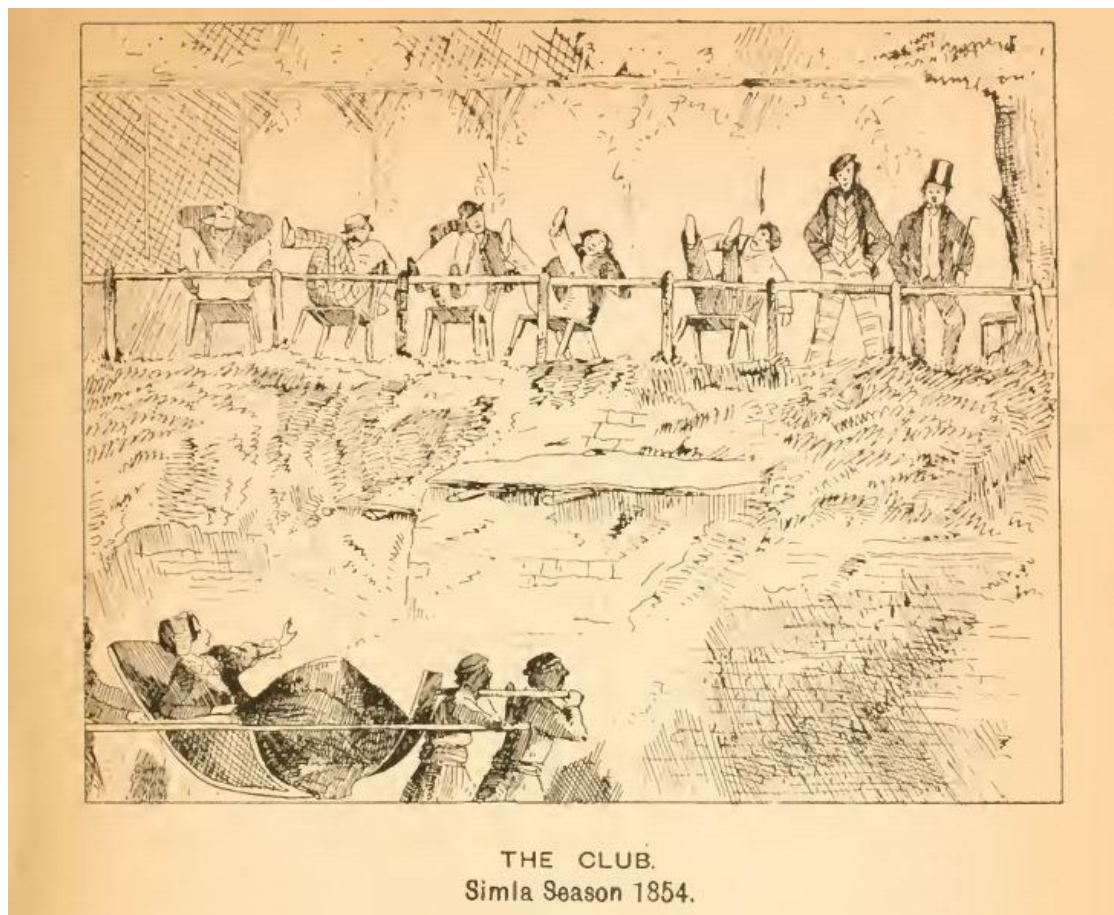


Figure 8. A sketch depicting the Shimla Club during the 1854 Season.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Buck, *Simla Past and Present*, 84.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

Here the officers are involved in playing cards and betting large amounts of money. The “soldierless officers of ex-sepoy regiments, Queen’s officers, civilians, doctors, invalids, unemployed brigadiers, [and] convalescents ...” are all involved in light conversations about sports, social activities, petty business matters, Europe, and politics in general.¹⁴² The extract presented by Buck gives us an idea of a typical evening at the club during the Season in Shimla.

The Shimla Club, however, was unlike any club one would encounter in the metropolis. As Mrinalini Sinha argues, “the social clubs in colonial India, unlike their counterparts in Britain, were seldom seen to be in competition with favoured forms of domestic life: in fact these institutions were instrumental in fashioning politically more desirable domestic arrangements among European elite in India.”¹⁴³ The unique purpose of clubs in Shimla, Nainital, or Mussoorie would be to provide an opportunity for existing officers to socialise, and also to initiate newer officers and civil servants into the social fabric of the *colonial* British ruling elite. The curious exclusivity of these institutions, however, presents a contradiction to Kennedy’s argument about how the clubs were instrumental in developing a unified British imperial identity. Sudarshana Sen points out that clubs in British India were meant only for Europeans and (later) exceptionally distinguished Indians (of the ruling class), but specifically excluded Anglo-Indians from membership.¹⁴⁴ Given that priests, missionaries, poorer Europeans who could not pay for club membership, alongside “vagrants, orphans, prostitutes [and] the insane” of the white race were also excluded,¹⁴⁵ how are we to imagine clubs as imperial machineries of identity formation and unifying the British (or European) race against the native as Kennedy as suggested? Club membership policies, the

¹⁴² Ibid., 84.

¹⁴³ Sinha, “Britishness, clubbability, and the colonial public sphere”, 499.

¹⁴⁴ Sudarshana Sen, *Anglo-Indian Women in Transition: Pride, Prejudice and Predicament* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 174.

¹⁴⁵ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 225.

differences between various types of clubs, and the changing policies of clubs towards Indians and Anglo-Indians especially after independence, is a promising avenue of research to partly address this problem.

Schools

One of the most remarkable features of hill stations were schools for European children. Those British persons who could afford to send their children to England for education would do so, whereas those without adequate financial means, would send them to the “hill schools in the Himalayas and other mountain summer resorts.”¹⁴⁶ It is reported about Bishop Cotton School in Shimla that, “[t]he education given in the school is planned with reference to the wants and circumstances of the class for whose benefit the school is especially designed, viz., the sons of Government officers in receipt of small salaries, and others who cannot afford to send their children to Europe, it having been the desire of Bishop Cotton to establish for the middle classes of Anglo-Indians three public schools—one of which should be at Shimla.”¹⁴⁷ Similarly, the schools in Nainital and Mussoorie are evaluated and praised by Murphy and Northam. Murphy reports about St. Joseph’s College in Nainital that children of the school performed well in the Government examinations and that physical training was as much part of the curriculum as academics.¹⁴⁸ Northam describes the role of The Summer Home of Soldiers’ Children, an institution whose main objective was to “benefit the children of soldiers serving in India, by removing the weakly and suffering for a season or so from the effects of heat of the plains.”¹⁴⁹ Several types of schools were established in the hill stations, catering to the needs of different persons viz. Europeans, Indians, and orphans. However, in the case

¹⁴⁶ George Allan Odgers, “Education in British India,” *The Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Oct., 1925), 1-6. 5.

¹⁴⁷ Buck, *Simla Past and Present*, 87.

¹⁴⁸ Murphy, *A Guide to Naini Tal and Kumaun*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ Northam, *Guide to Masuri* 57.

of Europeans, there is, as is discussed in Chapter 1, a lack of understanding about the stratified nature of the category itself.

Although several schools were established in the hill stations for children of European descent, they did not quite function in the way that Dane Kennedy has imagined. Kennedy states that “Anglo-Indians were not welcome at most of the better schools.”¹⁵⁰ On the contrary, Elisabeth Buattner observes that in these environments, Anglo-Indians were usually present in a majority, “thereby making the presence of the former (European children) elusive and subject to doubt.”¹⁵¹ Thus, while Kennedy’s claim is true, Buattner is correct to observe that numerically, Anglo-Indians far outnumbered Europeans of pure lineage in general, thereby compromising, by default, the status of these European children who could not go to England to study. She argues that only those children who had successfully graduated from schools in England were considered for higher positions in the Civil Services, whereas those who had studied in schools in India, even if they had been of pure European descent, were treated as suspicious and indiscernible from their Anglo-Indian counterparts. Thus, the education of pure European children in India automatically “placed an individual within the racially amorphous realm of the ‘country born’, which included both domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indians.”¹⁵² There is scope for investigating in much greater detail the details of school education in the hill stations, for which one must access records that are not available in the digital form but are available in school libraries and state archives. Further studies on education in the hill stations will shed light on the complex dynamics and internal tensions of the stratified European community present in the hills.

¹⁵⁰ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 141.

¹⁵¹ Elisabeth Buettner, “Problematic spaces, problematic races: defining ‘Europeans’ in late colonial India,” *Women’s History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000): 277-298, 283.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 286.

Churches

Missionary activity began in the Himalayan foothills by the middle of the nineteenth century. A great amount of descriptive information, as well as the aims and objectives of Christian missions in India, especially in the hilly districts, is obtained from the American missionary James Kennedy's *Life and Work in Benaras and Kumaon (1839-1877)* published in 1884. Several missions had been active in India and although missionaries often had disagreements with other Societies and with foreign missionaries, the relevant work was carried out with great ease and concurrence.¹⁵³ Himself an advocate of the Anglican Church and employed by the London Missionary Society, James Kennedy reports that there was friendly communication and cooperation amongst missionaries of different churches, whether Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist or Episcopalian.¹⁵⁴ The Anglican Church, however, was the prime and ubiquitous church in the hills stations.¹⁵⁵

Edward J. Buck reports that "prior to 1836 Simla residents attended divine service in a building which stood at a site now occupied by Northbrook Terrace, which possessed a thatched roof and accommodated a hundred people but there was no regular Chaplain until the Rev. J. Vaughan was appointed in 1842. Even then services were only held intermittently until April 1845."¹⁵⁶ The foundation stone of the final structure, called Christ Church, as it exists in its present form, was laid in 1844.¹⁵⁷ We see from the writings of Buck that the local British population regularly contributed small sums of money to improve the church campus and, for example, acquire better organs, or larger bells, which shows a general interest amongst the community in the development of religious institutions.

¹⁵³ James Kennedy, *Life and Works in Benares and Kumaon (1833-1877)* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1884), 295.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 295.

¹⁵⁵ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 100.

¹⁵⁶ Buck, *Simla Past and Present*, 80.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 80.



Figure 9. A crowded scene in front of Christ Church, Shimla, 1903.¹⁵⁸

Churches took interest in educational policies and mission teachers are reported to have said that “education minus Christianity must prove a curse rather than a blessing to its recipients, since it tends to destroy their faith without providing them with an adequate equivalent for their loss.”¹⁵⁹ These comments were appearing at a time when secular education as opposed to a religious one was being considered for Government Schools in the Empire, and since several schools and orphanages established were established by religious societies in the hill stations, they had a say in the matter. Besides opening several schools in the hill stations, the greatest contribution of religious missions has been their humanitarian work (Margaret Kennedy, the wife of James Kennedy of the London Missionary Society, worked extensively for the lepers)¹⁶⁰ for the benefit of all, regardless of caste, class, creed or religion. Kennedy even observes that the British Indian community did not particularly approve of missionaries and “accused [them] of fostering expectations of equality on the part of indigenous peoples

¹⁵⁸ James Ricalton, *Before Christ Church, at Simla, India's charming 'Summer Capital' in the Himalayan Mountains*, 1903, photographic print, 8.9 x 17.6 cm, British Library, London, accessed June 15, 2020, <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/b/largeimage56455.html>.

¹⁵⁹ Davis, *The Englishwoman in India*, 126.

¹⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Life and Works in Benares and Kumaon*, 256.

that were bound to cause disappointment and discontent.”¹⁶¹ Overall, however, the sense we get is that the church and missionary activity were vital parts of British social life in the hill stations, even if their activities were not congruent with the opinions of their British colleagues.

Conclusion

There are certain outstanding issues with regard to the realities of British social life in the hill stations. The most important is the lack of understanding about the composition of this society itself. It is difficult to place within the social world of hill stations the various classes of British men and women who resided there. In order to fulfil the gaps in this research, it is imperative to search for more evidence and statistics that shed light on the population of hill stations. There is also a need for inculcating studies done on the Anglo-Indian communities in the approaches towards a social history of the hill stations and ascertaining the specific function of each of the many social groups that coexisted there. Another worthwhile task would be to study social life in the hill stations is through the oral history approach. There are many persons currently residing in the hill stations and nearby areas who have lived in the pre-Independence era of these regions, as well as Anglo-Indian communities who chose to stay in India instead of leaving for England or Australia, from whom valuable narratives about life in the hill station can be acquired.

What is clear, however, is that it is inappropriate to call hill stations an arena for the reproduction of English bourgeois social life. Although many elements of social life such as the club, the theatre, the churches, and the bungalows, all present in a cool and pleasant climate of the hills, far removed from the humid, sultry, and ‘unhealthy’ plains evince some feelings of a familiar European environment, in reality the hill stations are undoubtedly very

¹⁶¹ Kennedy, *Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj*, 80.

specific imperial formations in a colonial environment. The nature of these institutions and the specificities of the populations that lived in these regions gave hill stations a unique character that must not be forced into a familiar framework of European likeness.

Chapter 3

Hill Stations as Sites for Imperial Self-Fashioning

In this chapter I will argue that hill stations offered a host of interesting opportunities to the outsiders who would eventually occupy them. Initially at the very frontiers of the British Empire, the hilly regions were far from the surveillance of the imperial centre and therefore constituted a kind of *terra incognita* where anything was possible. The persons who had the opportunity to first visit and explore these new territories on the edges of empire were exposed to new experiences, and could refashion themselves or reconstruct their identities with a great degree of freedom, beyond the scope of their regular duties. The chapter will adopt a biographical approach and focus on the lives of two persons associated with the hills, each of whom serve as examples of the sheer complexity of the colonial context, and highlight the inadequacies of generalised narratives in history.

In “Collectors of Empire: Objects, Conquests and Imperial Self-Fashioning,” Maya Jasanoff discusses the complex world of Empire as a place which afforded many opportunities to radically transform one’s identity and social status. She gives examples of European persons who came from the fringes of society but saw an opportunity in the imperial context of nineteenth and twentieth century British India to refashion themselves and climb the social ladder. In the culturally vibrant city of Lucknow (in the United Provinces), the Frenchman Claude Martin was able to transform himself from the son of a vinegar maker in Lyon into classy English gentleman who owned vast tracts of lands, a town house, a large library of books, and even an art collection, a feat otherwise not achievable in the ordinary world he originally belonged to.¹⁶² In the city of Lucknow, therefore, far removed from the political and strategic loci of Mughal and Company interests, Claude Martin accumulated great wealth

¹⁶² Maya Jasanoff, “Collectors of Empire: Objects, Conquests and Imperial Self-Fashioning,” *Past & Present* 184 (2004): 109-135. 110.

and exotic collections, thereby enabling himself to enter the *beau monde* of the city. By doing so, he successfully transformed himself from a relative nobody in his original context to a respectable gentleman of high culture in the British imperial context. Secondly, Jasanoff argues, the act of acquiring more territories in the colony also helped the English East India Company boost its claims as an imperial power. At the imperial level, therefore, gaining more territory through warfare became an instrument to portray strength and dominance.¹⁶³ Yasanoff argues, for example, that by 'collecting' Seringapatam, the British East India Company, under Lord Wellesley, redefined itself from a mere trading company to an imperial force to be reckoned with: "[i]ts features were rather Roman, many liked to think: stately, noble, martial, triumphant."¹⁶⁴

Similarly, Peter Brown's characterisation of the Silk Road as a 'Non-Place' is particularly interesting: it is a space that is 'at once local and international' in which the individual actors meet and interact with each other with a completely different set of rules that do not apply in their larger realities. The juxtaposition of the exotic with the real, he argues, created "privileged environments [where a] skilful collage of elements from different cultures was brought together to create a world of its own."¹⁶⁵ Actors in the Silk Road, therefore, had the means to identify themselves as upper-class and superior in this fabricated 'non-place' where they could not only differentiate themselves from the various 'others' present there, but also regard themselves in a new cultural setting far away from the unstimulating reality of their original homelands. The Silk Road, therefore, offered a space

¹⁶³ Ibid., 114.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Brown, "'Charismatic' Goods: Commerce, Diplomacy and Cultural Contacts along the Silk Road in Late Antiquity," in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity—Rome, China, Iran and the Steppe, ca. 250-750*, edited by N. Di Cosimo and M. Maas, (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 103.

where the actors could encounter the exotic and define themselves as elevated from their drab and mundane existence back home.

With regard to the ideas proposed by Jasanoff and Peter Brown, can we understand hill stations in the Himalayan foothills as these ‘non-places’? In the initial years after the Anglo-Nepalese war, hill stations were uncharted territory of the empire. When first encountering the hills and faced with the task of exploring, mapping, and administering them, the British continuously created certain complex relationships between themselves and their newly discovered territories, which subsequently played a role in shaping their perception of themselves. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the unique experiences of the British in the Himalayan foothills impacted their self-image and self-fashioning, provided them with new opportunities to define themselves, and simultaneously also shaped the future of these territories.

Sir George William Traill, First Commissioner of Kumaon

The case of the first Commissioner of Kumaon, Sir George William Traill, is especially telling. Traill was made the Commissioner of Kumaon in the year 1815 and the history of Kumaon under him became “inseparably bound up” with his own personal narratives.¹⁶⁶ Neville observes that “Traill’s regime was essentially paternal, despotic and personal; but at the same time, though arbitrary, it was a wise, just, and progressive administration.”¹⁶⁷

Traill was so attached to and possessive about the district under his care that he caused great controversy regarding the extent of his jurisdiction, and wrote several letters to the concerned authorities with such high-handedness that he always “gained his own way on almost every question.”¹⁶⁸ From a mere servant of the Empire in the capacity of

¹⁶⁶ Neville, *Nainital, A Gazetteer*, 224.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 225.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

Commissioner, Traill could become the *de facto* ruler of the large Kumaon division of which he was in charge. The natives liked and supported Traill, because his attitude towards the division was “peculiarly agreeable to their own wishes.”¹⁶⁹ Pilgrim Barron also reports that Traill possessed extraordinary knowledge of this province, was very popular amongst the natives, and vehemently opposed the influx of other Europeans into Kumaon.¹⁷⁰ In fact, Barron suspected him of so much possessiveness and jealousy, he adamantly believed that Traill purposely hid the existence of Nainital from his superiors to pre-emptively avoid the settlement of other Europeans there.¹⁷¹ An incident is related about Traill that reveals, if nothing else, his acknowledgement of native customs: this one time Traill removed the temple of the goddess from a local fort for which he was cursed by snow blindness. In order to appease the goddess, he promised to erect a temple, wherewith he was delivered from the curse.¹⁷² When Traill was succeeded by Colonel Gowan in 1831, he left the province well managed and orderly, but Neville remarks that “[Traill’s] machinery was not easily worked by another hand.”¹⁷³ Unlike the Claude Martin of Jasanoff, George William Traill by no means came from humble origins, and was already a member of the aristocratic class. Nevertheless, the hills offered him an opportunity to reinvent himself in the colonial context, where, as a result of the general unawareness about the division under his care, Traill established close links with the natives and ruled autonomously.

Frederick “Pahari” Wilson

Another striking example of imperial self-fashioning is the local legend of Fredrick “Pahari” Wilson of the hill-village Harsil, about two hundred kilometres from Mussoorie. Wilson was

¹⁶⁹ Barron, *Notes of Wanderings*, 27.

¹⁷⁰ Barron, *Notes of Wanderings*, 27.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 27

¹⁷² H. G. Walton, *Almora: A Gazetteer, District Gazetteers of the United Provinces*, Vol. 35. (Allahabad: Government Press, 1911), 84.

¹⁷³ Neville, *Nainital, A Gazetteer*, 226.

a British deserter from the First Afghan War (1839-1842) who escaped to the Garhwal hills to avoid the serious consequences of his actions.¹⁷⁴ His name is mentioned as a subordinate in Paul J Rich's *Creating the Arabian Gulf: The British Raj and the Invasions of the Gulf* (2009) which states that "[t]wo Gulfites Fredrick Wilson qv and Malcom Meade qv served under General Daly when young agents in Central Asia."¹⁷⁵ Although literary evidence to support the facts of his life are imperfect, many versions of his story are kept alive in local folklore which unanimously portrays him as a very endearing *raja* (king). Remnants of some architecture built by him are still found in these villages and the vicinity. Debashis Bandyopadhyay mentions a bridge across the river built by Wilson, "a part of which still hangs precariously upon the gorge."¹⁷⁶ Some of the houses that he built, portraits of him with his two native wives, as well his grave in Camel's Back road is still found in Mussoorie. Wilson even issued his own currency in the form of a one-rupee coin.¹⁷⁷ Of the two local village girls he married, the first was called Raimatta, and the second, Sungrami, with whom he had three children called Nathaniel, Charles, and Henry. Gilmour attests to the habit of Englishmen to marry native women "whatever criticism the custom provoked."¹⁷⁸ Wilson took shelter in the village of Harsil and refashioned himself into quite the local celebrity comparable to a king. It is argued by novelist Hutchison, who researched the life of Wilson,

¹⁷⁴ For details about research done on Fredrick Wilson, see Robert Hutchison, *The Raja of Harsil: The Legend of Frederick "Pahari Wilson"* (New Delhi: Roli Books Pvt. Ltd., 2010); Also see *A Summer Ramble in the Himalayas with Sporting Adventures in the Vale of Cashmere*, ed. "Mountaineer" (London: Hurst and Blackett Publishers, 1860) which is purportedly ghost-written by Frederick Wilson himself; An earlier publication in the form of a biography is D. C. Kala, *Frederick Wilson ("Hulson sahib") of Garhwal 1816-83* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1921).

¹⁷⁵ Paul J. Rich, *Creating the Arabian Gulf: The British Raj and the Invasions of the Gulf* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2009), 214.

¹⁷⁶ Debashis Bandyopadhyay, *Locating the Anglo-Indian Self in Ruskin Bond: a Postcolonial Review* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 145.

¹⁷⁷ For images associated with Frederick Wilson, see the online gallery created by Robert Hutchison, "Raja of Harsil", accessed June 3, 2020, <https://raja-of-harsil.com/picture-gallery/>

¹⁷⁸ Gilmour, *The British in India*, 309.

that Rudyard Kipling's short story *The Man Who Could be King* was more likely based on the life and times of Fredrick "Pahari" Wilson rather than the American traveller Josiah Harlan (who, incidentally, after an extraordinary series of events, was also to become the Prince of Ghor in Afghanistan).¹⁷⁹ Wilson eventually acquired vast tracts of land in the Garhwal region and became a lumber baron, supplying wood for railway construction to the British.¹⁸⁰ The prominent environmentalist Sunderlal Bahuguna also holds him responsible for large scale destruction of the natural habitat of the region.¹⁸¹

The hills certainly gave opportunities for British administrators to refashion themselves into something more than what their office could define. I would argue that even persons such as George Everest and Jim Corbett attained their legendary status precisely because they found a chance to do so in the hills. Jim Corbett was a Colonel in the British Indian Army who was regularly employed to kill man-eating tigers in the Kumaon region, and soon became a legend in his own time after publishing several books about his hunts.¹⁸² Some of his books were adapted into movies, and his old house in the district has been converted into a museum. Similarly, Matthew Edney states that that George Everest himself was interested in exploiting the social capital associated with men carrying out scientific work for the Empire, and "played on the perceived duty of every state to patronise scientific activity."¹⁸³ Everest, he argues, used his profession as a man of science to advance his career

¹⁷⁹ See, Ben Macintyre, *Josiah the Great: the true story of the man who would be king* (London: Harper Press, 2011).

¹⁸⁰ George Alfred James, *Ecology is Permanent Economy: The Activism and Environmental Philosophy of Sunderlal Bahuguna* (State University Of New York Press, 2014). 85.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 83.

¹⁸² See Martin Booth, *Carpet Sahib: a life of Jim Corbett* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Mahesh Rangarajan, "From Gun to Camera" in *India's wildlife history: an introduction* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2017).

¹⁸³ Matthew H. Edney, "The patronage of science and the creation of imperial space: The British mapping of India, 1799-1843," *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization* 30, no. 1 (1993): 61-67. 63.

and acquire the status of a gentleman, to the extent that he managed to secure a knighthood.¹⁸⁴ Had Everest not been involved in developing surveying tools and techniques for the newly acquired territories of the Empire, he would not have had this opportunity to further his career. Edney thus observes that like Everest, “*all* surveyors in India were motivated by a healthy interest in self-advancement.”¹⁸⁵ On the other hand, as late as 1921, when hill stations were already well consolidated into the Empire, Francis Youngblood, the President of the Royal Geographical Society, organised the first Everest expedition into the Himalayas for ‘spiritual upliftment.’ On reaching the mountain the expedition realised that the Tibetans worship Everest as a sacred place, and subsequently “began to describe their own ascent as a ‘pilgrimage’.”¹⁸⁶ Many examples show how the mountains and the associated experiences mediated and sometimes even determined the identity of the coloniser.

Conclusion

Hill stations were places that offered innumerable opportunities for its residents to understand and contextualise their lives in the British Empire. Of course, this is not a feature limited to only the hill stations, but they nevertheless *were* places that were defined precisely by the actions of individual members who started to populate them in the first place. Prior to the coming of colonial rule, hill stations were not established as such, but had a sacred significance in native consciousness. Subsequently, however, the impact of colonialization, especially the activities of a handful of individuals, had been so drastic and far reaching, that memories of these persons persist till present day and continue to shape the lives of people living in these places. The books of Jim Corbett are widely read by children who went to the

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸⁶ Peter Hansen, “Modern Mountains” in *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II*, eds. Martin Daunt and Bernhard Rieger (Oxford; New York: Berg, 2001), 193.

same schools that were established in these hill stations in the nineteenth century, the stories of the *raja* of Harsil are still told to children in the Garhwal, and the tallest mountain in the world is named after George Everest. Barbara Caine has observed that “biography can be seen as the archetypal ‘contingent narrative’ and the one best able to show the great importance of particular locations and circumstances and the multiple layers of historical change and experience.”¹⁸⁷ It is for this reason that it is important to study in greater detail the lives of individuals who both shaped and were shaped by the Himalayan foothills, and for this reason I am also convinced that a biographical approach to not just issues related to British social life in the hill stations, but to the various issues in history will benefit our understanding and appreciation of the complex past, and will enable us to produce more focused and exacting studies that do justice to our shared history.

¹⁸⁷ Barbara Caine, “Introduction” in *Biography and History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

Conclusion

What the trajectory of the growth and development of hill stations tells is that although large tracts of territories were acquired after the defeat of the Gurkhas, the subsequent administration in these areas was ultimately the prerogative of a handful of individuals who were placed in charge of these territories. George William Traill's unwillingness to give up control of the little kingdom he had carved out for himself is also evidence of the fact that the Empire did not necessarily have a thorough mechanism in place for the development of hill stations, but was more interested in the commercial and economic integration of these regions. Individuals who, in their personal explorations of the Himalayas, chanced upon appropriate landscapes at a significantly higher altitude reported it to the higher authorities for such sites to be converted into sanitarium, or often did so through their own agency. However, the primary interest of the Empire in these regions was limited to ensuring the incorporation of these territories into the imperial economy and turn them into a profitable enterprise that would add to the Empire's coffers. The real development and settlement of towns is attributed to the travellers, businessmen, tourists, and merchants who came and settled here, and built their houses, clubs, churches, and schools.

Social life in the British Empire developed on many scales and in different kinds of spaces. The imperial cities of Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi would share certain characteristics with each other but on the other hand would have their own unique character. The case was not so different with the hill stations. Each hill station in the Indian subcontinent developed at a different time, pace, and at the behest of a variety of individuals. Unlike the prominent cities of the plains, however, hill stations were established from scratch. In the Himalayan hill stations, there was no dominant pre-existing urban culture with which the British had to negotiate. Other than a few formal land agreements, the British community simply took over in the hills without much resistance. The idea that they could transform these landscapes from

their wild, natural state to modern settlements amenable to the demands of the ruling class is a reflection of how they constructed their imperial identities.

In the hill stations, social life was governed by a host of factors such as the nature of the landscape that evoked nostalgic feelings of the metropolis, the migratory native population who provided the labour for services, as well as the nature and composition of British community itself. A complex web of relations operating on many different levels in a stratified British community of military officers, civil officers, domiciled British persons, mixed Anglo Indians, civilians, women, children, missionaries, priests, and vagrants, together defined social life in the hill stations. The Season gave a unique character to the hill stations where a variety of social actors interacted with one another and with the environment to create a vibrant culture in an otherwise very boring and stressful world. The leisure and tourism opportunities afforded by these sites in the hill stations is a reflection of a tough and strenuous life of British administrators in the plains. Tourism in the hill stations in the nineteenth century was so impactful, that even in contemporary times the economy of the towns is primarily dependent on the tourism industry where the ‘colonial feel’ of these places is often marketed to boost the influx of tourists and the Season remains an important part of the lives of shopkeepers and hoteliers.

A significant issue that has been highlighted though not resolved is the complicated nature of Anglo-Indian society and the highly stratified nature of British society in general. The discrimination meted out against the Anglo-Indian and their unique position between being native or British has not been sufficiently understood in the colonial history of India or even in subaltern studies. The resentment of the Anglo-Indian community towards the British is part of the reason many of them chose to stay in India rather than find a new life in Britain. The issue of race and social origins was so strong in British India that they came to regulate life in the social institutions of the hill stations. Whereas some members of the society could

participate in balls, watch the theatre, go for a skate or hang out at the club, others, even though they were white, would face complete exclusion from these mainstream activities. Previous studies done on the subject have argued that hill stations were sites of segregating the ruler from the ruled and reifying the imperial identity. However, it is clear that hill stations were themselves sites of exclusion. Here, the inequalities, prejudices, and biases persistent amongst British society itself become most visible. Therefore, the hill stations were not slices of Europe in the Empire, but complex colonial formations that were specific to the cultural and social context of the Himalayan foothills under British rule.

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