The Great Hill Stations of Asia

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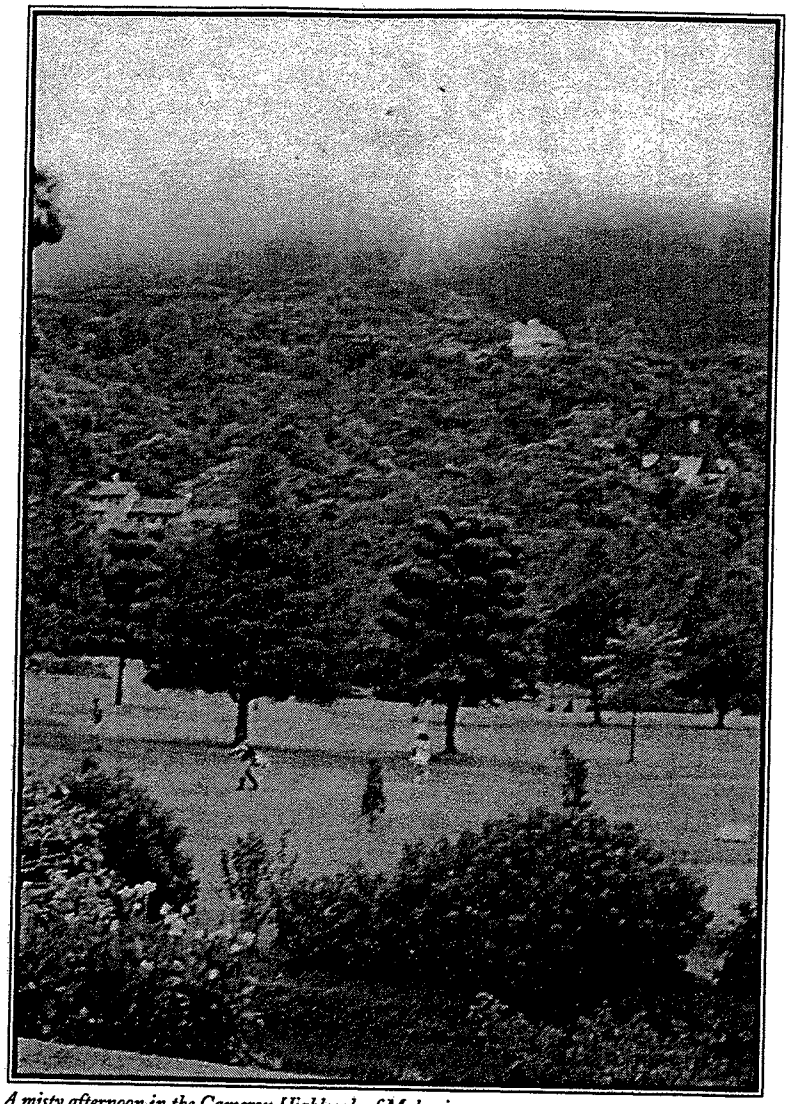


A misty afternoon in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia

Pity John Ouchterlony. By the time they brought him to the healing hills, it was too late. On April 29, 1863, Lieutenant Colonel Ouchterlony of the Royal Madras Engineers died of "jungle fever brought on by exposure while in the execution of his duty," says a memorial plaque at St. Stephen's Church in Ootacamund, a British colonial town in the Nilgiri Hills of southern India. Others were luckier. They got to Ooty in time and survived the perilous East, at least for another season, by rising above its pestilential lower reaches. On litters, in chairs, on ponies, by foot if they were able, Europeans in Asia nearly two centuries ago began climbing into the hills in search of health, relaxation, and sometimes their sanity.

They called the refuges they created "hill stations." These little towns carved from rocky mountainsides or nestled in the meadows of high plateaus began mostly as sanitariums or convalescent centers, but they soon became Europeanized highland resorts and, ultimately, escapist retreats far from the tumultuous cities and hot, parched lowlands below. Colonialism came and went, but the hill stations are still there, from Pakistan on the old Northwest Frontier of imperial Asia, across India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam to the mountains of Luzon in the Philippines, where Americans built one too. The hill stations are overgrown, often overpopulated, and no longer European now, but most have not lost their unique appeal. Air-conditioning notwithstanding, the plains still fry in the sun, and the cities of Asia have only grown larger, noisier, and more polluted.

For the European or American colonial soldier, the civil administrator and his clerk, the merchant, the missionary, and the families who followed them east of Suez, daily life was less a matter of advancing the glory of God or empire than a battle for survival against sunstroke, dysentery, cholera, malaria, and a host of other unnamed deadly fevers as well as little-examined, vague indispositions that in hindsight would probably be diagnosed as clinical symptoms of depression. Later medical scholars coined a phrase for it: "tropical fatigue." Even a contemporary traveler in Asia, armed with the newest medications, knows the fear of falling sick in a very strange place. Within a few hours, a once-exotic environment can suddenly become an alarming, perhaps threatening one, as panic and disorientation compound the illness. Imagine the terror that gripped the afflicted when there were no reliable diagnoses, let alone cures.

A British army doctor in Ceylon in the early nineteenth century calculated that a soldier between the ages of twenty and forty was five times as

likely to die in the island's tropical climate, war or no war, than if he had been based in the British Isles. Ruskin Bond, the great essayist of India's Garhwal Himalayas, said that the average life span for a Briton in India in the first half of the nineteenth century was thirty-one for a man and twenty-eight for a woman, figures that reflect the deaths of many children. Bond wrote of a common grave in a town below his hills where ten members of an English family were buried together after dying of cholera in a period of only three days. In the 1830s, a group of American missionaries who arrived to open a new beachhead for the Lord's work in Madurai, in southern India, lost six of their number to diseases within a decade, only to be struck again, this time by a "fearful" cholera epidemic, when they thought the worst was over. The survivors, casting about for an escape, first considered buying a ship to sail away from infested India. On second thought, they took the advice of the British and joined the new trend. They, too, built a hill station.

Among Europeans in the colonies, culture shock was also certainly felt, if not identified or understood, by insensitive, blustering bureaucrats. Breakdowns sometimes followed long periods of stress punctuated by useless explosions of frustration. And all of it in the blistering, suffocating heat. "It rains hot water here," the nineteenth-century traveler Florence Caddy, who was good at one-liners, noted in Singapore. These were obviously not salubrious climes for the hot-tempered or inflexibly self-righteous. People almost literally burned out. Rudyard Kipling's oft-quoted bit of doggerel, injected into the odd little story he wrote with Walcott Balestier called "The Naulahka," struck a chord in the memories of many, to judge from the popularity it enjoyed in England:

> *Now it is not good for the Christian's health to hustle the Aryan brown,*
> *For the Christian riles, and the Aryan smiles, and he weareth the Christian down;*
> *At the end of the fight is a tombstone white, with the name of the late deceased,*
> *And the epitaph drear: "A fool lies here who tried to hustle the East."*

A flight to the hills gave many a nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century European beaten down by the debilitating tropics the strength to go back into the ring for another bout of administering, ministering, or running a

colonial household. Although these men and women are long gone, their hill stations are being rediscovered by Asians, Europeans, and travelers from other continents and regions. Remote and rustic, hill stations are novelties to postcolonial Asians born and raised in increasingly affluent but traffic-choked cities. Furthermore, a century after Europeans first sought refuge in the highlands of Asia, the worst epidemic diseases may be under control, if not entirely gone, but new scourges have created new needs. Asian cities are among the world's most polluted because emission standards, where they exist, are often not enforced and unregulated industries, with the help of corrupt politicians, have made the air dangerous to breathe in New Delhi, Bangkok, and Manila, among other places. Great rivers have died, turned into stinking sewers. Coastal waters and shore resorts do not escape the poisonous by-products of rapid industrial growth and the press of population explosions.

Traveling around Asia now, one sees advertisements for hill stations pitched to local tourists in terms similar to those that publicized them first among colonial elites. Governments still use hill stations as rest and recreation areas for officials; large companies maintain substantial homes for executives and family resorts with lodges or cottages for employees. For foreigners who have done the palaces, temples, and beaches, hill stations are a quirky alternative, with eccentric inns nestling a lot closer to the land and the people than walled-off international tourists resorts with mass-produced hotels.

The universal resurgence of interest in hill stations is evident in the steady stream of old European books about this genre and its historical period now being reprinted in toto or extracted in anthologies. There is a rich deposit to mine. Colonials, whether government servants or private citizens, were often meticulous cataloguers and diarists. The joy and astonishment of discovery, tempered with the extreme hardship of the effort, leap from the writings of early travelers, both men and women, who were seeing wonderful things that none of their compatriots—or for that matter, many local people—had seen before. When Etienne Tardif, a young military doctor in Vietnam at the end of the nineteenth century, was searching for the right spot to build a French sanitarium, he encountered hill-tribe people in the highlands of Annam who were as strange to the Vietnamese in his party as they were to him. So was the sudden change in climate, since the towns of both the French and the Vietnamese tended to hug the torrid coast of the South China Sea and a few river valleys and deltas. "How well one sleeps when it is cold!" Tardif wrote of his

first night in the hills, as it occurred to him that this was the first refreshing rest he had enjoyed in four months. "A light mist blurs the landscape. Am I in the colonies or in France, wrapped in the clouds of the Rhone?"

Whether or not these European intruders had the right to be wandering around Asia building towns and cities—apparently intending to stay forever, as they did in the Americas—is another matter. A crop of recent historians has sought to reduce their accomplishments to mere acts of cultural suppression. But to take a longer view of history than is now apparently fashionable, European explorers and settlers were certainly not the first people to migrate into Asia and change it. Arab traders in dhows and Chinese merchants in junks had transformed coastal populations in numerous places before the Europeans came. Before them, larger ethnic migrations had taken place almost everywhere, often pushing indigenous peoples into the hills and hinterlands or boxing them in there on subsistence land. Empires—Hellenistic, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist—were on the move, conquering and converting, from the Indus Valley to the islands of what is now the Indonesian archipelago. Europeans were neither the first nor the only intruders to cajole, trick, or intimidate native populations while looting the land, which the great Western mercantile companies certainly did at some times and in some places. Now and then Europeans also fought one another, blowing up rivals' fortifications and sinking their ships, to the astonishment and bewilderment of the local audience.

Yet individual adventurers—among them Victorian tourists who chose, courageously or recklessly, to venture beyond the European Grand Tour, along with scholars, writers, and the first Western administrators assigned to Asian posts by the trading companies—made tremendous contributions to the world's understanding of various Asian cultures. Of necessity, the pioneers learned languages, often without dictionaries or formal teachers. They ate and drank with native rulers and sometimes ordinary villagers, trading lore and absorbing local customs. Even the drunken misfit or the brawler who broke the cultural china everywhere he went often had an encyclopedic knowledge and a shrewd understanding of the neighborhood. Short stories and novels about colonial life draw vividly on such characters.

The first Europeans slogged through suffocating rain forests thick with ravenous leeches and mosquitoes and slashed their way into jungles alive with tigers and other predators. Alone and on foot, they approached indigenous settlements, not knowing if they would be welcomed, ignored, or summarily hacked to death; all had proved possible. They took measurements of everything: the longitude and latitude, the height of mountains, the depth of rivers, the temperature by day and night. They collected specimens and samples that enriched the museums and research organizations of Europe. They analyzed the composition of the soil and ground water. They observed and noted the existing wild and cultivated fruits, grains, or vegetables and calculated the potential for new species. They catalogued insects, animals, and trees. Those with the requisite talents made drawings and watercolors of the birds, the flowers, the untouched landscapes that unfolded before them. Some tried their hands at rudimentary photography when that became possible. All across colonized South Asia and Southeast Asia, European experts and their local colleagues established scientific, medical, archaeological, geographical, cartographic, and artistic institutions, museums, and libraries that sustain modern scholarship to this day.

Hill stations began to appear, albeit at different times in different places, when the era of initial exploration and conquest was waning, wives and families were arriving in substantial numbers, and life had become a bit more routine. By then, colonial societies could take stock of their longer-term needs and, regrettably, look for ways to build walls around themselves to shut out native populations. Though the age of European mercantile empire building and colonialism began with the turn of the sixteenth century, hill stations were largely a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Most were established between 1820 and about 1885, though the French came late with Dalat, in Vietnam, and the Americans with Baguio, in the Philippines, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The British themselves created a second generation of hill stations in peninsular Malaya even later, after World War I. All had the example of British India's older hill stations to emulate—or not.

The age of the hill station mirrored the period when seaside resorts, spas, and great mountains lodges were built in Europe and the United States. In some cases, the style and atmosphere of these European or American mountain retreats were consciously copied in the colonies. A planner of Baguio, in the Philippines, was influenced by the Adirondacks, for example. But in colonial Asia, the relatively high altitude hill station, usually at 5,000 to 8,000 feet above sea level, always had to be more than just a resort. It had to be a medical center of sorts to justify an officer's taking recuperative leave, however flimsy the excuse or ineffectual the cure. The site had to be beyond the reach of mosquitoes, though it was not known until the end of the nineteenth century that the malaria para-

site was carried by these insects. The hill station was also a genteel fantasyland, a retreat from reality where the homesick colonial could be cosseted by the atmosphere of a European hometown, down to its familiar architecture and its cozy institutions: the club, the library, the village church. The hill station at its homiest is a phenomenon most often associated with the British in India, but the French, the Americans, and to some extent the Dutch also endowed them with similar properties.

The hill station was not confined to Asia. In Africa, the British found highlands that served similar needs in Kenya, Uganda, and elsewhere. But it was in Asia, in countries so far from home and so radically different in culture, where strong old civilizations stood their ground against the incursions of Westerners, that the hill stations thrived. Their place in history was strengthened when the British in India began the practice of moving the entire apparatus of regional and national government to the hills during the hottest, beastliest months of the year, turning hill towns into summer capitals. The greatest of these part-time capitals was Simla, in the Himalayan foothills of North India, where the viceroy's lodge rivaled a maharajah's palace. But there were others. British officers on the Northwest Frontier had a hot-weather headquarters at Murree. Mahabaleshwar served the sahibs and memsahibs based in the East India Company's Bombay region, and Ootacamund was the summer capital of the Madras presidency, Britain's first foothold on the Subcontinent. The British governor of Burma went to Maymyo for part of the year, and in the Vietnamese town of Dalat, the French planned to create a regional capital for an Indo-Chinese federation of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The American ambassador to the Philippines and the Philippine president continue to have formal residences at their disposal in Baguio, and the president of Indonesia has a palace at Bogor.

Although the most important hill stations served as seasonal centers of government, administrative buildings were not always the defining or enduring landmarks. Hill stations often had and still have—in addition to their offices, hospitals, country homes, churches, clubs, and libraries—at least one grand hotel or rustic lodge, boarding schools, a brewery, a lake (usually created by damming a stream), a botanical garden, wildlife sanctuaries, a golf course, hiking trails, a race course or gymkhana ground for competitive games, and plenty of horses or ponies for mountain rides. A lot of hill stations have ghosts, "European" flowers, strawberries, and, alas, armies of uninvited monkeys. The monkeys are especially numerous in India, where Hanuman, the monkey god, is an important mythological figure

and an object of worship. Hanuman's descendants are marvelously adept at finding tourist attractions and picnic spots. I noticed a gang of them panhandling beside a speed bump on the road up to Ooty, where they knew they couldn't be missed when the tourist buses slowed to negotiate the bump. In Darjeeling, they hang out at the temples on Observatory Hill trying to look very hungry and forlorn. In Simla, half a dozen of them were entertaining themselves by removing and tossing around a traveler's laundry that had been hung outside a guest house window to dry.

Rehan Khan, who describes himself as a "lifer" at one of the most famous of boarding schools in the Indian hills, Woodstock, in Mussoorie, spent all his secondary-school years there in the 1980s and remembers a lush campus with a lot of "red-butted monkeys" among the prolific wildlife. "In my first year at school," he recalled, "I was walking down the path to the dormitories eating a sandwich when a group of monkeys started to chase me. Needless to say, they were after my sandwich. I remembered the oft-repeated chant of my peers: Do not ever run away from a monkey. If you happen to visit Mussoorie and a monkey chases you, muster up your best growl and run *toward* the animal. In my five years at Woodstock I always kept my food—and also perfected a pretty mean growl." A decade earlier, Gil Halstead, another student hiking in the hills, was pelted with pine cones tossed by silver langurs, who also enjoyed sitting on a cliff overlooking the Woodstock campus and taunting boys and girls as they walked to classes.

The presence and ultimately the proliferation of boarding schools in the hills stemmed from a distressing dilemma faced by many parents during the colonial era. Sending children back to the West for schooling split families for long periods. But keeping sons and daughters at home in the colonies reduced their educational opportunities and risked their health. Life in the Asian colonies could be hard on children. Their small graves are scattered everywhere, painful even to an uninvolved traveler, who cannot help but feel the parents' intolerable sorrow. In southern India, I happened upon a nineteenth-century stone decorated with watchful angels hovering over the grave of a little English girl "swept away by an unknown fever." In Vietnam, an overgrown French cemetery had, among other small tombs, one where six-year-old Alain Rouget was buried beside his thirteen-month-old sister, Odile. The two children had died within a year of each other, as late as the 1940s. In the Pakistani hill town of Murree, Jonathan Addleton, who was born there in 1957 of American Baptist missionary parents and educated at the Murree Christian School in the 1960s

and 1970s, was haunted by dead children. Addleton, now an American diplomat who has written a sensitive, thoughtful book about his Pakistani childhood, *Some Far and Distant Place*, remembers a brass plaque at Murree's Holy Trinity Church memorializing Hyacinth Swinhoe, who died in 1913, two weeks before her third birthday. On it, her family had engraved a verse:

I wonder, oh, I wonder where
The little faces go
That come and smile and stay awhile
Then pass like flakes of snow

Many children were sent back to England or another home country, sometimes as babies. But separation from their young sons and daughters was trying for parents, particularly mothers, as stories and diaries from the period reflect poignantly. "A Mother in India," a Victorian-era short story by Sara Jeanette Duncan, is one of the more painful to read. I found a copy of the story, part of a collection now out of print, in an old anthology tucked among the romantic novels in the library of the Kodaikanal Club. Duncan, who apparently knew India well, wrote of a baby dispatched to England soon after birth to be raised by an aunt, and of the mother's aching inability to relate to the little girl, still a toddler, when they met again on the family's next home leave. Brought to the crib of her sleeping daughter, the mother shrank back, mumbling something about not wanting to invade the child's privacy by picking her up and holding her.

Boarding schools in the hills were the solution for many parents, especially for families without the means or the connections to obtain a good education for their children in Europe or the United States, or the money to be able to arrange regular visits if sons and daughters were sent abroad. In the hill stations, parents could join their children for vacations, or make regular trips to see them during the school term. The best of the schools did not die with colonialism. The Murree Christian School, where Addleton recalls "living a Victorian childhood," was not even established until 1956, nearly a decade after Pakistani independence. During the colonial era, American Protestant missionaries in India had established two notable boarding schools, at Kodaikanal in the Palni Hills of the South and Mussoorie in the northern Himalayan foothills, which developed into internationally known and respected institutions that still draw students from around the world as well as from many parts of India. Roman Catholic orders also opened schools in the hills, as they had in the cities, giving the label of "convent school" such cachet in India that educational institutions all over the country adopted the description, though they may have had little or no connection with churches or religious orders. Secular private schools and colleges also appeared. Dehra Dun, at the gateway to the Himalayas, is the home of the Doon School, one of India's most exclusive private boarding schools. In Vietnam, the French built their rigorous and distinguished Lycée Yersin in the hill town of Dalat. Military academies were established in hill stations in the Philippines, Vietnam, and Burma. India's military academy is also at Dehra Dun, not far from Mussoorie, the hill station where the country's high-ranking civil servants study at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy, a national school for government administrators.

Social life was taken very seriously in colonial hill stations, especially in the "official" resorts of India. Newcomers left cards in all the appropriate places until communities grew too large and diverse. Dinners were formal affairs, and there were numerous full-dress balls and costume-party evenings. The best imported wines and spirits were hauled up from distant ports across the plains. From accounts of some of the menus of the time, it appears that the food and drink available to those privileged enclaves would no longer be procurable in most hill stations today, certainly not in much of the Indian subcontinent, despite more modern means of transportation and rising incomes. The sheer audacity of colonial society assuming that households could eat as if in Europe, with fine food on fine linens and an abundance of silver and crystal, is truly extraordinary. "Isn't it strange to dine in silk stockings in such a place, to drink a bottle of French wine and another of champagne every evening, to have delicious Mocha coffee and receive the Calcutta papers every morning?" a French naturalist, Victor Jacquemont, wrote of a visit as early as 1830. Others recalled smoked salmon from Scotland, pâtés from France, and Mediterranean sardines. Jacquemont eventually concluded that rich food and excessive drink were undermining the health of Europeans who thought they could carry on eating in India, in the steaming cities as well as the hills, the way they would at home. Some colonial doctors supported that contention; they were usually ignored.

Between social events at clubs and summer residences, there were horse races and horse shows—the ability to ride well was a necessity in most places where roads were few or nonexistent—as well as team games at the gymkhana clubs and amateur theatricals for amusement. Some reasonably good libraries served to expand the mind, titillate the imagination, or just

pass time. Shelves of popular novels and romances were escape hatches when life got boring. One viceroy's wife was thankful there was a Shakespeare collection at her disposal to recharge her mind now and then during a season of incessant entertaining. There were also assignations to enliven long afternoons and dark mountain nights.

The hills, where all cares and cautions seemed to be left behind, became famous for dalliances of every kind. Simla, the summer headquarters of the British Raj in India, had perhaps the worst reputation, though Ruskin Bond thought Mussoorie gave it competition. Rudyard Kipling suggested a cause for this propensity for mischief in "Bitters Neat," a story in *Plain Tales from the Hills:* "In India, where life goes quicker than at Home, things are more obviously tangled and therefore more pitiful to look at," he wrote. A mid-nineteenth-century cartoon from the "Delhi Sketch Book" in the Indian version of *Punch* warned horseback riders pictorially to slow down at Jakhu Hill, a well-known assignation point, lest they intrude too suddenly on a stolen kiss in passionate progress around the next bend. Adultery apart, hill stations were considered fine hunting grounds for lonely bachelors from the cantonments or collectors' bungalows, who sometimes in their rush to marry fell in love instantly and unwisely, as well as for single women shipped out from England under pressure by families to find a good match. In colonial parlance, these women were the "fishing fleet." If they went back unsuccessful, they were unkindly labeled "returned empties."

Decolonization began in the 1940s in Asia, earlier than in Africa. By the middle of the twentieth century, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, the Philippines, and Indonesia had become independent, with Vietnam and Malaya soon to follow. By then, the hill stations had lost much of their practical importance. Antimalarial drugs, insecticides, and antibiotics dealt with some of the worst diseases and their carriers; "air-cooled" and eventually air-conditioned offices and homes made life more tolerable at lower altitudes. Trips home to Europe during long breaks had for decades been easier and more affordable. Although many local people traveled or moved to hill stations for work or pleasure and often formed a significant majority of the population, the towns remained socially very much redolent of colonialism to the end, and thus a little irrelevant to the majority of local populations. Of course in some hill towns, the Japanese army occupation during World War II had cracked or shattered, if only temporarily, what was left of the effectively segregated colonial ambiance. The apparent ease with which the Japanese overran large areas of Asia, incidentally, suggested to many Asians that European invincibility had limits, a tremendous psychological catalyst to burgeoning independence movements.

But Japan's treatment of conquered populations during the occupation also demonstrated, paradoxically, that fellow Asians could be as brutal, if not much more brutal, than European colonizers. In a number of hill stations, the elderly relate that as children they were put to work at hard labor by the Japanese. In Indonesia, indignation at Japanese wartime atrocities was passed on to younger generations, contributing to widespread unease over Japan's economic power and its new reach over regions that Tokyo once called its "co-prosperity sphere." The brutality of Asian against Asian is part of history in other settings, too. Malays told the British in the nineteenth century about Siamese troops who ripped open the bellies of pregnant women to settle bets on the gender of unborn babies. Everywhere there are variants of stories about captive people tied down over fast-growing shoots of one or another jungle plant, usually bamboo or rattan, that pierce the body, causing insufferable pain.

Though the Westerners came rushing back after the defeat of Japan in 1945—except for the British in India proper, who never left, since the country escaped invasion—most hill stations had barely resumed functioning before the age of European empires was over. Hill stations went into a decline, and some observers at the time thought that they would never recover. For the people of the newly independent nations that inherited these orphaned towns, there were rankling memories of humiliating discrimination suffered at the hands of colonial masters, who in those artificially created settlements could make all the rules and often used their power to draw racial boundaries around their retreats. Freed of colonial domination, countries like India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Burma, the Philippines, Indonesia, and, later, Vietnam and Malaya (now Malaysia and Singapore) were in any case eager to get on with building new economies, political systems, and institutions. There were other preoccupations. Armed leftists in several countries, boosted in some cases by the Japanese during the war, carried on fighting after independence to "complete the revolution" by co-opting and harnessing anticolonial fervor to the service of Communist movements. The hills became both hideouts and battlegrounds. In India, there was horrific bloodshed over the division of the old British Raj into predominantly Muslim and Hindu countries. In Burma the hero of independence, General Aung San—the father of Aung San Suu Kyi—was assassinated, along with his cabinet. In India, Mohandas Gandhi, the Mahatma, met the same fate.

The hill stations may have languished somewhat in the postcolonial years, but they were never completely forgotten. By the 1960s, local elites had taken over the exclusive clubs, the solidly built bungalows, and the tea and coffee plantations. Numerous maharajas and sultans never gave up their retreats in the hills; middle-class professional families had also bought property during colonial times and were well established. In a number of places, Europeans who felt more at home in Asia than in the countries of their birth—along with a substantial group of men and women born in Asia of Western parents or mixed marriages—retired or stayed on around hill stations to work, learning to live with new masters and often dwindling resources. Anglo-Indians—in the original meaning of the phrase, Britons who were born or had settled in India—were frequently more Indian than they realized, although they spoke of England as "home." They capitalized it: Home. In her book, *Ooty Preserved: A Victorian Hill Station*, Molly Panter-Downes told the story of a woman in her eighties who, when finally forced to return to Britain because she could no longer manage alone, packed a stone mortar and pestle so that she would always have freshly ground chilies and spices for her curry.

Recently, it has become apparent that the old hill stations of Asia are not just going to survive, but are indeed reviving so quickly that they may be victims of their own successes. In the last decade or two of the twentieth century, when the hill stations began to experience a significant rebirth, in fact a boom, it dawned on those who love them that these little towns perched on their cliffsides and mountain meadows were going to be altered forever unless local planners curtailed or zoned development. Rising affluence and greater mobility all over Asia have made the hill stations accessible to millions, surely a democratic trend to be applauded. But the majority of those in the crowds now arriving almost year-round no longer are satisfied with bracing walks in the woods or a snooze in the garden under the fragrant evergreens. They want theme parks, fast food, discos, karaoke, casinos, lavish buffet tables and well-stocked bars, video players in every hotel room, and high-decibel popular bands in the gazebo, where the string quartet once played. "Indians love noise," said Nilam Macdonald, the Bombay-born wife and innkeeper partner of Tim Macdonald, who inherited the quietly elegant Himalayan Hotel in Kalimpong. Southeast Asians love golf more than forests.

In many hill towns, trash piles up, choking drains and fouling footpaths no longer pleasant to walk along. Bookstores have all but vanished, except in India and Sri Lanka—significantly, both established democracies—and library collections have dwindled. Many classic old hotels are struggling, managers say, as newer ones with extravagant names and flashy images carve out places for themselves on already denuded hillsides, gashing the landscape, transforming the skyline with concrete blocks, and smudging the black night sky with neon. Condominiums and time-share holiday flats have also begun to migrate toward the hills. How the people who inherited the fragile hill resorts cope with the challenges they now face will determine which towns will survive the longest. Environmentally, all hill stations are probably as endangered as the tigers that once stalked the encircling forests. The woods themselves are disappearing, with forest cover dropping by 20 to 50 percent or more in only a few decades in most countries.

It is perhaps not surprising that a number of leading environmentalists in Asia have their bases in the hills and see the fate of hill towns as part of the larger problem of conserving valuable ecological systems. Saving forested watersheds that nurture the plains below is a high priority for activists across Asia, whose efforts all too often earn the scorn of politicians. "The Government believes that we should enjoy what nature provides," Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia's prime minister, said, as he defended his decision to resurrect plans for a new federal highway that would slice through some of the most beautiful hill country in Southeast Asia in order to link three Malaysian hill towns now reached by separate roads from the lowlands. Repudiating environmentalists' charges that it was needlessly destructive to crack open whole hillsides and bulldoze away thousands of acres of rain forest for the greater convenience of motorists, the prime minister retorted that activists didn't seem to mind clearing land to build their own homes. "In order to preserve the forests, are we supposed to live in trees?" he asked rhetorically, as he cut the ribbon on a new tramway to another resort complex. Southeast Asians are infatuated with funicular railways and cable cars. In Vietnam, I read about government plans to build cable connections to the peaceful hilltop Linh Phong Pagoda and other attractions scattered around the pine forests of Dalat. Terminals would be buttressed with restaurants, shopping arcades, electronic games centers, and karaoke bars to draw and satiate the crowds.

All over Asia, this kind of development has already produced significant ecological and climatological effects, beginning with rising temperatures and the disappearance of plant and animal species. A resident of the southern Indian hill station of Kodaikanal, the environmentalist M. S. Viraraghavan, explained that deforestation in the highlands significantly raises the temperature of the earth itself and makes the reintroduction of

important old species, accustomed to lower soil temperatures, much harder. Many of these older species were useful regulators of water, retaining moisture and releasing it slowly to flow to the plains, helping farmers many miles away. Upland meadows and grasslands also played a part in this process. Without these natural regulators, rainwater cascades down the mountainsides, taking the shallow topsoil with it and causing choked waterways and floods thousands of feet below.

The men and women who created hill stations almost two centuries ago were not guiltless of environmental destruction. By 1904 in Simla, the wildflowers that had covered the surrounding hills and meadows in the 1830s were all gone, Edward J. Buck wrote in *Simla Past and Present,* the standard reference work on the town for nearly a century until the publication of Pamela Kanwar's *Imperial Simla* in 1990, which added to accounts of early ecological devastation. Buck thought most of the flowers had been sacrificed to dining room tables. Women noted in their diaries that they sent servants into the meadows to pull up whole plants by the roots. Around other hill stations, tea plantations razed thousands of rolling acres of jungle or consumed all available pasture land. Roads (followed by railroads) began cutting into virgin hillsides more than 150 years ago, facilitating erosion and landslides—and, of course, opening the hills to crowds. Subsequent deforestation has only made the instability of the land more pronounced. Some new trees introduced for landscaping or mercantile gain, with eucalyptus and wattle the most common, proved to be destructive to the soil and to other species.

But there is a more positive side to the environmental record of colonialism. The heyday of hill stations coincided with a great age of gardening and of horticulture and agricultural experimentation, symbolized and often inspired by the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, in London, which were established in 1759 and opened to the public about a century later. From Kew, botanists armed with seeds and seedlings roamed the world, changing whole colonial economies. They took South American rubber trees to Southeast Asia by way of Ceylon, and cinchona, the source of quinine, to a number of countries, planting it in the new botanical gardens often created with the help of colleagues on loan from the Royal Botanical Gardens. In the hill stations, a great deal of effort went into the planting of trees, grass, and flowers around private homes. Across Asia, hill stations continue to support nursery industries and hold wonderful flower shows. The cultivation of fresh vegetables was encouraged, and orchards with both tropical and temperate fruits appeared on many slopes. Cows

were herded up to high-altitude pastures, and dairies opened, adding to the general sense of wholesomeness by providing safe fresh milk (when not watered down by rogues) and cheeses.

For the Western sojourner in Asia, the hill stations still offer some keys to understanding a long-gone, geographically distant past. And although they were creations of the ancestors of Westerners, a point of interest in itself for many, hill stations are also still-living remnants of an earlier age for Asians themselves. They are returning to these towns to become reacquainted with a part of their own history, to learn why the misty mountains had such attraction. From the beginning, it must not be forgotten, Asians—Indians, Ceylonese, Burmese, Malays, and others—were part of life despite the social prohibitions. They sometimes went to schools and churches and often traded with the foreigners or created lucrative service industries, renting ponies or sedan chairs from the earliest days and supplying provisions. Later, local people were recruited by hotels, restaurants, and shops. Some eventually built their own substantial homes, temples, and businesses. India's Oberoi hotel chain got its start in Simla, when Mohan Singh Oberoi sold some of his wife's jewelry to buy Clarkes on the Mall, where he had been a manager.

With the passing of years, the hill stations become more a part of Asian than of Western history and are increasingly recognized as such. "In British times," an Indian will say by way of preface to a historical account, in much the same matter-of-fact way an American would talk about the days before the Revolution. "When the French were here . . . ," echoes a Vietnamese, with the emphasis on "here"—that is, in *our* place. In more than one hill station, Europeans are in fact back on the scene, advising local governments on tourism and sometimes restoring old hotels and villas for the leisure use of international corporations. Tourists from the old colonial powers come back to learn their own history, too: Witness the Dutch package tours to Indonesia.

Although natural settings may be under threat, there is still almost always enough wild terrain left in the hills, or along the way to them, to give the visitor at least a taste of the glorious Asian landscapes the first adventurers encountered. This was the environment in which earlier generations of Asians lived before the rush to the urban centers began in the latter part of the twentieth century. In very recent times, Asian cities, even more than Western ones, have simply bulldozed nature out of the way, making wild places more and more distant. Experienced tourists learn that beach resorts may seem largely interchangeable and Asian cities all

begin to look alike. But hill stations, with their individual histories and vistas of arresting landscapes and other natural wonders, cannot be mass-produced or even reproduced anywhere but where they are.

As hill stations change, they also reveal something of the countries that inherited them and demonstrate how different these nations are from one another. Murree, now in Pakistan, could never be mistaken at the end of the twentieth century for the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, though both countries were once British colonies and both now call themselves Islamic. The old tea planters' Hill Club in Sri Lanka's Nuwara Eliya has an entirely different atmosphere than similar establishments in northern India. The metamorphoses of the hill stations are yet another reminder that there is no such thing as a monolithic "Asia," an invention of the Occidental mind, into which everything from the Levantine through the Indus civilizations to the courts of Imperial China and Japan was filed.

I first encountered hill stations years ago while teaching at an Indian university in Chandigarh, not too far from where the Sivalak Hills, the first step to the Himalayas, descend to meet the Punjabi plain. Chandigarh is an entirely planned city, the creation of Le Corbusier and a team of architects called in by India after independence to build the Punjab a city to compensate for the loss of its historical capital, Lahore, to Pakistan. One evening, walking near the city's artificial lake, I noticed under the vast Punjabi sky a cluster of twinkling lights high above the horizon. It was Kasauli, at more than 6,000 feet the first of a series of hill stations leading higher and higher into the mountains. Not long after that introduction, I made my first trip to the hills, to Simla, and was astounded at what had been created there despite the formidable natural obstacles. In subsequent years, as a correspondent in Asia, I stumbled from time to time into other hill stations, often because there was trouble of one kind or another: guerrilla warfare, rebellion at a military academy, or an environmental confrontation over a proposed dam or other development project.

Eventually the hill station as an idea, a point of historical reference, and a kind of social litmus test in fast-changing Asian nations began to take hold of my imagination. In early 1997, I set off on a journey of several months: to see Asia anew just through its great hill stations, moving from mountain to mountain from Pakistan, across India, to Sri Lanka, Burma, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. A year earlier I had made a trip to the highlands of Indonesian Sumatra, and it was there, at Bukittinggi, in the land of the Minangkabau people, that the idea of this kind of journey came together. In the unlikely Sumatran interior, comfortable new

hotels were rising to serve new generations of Southeast Asians with the time and money to take one vacation there and perhaps the next in the Malaysian highlands, Burma, India, or Vietnam. Hill stations were back on the tourist map everywhere.

I knew that it would never be possible to see them all in a matter of months—there are literally dozens of hill towns in India alone; the geographer Nora Mitchell plotted ninety-six of them. What could be accomplished was a tour of the classic Asian hill stations, including at least one built by each of the colonial powers. Not all the European imperialists established such towns. The Portuguese appear to have left no hill stations, and the Spanish never quite got around to building true sanitarium resorts in their 375-odd years in the Philippines, though they had taken a look at Baguio before the Americans came. The Dutch barely qualified. Although Bogor was their invention, it was greatly enhanced by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles during the short period when the British ruled Java. In choosing which hill stations to visit, I gravitated first to those I had seen and might have enough familiarity with to discern the changes taking place. I limited the choice to the former colonies of South Asia and Southeast Asia, regions where I had lived for the better part of a decade. Thailand, Nepal, and China were eliminated because they were never formally colonized, though Europeans did have varying degrees of influence. In China, for example, American missionaries built a hill station near Moganshan, about 150 miles from Shanghai, which became a popular resort for Europeans.

The journey to any hill station is a major part of the experience. With very few exceptions, hill stations do not have airports. Getting to them involves heading away from today's manic Asian cities and rambling through farmland and back-country villages or towns, past rice fields and orchards, and under canopies of tamarind and banyan trees, to the narrow, winding colonial-era roads that snake upward thousands of feet into the mountains. Most hill stations are reachable only by car or bus, though a few have narrow-gauge rail lines, also built in the age of empire. Getting to the destination can foster a new respect for the grit and perseverance of colonial planners and their impressive engineering achievements. With explosives but no large earth-moving equipment, the builders of mountain roads depended on local labor—not always voluntary—to dig and level the roadbed. They called the workers "coolies," derived from *kuli*, an Indian word whose origins and meaning are still disputed between colonizers and the colonized.

The gang-labor system continues in India and Burma, where poor men, women, and children swarm construction sites, carrying bricks, earth, and concrete in shallow pans on their heads to build overpasses and air-conditioned office towers. Just out of Bagdogra on my way to Darjeeling, I saw a common sight made especially ironic by its historical context. Dozens of ragged, dust-covered people sat among piles of large rocks on the highway shoulders. They were breaking stones slowly by hand, with hammers or by banging one rock against another, preparing to lay the foundation needed to widen a colonial-era road to the hills. The scene might have been the same 150 years earlier.

In renewing my acquaintance with the great hill stations of Asia, I traveled around the world from New York through Europe to the mountainous frontiers of the Indian subcontinent in Pakistan. Then I progressed eastward through India, Sri Lanka, and Burma to the lusher, sweeter lands of Southeast Asia, where Americans experienced their most intimate relations with the Asian world, for better or worse, in the Philippines and Vietnam. As the plane bringing me home across the Pacific slid into Los Angeles at dusk, there was a dusting of snow on the Sierra Nevadas, as there had been on Pakistan's Margala Hills, my first stop. I saw houses built along the razorback ridges of the hills behind Los Angeles, cool retreats for a new elite escaping the ills of lower elevations. With their lights twinkling in the dusk, they seemed not very different as night fell from those colonial outposts on their Asian heights.

2

The Hills of Pakistan

Murree and the Galis

the atmosphere of this and other hill stations. The transformation was remarkable. Even when the electric power came back to stay in snowy Murree late one afternoon, only a few moments before the end of twilight, the glory that enveloped us was worth much more than the price of two bitter, cold-water days. I put away my books and blankets and sat by the window. The lights of the valley below again cast pools of gold on the snow. On the hill leading to the ridge along which Murree is centered, dozens of houses—odd-shaped boxes with caps of snow on their roofs of tin or galvanized iron—were piled atop one another in artistic relief, yellow lightbulbs visible through their windows.

The next morning life restarted. Birds I had not seen for days, mynahs and magpies, showed up to scramble for food, joining the aggressive crows. A huge rumbling machine with a rotating brush where a road-grader might be in summer chewed its way up the hill, lights flashing. More effective than a plow, it crunched into its maw both loose and packed snow, then shot the stuff out through a long chute that cleared the shoulder of the narrow road. Along the Mall, snow was piled high in front of shops and restaurants. But in most places, the roads were surprisingly clear and already clogged with traffic and trash. One more day, and I made my escape, in a minuscule yellow taxi that slipped and slid very little in the hands of a skillful driver.

Within half a hour, we had cleared the snow line and descended into fog. The road was still slippery, and we passed a family car that had skidded into a deep culvert along one side. The driver flagged us down, and the next car, and another coming in the opposite direction. No car failed to stop, and no motorist hesitated before joining the enlarging band of men in their rough *shalwar-kamizes* and wool Pathan caps who were trying with their bare hands to lift the car out of the ditch and back on the road, while an unbelievable number of women and children who were the little auto's passengers watched. After little more than a quarter of an hour, the pick-up rescue crew succeeded in righting the car. The passengers wedged themselves back in. We all drove away with friendly waves. A few miles later the air got warmer, grass grew, flowers bloomed, and contemporary Pakistan took over.

Crosette. The great Hill Nations of Asia.

3

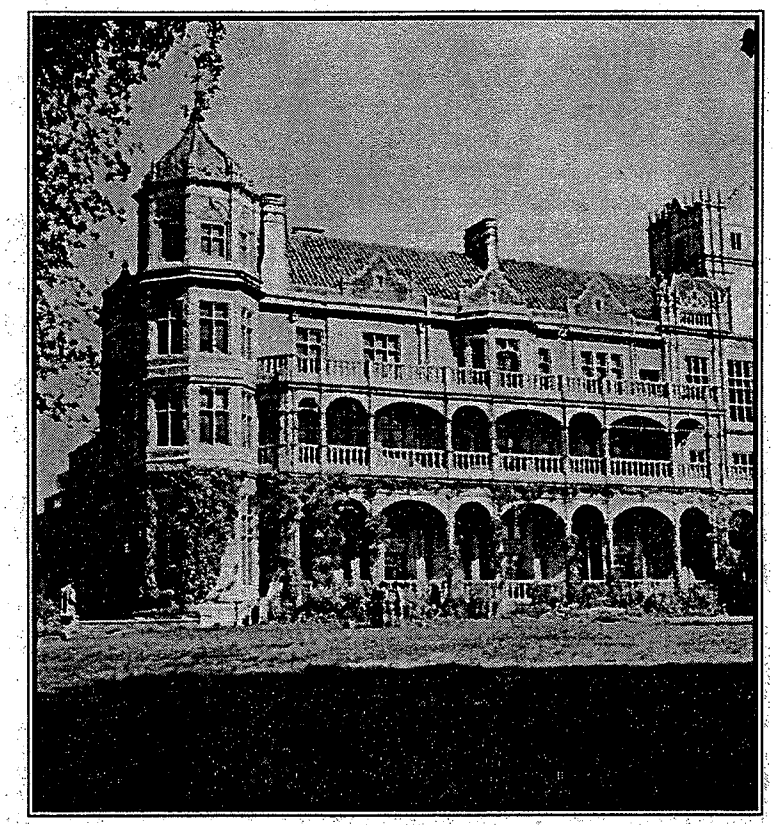
AN INDIAN SEXTET

Simla

Mussoorie

Darjeeling and Kalimpong

Kodaikanal and Ootacamund



The Viceregal Lodge in Simla

Simla

No hill station in Asia has mesmerized more historians, politicians, journalists, and tourists of all kinds than Simla, a town studied to death not only for its astonishing creation but also for its symbolism. There is no mystery about this. For long periods of the year and for more than a century Simla was, unofficially and then officially, the summer capital of British India, and no place more succinctly displayed, not just in that season, the hard core of the British Raj, with all its political trappings and social and racial distinctions. For decades—right up to World War II—it was also the year-round headquarters of the British Indian army and, after 1876, the part-time capital of Punjab, arguably the most important Indian province. The absurdity of all this justifies the attention Simla gets. Here was a hill town at 7,000 feet and higher, devilishly hard to reach and 1,200 miles from the winter capital at Calcutta. Getting there and back every year, with the government of India largely loaded on wagons, was a logistical operation larger than many a military campaign. Below the top officials, nearly everyone ultimately felt the outrageous cost of this pilgrimage in one way or another, most harshly the thousands of Indian villagers recruited or dragooned as porters to carry the empire to and fro for little or no pay.

"I doubt if any government has ever existed so cut off from the governed as the Government of India nestling among the Himalayas in Simla," noted Malcolm Muggeridge, the British journalist doing a stint on the *Statesman* of Calcutta in the 1930s. In the second volume of his autobiography, *Chronicles of Wasted Time,* Muggeridge called the viceregal court "a honey-pot of authority" around which everyone and everything buzzed. Simla, the make-it-or-break-it town to a lot of colonial careers, seemed to Muggeridge to be more or less indifferent or blind to the vast nation of India below.

Victor Jacquemont, a French naturalist on an expedition in India a century earlier for the Museum of Natural History in Paris, watched as the personal and official baggage of Lord Bentinck, the governor-general of India (before there were viceroys), was loaded for the trip to Simla in late February of 1831. Jacquemont claimed to have counted roughly 300 elephants, 1,300 camels, and 8 oxcarts in the caravan, which was accompanied by two regiments of troops, one cavalry and the other infantry. Emily Eden, the sister of another governor-general, Lord Auckland, described in letters to their sister how equally cumbersome, lengthy, and disruptive the preparations for the return to the plains in autumn had become by the

late 1830s. For many, including families with babies and small children, the trip to Simla in March or April and back again to Calcutta in October or November involved weeks of tramping or bumping away in a rough cart by day and camping at night, hoping to avoid disease, wild animals, and accidents along the route. Unwilling Bengali servants were dragged along from the Hooghly to the hills, shivering and protesting at the prospect of cold weather on the outward journey and stumbling back in weakened health on the return.

Not relishing another such expedition herself—and she went in style, to say the least—Emily Eden (who later became a novelist in England) enjoyed the irony of a punishing trek made in the name of well-being. She remarked sarcastically that "those camp preparations, I am happy to say, made everybody ill." But her letters, collected in the book *Up the Country*, hinted more than once that at least the outward journey might have been worth the trouble and that Simla, not Calcutta, was really considered home. Because she followed her governor-general brother on his rounds across India the rest of the year, Simla was stability. In one year she reckoned that she and Lord Auckland had spent five months on the road, sleeping in tents and being jostled along on all forms of pre-industrial-age transportation. Other British families of sufficient wealth and position bought land and built homes in Simla, which most Indians now spell and pronounce "Shimla." A substantial number of women and their children stayed in the hills all year, as they did in Murree. Most did not live in luxury, at least not at the start. Before galvanized iron and tin roofing was used widely, giving the hill towns vaguely similar skylines, there were leaky roofs of shingles or sod that sometimes collapsed under monsoon rains. Fleas and rats infested households. Pets got eaten by wild animals. A walk in any direction was a serious trek up and down steep inclines, and travelers on horseback were occasionally pitched into ravines or crushed by landslides.

Nonetheless, Simla soon created a surprisingly durable fantasy image for itself. It still lives on the romantic notion that it is somehow foreign: a tidy little corner of India that will be forever England. A 1996 *Guide to the Tourist Places of India with Hotels and Trains at a Glance,* published in New Delhi, talks of Simla as a moody foreign town whose atmosphere changes with the seasons. "The Mall is lined with stately English-looking houses bearing strangely displaced English names," it tells us. "Simla's English flavor is continued by buildings like Christ Church, which dates from 1857." But then the guide goes on to list the top sites to visit, and Europe fades. A few natural wonders, a Tibetan monastery, and more Hindu temples than British landmarks are recommended. Today's visitor can walk the Mall and the Ridge in vain looking for something other than derelict architectural details that recall the days of tea shops and the Gaiety Theatre, the hub of colonial culture before the cinema was born.

I have an enduring memory of Simla that will probably outlast most others. My husband and I were getting ready for dinner at the Oberoi Clarkes Hotel, a classic colonial throwback conveniently placed at one end of the Mall. There was plenty to do. After washing, we filled the bathtub as insurance against a break in the water supply, which did happen overnight. We tried to coax the fire into giving a little more heat to dress by. One searches old British hotels and lodges in India vainly for those huge hearths that warm English country inns; only the Windamere in Darjeeling seems to have mastered fireplace heating, and they do it with coal. But then British houses are more often noted for being damp, cold, and drafty, and India inherited the knack. At Clarkes, I telephoned for more wood, acutely aware (but with diminishing guilt) that deforestation was already a very serious problem. Then the electricity failed.

At just about the same time there came a knock on the door. Thinking the firewood had arrived, I flung the door open to confront in the dim light of the corridor the shrouded form and weather-beaten face of an old Tibetan monk. He was startled and stood motionless, wrapped in worn shawls and carrying a bundle and a prayer wheel. We stared at each other for a long moment without saying a word. Then, as if an apparition, he vanished into the dark. I never saw him again. At dinner in the spartan dining room, however, there were other Tibetans and exuberant men of Himachal in their distinctive caps, engrossed in some kind of official function. The few Indian tourists from the cities of the plains on that winter weekend were just about as alien as we. Simla was a Himalayan town populated by the people whose mountains the aliens had once invaded and briefly inhabited.

Colonial hill station life and travel in India probably contributed more contraptions to the world's collection of man-powered forms of transportation than any civilization since ancient times, as diaries and letters like Emily Eden's demonstrate. Only someone familiar with the annual trek to the hills before there were carriage roads or railways would have any idea what she meant when she wrote to her sister that "F. and I got into our *jonpauns*, which might just as well be called *tonjauns*, they are the same sort of conveyances, only they swing about more, and look like coffins." Nigel Hankin, in his absorbing and entertaining book, *Hanklyn-*

Janklin, tried in 1992 to catalogue the chairs and litters in which "men with power contrived to be carried by men without." But he cautions that names could change or designs vary from place to place, depending on local needs and ingenuities.

The *tonjaun,* or *tonjon,* to which Emily Eden referred, was an open sedan chair largely reserved for town and city use. The *jonpaun*—also spelled *jampan, jhampan,* or *jompon*—was at first a portable chair slung on poles, Hankin said. Some, however, were really enclosed boxes that contemporaries, like Emily Eden, described as upright coffins. Hankin asserted that the *jampan* evolved into the *jhampani* in Simla, Mussoorie, and Matheran in the hills above Bombay. The wheeled *jhampani* was powered by four men—two pulling, two pushing—making it a kind of mountain rickshaw. Memoirs from colonial Simla usually call this vehicle a rickshaw and the men who pushed and pulled it *jampanis*. The man-powered rickshaws served as family cars until modern times in part because no other vehicles, except for the viceroy's and occasionally those of other high-ranking people, were allowed on Simla's upper roads. Ladies liked to outfit *jampanis* in distinctive household livery. The brilliant, volatile Indian artist Amrita Sher-Gil, who lived in Simla in the 1930s with her Sikh father and Hungarian mother, had a bright yellow rickshaw, with *jampanis* dressed in uniforms to match. As wheeled vehicles went, the tonga was a better bet, when it could be maneuvered into the terrain in question. This horse-drawn cart with two wheels and a passenger seat facing backwards is still a common form of local transportation in Pakistan, where Begum Nargis Jan once enjoyed the efficient service they provided to Murree.

A *dhooli,* or *dooli,* was described by Hankin as "something equivalent to an upturned string cot" used at first to carry invalids. In Kodaikanal, a "doolie" looked more like a *jampan* and was not considered as comfortable as an open sedan chair, which cost twice as much to hire. Kodaikanal did not have the severe weather of the Himalayan foothills, and a covered box could have been a nuisance when there was so much wonderful scenery around. The open Kodaikanal sedan chair was slung on two poles and carried by four men. A "dandy," in contrast, was a sort of hammock slung on only one pole and borne by two coolies, said Hankin.

The palanquin, or *palki,* was the most elaborate kind of man-powered transporter, with its tiny cushioned carriage mounted on poles. Borne by four or six men, a palanquin was often low-slung, barely a foot or two off the ground. Being roomier and enclosed, it was good for long journeys, though a few passengers discovered that the swaying and bouncing produced motion sickness. A *palki* mounted on wheels became a *palki-ghari* of one sort or another, with varying degrees of comfort. Nina Mazuchelli, the wife of an army chaplain, Francis Mazuchelli, wrote in *The Indian Alps and How We Crossed Them* of hiring a *palki-ghari* on the way to Darjeeling that was no more than an oblong box in which they had to lie down; their luggage was piled on top. Almost any of the pole-mounted chairs or boxes could be attached to carts. George Elsmie, heading for his new job as assistant commissioner in Murree, started the trip in a doolie lashed to a mail wagon. In the mountains where there are no roads to this day, it is still possible to see a "kandy," a large, cone-shaped basket strapped to the back of a single porter that can carry a child or an elderly or sick person. In Nepal I encountered an old man being carried this way from the town of Lukla toward the Everest base camp of Namche Bazar.

Contemporary travel to Simla by car, bus, or train certainly makes the trip shorter, but for many, it is still an ordeal. The train journey may begin in a distant city in an overloaded carriage where there is no room to sleep or sit comfortably, the food is barely acceptable, and the toilets and washrooms are filthy beyond description. An Indian consumer group has busied itself in recent years measuring the level of fecal matter in the drinking water on the Calcutta run, not overlooking the luxury trains. Boxes and giant suitcases are stacked all around and overhead. Even in air-conditioned class, privacy is elusive. Trains that were state of the art in the nineteenth century are still just that: nineteenth century. Or pity the Indian middle-class families and poorer people without cars or the money to hire taxis who travel on stuffy, lurching buses up the twisting road to Simla—the culmination of a trip of ten hours or more from Delhi—clutching bottles of boiled water for relief and taking turns vomiting out of the windows. The experience must make not a few of them think nostalgically about the plodding oxcarts, slow-motion tongas, and quiet tent sites of yore. Long-gone early travelers could write in their meticulously kept journals of those fine moments, perhaps while changing horses, when a pause to take in the spectacular scenery and breathe pure air was tonic enough to carry one through another leg.

The story of Simla is woven into the history of the East India Company, which established the British Empire in India and ran it for more than two centuries. In fact, the British government did not directly administer India (including what is now Pakistan and Bangladesh and, for a time, Burma) until the mid–nineteenth century. The British East India Company—there were also Dutch and French versions—was chartered in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I. The Company, as it was known, was intended to hold a monopoly in trade with Asia, though it was soon challenged not

only by other European nations but also by private English entrepreneurs. A rival company was formed in the late seventeenth century, but the two were merged in 1708.

In the early years the Company, which exercised administrative and defense powers in its overseas bases, worked mostly through agreements with local rulers in India, leaving political power in their hands. There were three Company regions, called presidencies, in Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta—each with official hill stations of its own, in addition to the national summer capital at Simla. But in the eighteenth century, for a variety of reasons, including the decline in the effective power of some local sultans or maharajas and the growing influence of the French in India, the Company began to become involved in governing parts of India. After Robert Clive delivered a few decisive military blows to the French in the 1750s, blunting their commercial and territorial expansion, the Company began to rule Bengal, in eastern India. It was there in Calcutta that the first governor-general was installed, with the power to oversee all British possessions on the Subcontinent. By 1784, that power had been broadened and consolidated by an act of Parliament.

At the same time, the Company controlled the British army in India. It was known as the Indian army, but this usage has become confusing since Indian independence in 1947. The army consisted of a "European" (that is, mostly English, Irish, Scottish, or Welsh) officer corps and of troops whose majority became increasingly Indian. The ratio was a cause for alarm after the Indian Mutiny of 1857–1858, a watershed event in a number of ways for the British in India. The rebellion sent a chill through British colonial society. Women and children had been massacred on the plains, and rumors swept even the safe heights of Simla that Nepali Gurkha troops nearby were restive. By then thousands of Indians had settled in the hill stations, and they too suddenly became the objects of suspicion and fear.

The mutiny, which some Indians call the Uprising and others, the First War of Independence, led to the East India Company's losing both political and military power to the British crown and government. In his exhaustive *Oxford History of Modern India, 1740–1975,* Sir Percival Spear pointed out that by the time of the mutiny, the Company "had already become a husk of its former self," administering India on contract for the British government. The Government of India Act of 1858 finished the job by taking away whatever governing functions remained and establishing the post of secretary of state for India under the control of the British Cabinet. On the ground in India, however, the structure was not changed dramatically. Britons bearing titles that were a mixture of native Indian and colonial British nomenclature

and function continued to carry on their political, judicial, and public service functions. The governor-general took on the additional title of viceroy as the direct representative of the British crown.

The British Indian army—in particular the Bengal army, one of three corresponding to the three presidencies—was reorganized. Spear noted that 120,000 of the 128,000 Indians in the Bengal army were involved in the mutiny, and most of them were dead or had fled when the uprising was finally put down. When the mutiny (almost entirely confined to North India) was over, there were only 16,000 European troops and a few Indian units that had not rebelled available to form the core of a new army. Care was taken to cut the proportion of Indian to European troops in the restructuring. Spear said that before the mutiny there were 238,000 Indian soldiers, called sepoys, and 45,000 Europeans in the three presidency armies combined, although the three were not actually merged until later in the nineteenth century. In 1863, there were 140,000 Indians and 65,000 native Europeans or soldiers of European descent. British officers were put in charge of all units, and it became military policy not to base Indian battalions alone without a complement of European troops.

William Howard Russell, who reported from India for the *Times* of London in the late 1850s—and would later cover the Crimean War and American Civil War for that newspaper—judged that the worst consequence of the mutiny "was that instantly the whole sepoy army was placed under the ban of suspicious distrust, and, there is reason to believe, in some instances the stigma of open and avowed insult. Every man, no matter how well inclined, was at once ranked among the intending mutineers."

While all of the postmutiny reorganizing was going on, Simla was growing in size and authority. A number of factors coincided to make Simla what it was, and is. In 1815, the Gurkha rulers of Nepal, who had harassed the British in the western Himalayan foothills, were defeated, and the way was open to exploration and settlement of a large region. The East India Company was always on the lookout for new routes into Tibet, the source of fine wools and salt, among other commodities. Approaches to Tibet were at the heart of Calcutta's relations with local rulers on the borders of West Bengal also, in Sikkim and Bhutan, from which the British wrested frontier territory later in the nineteenth century. Farther to the northwest and closer to Simla, the Tibet trade route passed through Kashmir and Ladakh, where it was subject to attack by a Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh. After his death in 1839, his heirs would go down to defeat. But in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Ranjit Singh loomed large in the thinking of everyone along the upper reaches of British India.

Simla could be the focal point of a different Tibetan trade route through Rampur, the capital of a friendlier Indian state, Bushahr.

To these strategic and commercial interests was soon added the compelling issue of health. This was the dawn of the sanitarium age in India, and a number of British officers recommended the development of a hill station at Simla not only to enhance trade and trade and security but also because the military needed a convalescent resort. Until the creation of Simla and Mussoorie, soon after, troops had been sent by ship as far afield as Cape Town for a recuperative climate. Chance sojourners in the northern hills, among them soldiers who fought in the Gurkha wars, were struck by the invigorating air, fragrant with pine, and the lack of hostility among the local hill people.

In 1822, Captain Charles Kennedy, a garrison officer, built the first house on the forested ridge near a small village he understood to be named "Semla." His predecessor had erected a rustic cabin in the vicinity, but historians credit Kennedy, a resident until 1835, with establishing Simla and giving it its imperial style. Drawings of the period show his house in stately isolation on a rise, commanding a view over hills in every direction. Kennedy was a generous host, and numerous visitors who were entertained by him described his life and that of the town, bequeathing posterity good records of those early days. Among his guests was Victor Jacquemont, who was still in his twenties at the time. The French naturalist watched the captain with some admiration. In letters home to his father in France, Jacquemont praised the quality of food served at Kennedy's table and marveled at how little time his host seemed to spend on work, given the breadth of his political and judicial as well as military duties. In one letter, Jacquemont wrote that Kennedy seemed to enjoy "the independence of the Grand Turk as he acts as judge over his own subjects and, what is more, those of neighboring rajahs, Hindu, Tartar, and Tibetan, sending them to prison, fining them and even hanging them when he sees fit."

Jacquemont, visiting in 1830, thought Simla was "a resort of the very rich, the leisured, and the sick." Simla also attracted the fit and healthy who wanted to stay that way or who just wanted a break from the summer torpor of Calcutta or other lowland cities. Some found the promise of a salubrious climate overrated. The journalist Russell, for one, noted wryly in his diary that within days of his arrival his health was worse in Simla than at lower elevations. "A malady peculiar to Simla, which seizes on new-comers from the plains, has attacked me, and the doctors recommend me bed, starvation, and drastics—low diet, full physic." He took to his couch in pain, unable to move one leg and complaining generally of being "supine and sick."

Lord Amherst was the first governor-general to visit Simla, staying at Kennedy House for two months in the 1820s and setting a precedent. By 1830, the East India Company had formally acquired land from two local rulers, the maharaja of Patiala and the rana of Keonthal, to develop the town. Lord Bentinck, the governor-general whose moving caravan was observed by Jacquemont, was the first to construct a comfortable residence for himself, a house called Bentinck's Castle. Other governors and more houses followed. By midcentury, when Russell arrived, Simla had at least a hundred homes. Clubs, theaters, shops, and public offices were being built. Colonial administrators and military officers with their eyes on the important province of Punjab, the Northwest Frontier, and Afghanistan began to press for a larger role for Simla, complaining that Calcutta was no longer where the action was.

But Simla was still very difficult to reach, with only a dirt track a tortuous 40 miles long, passing through forests and along steep ravines from Kalka, the first town of importance at the edge of the plains. Kalka itself was little more than a way station. The main British presence, particularly for the military, was at Ambala, another 40 miles south. Had Delhi, an easy 120 miles farther south of Ambala, been the Indian capital then and not Calcutta, the selection of Simla as a summer headquarters might have made a little more sense. Criticism mounted at the extravagance of the biannual migration from Bengal. Nevertheless, the British, with their determination harnessed to their engineering skills, went to work on what they grandly titled the Hindustan-Tibet road from the foot of the hills to Simla, with plans to continue to the Tibetan border, a design that was never fully realized. Outposts were fortified between Simla and the plains. Soon after leaving Kalka, a side road from the main Hindustan-Tibet highway that follows the original horse track to Simla leads to Kasauli, the smaller hill station I saw from Chandigarh. The British made Kasauli a garrison town.

"There is Kussowlee!" Russell of *The Times* exclaimed to his diary, as he arrived after a "tiresome and sickening" *jampan* ride at his first stop in the hills en route to Simla.

> It was 11 o'clock ere we reached this charming hill station, which is on a small plateau, and on the side of a long ridge of hill, covered with pines of great size. First we passed a dirty fakeer, sitting in a hole, burrowed out of the side of the road—then some poor native huts—then came in sight a

handsome church, some large barracks; a few English children and soldiers playing and sauntering in the shade; then a few shops, and a long road, bounded by hedges, inside which were English bungalows, with names painted on the gateways, "Laburnam Lodge," "Prospect," "The Elms," and such like home reminiscences, and the clang of piano-fortes and streams of song rushed out through open windows.

These days, many Indians think Kasauli is a much prettier place than Simla because it has not been overbuilt, in part since the military still influences—and limits—development. Solan, about halfway between Kalka and Simla on the main road, was also turned into a military cantonment and rifle range but never became the pleasant town Kasauli was. At Solan, the famous Mohan Meakin brewery, established in colonial times, still produces some of India's most popular beer and, recently, bottled water.

Simla did not become the official summer capital of India until the mid-1860s, under the viceroy Sir John Lawrence, who nagged London endlessly on the subject. By then wheeled vehicles could make the trip from Kalka, and trains were not far behind. By 1891, the line connecting Ambala to Calcutta had been extended with a spur to Kalka. In 1903, the narrow-gauge Kalka-Simla Railway was completed to carry the little "toy train" and a swifter, smaller, more expensive one-coach, eighteen-seat rail car into the mountains through scores of tunnels, sharp bends, and switchbacks, with a stop for breakfast or tea at a rail-side rest house along the route.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the British were actively looking around for a new national capital to replace Calcutta, and fortunately for Simla, all the proposed locations were closer or more accessible to the hill station than the Bengali capital had been. In 1911, the British finally chose a site on the Jamuna River a few miles from Delhi, a centuries-old city that had been the seat of Muslim kings and emperors. Named New Delhi, the imperial city that arose there over the next two decades, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Herbert Baker, is still Asia's most magnificent capital. Although there were still many in India and in England who questioned the cost of two capitals, if there was to be an official hill station, the case for Simla was certainly stronger at that time than it had been earlier.

Once Simla had been formally designated the summer capital and military headquarters in the 1860s, more development followed, crowned by the completion in 1888 of the baronial Viceregal Lodge. The viceroy's retreat, built of stone and paneled inside with teak from Burma, now belongs to Himachal Pradesh University. At the time it was built, however,

it quickly became symbolic of Simla's hierarchical professional and social system. A summons to a viceroy's reception or dinner was something to die for. Once in possession of the engraved invitation card and starchily outfitted in formal evening clothes—and medals if he could muster a few—an ambitious officer or colonial administrator of middling ranks would travel the three or four miles from Simla town to the viceroy's baronial hall in both hope and trepidation, aware that a casual remark or the wrong answer to a viceregal question from him or his wife could ruin a career. Commenting on the serious social climbing that went on at such formal events, the journalist William Howard Russell described the Simla scene as "ball after ball, each followed by a little backbiting."

At first glance, the imperial social system seems straightforward: The ranks descended through the white British line from the viceroy down to the lowest of imperial officials before crossing over into Indian or Eurasian society. In her *Up the Country* letters, Emily Eden wrote about the fuss caused by her suggestion that the wives of uncovenanted officers—usually locally hired clerks not under contract to the East India Company and often Eurasians or Anglo-Indians—be asked to contribute crafts to sell at the annual "fancy" fair, a charity extravaganza held at Annandale, the wide, pine-framed playing field where all manner of outdoor events from polo to picnics took place. Ladylike craft work, often embroidery or sketching, was encouraged in colonial society, and women in Simla had a lot of spare time to be as creative as their talents allowed. Eden rightly assumed that the fancy fair would benefit from a broadening of participation.

"This was rather a shock to the aristocracy of Simla, and they did suggest that some of the wives were very black," she recalled. She told them that "the black would not come off on their works" and won that round. She was, after all, the governor general's sister, and her drawings of local life were a centerpiece at the sale. She was not a social reformer, though; there were few of them to be found in colonial service. Indian servants were routinely derided in racial terms behind their backs and abused verbally to their faces by sahibs and memsahibs. Sometimes physical violence was used against them. As late as 1925, a coolie tangled in his blanket who did not stand up quickly enough to answer a summons was kicked to death in a Simla garden by a British army business manager. To be fair to colonial justice, the Briton was sent to jail, where he committed suicide.

In India, British notions of class and the Indian caste system often cross-pollinated to create some interesting anomalies. In her very valuable book, *Imperial Simla*, Pamela Kanwar took a look at the town and its social and political systems through Indian eyes as much as possible. Indian

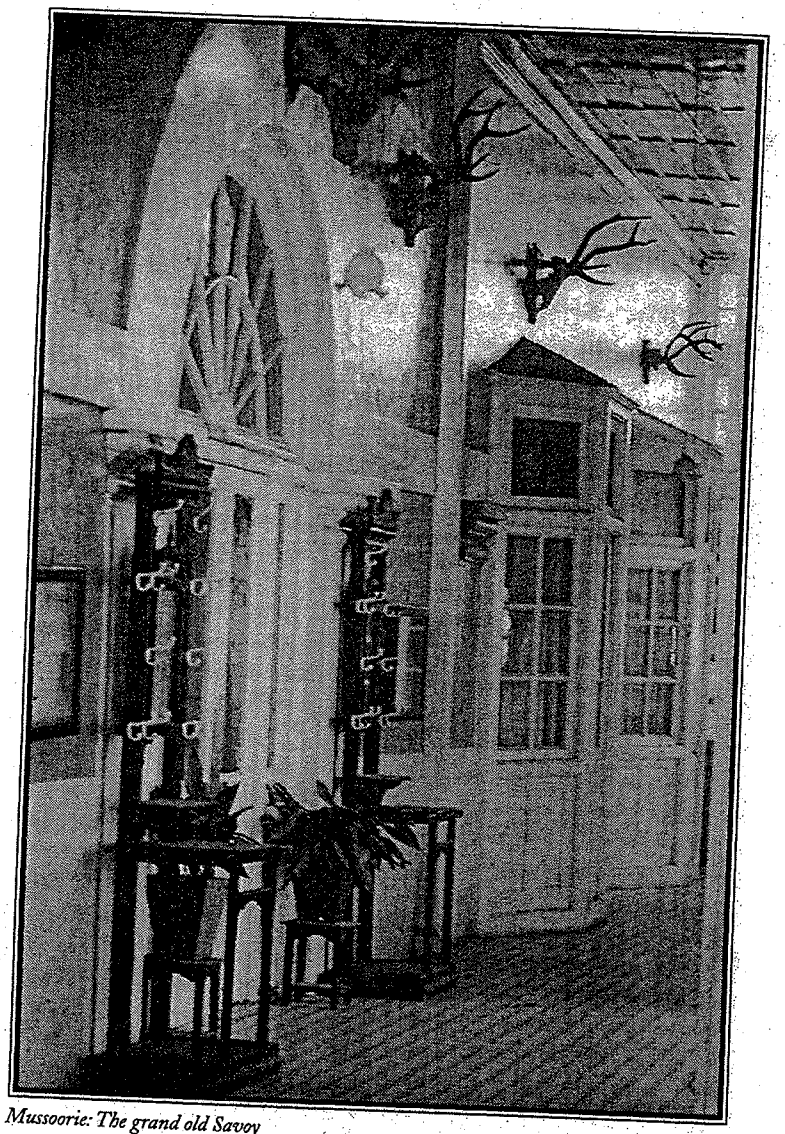
society was complex, mannered, and fraught with taboos. At the top were the brahmins and maharajas, who also bought property at Simla until the British began to fear they were amassing too much of it and tried to stall the process with red tape. Indian rulers paid formal calls on the viceroy or a lower official befitting the ruler's perceived place vis-à-vis the imperial hierarchy. Gifts were exchanged. Indian professionals and rich merchants from several higher Hindu castes bought homes and became influential in the affairs of the town as their numbers grew, although most local businesses were relegated to the Lower Bazar, which still tumbles down the cliff side below the Mall.

Unofficial Britons—known then as Anglo-Indians, though that term was later broadened to include mixed-race Eurasians—were able to start businesses and buy homes, whereas colonial officials were eventually prohibited from becoming property owners during their tours of duty. Not infrequently, the unofficial (especially commercial box-wala, or merchant) British and the middle-class Indians were equally shunned by imperial society and its clubs. Journalist Russell noted the rigidity of the British social system in Simla. "Wealth can do nothing for a man or woman in securing them honour or precedency in their march to dinner," he wrote. "A successful speculator, or a 'merchant prince' may force his way into good society in England; he may be presented at court, and flourish at courtballs, but in India he must remain forever outside the sacred barrier, which keeps the non-official world from the high society of the services." Moreover, the shunning of the merchant classes did not break down racial barriers by Indians and unofficial Britons' making common cause. Mixed marriages, though they occurred occasionally, were largely anathema to both Europeans and Indians.

Indians also discriminated against one another along caste lines, and these attitudes sometimes reinforced British distinctions and prejudices. At the bottom of everyone's social order were the outcastes who emptied latrines, and just above them, the coolies and rickshawalas, who carried goods and people. Even though imperial officials and military officers were always in need of porters, the law of supply and demand was not germane here. Instead of making the value of a professional porter's labor worth more and, therefore, his income grow, the shortfall led the British to impose and enforce a system called *begar* on the people of the hills. Pamela Kanwar explained how it worked: rulers of the hill areas, whose subjects were considered more docile than the people of the plains, were required to provide the human backs for transporting official baggage and often the paraphernalia of private hunting expeditions or other leisure excursions. Farmers were taken from their fields with no regard to the consequences for their crops. Indeed, rural lives were already beset by the gradual disappearance of farmland and forests, as a growing town fostered larger-scale agriculture and woodlands were set aside (and off limits) to meet Simla's need for timber. Some British residents of Simla opposed the *begar* system—one official called it serfdom—but even after its formal abolition, it went on well into the twentieth century, helping to fuel a minor hill revolt in 1921.

Much mythology is attached itself to the social history of Simla. On visits there, I was told that Indians were not allowed to walk on the Mall or the Ridge, where Christ Church towered over the town and made it look British long after the place had any English ambiance left at all. Though this story is retold again and again in articles and books, Kanwar said it was never strictly true. She set the myth to rest by including in her book the text of laws governing access to the Mall, where evening promenades took place and more exclusive shops were located. The rule in question said that from March 15 to October 15 "no job porter or coolie shall solicit employment, loiter or carry any load" on most of Simla's major roads from 4 to 8 P.M. Moreover, from 3 to 8 P.M., "no person shall lead or drive any animal used for slaughter or burden, or horned cattle, and no horse dealer, syce, grass cutter, native trainer, jockey or other native servant shall lead, drive or ride any horse, pony or mule or other animal." The prohibition was always a limited one. But, as Kanwar said, the letter of the law was often stretched on the Mall to facilitate the harassment of any Indians whom officials did not want around. Political demonstrations in particular and "ill-dressed Indians" in general—whatever that might mean—were removed in humiliating style. Naturally, when civil disobedience was planned in 1930, the Mall was the place to march. By that time, India was moving swiftly toward self-rule and then independence.

Simla is now a city in the hills, not a hill station any more. The state capital of Himachal Pradesh since 1966, Simla is a busy hub of politics and commerce. Viceregal Lodge belongs to the state, and British homes and businesses belong to Indians. But the old image refuses to fade, not only from tourist brochures. Pamela Kanwar made the fascinating observation that Simla had cast a spell on Indians. "That Simla was the facsimile of an original British town (which most had never seen) was never doubted," she wrote. "Thus a strange convoluted nostalgia shadows Indian memories." Everyone touched by it, from the wealthy professional to the lowly toilet cleaner, "all felt privileged to have lived in the Chota Vilayat—little England—of India."



Mussoorie: The grand old Savoy

Mussoorie

Ruskin Bond, whose evocative journals, stories, and poems have given life to a region known as the Garhwal Himalayas, was quick to discern what made Mussoorie different from Simla. There was nothing starchily official about Mussoorie's origins: It was created for pleasure, not work. There were no swarms of bureaucrats migrating from the plains, no army cantonment, not an excessive number of missionaries, not even much in the line of police. Mussoorie, born liberated, quickly embraced promiscuity. In an essay called "A Station for Scandal," part of the collection of his writings published as *Rain in the Mountains*, Bond wrote that "you could live there without feeling that the Viceroy or the Governor was looking over your shoulder." Mussoorie was where pukka British fellows built cottages for their mistresses and proper English ladies actually sold their kisses at fetes. Dancing and dallying along mountain trails led to this and that. In the lore that accumulated around Mussoorie was the story (also told of other hill stations) about how the Savoy Hotel, the Ritz of the mountains, rang a bell just before dawn to prepare the religious for prayer and chase the others back to their own beds before the sun came up.

Comparisons between official and unofficial hill stations were a reflection of rivalry and a measure of loyalty to competing towns, most of which laid claim to superiority for one reason or another. Of course, most hill stations have—or had—unique characters, even personalities. Two other Indian towns on the south flank of the Himalayas—Naini Tal and Almora in the Kumaon Hills—are good examples. Naini Tal was the official one, the summer capital of the colonial United Provinces of Agra and Oudh. Its setting was so beautiful that not many cosmetic changes were necessary. There was a natural lake, whereas other hill stations had to create one. At about 6,400 feet in altitude, Naini Tal was densely forested (and populated by tigers and wicked spirits), and so the population was sparse well into the nineteenth century. Like Kasauli, it clings today to a reputation for being quieter and more attractive than many other overdeveloped hills resorts.

In contrast, Almora, at only 5,000 feet but still considered healthy, was never a formal summer capital, and its unofficial status left room for alternate lifestyles. It was populated first by Himalayan traders and later attracted legions of people with causes, from environmentalists to spiritualists. Bill Aitken, a Scottish-born Indian, settled there for a spell more than three decades ago. "The Kumaon Hills for some reason seemed to attract

eccentrics," he wrote later in *Seven Sacred Rivers*. "Almora, from the days of the exotic American disciples of Swami Vivekananda, has had a flourishing 'Cranks Ridge' which in its way had contributed to twentieth century mysticism." In Almora, Aitken found British Buddhists, Indian scientists given to alchemy and religious reform, Europeans of various origins dabbling in ashrams. Timothy Leary, a brother of Mick Jagger, and camp followers of D. H. Lawrence passed through. Among the mystics was Sunya Baba, "whose spiritual credentials were not quite top-drawer, since he had started out as Sorenson, the Danish gardener of the Nehrus," Aitken wrote. His favorite character was a blind former actor from Australia who ran an organic (he called it "biodynamic") orchard.

Mussoorie, which also liked to think of itself as independent minded, is not without its contemporary officialdom, however. The Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy for the Indian Administrative Service trains the cream of New Delhi's civil servants there. And in Dehra Dun, where the road from Mussoorie hits the plains, the Indian Military Academy has been functioning since colonial times. But the atmosphere of Mussoorie, although much changed over the years, is certainly different from that of contemporary Simla, where the Annandale picnic ground is now a heliport for the military and state government officials.

Like Simla, however, Mussoorie and about two dozen other hill settlements scattered along the northwestern Himalayan foothills were made possible by the British accession of Nepali Gurkha lands following the 1816 peace treaty that ended a two-year war. Despite the Gurkha defeat, Nepal managed to avoid becoming part of the British Empire in India, as did the two small kingdoms of Sikkim and Bhutan, but Gurkhas enlisted in the British forces stationed in the Garhwal and Kumaon hills and stayed on after independence to serve in India's army. Like many hill stations, Mussoorie was first widely known as a health resort for troops, a number of whom had fought in the Gurkha war. Their convalescent center was actually in Landour, a few miles above Mussoorie, but over time the two towns grew together into a single sprawling settlement. A British chronicler wrote in the nineteenth century that the rate of cure there was phenomenal for sick and wounded soldiers; the area was also reputed to be especially good for the health of children. By the 1840s, dozens of homes dotted the hills, along with farms for growing fresh produce and grains, a brewery, and, of course, a club, with at least 150 members in 1842.

Into this evolving social setting, the Savoy, like a debutante, made an entrance. The Savoy Hotel is now a dowager, crippled by assaults from

upstart resorts new to Mussoorie, most recently a mammoth mountain lodge called the Residency, which advertises itself as "the first five-star deluxe hotel in the hills of North India." But it was the legendary Savoy—not the squash courts or pool of the Residency—that propelled me to Mussoorie in the dead of winter on my most recent trip. It was the second time I foolishly made the climb from Dehra Dun in cold weather. My son, Jonathan, and I had visited the Woodstock School in Landour more than a decade ago. He, hardened by short-pants British education, nonetheless remembers Woodstock as the coldest place he ever had to get out of bed in the morning. But at least our guest room had an efficient *bukhari*, a wood stove that can be started quickly with almost anything flammable and will produce warmth very quickly. In the 1950s, when Edith Theis-Nielsen was a student at Woodstock, she found the cold-water showers "trying" in winter. "For at least 15 years after my time at Woodstock, I was thankful every time I turned on the hot-water tap," she recalled. Theis-Nielsen, who is Danish, had brought along a Scandinavian eiderdown for her bed. "Once at room inspection the matron gave me a demerit because she didn't think my bed was properly made. I explained to her that an eiderdown has no way of being made flat as a pancake."

Rehan Khan, who was a student at Woodstock in the 1980s, said he never remembered it snowing, but "a few avalanches in the mountains every month provided badly needed excitement." The next time I arrived in Mussoorie the town was deep in snow, adding considerable adventure if not exactly excitement to the experience. Leaving a hired car and its dubious driver at the base of the hill crowned by the Savoy, I plodded up on foot, lugging my laptop and luggage along a frozen pathway with an angle of ascent approaching 45 degrees, if not more. It was dark, and there seemed no end to a slippery hike up a long curved driveway circling toward the Savoy's private hill. Then around the bend, there suddenly was a speck of light, a small cottage and a trellised doorway bearing a modest sign that read "Office." A naked yellow bulb illuminated it and the doorstep below. All else was lost in the black night, except the acres of snow. In the bitter cold, absolutely nothing moved; even the trees seemed frozen.

Decades vanished in the few moments that followed my opening the door, with some uncertainty about whether I had come to the right hotel. Inside was a small foyer with a chest-high barricade of bank-teller windows that would have made Dickens comfortable. One sign over an old metal grill said "Reception." Others said "Cashier," "Bills," and "Miscellaneous." On the wall, there were boards for pinning up one's calling card to

inform other guests who was here and who was who. Old ledgers, coated with grime and dust, were piled about. A yellowing newspaper covered the small table this side of the barrier. I peered through the opening marked "Reception." There, huddled in a chair, back to the door and to me, an old man sat, wrapped in the ubiquitous shawl. He was motionless.

"Excuse me," I tried. He came to life slowly, turned and stood. I asked if this was indeed the Savoy. He said yes. I gave him my name, and he opened the top ledger on the pile nearest him and searched a penciled list with a bony finger for what seemed forever. Thoughts of what I could possibly do if turned away began to form in the panic zone. Then the old gentleman looked up, pleased. I existed. Collecting a key, he shuffled around through a back door and joined me, leading the way to a suite that had been set aside for me in an upper corner, "where there are good views," he said.

Crunching over ice and snow, we made our way through a kind of carport, up numerous flights of frozen stairs (passing a sign pointing to a ballroom), and along a second-story veranda to Number 17. Now this was a suite to remember. When the double doors swung open, all I was conscious of was the temperature. Wearing, as I was, thermal underwear, a track suit, a heavy woolen tunic-style long-sleeved *pheran* from Kashmir, and a shawl, I would never have dared to sit down, fearing death from inaction. Sensing that I would not be capable of removing my gloves, the wizened receptionist said that it would be all right if I signed the registration book required of foreigners in the morning. Could there be a morning? Out of the frigid black night, help soon arrived. Improbably, a waiter appeared, asking if I wanted the veg or non-veg dinner. Behind him was a housekeeper, an attractively casual man in a down jacket who looked more like a guest than the fellow in charge of hot water bottles, which he was. In a few minutes, he came back with one, and also a quilt. He was followed by a nineteenth-century figure bundled in Bob Cratchit scarves and carrying a lightbulb for the dark and cavernous bathroom—where no water ever ran from the taps during my stay. Mercifully, the toilet worked. And now I could see it.

The view was more of a problem. The vaunted windows were so coated with grime and laced with cobwebs that I thought it might be more useful to see what was out there by stepping onto the veranda, which at that time was bathed in moonlight. The moon, helped by a blanket of snow, also illuminated other wings and outbuildings of the hotel. There seemed to be no other lights but mine. The canopied stairs leading to the elevated central entrance to the dining room and bar rose out of a snow drift, where

there must have been a path. In the morning I could see that the potted plants that lined the covered staircase, among them a fern and a spider plant, seemed no worse for the cold. One of the pleasures of many Indian hills stations is the warmth of the daytime sun and the heat that unlikely plants can take from it to store against the nighttime chill, even against a substantial frost. European and American botanists and amateur British horticulturists alike were astounded in the nineteenth century by the sheer number and climatological variety of species they found growing naturally or could introduce successfully, particularly in the South Indian hills, only 11 degrees north of the Equator. Even this far north, species and seasons could be mixed in remarkable ways.

Suite 17 at the Savoy was huge and probably once magnificent. Regrettably but not unexpectedly, the front parlor had those ponderous, squarish, overstuffed British-inspired armchairs and settee upholstered in the red moquette that India has spent half a century trying to rid itself of. A cheap thin carpet, also red, more or less covered the floor. In one corner, a Gothic writing desk with a useless telephone stood by the door, through whose cracks arctic wind whistled. In one of the desk drawers, someone had secreted an empty Peter Scott whisky bottle, the room's only echo of a perhaps scandalous episode, albeit recent, since Peter Scott is an Indian imitation of scotch. They call it "Indian-made foreign liquor." A local newspaper used as a drawer liner featured this very Indian story: "Supervisor Beaten Up While Distributing Flood Relief."

But the room did have a fireplace. It was of the most basic sort, no more than a flueless hollow in the wall with a chimney above. Still, it was worth a try. "The fire will be 80 rupees extra," someone in the gathering crowd mentioned helpfully. At a little over $2.25, could I turn that down? Another ancient retainer arrived, carrying on his back a large tin bucket filled with chunks of solid, very dry hardwood. He also had the inevitable kerosene can, so beloved of fire starters all over the Himalayas. Dousing the wood he had arranged in the fireplace, he threw in a match and there was instant heat. But without a draft or flue, the fireplace was not likely to provide warmth for long, so I asked for another round of wood. "That will be 75 rupees more," was the answer. For each load I ordered, we had to complete the necessary paperwork in duplicate.

I pulled up one of the two armchairs to the fire to await the dinner. Ordered at 7 o'clock, it could not be served until 8:30 when the dining room opened, in a manner of speaking. With no discernible guests but me in

this 121-room hotel, the dining room was closed for the season. But standards are standards. I unpacked my laptop computer to begin recording the trip up to Mussoorie from the plains. Not for long. A few paragraphs later, three short electronic shrieks said that the battery suddenly needed recharging, sooner than expected. The power seemed to be draining with uncommon haste, judging from the increasingly dire warnings on the screen. Unwrapping myself from my shawl, I searched for any electrical outlet that might be reasonably safe. In the bathroom there was a grounded socket for shavers, a kind of outlet I had used successfully many times in the third world. So I hitched up the machine to its cord and headed for the wash basin. No more than a second after the plug met the wall, smoke began pouring from the adapter and there was the unmistakable smell of burning electrical parts.

Though it would be hard to feel philosophical at such a moment, the meltdown of the adapter offered another example of India's mixed success at modernization and economic reform. The use of computers, Indian and foreign, is spreading rapidly, and with the resourceful help of the *New York Times* Indian office manager, P. J. Anthony, I was able to replace the IBM adapter within twenty-four hours in New Delhi. This would have been unthinkable a few years ago. But no adapter, even with a portable surge protector, can withstand an electrical system that was clearly sending a steady current in excess of 250 volts through the wiring of the Savoy. "It happens all the time," a computer expert told me a few weeks later in South India when I told him the story. The school where he teaches children to use these high technology tools plugs its state-of-the-art equipment into car batteries.

The trip to Mussoorie from Delhi by road is in itself a hard lesson in the reality of near-twenty-first-century India. The road crosses Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state, with more than 150 million people. The sheer magnitude of India is revealed in the claims on the billboards: Bagpiper Whisky, the world's sixth-best seller; Hero Bicycles, the world's Number One. Those honest claims can be made on Indian sales alone; there are no export markets, at least not for Indian whisky, sold all over the country (or rather in states without prohibition) at what are euphemistically referred to as "English wine shops," an old colonial designation transformed. A billion people, with a few hundred million of them in an internationally recognizable consumer society, are big business. It is the rest, those millions in material poverty, whose lifestyles are on display in Uttar Pradesh, however.

"U.P." is among the least developed, least humane places to be found in Asia and certainly difficult to accept or explain in a nation that calls itself a democracy and hopes to be the next Asian economic tiger. Horrifying police brutality and criminality are routine, literacy is low, women have scant status, and scrawny children with dull eyes and runny noses spend their days hanging around filthy market stalls instead of going to school. A Muslim writer once said that the state constabulary, laced with Hindu nationalists, is set loose on his people like a pack of hounds whenever there is a disturbance. Population growth is unsustainable and family planning programs are shams. The high-profile Thai family planning pioneer, Mechai Viravaidya, who was on a visit to India while I was last there, roundly rebuked Indians in places like this for their sloth in family planning. "You were the first to start a program forty years ago; we began only twenty years ago, but today our birthrate in Thailand has gone down from 7 percent to 2 percent. You, however, are still rolling around in the same place you were then. In sixty years at this rate, India will have 1.6 billion people." It will have by then overtaken China as the world's most populous country, and much of that growth will occur in places like Uttar Pradesh.

The road north to Dehra Dun and the hills, a major highway only two lanes wide, shared by bullock carts, bicycles, trucks, buses, and now imported high-powered cars, passes through town after town choked by people forced to live in the most degrading and debilitating of environments: open sewers, air thick with black soot and chemical pollutants that pour from vehicles and factories, mangled trees stripped of every reachable branch for firewood. Corruption lurks at every crossroads. My driver, Ebeneezer Massey—who felt he had to explain his unusual name by saying that his family were Punjabi Christians who had named all their children for biblical figures—began the trip by trying vainly to get a receipt for the road tax he had to pay at the Delhi-U.P. border. Naturally, up the road a few miles, a policeman stopped him and asked to see the nonexistent receipt. The indolent cop, roused from his chair by the sight of a new imported car with tourist plates, demanded a bribe to avoid a fine for not having the necessary piece of paper. Apparently intending to be both threatening and irritating, the overweight constable pored endlessly over all the car's documents. The driver offered 20 rupees (under $1). The cop said that wasn't enough: He needed at least 50 rupees. Massey told him that he would have to speak to the memsahib about that since 20 rupees was all the spare cash he had; he was only a driver. The cop relented, took

the 20 rupees and went back to waiting for another victim. We headed for the next stretch of potholes that these "road taxes" will never repair.

The road to Dehra Dun and several holy cities of pilgrimage in the region is considered one of the most hazardous in India, a country where 60,000 people die and hundreds of thousands are injured every year in traffic accidents—and those are the reported cases. The Highway Users' Club in New Delhi, one of those nongovernmental organizations that is trying to change India from the grass roots up, says that the country has only 1 percent of the world's motor vehicles but accounts for 6 percent of its traffic accidents. A crash takes place every two minutes; every ten minutes somebody dies, often because there is no emergency medical service available. Another public-interest group calculated that more than half the truck drivers, the culprits in many fatal crashes, have fraudulently acquired driving licenses or no licenses at all.

What venal politicians and a law enforcement system beyond redemption have done to rob U.P.'s hardworking people of their due is evident from the natural wealth of the countryside. As we drove farther and farther from the industrial sprawl of the Delhi metropolitan area, fields of sugarcane and rice came closer and closer to the road. By Roorkhee, north of the sprawling, gridlocked city of Muzzafarnagar, shady groves of mango and papaya become more common, along with plantations of chilies and other crops. Some woodland has survived; there is more room to move and breathe. What many people of the hills fear, here and elsewhere in India, is that the sprawl and clutter and pollution of the plains is moving steadily toward them, bringing with it a sadly diminished quality of life and new hazards like lead poisoning, rejuvenated cholera, and clinical disorders caused by stress. Water resources are strained and already-meager sanitation efforts are overwhelmed. Temperatures rise as trees disappear.

Massey, the driver, fumed for miles over the ethical standards of the U.P. police, which clearly ran contrary to what he had been taught in a Christian school somewhere in neighboring Punjab. Another religious minority, the warlike but tolerant Sikhs, had made Punjab into one of India's most productive states in agriculture and industry. Massey had gone back to Punjab for a wife, a laboratory technician from the Christian Medical College in Ludhiana. They were to be married in a few months, now that he had saved enough to buy a car and a few other luxuries. Massey then segued for my benefit into an exposition of the differences between Protestants like him and Catholics. "Their God is Mary and our God is Jesus," he said. I hadn't thought of it quite that way before, but in the Indian context, this made sense. With a pantheon of gods in human and animal forms to chose from, most people in India's Hindu majority do not give much thought to divinity in the abstract but focus on the idols or symbolic representations of specific gods or goddesses. Even modern living gurus, so successful at luring Western seekers into their aura, are often treated as gods, with shrines erected in homes to honor them. Years ago, I had marveled at the splendid altar the mother of my Hindi tutor in Chandigarh had erected to Sai Baba. It taught me to recognize his image everywhere I went in India.

By the end of a daylong trip to Mussoorie, Massey had worked himself into such a righteous state that he decided to sleep in the car, a relatively new Toyota, rather than risk any harm coming to it. He had been offered a free room at the Savoy. In the morning, he admitted he had taken a look at the room and decided the car would be more comfortable. In my $30 Savoy suite, dinner—veg, which usually does one less harm in India than non-veg—had arrived on time. It was a wonderfully hot and tasty array of curried cauliflower, peas, spinach, and paneer, or local cheese, with a pile of fresh chapatis wrapped in a heavy linen napkin. My fire dwindling, an electric heater arrived, borne by a man who proceeded to connect it by adroitly inserting two bare wires into a wall socket in a wooden baseboard on a wood floor in the bedroom. If the whole thing followed my laptop adapter into a fiery oblivion, I reckoned, I could always escape through the sweeper's door to the bathroom, the only egress permitted those outcasts who traditionally clean toilets or, still today, carry away buckets of human waste.

Fully dressed for a hike in the hills (shoes excepted), I dug under several quilts and went to sleep, trying not to think about the computer. Fashion's layered look finds its definitive expression in the Himalayas and on the Tibetan plateau beyond. David Macdonald, who for twenty years in the first quarter of the twentieth century was the British trade agent in Tibet and later the empire's representative in Sikkim, explained in his book *The Land of the Lama* why "Tibetans are, generally speaking, not a cleanly race." Since there is not enough water for bathing, and if there were, it would be freezing, the Tibetan, he said, has little incentive to disrobe in such a climate, so he does the opposite. "Even when feeling chilled, the Tibetan does not make a fire for warmth, he simply puts on more clothing," Macdonald observed. To this day, the same tendency prevails in certain seasons in the hills of India, not only among the natives.

A long but peaceful night followed, punctuated only by occasional high-pitched screams that I imagined were coming from Ruskin Bond's

brainfever bird. There are, of course, ghosts at the Savoy, but they are not known to be noisy. One of them is the restless spirit of Lady Ormsby-Gore, who succumbed here long years ago to a dose of strychnine in her medicine bottle. Her doctor died soon after, deepening the mystery. Agatha Christie drew on the story in 1920 in her first case for Hercule Poirot, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles.* Her tale, however, was set in Essex, not India, and mercifully it was summer. Landour also has a tradition of murders, Ruskin Bond asserted. Those occur at the extreme edge of erratic behavior that otherwise is limited to lifelong feuds and harmless offenses, he wrote in *Mussoorie and Landour: Days of Wine and Roses.* "Some residents of Landour past and present have been known to be slightly touched," he said with the tongue-in-cheek attitude of the observant native. "There is the theory that anyone who lives above 7,000 feet starts having delusions, illusions and hallucinations. People who, in the cities, are the models of respectability are know to fling more than stones and insults at each other when they come to live up here. Even those who have grown up and gone away still retain their cattiness."

A crystal morning dawned, and the golden Savoy, wrapped in drifts, glowed resplendent under the sun. Above its sloping rooftops, a panorama of high Himalayan peaks defined the skyline. Using the guide on my check-in brochure, I counted at least ten perennially snow-capped peaks over 20,000 feet. Three great Hindu shrines are perched in these mountains: Gangotri, Kedernath, and Badrinath, all more than 10,000 feet in altitude. Bill Aitken, whose richly descriptive *Seven Sacred Rivers* recounts his own efforts to reach some of Hinduism's most accessible holy places in these mountains, settled in Mussoorie for a spell in 1960 to learn Hindi at a missionary language school in Landour.

"One lived among the last weird vestiges of empire—elderly spinsters from Henley-in-Arden, posted to isolated mission compounds in the hinterland of Oudh, praying for guidance on the appropriateness of buying a kukri from an itinerant tradesman from church funds," he wrote. Within a few years, most of those missionaries would be gone from the Indian hills, withdrawn by their European and American churches, as a more assertive India began to turn against foreigners under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, the daughter of Nehru but a personality as inward-looking as her father was outgoing in world affairs. Aitken found the air crackling with conversion in 1960, giving the atmosphere of Landour "a raw neurotic edge." When he revisited the town in 1990, he was pleased to see that his old pandit tutor had survived with his Hindu religion intact.

Landour's most famous institution, the Woodstock School, was founded in 1854 as a school for Protestant girls, many of them American or British children of missionaries. In 1874, the Board of Foreign Missions of the American Presbyterian church took over management, an arrangement that lasted until the early 1920s, when the school became interdenominational, though it never lost its earnest missionary atmosphere. At that point, boys were accepted as boarders; until then they were admitted only as day pupils. Like the Kodaikanal International School in South India, Woodstock has managed to keep alive strong links with American Protestant churches, despite India's unease about foreign Christians and their influence. Maureen Aung-Thwin, a Burmese-American who was educated at Kodai, where her mother also taught, told me that whole families became associated with these schools. The alumni are loyal friends who watch over Woodstock's fortunes just as Woodstock in turn watches over its natural environment. From the air, the school is enveloped in green. Rehan Khan remembers the lush, luxuriant foliage of the campus when he was there in the late 1980s—"a respite for sore eyes" after a walk through treeless Mussoorie town. The rainy, unspoiled forest presented its own problems, of course. "My most poignant memory of driving up to Mussoorie was the feeling of terrible gloom when the school reopens in July," he said. "The sky is overcast, it is raining heavily and it is a three-mile hike strewn with leeches from the town to the school." Gil Halsted learned about jungle wildlife in 1972 when he and his friends, exhausted from climbing Nag Tibba, decided to camp overnight at a deserted government rest house, only to be shocked out of their sleep by a water buffalo barging in through the front door.

Woodstock and the Kodaikanal school, which briefly considered a merger at one point, have had a powerful influence on many individuals, Americans and others, who support active alumni associations and retain their links to India and each other through these institutions. Edith Theis-Nielsen, who studied in a special class for Europeans and others at Woodstock who needed to take the British Cambridge secondary-school examinations, said the school had many activities that challenged students to think independently, though she and others bristled at the demonstrative Christianity of the missionary environment. But there was always also tolerance and an atmosphere of sharing. She later went to a boarding school in France and found it "run with military discipline separated from meaningful values." Students did not care for one another as they did at Woodstock, she said. "When I left Woodstock, I didn't think there was anything unusual

about the school. But as the years passed, I realized how much Woodstock students and parents differed radically—in a positive way—from the people who surrounded me later in life in a purely secular context. I had given up being a believer. But in my search later for people who were like the ones at Woodstock, I also found faith rooted in the Bible."

Wilbur H. Lyon, a physician who lives in Idaho, was among those who feel, as he put it, "that exposure to international concerns at an early age helps one comprehend the complex world in which we live today." Lyon, who graduated from Woodstock in 1940, absorbed firsthand the tremors of approaching Indian independence. "India was then still British India," he wrote in an e-mail message to me. (Woodstock and Kodai schools have their own home pages on the World Wide Web.)

> A classmate of mine was Chand Pandit. She was the daughter of Madame Jayalakshmi Pandit, the sister of Jawaharlal Nehru. He was to become the first Prime Minister of independent India and she would be India's Ambassador to the United Nations. Madame Pandit invited Chand's classmates to a party at her home after our baccalaureate service. At the party she stated that she expected to be imprisoned soon because of the stand she felt she needed to take, even though she knew it was against British laws. She wanted us, as Chand's classmates, to understand her views. She still stands out as one of the most intelligent and gracious people I have met in my nearly 73 years.
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> As a sixteen-year-old boy with nearly all my life experience in British India, I was concerned that India would be worse off if the British were forced out, since the British seemed to control the transportation, communications, financial structure, law enforcement and so on in such a large and diversified country. Her reply to my expression of this concern impressed me by making me realize the difficulty our very young country has in really understanding the thinking and philosophies of countries which are several thousand years old. She replied very calmly and graciously: "Yes, we will be worse off at first, and it may be 200 years until things are as good as they are today. Then things will get better, because that is the way it should be." At that time, my country was 166 years old. In the U.S.A. we are very impatient if our goals cannot be met in a four-year term or a fiscal year.

Young Wilbur also confronted other Indian realities at an early age, and came away sobered.

> I remember as a thirteen-year-old student a feature speaker at one of our assemblies was one of India's top socioeconomists. He made one point that captured my youthful attention. He remarked that India had a serious problem because the previous year there had been an "unsuccessful famine." By that he meant that only about 20,000 people had died of starvation, rather than the predicted number ten times higher. This would result in many more people to feed and house in the years ahead than the country was prepared to support. This was entirely at odds with my thinking, even as a thirteen-year-old American boy.

The internationalism of Woodstock meant a lot to most of its students. "I remember the smells of breakfast and of the winter, the village and its northern influence on my experience of India and its culture," said Monica Flores, who entered Woodstock in 1988.

> I was was the only Mexican at the time, even the only Hispanic. The experience made me stronger in my own beliefs and more fully cultured. I learned a lot about uprooted children like myself; my father was in business and I never lived more than five years in one place. I have returned to Monterrey, Mexico, my birth town and work for a Dutch company now. I have a managerial position, a top staff job in a highly male culture. I know some of this is due to what the Woodstock experience taught me about being true to yourself—and how when you feel you represent only yourself you discover there is a lot of you in others.

Woodstock may have its lifelong friends and guardian angels, but other venerable institutions like the Savoy Hotel are in trouble in a new India. Anand Singh, the duty manager, told me the next morning how this came to be. As in Pakistan, many people in India with money to spend on vacations no longer want what an old hotel has to offer, a quiet formality tinged with eccentricity. Less-affluent tourists, coming to the hills in mushrooming numbers, would find it too expensive, even at the equivalent of about $35 a night, though it is doubtful it would hold any attraction for them either. Most visitors, including the busloads being disgorged that morning on a national holiday, the birthday of the Indian nationalist (and fascist sympathizer?) Subhas Chandra Bose, go to places with names like Sun 'n' Star, the Shilton, or the Honeymoon Inn. They ride a precarious cable car or hire the somnolent horses that are part of a hill station's repertoire. Like Murree, Mussoorie has a revolving restaurant and dozens of souvenir shops stocked by Kashmiris. Tibetans, perhaps even more successful merchants than Kashmiris, are also part of commercial life here, as they are now part of the scene in every hill station bazaar from the Himalayas to the blue Nilgiri Hills and the Palni highlands of the South.

The Savoy is willing to rent sections of the hotel to banks and corporations to use for staff recreation; "holiday homes" is the Indian expression.

That just about keeps things going. The seasonal summer crowd is still loyal, but shrinking. The hotel tried to add some amenities to attract a new generation, but old-timers are more outraged than pleased to find television sets added to their favorite rooms. "They tell me, 'Take it out!'" the manager said. For those who escape Mussoorie's noisy bazaars to find peace on the Savoy's hilltop, the traditional pastimes are the best: walking, reading, meeting in the bar with its upholstered armchairs, and lingering over dinner in a cathedral dining room complete with stained glass windows. In earlier times, the now-decrepit bandstand in the Library Bazaar just below the Savoy was the place where a regimental band performed most evenings during the season. A busy street barber has now set up shop—a chair and a mirror—to one side of the trash-strewn bandstand, alongside of which hooting buses and cars pass impatiently. Some yards away, a gaudy arch—an Indian described its decor as "the colors of Rajasthan"—has been erected over the entrance to Library Chowk by Hindu nationalist politicians. If the arch was intended to exorcise the ghost of British/Christian India from the chowk, there isn't much left to chase out.

When India was younger and less nationalistic, Mussoorie played its part in providing refuge for Tibetans fleeing a Chinese military attack on Lhasa in 1959. In Mussoorie, Rinchen Dolma Tsering, a well-educated woman from a prominent Tibetan family, and her husband, Jigme Taring, a Sikkimese prince and an aide to the fourteenth Dalai Lama, established a school for Tibetan refugee children even while they struggled to overcome a wrenching personal tragedy. When the Chinese shelling of Lhasa began in March of that year, both of them were about two miles out of the Tibetan capital at the temporary headquarters of the Dalai Lama, from which he soon fled to India. Rinchen Dolma's frantic efforts to return to Lhasa to rescue their two daughters, half a dozen grandchildren, two of them babies, and her elderly mother-in-law were thwarted by gunfire and menacing Chinese troops. She and a servant who had accompanied her out of the city were forced to flee. They made an impossible escape with the help of Tibetan rebels but without adequate clothing or supplies to sustain them across one of the highest, iciest Himalayan passes into the remote and landlocked Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan, and from there to India—and another hill station, Kalimpong.

Rinchen Dolma—who had picked up the Westernized name of Mary as a pupil in a Darjeeling boarding school many years earlier—had no idea whether her husband had survived until she reached India and learned that he was in Mussoorie, where the Dalai Lama stayed before he established his exile headquarters to the northwest at Dharamsala. All along the Himalayan foothills, thousands of Tibetans—monks, guerrilla fighters, and every kind of ordinary citizen—were flooding the hill stations, often their first safe stop in journeys of unimaginable horror and suffering.

For me, getting out of Mussoorie was harder than getting in, even though a warm sun was beginning to melt the snow and ice on the morning I returned to the plains. It was a beautiful day when Massey and I started back down the hill. But we didn't get much farther than the first bend out of the Library Chowk square when there was gridlock on the narrow road. Buses were snaking up the hill bumper to bumper, jammed with young people who wanted the rare chance to play in snow. At the slightest pause, passengers poured out to scramble into the drifts and make snowballs to throw at each other and other buses. Drivers honked and shouted; nobody could possibly move. Nobody was in charge. It took a shopkeeper to intervene, shooing a few wayward coaches out of the road and opening a lane for traffic going down. We left to the joyful sounds of laughter and singing and the screams of surprise as kids dressed for the heat below fell happily into snowbanks, slid crazily on ice, and seized a brief experience of an unusual winter they would remember for a long time.