The changing tourist gaze in India’s hill stations: from the early nineteenth century to the present

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The aim of this chapter is to explore the major groups of visitors to India’s hill stations during the British era, broadly from the mid-nineteenth century to Indian Independence in 1947, and to compare and contrast the gaze of these earliest recorded visitors with that of more modern domestic tourists. Inevitably, we face problems in doing this. First, the term ‘tourist’ was rarely applied to the earliest European visitors to hill stations, although that was what they were, so instead, the term ‘visitor’ is used as an alternative to ‘tourist’. Second, representing the past is inevitably an act of the present, and however much we try to empathise with the past, we are, nonetheless, observing it through a contemporary lens (Driver, 1992:36). Third, when discussing historical situations we must consider through whose eyes we are seeing history. In this case, the answer has to be through Western eyes as much of the literature and imagery from the British colonial era in India is based on reports and evidence generated by the British. A comparatively small amount derives from the work of Indian authors.

In regard to more recent times, our explanation of the modern, predominantly Indian visitor’s gaze on India’s hill stations is also based on Western perceptions. The problems involved with visualising events (both past and present) are noted by Gregory (1994), while Wright (1947:15), who considers the role of imagination in geography, forces us to reflect on whether we can justly say that there is any congruence between “The world outside and the pictures in our heads”. Views of the world are transient, and as the world of the nineteenth century is not one we knew or experienced, we have to rely on literature and imagery produced by authors and artists from that period. Even though we now live in a globalized world where comparisons are frequently drawn across continents and regions, we still face problems explaining the tourist experiences of other cultures. Inevitably, these must be framed within the cultural context of the observer (Lowenthal, 1972) which, in itself, is a limitation. The justification for a Westerner’s attempt to compare the gaze of nineteenth century European visitors to Indian hill stations with those of modern Indian tourists is indeed thin, however, it is hoped that a combination of the author’s personal experience of hill station life in the wake of the Empire, supplemented by secondary source information; fieldwork in Ooty and Yercaud in 2006 and 2007 and visits to several other hill stations, both colonial and post-colonial, will ensure that the pictures and explanations in the author’s head, though still remaining personal constructions, might to some extent concur with the reality of the ‘world outside’.
Before considering the different visitors to hill stations and the factors which may have influenced the construction of their gaze, I first consider the form, function and evolution of hill resorts. Where possible the aim is to generate a visual image of these settlements in pictures, but where such images are unavailable, we resort to words as a means of creating visuality.

**Evolution of India’s hill stations**

Most of India’s hill stations were created in the colonial era by the British, for the British (Kohli, 2002; Kennedy, 1996; Reed, 1979; Thomas and Shaw, 1948; Spencer and Thomas, 1948; Shaw, 1944). As their names suggest, they were confined to the hills and mountains, usually between altitudes of 1200 metres and 2250 metres (roughly 4000 and 8000 feet) and are to be found in the Himalayas and further south on high land in the peninsula. Fig. 1 shows the locations of some of the major hill stations. It is not quite certain how many there were, but Kennedy (1996) has identified some 60, around 20 of which have developed since independence in 1947. India’s hill environments are believed to have been discovered unofficially, by explorers from the East India Company who wanted to know more about the sub-continent (Price, 1908). Other visitors in the early nineteenth century were soldiers seeking good health, but very soon a far wider civilian population was ‘going to the hills’ for the same reason (Spencer and Thomas, 1948). Soldiers would return to the plains refreshed and hill stations with their cooler air, developed a reputation for possessing curative powers. People with fevers or diarrhoea were said to have been restored to health after visiting the hills. ‘Going to the hills’ in nineteenth century India showed certain parallels with ‘taking the waters’ in the spa towns back home (Urry, 2002). Secretly, those who made these pilgrimages were hoping for cures, but never was it proven that either the hill environments, or the spa waters, had healing properties and the myth gradually faded.

From the early years of the nineteenth century, growth of the leading hill stations, Simla, Darjeeling, Mahabaleshwar, Ooty and others was rapid, and throughout the century the hills became increasingly attractive as summer resorts for the European population in India. However, going to the hills was not all that easy for the earliest European visitors as access was so difficult (Price, 1908). There were no roads, only paths, and in places, these were steep and difficult. Wild life abounded, some of it dangerous, and no sooner had tracks been cleared than they were overgrown or washed away by the monsoon rains. And when at the hill station, comforts would have been few in those early days. All that would have made the whole journey bearable were the cooler temperatures, the reduction in the
flies and biting insects, the spectacular scenery and possible meetings with like-minded British explorers and soldiers (pers. comm. former hill station residents).

The early nineteenth century was a time when the British were considering India as a potential settler colony as the climate of hill stations was ideally suited to a British or European population. A particular virtue of the hills, from the viewpoint of the early visitors was that unlike the plains, they were thinly settled. The majority of Indians considered the cool atmosphere of the hills unhealthy and going out into the ‘night air’ was, and to some extent still is perceived as the surest way of getting a cold (author’s fieldwork). If a future settler colony were to be based on the hills, then these hills had to attract colonisers. Kennedy (1996) argues that the adoption of the term ‘hill’ station was an attempt to scale down the remoteness, the isolation and the overpowering sensation of ‘nature untamed’ in what was really a mountain environment. Mountains were popular in works of art, and the Grand Tour had brought an appreciation of the Alps to Britain but these picturesque images in no way compared with the magnitude of India’s ‘hills’, particularly the Himalayas. According to Reynolds-Ball (1907: 311) “Himalayas are to the Alps what these mountains are to the Welsh Hills”, and though much smaller, even the Western and Eastern Ghats of southern India presented an image of nature as a major barrier to human existence (Fig. 2). It was not just that the ‘hills’ were veritable mountains, clearing the land and keeping it clear was a major problem as the vegetation in this tropical domain grew literally twice as fast as in the temperate zone (Six et al., 2002; Kirschbaum, 1995; Oades, 1988). In an attempt to pacify the environment and to create a sense of the familiar, John Sullivan, the founder of Ooty in 1819, was one of the first Europeans to introduce the seeds and cuttings of trees, flowers and shrubs from Britain and thus to create an illusion of rural Britain in India; an image of Eden.

From the late 1820s, efforts were directed towards making hill stations places which felt safe and familiar. Houses built were of cottage style, with gardens and hedges reminiscent of village England, and familiar seeds and plants from Britain and Europe fortified this image (Figs. 3a and 3b). Darjeeling, Shillong, Ooty, Conoor and other hill stations were the sites of Government Botanical Gardens where saplings of trees, fruit and flowers, garden plants, plants from the wild and from other parts of the Empire were bred and spread through the local hill communities. These gardens were used for recreation by European residents and by visitors because of their quiet beauty and because they generated a sense of the familiar through their staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1999). It should be noted that plants which thrived in the Himalayan Botanical Gardens were quite different from those of
the south, but there was, nonetheless, some degree of familiarity to be found in gardens of both the north and the south, and the produce of all the gardens contributed to the ordering of the vegetation on the hill stations, and to the taming of nature in these environments. In writings about hill stations it seems to be taken for granted that the British acquired the land easily, but this was not always the case and Pradhan (2007) reveals considerable tensions in some places between the colonial power and the hill tribes.

When, after the mid-nineteenth century Simla, Darjeeling, Mahabaleshwar and Ooty received visits from governors and governors-general, the imperial government which was based on the plains was persuaded of the benefits of spending at least part of the year in the hills, and subsequently, hill station development became incorporated in state policy (Kennedy, 1996: 12). Construction on the hill stations was swift and their physical transformation, rapid. Timber was needed for building on the plains and also for building on the hills, and this period saw the removal of much of the forest around hill stations. In addition to the need for timber, a more open landscape generated feelings of security in visitors and reassurance that nature was not overtaking human existence. However, within two decades, the folly of heavy felling became apparent: soil erosion became a major problem and landslides increased in number and frequency (Kennedy, 1996). The British response was to re-forest the land using species imported from Australia such as wattle, Australian blackwood and Eucalyptus, species which it was believed would further improve the appearance of the hills and encourage settlement. As Table 1 shows, hill stations increased significantly from the 1840s to the 1850s and though their numbers grew more slowly after that, the British consolidated their position in the hills (Kennedy, 1996).

Table 1 Growth of hill stations in the nineteenth century

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date founded</th>
<th>Number of hill stations</th>
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<tr>
<td>1820s and 1830s</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>1840s and 1850s</td>
<td>23</td>
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Several factors came into existence in the mid-nineteenth century all of which had a bearing on the development of hill stations: first, the colonial administration had become more established by the middle of the 19th century and with thoughts of India becoming a settler colony, the marriage of Crown employees to Indians and Anglo-Indians was restricted. This had been encouraged and became common practice earlier in Britain’s presence in India and as a consequence, a significant Anglo-Indian population had grown up (Ghosh, 2006; Joseph, 2004; Stoler, 1989). The restriction on marriage to Indian women saw many more British women coming to India as wives of colonial administrators and soldiers, and travel to India was made infinitely easier by the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Unused to the extreme heat of the Indian plains, it was usual for wives and children to spend at least the hottest months of July and August in the hills and this alone contributed to the growth of the hill stations. From the mid-nineteenth century British women on hill stations outnumbered British men, the only place they did in India and in their cottage homes and gardens women reproduced the homeland and its culture. The strict social etiquette which developed on the hills, and which was sustained by women through the home, was perceived as fundamental to the continued survival of the Empire (Clayton, 2006; Kennedy, 1996).

Second, the colonial government’s support for spending part of the year in the hills saw hill stations become linked with the administration of the colony. By the turn of the century hill stations had become the focal points from which the British ruled India. As a consequence, hill stations most closely linked with the colonial administration such as Simla, Darjeeling, Mahabaleshwar and Ooty saw particularly rapid expansion. Simla which became the seat of the Viceroy and the summer capital for the Raj developed five satellites, some of which were specifically for the military. Cash crops such as tea, coffee and cinchona had been introduced on hill stations and these too became increasingly important after the mid-nineteenth century. Darjeeling and Ooty, benefited economically from tea production, as did Coorg and Yercaud from coffee.

A third reason for the growth of hill stations was that after the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the British administration became increasingly wary of Indians on the plains. The Mutiny was a major shock to the Raj which clearly shied away from admitting that perceptions of the Raj by the Raj did not accord with those of the majority of Indians in India. Worlds of perception and reality were thus far apart (Money-Kyrle, 1956), and the insecurity caused by the Mutiny almost certainly fuelled the British retreat to the
hills. Here, their comparatively large numbers gave the illusion that they were less of a minority than on the plains. This distancing of the administration from the plains was strongly opposed by government officers remaining in Calcutta and Madras, and also by the growing strength of the Indian Nationalists who complained that the core of the British Administration was becoming increasingly isolated and out of touch with the pulse of India (Clarke, 1881). In spite of this, the British remained blinkered and pressed ahead with the development of their hill stations, a symbol of their power and domination in India. They left the administration on the plains in the safe hands of Anglo Indians, people trusted because of their close ties with the Europeans and whose very existence according to Said, (1979) reflected European possession and mastery of the Orient.

Hill stations declined between the wars and were a shadow of their earlier colonial splendour by independence. Most of the British had gone by then and of those who were still there, most had left by 1960. After a relatively quiet period, hill stations have now been rediscovered as tourist resorts. Predictably, they have quite a different flavour from colonial times. They have grown in importance along with global and domestic tourism, with increasing disposable incomes among India’s middle classes (Fernandes, 2006, 2000) and the explicit desire of this group to enjoy their leisure time. Improved technology has enhanced the quality of roads and vehicles, and developments in electronic technology have brought to a wider audience in India and overseas the existence and beauty of hill stations. Bearing in mind all the limitations identified at the start of this paper, we now return to the visitors to the hills, past and present, and examine how their gaze may have been constructed and how it has changed over time.

The tourist gaze
As Urry (2002) observes, “What makes a particular tourist gaze depends upon what it is contrasted with; what the forms of non-tourist experience happen to be. The gaze therefore, presupposes a system of social activities and signs which locate the particular tourist practices, not in terms of some intrinsic characteristics, but through the contrasts implied with non-tourist social practices, particularly those based within the home and paid work.” (Urry, 2002:1-2). The gaze, however, has its critics: Crouch (2002) argues that major limitations of the gaze are that it is two-dimensional, is limited to the visual and does not speak of engagement with the environment. Crouch (2002) advocates the need to extend the gaze, to include the embodiment of space and the multidimensional experiences of tourists themselves. He observes that the sensing of space by the tourist or visitor is far more complex than the
gaze would suggest, however in our case, proceeding with an analysis of the embodiment of space would be extremely difficult in historical settings as access to tourists is impossible. The gaze, however, is arguably a more attractive tool for analysis because it can be based on existing images and cultural stereotypes (Pagenstecher, 2007), thus, unattractive as it may seem to some, the gaze may be constructed by the non-involved bystander. It is this detachment which has made it popular and the tourist industry is arguably one of the worst culprits as the marketing of destinations is now ‘Fordist’, according to Pagenstecher, 2007, and is based on the constructed gaze of the ‘average’ tourist who is denied all individuality (Coleman and Crang, 2002; Perkins and Thorns, 2001).

The gaze can also provide the context through which space becomes enlivened by the human conduct which gives it meaning (Massey, 1994, cited in Crouch, 2002). Using the gaze, as did Foucault (2003:ix), for “the act of seeing” and analysing power relations between medical practitioner and patient, leisure visitors can similarly exert control on the people and environments which are the subjects of their gaze. This is especially relevant to the way in which Europeans gazed upon and saw hill environments; the way they took them for their own and modified them to match their own imported idealised images. However, as Cheong and Miller (2000:371) argue, the tourist is also “vulnerable to the composite gaze of others”, and this is particularly relevant to tourists visiting hill stations today.

Despite its perceived limitations, the gaze is adopted as the main analytical tool in this paper and will be used initially to construct the contrasts between the visitor experiences of Europeans to the hills and their daily lives, as we understand them to have been. Where possible, the analysis is extended to include the engagement with space by visitors, or their embodiment of space. In the latter stages of the paper the discussion turns to modern India, and here we draw not only on the concept of the gaze, but also on the concept of the tourist glance (Chaney, 2002) to understand better the motivations and experiences of visitors whose access to the hills has been improved significantly by space-time compression (Harvey, 1973), and who experience the environment at a far faster pace than tourists who came before them.

**Visitors and their gaze in the European era**

Some of the earliest visitors to the hills were soldiers, sick or exhausted from the heat of the plains and in need of rest and convalescence (Kennedy, 1996). The gaze of those earliest visitors would have contrasted with their non-tourist experience which was the work of the Colonial government. First, they
would have been based in the plains where temperatures were high, frequently over 40ºC away from the coastal areas in the heat of the dry season and before the advent of the rains. Other than ‘punkas’, rudimentary fans, operated manually by an Indian servant, there would have been little to offer the European visitor respite from the Indian heat which, on the plains, continued oppressively day and night. In the hills, temperatures were much lower and better suited to peoples of European origin. It should be said that Europeans were, for many years, concerned about the tropical climate. The extreme heat was perceived to be the cause of sickness, and diseases such as malaria though the effects of bacteria, extremely active under tropical and humid conditions, were apparently unknown at the time. There was also a strong perception that the hot climate weakened the white man and that Europeans would die out if they settled in India (Arnold, 2004; Kenny, 1995; Bird, 1863). Stoler (1989) explains this belief more precisely, namely that “colonial men [were] susceptible to physical, mental and moral degeneration when they remain[ed] in their colonial posts too long”, that “native women [bore] contagions”, and that “white women [became] sterile in the tropics” (Stoler, 1989 p.636) While there is now evidence to show that such assumptions were erroneous, at the time they were of considerable concern to the European and hence hill stations were perceived as safer environments than the plains. Though the environment might have appeared healthy, mountain streams and lakes apparently fresh and clear would have contained bacteria with just as devastating effects as the waters of the plains, especially on the lower hill stations at 1200 metres (around 4000 feet) above sea level. Higher stations were undoubtedly safer. Those above 1500 metres (approximately 5000 feet) were generally malaria free, but there were never any guarantees. It soon became apparent that the hills did not provide a cure for illness, that people could and did become ill in the hills, but that their rarefied atmosphere was also restorative for European visitors and so the hills remained popular.

In addition to the peaceful environment, there would have been no seething crowds, so typical of major cities on the plains such as Calcutta, Bombay and Madras where the administration was based. Though the civil lines would have separated the residential areas of the colonial population from the non-colonial, any engagement of colonial officials with the urban areas would have brought them into contact with noise: noise from the sheer numbers of people on the streets; from the shouts of mobile vendors selling their wares; from daily temple rituals where loud clashing of cymbals, ringing of hand bells and discordant music from a range of instruments summoned the holy to gaze on the temple deity; from the processions and noise that accompanied weddings, temple festivals and other celebrations, and from mosques where the Muslim faithful were called to prayer. Most of these sounds were virtually
absent in the hills. Neither would there have been the persistent swarms of flies and biting insects, nor the smells of urban life on the plains, just peace and quiet during the day, with the exception of birdsong, and at night, the noisy silence of insects such as crickets, of night birds and the call of prowling animals in search of prey.

In addition to providing a contrast with the plains, the hills would also have been reminiscent of Britain and other parts of Europe and a substitute for returning home to England (Kennedy, 1996). The vastness of the hills and their untamed appearance was doubtless daunting for some of the earliest visitors, though once at hill stations such as Ooty, Coonoor and Yercaud in Tamil Nadu, the gentle rolling scenery was more evocative of the English Downs. Cool temperatures would have been similar to those of temperate Europe; hills draped in cloud and mist would have reminded visitors of European landscapes (Reynolds-Ball, 1907). When the mists lifted (Fig.4), glorious weather, rarely too hot, would have evoked memories of summer days in Britain and Europe. Facilities and accommodation on the hills were poor, virtually non-existent in the earliest days of settlement but the feelings of being close to nature would have been some compensation. Being people who were clearly adventurous (these early visitors had undoubtedly taken considerable risks by joining the colonial service or the army) the joys of hiking in the mountains, of watching both birds and animals, and of hunting the abundant wildlife would have been exhilarating and a welcome contrast to daily life on the plains.

Another contrast would have been the local inhabitants. In the south, many, though not all the hill tribes were gentle people with well developed subsistence skills, who lived close to nature. British visitors to Ooty were charmed by the Todas with their long hair in ringlets (Fig.5), their quiet pastoralism and their unusual and attractive beehive shaped huts. Some thought the Todas were related to peoples of the bible, inhabitants of an Eden (Kennedy, 1996) and Fig.6 reveals a nineteenth century representation of Ooty’s hills. Here we see Europeans gazing on a romantically constructed Toda family and their buffaloes; a scene almost biblical in its form, of people in peaceful harmony with nature. Similarly, on the Shevaroys, the elegant manner of the Malayalis who would stride effortlessly for miles across the hills appealed to the European visitors, as did the Woddas, stone masons with a gentle demeanour and incredible strength. Both men and women carry remarkably heavy stones and the Woddas’ capacity to break and dress stone for any purpose with the simplest of tools was a constant source of amazement to Europeans (pers. comm. hill station residents). The hill tribes were thus a
major contrast to European visitors’ experience both on the plains and in Europe and they thus provoked considerable interest.

The earliest visitors to hill stations would have taken their time to absorb their new environment. They would have stayed weeks, probably months in recuperation and restoration and it could be argued that the concept of the gaze (Urry, 2002) could be taken further (Crouch, 2002), as visitors engaged with the environment, participating in the peaceful existence of the hills. Their impressions of the hills, be they a reflection of gaze or embodiment in the environment were recorded in sketches and painting (Kennedy, 1996; Price, 1908). Images produced were picturesque, focusing on the beauty of the landscape rather than the harshness of life faced by either Indians or Europeans. Scenes such as those from Ooty and Conoor reflected gentle, rolling landscapes, unthreatening and reminiscent of the temperate West (Price, 1908). Fig. 7 shows St. Stephen’s church in Ooty, set against a background not dissimilar to the English Downs. Wending their way to church is a small family, more typical of a European than an Indian family, portrayed with a sentimentality that evokes the European’s pride in their conversion of Indians to Christianity. As with Fig.6, Fig. 7 also exudes paternalism, peace and safety, something that would have attracted visitors. Similarly, images of the Himalayas represented the sublime, awe-inspiring magnificence of the mountains at one extreme, and gentle beauty of the landscape with its animal and bird life at the other (Pradhan, 2007).

The tourist gaze at the end of the nineteenth century
By the turn of the century most hill stations were much larger and more established. Visitors intent on work, rest and play included members of the Administration, their wives and families, and inevitably, the army. Access had improved. Unmade roads were now much more than tracks, though they frequently fell into bad repair in the rainy season. To improve the reliability of access, railways (Fig. 8) were constructed by the British (using Indian labour) at Darjeeling, Simla and Ooty. For most other hill stations, visitors would begin their journey on horseback or in a horse-drawn cart where the road was not too steep. Once the road became too steep the horses would be taken back to the plains and the journey continued on foot or, for women and children, in a sedan chair which put enormous strain on the Indian porters. On the steep road to Yercaud, the porters were frequently bold enough on the steepest parts to refuse to carry the sedan chairs with their occupants unless their wage was increased (pers. comm. Yercaud resident). Luggage would have been transported by horse or bullock cart as far up the hills as possible, and beyond that, it would have been head-loaded by porter. The journey to the
hills would have been time consuming and exhausting for all involved, but mostly so for the porters whose interests were little considered. In spite of the exhausting journey, hill stations remained popular as the visitor’s gaze was set on the pleasurable experiences that lay ahead and the contrast with the daily grind for men of the administration based on the plains, and for their wives.

Simla had become the summer capital for the administration of all of India, and Ooty was the summer capital for the Madras Presidency, and similarly, Mahabaleshwar for Bombay. By the late nineteenth century European visitors were more numerous than in the past: many colonial administrators came on leave for the hottest months of the year, and some of these stayed longer in the hills to continue the business of government. The wives of colonial administrators based on the plains came to the hills with their husbands, or ahead of them to enjoy a longer summer break. Some came with their children to escape the heat, and some came to visit their children in boarding schools on the hills. These were similar to many of today’s leisure tourists. Significant numbers of soldiers would also spend their leave in the hills but colonial administrators and their families had comparatively little to do with soldiers in the ranks. Only the officer classes were considered socially acceptable, and only the most senior ones at that. Missionaries were also among the visitors to the hills and all too frequently were excluded from the society of senior officials of the Crown. The social hierarchy was thus clearly structured and in many ways bore a resemblance to India’s caste system. Moving from one level to another was extremely difficult.

If we are to understand how the tourist gaze was constructed, we must first have some understanding of what the lives of the visitors were like when they were not in the hills. A high proportion of visitors would have been in the British Colonial Service, the people who governed India. Graduates from British universities, these men were trained for their work in India. Most eventually rose to be District Officers, responsible for several hundred districts, the basic administrative units in India. They would have had the help of no more than a handful of British and Anglo-Indian officials who would be concerned with the practical issues of government and communication with the higher echelons of the administration. They would have had to deal with tax collection, labour problems, local conflict, rising Nationalism, local disputes, issues of law including tax disputes, with the education of staff for the administration (Frykenberg, 1986), with local problems such as disease epidemics, famines and attacks on local people by wild animals. They would also have had to co-ordinate the activities of other branches of the Colonial administration within the District, for example, the Forestry Service and the Survey of India. Though life
in the Colonial Service is frequently portrayed as one of self-indulgence, of being waited on by servants, and of lavish social activities, and though there is much truth in this, the work of Empire was nonetheless challenging, personally demanding, often difficult and sometimes dangerous. The numbers of administrators were comparatively few and their levels of responsibility, substantial. Indians were often treated harshly and with derision, possibly a result of the power bestowed on colonial officials, whose perceptions of their own superiority may well have been reinforced by the negative sentiments expressed about Indians since the late eighteenth century in Britain, by authors such as Dow (1770), and Macaulay (1907) (cited in Arnold, 2004). Most colonial officers were committed to the success of the Empire, and as a consequence, theirs was often a life of worry, of loneliness through separation from their families, at times of being hated, attacked, and in some cases killed. With this as a background, the desire to get away to the hills for respite is clear.

Besides District Officers, there were many others who assumed significant positions in the administration including officers in the Forest Service, the Education Service, the Survey of India, the Police and the Political Service which was made up of officers from the ICS or the Army and whose principal role was to work with the many princes who ruled large areas of India, overseen by the British. Other officials were involved in the Medical Service and played a role in commercial enterprise such as quality control on produce from India’s tea, coffee and jute plantations. For these too, work could be arduous, and although most would probably have had a higher standard of living than they would ever have achieved in Britain, nevertheless, this came at a price as theirs was a working life in relative isolation and trips to the hills would thus assuage their thirst for Western company.

India’s Colonial Administration was virtually all male, though some wives did play major roles in their husbands’ work and became very involved in Indian life. Some wives went up to the hills for most of the year but the harder among them would remain with their husbands, keeping a close eye on local conditions and participating in their husbands’ work where they were able. As the following quotation indicates, some women made stalwart efforts to learn the local language.

"You had to learn the language even as a woman, or you missed so much...I had a munshi [clerk] to teach me, but he always taught along military lines, because that was what he was used to. He would say, 'Go to the adjutant, and tell him that number 3 company has mutinied.' And all I wanted...was how to say, 'The meat is
\textit{tough.}”

- Patricia Edge, whose husband was in the Army and the Survey of India.


The role of the army was to keep the peace throughout India and consequently, soldiers were stationed in remote cantonments with few sources of entertainment, the North West Frontier being one example. Some were already stationed on the hills, such as the satellites around Simla, or at Ooty, but where they were in the heat of the plains, the hills had considerable appeal for periods of leave. They offered a rich social life and a relative abundance of women, Indian, Anglo-Indian and British, many of whom were prepared to enjoy, or endure, the attentions of the soldiers.

The impact of Christian missionaries, like the colonial period, was also at its strongest between the in the late nineteenth century and the end of World War I. However, they were viewed with some degree of suspicion by the higher echelons of society on the hill stations. Christianity in colonial India came from several missionary sources: the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, an Anglican mission; the London Missionary Society, where the Anglicans joined forces with the Presbyterians; Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist and many other missionary societies, from Britain, from Europe and from America. (Kent, 2004; Cox, 2002). Despite their best intentions of converting those perceived to be ‘heathens’ to Christianity, missionaries were given a wide berth because they were educating Indians, teaching them English, as this was the medium through which conversion could take place. Clearly, a religion which taught that all people were equal was appealing to the oppressed and missionaries’ close involvement with the poor encouraged the conversion of many from the lowest Hindu castes, and the casteless. This infuriated the higher castes who had much to lose through the liberation of the lowest in the caste system. Some missionaries also used their role to advance the status of women (Sawant, 2000), and predictably, this was not welcomed in Hindu society. The potential for missionary work to cause serious problems for the Colonial Administration was clearly recognised. Since the mid eighteenth century the East India Company had become increasingly anxious that the actions of the God-fearing missionary could threaten their commercial activities in India (Kitzan, 1971, Daughrity, 2004), and the murder of three Australian missionaries in China in the late nineteenth century reinforced this concern (Welch, 2005). A further reason why missionaries were not welcomed by all on hill stations was that their objectives were best met by their close involvement with Indians, especially the poorest and most oppressed, people usually ignored by the majority of the British in India. Missionary work was also a
calling for many single women and this too was perceived as suspect by some. Nevertheless, their work of spreading the Christian gospel found favour with Europeans and Fig. 7 is testimony to this. Though few missionaries participated in the extravagant social life on the hills, the cool air of the hills and the opportunity for relaxation were welcome relief from their labours of teaching English, preaching Christianity and fortifying the poorest, in particular women on the plains (Sawant, 2000).

The anticipation of getting away from the plains, from India and from Indians by many of the visitors to the hills was, to some extent confounded as the more the hills were transformed to accord to an image of Britain and escape from India, the more labour was needed from the plains in order to make the vision a reality. Labour, permanent and temporary was needed to construct roads, railways, bridges and buildings; labour was needed to maintain public spaces, to service clubs, reading rooms, tennis courts and offices of the administration; to act as house servants, cooks, gardeners, ayahs to help look after children, syces to look after the horses, and to meet many other British needs. Kennedy (1996) estimated that every visitor required approximately ten Indians to sustain their life on the hills. Rather than getting away from India and Indians, colonial administrators coming to the hills would have been just as close to the colonized as they were on the plains. But although Indians were all around, they, as ‘the other’ lived quite apart from the British, usually in overcrowded areas poorly provided with services. The picture of Coonoor bazaar (Fig.9) aptly shows the concentration of crowded Indian dwellings at the foot of the hill which date from Colonial times. The solid, spacious buildings of the colonial administration located nearer the top are not clearly evident on the picture but the contrasting constructions are still visible to visitors.

The gaze of the colonial administrator in the hill stations would thus have consumed on the one hand a model of rural England, and on the other, the very clear contrast with colonial India which was the context for the idyll. It is highly probable that the sharply contrasting situation of Indians in their dwellings would have been ignored or gone unnoticed by most visitors, though not by missionaries who would have been powerless to change perceptions of the Indian by the British, had they wished to do so. In analysing the gaze of British visitors on the hill stations, it is arguable that ‘gaze’ is not sufficient to understand the experiences of the visitors who enjoyed not only rest and relaxation but an active sporting and social life as well (Perkins and Thorns, 2001). Perhaps, in regard to this group, Crouch’s (2002) appeal for understanding the embodiment of space on the hills and the very different experiences of the visitors which contrasted with the norms of every-day life might be more apt.
Idyllic images of Britain which contrasted with life on the plains were constructed physically in every hill station, be it Simla, Darjeeling, Ooty, Conoor or somewhere as small as Yercaud. They all had features in common: at the centre of each was the Anglican church, the club which was a particularly British institution (Sinha, 2001), reading rooms, tennis courts and a lake probably created by damming a stream (Price, 1908). In addition, there were opportunities for hunting, shooting and fishing and all such pursuits favoured by the English gentry and widely adopted by Europeans in India (even though they might never have participated in such sports, were they in Britain). Ooty’s hunt club, for example, which dated from 1835 was renowned and continues to this day to meet once a month to charge through the Nilgiris, chasing the scent of a jackal rather than a fox (Independent on Sunday, 2005). Images of huntsmen in their deep pink uniforms remain, a lingering legacy of Ooty’s colonial past. This engagement with the landscape is not peculiar to the European visitor to India and has been noted in Perkins and Thorns’ (2001) analysis of current international tourists in settler societies such as New Zealand.

Social life on hill stations also contrasted markedly with the plains: it was more abundant, lively, and was taken extremely seriously (Crossette, 1998). The hills were the place where young men and women could meet as other opportunities were comparatively few. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation at the balls and the dances which were used as ‘coming out’ occasions for young women, announcing their readiness for marriage. European society on the hills rippled with frisson as rumour, gossip and scandal abounded (Kennedy, 1996). Social life was all the sweeter because the gender balance was fairly equal, contrasting with the plains where men far outnumbered women. Also, schools in the hills were good and many tried to re-create the British public school in India: institutions such as Bishop Cotton’s school in Simla; St. Paul’s of Darjeeling; St. George’s College, Mussoorie; St. Joseph’s of Coonoor, the Lawrence School at Lovedale, near Ooty, and to a less extent in the colonial era, Montfort and the Sacred Heart Convent in Yercaud attracted children of the Raj (Fig.10). These and many, others had clear religious affiliations and were renowned for their academic quality. Even more important, such schools enabled children to be educated relatively close to their parents, or at least, to their mothers.

In their attempts to re-construct and preserve Britishness in India, an increasing ritualistic importance became attached to the perpetuation of social traditions which had their roots in Britain (Kanwar, 1984).
In the major hill stations, dinners were formal affairs and Crossette (1998) writes of numerous full-dress balls and costume-party evenings. In places like Simla, Darjeeling and Ooty the best wines and champagnes were drunk regularly and food not easily available today was made available for officials of the Crown. Women who ran the households for their husbands (Blunt, 1996), especially wives of senior colonial administrators would have ensured that fine food was served on tables set with fine linens, silver cutlery and crystal. This opulence was all part of the perception that maintaining high standards was key to the continuation of Empire. Standards of etiquette and behaviour were arguably taken to extremes, exceeding those in Britain. They were perceived as strengths by those who upheld them, and were used to emphasise to the Indian one of the strengths upon which Empire was based. Between social events at clubs and summer residences, the British on the hills enjoyed horse races, horse shows and gymkhanas. It was an absolute necessity to be able to ride well where roads were poor and many Crown officials were army-trained horsemen. Shooting (game) was another pastime, mainly but not exclusively for men. Amateur theatricals, bridge parties, whist drives and mahjong evenings all provided amusement and for those hours of rest and relaxation, local libraries provided literature to suit a variety of visitors. Painting and sketching were popular and in the majority of colonial homes it was possible to find at least one home production of Monarch of the Glen, or similar artistic construction. Crossette (1998) notes that besides the lavish social events and relaxation there were also assignations to enliven long afternoons and dark mountain nights.

Excessive extravagance was confined largely to the major hill stations. The smaller settlements where official functions were limited were much more prudent. Nevertheless, even at these stations visitors from the plains looked forward to a relatively rich and lively social diet for the duration of their stay and the anticipation of all this conditioned the visitors’ gaze. The lives of Indians were largely ignored except where they formed a regular part of the workforce or where the ‘otherness’ of the hill tribes interested European visitors.

The tourist gaze in the 1950s and 1960s – the end of an era

Hill stations had declined significantly after their heyday which lasted from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War I. After this, travel to and from Britain improved, and following the end of World War II in 1945 and rising Indian Nationalism, it was clear that the last days of the Empire were looming. Fearful for their future, many British residents returned to Britain. There was also significant migration from the hill stations to Rhodesia, South Africa and Australia, for in spite of their allegiance to
Britain, many residents who were second generation British in India, knew no other ‘home’ than India, and fearful of the British climate, they chose to live nearer the equator than in Britain. With India’s independence in 1947, the Administration with its enormous retinue left India, and so did the British army. European visitors to the hills declined significantly; property, including tea and coffee estates were sold to Indians and comparatively swiftly, the social balance changed. By the 1950s Indians had taken over the clubs, the estates and other social and economic strongholds of the British, but in spite of this, each hill station retained a relic of European dwellers. Some were planters, and some retired from the army or commercial life.

A significant group of visitors to the hills at this time were missionaries who were no longer predominantly European or American but included many Anglo-Indians and Indians. Another, still significant group of visitors included British and other Europeans who had returned to Europe but came back to India perhaps once or at most twice to see those who had stayed on. In this period visitors to the hills also included academics from Europe and North America who were interested in botany, history, health and social change, and retired members of the British army (author’s experience). Returning to the tourist gaze, missionaries continued to come to the hills mainly for a rest, not for a lively social life. The Shevaroy hills in particular, grew in importance as a ‘stronghold’ for religious organisations and many missionaries came to relax and gain strength from their parent organisations. Even in those days there was mild cynicism towards missionaries by the remaining Europeans. The tourist gaze of visitors from abroad was focused on keeping in touch with relatives and friends, of glimpsing once again the magnificence of the hills, and experiencing with nostalgia, the remaining richness of an era past. As Crossette (1998) observes, the hill stations may have languished in the postcolonial years, but they were never completely forgotten.

**The modern tourist gaze**

Stagnation of the hill stations in the years following independence came to an end when domestic tourism began to flourish in India. Robinson (1972) observed the vigorous growth of recreation movements throughout South Asia while noting that they had attracted little attention in the literature at that time. Visitors to Ooty were already on the increase by the early 1970s, and even in Yercaud, the green shoots were visible with the first ‘new’ post independence hotels established at about this time. Tourism grew rapidly on the hill stations after 1991 when India’s economic liberalization policies saw an increase in both the numbers and prosperity of the middle classes. This, together with Indian
Nationalism has generated a new progressive image of India both within India, and overseas (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2007; Foster, 2007; Fernandes, 2006; Mawdsley, 2004; Bhardwaj et al. 1999). As part of the growing wealth of the middle classes a leisure culture has developed and with it, increasing demand for leisure breaks. In 1987 an estimated 34.82mn domestic tourists travelled within India for leisure breaks, to visit family and friends, as pilgrims and for business purposes. By 2006, this figure had risen to 420 million domestic tourists (Sreekumar, 2005; NCAER 2003) an increase of over 585 per cent. A survey by NCAER (2003) revealed that the proportion of tourism households was highest among the urban, middle income groups. Owing to their increased disposable income, many middle class domestic tourists are now taking three to four holidays a year within India, and hill stations are proving to be popular destinations (India Core.com, 2008; Sreekumar, 2005).

But what is it that prompts India’s domestic tourists to visit hill stations; what conditions their gaze? What do they expect of the experience, and are their expectations met. How does the gaze of Indian domestic tourists compare or contrast with that of their European predecessors? Broadly three main groups of domestic tourists were identified during the period of fieldwork: leisure tourists, business tourists and pilgrims. However, owing to constraints of time, fieldwork was conducted mainly with one group, the leisure tourists who will be the focus of discussion.

Regarding the gaze of the modern leisure tourist, expectations are to a large extent ‘conditioned’ by web descriptions of hill stations as this source of information is widely available in India. Over 70 per cent (51 visitors) of the 72 Indian leisure tourists to the hills interviewed in December 2007 claimed to have used the web to learn more about Ooty and Yercaud. Although each hill station is different, they still share many similarities and web images tend to highlight common features of scenic beauty such as the lake, the Anglican church, cottages with their gardens and hedges, a range of local picnic spots, waterfalls, wildlife, sites with panoramic views from the hills, tours of tea gardens and coffee estates and particular features such as the Botanical Gardens in Ooty, the Nilgiri railway, and above Yercaud, the Shevarayan temple. According to OotyIndia.com (2008), visitors are attracted to hill stations because “they not only offer respite from the dust and pollution of the city but also give people a chance to see the undefiled beauty of nature. The green hills, the cascading waterfalls and sparkling brooks all make the hill stations a delight for the eyes of the city-weary.”

Available at http://www.ootyindia.com/tourist-attractions.html
As many of the leisure tourists to the hills are middle class Indians (see Table 2), and as the gaze is constructed partly by the contrast with their non-tourist daily lives, I digress now to consider the nature of the working lives of professional middle class Indians. The characteristics of employment in corporate industry, including the IT sector and major Indian companies operating call centres are of particular interest as these are the types of employers included in the sample of tourists in the hills.

Table 2: Employment of sample of leisure tourists in Ooty and Yercaud, December 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of</th>
<th>Ooty (total)</th>
<th>Ooty (women)</th>
<th>Yercaud (total)</th>
<th>Yercaud (women)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT industries</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>managers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>business</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>call centres</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doctors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lawyers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>retired</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housewife</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s fieldwork, December 2006, 2007

It would seem that growing affluence of the middle classes has come at a price: long hours of work which increasingly absorb not only men but women too are bringing about changes in social structures. Women are drawing increasingly on the service of others to look after their children while they work, and respondents, particularly younger women, talked about the problems of balancing the demands of family and work (Radhakrishnan, 2008). Pressure at work and a sedentary lifestyle are trapping many who are succumbing to a range of illnesses, including ‘lifestyle diseases’, defined as coronary heart disease, cancers and diabetes. In addition, there have been growing reports of weight problems, depression and family breakdown among the middle classes (Mehdi, 2007). Though there may be many who are satisfied with their jobs and especially with their incomes (author’s fieldwork), the pressures at
work which are increasingly being documented, provide a good basis from which to construct the perceived tourist gaze (Mahapatra, 2007).

Advertisements for virtually every Indian hill station cited on the web highlight the serenity, calmness and physical beauty of the environment, and almost every single respondent interviewed said that they had come to the hills either for ‘rest and relaxation’, for a break from work, ‘to get away from it all’ and / or to ‘enjoy the natural environment’. These same words were used again and again. Asked exactly what these terms meant, respondents explained that the hills provided escape from the noise, the rush and the pollution of the city; escape from the long hours of work; time to relax with wives / husbands and families in a beautiful setting, and on the hills they felt close to nature.

Discussion: Comparing and contrasting the gaze over time

Getting away from it all (to peace, quiet and ‘undefiled nature’) embodies similar sentiments to those of the Europeans who so enjoyed ‘going to the hills’. While the desire to experience proximity to nature was as strong among European visitors as among modern Indians, it is noteworthy that the colonials were keen to escape the heat, the flies and the noise of the plains, but Indians rarely referred to escaping the heat. Pollution and congestion are more contemporary concerns in modern urban India (Pucher, 2007; Mohanraj and Azeez, 2005). Almost all the modern visitors enjoyed the scenic beauty of the hills and spent much of their time preoccupied with this aspect of their trip. They were far less interested in constructed monuments even though these were always advertised. It could thus be argued that the values that India’s domestic tourists attribute to space on the hills, and the ways in which they engage with it are significantly different from their European predecessors (Massey1994, cited in Crouch, 2002). In colonial times a great deal of energy was devoted to mastering, possessing and even transforming space on the hills so that it conformed to predetermined criteria which related to Britain and the Empire. It was this obsession with recreating the landscape, this staged authenticity which attracted many visitors for whom returning to Britain was not an option. Many took the beauty of the environment even further, claiming to have found ‘paradise’ and ‘Eden’ on the hills (Price, 1908; Kennedy, 1996), a paradise which they tried to possess and from which most Indians were excluded.

Most modern Indian tourists, however, have neither such obsessions nor such pretentions and space on the hills is now invested with very different meanings (Massey, 1994). They are predominantly places of beauty and escape for Indian tourists, and although Europeans also sought to escape to the hills, it was
for different reasons and from different pressures. Because the conditioning of both sets of visitors is so very different, inevitably, the eyes through which they see the hills are markedly different.

One notable difference between European visitors and modern domestic tourists concerns travel and the length of their stay on the hills. In the nineteenth century the journey was lengthy and tiring and visitors stayed for weeks and months. Today, travel is much easier. With the development of technology in the form of air travel, good roads and cars, travel has become part of the leisure experience, extending the time couples and families can spend together. There is evidence that more families are travelling together now than ever in the past (Varghese, 2005). This brings to mind Urry’s (2002) scapes and flows where travel itself becomes part of the scape, influencing the flows of tourists. Along the routes enterprises develop, small at first, responding to increasing demand by tourists for restaurants, local crafts and many other products, access to which adds to the intensity of consumerism and becomes part of the holiday. Hill station visitors were knowledgeable about a range of destinations and were eager to relate where they had been, and where they were going next. The nature of their engagement with the hills accords with the findings of Chaney (2002) and Larsen (2004) who refers to the ‘mobile travel experience’ where participants are able to experience a moving landscape as immobile observers, glancing rather than engaging any more closely. Technological improvements have increased time-space compression and Harvey (1989) argues that this has enhanced rather than diminished the significance of space and place. However, much depends on the term ‘significance’. In colonial times, cultural capital was undoubtedly obtained from visiting hill stations and experiencing British culture for a period of the year. There was considerable snobbery between the hill stations and the clear hierarchy which existed between them would have conditioned the visitors’ gaze. Inevitably, this disappeared with the independence of India but it could be argued that the domestic leisure tourist’s capacity to ascend one set of hills, take in the scenery, descend to the plains and move on swiftly to conquer another destination is, in itself, used as a form of cultural capital. There is a hunger for seeing as much as possible, for consuming environments by glimpsing and glancing, capturing them on camera rather than engaging more deeply with them (Larsen, 2004; Chaney, 2002). Bell and Lyall (2002:21) argue that “today’s technologies of movement, from aircraft to video camera, both inspire and facilitate new forms of consumption”.

Perhaps one could argue that with modern leisure tourism still relatively new, the experience of travel, or travelling hopefully is just as important to India’s domestic tourists as arriving at destinations. Perhaps one could go on to advocate that in much the same way as a destination develops and matures
(Butler, 2006), a similar progression can be found in the nature of demand by tourists. Initially, the experience of travel itself is of paramount importance; next, a variety of entertainment at destinations is demanded; then the tourist seeks quality of experience at each; this is followed by an overt desire to appear to be learning, benefiting from the experience of being a tourist. The next stage is where, in this age of environmental and social concern, the self-deluding tourist still wishes to continue to consume the environment and its occupants but in a manner which marks them out as being environmentally friendly, not socially destructive, and of benefit to the destination.

At the moment, though they might dispute it, evidence from the field visit showed little depth of interest of domestic tourists in their destinations but far more interest in where they had been, and their travel plans for the immediate future. Does this perhaps show some similarities with tourists at the time of the Grand Tour? Engagement with space has clearly changed, and as factors such as technology now have a major influence on the gaze, it is no surprise that the nature of the leisure visitor gaze on the hill stations has changed markedly over a century.

Escapism is always important in tourism (Ryan, 1992) and that is common to the motivation of visitors to the hills past and present. However, the above analysis does show that while the gaze of the European visitor to the hills was driven by the obsession to escape to the staged authenticity of a replacement for ‘home’, that of the modern visitor is driven by the headiness of travel and of escape from the growing pressures associated with India’s increased participation in the global economy. Perhaps the greatest difference is that the element of staged authenticity is no longer critical to the modern tourist gaze.

**Endnotes**

1. The author lived in Yercaud for ten years and has also visited several other hill stations including Simla, Mussoorie and Dehra Dun in the Himalayas; Munnar, Ponmudi and Thekkady in Kerala, and Udhagamandalam (Ooty), Conoor and Yercaud in Tamil Nadu. Fieldwork in Yercaud and Ooty was carried out in December, 2006 and December, 2007.
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Till the mid 1870s, El Co., Xtn missionaries and Hindu elite used to cooperate but from 1870s, stopped.


OTTACAMUND ON THE NEILGHERRIES, 1856
Reduced from the original lithograph of a drawing by Primrose Fraser, H.M. 22nd Regiment.
St. Stephen's, 2007

ST. STEPHEN'S CHURCH OOTACAMUND

Enlarged from the original lithograph in Baikie's The Neighbours 1st Edn. (1834)