Himalayan hill stations from the British Raj to Indian tourism Isabelle Sacareau

National tourism in developing countries and especially its links with colonial tourism has been quite largely ignored by researchers, except for the pionner works of Mohamed Berriane on Morocco (Berriane 1992) and Nathalie Raymond on Latin America (Raymond 1999, 2002). Recently, several works about domestic tourism have been published, mainly by Chinese and South Asian researchers (Wen 1997, Wang and Yamamura, 2000, Ghimire, 2001), but their approach is more economic than geographic or historic. However, colonization was an important part of the spread of tourism outside Europe during the 19th century, especially during the British Raj, when many hill stations were built in the Himalayas and the Western Ghats. The main reason for ignoring this phenomenon is probably the general discredit attributed to tourism, which is generally viewed as a futile activity for rich people, especially when enjoyed in developing countries. While French research has no tradition of colonial and post-colonial studies in spite of its colonial history, English, American and Indian scientific literature has produced some important works on the hill stations of the British Raj in India (Spencer and Thomas 1948, Pubby 1988, Kanwar 1990, Hamilton and Bhasin 1995, Kenny 1995, Kennedy,1996). However it has generally analyzed them from a colonial and post-colonial point of view as a spatial and symbolic manifestation of British imperialism.

If the tourism dimension of such places is often evoked in comparison with similar places in Europe at the same time, most of these works do not study them as the result of the spread of tourist practices from Europe to a different cultural area and to a different socio-economic and political context. Hardly anything is said about the future of these hill stations, symbols of colonial power, after Independence. As a matter of fact, the Post Independence era might have put an end to such places, in so far as India first had to face underdevelopment. However they became the favourite destination for Indian domestic tourists, as a middle class was already emerging, especially in the 1980s.

This apparent paradox in the nationalist context of independent India needs to be explained. For us it reveals the extent to which these places attract tourists. This indicates their ability to survive the early conditions of their birth thanks to a process in Indian society of appropriating these places. This paper falls within a geographical approach to tourism developed by the French MIT research team (Knafou, Bruston, Deprest,

Duhamel, Gay, Sacareau 1997, Équipe MIT 2002, Stock (coord.) 2003, Duhamel, 2003-2004, etc.). It is based on field research conducted in April 2003 in Mussoorie and Nainital, two hill stations in the Indian Garhwal Himalayas, located in the state of Uttaranchal. Its aim is to show the relationships between the systemic combination of actors and practices that produced colonial hill stations and the Indian contemporary tourist system. It will first present how the colonial tourist system developed, and its links with the European models of practice and places at the same time. Then, it will examine the expansion of the hill station since Independence with the rise of Indian domestic tourism. It is argued that there is no break but continuity between the colonial system and the post-colonial tourist system.

The constitution of the colonial tourist system in Himalayan Gahrwal (1820-1880)

According to a geographical approach, tourism is defined as a system of actors, practices and places, which allow individuals to travel for their "recreation" 1 and to live temporarily in other places located "outside their everyday life" (MIT 2002, Knafou and Stock 2003). According to this definition, the hill stations of the British Raj in India are one type of tourist place created *ex-nihilo* by British residents, and dedicated to their own recreation. These establishments were the result of the transfer of tourist practices in use in the early 19th century in Europe by people who belonged to the same social elite, who were the inventors of tourism and tourist resorts in England and on the continent. They were built for similar reasons but with some adaptations to the colonial and tropical context. Two phases can be identified during the colonial age concerning the development of hill stations. The first phase corresponds to the pioneering phase of building military cantonments and health resorts from 1820, when the Himalavan borders were secured, to the Great Indian Mutiny in 1857. The second phase, from 1857 to 1880, corresponds to how hill stations thrived by acknowledging their recreational nature and the diversification of their functions as administrative capitals of the Empire and as educational places for the children of British residents.

¹ The concept of "recreation" in French is considered as the reconstruction of body and mind, which differs from simple enjoyment or leisure activities (cf. Stock (coord) 2003, Le tourisme, acteurs, lieux et enjeux, p. 27).

HILL STATIONS IN INDIA IN 2006



The creation of hill stations in the Himalayas in the early 19th century is first a response to both sanitary and strategic considerations (Spencer and Thomas 1948, Kenny 1995, Kennedy 1996). British citizens who had to live in the tropics were particularly exposed to fever and disease. Until the second half of the 19th century, doctors were unable to detect the reasons for most tropical diseases or their links with transmission agents such as water or mosquitoes. Mortality was very high among them, just as during the great cholera epidemic of 1817-1821 (Kennedy 1996). According to the hygiene theories fashionable at that time in Europe, British people wanted to set up sanatoria in the Highlands. So, just like European civilians, convalescents and invalid soldiers were able to escape the heat and the

fever of the tropical plains in summer. As British doctors in Europe established winter resorts on the French Riviera and in the foothills of the Pyrenees, the British living in India looked for temperate climatic conditions, which they found at about 2,000 m in the Himalayas (*cf. map Hill stations in India in 2006*).

The Indian hill stations are a kind of transposition to the tropical world of *villegiature* in use in Europe at the same time. The difference lies in the inversion of climatic and seasonal conditions specific to the tropical zone: while their compatriots flew away from bleak weather conditions in the industrial cities of England to the softness and sweetness of the Mediterranean Riviera in winter, British colonists in India sought the cold and rainy weather of the tropical mountain climate in summer to escape the heat of the plains.

But the project to build such health resorts-cum-vacation resorts called for locating safe places within the up-and-coming new Empire. In the early 19th century, the Himalayas were still an unstable margin. The Gorkhali rulers of Nepal tried to extend their kingdom at the expense of their neighbours, the rajas of Sikkim, Kumaon and Garhwal. Their interests clashed with those of the East India Company, which wanted to establish trade routes to Tibet through the Himalayas. Following the victorious intervention of the British Army, Nepal's boundaries were fixed. The British took the opportunity to annex some strategic territories in order to control and to secure the Himalayan border. They purchased land from local princes to establish military cantonments and to build sanatoria for their soldiers, as in Mussoorie in 1820, one year after Simla had been established.

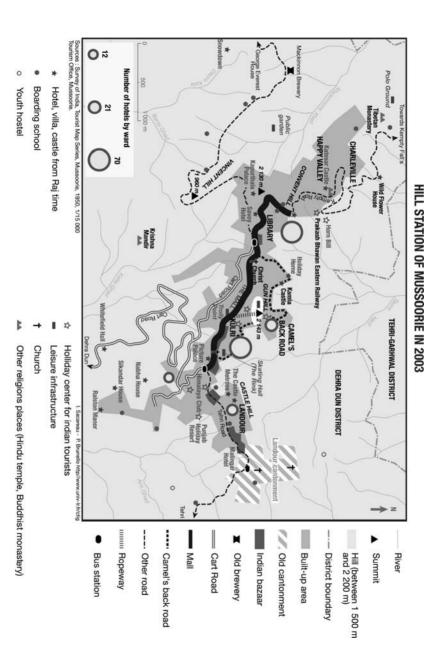
The people mostly involved in developing these hill stations were British Army officers, administrators of newly conquered territories of the East India Company, military doctors, businessmen, suppliers to the British Army and planters. They succeeded in convincing the political authorities of the possibility of building European settlements in the Himalayas. They incited investors and colonists to settle there, or to sponsor the new hill stations. They did not hesitate to build their own residence there, as an example to their compatriots. They attracted numerous visitors who used to stay in the Highlands each monsoon season. For example, Mussoorie was founded by Superintendent Shore of the Doon valley, by captain Young, commander of Landour cantonment and by an English trader from Meerut, who opened a brewery in 1830 to supply the army. In the same way Naini Lake was discovered during a hunting party in 1839 by a sugar trader from the nearby district of Shahajanpur, Mr Barron, and by an engineer from among his friends (Gazetteer of the Simla District, 1904). Conscious of the quality of the site,

very similar to the romantic Alpine lakes celebrated by the Romantics at the same period, he gave up his business to promote the idea of building a new health resort. He came back in 1842, with official instructions, to mark out a dozen properties to be sold or rented.

Nevertheless, they would not have succeeded without the help of the colonial society and the British Empire's authorities. The arrival of prestigious representatives of the Raj, such as the Governor General of India in Simla in 1827, brought fame to the young hill stations, just as the members of royal families did for European tourist resorts. All these stations were created *ex-nihilo* in mountain forests and on land that seemed to be uninhabited and ownerless with the exception of some local *zamindari*, tax collectors for the rajas. In fact, most of this land was appropriated and used by the mountain people from the nearby valleys as pastureland or to collect firewood.

As well as health considerations, hill stations had military functions which were obvious from their strategic location on high ridges at about 2,000 m. From there it was possible to check both the plains, where most Indians lived, and the Himalayan borders. This remote location had a great advantage in sheltering women and children during the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 (Kennedy1996). Its very characteristic morphology can be explained both by these strategic and physical conditions and by the aesthetic values prevailing at the same time in Europe, which shaped the hill stations' landscape (*ibid.*).

Mussoorie or Darjeeling give good examples of the hill station morphhology. Steep slopes and deep valleys limits the amount of flat land with the exception of the narrow mountain ridges. On the main ridge, the Mall is a tree-lined promenade, with benches and kiosks which link the station's wards. It is the axis structuring the hill station, like the promenade in European tourist resorts. The highest ridges and hills offers a panoramic view of both the mountainside and the plain. Observatories are also set up at their summit, such as Gun Hill in Mussoorie. Shops and public buildings (churches, banks and post offices), leisure facilities (assembly rooms, libraries, gymkhanas and clubs) or outdoor playgrounds are to be found at the mall's extremities (see Mussoorie map). All around lay the English station ward with its hotels and cottages. Cart Road serves the hill station. It allows cars and goods to access the foothills of the resort. Military cantonments and Indian bazaars stand outside the station, like a world apart and run in their own particular way. Crowded Indian bazaars that provides British supplies are strictly separate from the European settlement. This socio-spatial segregation reflects the domination of the indigenous society by the British colonist.



Approval of recreational places for colonial society and gradual investments by Indian society (1880-1947)

During the second half of the 19th century, thanks to progress made in medicine and to the systematic planting of cinchona for treating malaria, long stays in the highlands were no longer of any use. But in spite of this, doctors continued sending their convalescents and weaker patients, especially women and children, to the hill stations. As a matter of fact, in keeping with Victorian ideology and social Darwinism, the idea prevailed that long stays by white men in the Tropics could lead to race degeneration. On the contrary, a cold climate associated with sport and physical exercise was believed to produce the strong men that the Empire needed to rule India (Spencer and Thomas 1948, Kenny 1995, Kennedy 1996). This explains why a lot of boarding schools were established in the hill station. In the second half of the 19th century, they became educational places for English children, a real "nursery for a ruling race", as the historian Dane Kennedy points out (ibid.). For example, according to the District gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, there were 205 schools and 8,348 pupils in Nainital in 1932.

The hill stations were also supposed to be a good distraction from neurasthenia and spleen ailments which were very common among expatriates, isolated in the midst of the Indian masses. This was also one of the main functions of European spas where places of leisure were associated very early on with health resorts as a way of treating illnesses, but where distractions, socialising and enjoyment have progressively taken over from medical justifications. Mussoorie is described as being the "Ramsgate of the Himalayas" and Simla is compared to Brighton (ibid.). Like tourist resorts in Europe, hill stations enabled colonial society to escape the social constraints prevailing in the plains for a while. Staying there was a real break from everyday life in the colony. This break had a recreational effect on individuals (Équipe MIT 2002), as games, sports and entertainment allowed them to forget their self-restraint (Elias, Dunning 1994). As a matter of fact, tourist travel is based on the search for a "differential" which exists between one's usual place of residence and tourist resorts (Équipe MIT 2002, Duhamel 2003-2004, Ceriani, Duhamel, Knafou, Stock 2005). But this differential is inverted in the case of British colonial society. British residents experienced Indian exoticism on a daily basis. They were permanently confronted with the deep alterity of India. It therefore induced a feeling of insecurity. According to Marshall, there were fewer than 126,000 Europeans in the whole of India in 1861 (Marshall 1992). This much dispersed population experienced its own fragility during the Great Mutiny. Meeting each other in safe places like the hill

stations was a necessity for individuals if they were to put up with Indian alterity.

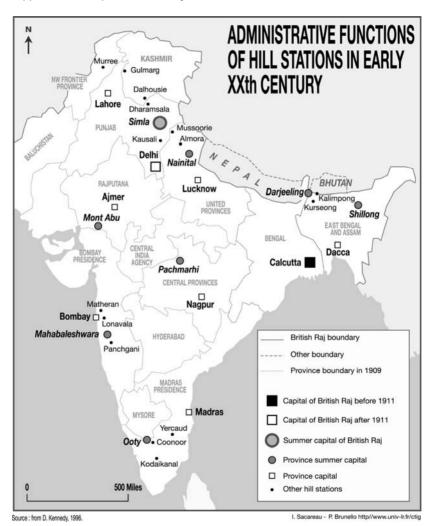
One can also understand why individuals, as well as colonial society itself, spent much of their recreational time in the hill stations which remind one of Swiss or Scottish landscapes. The number of native inhabitants was also very low in these remote mountains. This allowed foreign residents to avoid contact with local people as much as possible. The hill landscape satisfied the aesthetic criterion for what had been considered picturesque in Europe since the 18th century (Gilpin 1792) while the quite distant Himalayas corresponded to the romantic criterion of the sublime. The introduction of temperate vegetal species and orchards as well as the Swiss chalet and English cottage architecture created a differential with their tropical places of residence and a familiar place, "a home away from home" (Kennedy 1996). In the same way, these places allowed colonial society to assert its own values and identity in the alien world it had to rule, as Kennedy exemplifies in his work. In this sense, hill stations really were places for "recreation" (Stock 2001, Équipe MIT 2002, Stock 2003).

All this goes to explain the increasing flow of tourists in the second half of the century and the beginning of the 20th century. Their recreational dimension also asserted itself with the arrival of the railway in the stations (arrival of the railway in Kathgodam near Nainital in 1889, the building of the Haridwar-Dehra Dun Railway in 1902 providing easier access to Mussoorie). It allowed shorter stays for lower-income tourists from the middle-classes who were resident in India or who were travelling more easily from England after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. As they had neither time nor money to purchase villas or cottages in the hill stations, they stayed at hotels or boarding houses which were greater in number in the second half of the 19th century.

At that time, one can also see the diversification in the functions of the hill stations. After the Great Mutiny in 1857, some of them became British Army headquarters and summer capitals for civil administration. They asserted themselves as places of power for British imperialism (Kanwar 1984, 1990, Kenny, 1995, Kennedy 1996). Simla officially became the summer capital of the British Raj in 1902. But other stations became summer capitals at regional level, such as Nainital for the government of the United Provinces in 1862 (cf. map Administrative functions of hill station in earlier 20th century).

Consequently a large part of political centrality temporarily moved from the big cities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras to the mountainous periphery of the Empire, creating twin cities (Landy, 1993). With the arrival of administrative staff, civil servants, Indian merchants and

domestic staff, the hill station population in summer increased fourfold (Kanwar 1984). But their presence also attracted a considerable number of Indians to provide for their needs. They became the biggest part of the hill station population. As Kennedy notes, "at least ten Indians were necessary to support each European" (Kennedy 1997: 175).



Throughout the colonial era, British people tried to set a strict spatial and social segregation with indigenous society in keeping with the

Cantonment Act (Kennedy 1996, Sharma 2000). Indian people were housed in the crowded bazaars located below or at quite a distance from the English ward. But during the 1880s, new actors started to interfere with the colonial project. Local princes, representatives of the Native States, who also used to spend the summer season in the highlands in the same way as during the Moghol Era, started to build sumptuous castles as far as the English ward (Kanwar 1984, Kennedy 1996). For example, the King of Nepal owned the Fairlane Palace in Mussoorie. In 1853 Mussoorie also received Maharaja Dilip Singh, son of Ranjit Singh, the "Lion of Punjab". The British could not avoid social interactions with these very rich maharajas as they did with the Indian people of the bazaars. They tried to limit the amount of land or the number of villas purchased by the Indian princes, but to not avail. When reacting to an attempt made by the Nizam of Hyderabad to purchase property in Simla, the Viceroy, Lord Lansdowne, made it known that "the presence of these Chiefs at hill stations is distinctly undesirable, and that we ought to discourage it in every way" (Kennedy 1996: 199).

Moreover these rajas were soon joined by rich Indian businessmen such as the Parsi of Bombay and by some westernized Indians working for the Civil Service. They purchased properties in the English ward, not only for their own recreational use, but also for rent to European tourists. They also built new hotels entirely reserved for Indian people (ibid.). The British could not stop the arrival of a class of Indian professionals, who were keen to take their holidays with their families in the hill stations. In the end a large part of the land in hill stations became the property of Indians at the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, even if Indian people were not welcome in the hill stations, they could serve their apprenticeship in new recreational practices, as the Nehru family did, by spending holidays in Mussoorie. They succeeded in conquering the local tourist system for their own purpose, especially in places like Mussoorie where political functions were not predominant (ibid.). One can see that, in spite of unfavourable ideological conditions, part of the indigenous society took over the tourist system quite early. As Kennedy said, hill stations "were meant to be places where the British could define themselves according to an exclusive set of cultural values and practices but they attracted a westernized Indian elite whose adoption of some of the same values and practices subverted British claims of exclusivity" (ibid.: 229).

The main destinations of Indian national tourism since Independence (1947-2004)

After Independence, the departure of the British and the decline of the Maharajas might have ruined such places, a symbol of political and

cultural colonial domination. The economic and political conditions in the 1950s (starvation, wars with Kashmir) were not propitious to developing tourism and the 1950s were a critical period for most of the hill stations until the return of prosperous Indians from the emerging middle class in the 1960s. Many hill stations lost part of their administrative functions during the first years of Independence. But they recovered them again when new States were set up. For example, Simla which first lost its functions of Punjab Capital to Chandigarh, became the State Capital of Himachal Pradesh in 1966. In 1960 the Government of Uttar Pradesh decided to stop staying in Nainital over summer. However, this spelt disaster for the station, so it changed its mind in 1963. At the same time, the Indo-Pakistan war closed Kashmir to tourists who moved to the Gahrwal hill stations.

The recent creation in 2000 of the new state of Uttaranchal at the expense of Uttar Pradesh, provided the hill stations of Dehra Dun and Nainital with the functions of State Capital and District Capital respectively. These administrative functions are confirmation of their urbanity among the rural mountainous areas. Sixtee four percent of Uttaranchal territory is covered in forests and 13% in rocks and snow. Around 95 % of inhabitants are of a rural population. There are only 75 townships but they look more like simple rural bazaars than real urban places. Therefore, except for Dehra Dun with its 447, 806 inhabitants in 2001, tourist resorts such as Mussoorie (29, 397 inhabitants) and Nainital (96, 116 inhabitants) became central places in the new urban hierarchy (Census of India, 2001).

Otherwise, the transition from the colonial tourist system to the post-independence system was partly ensured by the Indian elite who had already largely appropriated hill stations many years before Independence. As India did not have a satisfactory educational system, the rich and educated Indians, who could not send their children to study in foreign countries, sent them to hill-station boarding schools. Families joined their children during the holidays, so the hill stations again experienced a seasonal increase in the number of visitors.

It was these same elites who assumed the leadership of the independent Indian State. Their attitude regarding tourism was rather ambiguous. On the one hand, nationalist ideology condemned tourism as a neo-colonial practice. The Government first had to face underdevelopment, so tourism was not a priority. On the other hand, the Congress Party's elites kept their holiday habits. For example, very rich Indian people rose to the head of the Nainital Yacht Club in 1948. They had very selective rules of entry as under British rule. But in 1970, they finally opened the Club to the Indian upper middle class.

Furthermore, let us not forget the interference by the Indian government in all the economic sectors of life, including tourism, through public enterprises and legislation. It offers 30 days holidays a year to civil servants. The Indian government also acts as tour operator via public travel agencies, public hotels and restaurants. For example at regional level, in tourist places, one can find tourist offices in charge of information and of implementing state policy, but also public tourist companies, such as GMVN (Gahrwal Mandas Vikas Nigam) created in 1976. It organizes package tours and runs many hotels and tourist bungalows throughout the area as well.

But international tourism figures remain very low compared to other developing countries and domestic tourism has not yet developed because of the population's poverty level. Nevertheless, a middle-class has slowly emerged among civil servants and wage earners of private and public companies. These workers have obtained holidays and low fares on railway transport. For example, civil servants are allowed one free train journey every year. So they have begun to travel in their own country to visit temples and national heritage monuments, to go on pilgrimages, and also to visit hill stations. But the main change occurred after the 1980s with the free market, the opening to the private sector and the development of numerous small-scale companies in the tourism sector.

Evolution of tourist flow in Mussoorie (1990–2001)	
(Source: Mussoorie Tourist Office)	

	Domestic tourism	International tourism
1990	1,369, 772	1, 041
1991	1, 500, 000	1, 069
1992	1, 756, 000	1, 127
1993	1, 473, 000	1, 176
1994	1, 220, 000	1, 384
1995	1, 280, 000	1, 347
1996	1, 901, 800	3, 293
1997	1, 833, 778	3, 163
1998	1, 957, 930	3, 395
1999	1, 975, 438	3, 555
2000	1, 975, 620	3, 068
2001	2, 034, 355	2, 963

The number of domestic Indian tourists has increased spectacularly, from 72 million in 1976 to more than 200 million today. For example, in Mussoorie, there were 1,369,772 Indian tourists in 1990 compared to 2

million ten years later. In comparison, there were around 3,000 international tourists in 2000, and the local population is estimated at around 30,000 inhabitants (Mussoorie Tourist Office).

Moreover, these tourists no longer belong to the elite of Indian society, even if some rich and famous families like the Princess Sita of Kapurthala still spend their holidays in Mussoorie. According to Indian field research conducted in Nainital in 1999, among 500 Indian tourists, 42% belonged to government services, 13% belonged to the private sector, 10% were small traders, 7% were students, and more surprisingly, 6% were farmers (Singh and Nag 1999). Fewer than 29% belonged to the high-income group (more than 2,000 Indian rupees per month), a little more than 53% belonged to the middle-income group (between 500 to 2,000 Indian rupees per month) and a little more than 17% had a low income (less than 500 Indian rupees).

Our own field research shows that in the hill stations one can find all categories of hotels, from the very simple Indian style hotel to more luxury ones. They are present in every ward of the hill station. The sociospatial discrimination of the British rule failed for a long time. Some old hotels from the colonial age have also been converted into holiday centres, property of some Indian public or private companies (*cf. Doc. 2*). Few of them are still in use as heritage hotels. Most of these establishments belong to Indian investors, mainly from Delhi. Since 1996 new buildings are no longer allowed. In Nainital the official number of hotels is on the rise today, at 250 with around 10,000 beds, but there is also a large number of non certified hotels and guesthouses (source: Nainital Tourist Bureau).

Most of these Indian tourists come from North India (mainly Uttar Pradesh, Delhi and West Bengal). Tourists from South India are fewer because of the distance and because of competition with Western Ghats hill stations such as Ooty and Koddaikanal with tourists from Kerala and Tamilnadu or Mahabaleshwar and Mount Abu with tourists from Bombay or Gujerat. The pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons are still the main tourist seasons, as under the British Raj, with a peak in June and July. In Mussoorie, tourists in June come mainly from Delhi and the Punjab (Mussoorie Tourism Office). In October, they come mainly from West Bengal, and in November, the period of the Diwali Festival, most of them come from Gujerat and Maharashtra.

If some rich Indians from Delhi or Bombay have villas for holiday homes, and spend their holidays as the English did before them, most Indian tourists stay in the hill station for a couple of days. According to the Mussoorie Tourist Office, 20% of the station's houses are second homes and a tourist's average stay in Mussoorie lasts three days. Their main occupations are sightseeing, shopping, games and entertainment, such as

skating or horse riding. The main attractions for Indian tourists are the ropeways in Mussorie and Nainital which lead to the top of the hill station and admiring the sunrise from there. In Nainital, peddle boats and yachting on the lake are still in fashion as during the British period. Himalayan hill stations are also the favourite destination for honeymooners as they are the setting for many love scenes in Bollywood movies.

With the exception of pilgrimage places, hill stations are still the main tourist places for domestic tourism. Haridwar and Rishikesh are the holy cities of the Char Dham pilgrimage to the Gange sources which attract millions of tourists. The pilgrimage is organised from these old cities and from Delhi. Some tourist travel agents in Nainital provide packagetours to the Char Dham, but it seems that the pilgrimage activity is not really connected to the hill stations. On the contrary, the hill stations are the starting point of packagetours and excursions in the surrounding area, and also of a process of spatial spreading of tourism. In the vicinity of these old stations, new Indian resorts are cropping up. Hotels, restaurants as well as cottages, holiday homes for Indians and new tourist housing developments are on the increase in places like Bhimtal and Bhowali, an excursion circuit from Nainital. Another example is Dhanauti, where the GMVN has established a small tourist resort and organizes packagetours from Mussoorie. One can see the emergence of new tourist resorts there based on the hill station model.

CONCLUSION

Tourism is a system of practices, actors and places that move through time and space with the development of the society which produced them. The hill stations have not been ruined by the shift from the colonial era to the postcolonial age. On the contrary, they have become the favourite destination of Indian domestic tourism, probably because they were real places for recreation, and not only the symbol of imperialism. They have also kept and developed some administrative functions, a sign of their urbanity among the mountainous areas where they stand. The new tourist system that emerged in the second half of the 20th century has not broken with the older one. The Indians succeeded in their conquest of this symbolic place of power, a long time before Independence. However, they also found in these stations an alterity and an exoticism in precisely what was familiar to British residents. What is exotic for one is not exotic for the other... It exemplifies the amazing power of tourists to subvert places and of tourism to survive the conditions that governed its generation.

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