

# Representation and Contestation: Hills in Colonial Imagination (Simla, Darjeeling, Ootacamund and Mount Abu, 1820-1920)

Queeny PRADHAN<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The article explores the themes of 'hills in colonial imagination', 'images of mini-England in the hills', 'community identity' and the 'hill space as a liminal zone'. The central argument is that there was a conscious effort on the part of the colonizers, during their stay in India, to create another home away from the real actual one (England), which led to the marginalization of local people and the erasure of their past history, snapping their association with the land. Instead, there was reproduction of Imperial spaces, which is closely aligned with expanding forces of capitalism and modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also questions the popular colonial construct that hills in India were 'discovered' by the British travelers and army officers. My argument is supported by the corpus of Indian folk narratives and mythologies existing prior to the British colonization, which challenges hills as 'terra incognita', as asserted by the British. The article ends by exploring traces of resistance by the hill people, reconstructed through oral narratives of the local people in contemporary times, which have not been represented in the 'official history' of the hills.*

## Introduction

During the course of my research into the making of the British Empire in the hill stations of Simla, Darjeeling, Ootacamund and Mount Abu from the early nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century, I found that hills have been neglected in the study of societal development. The focus in most studies has been primarily upon the urban/rural development. This has been a flaw in India and elsewhere. We need to move beyond the stark urban-rural divide to look into other spatial developments that have been taking place simultaneously. In the paper, the colonial names and spellings of the hill stations have been used.

*Hail! Kanchanjangha! Snow-lapped ridges!  
Say -art thou a mere mountain?  
No, Thou High Golden of Durga.  
Thou art the Vedic fountain  
I woke up early morn with joy*

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<sup>1</sup> GGS Indraprastha University, Delhi, India (queeny.singh@gmail.com).