Nineteenth-Century Libraries in the Hill Stations of British North India

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This paper aims to show that the libraries established in three selected hill stations in British North India—Mussoorie/Landour, Simla and Naini Tal—were an important part of the life of the British population resident there. Although established on the pattern of their counterparts in Britain, the libraries were adapted by their patrons to the way of life of Britons in India and fulfilled several functions. The collection of each library developed characteristics unique to its Indian environment. After a brief survey of the different types of library, this paper examines two contrasting libraries in some detail: the Simla Station Library and the library of the United Service Institution of India.

The first libraries in the northern hill stations were established at Landour, for the benefit of convalescing soldiers. Libraries associated with social clubs as well as subscription libraries soon followed. Several government libraries were located in Simla and Naini Tal after these places became the official summer capitals, respectively, of the Government of India in 1864 and the Provincial Government of the North-Western Provinces, probably in 1862. Additionally, the library of the United Service Institution of India, in Simla, was established to support the advancement of professionalism among the military. Putting aside the government departmental libraries, the remaining libraries were established and flourished, in large part, because of the educational background, intellectual curiosity, and reading habits of their patrons.

The need for a British public service elite in India and the cultural requirements of this group in a foreign land were crucial to the establishment and subsequent development of libraries in these hill stations. Members of this elite group not only provided ideas for new ventures in India, but also held key positions in the management of the libraries, and thereby determined the conduct of both day-to-day business and long-term policy. The cultural ideals that placed a high value on self-improvement and emphasised the importance of being a well-informed member of British society in India, together with the acquisition of good reading habits among the British residents through previous education, gave birth to the establishment of the libraries in the hill stations. These urban centres emerged during the second stage of British expansion in the Indian subcontinent in the early part of the nineteenth century.

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The hill stations of Simla, Mussoorie/Landour and Naini Tal were founded after the Gurkha Wars of 1814–1815, when British power in India was sufficiently consolidated for the establishment of settlements in remote areas. They were located at an elevation of over 2000 metres, in the foothills of the Himalayas between the rivers Sutlej to the west and Kali to the east.

The first house in Simla was built in 1819 for Robert Ross, Deputy Superintendent of Sikh and Hill Affairs. Mussoorie was established in 1826, Landour in 1827, and Naini Tal in the early 1840s. These hill stations fulfilled a variety of purposes and functions—such as providing a convalescent depot for soldiers, a health and holiday resort for the general British population, a location for schools for European children, and, somewhat later, a summer headquarters for government. Educated professional people worked in, and visited, the hill stations. By the middle of the nineteenth century these hill stations consisted of both a permanent and a transient British population. With the influx of Britons, cultural and social patterns and institutions reminiscent of life in Britain emerged, which—among other things—created a demand for libraries. Moreover, the cooler climate of the mountains and the leisure time that the visitors had there were conducive to reading.

The earlier libraries were established prior to the 1850s, and from the very beginning fulfilled a variety of functions. The first hill-station library was established at the Landour Convalescent Depot in 1829 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, and modelled on libraries established by the SPCK in Britain. This organisation wanted to promote moral values among soldiers and aimed to keep them away from what it considered to be unacceptable recreational pursuits. A second library at the Depot was established in 1839, by the Military Department for soldiers and non-commissioned officers, in order to help them occupy their time during their residence in Landour while convalescing from illnesses or injuries.

In addition, in 1852, a church library on the pattern of parish libraries in Britain was established in St. Paul's Church in Landour by the chaplain of the Bengal Ecclesiastical Service, the Reverend Frederick A. Dawson, M.A. This library provided material for the religious instruction of members of the congregation, which consisted of officers and soldiers and their families. A similar library was established at Christ Church, Simla. All four of these libraries had materials to promote general education and moral values.

As the popularity of the hill stations grew, residential clubs were formed for officers who came to the hill stations for a short period of time, generally during the hot season. These social clubs also added to the cultural life of the permanent British residents. In 1857, John Lang, thought to be the first Australian-born novelist, wrote an article for *Household Words* about the Himalaya Club, established in 1841 in Mussoorie. In this he mentions a reading room at the club.
A similar social club was established in Simla sometime in the 1850s, and another in Naini Tal in 1864. Initially designed exclusively for men from the upper class, all three clubs subsequently changed in character. The Himalaya Club in Mussoorie came to have a reading room for women. The Simla Club, which became the United Service Club of India on the pattern of the United Service Club in England, became exclusive and restricted its membership to civil and military officers. The Naini Tal Club, though also primarily for civil and military officers, entertained the wives of the officers as well. Each club had a general library on its premises, comprising books on various subjects, periodicals on current affairs, and selected fiction.

In the early years of the twentieth century, the library of the United Service Club in Simla had a substantial collection of 6,000 books. At that time the collection was divided into four sections: fiction; sports, travel, and so forth; miscellaneous; and books of reference.

The increasing popularity of these settlements produced a demand for subscription libraries based on the pattern of gentlemen's subscription libraries in Britain. Subscription libraries, with both collections and memberships larger than those of the earlier libraries, were established from the 1840s through to the 1860s. By that time, the British position in India was secure and serious thought was being given, even in the British Parliament, to the idea of colonising the hill regions. Because of the efforts of civic-minded officers and settlers in Mussoorie, a subscription library was established there first, in 1843. Subsequently, another was established in Simla in 1854. By the end of the 1850s Naini Tal also had a subscription library.

A subscription library in Simla, known as the Simla Station Library, was established in 1854, when a house named “Conny Cot” was acquired. In addition to books purchased from England for £100, the library amalgamated two collections—the circulating library of Mr. Barrett and books from the Staff Library of Head Quarters. In 1855 the officers of Her Majesty’s 9th Lancers sent the books of their regimental library to the Simla Station Library. The founding members were Lord William Hay, Deputy Commissioner of Simla, later the Marquess of Tweeddale; Major O’Brien, Commandant of the Nusseree Battalion posted in Simla; Dr Cannon; Dr Douglas, M.D., Assistant Surgeon; Mr D. O’B. Clarke; and the Reverend Charles Sloggett, a chaplain of the Bengal Ecclesiastical Service.

The history of the buildings that housed the Simla Station Library is almost as complicated as the history of Simla itself, and arguably mirrors the decline and fall of the British Empire in India. In 1886, the library was moved to the newly constructed Town Hall. With the growth in the importance of the Simla Station Library, in 1907 a separate building was erected to house its collection.
which remained there until the space was required for city offices. When the library was moved again, in 1935, it was to the nearby annexe of Christ Church, Simla.

No printed catalogues of the Simla Station Library seem to have survived, though there is evidence that they were published. In 1997, after examining the collection that still existed, which by then had become a separate part of the Himachal Pradesh State Library in Simla at Scots Kirk (now Gandhi Bhavan), together with the re-accession register of the former Simla Station Library, I was able to determine that the collection of the old Simla Station Library had been arranged in ten sections: I. Fiction, [II — ], III. Foreign, IV. History, V. Travel, VI. Biography and Memoirs, VII. Drama, VIII. Poetry, IX. Theology, and X. Literature and Miscellany. Since no books have survived from section II, it cannot be established what it contained. The categories imply that the collection of the library was—at least in range—well balanced and of a serious nature, in keeping with the varied reading interests of its members. In 1906, the library had a collection of 17,000 books.

Fiction was predominant. Major English authors included Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, H.G. Wells, John Galsworthy, Jane Austen, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anne Brontë, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, E.M. Forster, Mrs Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, D.H. Lawrence, Somerset Maugham, Robert Louis Stevenson, P.G. Wodehouse and J.B. Priestley. A sample of the more popular novelists in English discloses James Hilton, Emilie Loring, H. Rider Haggard, Jeffery Farnol, A.J. Cronin, Marie Corelli, Wilkie Collins, Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. Also in the collection are novels by Flora Annie Steel and various works by Rudyard Kipling, both of whom were very familiar with Simla society and were well known there.

American authors are represented by Ernest Hemingway, Nathaniel Hawthorn, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck, Stephen Crane, Sinclair Lewis, James Fenimore Cooper and Robert Penn Warren. European languages are represented in the library as well, for example, novels in French by Emile Zola, Victor Hugo and Gustave Flaubert. English translations of the Russian novelists Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky and Maxim Gorky are also to be found in the collection.

The Honorary Secretary of the Simla Station Library for several years from 1907, Mr. W.L. Dallas, reported to the Simla Municipal Committee in 1910 that:

The demand for works of fiction largely exceeds that for works of a more serious character, so that though all standard works of biography, travels and his-
tory are regularly bought and added to the Library, the popularity of the Institution depends very much on an adequate supply of lighter literature.\textsuperscript{35}

The non-fiction section contains books of philosophy, theology, poetry, drama, biography, history and travel, with a sprinkling written in German and French. Among the rare non-fiction books still in the collection, a few are worthy of mention: \textit{Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire} in seventy-one volumes (1784–1790), \textit{The Works of Samuel Johnson in Twelve Volumes with an Essay on his Life and Genius}, by Arthur Murphy (1806), and \textit{The Works of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's Dublin} in twenty-seven volumes (1765–1779).

Among the rare books are some illustrated ones on Indian subjects, including: \textit{Illustrations of the Botany and other Branches of the Natural History of the Himalayan Mountains, and of the Flora of Cashmere} by John Forbes Royle (1839); \textit{Recollections of India Drawn on Stone} by J.D. Harding, \textit{from the Original Drawings} by Steward Harding (1847), which contains 26 large lithographic views; \textit{The Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalayas; Being an Account, Botanical and Geographical, of the Rhododendrons Recently Discovered in the Mountains of Eastern Himalaya, from Drawings and Descriptions Made on the Spot, during a Government Botanical Mission to that Country} by Joseph Dalton Hooker (1849).

Books on the history and administration of India, as well as on travel in India and neighbouring countries, comprise a large part of the collection. The biographies of Governors-General and Viceroy's, such as the \textit{Life of Lord Lawrence} by R. Bosworth Smith in two volumes (1883), \textit{A Life of the Earl of Mayo} by W.W. Hunter in two volumes (1873) and \textit{The Life of the Marquess of Dalhousie} by William Lee-Warner (1904), are in the collection.

The bulk of the collection obviously consisted of books and periodicals published overseas, replicating the holdings of comparable libraries in Great Britain. In addition, however, an important part of the collection included books on Indian history and the biographies of individuals who had served in India, as well as books on adventure, sports and travel in India and its neighbouring countries. This part of each collection in similar libraries in the hill stations reflects the Indian environment in which the British population lived. Some of the patrons were Britons born in India, perhaps of the second or third generation. They were naturally interested in books about the life, society and culture of the British India with which they were familiar.

Because of the decreasing British population at the hill stations after World War I, the subscription libraries declined in importance. Though the Mussoorie Library survived because of its legal registration and the interest of a few key individuals, the substantial collection of the Simla Station Library, once considered to be the "best library of its kind in India," suffered considerable damage.
In comparison with Mussoorie and Simla, the story in Naini Tal is quite different. There, the Durga Lal Shah Municipal Library was started in the early 1940s, after a landslide in 1880 had destroyed the previous subscription library located in the Assembly Rooms. Its membership was more broadly based from the beginning. In addition to books in English, the collection included books in Hindi and Urdu by prominent Indian writers.

The Government of India departmental libraries in Simla present a complex history. One of their unusual features is that these collections, or at least a part of them, initially were moved to and from Simla as the government migrated there to conduct its affairs during the summer season. Because of a desire for increased efficiency and rationalisation, a permanent branch library of the Home Department had been established in Simla by 1864, the first of its type there. Subsequently, a permanent branch of the Secretariat Library was established in Simla, known as the Central Library. Additionally, an Army Head Quarters Central Library was established in Simla. In a similar manner, government departmental libraries of the North-Western Provinces were established in Naini Tal, but on a smaller scale than in Simla.

The second library to be considered in detail is a special library, the library of the United Service Institution of India. It was established in 1870, in Simla, on the model of the library of the Royal United Service Institution, founded in Whitehall, London, in 1831, to support the professional advancement and development of individuals within the military.

The United Service Institution of India was founded, in 1870, on the initiative of Lieutenant Colonel, later Major General, Charles Metcalfe MacGregor. He was born in Agra in 1840, the son of Robert Guthrie MacGregor, a Major General in the service of the East India Company. As was the custom of the day, Charles Metcalfe MacGregor was sent to Great Britain for his education, and after leaving Marlborough College was commissioned in the Indian army in 1856. Charles Metcalfe MacGregor published several works. Two among them are The Defence of India (1884) and a monograph in six volumes, History of the Second Afghan War (1885–6).

The collection of the library of the United Service Institution of India naturally consisted of books on subjects such as military history, strategy and tactics, military training and education. Among the books related to European and local military powers in India is The Portuguese in India, Being a History of the Rise and Decline of the Eastern Empire (1894), an illustrated work in two volumes. During 1890–91 its author, Frederick Charles Danvers of the Indian Civil Service, was sent to examine Portuguese records relating to India.

Worth mentioning in this category, as an example of the presence of another European power in South Asia, is the History of the French in India from the Found-
ing of Pondicherry in 1674 to the Capture of that Place in 1761 by Colonel George Bruce Malleson (1893). Other representative titles include the Narrative of a Visit to the Court of Scinde by J. Burnes (1839); Conquest of Scinde, a Commentary, in two volumes, by J. Outram (1846); and Sikh War by C. Gough and A.D. Innis (1897).

The collection contains many travel books on India and adjacent regions. Some of the early nineteenth-century titles are Travels in China by J. Barrow (1804); Journey from Madras, through Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, in three volumes, by F. Buchanan (1807); Journey from Bengal to England through the Northern Part of India, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Persia and into Russia by the Caspian Sea by George Forster (1808); Account of the Kingdom of Nepal by Colonel Kirkpatrick (1811); Travels into Bokhara, in three volumes, by A. Burnes (1834); Journal of a March from Delhi to Peshawar, Thence to Calcutta by Lieutenant W. Barr (1844); Six Months in British Burma by C.T. Winter (1858); and Through Unknown Tibet by M.S. Wellby (1898).

In addition to books, the Journal of the United Service Institution of India, published continuously to the present day by the Institution, may be considered the most important periodical in the collection. The Journal publishes articles on topics relating to the development of military science and the defence forces in India. In essence, the library of the United Service Institution of India serves as a reference and archival library for a specialised function, which is to promote "naval and military art, science and literature."

The library was also established to promote fraternity and solidarity among officers of the Indian army, whether they were in Simla, on the plains, or on leave in Britain. Further, it served as a resource for officers in their preparation for examinations for promotion to more senior posts. After 1870, the officers, as part of the British army, could be posted to any part of the Empire. It was therefore important for them to keep abreast of military and political activities throughout the world, and in the British Empire in particular. The collection of the library of the United Service Institution of India met these needs.

Although the library of the United Service Institution of India was formed initially on the pattern of another institution, in London, it quickly established its own identity, particularly with respect to its membership and the focus of its collection. As is illustrated in the life of the founder of the Institution, it was natural for "Anglo-Indians" of the nineteenth century to want to establish their own identity, distinct from that of the metropolitan culture. Consequently, the strength of the library collection was in materials (including its own journal) focusing on military campaigns in India and neighbouring regions. The library today is located in New Delhi and continues to serve as a reference library.
The discussion of individual libraries may give the impression that they were self-contained entities existing in isolation one from another. In fact, however, they were essentially complementary, having collections with relatively little overlap. Therefore, readers in any of the hill stations had access to a number of libraries, and hence to material on a wide range of subjects.

Subscribers came from a core population of educated professional people who had acquired a reading habit and needed libraries not only for leisure hours, but also for several other reasons—work, advancement of professional knowledge, research and publication.

Even though hill stations are generally depicted as being places located in a salubrious area, intended for recuperation and recreation—characteristics that certainly constituted a major reason for their existence, development, and popularity—they were also places for work, especially Simla and Naini Tal, when government offices were moved there in the hot season. According to a writer in the Calcutta Review of 1856, the hill stations generally had a more intellectual tone or aura than that found in the work-a-day society on the plains. With the assemblage of people from widely scattered locations in British North India in the hill stations, wide-ranging subjects about India and the world in general were discussed. In this context, library collections contributed to the vitality of social, cultural, and intellectual life in an atmosphere charged with the excitement people experienced from being among a large group of fellow countrymen, in a foreign land, when normally, on the plains of India, these same people would have led a relatively isolated life.

In summary, the libraries considered in this survey are examples of the extension of library traditions from Britain in the nineteenth century being an essential part of British society in the North Indian hill stations of Mussoorie/Landour, Simla and Naini Tal. And although initially they were modelled on their British counterparts, these libraries had distinct characteristics that represented, and reflected, their locations in India. Most importantly, they also reflected the unique intellectual culture of British life in India during the nineteenth century.
Endnotes

1 This article is based on Nirmolini V. Flora, “Hill-Station Libraries in North India: A Historical Study of Selected Libraries in Landour/Mussoorie, Simla, Naini Tal and Mukteswar as Reflections of British Culture, 1830–1947; with Special Reference to Their Background and the Institutions to Which They Were Connected” (PhD thesis, Monash University, 2000).

2 The name of this region has changed several times during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: “Ceded Provinces (1801–1805), Conquered Provinces (1805–1833), Agra Presidency (1833–1836), the Lieutenant-Governorship of the North-Western Provinces (1836–1902), the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (1902–1947) and Uttar Pradesh (1947—)” (Henry Scholberg, The District Gazetteers of British India: A Bibliography [Zug: Inter Documentation, 1970], 28). Now Nainital (its current spelling) is in Utaranchal, a new state formed in 1999, comprising the Himalayan districts of Uttar Pradesh.


7 Naini Tal: A Historical and Descriptive Account, 1927, 1.

8 Flora, “Hill-Station Libraries in North India,” 35–42.


11 Ibid., 26.


13 St. Paul’s Church, Landour, Chaplaincy Record Book, 1840–1879, 42.

14 Colin C. Garrett, One Hundred Years: Christ Church, Simla, 1844–1944 (Lahore: Civil & Military Gazette, 1944), 46.


17 Thacker’s Indian Directory 1904 (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1904), 998.

18 [T. Kinney], Guide to Mussoorie (Mussoorie: Mushaful Printing Works, [1907]), 139.

19 National Archives of India, United Service Club Papers, Serial No. 2(i), General Committee Minute Book from 1870 to March 1879 (16 September 1876).

20 IOL, V/27/10/1, “List of the more important libraries in India” (Government of India Supply; List of Books; December 1905, January–February 1906), 23.

21 NAI, USCPR, 3(viii), House Committee Minute Book, 1934–21 October 1937, “Minutes of Library Sub-Committee, 22 August 1937.”


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28 W. Martin Towelle, Towelle's Hand Book and Guide to Simla (Simla: Station Press, 1877), 34.
29 Carey, A Guide to Simla, 60.
33 IOL, V/27/10/1, 23.
34 IOL, V/27/10/1, 23.
42 IOL, V/27/10/1, 27.
45 United Service Institution of India, Library Catalogue, Simla 1940 (Simla and New Delhi: Liddell's Printing Works).
47 According to The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd ed., 1989), s.v. "Anglo-Indian," "the term 'Anglo-Indian' used to be applied to people of British birth who had lived long in India. In 1911 the Government of India decided to substitute 'Anglo-Indian' for 'Eurasian' as the official term for those of mixed descent."