

# FROM ANCIENT TRAVEL TO MODERN TOURISM IN THE HIMACHAL HIMALAYAS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

*The majestic Himalayas have a unique place in Indian history and traditions. The entire region is endowed with natural and cultural beauty. Since the dawn of civilization in this subcontinent, the strategic location of the western Himalayas on the crossroads of racio-cultural movements has been responsible for shaping the socio-economic milieu of the people of this region. The state of Himachal Pradesh is located on the traditional trade routes that connect the Indian mainland with the Trans-Himalayan regions in Tibet, China, central Asia, and even the Middle East. It is the most desirable state for mountain tourism for domestic as well as foreign travellers. Himachal Pradesh is a relatively new establishment, but the history of the lands it comprises goes back to ancient times. The main objective of this paper is to study the historical perspective of tourism in Himachal Pradesh from the Mughal period to the modern period with a narrative approach.*

**Keywords:** Travel, Tourism, History, Mountains, Himachal Pradesh

## INTRODUCTION

Travel was a typical way of life prior to the advent of modern means of transportation, when economic compulsion forced people to travel, often over hazardous territories to trade essential commodities. In 1984, tourism was declared as an industry in the state. Today, tourism in Himachal Pradesh is described as a strong pillar of economic prosperity in the state. In 2016, the number of domestic tourists arriving in Himachal Pradesh was 1.79 crore and that of foreign tourists was 4.53 lakh. Himachal Pradesh held the tenth position in India with respect to total tourist arrival. The total tourist arrival in the state in 2016 was 1.84 crore, which was almost double the population of the state and appropriately shows its status as a popular tourist destination. The white, lofty, and flurry mountains, noisy rivers, floral and verdant valleys, beautiful lakes, dense forests with broadleaf vegetation to alpine vegetation, attractive orchards, unique fauna of Himachal Pradesh bring delight and satisfy a tourist's dream. Himachal Pradesh is also known as a unique place for its culture, including hundreds of temples, vibrant fairs, and festivals, which are inimitable in style and attractive for tourism. The astounding and splendid cultural beauty in terms of its artistry and crafts, ethnic fairs, and religion along with innate geographical beauty, vegetation, and fauna makes this state one of the most gracious and spectacular tourist places irrespective of various purposes like natural, cultural, spiritual, and commercial. Several ancient trade routes passed over this land. Prominent among them were the Hindustan Tibet road, joining the north-Indian plains to Tibet via the Satluj River and the route over Rohtang pass joining Kullu valley to Lahaul and Spiti, Ladakh, and central Asia. Traders travelled with goods of daily needs over these trade routes.

## STUDY AREA

With an area of 55,673 km<sup>2</sup>, Himachal Pradesh is located in the lap of the western Himalayas. The absolute location of the state is 30° 22' 40" North to 33° 12' 40" North latitude and its longitudinal extent is 75° 45' 55" East to 79° 04' 20" East. The state is almost completely mountainous. Its altitude varies between 250 msl and 7000 msl. High mountain ranges and valleys of the Himalayas make a complex physiography of the state. On the basis of its physiography, there are four parallel zones from south to north, viz., Shiwalik range, Middle Himalayas, Great Himalayas, and Trans Himalayas, which differ not only in their physiography but also in their climate and vegetation. This hilly state is home to 68.56 lakh inhabitants who make 0.57% of the country's total population.

## METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION

In the following pages, the historical perspective of tourism is described and a chronological survey of historical tourism is presented with an emphasis on the Mughal (1526–1857), Colonial (1857–1947), and Post-independence (1947 to recent) periods. The information has been collected from books on ancient

trade routes in the Himalayas, historical records of Punjab hill states, and academic publications such as research reports, articles and periodicals, travel records, etc.

### 1. **Tourism During the Mughal Period: 1526-1857**

Travelling to this region for pleasure was started mainly during the Mughal courts. Mughals were great lovers of nature, food, and trade. Therefore, they travelled extensively to the hills of Himachal Pradesh. To escape from the hot and humid weather conditions of the Indian plains, they often moved to the high mountains of the states. Therefore, they can be considered the pioneers of leisure, pleasure, and comfort in the Himalayas. Emperor Akbar is believed to have visited the holy shrine of Jawalamukhi, while Emperor Jahangir travelled in the Kangra valley. He visited Kangra in 1622 accompanied by his wife NurJahan. The emperor was so fascinated with the beauty of the valley that he contemplated making it the summer residence of his court. The town of Nurpur in Kangra district is actually named after NurJahan (Hutchison 1994).

Travelling for pleasure to the hills was a tradition started by the Mughals, and the British followed it. Several foreign travellers visited the Himalayan states, including the hill areas now forming part of the present state of Himachal Pradesh. Many European travellers have left tours account they made through the different parts of the world. Finch W. was one of the earliest travellers to record information about Himachal Pradesh. Finch made a tour to the state in 1610 (Foster, 1921). Specially, he visited Nurpur, Kangra, and Sirmaur. He has also made observations about the religious beliefs of the people of Kangra. He also mentioned that most of the Indian medicinal plants that grew in the mountains came from Nurpur and surrounding areas.

Thomas Caryot was probably the first European traveller (Foster, 1921) to visit the state. He visited Nagarkot, i.e. Kangra and Jawalamukhi in 1615 CE. Terry Edward (Foster, 1921) was the first Englishman to set out for India with no intention of trade but to see the temples of Kangra and Jawalamukhi and describe the religious beliefs of the people. He travelled in this region during 1616–1619.

Foster G. followed Terry Edward and entered Himachal Pradesh in 1783 from the direction of Dehradun at Nahan in March 1783, which he described in brief. Then he proceeded to Bilaspur and described his journey through various villages through 'hamlets enroute' and the 'hill route.' Then he went to Kangra, which was called 'the land of Kotchien'. Some of the places visited and mentioned in his account are Sooree, Sompal, and Doda etc.

Fraser J.B. travelled through Delhi and entered H.P. at Nahan in 1815. He visited the areas of Sirmour, Jubbal, Bushahr, Kumarsain, and Theog. He presented extensive details about the areas through which he travelled, covering not only accounts of the ruling classes but also the social, economic, and geographical details. Geard P., a trader, reached Subathu and Kothgarh in 1817 and gave an account of the export of opium. In the same decade, Moorcroft, a famous traveller, visited the state during 1819–25. Moorcroft entered Himachal in 1820 at Nahan and then went to Bilaspur via Pinjore and Nalagarh. Later he went to Mandi and Nadaun and from there he continued his journey to Lahaul and crossed over to Ladakh.

In 1821, Geared A. and his brother Geared J. travelled extensively in Kinnaur and surrounding regions. Hetbert J., a captain in the British army and Major Sir Lloyd W. travelled in the Great Himalayas in 1822 through places like Subathu, Kothgarh, Rampur, Sarahan, and up to Rohru and then returned to the plains via Nahan. During the same period, another traveller Francis H. visited the areas of Sirmour, Dharampur and Kangra thoroughly. He also wrote an account of the economic activities in this region. A British army captain, Munday came to Himachal Pradesh in 1828. He visited Nahan and from there he proceeded to Shimla. He also travelled through Fagu, Theog, Jubbal, and Rohru. His account of Himachal provides useful information about the economic activities and social practices of people of Nahan and upper Shimla.

Hugel B. C. came to Shimla in Sept. 1835 from Mussoorie via Ambala. Then he went to Bilaspur via Kunyar and Sahipoti. Later he departed to Jawalamukhi and Nurpur in 1835 from where he proceeded to Kashmir. Thomas G. V., who was a private gentleman, travelled for pleasure. He was keenly interested in observing the hilly culture of the Himalayas, and travelled relatively extensively through several parts of Himachal Pradesh. He came to Shimla from Delhi via Pinjore, and then returned to Ludhiana. Again, he entered Himachal by the way of Nanda Devi to Bilaspur in 1939 and then travelled through Mandi. He also covered Nurpur and Chamba during his tour to Himachal Pradesh. He had recorded a vivid account of the contemporary rulers, and also wrote about the social customs of the hill people in different parts.

Thomson T., a nature lover, travelled through Himachal Pradesh and covered almost all the geographical and botanical details. He also remarked on the social and cultural setup of hill communities. Thomson commenced his journey at Firozpur in 1845 and came to Shimla via Kalka, Kasauli, and Subathu. Then he visited Shimla through Fagu, Theog, Matiana, Narkanda, and Kotgarh and reached Rampur. Later he travelled through Serahan, Nachar, Mangtoo Bridge, Chini, Lipa, and Runrang pass in Kinnaur. Subsequently,

he travelled through Spiti passing Hangrang valley. After the first Anglo-Sikh war (1845-46), the hill areas came under British rule and consequently Kangra, Nurpur, Kullu, Lahaul, and Spiti become a part of the British Empire in India.

## 2. Tourism During the Colonial Period: 1857-1947

During this period, the first modern hill stations of Shimla and Mussoorie were established in 1819 and 1826 (King, 2007). Shimla was recognized as the government and military summer headquarters of India in 1838, thereby gaining importance (Spencer, 1948). In the late 1830s hill stations grew into more striking destinations for civilian residents, especially for the middle-class British and upper class of India. Shimla has retained its importance to the present day, being the capital of Himachal Pradesh. The other hill stations included in the list were Mussoorie (founded in 1827), Darjeeling (founded in 1835), and Nainital (founded in 1839). By 1869, many more hill stations, such as Dalhousie, Dharamsala, and Ranikhet (Map), were also founded.

During the British period, tourism in the Himalayan states became very systematized, especially in Himachal Pradesh. The Britishers started to travel the areas of Kullu, Shimla, and Lahaul-Spiti frequently for the sake of comfort, health, and adventure. They built *Dak Bungalows* in the remote hilly areas (Heritage Report Shimla, 2013) of the state, which became famous hill stations after independence. The Britishers made several changes to the entire region. Among these changes, the development of road, railways, and communication in the hilly terrain were the most important. Introduction to several cash crops such as tea, temperate fruits, and potatoes, and the idea of transformation for the hill stations was perhaps the most important transformation for the hilly areas of the state (Jreat, 2004). Hill stations were soon perceived to be the answer to many of the health problems of Britishers living in India. People with fever or diarrhoea were reportedly restored to health after visiting the hills (Baker, 2009).

In Himachal Pradesh, many important towns of today, such as Shimla, Chail, Solan, Dharamsala, Dalhousie, Kasauli, and Dagshai, emerged during this period. Several pre-existing towns that were favoured by the British, such as Kullu and Chamba, also gained popularity during this period. Hill stations were originally built as health sanctuaries for the British army, many of which were later developed as administrative and recreational centres and grew rapidly. Efforts were also made during the British rule to develop transport routes in the state. Prior to the arrival of the British, there were few roads in the state. Travel was painfully slow and hazardous. Consequently, efforts were made to connect the hill stations to the plains by road. The older, narrower track from Kalka to Shimla was improved. A new road named Grand Hindustan-Tibet Road, 58 miles in length, passing through Dharampur, Solan, and KiareeGhat was built to make the region of Himachal Pradesh easily accessible to Tibetan visitors (HDR, 2003). This road made Shimla easily accessible from the plains that led to a rapid expansion of the city of Shimla. Similarly, the Kullu-Largi road that connected Kullu valley to the plains led to the growth and development of the entire Kullu valley. Apart from roads, efforts were also made by the Britishers to connect the hill stations and plains through railway lines. Shimla, the then summer capital of the British Raj was connected to Kalka through the Kalka-Shimla railway line in 1903 (Heritage Report Shimla 2013, p.17). Another railway line was built during 1926-1929 in the Kangra valley joining Jogindernagar to Pathankot. Easy accessibility from the plains helped in the transport of mail, goods of daily needs, and above all, vacationers to visit these hill stations during the hot summer months. Tourism in the modern sense began developing in Himachal Pradesh only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the British administration reached here and travellers, explorers, missionary workers, and vacationers closely followed. In this period, the perception of mountains also changed from that of fearsome places to attractive landscapes. However, the retreat to the hills during the summer months was confined to the elite class only.

## 3. Tourism After Independence

Change started in 1947, when India became independent and the number of British tourists decreased dramatically (Spaltenberger, 2014). After a few year of crisis, the number of tourists started to increase again. The Indian urban middle class had discovered the hill stations as an interesting vacation destination. Such a development was attributed to the construction of a network of roads in the state. Several important roads now connected even the remotest parts of the state to the rest of the country. This has factually concretized the way for contemporary mass tourism in the state.

As Himachal Pradesh is a hilly state and does not enjoy considerable economic resources, the government here is making several efforts to exploit the tourism potential in the state. In 1955, by the efforts of the government of India, the Tourist Information Centre was established in Shimla, which was then the headquarter of the union territory of Himachal Pradesh. During 1958-1959, a centre for winter sports and golf club were established in Kufri and Naldehra, respectively. Similarly, tourist information centres were

established in Mandi, Chamba, Bilaspur, and Nahan. At the beginning of the first five-year plan, a tourism cell headed by a Deputy Director was created within the public relations department. After the separation of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, a separate Tourism Information Centre was established in Shimla as 'Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation' (HPTDC, 1972) under the companies act 1956. The HPTDC was created to act as a pioneer in developing and opening new vistas and horizons for tourism and providing a healthy competition to the private sector. In 1985, the civil aviation activities were also brought under the Department of Tourism and in 1987 tourism was declared an industry in Himachal Pradesh (Jreat, 2000).

To boost the status of rural tourism, under the 10th Five-Year Plan, thrust was given to promote village tourism and its socio-economic benefits in rural areas and its new geographic regions. The selected sites were further improved by creating infrastructure by undertaking various activities such as improvement of surroundings of the village, which include landscaping, development of parks, fencing, compound wall etc.; improvement of roads within the Panchayat limits; illumination in villages; provision for improvement in solid waste management and sewerage management; procurement of facilities directly related to tourism, such as water sports, adventure sports, eco-friendly modes of transport for moving within the tourism zone; restoration of monuments; signage; reception centres; tourist accommodation; and other work/activities directly related to tourism. 'Home Stay Scheme' was launched in 2008 by the government of Himachal Pradesh with the aim of providing clean, comfortable, and affordable supplementary accommodation to tourists in rural areas in the vicinity of famous tourist destinations when hotel and guest houses are packed to capacity. The scheme was intended to broaden the stakeholder's base for tourism in the state by including the rural and interior areas of the state in providing tourism accommodation infrastructure and this simultaneously helped in decongesting the urban areas, which were running to capacity in terms of tourist traffic during the peak season. The scheme proved highly successful for the Himachal Pradesh Government with the home-stay unit registering overwhelming response in Kullu, Manali, Shimla, Dharamshala, Palampur, and Dalhousie. A total of 891 rooms in 332 units were registered as home-stay units by the end of February 2011. Till the end of 2010, there were 332 registered home-stay units and the whole state enjoyed 18156 domestic and 1485 foreign tourist visitors. In August 2010, the State government of Himachal Pradesh launched a Scheme 'HarGaon Ki Kahani' for promoting rural tourism. The state's department of tourism has launched this scheme in all 12 districts of the state by selecting one village destination. The selected villages are Hewan village in Shimla, Sangrah in Sirmaur, Baniya Devi in Solan, Brua in Kinnaur, Udaipur in LahaulSpiti, Shamshar in Kullu, Bagi in Mandi, Salasi in Bilaspur, Bela in Hamirpur, Nari in Una, Nerti in Kangra, and Saho in Chamba District. The state has also won 22 national awards for the most innovative marketing technique in Rural Tourism (Sharma, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that, in early times, several trade routes passed through Himachal Pradesh. Consequently, several trade centres were developed on these routes, which later developed into major cities in modern times in the state. Mughal and British travellers travelled through different parts of the state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for trade, observing the culture, and most importantly for leisure and comfort in the lap of the Himachal Himalayas to escape the hot summer season of India. Several hill spots were planned and developed by Britishers during the colonial period. To date, the infrastructure and tourist centres developed by them are the most fascinating centres of heritage tourism in Himachal Pradesh. To provide better exposure to the culture and heritage of local inhabitants, projects such as 'HarGaon Ki Kahani' were launched by the government. Home-stay units were registered to offer them a natural cultural setting. The tourism in Himachal Pradesh, which started as mere travel for trade and comfort, has now matured, advanced, and is also further developing into more specific forms of tourism such as adventure tourism, heritage tourism, and cultural and ecotourism.

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