

HER HILLS, THEIR DREAMS

SHIMLA

A BIOGRAPHY
IN STONE AND GREENS

Shalini Sharma



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Why I Wrote this Book?

This book is more than just words on a page. It's an invitation for both readers and non-readers to embark on an unforgettable journey. Historians will find a power-packed narrative that unravels the rich tapestry of time. While casual readers will discover a captivating tale that holds their attention from the first word to the last. 'Her Hills, Their Dreams - Shimla' promises not only a taste of history but also an enchanting mystery that lingers long after the story ends.

Shimla is not just a place to me, she embodies a spirit of a wild and dynamic lady who faced life's challenges head-on, weathering the British storm that changed our world forever. I yearn for you to see her through my eyes, to feel her pulse, her struggles, and her triumphs. My hope is that as you turn these pages, you will forge a bond with her, allowing her to become a cherished part of your memories. Thank you for selecting this book. Your journey into her world awaits, and I can't wait for you to experience it.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my beloved daughter, Revaa.
You are my guiding star. It is your magic that allowed
me to turn my imagination into a book.

Loads of Love

Amma

Author's Note

Dear Readers,

Thank you for joining me on this journey through the pages of 'Her Hills, Their Dreams -Shimla, A Biography in Stone and Greens'.

As you turn each page, let her magic unfold. With Shimla as your guide, let the journey commence, from the past to the present. From the depths of mythology, let her stories emerge. Her parallels are drawn from the sacred skies. Her mist carries her love story. In the echoes of Ramayana, Mahabharata's lore, and whispers of Ravan Sanhita, there's so much more.

It is guaranteed that towards the end, Shimla will become an existence for you—a stormy and captivating Lady who is queenly in her ways and is an integral part of History.

This book carries the Tales of Shimla as never before. Be prepared to be stunned. Shimla will be your host.

This book is closely connected to my website, which features a curated collection of articles and reflections on Himachal Pradesh—its heritage, culture, landscapes, and everyday life. The website serves as an extension of the themes explored in this book and offers readers additional context and insight.

You can explore more at: **www.himachalwire.in**

For any correspondence, queries, or feedback, you may contact me at: **himachalwire.in@gmail.com**

Contents

<i>Chapter-1: Crowned by the Nature: The Resilient Spirit of Nature</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Chapter-2: Birth of Shimla: Where Mythology meets History in the Himalayas</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Chapter-3: A Forbidden Romance In The Hills.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Chapter-4: When Hills Turned to Heroes: The Defiance of Shimla's Natives</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Chapter-5: Captive Souls: The Unyielding Spirits of Shimla and Sita.....</i>	<i>37</i>
<i>Chapter-6: Shimla's hidden chronicles Tales from Monkey Kingdom.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Chapter-7: Under the Chandelier: Shimla's Electrifying Rebellion in the Face of Empire</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Chapter-8: The Weight of Departure: Shimla's Heartbreak and Rebirth.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Chapter-9: The Poetic Majesty of Shimla: A Skyline of Dreams</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Chapter-10: Shakti of the Mountains: Parvati and Shimla's Eternal Bond.....</i>	<i>65</i>
<i>Chapter-11: Nature's Jewels: Celebrating the Flow of Shimla's Rivers</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Chapter-12: From Dreams to Divisions: The Tale of Shimla and Chail.....</i>	<i>79</i>

<i>Chapter -13: The Graveyards of Shimla: Where Silent Echoes Weep</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Chapter-14: Shimla's Heartbreak: A Tribute to Her Wounded Landscape</i>	<i>89</i>

CHAPTER-1

Crowned by the Nature: The Resilient Spirit of Nature

Fakir's Vision: The Timeless Queen of the Land

Shimla is an enigma...an ethereal, wild beauty who gave her foes a nuanced charm of submissiveness. She knew that the enemy would leave, but allowed only after the lioness inside her calm exterior ensured their irreversible exit. She sets a powerful reminder that beauty can be stormy and wild. Also, gentle and nurturing, yet invariably and unforgettably strong. The midnight sky talks through her eyes, while her soul races with the wolves. She is a stunning rarity—a perfect combination of wild and wise.

The British seized her lustrous peach skin, only to call it brown. They intended to polish it brutally so Shimla could turn European white. Her patience made them believe in the deception that the wild, untrodden beauty has been tamed to the tunes of the 'Union Jack'. They thought they had won her, but she was more than her mountains, greenery, rivers, and land. She was a queen born to lead and protect her lands. Hence, she owed more than she ruled. She was her own person, striding through her forests like an enchantress. Creating a legacy of resilience and beauty.

Shimla is a paragon of culture. She runs through the Northern hills. Graceful like the greens of nature, she strides with the elegance of wildflowers, which are deeply embedded in her heart, just as her beliefs. Shimla stages the winds of change. Naïve but resolute, she has withstood any attempt at colonisation on her.

Centuries ago, before the steam engines chugged up her spine and their chimneys cast her pine-scented breath. Shimla was a mystery. She was neither a city nor a place. An energy - incredible, untraversed, and unspeakably stunning. She strode with the exquisiteness of a wildflower, rooted strong in her beliefs, swaying beautifully to the winds of change.

She was the muse of an old Fakir. He lived in a blue-roofed hut in Jakhu and served water to all who crossed his hut. His belief in her destiny was indefinable. Waiting for the right time, he sat patiently for the day when his dream of men walking through the dense foliage, evading the wild beasts, would come true and give Shimla the crown she deserved.

For her, the crown was just a glittering ornament for the eyes to catch sight of her calm mountains, jaw-dropping star line, and feel the scented air from afar.

She was crowned by the skies and embraced by the hills. Shimla was more than any title. She was the heartbeat of her land. Shimla was the spirit of resilience and beauty that outshone any crown. She was a storm wrapped in sunshine, fierce yet nurturing, reminding the world that true beauty lies in walking with one's chin up amid all the mess life can throw.

Fakir awaited the day of acknowledgement. For he knew this wild flower was born to command the world. The restrictions of distance will fade. The opaqueness of the mountains will turn transparent, and her rivers will sing the virtues of her being. But he will have to wait. He waited like the dawn awaits the sun, trusting that they would come and her light would soon fill the world.

Born from Tectonic Dreams: The Legend of Shimla

Shimla was not an ordinary female. To come close to understanding her rich natural majesty and the prospering province, soaked in folklore and tradition. One can begin with how she was born, the stories which moulded her and the beliefs that held her together.

He was born from the broken heart of the Tethys Sea. Her body was carved from the strength of trembling tectonic rage. Announcing her arrival loud and clear throughout the universe. The water broke when the landmass of India crashed into Asia. The labour pains that had never been felt or heard before. This was the birth of an unusual girl. Mountains formed her ribs, and her dress was the most pleasant shade of green forest velvet.

She was wrapped in the whispering deodar forests. Shimla was the girl that earth itself had sculpted with impossible imagination. Her story is a lesson for the Dominants. She wrote a lesson in history that a calm, silent, and welcoming gesture should never be taken as a sign of weakness.

Her home is in the majestic embrace of snowy mountains. Where the peaks invade the blue of the sky. Above, her throbbing and breathing hills clouds swirl in a dance. No eye can envision Shimla as anything other than a captivating wild woman. Like a river sculpting the mountains, her beauty soaks with strength, shaping the world around her with compassion and fearlessness.

She is a living testament to the wilderness that envelops her. Amidst her untouched landscape, she unveils herself, yet she retains her mystery. Shimla is proactive and peaceful, mirroring the very essence of her home, the Himalayas. Mountains have layers, plants and trees. They have different colours of soil and roots that go deep within. They are hers, and she is a reflection of them. Known and unknown both walk on either side of her with grace.

She is born to the day but fostered by the night. Like the serene night sky snuggled between the peaks, where every hint of her smile is like a shooting star. A wish-fulfilment and as rare and memorable.

Her dress is the work of every petal, which had transformed into a brush to paint her lush green attire. The wilderness of her core is an undomesticated, dazzling spectacle, which has delicate daisies and orchids dancing joyfully as halves. They make elaborate designs on the border of her dress and give her a sweet-smelling fragrance.

She is the first ray at daybreak in the mountains, a soft glow that awakens the day and paints everything in hues of Gold and lavender.

Glowing, born to be sun-kissed, Shimla is the manifestation of the sun's embrace. Her brown, lustrous hair is like a gush of fresh flowing rivers. Deep water, carrying the virginity of glaciers, nourishing every human being on the way. They flow through her spine in boisterous waves, catching the sunlight and the glimmer, reflecting life.

Dawn glistens them as if knitted with threads of Gold. Comparable to the dew-kissed leaves, she wakes up to the tender touch of morning light.

Her hair is a wave that can form a whirlpool for her enemies and cuddle the natives with love. They are also an image of a deep, star-strewn tapestry, which stimulates a sense of wonder and beauty. In the moonlight, she becomes a velvet expanse.

Each individual strand of her hair carries the stories of her forests. These stories have a streak of horror, a strength of bravery, shining a nurturing light on mothers. Her skin is glossed with the heat of the sunlit earth. It is a soft shade of bronze which tells tales of resilience. She has weathered the harshness of winters and the gentle caress of summers alike. Well-wrapped in the lush green of her surroundings as if she had been draped in nature's finest silk.

Nature's Serenade: The Allure of the Mountain Maiden

What began as a mere military exploration for the British Officer, William Garden, in the mid-19th century evolved into a deceptive love story. A façade which took a toll on both the pursuer and the chased. They wanted Shimla- loyal and fierce beauty, but with a new look and a changed heart. Both of them played, and the better player won.

William Garden had set out to discover, but was unprepared for the wonder's nature had in store to reveal. The Redcoats walked through her forests, feeling the soft chill in the air. It was a cast of nature's spells for them. Pine scent and her emerald heavens have ordered them to come home to her. A professional pursuit evolved into a passionate quest to create a place that has influenced a significant portion of the world's population.

A wild woman is a puzzling spark of life. She belongs to nobody but herself. Yet she gives a piece of herself to everyone she meets. So, notwithstanding the colonial establishments, Shimla remained her wild, untamed, and ethereal self. True to the Himalayas' fierce spirit. For she knew that Queens are born, not made. Like the peaks that drive the heavens, she is challenging and independent, unfazed by crowns or claims —a beauty that rebels against control.

This woman rules the mountains and radiates a spirited aura. She dances through the valleys and climbs the highest summits, a free soul bound to no one, her heart

resonating the call of the wild. The rule of her land's community living, and her charm lies in the folklore that follows her. Nature sings songs to her. It plays a periodic lyrical symphony, accompanied by a variety of chirping birds and rustling leaves, to glorify her.

But Shimla's persona is more than just her beauty. She stands as a fierce protector of her realm. Mountains are her home, and she is theirs.

A human heart is not capable of escaping the breathtaking beauty of the Queen of Hills, Shimla. She lives in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, a shadow of mystery and an image of grace.

Shimla enjoys a vantage position in the heart of the Himalayan quarters. She has been breathing life into the hills for centuries. This daughter of the earth possesses wild beauty, untamed, a storm sweeping through her valleys. Feet grounded and strong as a guardian of the hills. She is home to scores of creatures. Leopard and Bear Walk unbothered. Animals are a part of her untamed spirit. Animals share her pulse, the rhythm of her seasons, the breath of her night.

Canvas of Conquest: Shimla's Fight for Identity

Yet, the British unveiled their ambitious plan. This wild woman had caught the eye of the Redcoats. Captivated by her beauty and warmth, they desired to conquer her. But Shimla lived unrestrained. She defied the concept of civility that the British wanted to impose. Roads were mapped, and letters flew to and fro. They visualised houses that would blend seamlessly with the mountains, but for her, it was the invasion of her sacred spaces. Chained and transformed, Shimla was their idea, to which she gave a smile.

The British drawing rooms were filled with accolades sung in her praise. Like the fresh bloom of spring, they saw Shimla as a prize for colonising India. They dreamt of her in Western dresses, wanting to paint her greens with pastel European colours. "How beautiful she will look?" they thought. Hell bent on acquiring and not merging. They sought to make her their masterpiece, but she chose the canvas for her own life, painting her story in colours that belonged solely to her.

First, the trees were cut to make axes, and then those axes were used to slaughter the trees. Shimla was hoodwinked. They accepted her to feel obliged for the development and urbanisation. They dreamt of showcasing her beauty as if it belonged to them, but she stood firm, a wildflower in the sun, thriving in the freedom of her own identity.

For the metalled roads which choked her skin. For houses which could never become home. For

strangling her spirit that wanted to be free. They longed to capture her essence in a frame, yet she gracefully declined, knowing that true beauty cannot be possessed but must be celebrated in its natural state.

To get over it, one should know why. Shimla is the stoic daughter of the hills; she kept her patience with her guests. But they misunderstood her silence as her acceptance. Hence, did not stop. So, she had to roar with the force of nature as she collected her warriors. The young and the old, men and women, all gathered to fight on her side. For she was no docile beauty. The westerners could neither confine her nor mould her into a doll. She was free and fair.

Both her reactions and anger flowed naturally. Declaring her defiance was her bloom of wild flowers, which erupted with every new road the British laid. It was her way to regain ownership of her land. She was for the sensitive and mature. Ironically, they were ambitious and dominating. While they misinterpreted the flower blooms for her acceptance, she refused to fade into the memories of what she once was.

Within no time, a new establishment rose. Astonished by how and how many of them. She moved around, ensuring that these extraneous elements were recast under the shade of her giant trees, in the memories of those who had been cut and in support of the ones who stood in fear of being slaughtered. Partly dazed and partly awaiting their following action. She slowed down her pace. Watching the people being robbed of their land and freedom.

Yet, she gave the Redcoats time to rectify and repair. Working relentlessly, she tried to save the soul of her land. Victorian elegance failed to overcast her

wilderness. Enveloped in the Victorian structures built by the British, she respired heavily. Suffocated by a golden guise, Shimla ultimately embraced her true self, letting her vibrant blossoms and natural splendour breathe life back into her storied landscapes.

The Aroma of Identity: Spices and Strength in Shimla

She kept her land vibrant with blossoms. Every blossoming flower was a testament to her strength, as he triumphed over the past, reclaiming her story through the language of earth and sky.

As petals unfurled in the sunlight, she gathered the fragments of heritage the British had taken, weaving them back into the rich soil of her identity.

She wanted to reclaim all that they had laid their eyes and hands on. The western allure tried to dim her light, but Shimla's wild nature surged forth, enveloping her hills with the blooms of freedom and unyielding grace.

They built markets, and she filled the shops with her spices. The fragrance of her home-grown spices overpowered the scent of vanilla and cinnamon candles from London. In everything that became British, she celebrated the culture of the Himalayas, which thrived under her watchful eyes. In the embrace of a golden envelope that sought to suffocate her wild essence, Shimla fought back, her hills adorned with the blossoms of resilience and authenticity.

She wanted to rewrite history on her own terms, with her rebellion running in the breeze that the British chose as a blanket to calm their homesickness.

She laughed at their every move. "As they declared their supposed victory, her laughter danced like sunlight through the trees, a reminder that some souls are meant to soar free and unbound.

The irony of conquest was visible in the flare of her dress. Imperial colours stayed but faded. Their image of her as a posh, elegant and refined lady dimmed. She proved that Shimla was a force that belonged to no one and to no empire. She wrote the names of her forbearers on her forest, hills and also her skies.

They were the men and women who had walked upon them before she was born.

Shimla: A Storybook for Everyone

Shimla became a story which was shared by the fireside. The older one spoke about the temper of the wild woman who made the mountains shake to drive off the Redcoats. They voiced her anguish, expressed in thunderous roars that shook the ground of the colonisers. Her sanctuary was the identity of her strength. So, she warned the British to tiptoe and move away from the land she had nurtured.

Her accounts are undeniable. They still make rounds among historians, tourists, and her own people. Every walk through her mesmerising tracks carries the whispers of travellers lost in her serene paths. She is the heroine in every mountain story that has gone around the world. Time could not tame her. It could not transform her. Shimla remained wild, as it once was.

Despite all that she went through, she remains a nurturer. British architectural marvels are proof that she can be trusted. Allowing the paradox of cultures to entwine. She did want to learn them, but did not agree to lose her essence.

Till today, Shimla stands ferociously as the wild glamour clad in the brightest greens of nature. She still celebrates all the seasons. The rain that sweeps through her feet, the snow that blankets her in freezing winters, is a celebration of her due acceptance of the nature of her mountains. She remains responsible, persistent and free. A reminder for all who visit her that a woman of character can change forms, but her heart remains loyal.

She is not born as a city, but an experience for one and all. Calling for sensitivity, she still invites and embraces the travellers to feel the mystery of her foggy veil. Her tall pines calls on everybody to become a part of her stories, whispering in the winds. The unmatched wilderness reminds her of her power.

Visitors take back the image of a stunning wild woman who owns the hills. Image of a lady who refuses to conform to the commotion. Her robust hills are a metaphor of her nurturing spirit, but are nowhere close to submission to tyranny.

As we delve deep into her story. Her geographical location becomes a part of her spirit. She remains an embodiment of her eternal ethos, which defends her hills, her people and her rivers. Unchanged, becoming a timeless tale of echoing hills in the heart of those who honour her legacy.

The night skies of the Queen of Hills are dreamy. They dance to the moon with stars, sprinkling Gold on the black of royalty. The glittering lights of its nights leave an impression for a lifetime. It is life for the painters and rhythm for the poets.

A portrait which fills the canvas of the painters, a poem which seemingly flows through the pen of poets. Mirroring the mysticism of an epoch. Each shadow of the tall pines and the emerald frames whispers in silent tones of a love story that once strolled in her streets.

Shimla has become a living legend, carried on the whispers of the winds, where each breath of air holds a segment of its captivating history.

Before discussing what went wrong, let's first understand why it happened.

For that, you should know her—Shimla, a Charisma.
Words can't contain her, and expression withers in her
portrayal.

CHAPTER-2

Birth of Shimla: Where Mythology meets History in the Himalayas

Shimla is headstrong, it took wave after wave to carve her. She is a blessing born into a family of proud forebears. They knew that their girl would grow up into a queen with love. Her formation is a journey through history.

She was formed from the collision of the Indian and the Eurasian Plate. Towering peaks from the deep sea emerged and created the tallest mountain in the world. Tallest and special for it was Shimla's unique snow abode- The Himalayas.

Her ancestors saw the waves of time turning into a Tsunami. They were witness to the lives of troglodytes—their evolution from hunter-gatherers to cultivators. Mythology breathes life into the northern Indian hills. Here, every stone has a story, and every ridge carries the echo of an ancient legend.

The Rigveda talks about Indra, the Dev of the swarg, being the hand behind the victory of the Aryans over the powerful ruler Shambar in the Northern Hills. He was the proud king who possessed a hundred forts. Indra helped the Aryan chief Divo Das against Shambar, but his victory was not easy. The war went on for twelve long years before Shambar could be won.

Shimla, with its lush landscapes, has always been an integral part of the ancient narrative, connecting the eras of the Rigveda to the grand tales of the Mahabharata to the British conquest of India.

Northern Hills was a cluster of multiple small kingdoms in the past. Shimla and Sirmour Hills were known as Kulind in the Mahabharata era. The first King of Kulinda is believed to be Amoghbhuti.

King Ashoka, Grandson of Chandragupta Maurya, is associated with the spread of Buddhism in the Hills. Later, many rulers came and went. Shimla sat quietly and watched the waves of craft, culture, and heritage sweeping her hills, wishing for the phase to pass but trusting her people to keep their roots strong.

Shimla is the poem flowing in its mysterious, chilled air. Her land, forest and the rivers have giant bags full of stories. These are the tales written not just in the books, but spread with the deep roots of its tall trees and held tight in the stones her mountains cling to. For millions of years, her trees have been witnesses to her unfolding saga. Securing her connection with the past.

These hills have been home to Stone Age humans since their emergence. Human fossils discovered from different parts of the state prove their presence. It is believed that human life in the mountains began about two crore years ago. The presence of Stone Age tools and villages also indicates that Stone Age humans inhabited the Hills approximately 40,000 to 50,000 years ago. The social, cultural and religious customs of the Indus Valley civilisation influenced the Himalayan culture as well.

It was them who laid the foundation of civilisation. Evolution led to the development of animal husbandry and the refinement of agricultural techniques.

CHAPTER-3

A Forbidden Romance in the Hills

Veiled in Nature's Embrace: A British Heart in Indian Shadows

Heart of the Himalayas is home to a dazzling wild beauty- Shimla. She is tempestuous and vibrant. So exquisite that the snow-capped peaks and verdant valleys made a cloak to conceal her from the eyes of the citizenry of the world.

However, her destiny denied the seclusion. She knew she was born to rule. Her moonlit, glittering mountains became the lighthouse for the British. Destiny carted them to her through the curving mountains. She was the finest feather nature had created.

It was time for her innocent interior to break free in a world full of clever and crafty people. She was born to the earth, and nature is not a compassionate mother. Therefore, she has a rough way of disciplining her children. Accordingly, Shimla was exposed to the might of the British.

The Brits were strong. Initially, they gave the impression of a power couple. With a vast empire that stretched from horizon to horizon, they flexed their muscles. Nothing was played at the hands of destiny in Shimla's love story. The beginning was marked by temptation, unmatched euphoria and a feeling of triumph. At the same time, the end was underlined by the urge to break the chains of possessiveness. Love can only be mutual growth; strangulation in its name is the way to sabotage.

Call it love at first sight. The Gerard brothers had camped in Shimla, a small village. Purity of her air was that of a divine virgin. Splendid forest covered her like their favourite girl. There was something special about this wild beauty.

One look exposed her unreal charm. Her long, hazel hair flowing in the wild air was the messenger of her wild core. Britishers had not seen a woman like her before. The forest reverberated with her laughter. She was the life of her slow and sleepy hills. At times barefoot and mostly walking around with high leather boots, the flair of her dress swirled, hugging the clouds on her mountain peaks.

She flew with her wild winds, displaying her unrestrained nature. Shimla became their most favourite memory. Here, the feminine and masculine are both personifications of the divine's finest creation, but somehow, they were not perfect. Ironically, it had attracted the dominator towards a bohemian. The clash was evident, but it took time to develop.

To begin with, the opposites did attract, but could not last forever. However, their love story inspired both art and their lives. A wild Lady in every sense—quirky, intense, and immensely enchanting. She walked holding the spirit of Bharat within.

The British officers could feel Shimla dancing in the sunlight. In fluid and free movements. For a long time, their hearts have been dead under the burden of duty. They have become strangers to passion.

It was a reluctant beginning. Called for help, the Brits were successful in dampening the spirits of the Gorkhas in 1815 and restraining them by March 1816. Defeating

the brutal Gorkhas was a daring task. They had requested all the Hill chiefs and hill people to strengthen them.

Until this period, neither British policy nor the British intentions tempted them to retain the Jagirs won in the war. An announcement was made to reinstate the expelled Hill chiefs after the Hills were declared free of Gorkha rule.

This was the laid path. Walking on it was a practice, but destiny made them change it. They modified the original plan. Brits had put their foot down to ratify all their military positions. Acquisition was their master strategy. A forced favour was wrapped in fragrant paper. Minutes of the war were prepared. A few Hill chiefs were found responsible for delays and were accused of being reluctant. Bhagat State and Sirmour State topped the list.

The British prepared to present themselves as unbiased and intelligent, and punished the Bhagat State by taking three-fourths of its land. At the same time, Keonthal had to surrender a portion of its territory. The possession became the reward for the favourites. A part was passed on to the Sirmour state, and most of it to Patiala for their brilliant assistance.

After the balloon burst of trust. A fair game awaited the Hill Rajas. The British made the Raja of Patiala pay a nazrana of Rs 2,80,000 to the Rana of Keonthal. Shimla was watching the game in silence. This was her first experience with the outsiders. Understanding the Credit and debit entries on the Britisher's balance sheet was difficult.

The Britishers thought it would take effort to carve Shimla out of her deep forest. To begin, a Redcoat came requesting land to build houses. He proposed giving rent-free accommodation to the visiting fellows. Interestingly, the permission was granted on a condition that should make the most sense in today's context. It was not to cut a single tree. If needed at all, it should be well-explained and obtained with the owner's permission. Slaughtering the cattle was banned in bold Red. The place came to be known as the 'Sanatorium'. Credit to the weather and the healing air of Shimla. She was a nurturer. Assuming the wild lady has trusted them, it was time for the next move.

A slow beginning, the opposites did attract, but could not last forever. However, their love story inspired both art and their lives. She was a wild Lady in every sense—quirky, intense, and immensely enchanting. But she walked holding the spirit of Bharat within. Not understanding her uniqueness. The British officers envisioned Shimla dancing in the sunlight. In fluid and free movements. They were enchanted with the grace of her demeanour. Since years, their hearts remained dead under the burden of duty. They have become strangers to passion.

Hence, it was a slow beginning

Mountain Secrets: The Forbidden Affair of Shimla and the British

Conjointly, the area which shaped Shimla belonged to the Raja of Patiala and the Rana of Keonthal. In the year 1830, the British called upon the Raja of Patiala and the Rana of Keonthal. They demanded land to assign Shimla her crown. Major Kennedy was the political agent of the Raj, responsible for negotiating with the Rajas. Rana of Keonthal surrendered 12 villages, whereas the Raja of Patiala contributed four villages from his Jagir. Redcoats were there to impress the lady. Playing fair was the requisite.

Hence, both the Indian lords were promised an annual compensation by the Raj. It seemed fair for a while. Soon they wanted to refine her and redefine her existence. The grand structures began to cover her rough, yet breathing, land. Her seven Hills were marked. The British were playing a game of trying to tame the wild lady with sugar. Not knowing that her forest bees presented her with rarest honey.

No doubt they were royal, their presence was massive, and dominating. Therefore, the natives felt restricted. They built and acquired but could not win her. Hence, became the charming outsiders. They thought the charming Victorian cottages and embellished churches would glamorise her.

For the onlookers, it was a perfect blend of two cultures. She was the bloom, and they were the grandeur. Shimla took her time to understand the chronology of conditioning, she contested it. Her Deodars wanted to

spread their roots as far as they wished. But roads were built and areas were marked. Her mountains clutched their creatures close, safeguarding them. Natives were restricted and became made fence sitters. The mud on the road was blocked out of sight by mortar. While her gut was hinting at uneasiness, the British made the affair public.

In 1864, Shimla was declared the Summer Capital of the British. She was still considering the offer when the rings were exchanged. The proposal was loud and rich—one of a kind, which was hard to refuse. Only a woman in love with her paradise, its originality, the happiness of her people and culture could refuse. Therefore, Shimla turned down the offer but they perused.

Back then, Shimla was a sheer cluster of wooden huts and rough trails that extended into the embrace of grandiose mountains. The British came with a mission. All they wanted was to conquer and claim the land. Somehow, the serenity told them that she was more than a captivating landscape. Unquestioningly in love, they felt a profound emotional awakening within. The moment of enlightenment threw them into the arms of nature, questioning the rigorous structures and their imperial lives. They wanted to float free like her. Enjoy the little things and laugh out loud.

As much as they wanted to become one with her, their strings tied in London shook them out of their heart's desire into the practical world of monthly and annual salaries and packages.

Still, they did not give up on each other. Shimla was the nurturer, and the British played the role of the protector. They danced together at times in the wild and at times in the grand balls. The elegant High Tea tables were

hosted on her well-groomed land. The gatherings were grand but were infused with the colours of her Indian culture. Both wanted to adjust and accommodate.

Shimla became both a canvas and the muse of the Brits. While all this was on, she was clear about what she wanted. Like a perfect lady love, she allowed them to come close but marked her boundaries in clear view. Efforts were seen from both sides. But she played the best host.

They embraced her Indian spices and curries. Especially the local legends and the regional folk made a place in the imperial buildings. In their honeymoon phase, the British soaked in the Indian tunes. They drank at the desi festivals. Yet the undercurrent of imperial rule could not be overlooked. Similarly, the high mountains could not lighten the building guilt.

Years went by. Both came closer to understanding their differences. They had agreed to disagree with grace. Her sunrise and their late-night parties made circles far east. She did not mind revealing her secrets, whispering them in the cool breeze on the banks of the Sutlej. The dance of her wildflowers became an acceptance of their love, which could never be completed.

CHAPTER-4

When Hills Turned to Heroes: The defiance of Shimla's Natives

She is an integral part of Indian History. The day she was crowned, the British Summer capital became the focal point of the Indian Freedom struggle. Emotions squallied in 1857. The mutiny became the first show of rebellion in the Northern Hills. Having lost her patience with the Brits, Shimla called on her people to burst their bubble. Freedom was the rule of dominion in her part of the land. The Rajas, Ranas, and the British have overstepped, infringing on the liberty of her natives. Privilege was mistaken for liberty.

Life for natives struggled under the new, uncalled-for political rituals. The social and religious culture of her hills was in danger of fading from sight. Shimla saw her people destroyed. Once full of life, she felt hammered by the news of forced conversions. There was a hearsay of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu soldiers in the British Army being forced to convert to Christianity.

Both sides, the oppressor and the oppressed, were in an uproar. She has set a timer for the Local feudal lords and the British knight in shining armour. A massive cleanliness drive had to begin.

The British came in with a promise to dwell in her colours. Respect is the unspoken rule of all relations. Control and domination are integral to deceit. Her comrades in the Army were being subjected to bias and discrimination for trusting the empire. She was appalled to see that the highest Indian army officer was subordinate to the lowest British officer.

Shades of skin and tunes of culture became the barricades. Shimla was stabbed in the heart. She reminisced about the days when the Brits had walked on her soil and enjoyed everything that was being objected to. Love has a simple formula of care and respect.

Humiliation and deceit have been written in the history of vengeance. They had to go.

The neighbouring Kasauli Hill gave SOS on 20th April, 1857 to Shimla and her warriors. Every existing native became her soldier. Results started showing up immediately. A milkman and a maid at a British residence were punished for disrespectful behaviour towards the Westerners. Simple people were looking eye to eye with the mighty empire. Such was her strength. She wanted to reclaim everything that was hers.

The Westerners owned the metalled Mall Road in Shimla. The privilege of setting foot on it, along with the British, belonged only to westernised natives. An Indian man was picked up for twirling his moustache at the Britishers. The rules of love were broken. Shimla was a mother and under no circumstance her children could be overstepped. Even by a lover. The betrayal became a dead end. The known and unknown all stood in the way of the British. The local shopkeepers took pride in demeaning the light-skinned intruders.

The natives in the Army questioned the Western intention. Marking their discontent loud and clear, they captured the Jutog cantonment and swept its treasury under the guidance of Subedar Bhim Sing. Shimla was beaming with pride.

The news of the Meerut, Delhi and Jutog rebellion caused panic among the Britishers of Shimla. The lioness in the wild has unleashed. Fearing the worst, under the instruction of Major General Nicholas Penny, the British went into hiding. About 800 petrified European children, women and men in Shimla gathered near the Church. Later took refuge in the compound of Shimla

Bank (Grand Hotel). Her Hills were hers. Moreover, the wolf in sheep's skin had infringed on the mother in her.

Things were to get ugly. Amongst all that was unfolding, a Gorkha soldier beheaded a British officer in the middle of the Shimla bazar. She watched the fire engulf the cheaters. Britishers could not hold their ground in Shimla. The Deputy Commissioner, Lord William Hay, failed to provide needed security. The situation was beyond control. The British ran to safety in all directions. Risking getting caught on the Highways, they fled from the tricky mountain roads—the roads from where they were once carried in palanquins.

Many stayed hungry in the dark bungalows deep in the hills, fearing for their life for days. It so turned out that the British were riding on the Indian soldiers' shoulders for safety. Hence, during these times, it was not just the families who went into hiding, even the British soldiers ran for their lives. In these times, the Indian crows trying to walk like swans were painted red. Many higher British officials, along with hundreds of their people, took refuge at the mercy of the Raja of Junga and the Raja of Keonthal. Living in tents for days together, they got the taste of their own medicine. After this incident, the European troops and families who fled from Shimla were named ' Flying Squadron', in mockery of their courage.

From Sanctuary to Stronghold

Commissioner of Punjab, Sir John Lawrence, sent a telegram from Rawalpindi. He ordered the immediate transfer of European women to Ambala and for the weak and old to be sent to Kasauli with immediate effect. Shimla was the place that once healed them. The affinity was such that she was chosen to become the summer capital of the British. Now, they had to flee. Once the trust breaks, everything crumbles.

This news spread from East to West. It was printed under the heading "Shimla - Terror and Shimla Massacre" in a contemporary English newspaper. But this was just the beginning of the worst for them.

The love story between the Redcoats had hit a dead end. Cynicism had replaced the feeling of passion. Britons were willing to win at any cost. When winning on the ground seemed impossible. They played foul by concealing their faults and highlighting the ones made by the Rajas and Ranas. The even-stein stories became the word written on stone for many.

Later, the fugitive foreign nationals returned to Shimla after multiple assurances. Shimla was again ready to surprise them. On their arrival, they found the houses which they had left unlocked, unattended and untouched. Shimla was a lady of values, she knew she could create wealth. She need not stoop down to foreign standards. Apart from their unattended houses, cash worth Rs 80,000 was untouched in the Shimla Bank. All she wanted was her native's dignity and her hills back.

She became a pandora's box for the British. Everywhere they went, a revolt erupted. The hills rejected everything that was British. The Western clothes and things were burned. The Westerners were denied. She stood in the centre, protected by her people.

Nothing, though, was easy. She knew her hills were infested by the traitors, but the time was right. With the impostors, the weeds were also picked up. The Feudal Lords of Hills were taken back by the revolt. Their deep slumber of riding high on the backs of ordinary men was broken. They were astonished to see an army of well-trained warriors lined up before them. The known, kind and straightforward men, women and children turned into the finest soldiers in Shimla's Army. They hindered their life in every way.

Shimla took them by storm. Life for the Redcoats continued in Shimla for a few more years, but it was like eating stale bread every day. For them, neither the health nor the charm of her hill remained the same. They walked through the same paths which she had decorated with her bloom, but now they did not feel the fragrance. The colours of her flowers did not attract them. In vengeance, the snake bit more, but her hills had her protectors.

The westerners came with a promise to grow with her, but their greed for dominance and more wounded her soul. True to her nature, Shimla still held the western encroachment on her as a memory of her once-loved story.

Shimla sought to protect not just her territory and secure political freedom, but also to safeguard her ecological and heritage interests. Nothing could come her way or her warriors' way.

She enjoyed the passive affection and devotion of her people. Her natives wanted her to be the free-spirited lady again, and soon. Hence, they left behind a legacy of stories full of unity, sacrifice and determination which flow in the cool breeze of Shimla.

The story of the wild lady Shimla is far from over. From generation to generation, it flows like a thrilling tale—a story dedicated to the senora who continues to enchant hearts with her charm and resilience.

CHAPTER-5

Captive Souls: The Unyielding Spirits of Shimla and Sita

Like a snowflake, she was born in the quiet hills of the Himalayas. Growing up with the stories whispered by the Pine Trees, she flew with the winds. This beautiful daughter of the earth- Shimla. Like Sita, this daughter of the soil was born to the sacred roots. She belonged to no man. Her soul belonged to the mountains and their mist. The forest echoed with her laughter, and the tall Deodar trees found their strength in her spirit. She was a goddess to her natives, animals, rivers, lands, and forests—a perfect blend of fiercely independent, loving and nurturing beauty.

The British stumbled upon her presence not as lovers, but as masked invaders, like Ravana, who came disguised to capture Sita, disguised as a sage. In the 1800s, tired and sick, the British walked up the Hills and found this gorgeous, carefree lady wrapped in mist. She was glowing in the moonlight. She was owned by the rhythm of chirping birds and the golden hue of sun rays.

Yet, both these daughters of the soil were captured and claimed. Ravana laid his eyes on Sita and forced her to become his. The very days made the ascent of his power and empire. Much like the British Empire, on which it was believed that the sun also refused to set. It was not falling in love. It was the obsession with control for them.

These are two outstanding figures that illustrate the struggle of a woman being punished for her grace and kindness. Sita from the revered Indian epic Ramayana and Shimla from the Northern Hills were thought of as weak and submissive beauties, but to the dismay of their captors, they turned the tables. Both of these women are from different time zones and carry different contexts, but their stories, brought together, will revive the

emotions that had stayed forever. Shimla, being surrounded by the captives, and Sita imprisoned in the Ashok Vatika showcases striking similarities.

Neither did Ravana ask Sita's permission before he carried her in his Pushpak viman to Lanka. Nor did the British, before they started renaming Shimla's Hills, change her tongue and force her wild curves into the corsets. The British tried to tame the wild beauty, turning her into a British Lady with gloves and laces. Shoes were forced on her bare feet. After which her fingers could never feel the moist grass beneath them. The huge mansions of the British Raj could not hold the spirit of Shimla. She breathed along with the Deodars; cosy drawing rooms of Westerners suffocated her. Much like Sita, who lived surrounded by the riches, but her heart longed for the forest where Ram lived.

The British enjoyed the finest wine in golden goblets. Danced in the wood-panelled halls, embellished with the grandest crystal chandeliers. But Shimla wanted to be free again. Run through her forest and play in her rivers.

The monkeys did not bow to the Union Jack. They disturbed and robbed the British. A bearing reminder that, like Sita, Shimla was the daughter of the earth, and she will be set free. The mighty Hanuman is watching her back. The efforts of the British to convert her into one of theirs were as grand as the temptation thrown at Sita by Ravana. They tried to divert her mind with the dramatics played in the Gaiety Theatre, but for her, it became a mark on her bones. She was dressed in the finest gown, but the mirror read her heart. No hats or laces could bring a smile to her.

The year 1947 marked the end of her vanavas. The Union Jack fell like the mighty Ravana. After all the

manipulations and tactics, the British failed to retain India.

Her freedom from the Brits was celebrated. Like Ayodhya sparkled, greeting her favourite people. Similarly, the hills brought back their culture and festivals. She did not clear the colonial scars but wore them like medals for the fitting reply given to the colonial oppressors.

CHAPTER-6

Shimla's hidden chronicles Tales from Monkey Kingdom

The Interwoven Fates of Shimla and Her Monkey Protectors

Shimla is graced with a companion who stands as her shield. This innocent protector allows her to stay carefree and delicate. Monkeys of Shimla have since been her caretaker. The Ravan Sanhita discusses the curse put on Ravana by Nandi, the sacred Bull of Shiva.

When Ravana laughed at Nandi standing in his Monkey form, calling him ugly, Nandi warned him that unarmed monkeys would diminish his strength and power. Their claws and teeth will be enough to take down the King and the city made of gold.

So, was the curse on the British. The Monkey God is the venerated identity of Shimla. His army never allowed the British to settle in peace.

The Indian side of the Himalayas is home to the spirit of womanhood, in a place known as the Queen of Hills. The regal lady wears a crown of Deodar trees. The nature pampers her. It covers her under the shawl of mist with every sprinkle of rain.

Shimla created a space for the monkeys to roam free. They returned with their loyalty and a promise to protect her. Thereafter, they have been watching over her as her protector. Like her, they embody the spirit of the mountains, which carry their stories from one generation to the next.

Monkeys are playful by nature. They also display sharp intelligence. Often seen swinging from one branch to another. Their eyes are small but curious, for they have

been observing the changes of the Hills as long as they have been.

The Ramayana describes the moment when Hanuman, the Monkey God, arrives in Lanka, the city of the Demon King Ravana. After meeting Sita, he takes her permission to eat some fruits from the gardens of Lanka. She cautions him about the guards watching over the fruit-laden trees before he leaves.

Hanuman eats some fruits and throws some on the ground. While eating, he also uproots a few trees. When challenged, a fight breaks out. Many guards are killed. Even Akshay Kumar, one of the Demon God's sons, is killed in the battle. After which, Inderjit ties Hanuman to Brahmafaans (Brahmastra).

On reaching the Demon God's court, when asked why he threw fruits on the ground, uprooted trees and killed guards? He explains innocently that he is a monkey. Uprooting trees while eating some and throwing some on the ground is his nature. However, when he was challenged and threatened, he had to retaliate, which ultimately led to chaos. Known for their playfulness, they have been continuously chased away from the residential areas. Shimla's monkeys are a reflection of mythology.

Shimla and her monkey guardians represent a perfect coordination between nature and humanity. Northern Hills are not just a cradle for Shimla. In the background, they are a habitat for the entire existence. Her monkeys return the favour by scattering the seeds deep into the forest. They don't leave a stone unturned to keep her warm, while they prosper in her embrace.

The British established their presence with the bandwagon, turning her into their summer capital in 1864. A decision which changed Shimla's destiny but could not change her was taken by Sir John Lawrence, the then Viceroy of India.

Muddled by the heat in Calcutta, she became their peace. The Redcoats were treated to stunning views. Her cool breeze was the reflection of her peace.

Along with them were the Rhesus macaques, who were in the habit of walking on her hills unchecked and unbothered.

Initially, they became a fanciful addition to amuse the Westerners. However, their presence soon turned into annoyance. Ironically, they missed the fact that it was their abode and the British were the foreign intruders.

Chasing Shadows: How Shimla's Monkeys Challenge Colonial Narratives

It was evident that these brown furry creatures could not be taken lightly. They were masters in the art of replicating, like a design made in the gardens of heaven. As they quickly learnt the rhythms of their new neighbours, their timing went unnoticed.

The picnic, garden brunch, and open-area meal plans fell flat. The British knew their delicate China was under threat from the highly strategic monkey guards of Shimla. These hills were serene, but history has proved that beauty was never easy to win.

The phrase "monkey business" became a catchphrase among Westerners. In an infamous incident, a giant monkey, displaying remarkable skill, leapt onto the elaborately laid table for high tea. Before, the British could realise and react the innocent thief was on his way out with a sandwich and a pastry.

The afternoon high tea snacks were forcefully shared with the monkeys. The incident became the talk of the town. It might have seemed like a mere monkey accident, but her guardians were watching their every move.

Before they could gasp, the monkeys were raiding their kitchens and pantries. Skilful to open the drawers, lest they leave an unopened packet behind. The British had come to embrace the openness of the virgin hills. However, her protectors have instilled in them the habit

of eating behind closed doors and sitting with latched windows.

Gradually, the whiff of fresh air became a miss within the four walls of their houses—the sight of anguished cooks chasing after monkeys was a regular thing. Villagers laughed at the commotion.

Monkeys of her Hills have learnt the Britishers by heart. Uniforms kept them apart, and their hat was a mark of superiority. Laundry day turned the Britishers into sentries. Their hats, scarves and spectacles became the target of Monkeys. Not only did they pick them up, but they also used them to tease the British, parading them like trophies of boldness from one tree to another.

Either it was the warmth from the chimneys in winter, or it was just a display of boldness. However, the monkeys' actions became increasingly bold and aggressive. They took to inspect the Britishers' kitchens personally. It was a takeaway understanding. Wherein the monkeys would search the cabinets and shelves for food and run away.

Kitchen gardens going bare can be attributed to the monkeys during those times. It was chaotic with them around. The scenes of vast groups of monkeys uprooting what was sown were a regular sight. Half-eaten fruits thrown all over the place became a new normal. No traps or makeshift barriers could stop the monkey business.

In a way, what was being forced was being uprooted by nature. The British were learning. With each endeavour to tame the circus created by the monkeys, the British learned a priceless lesson. There was an unspoken respite between the natural pizzazz of Shimla and its playful dwellers. The monkeys, the indigenous culture of

the province, were a vital part of the region. Natives chose to adopt the witty sides of Monkeys and live in coexistence.

The Raj dwelt in uncertainty, with monkeys challenging their smallest and most regular decisions. Their households operated with caution. It was a warning that even the mightiest will change with time, and submissiveness is not a sign of weakness.

The British hired many for multiple assignments, but there were special vacancies in the viceroy's bungalow set on top of the Summer Hill for men who could chase away the monkeys.

To date, the skies of Shimla carry the stories of mischievous but observant monkeys. They are not just the inhabitants of these Hills. They are the guards of Shimla. They patrol the streets, swinging from one branch to another, with curious eyes scanning for any danger that might encroach on Shimla.

They are revered and believed to be kin to the great Monkey God Hanuman. These tiny descendants of Hanuman stay vigilant against any threat to their lands.

Monkey God Hanuman's powers had to be awakened by jolting verses of Jamvant in Ramayana before he flew across the ocean. But the thaumaturgy of these ascendants is active by birth. By-passers can watch them jumping from one rooftop to another.

Local fables narrate an age-old bond, with a promise to ensure protection, and in return, be blessed with the respect of the town's natives.

Just as Hanuman served Devi Sita in the Ramayana, these monkeys have made it their life's goal to safeguard Shimla for generations to come.

The story of Shimla, as a woman, and her monkeys as protectors, presents an enduring bond between the force of nature and humanity. Where Shimla stands as a symbol of femininity, the monkeys portray a need for guardianship, love, and above all, respect for nature. Remembering them is the only way to pass down the tales of wild beauty, Shimla and her monkeys, through the generations.

CHAPTER-7

Under the Chandelier: Shimla's Electrifying Rebellion in the Face of Empire

This is a tale of how Shimla, embodied as a woman, fiercely rejected the colonial ambitions and embraced her own uniqueness.

By 1830, the British were almost home at Shimla. Comfortable in the bungalows, their evenings were filled with drama and displays in the 'Gaiety Theatre'. The central city had evolved into its perfect capital above the summit of the British Empire. Stories of her irresistible beauty, fresh air, and cool breeze were circulating between Delhi and Calcutta and back. Summer saw an exodus of the British to the Hills of Shimla.

For them, she was in the prime of her life.

Shimla did captivate the hearts of those who laid eyes on her. But her heart belonged to none—she was independent, wild, and fiercely proud of her heritage.

The British were mesmerised by her charm and decided to make her their summer capital, transforming her landscapes into lawns, constructing bungalows, and trampling upon her once-undisturbed wildness. They built and spread into the dense area, but could not win her. Their grand gestures went waste. She had no time to revert to their grand gestures. Her life became busy preserving her roots under layers of colonial façade.

Shimla displayed a blend of curiosity and contempt towards the British. She was intrigued by the change. Once, lovers were trying to crown themselves as the rulers of her lands. The priorities have changed.

Once she was the Apple of their eyes, with time, Shimla was reduced to a mere backdrop for administrative work. Fanciful to have a dance when they wished for.

They mistook her for a docile village beauty and tried imposing on her the portrayals that suited them. Amongst this, her wild and fierce soul began to stir with rebellion.

Secretly, she held gatherings in hidden glades under the moonlight, where poets and freedom fighters convoked, exchanging ideas of independence and identity. They spoke of the need to reclaim their land, their culture, and their essence. Each whispered word echoed through her hills, fuelling her spirit.

The British were determined to civilise this wild woman, but they only inspired her to resist further. Shimla's heart raced with the stories of bravery that circulated through her valleys—a narrative that celebrated her past and nourished her hope for a free future. The revolution was not silent anymore. It was beyond the stage of under current. It was alive in the very essence of Shimla. Her people were prepared and so was she. It was the time to perform.

The definitive moment of rejection from her came during a grand ball organised by the British to showcase their dominance. They adorned their extravagant halls with garlands of flowers and tunes of the past. In contrast Shimla arrived—not in a flowing gown, but wrapped in vibrant garb that mirrored the colours of her land. Her presence was electric and defiant, a stark contrast to the elaborately dressed British officers. She was a tempest among the still waters.

Shimla danced through the gathering, capturing the eyes of everyone present. Not just as a woman, but as an embodiment of freedom. In every move, she conveyed her rejection of colonial rule. The British who attempted to maintain their decorum, felt the shift in the

atmosphere, a reminder that they would never truly be able to claim her as their own.

She took the grand chandelier overhead as her audience, weaving a tale of rebellion, unwavering spirit, and beauty that transcended borders. Shimla made it clear that while she could host them, she would never submit to their authority nor lose the essence of her being.

The rejection was not just of the British authority but of any force that attempted to undermine her spirit. Shimla's beauty, strength, and resilience became symbols of hope for those who longed for freedom. As political movements gained momentum across the country, residents of Shimla stood tall in their love for their home, charged by the bravery she embodied.

Over time, Shimla transformed from a mere colonial outpost to a prominent figure in India's fight for independence. She became a symbol of unity, attracting people from all walks of life who found inspiration in her wildness and beauty. She was no longer a secluded queen. She was a revolutionary, inviting everyone to dance alongside her in the pursuit of freedom.

Today, Shimla continues to endorse the values of resilience and independence. With each visitor who gazes upon her majestic landscapes, there lies an echo of her spirit—a reminder of the past battles fought and the legacy of a woman who chose to stand against colonial imposition.

In every flower that blooms, in every gust of wind that whispers through the pines, Shimla's essence remains alive. She portrays the memories of those who dared to love and fight for their land, serving as a poignant

reminder of the beauty that can be found in resisting oppression.

She challenged imperialism and dominated narratives through her voice and spirit. Her rejection of the British was not a single act of defiance. It was a lifelong commitment to preserve her identity against any forces that threatened her essence.

As we walk through her valleys and admire her peaks, let us remember that Shimla is more than just a city. She is a legacy—a vibrant celebration of freedom, identity, and undeniable strength.

CHAPTER-8

The Weight of Departure: Shimla's Heartbreak and Rebirth

Sunset brings the longest shadows with it. Shimla felt the first tremors of transformation. The news of Partition did not come as a bolt from the blue. The country and the British have been preparing for it for some time.

It began with whispers. Then a volley of letters and meetings followed them. Shimla watched patiently. The tall tress gave her a clear view of viceregal Lodge. She could sense the dead chill in the air. It was not about who was leaving but how they had planned their exit. The British have decided to divide India. The news of the division sent waves of anxiety among the natives.

In the far-off corner hidden in the northern Hills, both the communities lived in harmony. The news of Partition made them question each other's existence. This was not what she had asked for. Shimla had flowed with the wind's pace. But the news weighed heavily on her chest like stone.

She saw her people leaving for good. Bags packed, infants clutched in the hands, the stations had never seen a heavier footfall. Her Hills managed to maintain peace, but from the far heights she could see the country burning.

Brothers from different mothers were killing and looting each other. She opened her arms for all. Embraced those who came to her. Becoming a pilgrimage for the ones who climbed her hills. They were the children of her country who had chosen her as their protector. They had trusted her to cover their bare feet, heal their cracked heels and fill their empty stomach. She sheltered them in the abandoned mansions. Healed their body and soul. Her forests still carry the cries of the horror they heard

during the Partition. Her fog hid them till they recovered, and her forests provided for all they had lost.

She saw the Britishers packing before they left. Their furniture was glossy and shining, which would never be the same again—the roles of curtains folded like old lies. The chandeliers hung confused. It ached her heart. For years, she had been rebelling against the chains of dominion, but that was over. She did not hate them but disliked the way they treated her.

The painful lines on her, the marked borders and the cracks on her chest were all gifted by them. But now they were walking away. She saw them off till where she could see, holding them with her eyes. Questions left unanswered, they went across the seven seas. She wanted to ask, what am I now? A capital without a crown or a palace without a prince? She maintained a sombre moment for she had trusted in love. But letting go is the first step towards healing. Hence, she woke up to a new sunshine and free skies once again. Understanding that her freedom could not be compromised for the players. They had to leave and she will have to move on. Hence, she did.

Shimla hosted the National Flag on August 15. Her hills saw a day of celebration after years. But she did not wear Red. Shimla adorned herself in white, for all those who have gone, for the abandoned homes and friendships that have been shattered. She chose silence, but soon stirred a new flame of rebirth. She is a mother who knew how to heal. Perhaps not a capital now, but she has become bigger than the crown - Summer Capital of Britain. She lives as the keeper of memories. She is a wild woman again, unbroken and untamed.

CHAPTER-9

The Poetic Majesty of Shimla: A Skyline of Dreams

She is not just an exquisite being, but also an unreal beauty. As is her skyline. Like a poem from the pen of the most read rhymers, Shimla has been inviting one and all to immerse themselves in her landscapes. The sky, which proves that beauty is an interplay of nature, architecture, and humanity, belongs to the wild grace of Shimla.

At dusk, it brings with it time to connect with oneself in Queen's Hills. Evenings are spent in poetic heavens under her starlit skyline—echoes of the poems collected under her sky last long, reverberating for a lifetime.

Every shade of her sky is like a verse waiting to be translated dynamically. It belongs to all and is everybody's. Her snow-covered peaks shine like the earned sweat of a hard-working hill folk.

The feminine of Shimla Hills reveals herself in shades of orange, yellow and pink with poise as the finest woman the mountains have ever known. She doesn't shy away from stepping onto the centre stage. Whether she was amid foreign domination or on the days that were challenging her truce. Shimla has never missed an evening. Consistently, she has taken over her skyline, declaring in bold that she is the Queen and these hills belong to her.

Comprehensively, she asserts that she is a free woman. No man or no empire can own her. Nevertheless, she speaks and blends with everyone who beholds her. She maintains a regal and poised demeanour while amusing the natives and guests.

Always a head turner with jaw-dropping beauty, her view from the majestic Ridge Road and the Christ Church spurs instant admiration. At the same time, she

enjoys every bit of it. Shimla also ensures that her twinkling stars tell tales of authoritarianism and the imposition of the British, which changed her landscape.

The wales of trees which were cut in the process are heard, and the cutting of her hills is felt. She plays with the eyes of the bystanders with her mist cover, wobbling them as if reminding them to walk home before the ghosts open their Pandora's box of stories.

As the darkness of night sets in, a natural hustle of Pine and deciduous trees becomes prominent. As the clock ticks, the hustling turns into the whispering of a woman sharing her stories. These are the stories of her birth, carefree childhood, oppressive Redcoats, regaining freedom, and becoming a full-fledged state from a union territory. But she seems in no hurry. Requesting her guest to slow down and take the time to feel her. Sit with her every evening while she talks them into the dreams which form the history of the world.

Her transition from day to night is a spectacle which intrigues the imagination. It forms a backdrop of dark velvet sky. For human eyes, it is a clear sight of a fine lady weaving her dreams. Her skyline is a testament to her aspirations.

The dreams which she lives for are majestic like her snow-clad peaks. The twinkling of the stars makes her aspirations and dreams even more splendid and luminous. These robust structures tell the story of her unwavering quest for dreams, anecdotes of her goals, and her originality. Motivating millions to focus till they reach the finish line. Nothing is impossible for this Queen who turned the indigo of the British to her soft peach.

Her mountains are visible both during the dawn and the dusk. The camouflage of their colour signifies her complex yet nurturing soul. With every sunset, Shimla gives hope of the next equally stunning sunrise. She motivates all to cherish the journey of life. Every woman has a powerful and admirable story to convey.

Caged in Stone

Shimla embodies a paradox- her enchanting beauty hides a deep pain in the heart of her hills. Some call her a Victorian wonder. The Tudor style of architecture replicated by the British on their Hills was accommodated as a form of hospitality.

She extended her hand to the guest. However, they mistook her for a self-indulgent village girl, whom they approved of. Gradually, the European structures revealed their true intentions. The British wanted to cover her hills with their structures and also her soul with their colours. She knew that a great effort would go into redefining herself.

Her authenticity was breached, and Westerners yielded her history. She had trusted the traitors. They have given her slow poison into her veins. Late but ready to recoup, she stood tall with her natives giving her the cover.

Shimla has offered an irresistible allure to the British elite. In return, she was crowned the Summer Capital of the Raj. Once claimed, the British had started replicating the grand European estates from back home on her.

On the face of it, they were understood as a facelift. The structures were elegant. Their roofs had a slope, a kind of slope that could not be trusted. No amount of affection

could maintain a grip on them. The complicated wooden fronts had a resemblance to their problematic core. Yet she supported them as beautiful shells on her hills. They still stand tall but carry the weight of betrayal that Shimla had never foreseen.

She was innocent and youthful. Trusting the design of the westerns who promised to keep the honour of her natural splendour. They carved out their dominion while sweet-talking her into their fake promises. They pledged to preserve her untouched beauty. Forcing their bricks and mortar with her essence.

She became their colonial ambition. A new lullaby of merging the cultures formed a loop.

Her people were forbidden to use their motor roads, for they wore what the Hills provided-Khadi. Her people were restricted from the places the British called the main areas for recreation. These were the Mall and the Ridge. Her trust was invalidated.

The old structures from the British era, such as Christ Church and the Gaitey Theatre, in the Mock-Tudor style, are reminders of the Britishers' complicated trust.

These beautiful structures became a symbol of handsome betrayal. The Westerners began building on the path of symbiotic coexistence, but ultimately transformed it into a substance that altered Shimla's beauty forever.

She stood as a strong protector of the Deodar and Pine trees. Their whispering winds carried complaints of western intrusion after the Readcoats chopped off their friends and family.

The hills fell apart, expelling the European style. Instead of merrymaking with the culture and simplicity of the

Hills, the European style stood robust yet dissonant. No doubt they had the grand persona, but her simplicity rejected the fakeness.

With the years, European-style buildings became a timepiece in the patina of history. They have weathered the test of time, just like the relationship that came to define them.

Still, their charm could not be denied, like the emotion of the woman whose heart was both embellished and mutilated. However, Shimla cannot just be defined by the structures that sit on her. She is the spirit of a wild lady. Those who live in her forest, play in the rivers, and enjoy her rich culture.

CHAPTER-10

Shakti of the Mountains: Parvati and Shimla's Eternal Bond

Drawing a parallel between the two powerful yet gentle daughters of the Hills is inescapable. Uma/Parvati-Shakti was born in the Himalayas to Himavan. Parvati is not just the daughter of the Himalayas; she is the soul of the hills, bestowing upon them an eternal blessing that reverberates through time. With her, the hills changed. Her arrival brought abundance to the mountains. The birth of Parvati infused the mountains with divine energy, carving out a space where reverence for nature and humanity unite.

Shimla and Uma share the same bedrock. As the divine daughters of the cosmos, Parvati and Shimla reveal that true strength lies in love—strength that nurtures and protects all living things. Both are manifestations of divine femininity; one nurtures the universe, while the other cradles the hills in a gentle, embracing manner.

Individually, they embody a devotion to their cause and a passion for their dream of becoming one with their love, while simultaneously fostering unwavering determination. Uma was greeted with the force of nature.

Known for its soft and soothing breeze, Shimla carries the sweetest fragrance of blossoming flora. Making them one, nature has expressed itself to its best. Manifesting clarity in their thoughts and maintaining a focused vision on their goal, both the feminine have walked through the jungles of the Himalayas. The Blue skies have mirrored their clarity.

Specifically, the Animals are treasured by both Shimla and Parvati. Uma being Uma was an extension of Shiva, for whom everybody stood as one. Shimla, on the other hand, with her nurturing spirit, ensures that all the living beings feel safe and at home. The ghost of

mountains -Snow Leopard walks through her curves in all his glory. The Western Tragopan- Jujurana mesmerises one and all with its colours.

The forest became Parvati's home for years. It fed her and gave her water until she needed it. Its air kept her nurtured till the time Shiva sent for her. Shimla draws a parallel here by living in the cradle of nature. In the heart of the jungle, Parvati found her sustenance not just in the fruits of the earth but in the unwavering strength of her devotion.

Mountains have never paused while narrating the stories of Uma and Shimla. Their entangled lives are a testament to what the mountains are capable of sustaining. Also, how to dwell and become one with the mountains.

Uma as Sati from the previous birth loved Shiva. She wanted him in every birth.

Her life story is a testament to her fierce love for Shiva. Mountains, specifically the Himalayas, are the abode of Shiv-Shakati. Though the world around her changed, Uma's love for Shiva remained unwavering, a constant flame that lit her path to reunion in her next life.

To find him, Uma transformed into a powerful goddess from a young, innocent girl. Her story represents her resolute affirmation to win Shiva's heart. Denoting that true love often requires strength and surrender.

Likewise, Shimla, the Queen of Hills, lives in deep devotion to her land and her people. Just as Uma's heart beat for Shiva, Shimla thrived in love for its hills, its people weaving a tapestry of culture and nature that echoed through the valleys.

She is denoted as a moment in memory for those who have felt her. She is stunning and delicate. At the same time, a fierce custodian devoted to fostering life in her hills. She is the epitome of nature, constantly adapting to her ever-changing seasons.

Similar to the righteous and focused journey of Uma. Shimla, with all her swirls and colours, sketches her journey by obstinate decisiveness to thrive in the forest and achieve autonomy of her land. Love binds the stories of both ladies, as Uma loved Shiva, a reflection of the mountains and forest. Kindness and acceptance for everyone. But a destroyer of evil. Similar to Shimla's feeling for her land and community, she is a nurturer. Equally, she was a destroyer of enemies. Displaying the forms of Shakti.

Both women are stunningly gorgeous, having transformed over time. Seasonal evolutions make Shimla magnetic. Her Hills become a canvas filled with colours, home to a variety of wild flowers eager to design her new dresses with every breeze. During the summers, she embodies growth and vitality.

Autumn graces her in shades of Red, burnt orange and golden yellow. Winters turn Shimla into a mystery with long veiled snow gowns. It covers her in warm white blankets. She looks delicate and crystalline. When the white shines, she becomes a figure of patience and endurance. All the qualities that Parvati carried with her on the pursuit of Narad Muni to the Forest.

In a distinct yet intense fashion, Parvati's journey echoes her metamorphic magnificence. Initially, she appears as the naive daughter. She is full of yearning as she sets out to win Shiva's heart. As she climbs the robust mountains, her form matures. She transforms from a damsel into a

warrior, symbolising not just strength but also uncompromising determination.

Both the females in this story are not just symbols of Beauty. They are the protector of nature. In utmost respect, they lived in harmony and support of the wild force.

Shimla's wild spirit embodies the harmonious interplay between wilderness and her nurturing nature.

Likewise, Parvati epitomises a powerful protector not only of nature but of the cosmos itself.

Parvati is Shakti. She strives to nurture the universe. While giving rise to life. Both the feminine are exemplars of guardianship, instilling respect and reverence for their realms.

The profound strength of Shimla and Uma is inseparably woven into their connections, allowing them to love. Shimla is the canvas of artists and a tale of storytellers. Her stories are written on the stones and grasslands. She draws her strength from her relationships with her forests, rivers, land, and her people. May it be a naive shepherd, a skilled artisan or a farmer, she nourishes them equally.

Like a blessing from the Goddess herself, Shimla replicates the selfless love. Where the Goddess embraces the eerie essence, accepting one and all. So, does Shimla embrace everybody who sets foot on her Hills?

Hence, the Redcoats were accommodated. But they failed her.

Shimla and Parvati are not just figures of strength and beauty. They are embodiments of nurturing love. They radiate a warmth that cocoons the hills they protect.

Reborn in the Himalayas, Uma's journey starts as an obedient daughter. She is auspicious and is beaming with the dream of marrying Shiva. During her abstinence and devotion to win Lord Shiva. Her delicate self moulds into a powerful goddess. Similar to the journey of Shimla, who transformed into a fierce warrior from a carefree, innocent girl, to throw out the British.

Like, Uma is tested after every step. The imperialist swindlers dodged Shimla. She grew in her journey. Patiently, like Uma, Shimla observed and delivered a potent blow. She willingly sacrificed for her people. Her patience draws parallel with that of Shakti.

Shimla went way beyond her feminine facade. They were testing times. Her challenge was not just to save her Hills but also to maintain a balance between the physical and emotional realms. Furthermore, to foster creation and growth. Emotions and the soul of Shimla were at stake. She fought back, ensuring to protect her wild spirit.

Shimla's wild spirit resonates with Uma's fierce devotion—a poignant reminder of how nature is inextricably linked with divinity.

Like Shimla provides a haven for its flora, fauna, and people, Uma also supports the divine energy that binds the entire world.

While Shimla embraces her landscapes as life changes, Uma's immense power is a reminder of her tremendous commitment.

Together, they represent what it means to be a guardian, demonstrating the importance of protecting and nurturing our world.

In this beautiful blend of nature and divinity. Shimla and Uma shine as two sides of the same coin. A vibrant spirit and a loving goddess are both requisite to safeguarding the hills.

CHAPTER-11

Nature's Jewels: Celebrating the Flow of Shimla's Rivers

She was born as Grace. So, she maintained the standard. Hence, nature stood in support of her belief. The glacier-fed fresh water rivers of the Hills are more than geographical marvels. They are the invitation to lounge in the enchantment and magnificence of the wild lady, Shimla. They are the means of hypnosis. Therefore, they are incomprehensible. Her rivers are special to her. She adores them. Their current is a whirlpool of laughter and melodies intertwining with her heartbeat.

The rivers flowing through Shimla are the silken cords which have been adding chasm, motion and dynamism to the bewitching character of Shimla. Like a child playing with every stone in their way. At times swirling around them and at times taking them along, they loquaciously run, jump, sculpt, and preserve the wild spirit alive.

Rivers are the artisans of Shimla. For years, they have been the hands to contour her face and sculpt her curves. They run tirelessly through the Hills. Eager to gloss their precious lady. Bringing joy, tranquillity and adventure along to amplify the beauty of Shimla.

Giri: The Playful Muse of Shimla

Giri has the most playful spirit. She is the sparkling waistband/kamarband that Shimla wears to celebrate her femininity. She curls gracefully as she moves through the dense valleys. Her laughter is heard from every steep drop. Giri has her way of twisting and turning like that of an unruffled dancer. She makes careful moves while she rushes over round stones, creating an orchestration of infectious laughter.

It originates from the Kuper peak, near Jubbal town in today's Shimla district. She is an enchanter, a tributary

of the Yamuna. No passerby leaves without a remembrance of her playful rush, touching every bank, sparkling, shimmering and charming every visitor. She is playful and childlike but true to her nature of a nurturer, Giri blesses the land she touches with rich vegetation. Orchard's bloom and crop multiply in her presence.

She has framed the beautiful Shimla in a way that none can. Shimla hums her melodies to her natives, who fold their hands to the pure connection with nature.

Giri represents the laughter of the wild lady Shimla, reflecting her nurturing spirit, which sustains life and growth around her and reminds every one of the salivary trusts of nature.

Satluj: The Regal Mirror of Purity

Satluj flows in contrast to Giri. She is like the huge diamond stud adorning Shimla, glittering from a far-off place. Her flow is regal, graceful and pure. She gleams like a diamond with her crystal-clear water.

Becomes a mirror reflecting the rich tapestry and the breathtaking magnificence of the Hills. She is rich with the stories of ancient civilisations that have lived along her banks. Her calm water carries the true stories of age-old traditions and culture. Hence, the air around her is thick, which reminds one of the strong connections between her and the Wild lady she adorns.

Her waters are the extension of the vast, blurred expanse of the deep blue skies. Satluj is the river that embodies the pristine integrity with its calming presence, becoming a mirror of the untouched splendour of Shimla's wilderness. She calls on the visitors to halt, soak

their feet in its calm water and become a part of the story that she will share with generations to come.

Serenade of the Pabbar: Lessons from the Flow

Pabbar is fierce and dramatic like the heavy anklets of Shimla. She makes a loud noise and keeps the thrill up. Hers is the adventurous spirit reflected in her white waters, rushing and gushing through the wilds. She denies the rule of conclusion in her rousing journey into the unknown.

It is challenges and thrills that the adventure seekers find as she calls upon them to brave her instantaneous current. Like the silver anklets of a wild lady, Pabbar makes noise, heard from far-off places. Her movement is sharp and elegant. Sunset transforms her into a cloak reflecting the starlit sky. At night, she whispers the adventures she enjoyed with the brave hearts to her wild lady. She assimilates the boldness of Shimla with both her beauty and chaos.

As the rivers flow with eternal Grace, embellishing Shimla. They continue to whisper tales of love, faith, laughter and life. With the moon, all three the Giri, the Satluj and the Pabbar restore the wild and free spirit of Shimla.

They become her jewels, lifting her character. Their ripples bring to the surface the reverberation of bygone eras, tales of all who came to them, and the laughter of the natives who call the riverbanks their homes. These rivers rejuvenate Shimla, moving from one cutting hillside to another. Their purity is her spirit, which has historically served as a healer to the community.

With the constantly evolving world, the Giri, the Pabbar and the Satluj are also learning to adjust to the new normal of urbanisation and climate change. They do feel threatened, but from the wilderness they carry within. Their flow can be flagged, arrested or become frail. Despite that, they know that the day they feel repressed, the rivers will crash down everything that tries to hold them. All three have dissimilar performances, which have defined the wild lady that is Shimla.

CHAPTER-12

From Dreams to Divisions: The Tale of Shimla and Chail

Among the myriad stories she harbours, one resonates through her lush valleys and fragrant pine forests louder than all others — the notorious saga of Scandal Point.

As Shimla's wild heartbeat, she beheld the spectacle of extravagant gatherings hosted at the Vice Regal Lodge, a palatial structure that mirrored the dreams of empire and aristocracy. Majestic chandeliers hung from the high ceilings, casting a soft glow over the dance floors where British ladies, draped in silken gowns, twirled alongside Indian maharajas adorned in intricately crafted jewellery.

The jewels sparkled like stars scattered across the night sky, each gem narrating its story of heritage and legacy — a narrative that enchanted and ensnared the British elite. Shimla, always an observant spirit, noted the awe in their eyes, almost tangible in the charged atmosphere. The whispers of admiration danced through the air, as foreign hands caressed the cold, smooth stones, each touch weaving a tenuous bond between admiration and envy.

But amidst the magic of this cross-cultural exchange, Shimla felt a pang of discontent. While joy sparkled in the air, she sensed the creeping shadows of dominance that accompanied the British presence. For what started as admiration soon twisted into a semblance of control. As the very land that thrived with unity began to fracture under the weight of colonial ambition. Her landscapes, once resonating with the laughter of the Raja of Patiala and the simple joy of villagers, were now overshadowed by the grand aspirations of empire builders.

Irony, that the dynasty that gave its villages to form the British summer capital was ostracised for being the

charmer. The story of the lovebirds evolved in hushed whispers that the viceroy's daughter had eloped with the Maharaja of Patiala. She could not resist his charm. Much younger than him, she chose Indian royalty over the British aristocracy.

Betty spent the night gazing at the starlit skies of Shimla with the Maharaja of Patiala sitting next to her.

The next day was a decisive day to take her away with her consent. It is believed that she ran, holding her skirt up to her ankles, towards him. The Maharaja, who was awaiting her at a point on the mall on his horse, took her in his arms, and off they went to Patiala. Hence, the name "scandal point" was conferred upon the particular point.

They halted at Kandaghat before reaching their destination. No one could understand what had evolved before them for a few days. But as the days went by, the news of the Maharaja of Patiala being banned in the boundaries of Shimla was thumping in the hills.

The Raja of Patiala had been a benevolent ruler, a man of vision who shared his lands with the British, believing that harmony could flourish in the cool embrace of the Himalayan summer. However, hopes of unity gave way to an uncomfortable reality. As colonial greed suffused the air, the Maharaja found himself ousted, banished from the land he cherished. Shimla, the wild woman, felt the deep divide.

With his dreams dashed, the Raja sought his sanctuary, a place where he could reclaim his spirit and identity — thus, Chail was born. Constructed not merely as a rival but as a bold statement against Shimla's evolving narrative, Chail rose into the heavens like a phoenix. It was a manifestation of resilience. The Maharaja poured

his heart into Chail, ensuring that every stone told a story of culture and heritage, unlike the structured and sometimes stifled elegance of Shimla.

As Shimla gazed upon Chail, a *mélange* of emotions churned within her. Here was a place where the beauty of traditions spoke louder than the opulence of foreign rule. Nestled amidst resplendent deodar trees and vast spreads of lush grasslands, Chail thrived in lively festivals that echoed tales of yore. Traditional dances and local celebrations filled the air with laughter and music, connecting villagers in ways Shimla longed for, yet seemed to have lost amidst the clamour of British soirées.

In contrast, Chail emerged as a symbol of resistance, a refuge of calm and safety amidst the tumult. Known for its grandeur and tranquillity, Chail felt robust and anchored — an antidote to Shimla's increasingly burdensome narrative. With strength in its heights and serenity in its valleys, it served as a reminder that nature, too, thrives on its terms.

And so, the intention behind both Shimla and Chail intertwined yet lay in essence. Shimla, in its splendour, was perpetually at risk of losing its wild heart to the whims of dominant powers. At the same time, Chail embraced a return to simplicity and authenticity, showcasing the resilience of its inhabitants and the essence of its rich heritage. As Shimla's memory echoed through time, she realised that the depth of her existence was not merely defined by the grand parties of her youth or the downfall of kingdoms, but by the stories left behind — tales of love, betrayal, and challenges that would ripple through generations.

The name "Scandal Point" became a reflection not solely of one incident but a metaphor for the complex interplay of desire and consequence that defined her existence. It encapsulated the heart's struggles against societal expectations, serving as a poignant reminder of how love, in its many forms, can both uplift and shatter the heart.

As the sun dipped behind the hills, casting a golden light across the land, Shimla closed her eyes — not out of surrender but in acceptance. With her wild spirit undeterred, she chose to celebrate both her narrative and Chail's. While their paths diverged under different circumstances, both hills carried the weight of history, love, and resilience. Shimla felt the flicker of warmth in knowing that her tale was everlasting, interwoven with Chail's stories of strength, calmness, and tradition.

Thus, Shimla breathed, a wild woman among the mountains, a guardian who embraced every joy and woe, protecting the vast library of tales that defined her existence and that of her rival, Chail. She became an eternal witness to the ebb and flow of souls and stories, understanding that the beauty of life lies in its imperfection, its contradictions, and the vibrancy that comes from living wholeheartedly amidst the unfolding drama of existence.

CHAPTER -13

The Graveyards of Shimla: Where Silent Echoes Weep

Shimla, often envisioned as a wild, untamed woman, fiercely beautiful and impossibly nurturing. Also stands as a guardian over the graves of those who sought respite in her lush bosom, only to be snared by the inescapable grasp of mortality. They enjoyed her sun-drenched days, filling her streets with their laughter. It was their brief joy amidst the stunning landscapes of her grace.

While they basked in the grandeur that Shimla offered, a darker shadow stalked them. It was the relentless spectre of illness. Tuberculosis, fever, and heart ailments lurked like silent phantoms, claiming lives tragically young and leaving behind the drapes of grief woven into the soil of her graveyards. She felt heavy, for this weight was forced. They came to win and dominate, but here they lay still and relinquished. Shimla's spirit became a witness to this sorrowful cycle unfolding.

It started with one cemetery, but the casualties were multiple. The young, newborns, even the powerful, fell to their knees. The first cemetery came up in Chota Shimla. Right at the back of the present Raj Bhavan, which was once known as Barnes Court. A place regaled by the British commander-in-chief of the Indian army. His name was 'Sir Edward Barnes'. The place got its name after him. It could incorporate only about forty graves. Hence, fell short.

The second was made in the humming part of town, near the cart road. It was another small spot devoted to the dead, which led to the next. Likewise, many came up. One near the 'Metropole Hotel' had three additional extensions. The next cemetery, known as the 'Nun's Graveyard', was private property. It was associated with

the convent of 'Jesus and Mary'. With time, a few more were developed.

Shimla found herself shrouded in profound sadness, each passing soul leaving her heart heavier. The graveyards, stark reminders of lives extinguished too soon, cradled the memories of the young ones who had arrived full of hope, only to succumb to fate's cruel embrace. In these solemn places, where the air hangs thick with the whispers of bygone days, Shimla felt the weight of their shared stories, echoing the silent anguish of lost loves and shattered dreams.

As twilight descended upon the hills, the graveyards revealed an emotional landscape—where nature's vibrancy stood in stark contrast to the stillness surrounding the resting places. Crumbling gravestones, often overgrown with wildflowers, bore witness to the lives once lived. "Here lies an only son," one stone reads, a soldier fallen before his time; "Beloved Daughter," another proclaims, the epitaph marking an unfulfilled legacy. Each inscription echoed the fragility of existence and the relentless tide of tragedy that swept through those who believed they could tame Shimla's wild heart.

Seasons changed, and the vivid colours of life contrasted sharply with the melancholic stillness that enveloped the graveyards. The blooming flowers, with their brilliant hues, served as reminders of resilience, yet beneath their beauty lurked the sorrowful desperation of those left to mourn. Shimla, the wild woman, continued to nurture the lost souls, cradling their memories within her verdant embrace, even as her spirit bore the scars of betrayal and loss.

As dusky shades enveloped the hills and the mist rolled in, shrouding Shimla in a veil of nostalgia, her longing

deepens. She felt anger swelling within her as Westerners continued to overlook her spirit, trampling upon her identity. Yet, she also harboured a profound sadness for their plight—caught in a web of privilege, unable to see the consequences of their indifference. The graveyards, with their silent stones, stood as tragic testaments to a yearning not only for connection but also for understanding.

Under the waning light of day, the atmosphere grew heavy with a palpable grief that lingered long after the last rays of sun slipped behind the mountains. Shimla's sorrow is intertwined with the tales etched in the soil beneath, forming a complex narrative of love and loss. She desired the world to recognise her duality—her beauty and her pain, the joyous vibrancy of life intertwined with the sombre reality of death.

In every corner of these hallowed grounds lie the whispers of those once cherished, and through her silent watch, Shimla nurtures their spirits, transforming sorrow into a haunting melody that resonates through the ages. Here, in the heart of the mountains, the true spirit of Shimla unfurls—a wild woman sheltering the echoes of her past, a tragic yet beautiful reminder of life's intricate and fleeting nature.

CHAPTER-14

Shimla's Heartbreak: A Tribute to Her Wounded Landscape

The Himalayas are the youngest and still evolving mountains. The girl born to them cannot be of age. Yet, through the Deodar veils, she is heard coughing. Cracking mountains are making her heart sink. The chills of her sobs lash with the unruly rains ripping her hills.

She reminisces about the old days when she was the muse of the poets—inspiring rejuvenation for the aching hearts. Devine, amid the chanting of the monks, reverberated in her hills.

The change is heavy and painful. From a free-spirited girl to a lady living in an unplanned city, her bones have become brittle. People climb onto her shoulder with heavy machines. They drill into her belly and poison her breath. Once porous, breathing Hills are choked with plastic. It seems she has already seen enough.

She refuses to relate to her tiered eyes, slipping mountains and naked hills. Visitors still feel her piousness. But she wonders what they shall take back in their bag of memory? That she is unstable, for her hills tend to slip without notice. Or will they blame her rivers, calling them names? People now calculate the radius of Deodar trees for the number of houses they might take down if they fall.

Shimla wants to shake hard all the thoughts which cloud her will to live. But she knows that her agitation against the insensitivity will sabotage the human attachments. The change is visible. She is not the priority anymore, but a possession. Hence, they blame her for her unruly rivers, sinking Hills and for her inability to cope with climate change. Huge scorns of cement and bricks continue to erupt like warts on her.

She is wounded beneath her strong exterior. Until she is suffering, her people will survive. But she fears the day when she will stop enduring. Will it be the end of the Blame Game?

Shimla is commonly put in the category of a 'Hill Station'. The name has forced distance between her and her history. Now she stands juxtaposed with the grim reality of modernisation.

Independence brought back the authority to reclaim. She did not waste time. However, the threat of modernisation did make her nervous. In no time, her beautiful green dress turned pale. Massive infrastructure and rising pollution levels tainted her. She wants to live up to the expectation, but now she is breathing heavily under pressure.

The stroke of freedom at midnight, when India woke up to freedom, Shimla opened her eyes to the responsibility of cleaning and covering. The muck beneath is making the once-stable grounds stink with betrayal.

She feels tricked again. This time at the hands of her people. They have broken the fragile balance between development and preservation. She refused, but silently. Cracks on her surface and deep within her are her rebellion. Emotionally depleted, Shimla hardly enjoys the Mall. Her laughter is a thing of the past. She feels overwhelmed by the stress of human congestion.

Hers is not a stubborn soul. Shimla understands that the change is inevitable. All she is asking is to preserve her wild and natural spirit. The generation to come deserves a deep connection with her Hills. She does not stand in the way of modernisation, but the thoughtless desertion of old for new.

Shimla is a personal anecdote for everybody who has seen it once. She will remain a wild woman, reflecting the battles, joys, and triumphs of the world, split between modernisation and tradition.

Her journey continues in wait of a unified existence, anticipating her revival.