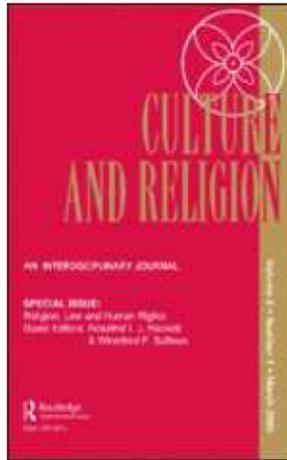


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**Pipe Organs and Satsang: Contemporary worship in Shimla's Colonial Churches**

Journal:	<i>Culture and Religion</i>
Manuscript ID:	RCAR-2011-0056.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Article
Keywords:	India , Christianity, Postcolonial, Samuel Evans Stokes, Sadhu Sundar Singh, Shimla

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# Pipe Organs and *Satsang*: Contemporary Worship in Shimla's Colonial Churches

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## Abstract

*The anthropological exploration of India's Christians has almost exclusively focussed on demonstrating the applicability of the Dumontian categories of power and caste to these groups as part of a misguided, if well meaning, politics of authenticity. This approach is not only at times socially damaging but also a largely inaccurate way of understanding the heterogeneous nature of contemporary Indian Christianity. This paper seeks to rebalance the discussion by exploring the contested landscapes of postcolonial Christian worship in Shimla, North India. By focussing on these neglected landscapes of worship the paper is able to shift the debate away from the binaries of colonial and postcolonial, Hindu and Christian, towards a more complex understanding of the different approaches that distinct patterns of worship in a single church represent. These are typified by two powerful symbolical acts of Christian worship: playing the pipe organ and engaging in satsang. By interweaving ritual and narrative analysis, this paper demonstrates that these forms of worship are the outward manifestations of often counterintuitive processes of identity formation. This identity operates at both the personal and the group level and involves contemporary worship that either highlights or erases traces of past ritual action.*

## Introduction

Only eight years ago, in the introduction to *Christians of India*, Rowena Robinson was able to complain that anthropological 'writing about Christianity in India [had] suffered from enormous neglect' (Robinson 2003a, 12). Over the last decade the development of the anthropology of Christianity (Bialecki, Haynes and Robbins 2008, Cannell 2006, Engelke and Tomlinson 2006 et al) has combined with a more widespread interest in popular Indian Christianity (Raj and Dempsey 2002) to help generate a far richer<sup>1</sup> ethnographic record of India's Christians (Jain 2009, Raj 2002, Schmalz 2010 et al). Despite this recent flowering of material there are still notable gaps in the ethnographic record. In particular, it is still the case that the majority of material written about Christians in India focuses on the South of India and avoids entirely certain regions, such as Himachal Pradesh.<sup>2</sup>

When, in 2006, I first began working with Christian groups in Himachal Pradesh I understood the main contribution of my work to be that of adding an account of the Christians in this region to the ethnographic record. However, it soon became clear that the lived reality I was entering into complicated the categories of colonial politics and Indian power structures that are commonly used to understand Christian groups in this region (Robinson 2003b, 864). For sure, the Christians that I was working with in Shimla, the state capital of Himachal Pradesh, had a connection with the colonial period that is entirely in line with classical ethnographic accounts of India's Christians (Fuller 1976, Mosse 1996, Robinson 1998 et al); however, these accounts

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<sup>1</sup> Although there are historically considerably more accounts of popular Christianity in India than may at first be presumed there can be little doubt that recent years have seen a growth in both the number of these studies and the awareness of them as part of a wider anthropology of Indian Christianity.

<sup>2</sup> Despite the general focus on South India there are some important studies of Christians in the north, which include Schmalz's (2010) work on Christians in the plains of North India, Usha Chung's (2000) PhD thesis on Himalayan Christians and Jeffery Cox's (2002) historical study of Christianity in North West India.

1 show the interface of caste and colonial history to be the key issues facing contemporary  
2 Christians, while I found that the issues surrounding colonialism in Shimla focused more on  
3 landscapes of worship than on caste. I will therefore demonstrate how a focus on landscapes of  
4 worship can provide a fresh approach to the exploration of postcolonial Christianity in South  
5 Asia, which has relied heavily on discussions of caste (Robinson 2003a: 69).

6  
7 Landscape has traditionally been viewed by anthropologists as either the backdrop for  
8 ethnographic action to unfold upon, or a mystery to be unlocked through indigenous knowledge  
9 (Hirsch 1995: 1). From such a perspective landscape is always secondary to (and separate from)  
10 the social worlds that surround it. However, in recent years this picture has begun to change and  
11 the discipline has developed a more marked interest in landscape as a process (Hirsch 1995,  
12 Ingold 2000, Laviolette 2011). What is more, rather than seeing landscape as a singular process,  
13 many anthropologists, following Reason, have suggested that landscape is ‘a polyrhythmic  
14 composition of processes’ (Reason 1987:40). From this perspective, landscape is not something  
15 that is simply perceived, nor is it a backdrop that human action unfolds upon, rather it is a  
16 mutual constitution of person and place through action. As people flow and knot around certain  
17 places, landscapes are formed that bind not only the human and the non-human together, but  
18 also the past, present and future. It is these complexes of processes that I invoke when I employ  
19 the term landscape and it is therefore a focus on these processes that I believe reveals something  
20 profound about the way that Christians in Shimla understand their relation to both the past and  
21 the wider Hindu community.<sup>3</sup>

22  
23 I have chosen to center the article on two dramatically different landscapes of worship, which I  
24 helped to constitute during fieldwork in Shimla, in 2006 and 2009. These landscapes are typified  
25 by the generative presence of either what may be termed ‘European’ pipe organ music or ‘South  
26 Asian’ satsang.<sup>4</sup> These sounds of worship are of course neither entirely South Asian nor entirely  
27 European. They are however useful identifiers for the central issues that play out along a  
28 continuum within the wider landscapes of Shimla’s churches. I will therefore demonstrate the  
29 way that these elements are symbolic of the *communitas* and contestation that I observed in the  
30 heart of contemporary Christian worship in Shimla.

### 31 32 33 **Entering into Shimla’s landscapes**

34  
35 The church landscapes are central to the wider landscape of Shimla, which is marked by the  
36 trace of actions in the colonial period more clearly than most contemporary Indian metros.  
37 Formerly known as Simla, the summer capital of British India, the town was built on a largely  
38 green-field site in the Indian Himalayas (Puppy 1988, 20). There was an attempt to here build a  
39 landscape that would evoke memories of Europe, for either Europeans or those of European  
40 ancestry (Bhasin 2009, 87-89). This was however never a simple case of inscribing a European  
41 identity onto a blank canvas, from the beginning the geography of the town, began to transform  
42 the footfall of the constructions (Bhasin 2009, 92). This basic geography combined with the use  
43 of local craftsmen and materials to generate buildings that were more complex than their  
44 architects intended (*ibid*).

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<sup>3</sup> Bigelow (2009) has recently demonstrated the value of exploring issues of faith interfaith relations through a spatial model.

<sup>4</sup> Satsang is a North Indian form of congregational worship that involves repetitive chanting and religious singing in the vernacular (Juergensmeyer 1991: 113).

1 A landscape is made up of more than a combination of rock, plants and buildings, both human  
2 and non-human people both shape the landscape (by leaving the trace of their actions) and  
3 become part of the landscape (Ingold 2000, 189-208). Therefore, the landscape is not simply  
4 transformed by the way that we observe it (Tilley 2004, 12). Rather we are the landscape as we  
5 move over it, which is to say that the landscape is in a constant process of becoming, which both  
6 extends beyond us and becomes through us (Ingold 2011, 126-135). It is therefore perhaps not  
7 surprising that during the colonial period in Shimla a series of laws were passed which (when  
8 taken together) can be read as attempts to restrict the number of Indians present on the Mall  
9 (Kennedy 1996, 175-201). Moreover, many Shimlites like to recount tales of past restrictions,  
10 which are far clearer and more severe than those contained in the historical documents. This of  
11 course suggests that the landscape of the Mall today is altered by the storytellers themselves.  
12

13 Many contemporary Shimlites tell stories about restriction that emphasise both a pan-Indian  
14 connection and the disconnection of the storyteller's genealogical ancestors from Shimla. This is  
15 because in the post-independence period Simla became Shimla and witnessed a massive  
16 population movement. A few of the Indian princes, who owned much of the Mall property,  
17 retained an interest in the city (Kanwar 1990, 103), along with some Anglo-Indians, who  
18 traditionally were housed on the flanks of the central Mall (Kanwar 1990, 56 ), but most of the  
19 European residents departed. Today, Shimla is very much a migrant city with residents drawn  
20 from all areas of India. During the summer the pedestrianized streets are so crowded with  
21 tourists (mostly Indian, but some European and American) that walking along the Mall during  
22 the middle of the day involves the art of weaving through crowds. Not surprisingly, the  
23 landscape of Shimla tends to polarise people's opinions: to some it is heaven on earth, while for  
24 others it is a monstrosity.  
25

26 The first time I entered into the weave of Shimla's landscape it was winter and a rare snowfall  
27 had left the mock Tudor buildings and pine-clad slopes frosted. The horizon was punctuated by  
28 silver peaks and the muffled sounds of the then quiet pedestrianized Mall were a welcome relief  
29 from the roar of India's roads. Rather than finding myself part of one of the travel horror stories  
30 of a concrete jungle, I felt that Ursula Sharma had it right when she suggested that Shimla was a  
31 very pleasant place to do fieldwork (Sharma 1986, vi). Of course I did not know then the way  
32 that the Mall would change with the seasons, or how I would have to navigate the problems that  
33 accompanied life in this city. However, throughout the changing seasons and progressing years,  
34 one thing that remained constant was the sense that Christ Church Cathedral was central to the  
35 landscapes of Shimla. Although the snow that swirled around it in the winter changed to flows  
36 of tourists in the summer, the sense of Christ Church being at the heart of things always  
37 remained.  
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### 40 **Joining the Landscape of Christ Church Cathedral**

41

42 On my first day in Shimla, like most people, I had noticed and been drawn to Christ Church,  
43 whose gothic tower shone like a bright yellow beacon above the monkey filled, snow covered,  
44 roof tops. The cathedral, which was built between 1844 and 1857, was designed by Colonel  
45 Boileau, who imagined it to be an imitation of the Gothic cathedrals of Northern Europe (Buck  
46 1925, 118). Although the post-independence period saw the percentage of self identifying  
47 Christians dramatically drop, Christ Church remains an active site of worship (as part of the,

1 protestant, Church of North India), as well as functioning as both a pilgrimage destination and  
2 tourist attraction.<sup>5</sup>

3  
4 When I first approached Shimla, long before I reached the city, Christ Church was clearly  
5 visible, as indeed it nearly always was. The first time that I encountered Christ Church Cathedral  
6 its golden, tower seemed to crown the ridge of Shimla, like a church on top of a wedding cake. I  
7 left the cart road behind and navigated the lower bazaar before winding upwards, along the  
8 central Mall, towards the shining yellow church tower. On that first winter's day in Shimla, I  
9 paused frequently to catch my breath in the thin mountain air. At these times I raised my eyes  
10 over the roof tops to draw inspiration from my goal, the Gothic tower of Christ Church.  
11 Different elements of the tower revealed themselves through the softly falling snow, as my path  
12 turned from one side to the other, until finally I reached the top and came face to face with the  
13 building.  
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Figure 1: *First Vision of Christ Church Cathedral Shimla*

Over the years I came to Christ Church from different places at different times of the day, during different seasons, and at each time there was a sense of both encountering something familiar and entering into a landscape that was constantly transforming. The tower was always the first sign that I was approaching the area of worship and although it was always present the way in which it was present was always new: sometimes it was in dialogue with the now deconsecrated St Andrew's church, which it looked at across the ridge, while at others it spoke

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<sup>5</sup> Differences between tourists and pilgrims can be overlaid and although some of Christ Church's congregation work hard at making this distinction they are always fighting against the reality that a pilgrim is half a tourist and a tourist is half a pilgrim. (Turner and Turner 1978: 20).

1 more to Jakhoo forest, which extended behind it. Sometimes, as I approached, I heard increasing  
2 levels of noise and exclamation, at others it was as if entering ever deeper into a landscape of  
3 peace and quiet. Despite its changing nature one constant feature about Christ Church was its  
4 centrality. The place and (as I would later learn) the people who remade that place through their  
5 worship, were always at the heart of Shimla.

### 8 **Landscapes of *Satsang* and Transformation**

10 Many memories and stories of the past direct my senses when I visit Christ Church; however  
11 there is one particular story in particular that dominates my understanding of the church's  
12 courtyard. In the winter of 2008/2009 I topped the Mall road and saw Christ Church  
13 transformed: alongside the familiar looking tower was a strange, festooned, courtyard. Normally  
14 the church had a neat and unremarkable fenced off courtyard, which stood between the Mall  
15 road and the side entrance to the church. The back wall of the courtyard is provided by the  
16 church hall, which has the appearance of a large Tudor house. On that December afternoon,  
17 however, the usually quiet corner of the ridge was alive with people and the air was thick with  
18 noise. The church hall was barely visible through the throngs of people, gold coloured bunting  
19 and brightly coloured banners that filled the courtyard (see figure 2).



21  
22 **Figure 2: *The Transformed Courtyard***

23  
24  
25 A small stage had been erected outside the church hall's front door and stood there, in saffron  
26 robes, was a long haired, bearded, Christian guru, from the surrounding countryside. He  
27 instantly seemed radically distinct to the usual priests and congregants at the church, nearly all  
28 of whom had neat short hair, with either clean shaved faces, or neatly trimmed moustaches.  
29 Furthermore, the customary dress at Christ Church was either a shirt and trousers, or a full suit  
30 and tie. The distinctly dressed guru, accompanied by what can be termed a Christian *qawwali*  
31 band, proceeded to lead the worship through a series of devotional songs for Jesus, which was a

1 relatively new and irregular style of worship at Christ Church Cathedral. Although I had  
2 experienced this style of worship there before, the transformation from the usual landscape of  
3 worship at Christ Church was so dramatic that I nevertheless felt somewhat unbalanced by the  
4 experience.

5  
6 Although this style of worship is relatively novel for Christ Church, it has a long history  
7 elsewhere in India (Bauman 2006). What is more, this style of worship is also well established  
8 in the countryside that surrounds Shimla. During my time in Shimla, I heard many times from  
9 both Christian and non-Christian Shimlites the story of how there once lived in the village of  
10 Kotgarh, which is around 50 miles from Shimla, a famous Christian *sadhu*. The man that was  
11 described as a Christian *sadhu* was christened Samuel Evans Stokes and died known as  
12 Satyananda Stokes. He came from an engineering family in Philadelphia and went to the Shimla  
13 mountains in 1904 as a missionary (Sharma 2008: 3), he had several large impacts on the region  
14 including the introduction of the apple, a crop for which the countryside around Shimla today is  
15 famous. Stokes lived in the Shimla hills as a Christian renouncer, abandoning the pleasures of  
16 life and embracing a life of suffering as a way of becoming closer to God (Emilsen 1998: 97). In  
17 order to accomplish this, he drew upon the Hindu tradition of the wandering ascetic (Hausner  
18 2007).<sup>6</sup> He therefore copied the material culture and style of worship of local Hindu holy men  
19 and spent time wandering the Himalayas as a Christian *sadhu*, sometimes alone and sometimes  
20 with another remarkable, and often locally discussed, historical character, Sadhu Sundar Singh.

21  
22 Sadhu Sundar Singh was born into the Sikh religion and as a child was said to have had a natural  
23 inclination towards the study of South Asian religious thought (Thompson 2005, 1-12).  
24 However, he had an initially hostile reaction to the Christian Theology that he encountered in  
25 Punjabi missionary schools. Then, at the age of sixteen, it is said that Jesus appeared to him in a  
26 vision (Thompson 2005, 17-18). From that experience, it is claimed, he was lead to become a  
27 wandering *sadhu*, following a traditional Indian practice at the same time as spreading the  
28 message of the gospels (Thompson 2005, 45). He eventually left behind the plains and headed  
29 towards the Himalayas, where he believed people were closer to God (Streeter and Appasamy  
30 1921, 14-15). From here he came to Simla where he was formally baptised, not at Christ  
31 Church, but at what was then known as the 'native church' (Buck 1925, 123). This church was  
32 interestingly located on the lower bazaar, which was then (as it is largely now) a labyrinthine  
33 market that seems to wind organically around the mountain. The lower bazaar was seen by  
34 many Europeans, during the colonial period, as an unwanted incursion of the India of the plains  
35 into their European enclave in the hills (Kennedy 1996, 193).<sup>7</sup> As such, it is perhaps not  
36 surprising that Sadhu Sundar Singh's Christianity, which is associated more with rural Himachal  
37 Pradesh than Shimla, finds an association with the city in the area of it that spoke to so many of  
38 something other than the dream of Simla.

39  
40 Sundar Singh later travelled with Stokes, the pair sharing together certain ideals of Christianity.  
41 This in part drew from a shared belief in the inspirational value of the life of St Francis  
42 (Thompson 2005, 53-57) and in part from a shared belief that the most appropriate form of  
43 Christianity for India was one that engaged with wider patterns of religious practice in South  
44 Asia (Chung 2000, 65). Sundar Singh's influence was not limited to the Indian Himalayas and  
45 he was arguably more popular in Europe than in India. In 1921, during a tour of Europe, he is

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<sup>6</sup> Stokes can be seen as somewhat following the footsteps of earlier missionaries, such as Robert De Nobili, a 17<sup>th</sup> century Christian Missionary in South India, who adopted (amongst other things) the material culture of Hindu worship in order to encourage high caste conversion to Christianity (Waghorne 2002, 17).

<sup>7</sup> Far from all Europeans felt this way and some, such as Kipling, were attracted to the labyrinthine lower bazaar (Kipling 1999, 152).

1 reported to have preached to a crowd of ten thousand at Neuchâtel (Cox 2002: 231). Through  
2 such high profile events Sundar Singh became for many Europeans the archetypal image of both  
3 Indian Christianity in general and the Christianity of rural Punjab in particular. If Stokes  
4 represents the European dream of Christianity being reinvigorated by contact with India then  
5 Singh represents the equally European dream of India being transformed by contact with  
6 Christianity. The two come from opposite directions and meet in the middle, with perhaps  
7 Stokes crossing Singh after his conversion to Hinduism. Both Stokes and Singh fit well with an  
8 archetypal European image of Himalayan Christianity that also resonates with the kind of  
9 Christian worship that I entered into, outside Christ Church Cathedral, on that December  
10 morning, in 2009 (depicted in figure 2). It is therefore, possible to view this worship as a  
11 continuation and development of a certain kind of Christian worship that has been associated  
12 with this region for over a century.

### 15 **Landscapes of Pipe Organs and Stability**

17 At the same time as Stokes and Singh were famously wandering the Shimla hills a rather  
18 different kind of Christian witness was occurring in Shimla, this time actually at Christ Church  
19 Cathedral itself. This kind of worship aimed to evoke the mainstream Anglican churches of  
20 Europe. It was attended by the viceroy and surrounding dignitaries, used English as the main  
21 language, followed standard liturgy and prided itself on having a choir (and pipe organ) to rival  
22 those of Europe (Buck 1925, 118). Far from adopting saffron robes, or local forms of dress, the  
23 congregants dressed in the fashionable clothes of Europe and the priests in standard vestments.

25 There is recorded, by Sir Edward Buck, a delightfully revealing story about the dress of the  
26 congregants in the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century. He recalls a sermon against women wearing high fashion  
27 crinoline dresses to Sunday worship. For, it was said that the dresses were taking up so much  
28 pew space that many members of high society could not be accommodated in the large cathedral  
29 (1925, 118). There are then two different traditions of worship within the Shimla region and  
30 both have rather different contexts, for while one allows the maintenance of a minority group's  
31 status, the other invokes personal transformation as a way of reaching out to the population's  
32 majority. One may be said to be rich in bonding capital, whereas the other is rich in bridging  
33 capital (Putnam 2000, 25).

35 When Simla became Shimla and part of the independent Indian nation state, the city experienced  
36 a massive transformation in its population. In the colonial period the majority of its congregants  
37 had been Europeans, however today its congregants are generally exclusively Indian, or Anglo-  
38 Indian. The Church has 150 people who have recently self identified as members. Of these, 10%  
39 claim to be upper class, 80% middle class, 8% lower class and 2% labouring class (Chung 2000,  
40 7). I understand that class in India is a problematic category (Sen 1982) and that it is more  
41 common to talk of caste in India, both generally (Bayly 2001, Dumont 1970, Srinivas 1962, et  
42 al) and in relation to Christians (Fuller 1976, Mosse 1996, Kaufmann 1981, et al). However,  
43 members of Christ Church Cathedral do not like to talk about caste and while this does not mean  
44 that issues of caste do not implicitly play out in the church it means that it is not a category that  
45 they ever openly use for self categorisation. What is more, they are happy, on the whole, to talk  
46 in terms of class, although what matters most for them is level of education and historical  
47 connection with Shimla and its institutions. Issues of geographic origin also, from time to time,  
48 emerge as a way of groups within the congregation distinguishing themselves. It is therefore,  
49 here, counterproductive to follow the western, Dumontian, obsession with caste, which serves  
50 generally to reinforce western conceptions about authentic Indian Christianity. From the

1 perspectives of the Christians themselves the two key categories of distinction are  
2 overwhelmingly those of education and skilful worship.

3  
4 Christ Church's landscapes of worship often also consist of Christians who identify themselves  
5 as primarily belonging to other congregations in India. The majority of these worship regularly  
6 at the nearby St Michael's Catholic Cathedral, which has a similar history to Christ Church. In  
7 addition to self-affirming Christians, Christ Church is always frequented by large numbers of  
8 Hindus. These range from adult local residents, who like to particularly attend special events, to  
9 young school girls, who sing in the choir, to tourists from the plains, many of whom are entering  
10 a church for the first time. Given this eclectic mix of people and the transformation from a  
11 largely European to a largely Indian congregation it is not unreasonable to assume that the scene  
12 of worship I presented at the beginning of the paper is fairly typical. However, such worship is  
13 actually a very rare event, which can only be experienced a couple of times a year. Ordinarily  
14 worship, inside Christ Church Cathedral, shows a thread of continuity through the rupture of the  
15 colonial period. Every Sunday, for most of the year, it is possible to still hear services at Christ  
16 Church held entirely through the medium of English, with a European liturgy and the singing of  
17 Victorian hymns, which are accompanied by a choir of school girls and a deftly played pipe  
18 organ.

19  
20 It is not only regular worship, but also the special festivals that many Hindus attend, which  
21 maintain some sense of connection with the past. Indeed, the Christmas celebration that I have  
22 been describing was preceded, only a few days earlier, by a celebration in the church hall,  
23 (located behind the stage in figure 2) where the people dressed in their ordinary formal clothes  
24 (shirts, ties etc), Father Christmas distributed sweets, the children made a nativity and all sang  
25 such old favourites as the Holly and the Ivy. One of the ministers at Christ Church also took  
26 children from the local orphanage door to door carolling around Shimla, something that was  
27 almost universally appreciated by those he called on. Therefore, the kind of worship that I  
28 began by describing is not the staple fare of Christ Church Cathedral, despite its strong  
29 association with this region.

### 30 31 32 **Tensions, Tears and Ruptures in the Landscape**

33  
34 Returning now to the opening scene of worship (illustrated in figure 2), with swami ji and the  
35 Christian *qawwali* band of Gundu James, singing passionately repetitive praises of God, it is  
36 possible to understand more fully some of the dynamic tensions that are present in the  
37 landscape. The landscape that I described may, at first, appear to be a fusion of the two distinct  
38 strands of Shimla's historical Christian worship: the saffron robes and Tudor buildings here  
39 come together. The style of worship that in the colonial period could only make it to the lower  
40 bazaar has now moved up the Mall, onto the ridge, and into the church's courtyard itself. Here,  
41 we stood at the threshold of the old colonial church building, praising Jesus in a very vernacular  
42 style. Yet, we were only at the threshold - we did not make it to the inside of the church. It is as  
43 if the church building, forged out of a dream of churches in Europe and pregnant with the  
44 memory of European acts of worship was too powerful and restrictive a space to entertain this  
45 kind of worship.

46  
47 I was aware of the strong feelings that some in the church had about preserving a sense of the  
48 continuity of worship in this space and so I turned away from the stage and began to search the  
49 faces of my fellow worshippers, most of whom, but not all, I knew well (see figure 3). The first  
50 thing that was noticeable was that although the guru kept urging people to dance the vast  
51 majority of the crowd were stood still, some swayed silently following the movement of the

1 bunting in the languid wind, but none seemed to be responding wildly and spontaneously to the  
2 quickening drum and driving, passionate, vocals.  
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Figure 2: *Responding to Christian Qawwali*

After a while, an old woman, who I did not recognise, with covered hair (which was strikingly unusual), stepped out of the crowd and began to dance. When I talked to people in Shimla, who were from more evangelical backgrounds, they often claimed that the liturgy and hymns at Christ Church were not lively enough. One lady who had been raised in the Baptist church of North East India lamented that, although worship was supposed to make you want to shout, jump up and dance, the old plodding Victorian hymns at Christ Church never did. However, that December there was an opportunity to dance to vibrant and unrestrained music yet, in the entire crowd, only one stranger who answered that call. Even the lady from the Baptist background remained rooted and stationary throughout the ceremony.

It may be argued, following the line of thought developed by Douglas (2002: 44) that the kind of evangelical, vernacular, expressions of worship that we are discussing were in this landscape out of place. Moreover, it is possible to draw further inspiration from Douglas to suggest that the freeform expression that was being called upon by the leader of the worship was too much in the realm of elaborated code, that it required too much improvisation, to be appreciated by a congregation used to operating in the realm of restricted code (2003, 57-71). To put it another way, the congregation was so used to generating a landscape of worship that speaks to those of the past that when asked to improvise and exist purely in the moment they were bound to reject the challenge. However, this is only, at best, part of the story. What actually was happening was a complex becoming of a landscape of worship, within which distinct forces merged uncomfortably.

1 As I turned and looked at the faces of those I knew I could see a range of reactions, which was  
2 neither surprising in its diversity, nor in the specific way those different congregational groups  
3 reacted. Some looked on with dismay and concern, while others had their eyes clasped tight in  
4 prayer, hence remaining more reserved than the carefree dancer, yet, nevertheless, moved by the  
5 event. In fact, what was instantly notable was that most people were being emotionally engaged  
6 by this event, in one way or another. As I gazed at the crowd, gazing past me towards the stage,  
7 my eyes caught a set of eyes looking directly at me. Behind the gaze I saw one of Shimla's  
8 younger Christians, stood (slightly apart from the main crowd with some of her friends) under a  
9 tree. I made my way back through the crowd towards her to discover what her and her friends  
10 thought about the event. They informed me, in a very measured way, that while they found the  
11 change novel, its novelty was already waning and then curiously they added (while looking a  
12 little concerned) that they would not want this sort of worship to become a regular thing.  
13 Although it may seem strange to fear that a one off event would displace regular worship the  
14 youth were not the only ones to raise this concern. Indeed, some of their older community  
15 members were even more troubled by a similar line of thought.

### 18 **Emotional Worship and Landscapes of identity**

20 During both the 2009 Christian *satsang* and when I attended a similar style of worship at Christ  
21 Church in 2006 I witnessed strong emotional outpourings from normally reserved Shimlites.  
22 The first occasion is perhaps the more dramatic of the two and remains fixed in my mind,  
23 because it was also a point of explosion of personal insight. I had travelled up to Christ Church  
24 Cathedral from the nearby Catholic Cathedral of St Michael's, which is also a gothic styled  
25 structure that sits in a more tucked away position on the central Mall. I had travelled with a  
26 group of middle class Catholics, who were well established and respected figures in Shimla. The  
27 scene in 2006 was not greatly distinct from that which I earlier described as occurring in 2009,  
28 the same band lead the same kind of worship and although the air was a little colder and the  
29 crowd a little less dense, the same mix of local Christians, local Hindus, local Sikhs and tourists  
30 (of all religions) were gathered in the courtyard. The group I was with were very disparaging of  
31 the event that was unfolding and I was tempted to think that this was a case of rivalry between  
32 the two churches. However, the reasons that they gave for not enjoying the service, were not that  
33 it drew attention away from them, but rather that it drew the wrong sort of attention to them.  
34 For, they were not so much concerned that here Christ Church was putting on a performance  
35 that would win converts, as that through its performance the interdenominational Christian  
36 collective of Shimla would be reclassified in a way that they were deeply uncomfortable with.

38 Before too long the group that I had arrived with drifted away until I was left standing with one  
39 female member of St Michael's congregation, a middle class woman who had grown up in  
40 Shimla and was now in her late twenties. She continued the general line of complaint, before  
41 hardening, saying that this gathering was really 'a step too far'. I questioned this curious  
42 description, asking what it was a step too far towards and she melted, becoming teary. As the  
43 Hindi *satsang* played out in the background she related to me (in English) how she felt that her  
44 family's religious traditions were increasingly under pressure to transform into something more  
45 like the kind of worship we were seeing: 'before too long we will all be sat on the floor wearing  
46 red and singing satsang' she lamented, and then, 'how does it harm anyone if I worship in my  
47 own way?', 'Why should we abandon our practices in order to fit in?'. Finally, she finished the  
48 set of unanswerable questions by asking, more combatively, 'are my family traditions less valid  
49 than those of others?'

1 Here then is a complication of the general crusade to present Christians in India as distinct from  
2 European Christians and therefore true Indians (Hedlund 2000, Schmalz 2011). Rather we see a  
3 post Vatican II Indian Catholic arguing against what may be termed inculturation (Collins  
4 2007). Her objection was that these transformations destroyed traditions that developed during  
5 the time of British India that had become these h closely tied to her personal identity. This  
6 perception is striking yet far from unique and many people in St Michael's congregation  
7 expressed similar concerns to me at varying points during my time in Shimla.<sup>8</sup> Nearly all the  
8 people who expressed these views were middle class, highly educated adults, who had a  
9 comparatively long family connection both to St Michaels and to Shimla. This demographic  
10 constitutes around 50% of the 500 people who self identify as being congregational members of  
11 St Michael's Catholic Church in Shimla (Chung 2000, 3). The logic of these arguments has  
12 interesting resonances with the syncretism anti syncretism debate as summarized by Shaw and  
13 Stewart when they argue that 'both putatively pure and putatively syncretic traditions can be  
14 'authentic' if people claim that these traditions are unique, and uniquely their (historical)  
15 possession' (1994: 6).

16  
17 I later reflected back on the series of questions that the Christian *satsang* had prompted and  
18 realised that behind them lay feelings of persecution that stemmed from a wide range of factors  
19 and are fears, which are only ever partially materialised. Indeed, far from St Michael's  
20 transforming to a fully indigenised form of worship it has so far developed an uneasy fusion of  
21 styles to give birth to a truly vernacular form of Christianity. Religious meetings today fluidly  
22 mix traditional English songs and more modern Hindi songs. Interestingly, the Hindi songs are  
23 sung to rock and roll tunes rather than *qawwali* style music. This style of worship has so far  
24 managed to bring together an eclectic mix of Chinese Catholics, local Catholics and Catholics  
25 from the south. As well as labourer class, poorly educated, recent converts, and highly educated,  
26 middle class, families, with a tradition of Christian worship. Yet, here at St Michael's Cathedral,  
27 as at Christ Church Cathedral, there is a tension that both lies behind and helps to form these  
28 inclusive landscapes of worship. This tension stems from the understanding of action as an  
29 expression of being, coupled with competing ideas of how a Shimlite Christian should act. For  
30 these reasons I argue that a focus on landscape here, rather than the dominant trope of caste is  
31 more revealing. It is the landscapes that are generating varying levels of bridging and bonding  
32 capital.

33  
34 In 2009, as I stood listening to the *qawwali* band play at Christ Church, I once again saw the  
35 landscape of worship generate a powerful emotional response in one of Shimla's better known  
36 Christians. This time there could be no doubt that the reaction was sparked by something other  
37 than a sense of rivalry, for this response was manifested in a long standing, and important,  
38 member of Christ Church. This man, who normally stood at the centre of the church during  
39 worship, could not bring himself to remain at the event, which he saw as too painful a  
40 destruction of the church's traditions. This attachment to the traditions of the space is fairly  
41 typical of a strand of thought that can be found at the heart of Christ Church Cathedral's  
42 contemporary landscapes of worship. Put baldly, this is a belief that by creating landscapes of  
43 worship that are sensitive to Shimla's past the Church performs a powerful form of civil service  
44 (Miles-Watson and Korpela 2010, 73).

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<sup>8</sup> Harper's (1995) and Dempsey's (2001) fascinating accounts of a similar rejection of the indigenisation by Christians in Colonial South India share many parallels with the situation in contemporary Shimla. They are, however, distinct in two important ways: the Shimla conflict is not between pro-indigenisation westerners and anti-indigenisation Indians and the issues surrounding rural/urban divide that Harper presents is the inverse of that found in Shimla.

## Landscapes of Group Expansion and Group Maintenance

When I ran focus groups with Shimla's Christians two recurring themes were the sense of duty to preserve past traditions and the sense that despite all efforts standards were slipping. A common complaint was that things were not being done today as they were when the Europeans were still here. There was also a general lamenting of the gradual drifting away from Shimla of Anglo-Indian families and the moving in of migrant labourers. I heard on several occasions, from a range of well established upper class, or middle class Christians in Shimla that the introduction of migrant labourers was part of the decline of the church. The new converts were said to lack theological sophistication and the knowledge of how to behave properly in Church. This may of course be tied to the suggestion that if all Christians are judged together by association, then replacing government officials with labourers devalues the status of belonging to the Church. Yet, behind this rhetoric, lies a real concern about the way that the landscape of worship is being altered by the constituents of its congregation, the sense of worship as being something that protects the group identity and maintains links to the past is being undercut by the desire to create a form of worship that is capable of communicating the Christian message to a wider range of people. On the one hand a certain degree of education in what it means to be a Christian of Shimla is needed, sensitivity to reading and interpreting the signs of the past. On the other side all that is needed is an open heart.

This second view is captured perfectly by a key member of Christ Church Cathedral who draws from an evangelical form of South Indian Christianity. In many ways he stands at the opposite end of the spectrum to one of the other key church members, who is a long term Shimla resident and an Anglo-Indian. The two would often clash on ideas of what the church is and how it should operate. The first would often lament the weight of engaging with a heritage building like Christ Church. For him worship could be held anywhere at any time, the building was not important, rather it was the message. And he would argue that the church should be embracing the legacy of local heroes such as Sadhu Sundar Singh more and looking less to the practices of former viceroys. He told me on many occasions how he felt the standard CNI liturgy to be far too restrictive and the hymns of Christ Church to be too formal: 'people go through the actions of worship, but it is more important to feel the power of the Holy Spirit', he told me over tea, one stormy afternoon in Shimla. For him, it transpired, there were two main differences between being a Christian and being Hindu (as the majority of his family are):

- a) The way that Christianity encourages practical good deeds for the betterment of society and the mobility of the poor.
- b) The way that Jesus empowers people to do these good deeds and has more power than Hindu Divinities to bring about healing of all kinds of disease.

On another occasion he told me a story of a Christian woman from a humble background, who lived in a nearby village, and had walked from there for many hours to attend the Church service at Christ Church. Once there she began to dance with joy, but to his alarm, the other congregants far from seeing the Holy Spirit at work complained that this was not proper behaviour. For this man (and those like him) the power of Christianity is something that is practically and personally felt through the miracles of the Holy Spirit; therefore he would often relate such miraculous tales. He is not alone in thinking this way and there are several members of the congregation who, at other times, have echoed his views. However, these views also contrast sharply with other members of the church for whom Christianity is different from Hinduism fundamentally in terms of custom. Therefore, during focus groups the majority of people stressed that the key difference between a Christian Church and a Hindu temple is the sense of

1 peace and timelessness that the church brings. This they would contrast to the noise and clamour  
2 of more popular Hindu devotional spots. For them a key element of Christian practice was silent  
3 meditative prayer, which leads to the freeing of the spirit, not through actual healing of the sick  
4 so much as through providing insight into the nature of sickness.

5  
6 These issues play out wonderfully in the dilemma that tourists pose to Christ Church. Internal  
7 tourists flood to Shimla from the plains during the hottest summer months, swelling the streets  
8 and guest houses to beyond capacity. At the height of summer many travellers can literally find  
9 no room for them in the city and have to turn their cars and jeeps around and head back down to  
10 the plains of Punjab. Christ Church is a spot that tourists of all religious backgrounds are  
11 instantly drawn to and if they happen to be up early enough to be there during a service then  
12 they are happy to attend. Some of these tourists slip quietly into the blend of the service with  
13 little noticeable impact. This is especially the case during the winter season or when the majority  
14 of tourists are western. But in the summer months the tourists can have quite an impact on the  
15 service. Many of them are delighted to see what to them amounts to some sort of living history  
16 as the traditional service plays out before their eyes. Like most tourists when they see something  
17 that they like they attempt to capture it on camera or video camera, standing in the isles to take  
18 the best shots and excitedly talking to each other in often not so hushed voices.

19  
20 When I was there many in the church became so frustrated by this intrusion that they had a  
21 security guard attempt to first bar the outsiders from entering the church and then, if they  
22 managed to enter, locate them and ask them to leave. Many tourists would fight their forced  
23 departure, trying to get one last camera shot, as they were removed from the church. Just prior to  
24 this system a more inclusive system had been tried, where outsiders were incorporated into the  
25 worship more, but it was said that they were far too disruptive and kept doing the wrong things  
26 at the wrong times. One of these wrong things is to attempt to receive communion. I have seen a  
27 priest in Shimla question a man at the altar who professed to be a Christian before refusing him  
28 communion. I later asked the priest why this had happened and he explained to me that this was  
29 necessary to tell the true Christians from those who only pretended to be a part of the church.  
30 Here then we see an emphasis on bonding capital and group maintenance overriding that of  
31 bridging capital: because these tourists were not in the group, they were not part of the Shimla  
32 Christian identity.

33  
34 Of course the more evangelically minded did not see things this way at all. For them the church  
35 as a tourist church had a ministry for tourists. They reasoned that through embracing the tourists  
36 they could reach far more people than they ever could otherwise. However, in a further twist  
37 when I spoke to tourists after they had visited Christ Church they all told me that they loved the  
38 remarkable peace of the place and its sense of history, which is of course precisely what their  
39 presence was threatening to disrupt. Christ Church's visitor's book is full of comments by  
40 tourists that echo these sentiments showing this to be a dominant perception.

41  
42 In addition to tourists and local Christians there is a third group to consider, for whom the  
43 church is very important and who are very important to the life of the church, these are the  
44 majority Hindu residents of Shimla. Most Christians in Shimla live embedded within a wider  
45 Hindu community and during my fieldwork I was no exception. Therefore I had plenty of  
46 opportunity to talk with local Hindus about their thoughts on Christ Church. As I have  
47 elsewhere argued (Miles-Watson and Korpela 2010, 73) many have long and complex history of  
48 involvement with the church which is both literally and metaphorically central to their  
49 conception of life in Shimla.

50

1 When in December 2009 I stood in the courtyard of Christ Church Cathedral during the  
2 Christian *satsang*. I noticed several local Hindus and Sikhs stood on the edges of the courtyard  
3 with a look of intense interest on their faces. I moved over to talk to a migrant coolie to ask him  
4 his opinion. His response, like others from recent migrants, that I later solicited, was generally  
5 positive, if a little confused. However, those long term Hindu residents of Shimla that I spoke to  
6 about this were far less positive about the event. Some said that they were not sure why the  
7 Christians were not happy to do their own thing and questioned why they wanted to copy other  
8 religions. A small minority raised concerns that this might be a conversion tactic and behind the  
9 comments of the majority laid a sense that if the Christians abandoned traditional forms of  
10 worship then they were also abandoning the creation of something that was seen as traditional  
11 and important to the wider Shimla community.  
12

13 The evangelical elements of Shimla's mainstream churches therefore find themselves in a tricky  
14 position. They naturally want to make the message of the healing and uplifting power of the  
15 Holy Spirit more accessible to other non-Christians. At the same time they are confronted by  
16 those who believe that the main purpose of the church is to continue to sensitively recreate (all  
17 be it in a nuanced form) the contemplative ways and practices handed down to them by their  
18 Christian forefathers. Moreover, they have to cope with the suggestion that the challenge they  
19 present to the status quo also represents a challenge to organically evolved systems that allow  
20 the church to act as a witness to a distinct way of life that has become central to the identity of  
21 all of Shimla's residents. Strangely, it is precisely the blend of colonial traditions and  
22 postcolonial innovations that generate powerful landscapes of worship, which are capable of  
23 holding together a diverse congregation and the identity of a city with such a complicated past.  
24 For, the church landscape is not only central to the lives of Shimla's Christian minority, but also  
25 of extreme importance in the lives of its many Hindus and Sikhs, who at varying times also help  
26 to constitute these special landscapes. Through the exploration of these distinct yet connected  
27 landscapes containing *satsang* and pipe organs it has become clear that the study of dynamic  
28 landscapes can reveal something of the lived reality of the way that Shimla's Christian and non-  
29 Christian residents negotiate issues of colonial heritage and postcolonial life, global belonging  
30 and national identity, as well as interfaith relations more accurately (at least in some cases) than  
31 simply an exploration of caste and power relations, both of which have been perhaps overly  
32 central to the anthropological exploration of Christianity within India.  
33  
34

35 The landscapes of worship that surround Christ Church Cathedral shift with the seasons and  
36 with the people who worship there. Yet despite these transformations they are landscapes that  
37 bond the Christians and act as bridges to the wider society. They are, however, not simply  
38 arenas of *communitas*, but also powerful sites of contestation. They are sites that reflect the  
39 traumas of the past and the diverse backgrounds of the people who constitute the Christian  
40 landscape. They are then modern landscapes of the migrant city, which blur the traditional  
41 anthropological categories of region; caste and historical founding, which have traditionally  
42 been used to sort Christian groups in India. In Shimla today all these elements draw together,  
43 sometimes harmoniously, sometimes painfully. Often the pipe organ leads a worship that speaks  
44 to the past, while at others the *satsang* of future hopes and fears haunts the old cathedral.  
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Draft