

# THIS IS NOT A TRAVELOGUE

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From a person who despised setting foot out of her bedroom

It was the summer of 2022, I had just graduated from my bachelor's course and the end, just like any journey, brought with it a sense of gloominess along with hope. I was lost in this dichotomy and as much as I was reminiscent of the past, I looked forward to the future. One fine day, in an attempt to lessen my melancholia, someone asked me, "If you could do anything right now, anything in the entire world, what would you want to do?". "Honestly... just

have a cup of coffee overlooking some beautiful mountains and hills, that is all I want", I replied vaguely. Such a simple thing but it was all I wanted truly, as fate would have it, I found myself doing this exact thing a few months down the line. Life was about to change. I just did not know it then.

I had always been a quiet girl, who was very much happy in her bedroom, and hated any interactions with the outside world. Yes, I am painting you the picture of a cliched 'The Introvert'. It goes without saying that when I told

my parents I wanted to go on a trip to Shimla, they were concerned more than shocked. I will be honest with you, I was concerned and shocked at myself too. I had never really travelled alone, and to go straightaway to the hills seemed scary. To add more to my shocking state, my parents agreed and I, like the hopeless-bollywood buff-romantic I am, dreamt of finally living my 'Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani' dream. I packed my bags and at the end of November I left Jaipur, alone for the very first time. I reached Chandigarh to reunite with my best friend and from there the journey to the "Queen of Hills" began for the both of us.

We boarded an HRTC bus early in the morning, which we had almost missed but by some divine intervention, caught it at the last minute and embarked on our journey to Shimla, the excitement of it clouding all doubts if we had any. As the cityscape grew farther and farther and the hills grew closer, the reality of it all consumed me. It was scary to look down at the valleys when you were occupying the window seat in a local bus, which was swerving at the sharp turns. It was beautiful to look at the hills and roads lined with pine trees. It was scary to not have a 'safety net' and be miles apart from your comfort zone. It was comforting/satiating to eat a shabbily made sandwich, which you made for yourself in a rush to catch a bus so early in the morning. After a five hour journey, we finally reached Shimla, and it was breathtaking. We had booked our stay near Mall Road, which was very convenient as the popular tourist attractions were within a walking distance. Although the word "near" doesn't really apply when you have to walk on foot in winding lanes, for a happy-at-home person, the steep climb to our place of stay almost crushed me physically as well as mentally. After climbing three flights of stairs, we reached the room and at that moment I kid you not, I just wanted to go back home. I was on the verge of tears from the physical exhaustion and had forgotten to pack some glucose too. With no energy left in me to again climb

down and find a medical shop, I just ordered a lemon soda, it tasted really bad. Oh how I missed my mother who would prepare the best lemon soda for me and take care of me when every inch of my body ached. I wanted to run back. I did not want to be in Shimla. It was a strange but an honest feeling. Then I opened the curtains and everything changed. In that specific moment and now in retrospect I can say, in my life too, everything changed. I cried. I jumped. I was dumbfounded at the vastness I could perceive from this huge window, the valley of hills, a few massive trees down the road shedding their leaves and forests beyond, and for the very first time I saw sweet birds flying not above but below from where I stood.

As promised, this is not a travelogue. I won't tell you, my reader, what all I did in Shimla. I won't suggest any restaurants to eat at in Shimla or "five great places to visit", the internet can help with that. This right here is about me and my window, among other things. Yes, I called a hotel window "mine". It became mine little by little. Every morning, the first thing I did was to open the window, and my friend got worried sick for me as in the cold of the night, I'd still sit by the window, wrapped in shawls and blankets. Each evening I'd watch the most beautiful sunset which painted me orange and pink. In the afternoon, I'd watch a tree let go of its leaves so gracefully, never clinging onto any of them. I stayed there for three days. Each day I indulged in hearty conversations about my gloomy past and hopeful future, sitting by the window. The first day it was with myself, the second day it was with my friend and the third day it was with a couple of new friends I made in Shimla itself. Shimla wasn't about me, for it, I was a tourist just like everyone else. I never knew that I would find a part of myself in that town miles apart from my home, because there was no part of me hiding there. I was always whole. I happened to make it mine, I happened to make that window, that tree and the Sun and the Moon mine. When I had to bid the town goodbye, the end of a journey

again brought up gloominess and hope. I wasn't lost in the dichotomy this time because this beautiful town taught me to love, and to let it go when its time. The window remains in Shimla and it is someone else's right now and that is okay. My Past was mine at one point but now the Present matters more. The window of my memory always exists, I sit there for days at times but when the Present calls, I get up and say goodbye. This is how the hilly town, and that window changed everything. You know what really helps when you are feeling exhausted? A cup of coffee. I made myself a

cup of coffee that day I was exhausted, and sat by the window. It took me a couple hours to realise, I made it. I am 'doing' the one thing I wanted to do the most in this world, just having a cup of coffee overlooking some beautiful mountains and hills.

(Secret : I love to travel now, even better if alone.)



Photographs by Ananya Acharya