



The route from Naggar to Manali is breathtakingly beautiful

**C**OME summers and holidays and a visit to a hill station can't be far behind. It has become customary to go to a hill station during the summer season to beat the heat and escape the lethargy that bogs you down. A visit to the hills offers an attractive package comprising picturesque locales and clean air. Who wouldn't be tempted by such scenic destinations, be it Mussoorie, Shimla, Nainital, Dalhousie or Kulu-Manali?

We had been visiting Mussoorie and Shimla for many years and so decided to go to Kulu-Manali this time. The drive from Chandigarh to Manali is a long one but the lush green vegetation on the way is very soothing to watch. I could not help but recall our

earlier visits to Mussoorie and Shimla where the hills on the way were almost devoid of any vegetation. The onslaught of commercialisation has rendered those hills almost bar-

## **G**etaway

ren. It seemed as though man had tried to conquer the rhythm of nature and nearly succeeded.

In contrast, the Kulu valley looks resplendent from head to toe, surrounded as it is with green mountains. The deodar trees stand tall and erect, the vegetation is lush and dense and the greenery radiates a rich hue, offering a lively contrast to the blue sky. The snow

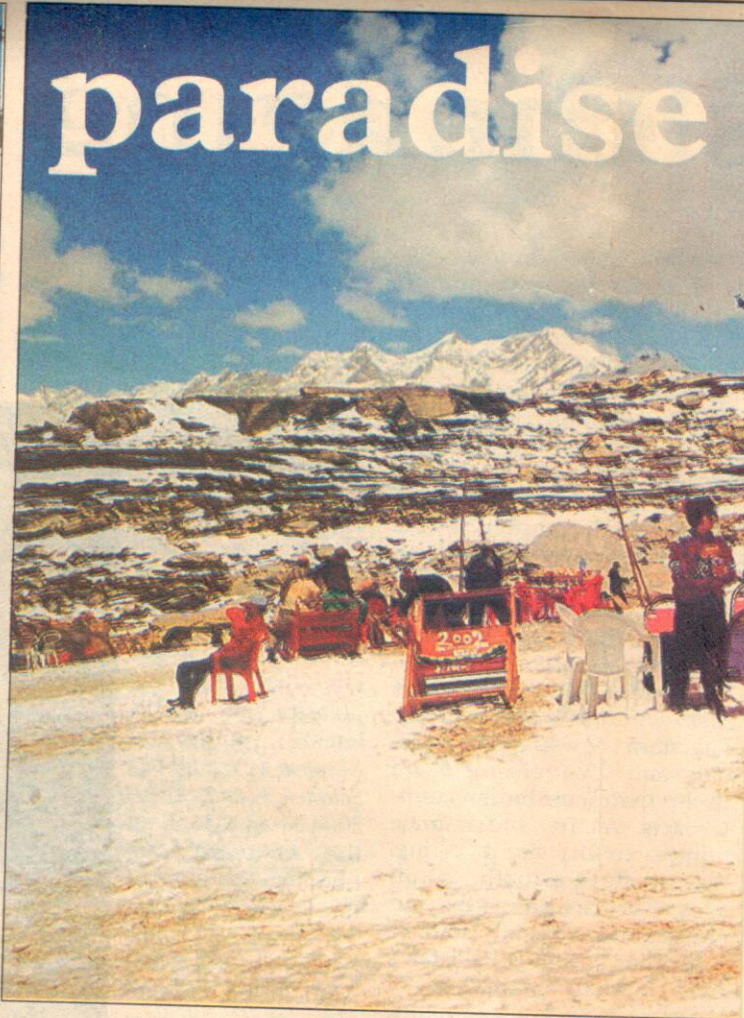
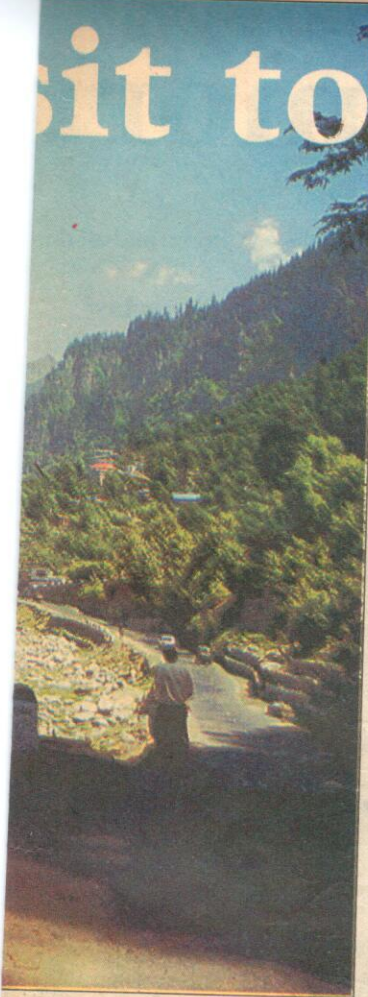
on the peaks and the clear waters of the Beas add to the beauty of this popular tourist resort.

It is a pleasure to race along the meandering route along the banks of the Beas. The river's racy gurgling water becomes foamy as it collides against boulders that show their menacing heads after every few hundred metres.

The banks of the river are covered with all kinds of stones: round, square, oblong, oval, some dark, some light. The speed of the water and the gurgling sounds it creates add to the aura and mystery of His creation.

Speeding all the way up, you cannot but admire the imposing presence of the mountains: the mountains everyone wants to befriend — the

# Visit to paradise



Vendors do brisk business atop Rohtang Pass

**The journey from Manali to Rohtang Pass is difficult. You have to make your way uphill through a narrow, winding road. As you go higher and higher, you experience the thrill of being in close proximity to nature in all its sublime purity. The tiny snow-clad peaks that you saw from a distance begin to appear bigger and more magnificent,**

**writes Suchita Malik**

mountains everyone dreads in case of a calamity or an emergency — the mountains that remind you at every step of their invincibility and the vanity of mankind — the mountains that are a symbol of serenity, peace, contentment and divinity as opposed to the futility of human wishes, ambitions, aspirations and efforts — the mountains that

offer you a respite from the hum-drum of life — the mountains that offer you an escape from the painful realities of the world.

As you head for Manali and leave Kulu behind, you find that you have left behind the clean environs of the place as well. Scores of roadside shops, kiosks and *dhabas* that have mushroomed in Manali over

the years not only mar the beauty of the place but are also polluting it with refuse and litter carelessly thrown all around.

Commercialisation of tourist places is becoming a norm in India, negating the very idea of a sojourn in a peaceful hilly environment. So much so that a visit to a hill station has purely become a rich man's prerogative. Besides being an expensive proposition, there are problems galore such as lack of proper accommodation, shortage of water, dirty toilets and over-crowding.

If you want to be away from the crowds, you can stay in Naggar, near Manali. Short of Manali by about half an hour's drive, it is located on the other side of the river.

The journey from Manali to

family had the...



—Photos by the writer

Rohtang Pass is difficult. You have to make your way uphill through a narrow winding road. As you go higher and higher, you experience the thrill of being in close proximity to nature in all its sublime purity. The tiny snow-clad peaks that you saw from a distance now start appearing bigger and clearer. You may also face a lot of traffic jams on this road during the peak season. Finally making it to the top, you will see a number of shops perched there, offering you every possible comfort — be it snow boots and fur coats to take you to the snow points or any cuisine... Chinese, pizzas or our simple *chhole bhature*.

We walked through the ice-melted slush, the moss and lichen, and the waste material

littered everywhere at Rohtang — a mule lay dead with one of its eyes eaten away by birds but none seemed to bother. Finally, we found our way to the snow-covered slopes. It is surprising to see the number of sledges operated by locals to give rides on the snow.

Rohtang Pass and the beautiful scenery around offers a heavenly insight into the wonders of nature, but only if man would cherish that beauty and not carelessly throw garbage and plastic bags, totally unmindful of the damage he is causing to the environment. Our ancient heritage is a treasure indeed and nobody should be allowed to defile its purity at any cost. Environmentalists have a hard task ahead, no doubt!