

The lure of the Himalayas

by Svetoslav Roerich, noted painter

BEYOND the ravages of strife the spirit of the Himalayas distils its influence throughout the world. We find it in the lofty philosophies, in arts, in poetry, in music, in paintings, sculpture and architecture.

FOR many years, I have intimately known the Himalayas—the mighty ranges of the west—and the towering peaks of the east. My first impressions and visions called forth by their unparalleled beauty and grandeur have only become more vivid as years went by and their message has become even more eloquent. Gradually their outward form and their inner meaning have assumed a new significance, blended into one and transmuted by the very power residing in the multiple concepts for which the Himalayas stand, this “Great Temple of nature” is reserved for the true seekers after truth in all its forms.

From time immemorial the best aspirations of mankind, the loftiest concepts and legends have been woven about the Himalayas.

Throughout the world, whenever the word Himalayas is pronounced, people become attentive, and a special eagerness and expectation light up their countenance. It is not only the concept of tremendous

heights, the call of unconquered peaks, uncharted glaciers and valleys of the unbelievable richness of vegetation and animal kingdoms; there is something else besides these outward attractions, there is a greater and deeper significance the word Himalayas conveys to the listeners, as if an unseen spiritual influence lives in this very word, a special magnet which made the Himalayas the great centre of spiritual pilgrimage.

Innumerable are the shrines and caves dotting the valleys and slopes of the *Himavat*. Everyone knows Kailas, Manasarovar, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Ravalsar, Triloknath, the caves of Arjuna and Milarepa, the centres of spiritual search and aspirations. But how many are the shrines unknown, reserved for the true seekers after truth, either on this or the other side of the range?

The great Rishis directed their holy quest towards the Himalayas. Mighty teachings and doctrines were born under their towering peaks. Is

it not strange that throughout the world, the great teachers of whatsoever race or faith have always gone to the heights to receive some of their greatest revelations? Does height, does eternal snow, the rarified atmosphere contribute towards greater lucidity, or is it in order to rise above the sphere of the turmoil of life?

Those of you who have climbed great heights, know how active becomes your mind, how light and even unnecessary becomes sleep. Are these some of the qualities that attracted the great searchers after truth from time immemorial?

Pure thoughts are born in pure places, in places unsullied by the lower selfish passions generated in the struggle for existence and self gratification.

The caravan is nearing the highest point of the pass. The men dismount and gather bright Primulas; reverently they place these offerings on the nearby rocks; “to the Devas, who live on those peaks”. Truly this is the sentiment unconsciously expressed by everyone when the word ‘Himalayas’ is pronounced—the abode of the devas.

The great sages and rishis, perhaps they could contact these spiritual influences, they most probably could, or else they would not turn towards these mighty peaks. These great souls, these brilliant minds who have given us the loftiest philosophies and systems, could they ever be justly suspected of not knowing what place was best for the generation of transcendental thought?

These great philosophers explained the mysteries of nature long before science was able to demonstrate them, the atomic theory, the theory of relatively and vibration, the *Maya* and *tatavams*, they proclaimed telepathy long before the human brain was found to emit waves.

The conscious awakened mind must and can attune itself to the influence of the cosmos and can read the book of life. It is part of life itself—this individual focus of conscious existence—hence partaking of all its influences. And if it is endowed with the faculty of self-realisation and cognition, with individual consciousness, truly there can be no limits to what human mind can achieve and know. Some of these marvellous mysteries of the sub-conscious we see in certain prodigies and in the realm of hypnotism.



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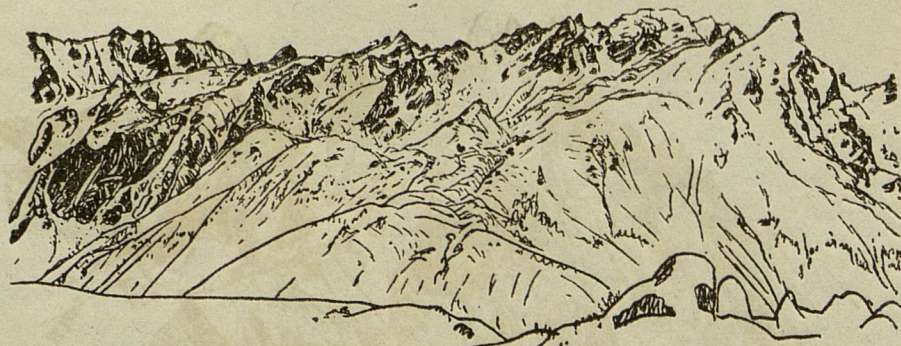
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Introducing the Himalayas

THERE is a mountain in the north,
A flaming heap of splendour.
Sunlight falls on it and scatters
at the summit.

It is golden, it glitters
Gods and celestial beings live on it
Mind cannot conceive it;
Many a sinning man cannot come near it
Divine herbs and healing flowers shine on it.
Fearful beasts of prey live in its cloud touching heights
Trees and riverlets filled with echoing birdsongs grace its slopes
It has stood high for countless years.

This is the Himalaya as described in the great Indian Epic Mahabharata. (Astika Parva adi Parva : Mahabharat : Translation : P. Lal)

The Himalayas have charmed the Indian mind ever since. What does the Himalaya stand for? Why does a mountain range, unending though it seems in reality cast a magic spell on the mind, generation after generation—why a whole culture is woven around a mountain peak that stands silently, its head above the clouds? Why have the sages and saints from the plains of India travelled to these heights in search of salvation since the birth of Indian civilization? What is the Himalaya in Indian ethos?

The word Himalaya, the name given to this great mountain system, literally means 'The abode of the snow'. As far as eyes can travel, there are only mountains after mountains all coated, and glistening with ice. There are

more than 250 mountains over 7000 mts. high, and fourteen above 800 mts. the highest peak SAGAR-MATHA as locally called in Nepal, the Mt. Everest of international fame 8848 mts. high.

For every Indian, the Himalaya is essentially the source of all life. From its womb springs the holy waters of the Ganga, a river which not only washes down all sins, but sustains all vegetation, agriculture and civilizations of the northern delta. The mountains in their massive bosom also preserve a fantastic range of flora and fauna, unparalleled in the world. Under the crust of these mountains, is buried a treasury of precious metals, stones, and rare soil specimens from time immemorial.

In the imagination of Kalidasa, the famous Indian poet of ancient India, these multi-coloured gems studded mountain tops are reflected in the wandering clouds, and when the sun nears the horizon, their colours are reflected in the dusky hue of evening much before the sunset.

But leaving aside, poetry, and the impressive physical attributes, the Himalayas enjoy a unique position in Indian spiritual discipline : Unlike the mount Olympus of the Greek myth, it is not merely the abode of Gods, this king of the mountains is DEVATATMA—The soul of Gods. For every Indian seeker of truth and salvation, the Himalaya remains the ultimate goal, where he can sit and meditate on the nature of reality. In its every stone and every nameless flower, there is a touch of bliss. Trekking in the mountainside, walking across where the horizon kisses the ice-capped peaks, one is suddenly face to face with eternity. It is this spiritual inspiration that has continued over a millennium and moulded the Indian civilization. □□□

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Colour transparency : Sanjay Acharya

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The pilgrims gather at a wayside shrine; 'Have you ever heard of the shining ones, the snow men, and those who live beyond the eternal snows?' Quietly flows the narrative, attentive are the faces. A new hope and understanding unite these accidental, passing friends.

There is always some truth at the foundation of every legend, of every apocryphon.

The quest of the spirit, for ever remains the supreme effort of mankind, the inborn aspiration to do something beyond the apparent emptiness of everyday life. All great minds stopped to ponder over the mysteries of life and death and they told us that this life here on earth, this short, evanescent existence is not a mere accident to come and to go, snuffed out by death for some unknown purpose. This life is only the means for the spirit to gain experience and when the material existence has come to an end, the real man continues in a different state and sphere.

Could one logically accept or believe that the products of the human mind, systems, philosophies, great works of art and all manifestations of human genius to survive for centuries and millennia are the products of a finite mind, and the creator, the cause of all these manifestations has disappeared and exists no more ?

Beyond all conflagrations and strife, beyond all destruction and violence stands the eternal concept of spirit.

Mightily stand the Himalayas their ramparts drawn towards heaven. Along the winding valleys and gorges Guru Charaka gathered his precious, healing herbs. Huen Sang, that amazing Chinese traveller, thirteen centuries ago describes the medicinal plants found on the Himalayas. The Pandavas came here to rest wearied by the great struggle, and the Tibetan poet-saint Milarepa listened to the echoes of nature and voices from beyond.

What memories lie concealed in the mighty folds of these ranges; The great Gautama in search of the salvation of mankind, Rishi Vyas,

Rishi Narada, Rishi Aghastya, innumerable are the noble souls to find their best inspirations in the shadow of these towering peaks and to carry them down again to struggling humanity, humanity caught in the coils of ignorance and selfishness. The great Pythagoras, Appolonius of Tiana, they have certainly contacted these illumined men, when treading the soil of India in search of wisdom.

The Lama say : 'I must go, my teacher calls me, his pilgrimage on earth is coming to an end.'

'But where does he live, your teacher ?'

'He is now at Kailas and it will take me months to reach him there.'

Thus speaks a Lama hermit, having heard the voice of his Guru, a thousand miles away.

Mysteries still live along the slopes of the Himalayas. They are ever present for him who searches for them with an open heart, not for the sake of curiosity or for derision.

Let us look with an unprejudiced mind for the real understanding of life, we shall find it all around us, and it will regenerate our outlook and our habits. How wonderfully rich life becomes once we contact these eternal values, everything assumes a different meaning and purpose. And it is precisely now in these days of the Armageddon that we must think of the sublime truths, real and eternal beyond every conflict and destruction.

Beyond the ravages of strife the spirit of the Himalayas distils its influence throughout the world. We find it in the lofty philosophies, we find it in the arts, in poetry, in music, in paintings, sculpture and architecture.

The great temple of Kailas at

Ellora, its outline was drawn after the holy summits of Kailas to inspire and remind those who were far from the mighty ranges, of those profiles and masses that meant so much to the builders.

How unforgettably beautiful are these majestic ranges; Every possible variety of form and colour is theirs.

Through the narrow winding gorges, mighty rivers carry the message of the snow into the distant plains, the three sacred life givers of toiling millions; the Ganges, Brahmaputra and the Indus. Waterfalls break into a thousand rainbows and relentless glaciers find their way down into dark precipices; the ever present, all pervading pulse of life; scattering, pulverising rocks and growing glittering crystals; the eternal Proteus; life in its infinite manifestations; combining and recombining forms, dissolving them in order to bring them again into objectivity under a fresh impulse and in new combinations.

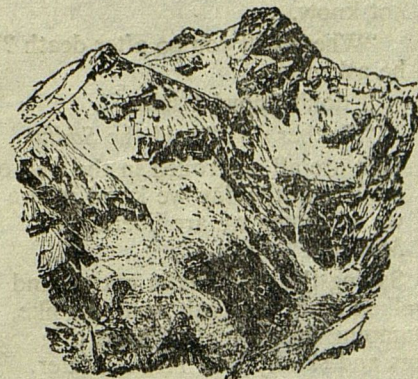
One can truly say such riches of natural beauty as are found in the Himalayas are not to be seen anywhere here on this earth.

Kanchenjunga, the guardian of the five treasures, like a priceless necklace of shimmering pinkish pearls floating above the hazy valleys and hills, the transcendental vision of another world of sublime beauty draws our spirit upward.

Himavat; the birthplace of immortal thought, the loftiest concepts hover over thy mighty peaks. Shambhala, the Holy Grail, the Heavenly Jerusalem, are symbols of the interlinked aspirations and visions of so many different ages and peoples, the eager and earnest hope of weary mankind and the eternal affirmation of the great Philosophers.

Himavat—the beautiful, thou hast given us our greatest treasures and for ever thou shalt remain guardian of the greatest mystery—the holy marriage of heaven and earth.

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Himalayas: through the eyes of a painter

by Serbjeet Singh, eminent painter



MY Himalayan experience is a state of mind, an adventure that can be shared and that can unveil its secrets to some extent. It is the capacity to comprehend the totality of an object or an experience by becoming one with it, that is what I seek to create when I paint the Himalayan landscape.

YEARS ago, when I first started my wandering in the Himalayas at the age of 16, I came upon a *sadhu* in the Chamba interior. He was on his way to *Manimahesh*, the sacred lake at 14000 feet above sea level, where a fair is held every autumn in celebration of an epic event—Shiva taking poison which would otherwise have destroyed humanity.

"Where are you coming from ?

I asked the *Sadhu*.

"Does any one of us know where he comes from ?" he answered.

"But where are you going ?" I asked.

"Does any one of us know where he is going ?" Do you know where you are going, young man ?" he retorted.

"Yes", I blurted. 'I am going to ...*Brahmaur* and then to *Manimahesh*...'

'And then where ?' asked the *Sadhu*.

"Then I go back to Dalhousie, my home", I said.

"And then where ?" persisted the *Sadhu*.

"Then I go to Lahore for my studies..."

The *Sadhu* kept on asking me questions until I came to the end of having described my present career and then, of course, I did not know.

"Where will you go after death ?" he asked me.

'I don't know' I said.

"Neither do I" said the *Sadhu*.

"We are all embroiled in the web of *maya* and the day we know where we are going we are liberated—*Mukti*."

Saying this, the *Sadhu* got up and walked away. His gait was bird like, stamping the ground with his thin legs and skinny feet. A week later,

while camping at *Gauri Kund*, at 11000 feet, below the *Manimahesh* peak, I saw this *Sadhu* again. He would sit quietly for long stretches and then jump from one rock to another and gaze at the surroundings aimlessly. He reminded me of the small, Himalayan falcon, sharp-eyed, alert, restless. In the days that followed, I wandered in the *Manimahesh* area, seeing for the first time dark forested slopes end up in metallic rock and then with one giant leap emerge with a crown of glittering ice. In the mornings thundering nullahs would wake me up from sleep, and in the early hours of the march to the next village, an occasional shepherd or a shopkeeper with his wares laden on a mule would pass by and then a *Sadhu*. It was the autumn of the year 1941, and from this experience there was no going back for me. From that year till 1960 the elusive Himalayan experience dominated my mind. Many treks along with my brother Jay (Jasjeet) led us into places far apart, Garhwal, Hindustan Tibet Road, Kulu, Chamba, Ladakh, Aksai Chin and Karakoram.

My Himalayan experience is an attempt to reduce to visuals the reaction of my self (Purusha) to this fabulous, external world (Prakriti) of the Himalayas. In the process, the vehicle has been generally paintings besides photographs and panoramas. My Himalayan experience like any other 'experience' is a state of mind, an adventure than can be shared and that can unveil its secrets (in this case via painting) to some extent. This is what I have attempted in the pages of the book I am now writing on my Himalayan experiences. I have no knowledge of facts and figures, no clinical insights into any Himalayan landscapes, no theory of leisure, there is no pattern in my documented information—Himalaya to me is like a perfect visual, emotional and spiri-

tual experience. Let me share some of it with you.

I first saw Ladakh in November 1948. War raged between Indian and Pakistani troops on this barren mountain terrain beyond Kashmir; and I had accompanied the Indian army because I was making a film on the war operations. Travelling over the watershed at a place called Gumri, I had my first glimpse of the austere landscape of Ladakh. Chiselled peaks pierced a startlingly blue sky and metallic rocks seemed to dominate the dun coloured land. Ladakh's other wordly perspective made distant objects appear close so that the further away an object was, the closer it looked.

Since my first, unforgettable glimpse of this incredible land, I have returned to Ladakh again and again, to paint hundreds of variations of what, to my mind, are 'themes' of Ladakh. The underlying concept of what I have tried to capture is *Tongpanye*, the Tibetan philosophical term which can be translated as 'loneliness leading to compassion.'

The painting 'Ladakh-I' for example, is probably the hundredth that I have done on this particular theme. It shows the vast unending plateau through which the Indus river flows and the inky blue sky above, an image that has fascinated me so that I have painted it over and over again. Since I discontinued painting, 'on the spot' over 25 years ago, my art has progressed from an earlier representational style to the flat arbitrary surfaces I paint today, and this, in many ways, reflects my inner revolution.

I began work on one particular canvas after a recent visit to Ladakh. On my return to Delhi, I made a number of sketches. Then I prepared a large canvas that had been put on the stretcher only recently. I do not use easels now, preferring to paint with the canvas lying flat so that the colours I use (acrylics, oils and metal paints) mix in their own way, without the aid of gravity. Placing the canvas on my favourite working surface, the dining table, I was ready to begin. I usually settle down to work late at night, when the entire neighbourhood is asleep, with only my Tibetan dog *Khorndu* to keep me company or in the somnolent silence of the afternoon. In recent years, I have found that