

EDITORIAL

On a relief map, the Himalayas appear as a majestic crescent over India. If one places Mt. Kailash as a dot, the *Chandra-bindu* of Sanskrit alphabet gets manifest over the physical landscape. *Chandra-bindu* is always placed at the crown position, and so do the Himalayas occupy the crown position in shaping Indian civilization. Throughout the ages, the Himalayas have been a refuge for the rebels against the social and political orders. There is a strange charm that pervades the Himalayas as a sacred mountain for solitude, contemplation and reinvigoration.

Many of the ancient and medieval reformers of Hindu tradition would take refuge in the caves and huts perched along the mountain ranges and come back to the society with the new message. The earliest mention of the mountain ranges appears in some of the Vedic texts, but only in the geographical sense. The sacredness of the Himalayan ranges was first indicated by one of the most towering personalities of Indian civilization, Sakyamuni Buddha. Buddha himself can be seen as the first great messenger from the Himalayas who set the wheel of dharma- rejuvenation rolling, succeeded subsequently by a cascade of messengers coming back from the pristine Himalayas to offer their solution to the human predicament.

Buddha grew in Kapilvastu from where 8,167 meter high Dhaulagiri peak is clearly visible as the most dominating feature of Kapilvastu sky. He would have felt the charm and might have contemplated over the changing colour of the Dhaulagiri peaks before he decided to renounce the world to seek a *madhyam marg* (middle path) to end the human suffering. In fact, Dhaulagiri is the point where the river Kali Gandaki, the deepest river valley on the earth, bisects the Himalayas into two halves of equal length (*George van Driem* 2014). Perhaps he had Dhaulagiri in mind when he compared the virtuous person to the shining sun-lit snow peaks of the Himalayas (Himavanta) while preaching Culasubhadda, the daughter of Anathapindika at Jetavana mango grove.

Dhammapada (XXI.Pakinnakavagga ,Verse 304)

Culasubhadda Vatthu

*Dure santo pakasenti
himavantova pabbato
asantettha na dissanti
rattim khitta yatha sara.*

(‘The good shine from afar
like the snowy Himalayas.

The wicked are not seen,
even when near,

like an arrow shot in the night.’)

(*Dhammapada*, Verse 304).

Lake Anotatta (Mansarovar), Mount Kilash (Kailash) and Himavanta (Himalayas) are referred a number of times in the Pali Tripitaka. The Himalayas is narrated as the abode of the Nagas and as the kings of the mountains. The Lake Anotatta in the Himalayas is the great lake. Vinayapitaka mentions that shortly after his enlightenment, Buddha used his super-normal powers to visit the supreme Lake Anotatta at the foot of Mount Kilash (Vin.I, 27).

In the *Jataka*, Buddha is described asking his monks, ‘Do you wish to go a wandering in the Himalayas?’ (*Gacchissatha pana Himavanta càrikaü*, Ja.V, 415). Thus, it is seen that the tradition of taking refuge in the Himalayas and subsequently coming back to the society even pre-existed Buddha’s time.

The earliest mention of the Himalayas in non-Buddhist literature is found in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana says: 'There is no mountain like Himalchal [Himalaya], for in it are Kailash and Mansarovar.'

But, it was Kalidas who popularized the mountain ranges in his epic of *Kumarasambhavam*. He described the Himalaya as *devatma*, a divine personality, and as the measuring rod spanning the eastern and western oceans.

The revivalist of Hindu dharma, Shankaracharya and the Second Buddha, Padmasambhava credited with introducing tantricism into Buddhism, traversed across the nook and corner of the Himalayas during same period. A few centuries later, when there was invasion by hordes of marauders from the Muslim world, Buddhism could survive only in the harsh terrain of the Himalayas, and also most of the sacred sites of Hinduism developed in the Himalayan ranges. Sacralization of the Himalayan landscape has further transformed the Himalayas into a site of geopietic imagination.

Traditional narrative of Tibetan Buddhists describe about earthly paradise hidden in the Himalayas, 108 of which are believed to be consecrated by Padmasambhava. The Tibetans believe that these are preserved for the time of crisis. After death of Fifth Dalai Lama, Dzungar Mongols sacked Lhasa and even destroyed his tomb. A group of Tibetan Buddhists following Padmasambhava prophecy, left for these secret and sacred earthly paradise, *beyul*. Revelation of a monk Rigdzin Jatson Nyingpo(1585-1656), had presented *beyul* Pemako as the ultimate heavenly refuge where human bodies can short-circuit the ritual of death by dissolving into rainbow light upon death. By mid 18th century, migrants from Eastern Bhutan, Tawang, Kham and Monyul settled in Pemako. Even after the Chinese invasion into Tibet and Tibetan uprising of March 1959, following which Dalai Lama escaped the Chinese forces, and intended to take refuge in Pemako, but his team could not reach the destination, and in fact his entourage arrived in Tawang.

This myth of earthly paradise in the Himalayas was the theme of James Hilton's novel, *Lost Horizon* (1933) and Shangrila story spread like wildfire. Paramhansa Yogananda described in his *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946) about immortal Babaji of the Himalayas. Theosophists C.W. Leadbeater and Annie Besant described about a sixteen year old, Sanata Kumara living in the Himalayas. The Himalayas has been metamorphosed in human imagination as a paradise where immortal sages wander.

The Himalayas has become physical indicator of our quest for earthly paradise. But, our modern paradigm of development treat the Himalayas as a mere storehouse of hydropower, timber, biodiversity, a carbon sink, and as source of fresh water. The Himalayas which was a refuge for centuries for the people seeking new meaning of life and new paradigm of socio-political organization, and a haven for the believers during extraordinary time of crisis is seeking refuge away from the mindless development which is being unleashed by two giant neighbors.

The mythical abode of immortals is falling apart. Glaciers, rivers, and forests are dying, and hence seclusion is dying. Death is pervading each nook and corner of the Himalayas. Massive tragedy at Kedarnath in 2013 has given us a strong message. The Himalayas no longer guarantee rejuvenation and immortality to Indian civilization if we do not start mending our ways in dealing with the Himalayas. This issue of the Journal of Indian Research gives a clarion call to the policy makers to look at the Himalayas in its entirety, not in piecemeal. A divided Himalayas will be a destroyed Himalayas. A singular perspective will be reciprocated by the high peaks of the Himalayas with the grace of immortality over both, Indian and Chinese civilizations. A teaming Himalayan landscape always sent messengers of peace. Terrified Himalayas cannot offer us virtuous wanderers. Let us keep the Himalayas as the refuge of the last resort for yogis, hippies, environmentalists, peace activists, trans-humanists, paradise-seekers, alternative thinkers and the left-over of corporatized world order!

– Niraj Kumar