

Research Article

Himalaya:

A journey to unfamiliar, unknown and undiscovered areas

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Introduction

Himalaya had experienced a long and rich history based on its geography before the arrival and influence of outside people and still contains many such rich areas unknown to the outside world. Himalaya has been attracting numerous visitors, tourists, and scholars specialized in various fields since long and had been fascinating for non-Himalayan folks. The geographical research looks to the records of explorations for the light that they can shed upon relationship between the processes and events of exploration, on the one hand, and the geographic environment on the historical study of geography, on the other hand. There exists a vast gap in reports and complete ground reality yet to be explored.

Mans' fascination with the mountains dates back to ancient times and is probably universal. The geographical location of Himalaya is like a natural citadel. Due to peculiar physical feature many communities and areas of Himalaya have been pursuing their ideal of keeping themselves undisturbed, aloof and a sort of de facto independence. These places are not only physically and linguistically isolated, it is also socially insulated from outside contact. Having remained virtually cut off from the outside world, the life in and around this realm of altitude has been bit unknown. Such inhabitants of this young fold mountain have chosen their habitat at such a remote and inaccessible place that the outsiders can reach only after a great exertion. Though it has been attracting numerous visitors, tourists and scholars since long but many areas are uncovered to the sections. The unique culture and socio-religious aspects of these many areas which have been the subject of great interest among the scholars is yet to be discovered. European travellers had started visiting the place perhaps shortly after the takeover of the region by the British in 1800 onwards.

Himalaya is one of the premier region with a strategic position as the catchment area of several perennial and important rivers. Out of the seven rivers, called 'Sapta Sindhu' which were known as the cradle of Ancient Aryan Civilization in the region, five had their catchment and watershed areas. Slow mountain formation due to upheavals and tectonic stress helped these rivers to stick to their elevation and course forming deep gorges and open valley with lakes and their surroundings suitable for human habitation. The river valleys culture covered in these places is well known for its splendid ethnic and cultural diversities against the bustling modernity.

The present paper gives a brief account on ecology, tradition, culture and socio-historical aspects in the backdrop of fast changing concepts in science and technology of the region. The

Himalaya are the youngest, longest and the highest mountain range in the world. It has most varied, delicate and threatened ecosystem, with a population of more than 150 million. The mounting demands in the fields of agriculture, population, fuel and fodder, irrigation, ecological system and development have led to natural hazards such as land erosion, slides, earthquakes, mass wastage, weathering and aggravation of calamities detrimental to life and sustenance in the region. Himalaya is one of the premier and variable paradise on earth with a strategic position. The drainage system of the Himalaya is quite complex. It consists of rivers, lakes and glaciers. These rivers criss-cross the entire mountain chain and cut across the main Himalayan Mountain wall. The Indus, Satluj and Brahmaputra are believed to be older than the Himalaya system itself. Slow mountain formation due to upheavals and tectonic stress helped these rivers to stick to their elevation and channels forming deep gorges and open valleys with lakes and enchanting meadows suitable for human habitation.

The river valley cultures covered by the river system in the Himalaya include Kinnara-Kirata-Mongoloid; Khasha territory of the ethnic people belonging to Khash-Kulind Janapadas of ancient times and the areas having Brahmanical influence i.e., submontane region of the Siwaliks. Monolithic traditions of Kinnara-Kiratas, graves of Mongoloids and unknown tribes of hoary past, monastic systems of the Buddhists, primogeniture traditions and polyandrous system of social life among Spitians and Kinnaras; Satluj valley, distinct building and architectural styles of parts of Shimla, Mandi and Kullu regions; language and religious peculiarities of the valleys across the river; fossil finds of Ramapithecus in the valleys, enclosing Haritalyanagar, Bharai, vibrating Harappan traditions in the area of Nirmand in Outer Seraj and typical fairs and festivals including rope sliding ceremony (Bhunda), Kahika, Boodhi Diwali, ceremonies of Phulaich (flower festival), Dakraini (Dakshinayan); nature and ancestor worship practices available in the region, establish the unique historical, religious and social accounts of the river valley cultures related to many rivers.

The whole system related to the river deserve attention for the study of ecosystem, traditional cultural and socio-historical backdrop with fast changing concepts in science and technology about the geological formation, etc., as the river system has been damaged in almost every sphere and Nature challenged in the name of development and advancement as a result of human endeavour. The mountains are rocky and bare, naked of vegetation, save for a few scattered weeds and small bushes. Irrigation, the only possible means of raising crops, is far more difficult than in Kashmir.

Explorations

The uncouth dweller among the loftier Himalayas must work hard more than half the year in order to live, while his Kashmiri neighbour across the mountains, whom he despises as lazy, cowardly, and dishonest, can sit idly on his heels much of the time, and yet live comfortably. Perennial streams are rare, and the only land smooth enough for cultivation consists of small patches of the extremely stony surface of fluvial fans and terraces. THE habitable portion of the upper Indus valley constitutes Ladakh. Upstream to the southeast in Tibet, the valley cannot be permanently occupied above an elevation of 12,000 feet; downstream from an elevation of 9000 feet to the point where the river emerges on the low plains of India, it narrows to an impassable canyon, where there is no room for habitation. Between the cold gravel plains of Tibet and the magnificent canyon, the sunny province of Ladakh lies warm and contented in its narrow valley. Although governed by the native Indian state of Kashmir, under British regulation, it is essentially Tibetan in character, not only physically, but in respect to race, language, and religion. The people are mainly Buddhists, with a few Mohammedans at Leh and in the western villages. To resume our narrative where it was interrupted by the account of the ancient climate of Kashmir, we and our coolies had reached the pass, or col, of Zoji La, 11,300 feet above the sea. We were on our way eastward from Kashmir to Ladakh, diagonally across the middle range of the Himalayas, here running northwest and southeast. The pass was fairly difficult, for the ascent from the southwest was long, steep, and snowy, and the descent on the other side toward the Indus, though gentle, was at first through deep snow. The other approaches to Ladakh are much more difficult. Aside from Zoji La, the passes southwest of the Indus rise to heights of 15,000 feet or more, and those to the north, as we found later, are still higher. The easiest line of communication within Ladakh itself is along the Indus, but this does not furnish an easy avenue of approach from without. Upstream to the southeast, a difficult caravan journey of three months over the snow and barren gravel of Tibet separates Leh from Lhasa, the next important centre of population in that direction. Downstream, where Indus turns to the south and breaks through the middle and front ranges of the Himalayas, its canyon is so narrow and impassable that it has never been properly explored. Thus the isolation of Ladakh is even greater than that of Kashmir. As might be expected, there is a radical change when one passes from the moist, forested southwest base of the middle range, with its easy conditions of life, to the northeast side, where most of the moisture from the Indian Ocean is shut out by the mountains, and life responds to a drier, sterner, more bracing climate. There are other equally marked differences between the two sides of the mountains.

Travel Account

In the year 1905, Ellsworth Huntington undertook a journey through Chinese Turkestan, from India to Siberia, across the Central Asian land mass which was yet unmarked by the footprint of any western traveller. These pages bring to life a description of that historic journey, of the culture and way of life of peoples hitherto unknown to the rest of the world. It contains some of the earliest and most interesting ethnographic details of the peoples living across the Sind, Kashmir valley, Himalayas and the Chinese Plateau. With tremendous descriptive skill, the author has etched out the minutest details of a bygone civilisation, bringing out vividly all aspects of life, including material culture, mythology, pre-history, rituals and social practices of those times. The descriptive details, which have a timeless character, embellish the core of the theoretical premise of the author, whose goal was to explore one of the perennial questions before mankind, namely the link between geography and civilisation. It was to explore this relationship that the pioneering expedition was undertaken by the team of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. This is a book about man's eternal scientific quest as also one of the most fascinating travelogues to emerge as a result of such a quest. A most remarkable amalgamation of a scientific endeavour and a literary masterpiece.

Again, in Kashmir, the abundant precipitation and consequent forests have led the people to build their houses largely of wood, with sloping roofs to shed the rain; beyond the mountains, on the other hand, the rarity of rain and consequently of timber has induced another type of architecture, one or two story houses of rough stones plastered with mud, and covered with flat roofs of mud, supported on beams and bushes. We saw that a mountain stream had been diverted into a little canal and carried along the precipitous side of the valley for three or four miles at a height of over a thousand feet above the river. The road ceased to follow the broad valley-floor near the river, for there was no room beside the water. The stream flowed between the steep cliffs of narrow terraces of gravel, like those of Kashmir, which filled the bottom of the V. Along these we made our way, finding the path level and easy except where it crossed the narrow gullies of frequent tributary torrents. Far below, in some characteristically rocky fields, irrigated from another canal, women with baskets slung on their backs were laboriously gathering the stones which had worked up during the winter. The glacial features of the upper part of the valley and the terraces of the middle both appear to owe their origin to the great series of climatic changes of which we have already found evidence in Kashmir. It is difficult to assign any date to the later changes on the basis of local evidence. The general freedom of the fronts of the glaciers among the lofty mountains from large amounts of detritus and the

withdrawal of some of them from their moraines show that the glaciers are on the whole diminishing in size; this suggests that the climate is becoming warmer or drier. Work-man, however, mentions the case of one glacier which has recently advanced, though the advance may be only temporary. Long ago, a vanished glacier ground its way slowly down from the mountains, cutting off projecting spurs, smoothing and broadening the valley-floor, steepening the walls, and changing the valley from a gorge with a V-shaped cross-section to a typical glacial trough, U-shaped, with well-marked shoulders at the top of the U. A few miles farther downstream, at the point where the old glacier came to an end, the trough changed suddenly to a gorge, and we found that our U became a V.

Communities

The Kashmiri's food consists chiefly of rice, with some bread and many vegetables; while the Ladakhi eats bread or parched flour of wheat or barley, with much butter, sour milk, and dried apricots. The Kashmiris wear clothes of woven cotton, or rarely of wool; but the Ladakhis, in a colder climate with greater extremes, need something warmer, which they find in the skins of their many flocks. Men, women, and children wear sheepskins, which take the form of coats with the men, and of circular capes, carefully arranged, with the women. As told, at Karbu found the terraces pitted with numerous tunnels, dug for gold which is contained in the gravel. There we met an English engineer prospecting for a mining company. He was disgusted with the meagre quantity of gold; it was not worth looking at, he said. He had found just one thing that interested him — a fragment of good gold ore said to have come from a mine near Lhasa owned by Buddhist lamas. The engineer was going home to tell his company that Tibet was the place to hunt for gold. The terraces furnish not only the one source of mineral wealth in this poor region, but the only level land available for agriculture. Though they are extremely narrow and rocky, fields and hamlets are located upon them wherever water is available for irrigation. The Indus and most of its tributaries have three distinct parts like the Drass, — at the head a broad, glacial valley, smooth and easy to traverse, but cold and almost uninhabitable; in the middle a narrower valley, rendered habitable by its lower altitude and by the terraces which occupy the bottom; and at the lone end a deep, impassable gorge. Sometimes there is no habitable middle part of a valley; and a U-shaped glacial trough gives place abruptly to a V-shaped canyon. Nevertheless, the threefold division and its appropriate response in the habits of organic beings give the essential features of the geography of Ladakh. Arid, inhospitable, and rugged as Ladakh may be, its clear air, bracing climate, and splendid scenery make the traveler long to return to it. The stony villages and ugly people have a peculiar charm. After

leaving the muslim villages in the vicinity of Zoji La and Kurgil, we had our first glimpse of the genuine Buddhist Ladakh at the hamlet of Maulbeck. A winding climb of several hundred feet up a massive tooth of limestone brought us to a lamasery, two whitewashed buildings with bands of red around the top, prominent landmarks, perched on a lofty pinnacle above the broadened upper part of a bleak open valley, surrounded by snowy mountains. Two of the lamas, or monks, clothed in the regulation gowns, caps, and boots, all of purplish red, received us. One, a young man of twenty, led us into the dark room which served as a temple. The other, the head lama, a little, beardless old man, with a most bland and innocent expression, showed us his own small room, which appeared to be the real sanctuary. Our guide from the village, a young man wearing a greasy pig-tail and a long gray gown of wool, prostrated himself on his knees before the door, and touched his forehead to the ground repeatedly. We were not invited to enter. As we gazed in through the door, the room appeared to be a curiosity shop. Brilliant masks, gaudy banners, and colored streamers bearing printed prayers hung from the walls and ceiling; a row of shelves contained the holy Buddhist books, oblong packages of long, narrow leaves wrapped in cloth or leather; small, shining brass bowls full of water stood on boxes on the floor; and among them a huge salver of oil, said to be replenished once a year, bore on its surface an ever-burning wick. The room was regarded with distinctly more veneration than any of the holy places which I later saw in other, larger lamaseries, and the little lama's reverent attitude made us honor it. When I asked the use of a thin, drum-like object hung vertically from the ceiling, the lama smiled like a pleased child. Seating himself before it, he took a sickle-shaped drumstick in his left hand and a cymbal in his right, and illustrated the call to prayer. The childlike simplicity of the two inmates, especially of the old man, impressed me greatly, as did also the cleanness of the monastery. The other two or three lamas, one of whom we had met trudging down the valley, were away on the tours of begging by which the institution is partly supported. Later, I visited other lamaseries, including Himis, the largest, but the impression was by no means so pleasant. The walls and ceilings of the sacred rooms were crowded with inartistic and sometimes vulgar paintings; countless images of Buddha and of saints stood in rows with offerings set before them in the shape of little round bowls of oil supporting burning wicks, or of conventional flowers and symbolic forms modeled in dough; and the open spaces in the middle of the room were filled sometimes with dusty benches, mere planks six inches above the ground, on which the lamas sit to read the holy books. In general there was an appearance of dust and untidiness. Some of the lamas seemed to be men of ability, and all were friendly, but the majority appeared coarse, lazy, avaricious, and sensual. In spite of previous reading as to the resemblance between Buddhism and the Roman Catholic form of

Christianity as it is seen in the less enlightened countries of Europe, I was surprised at the closeness of that resemblance. It appeared not only in the monastic system, well known to be almost identical, but in the form of worship, the lights, the images and pictures, the intricate ritual, the absolute dependence of the people upon the priests, the reliance of the latter upon spectacular effects, and the faith of all in charms and set forms of prayers. It is difficult to say whether the Ladakhi is superstitious because of his religion, or whether his religion is superstitious because of something in his environment. Certain it is that few people are more superstitious, or make their superstition more evident in their religion. In addition to the frequent lamaseries, we found in almost every village scores of "chortans," pagoda-shaped structures of mud and stones, erected partly as receptacles for the ashes of the dead, and partly as works of religious merit. The approaches to villages were marked by "manis," which the Buddhist religiously passes on the left, so that his right hand may always be toward them. They were long heaps of rubble, shaped like sheds, with a width of twenty feet, a height of five or six, and a length of from fifty to a thousand. Each "mani" was covered with hundreds of flat stones, eight or ten inches in diameter, on every one of which the lamas, "for value received," had inscribed the universal prayer, "Om mani padme hum," often interpreted as "Oh, the jewel of the lotus." The number of repetitions of this prayer determines the amount of credit which the worshiper of Buddha lays up for himself in heaven. In the lamaseries the lamas write it on pieces of paper, which are put in hollow wooden cylinders about a foot high and eight inches in diameter. The cylinders are set up in long rows on the outside of a building at a height of three or four feet above the ground, and are mounted so that they revolve easily on vertical axes. Visitors to the lamaseries as well as the lamas themselves take occasion to walk past the rows of cylinders and to strike each one with the right hand in such a way as to cause it to revolve. Each revolution gives the worshiper as much credit as if he had himself said, "Om mani padme hum." The lamas often carry little hand cylinders full of prayers, which they swing round and round instead of telling their beads. Every house has its prayer-inscribed streamers of cloth fluttering from poles on the roof, to keep off demons; and every man, woman, and child is said to wear a charm for the same purpose. Streamers are used to cure all varieties of trouble. At Leh we were shown one set up on a pole a few months before to prevent the demon of the cattle plague from killing the yaks and oxen. The people confessed their regret that it had proved a much less effective preventive than had the drastic measures employed in certain valleys where all ingress and egress, whether of man or beast, had been strictly forbidden. The visit seemed to give real pleasure to the household. Whenever I looked at the wrinkled little mother-in-law, she made a half curtsy, jerked her hand to her forehead, and smilingly said,

"Ju!" In spite of being a Mohammedan, the only one in the village, she was unveiled, and went about freely among the men like the Buddhist women. The position of women among the Ladakhis, as among the Tibetans, of whom, it will be remembered, they are a branch, is peculiar because of the practice of polyandry. This custom, like the prevalence of monasticism, as several writers have pointed out, is probably due chiefly to the limited amount of land available for cultivation, and to the consequent necessity of restricting population. If two brothers from a family of three have a single wife, and if the other becomes a lama, the entire family heritage of fields can be kept undivided, and a single house will serve for the whole family. But the question at once arises, What becomes of the daughters for whom there can be no husbands under such a system? There do not seem to be any. For some unexplained reason, girls appear to be less numerous than boys, as I was told by Dr. Shawe, an English physician, who has lived for years in Leh as a missionary. He knew of no cause, such as female infanticide, which could account for the anomaly. Geographically, the institution of polyandry is most interesting as a unique response to straitened physical conditions. In Ladakh the means of supporting life are scanty, and there is no opportunity to increase the amount of cultivated land, or the number of flocks. In most such lands the population increases until the pinch of want is felt, whereupon emigration ensues. In Ladakh the growth of population has been limited by the two peculiar institutions of polyandry and monasticism. Hence in a region where we should expect frequent movement of part of the inhabitants, there is the opposite condition of great fixity. Objectionable as both polyandry and monasticism are to modern western ideas, some method of limiting population seems to be a necessity in a land where opportunities are so restricted, and migration to unoccupied lands is so difficult. In Baltistan, just west of Ladakh, where physical conditions are similar, these institutions were overthrown some centuries ago by the introduction of Mohammedanism. Hence the people are constantly becoming too numerous, and the poorer ones are compelled to migrate to the most unproductive, and therefore heretofore unoccupied, corners of the regions round about them. The dress and houses of the Ladakhis, their manner of life, and their more obvious habits have been often described. The connection of all these things with physical environment is generally easy to trace. Perhaps the most noteworthy fact in regard to the people is that their characteristic traits of comparative honesty, courage in spite of superstition, industry, intense love of home, and cheerfulness under difficulty, are those which, all over the world, seem to make mountaineers, of whatever race, better men than the inhabitants of plains, where life is easy. The difficulty experienced in bringing water to the places where it is wanted is enormous.

Unfamiliar, unknown, undisturbed and undiscovered

Having remained virtually cut off from the outside world and inaccessible for the outsiders, how the natives pursuing their deal of keeping themselves undisturbed, aloof and a sort of de facto independent, Himalaya contains many peculiar life styles in it. Overlooked by the supreme heights of Himalayan ranges, Himachal is a land of glaciers, of majestic snow fed rivers and cascading streams. This remote mountainous region has emerged after thousands of years of isolation to join the mainstream of national life. literature gives a vivid account of its history, the social and cultural life of its people, and traces the impressive record of its economic development. These mountains, home to Buddhists, Bonpos, Jains, Muslims, Hindus, shamans and animists, to name only a few, are a place of pilgrimage and dreams, revelation and war, massacre and invasion, but also peace and unutterable calm. In an exploration of the region's seismic history, Robert Twigger unravels some of these real and invented journeys and the unexpected links between them. Following a meandering path across the Himalayas to its physical end in Nagaland on the Indian-Burmese border, Twigger encounters incredible stories from a unique cast of mountaineers and mystics, pundits and prophets. The result is a sweeping, enthralling and surprising journey through the history of the world's greatest mountain range. Imagine standing amidst the rugged beauty of the Himalayan landscape, surrounded by peaks that seem to touch the very sky. Here, every rock, every valley, and every snow-capped summit holds a story—a tale passed down through generations, woven into the fabric of local culture and beliefs. As we unravel the mysteries of the Himalayas, exploring the legends that have captivated the imaginations of mountaineers, trekkers, and adventurers for centuries. From gods and goddesses to mythical creatures and sacred rituals, prepare to be enchanted by the magic that lies hidden within these ancient mountains. In the cradle of the Himalayas, mythology intertwines with the very essence of the mountains, where gods and goddesses reign supreme. The legends of these celestial beings are woven into the fabric of Himalayan culture, their stories passed down through generations like precious heirlooms.

For the people of the Himalayas, these legends are a testament to the sacredness of the mountains, a reminder of their divine origins and enduring power. As travelers journey through these ancient lands, they cannot help but feel the presence of the gods and goddesses who dwell among the peaks, their spirits infused into every rock and every whisper of the wind. Regardless of the mythological interpretation, the significance of these stories extends far beyond mere folklore. In the tapestry of the Himalaya, certain peaks and sacred sites emerge as shimmering jewels, each one imbued with its unique mythology and folklore. These hallowed grounds

beckon travelers and pilgrims alike, promising encounters with the divine and glimpses into the mystical realm. Transhumance, or the seasonal migration of livestock, is widely practiced in the Himalayan pastures. Shepherds migrate with their flocks to lower elevations when the weather turns cold.

The Himalayas have a rich and diverse culture, with many religions, traditions, and livelihoods. The dominant religions in the Himalayas are Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. The Greater Himalayan region is mainly Tibetan Buddhist, while the eastern Himalayas and nearby areas of eastern Bhutan have similar cultures and faiths to Yunnan Province of China and Northern Myanmar. Nepal has a mixed cultural identity with both Tibetan and Hindu cultures. Some people in the Himalayas practice terraced agriculture, while others are pastoralists or traders. Many communities in the Himalayas have a culture of conservation, where they depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. They practice small-scale agriculture and effective community management to ensure that their traditional activities are sustainable.

Conclusion

Only Himalaya combines rich cultural traditions and palaces, temples and monasteries with the oddities and natural wonders of the most eye-watering mountain scenery on earth. 'The garden of God' deserves recognition as somewhere special. It cries out for whatever conservational safeguards can be devised. In the middle of the twentieth century, the Himalayan passes that traders, pilgrims and nomads had passed for millennia were blocked by a series of border disputes. Some trade and exchange has restarted across these multiple divides, but the states involved have exerted an exponentially greater effort to solidify control within their borders. They have deployed troops to protect or project their claims and enabled large-scale transport, resource extraction and tourism to reach further into this culturally diverse and ecologically fragile region. Since the contemporary Indian, Chinese and Pakistani states emerged in the 1940s, they have struggled to solidify their control of the Himalaya. The region remains restive. Aksai Chin, between Ladakh (India), the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) (China), and Xinjiang (China), is administered by China and claimed by India. In the East, Arunachal Pradesh is administered by India and claimed by China as Zangnan (Southern Tibet).

For all who journey here as pilgrims, may their vision be purified and all obstacles cleared away. May their lives be filled with joy, and may they gain the highest spiritual attainments.

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RESEARCH TOPIC: Himalaya: A journey to unfamiliar, unknown and undiscovered areas

ABSTRACT: The impact of exploration upon the larger course of geography and associated events is so vast a discipline that only a hint can be given of its real and imagined journey. Whatever is recorded or forgotten in the mists of time, exploration has nearly everywhere prepared the way for expanding knowledge about other or new places and setting up new routes. It has been the prelude to discover land, cultures and lifestyles unknown to us and unfamiliar to the world. Himalaya has been attracting numerous visitors, tourists, and scholars specialized in various fields since long and had been fascinating for non-Himalayan folks. The geographical research looks to the records of explorations for the light that they can shed upon relationship between the processes and events of exploration, on the one hand, and the geographic environment on the historical study of geography, on the other hand. There exists a vast gap in reports and complete ground reality yet to be explored.

The present work is an attempt, in continuation of the first and second spell as IIAS Associateship, aims to highlight:

- a) What specific geographic elements (wind, river, precipitation, distance, people, practices, perceptions, faith and fantasy) may support or hinder the process of exploration.
- b) How people and communities settled and survived even under extremely different and difficult geographic and economic challenges
- c) Having remained virtually cut off from the outside world and inaccessible for the outsiders, how the natives pursuing their deal of keeping themselves undisturbed, aloof and a sort of de facto independent.

Himalaya had experienced a long and rich history based on its geography before the arrival and influence of outside people and still contains many such rich areas unknown to the outside world.