



SIVA'S HIMALAYA: THE LIVING LEGEND

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Abstract:

Himalaya, the crown of Bharatavarsha, the pride of India, the glory of the Orient, nurtures innumerable legends and miracles in its fold. It is a harbinger of solace for the hermits, place of meditation for the aspirants, pathway for the Ganges and the birthplace of priceless herbs. The magnificence of the Himalaya is always associated to Lord Siva, who resides there with his consort, goddess Parvati. The abode of the Parents of this Universe, the Himalayas stands as a proud, unshakable and inspiring divine hill that looks on the ascetics, aspirants and saints who ascend its heavenly summits to accomplish their Goal-divine. Like Lord Siva and Parvati, the Himalaya and the Ganges are eternal partners conceived in spiritual or metaphysical connotations. The present paper focuses on the philosophical aspect of the holy mountain-range and at the same time, alludes to the message conveyed through its unconquered peaks.

Key-words: Crown, solace, birthplace, Parents, Goal-divine, eternal partners, unconquered.

Introduction

Himalaya, an 'alaya' (home) of 'him' (snow) is the pride of India; it is the crown of glory that Bharatavarsha wears since time immemorial. Standing with its head erect, it gives the immortal message of steadfastness, resoluteness, high commitment, dedication, persistence and firm determination. Extending over almost 1,500 miles in length, the Himalaya is not only a mountainous range that envelops the north. It is well-known, India is marked for her essential personality as a land that holds remarkable, meaningful and spiritually-oriented things. In India, the Ganges is not a river-bed of ordinary water. It is considered to be Mother Ganges and its water is called 'jala'. In this land of the Orient, the parents and the teachers are held equal to God:

Matri devo bhava

Pitri devo bhava

Acharya devo bhava.

Here, the spiritual preceptor is equal to God:

Gururbrahma Gururvishnur gururdevo Maheswarah

Guruh Sakshat Param Brahma Tasmai Shrigurave Namah.

i.e. Salutatorians to the preceptor who is verily Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara and who personifies the Supreme Being. In India, the land of the gods, the guest is supposed to be equal to God:

Atithi Devo Bhava.

Here, the earth is not simply soil; it is Dharti Mata The psyche of the Indians envelopes each and every spec in the halo of spirituality, raising it from its initial substance or appearance to high peaks of divinity. The Rig Veda says:

Aa No Bhadraah Kratavo Yantu Vishvatah¹

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side.

Here, everything is holy sacred, divine, saintly and heavenly, as if God created everything to divinize man. Likewise, the Himalayas is not only a mountain; it is the holy hill that nurtures innumerable legends and miracles in its vast fold. To some saints like H.H. Sri Swami Sivananda, he is the Father Divine, as he himself states:

I love Ganga and Himalaya. Ganga is my Mother Divine and

Himalaya is my Father Divine.² Regarding Ganga, he says: Ganga has nourished me. Ganga has comforted me. Ganga has taught me the truths of Upanishads. Salutations to Mother Ganga.³ India is incomplete without the Himalaya and Ganga. Swami Rama, a saint born and brought up in the valleys of the Himalayas, says: For me, the Himalayas are my spiritual parents and living there was like living in the lap of a mother. She brought me up in her natural environment and inspired me to live a particular style of life.⁴

As per its mythical aspect, the Himalayas are associated with Himavan, the father of Goddess Parvati who is the consort of Lord Siva and is ever united with Him. The great Sanskrit poet Kalidasa's 'Raghuvansa' starts with an invocation to the god and the goddess:

Vagarthavivasampriktau,
Vagarthapratipattaye;
Jagatah pitarau Vande
Parvati parameswarau⁵

Like the word and its meaning, the two are eternally united; I bow before the Parents of the Universe. Studded with innumerable sanctuaries like Amarnath, Haridwar, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Pasupat Nath, Neelkanth etc., the divine heights of the holy Himalayas present an unearthly scenario before the world. One of the great peaks named 'Gouri Shikhar' is supposed to be the sacred place of Goddess Parvati's penance.⁶ Like the word and its meaning, the Himalaya is eternally united with the Ganga. Originating from the Gomukh, the holy Ganga girdles over 500 miles before appearing on the plains of Bharatavarsha. Her presence sanctifies the place and the city where she flows. Besides the Ganga, other rivers like the Jamuna, Saraswati, Brahmaputra, the Indus and most of their tributaries find their origin in the holy mountain.

Being an integral part of the Indian heritage, the Himalayas find due place in the epics and other literature produced by the great writers of India. The Mahabharata frequently alludes to the Himalaya. It states that the Pandavas, at the time of their

renunciation "behold with heaven-aspiring hearts the mighty mountain, Himavat. Beyond its lofty peaks, they passed towards a sea of sand."⁷ 'The Meghadutam' by the renowned poet Kalidas, alludes to the majestic mountain-range in detail. Another major work by the poet-dramatist –

'Kumarasambhavam' pursues the spirit of the Himalayas. Bharavi, the other great Sanskrit poet, has penned a great epic 'Kiratarjuniyam'; most of the scenes in this epic are laid in the Himalayas.

Supreme Silence is the language of God. One who seeks Him must shake hands with it. Hence, the sages and saints, since the dawn of creation, have preferred their renunciate-life as a Himalayan Yogi, either wandering among its peaks or mediating inside its hidden caves, deriving glorious spiritual energy and supreme solace. According to Swami Vivekananda:

The loftiest tenets of ethics and morality that have raised human beings to the magnanimous heights of Supreme Perfection and the sublime truths of spirituality that have made men divine and moulded the spiritual life of nations, have all emanated from the cradle of the Himalayas.⁸ Irrespective of caste, creed, religion etc., the Himalaya has always welcomed and shed its blessings on the millions who have entered its lap for peace or higher ideals.

As a part of nature, the Himalaya stands unparalleled in the universe with its snow-clad peaks. Being the birthplace of countless herbs, it is also the up bringer of countless beautiful, rare and heavenly flowers. The grandeur and solace emanated from each spec of this mountain-divine excels description. One needs to have the ears to hear its music-divine, eyes to behold its immortal beauty and strength to ascend its towering inaccessible heights. Swami Rama says: In the depth of silence is hidden the source of love. The eye of faith alone can unveil and see the illumination of that love.⁹ The heights of perennial perfection of the Himalayas bear spiritual or metaphysical connotations too. They point towards

ascendence unto grandeur, exalted vision and Supreme Purpose in life. The serene snows signify the purity and untouched beauty of the soul; when the rays of the sun fall upon them making them shine bright, they signify the happiness of the soul as it receives the shedding of God's light upon it. The Himalayan peaks are a pointer towards a journey from the humdrum world of materialism to a quiet, peaceful world of silence, solitude and spirituality. A true aspirant, as he ascends the holy hills, feels one with the Universal Being. They purge the dross in the soul, thereby reminding him of the utter futility of lustful and sensual life, its impermanence, unreal and disease-stricken state. The high hills take the aspirant from a transient, unreal and unhappy state to a state of spiritual brilliance and immortal bliss. The seeker gets rid of negative traits like greed, hatred, lust, selfishness, anger, envy, jealousy etc. and learns to lead a life of selflessness, universal love and fearlessness.

The divine and mystic inspiration emanated from the Himalayan range certainly does not ask one to shirk from one's duty. They are a source of guidance to regain spiritual vigour and strength and engage in one's duties as a true citizen. It must not be misunderstood that the saints and sages leave off their duty by renouncing their household etc. Instead, they are on their way towards the fulfillment of the Highest Goal of human life. No one can sit idle in life. Saints and sages work through their subtle bodies. The renowned saint-scholar of Uttarakhand, H.H. Sri Swami Krishnananda says: Prakriti is the cosmic evolutionary process. It will compel us to take part in its activity ... The forces of nature will drag our whole being towards it either by apparently sitting quiet in a 'tamasic' mood, or 'rajasically' running about in the form of work that we seem to be doing for others, or 'sattaric' activity which is contemplation.¹⁰

He again puts it thus:

Saints and sages, Masters and Incarnations do not work through their

bodies, because they are not bodies... Their bodies are only the vehicles of the force which they really are.¹¹

Conclusion:

Hence, the masterly Himalayas have ever been, are and will ever be the fountain-head of immense inspiration for all – majestic hills for the poets, unconquerable peaks for the mountaineers, beautiful scenery for the painters and a holy place for saints and seekers.

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