



THE AUTHOR

Scholar, statesman and diplomat, Kavalam Madhava Panikkar was educated at Madras and Oxford. A scholar of Christ's Church and Bar-at-Law (Middle Temple) he became a Professor and stayed in the ranks of journalism for a while until he joined the Chamber of Princes as Secretary to the Chancellor. This was the first step in his rise from one position to another in the service of Princely India.

A past master of statecraft, Panikkar's great ability was recognised by the Government of India which used his vast experience in the integration of Indian States in the Indian Union and posted him as the Ambassador for India to Peking and later on to Cairo and Paris. Later he was on the States Reorganization Commission. Now he is the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University.

A distinguished writer and historian, Panikkar has written as many as twenty-four books on Indian history and history. In Malayalam he has written eleven volumes of poetry, five volumes of prose, and with other miscellaneous works. His book *Western Dominance* has been translated into several languages.

In the present book, Panikkar draws on his accumulated experience to a discussion of the geographical forces that govern India—an aspect so long neglected but so vital to the preservation of India's unity and independence.



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THE HIMALAYAS
in
INDIAN LIFE

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आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, I-89-i

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**THE HIMALAYAS
IN
INDIAN LIFE**

By
K. M. PANIKKAR

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THE HIMALAYAS IN INDIAN LIFE

K. M. PANIKKAR



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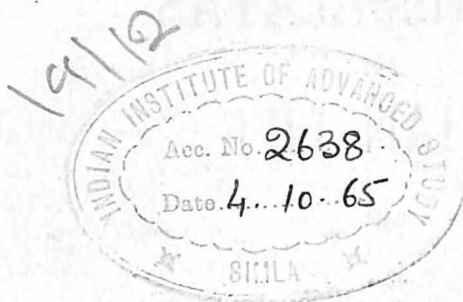
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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The Bhavan's Book University volumes had rare success. About a million and a quarter volumes have been sold in about eleven years. However, there is an insistent demand for the stray volumes which the Bhavan has issued from time to time at a lower price. In order to meet this demand, it has been decided to issue the new One-Rupee Book University Series side by side with the Book University Series.

I hope this new One-Rupee Series will have the same good fortune which the other Series had, of being useful to those who are interested in the fundamental values of Indian Culture, and of reaching out to a wider audience.

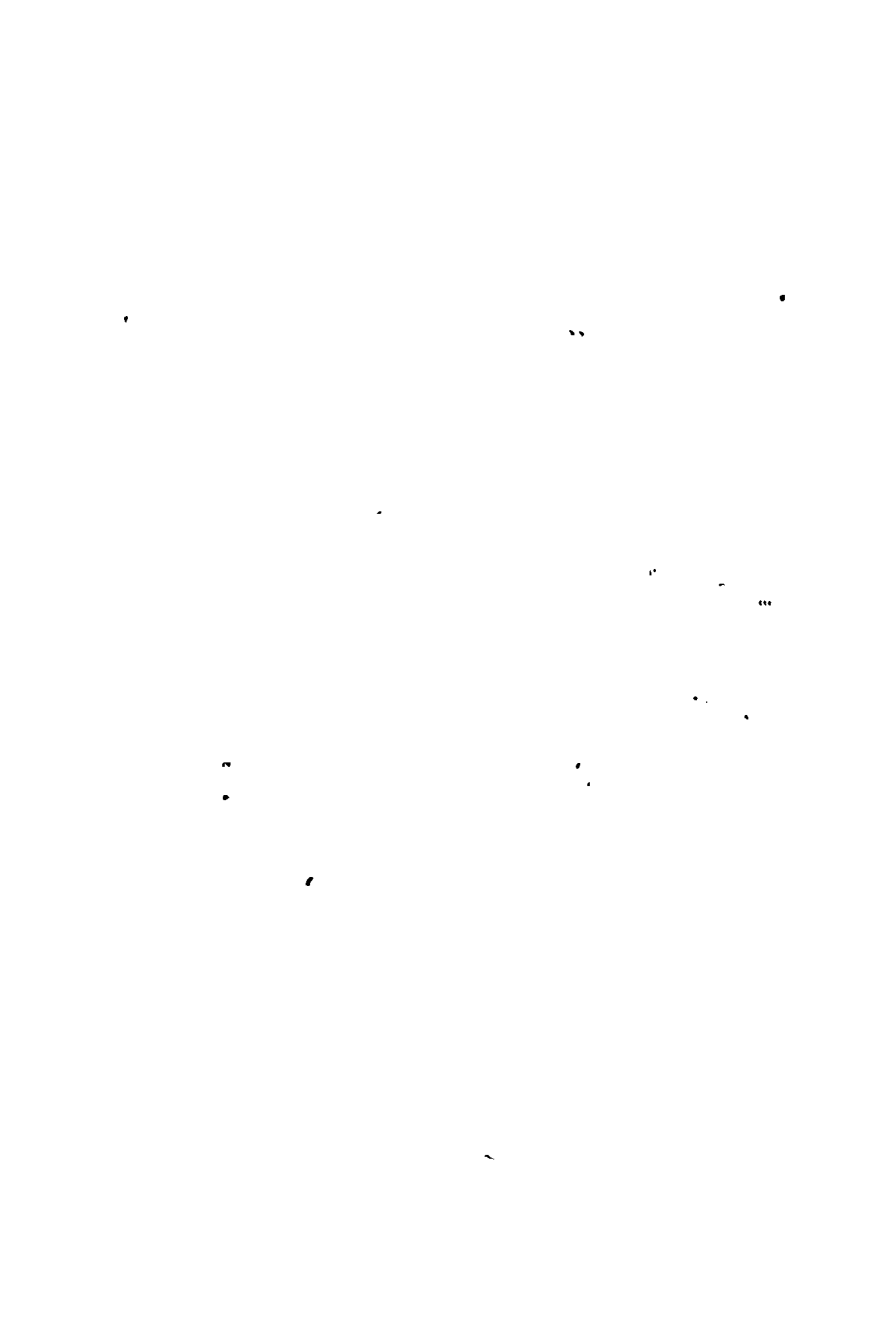
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K. M. Munshi



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An Integral Part of Our Heritage

THE geographical feature which dominates India most is the Himalayas. There are no mountain ranges anywhere in the world which have contributed so much to shape the life of a country as the Himalayas have in respect of India. It is not only the political life of the people of Hindustan, but the religion, mythology, art and literature of the Hindus that bear the imprint of the great mountain barrier. To the Hindus the Himalayas have been a perpetual source of wonder and veneration. To the peoples of the south, a thousand and five hundred miles away, to the men of the sea coast, to the dwellers of the desert land of Rajputana no less than to the inhabitants of the Gangetic valley the Himalayas have been the symbol of India. The majesty of the snow-clad peaks, visible from afar, the inaccessibility of even the lesser ranges, the mysteries of the gigantic glaciers and the magnificence of the great rivers that emerge from its gorges have combined to give to the Himalayas a

majesty which no other mountain range anywhere can claim. The Hindus have invested it with an element of the divine: it is *devata*—a fraction of divine majesty.

It is the abode of the gods to the Hindus, not the friendly Olympus of the Greeks, but the inaccessible seat of the great *Siva*. From one end to the other, it is studded with sacred places of pilgrimage—Amarnath, Jwala Mukhi, Hardwar, Kedarnath, Badrinath, Pasupat and the rest and above all the magnificent and isolated peak of Kailas, the unapproachable seat of the Great God himself. Parvati, the consort of Siva, the devi whose worship in different forms constitutes so much of popular Hinduism, is the daughter of the mountain god. One of the great peaks, Gouri Sikhar, identified in popular mind with Everéſt, is held sacred as the place of her penance. The holy Ganges takes its rise in the Himalayas and girdles it for over 500 miles before it streams into the plains of Hindustan to fertilise and sanctify its soil. The Jumna and the Saraswati, the Brahmaputra and the Indus and most of their tributaries on which depends the life of India, all have their origin in

the Himalayas. "The massive heights of Tibet" says Owen Lattimore (*Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, p. 207) "dividing India from China also nourish the sources of the Yangtze and the Yellow River flowing into China, the Indus and the Brahmaputra flowing into India, the Mekong flowing into Siam and the Salween flowing into Burma." It will thus be seen that the central plateau created by the Himalayas is the source of life as of civilisation of nearly a half of the human race. Well might Sri Krishna claim in the *Gita*: "Among mountains I am the Himalayas."

In a very special measure the Himalaya is India's national mountain as the Ganges is its national river. It is true that on one side there is the great plateau of Tibet, but it is a thinly populated country, unimportant except for its size and mystery. The popular mind, not only in India but elsewhere has from time immemorial identified the Himalayas with India. The very description of India which has come down to us by tradition is *Himavat-Setu Par-yantam*, from the Himalayas to Rameshwaram.

The conquest of the lower regions of the Himalayas and the exploration of the great

range itself must have been acts of high adventure in the dawn of Indian history. When the story of India unfolds itself we find flourishing Hindu kingdoms already established in Kashmir and Nepal, both being valleys ensconced in the Himalayas. The kingdoms of Dwigarta, Trigarta and Madra in the sub-Himalayan regions are already famous in the time of the *Mahabharata*. In the story of Rama there is but little allusion to the Himalayas. It is true that the spot of Lakshmana's penance is in the lower valleys of the Himalayas, a few miles to the north of Hardwar, but the mountain range itself does not figure in the *Ramayana*. On the other hand in the *Mahabharata* story allusion to the Himalayas is frequent. We may thus presume that the Hindu conquest of Himalayas took place mainly in the period between the Rama story and the *Mahabharata* battle. The Pandava brothers at the time of their renunciation, it is stated in the epic, marched northwards and "beheld with heaven-aspiring hearts the mighty mountain, Himavat. Beyond its lofty peaks they passed towards a sea of sand". The holy lake of Manasarowar and the great Kailas

itself, both on the Tibetan side, had become familiar to the people of India long before the Christian era.

The establishment of the great Hindu centres of pilgrimage from Amarnath (14,000 ft.) in Kashmir to Pasupat in Nepal could not have been later than the first century A.D. Long before this they had become popular centres of religious worship; holy men must have made their *ashramas* in spots where the scenery was majestic and life secluded, far away from the marring crowds of civilisation. In the period of the Rama story, the colonisation of the plains of India had not been complete and the great centres of *ashrama* life were in Dandaka and Panchavati—forests in the heart of Hindustan itself. The story of the *Mahabharata* clearly proves that *Aryavarta* had been fully colonised by that time and the rishis and *sannyasis* had moved to the more inaccessible heights of the Himalayas.

Gradually the entire range of the Himalayas, where human habitation was possible, became dotted with holy places. One of the most frequented of these, which attract thou-

sands of pilgrims every year is Badrinath which is 10500 ft. above sea level. Between Hardwar and Badri, there are literally hundreds of sacred spots each sanctified by some legend and considered holy by Hindus everywhere. The extent of the sanctification of the Himalayas may be inferred from the fact that on the fifty-six mile route from Kalka (Kalika) to Simla (Shymala) every important point is named after a temple dedicated to the Devi.

The gorges and the routes across the Himalayas were also known and explored by that time. Kalidasa in the *Meghaduta* gives a description of the gorges through which the cloud has to pass to cross the Himalayan range and reach the mysterious city of Alaka, which mythology locates near Kailas. In the 6th, 7th and 8th centuries we have ample literary evidence of Indian rulers annexing Himalayan kingdoms. Bana's description in *Harsha Charita* of the conquest of Kashmir and Nepal by Sri Harsha shows that these kingdoms had long ago been incorporated into the historic conception of the homeland of the Hindus. This must indeed be considered an epic story,

for it must have taken centuries of undaunted effort before the great mountain range was so fully explored, its habitable valleys colonised, its passes discovered and brought into use. All but the highest peaks, most of which had till a few years ago resisted even the efforts of mountain climbers equipped with the latest conveniences of science, had long ago been conquered by the Hindu explorers of those days.

The dominance of this great mountain range on the mind of the Hindus has only increased with time. Their epic poems describe its glory. The *Puranas* describe it with awe and veneration. In many of the legends they embody, the Himalayas have an important place. Two of Kalidasa's major works are dominated by the spirit of the Himalayas. *Kumarasambhava* is *par excellence* the epic of the mountain. The first canto opens with a great and thrilling description of the mountain-god and the magic of its presence is conveyed by the poet all through the major events of the epic. The *Meghaduta*—or the cloud messenger is no less a tribute to the majesty of the Himalayas.

The theme of the poem is the message that a Yaksha, a resident of Alaka, near Kailas, living a life of exile on the Vindhya, sends to his beloved through a cloud. It is through the Himalayas that the cloud has to pass and some of the most beautiful verses in the poem describe the cloud's ascent from the plains to the Himalayan heights. The scenes of Bharavi's epic* are laid in the Himalayas. The *Kathasaritsagara*—the ocean of stories—contains numerous passages describing the beauty of the great mountain. Nor is this confined to the literature of continental India. Wherever the Hindus colonised they took with them their love of the Himalayas. In *kavi* literature of Java: e.g. in *Smara Dahana* the same lingering admiration of the snow-clad mountain can be seen. Nor is it to be forgotten that the temple in which the King of Siam is crowned even today is known as Mount Kailas.

* *Kiratarjuniyam*.

Like No Other Mountains in the World

The Himalayan range, strictly defined, extends from the Indus to the Brahmaputra—a length of 1,500 miles. This is, however, only an artificial distinction. The two props, the Hindukush in the West and the Lushai hills in the East, are continuous with the great central belt to which geographers at the present time confine the name. It has an average width of 150 miles and within this enormous area the central range rises to an average height of 20,000 feet, eternally snow-bound, magnificent and majestic in its virgin whiteness. Rising above this huge rampart are the great peaks, Everest, Godwin Austin, Nangaparbat, Kinchinjunga and Dhavalagiri, mostly unconquered by human endeavour and challenging the resources of man to climb them. To the south of the central range is a second mountain system where the average elevation is between 12 and 15 thousand feet, also snow-capped and majestic but more friendly to human contacts and less inaccessible to pilgrims, explorers and

sannyasis. Gradually they descend into another range, the outer Himalayas and the Sewaliks, pleasant, cool and finely wooded, extending a friendly welcome to human effort and habitation.

“Even a simple topographical description of this multitude of little world Gilgit, Rupshu, Spiti and the rest would fill a volume of Himalayan dimensions,” says Spate.¹

Kashmir, the Happy Vale, Kulu, the valley of Gods, the Doon, with the sacred Hardwar and the hallowed *tapovan* and Nepal are but a few idyllic pleasantries of this mountain continent, while the new cities which stud the lower ranges from Gulmarg to Darjeeling, the pilgrim centres of the modern age, are but her guest-houses.

Glaciers are of the economy of its higher ranges, primeval forest, rushing torrents and frightening gorges are of its towering mountains. Its climatology reveals a world of its own.

“These (the Himalayas) are,” says an English writer, “the supreme mountains of the earth, tossed high in some convulsion of the

¹ O. H. K. Spate—*India and Pakistan*, p. 364.

primal age, and stricken immobile, a frozen ocean of lava waves whose crests are on the outer fringes of space, whose depths and hallows are the secret places of the earth unknown and inaccessible; rock-cut gorges set about by forest swamp and interlocking jungle within whose grim recesses life may pullulate shut off for ever from the outer world, Himalaya the abode of snow. At least 40 heights exceed 24,000 feet. This mountain continent makes its own variations of climate from the coldest, aimless arid heights to dark, steamy sunless deeps, glaciers whence torrents run through caverns, measureless to man, down to the sun-parched plains of India. Here the Ganges, the Indus, the Brahmaputra, the Alaknanda burst smitten from the bound rock to wind a hundred miles through hidden valleys, subterranean gorges and leagues of treacherous Tarai marsh to spread their healing waters on the plains and so to find the ocean and the end of all things, reabsorption in the infinite, reincarnation and rebirth—the very symbol of the pantheistic cults that give them adoration.”²

² M'cintyre—*Attack on Everest*—pp. 10-11. (Metheun)

Geologists claim that the Himalayas came into existence as a result of the crumpling of the earth's crust. It is said that there is conclusive geological evidence that some portion of the Himalayas must have been under the sea at some far distant date. These are matters of scientific interest, but the essential geographical fact with regard to this mountain system is that it is the culmination of a vast elevated plateau, Tibet, the average height of which is 15,000 feet above the sea level.

There are two aspects of the Tibetan plateau which are of great significance when we consider the Himalayas as a protective barrier of India. The first is the fact that the plateau of Tibet has as its northern boundary the Kuenlun mountains, in the west the Karakorum and in the south the Himalayas and the east is equally mountain bound. Secondly, its own elevation is above that of ordinary mountain ranges. The mountainous area to the north of India has to be considered strategically as one, a great quadrilateral, the middle of which is an elevated plateau 15,000 feet above sea level and the southern ramparts an invulnerable range of an average height of

20,000 feet. The area enclosed is 500,000 sq. miles, frightening and formidable in its geographical features, an arid waste, windswept and waterless where trees do not grow—snowy steppes inhospitable to man.

In the Himalayas so far surveyed there are, we are told—

74	peaks over	24,000	feet
48	„ „	25,000	„
16	„ „	26,000	„
5	„ „	27,000	„
and 3	„ „	28,000	„

in all 146 peaks which are among the highest in the World. “This vast 2,000 miles of mountain sprawl,” says M’cintyre, “would stretch from Calais to the Caspian sea; valley, plateau and pinnacle, nature in her most savage and gentle moods, hot hells of steaming jungle lands, cold hells of the high reaches: lovely flower-carpeted valley, bleak windswept plateau, deep gorge where glaciers 1,000 feet thick have cut the mountain side like a *bruin*, ice ledges overhanging frightful precipices from which they crash with cataclysmic force, incalculable variations of weather and climate”. This is the Himalaya.

But the quadrilateral of which the Himalaya is the southern rampart is something which no geographer has yet fully described. Sven Hedin's *Trans-Himalaya* gives us a graphic idea of this strange wilderness placed on the roof of the world. It was after 79 days of march that Hedin and his party came across a human being. The extraordinary adventures of that singular journey pass beyond the realms of belief: wolves howling close at hand, wild yaks charging, kaleidoscopic change of weather from extreme heat to extreme cold, sudden storms and equally sudden stillnesses, physical features which are enough to frighten men and 79 days of isolation. The following description of one of the days—not by any means the worst of his journey—may give an impression of what Tibetan weather is like. “We marched to the south-east in a strong south-west storm and were almost suffocated in the gusts of dust-laden air, which swept along the ground. We suffer greatly and cannot use our hands, the map sheet is torn in pieces and we wonder if we shall live to reach the next camp. Our faces are distorted and assume quite a different expression.

The eyes are blood-shot and water, tears run down our cheeks, catch the dust and freeze. The lips swell and burst, and the skin round the nails cracks so that the finger tips bleed. At last more dead than alive we reach the camp. We hasten to restore the circulation but it takes time. By degrees our facial muscles recover their elasticity and return to their proper position and we regain our former aspect.”³

This enormous expanse lies to the north of the Himalayas, inaccessible to man and beast. Its northern ramparts—the Kuenlun mountains—in themselves only a little less formidable than the Himalayas: beyond them lie Mongolia and the Gobi desert. Thus for over a thousand miles to the north Hindustan has a protective area which no other country possesses.

³ *Trans-Himalaya*, p. 197.

Early British Treks and Explorations

The English East India Company, interested as it was originally in trade and later in loot, concerned itself but little with the Himalayas. It was only in the time of Warren Hastings when dreams of Empire began to trouble the Company's statesmen that the Himalayas began to attract attention. In 1774 Warren Hastings sent Bogle into Tibet and the first modern attempt to establish trans-Himalayan relations began with this unheralded move. It was however the Gurkha War (1814-1816) that brought the British directly into the Himalayas. In the beginning of the 19th century the Gurkha Kingdom included practically the whole of central Himalayas, from Sikkim in the east to Simla in the west. The Hardwar valley and Dehra Dun and the area upto Simla formed part of this great Hindu State. By the treaty which ended the war the territories of the British in India included for the first time the Himalayan valleys of Garhwal and Kumaon and the petty rulers of the Himala-

yan States upto Kangra were "liberated" and brought under the paramountcy of the Crown. The Nepalese also evacuated Sikkim which became a British protectorate.

A period of notable activity in Himalayan exploration began with the acquisition of Simla and its gradual transformation into a summer resort of the Government of India. The Sutlej gorges were first explored and in 1818 Alexander Gerard crossed into Tibet along the route which was later on developed into the "great Hindustan-Tibet road." The cutting of this road, which is undoubtedly a great engineering feat might be described as the first attempt to connect India with the trans-Himalayan plateau. The "great Hindustan-Tibet Road" belying its name is but a bridle path, but it passes through some of the most difficult terrain ever trodden by man. It has four natural divisions. The first is from Simla to Narkanda. In the second stage it descends into the Sutlej valley past Rampur and again rises at Gaura. Then in the third stage, it continues along the mountain sides, through forests of deodar, crosses the Sutlej at Wangtu bridge and ascends to Oorni. At

the last stage from Oorni to Pangay, a distance of 25 miles, the road runs on a height of about 9,000 feet. Today a fair road connects Western Tibet with the Simla region.

The junction of the Sutlej and Spiti rivers takes place between unapproachable mural precipices. The boundary between India and Tibet at this point runs over the Lio Porguyle peak, which is truly one of the wonders of the Himalayas. The following is the description that a traveller has left us. "Even more memorable than the Kailas this inaccessible mountain suggested an inaccessible dwelling place of the Gods: a fortress shaped by hands, but not human hands; and if the scene was impressive by day it was absolutely overpowering at night, when the orb of night was slowly rising behind the dark precipice on which we midway stood. While itself unseen the moon's white light illuminated the deep gorges of the Spiti river and threw a silvery splendour on the marble-like towers and battlements of Lio Porguyle. It did not at all appear as if any external light were falling, but rather as if this great castle of the Gods, being transparent as alabaster were lighted from within and shone

in its own radiance, throwing a supernatural light on the savage scenes around.”

The second major road across the Himalayas is the Leh-Kashgar route which used to be frequented by caravans from Sinkiang. The building of this road which crosses the Karakorum range was undertaken after a report by Pandit Manphul about the political conditions in Kashgar and the possibilities of trade with that area. The revolt of Yakub Beg and the establishment of the short-lived kingdom of Kashgaria had awakened vain hopes in the imperial minds of Calcutta and Lahore and though the political dreams vanished, the Leh-Kashgar road remained an important trans-Himalayan highway until 1951, when Sinkiang was declared a closed area by the Central People's Government of China.

Before the Srinagar-Leh road was opened, the road to Chinese Turkestan lay along a bridle path from Simla, through the Kulu valley over the Roland pass and then through Lahoul over the Barra Lacha pass.

A third major route across the Himalayas came to be opened later in the 19th century, with the establishment of the protectorate over

Sikkim and its absorption into the Indian political system. In 1886 a Tibetan force crossed the Jhelap pass and attacked Sikkim, but withdrew after an ultimatum was sent to the Tibetan commander in 1888. The importance of the passes from Sikkim was thus brought to the notice of the Indian Government. The result was the establishment of a trading post at Yatung, but the progress of trans-Himalayan communications was slow. Early in the 20th century the Indian Government under Lord Curzon forced the issue and the result was the Younghusband Mission which marched across the Himalayan passes and concluded a treaty (1904). Its political and economic aspects do not concern us here but from the point of view of the opening up of the Himalayas the arrangements concluded were significant as in addition to Yatung, trade marts were opened at Gyantse and Gangtok in western Tibet. Apart from these "roads" there are immemorial tracks along which pilgrims have trudged through ages to worship at Kailas and bathe in the Manasarowar. Also the Himalayan States like Rampur Busshair, Tehri Garhwal, Sikkim and Bhutan, not to mention the king-

dom of Nepal, have knowledge of paths and tracks through which their trade passes across to Tibet. Annually over 12,000 Indians including pilgrims and traders reach western Tibet through various passes, a significant enough fact in considering the routes across the Himalayas.

The exploration of the lower Himalayan area on the Tibetan side was the work of the Trigonometrical Survey of India. Much scientific effort and skill was spent to trace the course of the Brahmaputra in Tibet and to map areas which had not passed into geographical knowledge. The names of the heroic Indian explorers who undertook much of this work remain shrouded in the records of the Department and are known to the public only by mysterious letters.

Hill Stations and the Quickening Pace of Progress

An equally important, if more spectacular development, in regard to the Himalayas which the 19th century witnessed was the growth of the great hill stations. Following the Nepal war, the area between Kangra and the present Nepal border, including what the Hindu public considered the most sacred areas of Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath, passed under the control of the Government of India. Lord Amherst seems to have been the first to hit upon the idea of converting Simla into a hill station. This decision was important, for from it stemmed not only the magnificent system of hill stations from Dalhousie to Darjeeling, but the exploration of the Sutlej valley already alluded to. Simla however did not become the summer capital of India till after many years. Lord Auckland and later Dalhousie used it as their summer residence but it was only Lord Lawrence who made it

a condition that he should be allowed to spend his summer there.

Other suitable sites were soon discovered and major towns like Mussouri, Nainital and Darjeeling developed urban amenities on Himalayan heights. Situated well inside the mountain ramparts, these towns had to be connected by roads, railways and other forms of communications and as a result the lower regions began to be developed systematically. On the Kalka-Simla route alone, the intermediate stations which came into existence included such notable towns as Kasauli, cantonment areas like Dagshai and Subatu, sanatoria like Dharampur and lesser resorts like Solan, Khandeghat and the Maharaja of Patiala's summer capital, Chail. The entire area was opened up. Though the development of this area was considerably retarded by the fact that they were held in fragmentised portions by petty princes, they were gradually absorbed into the economic structure of India.

Wherever a major hill station was established, a similar process was noticeable. As a consequence, by the first quarter of the 20th century, the lower ranges of the Himalayas

upto a depth of twenty to thirty miles, and an average height of 6,000 feet became integral parts of Hindustan, where an economic life different from that of the plains began to develop. From the borders of Nepal to the Kulu valley tea became a major crop. The Kulu valley became the orchard of India, its apples acquiring a fame which rivals those of California. The cultivation of potatoes and sub-tropical legumes became also matters of importance.

The only area, however, which was systematically developed was the Dehra Dun valley. This area which is enclosed by the Ganges and the Jumna is about 70 miles in length and 20 miles in depth and at one time the proposal was considered of converting it into a European colony, something like the Kenya high-lands. Lying between the Sewalik and the Himalayan range, and enjoying a pleasant climate and a varied vegetation, the Doon valley lent itself to development as it was under the direct administration of the United Provinces. Road and railway communications opened up the area and its natural advantages helped it to become the centre

of numerous institutions of all-India importance. The Roorkee College established in 1844 may be said to have been the forerunner of the great body of institutions which make Dehra Dun one of the centres of Indian academic life. The Indian Institute of Forest Research, the Indian Military Academy, the Doon Public School and numerous special schools for superior education have given to the valley an atmosphere of culture and research.

The 19th century also witnessed the utilisation of Himalayan water resources for purposes of irrigation. The Jumna Canal and the harnessing of the Sutlej and other Punjab Rivers made India dependent more than ever on the resources of the Himalayas. The economy of the Punjab and even of the desert areas of Rajputana became related to the flow of water from these mountains.

Freedom Heralds a Dynamic New Vista

It is however only with the achievement of independence that India fully realised the inestimable wealth she has in water, electric power and other basic resources, stored up in the Himalayas: how the floods which now cause destruction and disaster could be controlled and made to fertilise areas, yield power and generate life: how rivers can be dammed at very high levels, as at Kosi fifteen thousand feet above sea level, and made to serve human interests, how the glaciers themselves can be tapped and how the higher ranges, so far only the object of awe and veneration, can be made subservient to man. In the 19th century utilisation of Himalayan waters, power played no part. The Mandi electric scheme (1921) based on Jogendra Nagar was the first attempt in this line. The post-independence schemes, the Nangal, the Ganga and Kosi dam projects have the generation of electric power as one of their main purposes.

Few people have realised to what extent the

Himalayan valleys await to be populated and developed. From Chamba to the Naga hills there are numerous rich, thinly populated valleys, which except for the Dehra Dun area have so far been neglected. The main reason for this neglect was that this territory from the border of Kashmir to that of Tehri was, with minor exceptions, under the government of petty princelings, whose authority and privileges, a paramount power solicitous of the welfare of its feudatories, championed and upheld. The princes themselves frightened by the strength of the democratic movement in what was British India, were happy to exclude the penetration of their States by people from the plains.

The integration of the States following the independence of India has changed all this. The Hill States in the Simla region have been constituted into a Lt. Governor's province known as Himachal Pradesh—the Himalayan region. Naturally rich, possessing an equable climate, and but thinly populated at the present time, the Himachal Pradesh if properly developed may become one of the vital economic areas of India. An enquiry conducted

by a distinguished American expert in 1936-37 on behalf of the Maharaja of Patiala, about the prospects of a sub-tropical fruit cultivation in the Kohistan area (between Kalka and Simla) showed that under proper scientific direction, every variety of fruit grown in California could be cultivated in that area. The valleys of the Himachal Pradesh are even richer than the Kohistan area of Patiala. Luscious grapes, peaches and pears go waste in the inaccessible valleys of Busshair Rampur. The rearing of silkworms is also possible in the valleys.

With the abolition of fragmented jurisdictions, the difficulties that stood in the way of active colonisation would now vanish. A suitable road system can connect the most inaccessible areas with the plains bringing economic prosperity to the population and opening up the areas for development. Natural water resources can be surveyed and made available for cultivation and the scientific methods of lift irrigation can provide ample water supply. The extreme cold which in a more primitive time made human habitation of these altitudes difficult can now be over-

come. There is no reason why the spirit that colonised these areas in the earlier ages should not now receive the necessary impetus to carry the work forward and open up the lower Himalayan ranges and unite them with the life of India.

The *terai* lands to the south of the Gurkha kingdom are also showing the signs of a new life. The separation of the jute-growing areas of East Bengal from India has opened up the prospect of a valuable money crop for an area which had so far been neglected or reserved only for the amusement of the big game hunters. Also the reclamation of the *terai* has been taken up as an immediate project for the purpose of rehabilitating refugees from the Punjab.

The territories of Bhutan and Sikkim in the East and the undeveloped areas behind the Macmohan line are also likely to witness a new growth during the next quarter of a century. These areas, so long neglected, have now acquired a strategic and historic importance. Much effort is likely to be spent in the near future on their development, for the circumstances to be alluded to later render it

essential for government to build roads, bridges and generally make the area a centre of activity in the years to come. To some extent, they have up till now remained border areas of mixed population and hybrid culture. Closer contact with India, education and the development of trade have already begun to transform them but a forward economic policy involving the construction of roads will also open up the areas for intensive colonisation.

It may well be prophesied that the next few years will lay the foundation for a major development of the valleys in the interior of the lower Himalayan ranges.

Age-Old Impact on Our Political Life

What has been the effect of the Himalayas on the political life of India? No other fact has had a greater significance on the evolution of Indian history. It had in the past cut India off from its continental affiliations. To the Hindus the world ended with the Himalayas. What lay beyond was the region of unexplored mystery, identified with the arid waste of Tibet. The great Empire of China was cut off from India by land for all practical purposes of commerce and peaceful intercourse. The repercussions of events on the other side of Tibet did not penetrate into India.

The ocean while it separates also provides the highway of commerce and contact. The mountain where it does separate, as in the case of the Himalayas, becomes almost an impenetrable barrier. In the result, politically India was isolated from the rest of the continent and became introspective in its attitude. There was no appreciation of the point of view of other nations who, to the Hindus, virtually

did not exist or were known only by distant rumour. The contact of cultures which renovates and revives, the free association of different peoples, which gives rise to an international outlook, and the interplay of political factors on a wider scale which helps a nation to understand the strength and weakness of different peoples, were conspicuously absent in India in so far as the countries to her north were concerned. With the great civilisation of China which developed simultaneously with that of India, the Hindus have remained strangers to this day. India's land contacts developed therefore only with the countries lying to her west, mainly Gandhara, Persia and Arabia.

It is a matter of significance that there has never been the slightest disturbance of social life by invasion from the side of the Himalayas. It is true that on one occasion, in 637, a Chinese General from Tibet did raid a few districts near Tirhut and then withdrew.

While it will be true to hold that Hinduism and the Hindu people have been saved by the Himalayas, there have been other results from the impenetrability of these ranges which have

not been so advantageous. In the first place, it gave the Hindus and Indians in general a sense of contempt for the foreigner, which is the inevitable result of isolation. The rest of the world did not exist; if it did they were not concerned with it. In the second place it developed in them a false sense of security, a "meginotline" mentality. They were surprised when an invasion took place, as they never looked beyond their mountain barriers. The strange fact is that while in all other countries the decisive battles that settled their fate took place outside their own territories, Bouvines, Leipsic, Waterloo, etc., in India the decisive battle has taken place well in the interior, at Panipat. The reason for this phenomenon is obviously that India never considered her neighbours. The possibility of attack seemed distant to the Indians and it was only when the army entrenched behind the Hindukush marched into the Punjab that they awoke and began their hasty preparations. It is the Himalayan meginot line that is responsible for this attitude towards India's security.

Thirdly, India never developed a proper system of international relations. Her only

immediate neighbour was Afghanistan which except during short periods was never organised into a single state. The interest in Persia was limited and China was altogether inaccessible. In the result, the great traditions of diplomacy which China cultivated in her relations with her neighbours, especially with the frontier states which continually threatened her⁴ security were unknown to Indian statecraft. The history of China has thus a continental tradition: and Persia was, from the beginning of her history, caught up in the whirlpool of international relations by her continuous intercourse with Greece, Rome and Byzantium. A continental attitude of being one among a number of other states of varying power was not in the conception of Indian politics. The only doctrine to which Indian rulers adhered was that of *Chakravartin*, one who brought the whole of Bharatavarsha under one control. Where such a conquest was achieved and the unity of India re-arrested, they never entered into permanent relationships with states outside India.

⁴ See the *Inner Land Frontiers of China*—Owen Lattimore and the *Early Empires of Central Asia* by MacGovern.

What of Today And Tomorrow?

If the Himalayan barrier saved India in the past what is its position in the world of today? Can it give the same service today when the political conditions of all areas bordering India are undergoing rapid changes? Can the immunity of India from the northern side be maintained in the face of aircraft which fly ever higher and fly ever faster? Are there any other factors which may affect the traditional importance of the Himalayan ramparts?

The whole problem of barriers has undergone revolutionary changes with the growth of air power. In fact, we shall not gain proper perspective in respect of defence unless our geographical values are reinterpreted in terms of air. A land mass so protected by natural conditions as to be impossible of approach from any side by air, becomes an air island. Frontiers acquire new meaning. From the point of view of air a river frontier, however natural, has but little meaning. Vast stretches of sea acquire an importance, which in the concep-

tion of Mahan they did not. The airman's geography including definitions, distances, barriers, climate and strategic significance has become more important than the geography of the maritime era.

How is the position of the Himalayas affected by this changed conception? If the purely geographical definition of the Himalayan range as having a width of only 150 miles is taken—that is to say if it were possible to isolate the range and forget the plateau to the north—the Himalayas in spite of its immense height would not be an effective barrier. But the essential point about the Himalayan range, as emphasised before, is not its width of 150 miles, but the plateau behind it, which in itself is an elevation of about 15,000 feet and is guarded on all four sides by high mountains. In fact it was the vast barren upland behind the Himalayas that provided India with the most magnificent defence in depth imaginable. No centre of dynamic power had in the past been created anywhere near the ranges. The climatic conditions above the plateau were considered most unsuited and unfavourable for air opera-

tions. The distance involved from any reasonable point whence a continuous attack can be delivered on Hindustan from the Himalayan side was also an important factor. In short the Himalayas may still be considered a major system of defence for India, impregnable in the case of large-scale invasions and better than any man-made scheme of defence for so long a frontier. But no mountain range is ever a perfect barrier against every kind of invasion. While it separates nations and prevents normal commerce and intercourse between peoples, it has never been an insuperable obstacle against penetration by a determined enemy who has the resources of a powerfully organised state behind him. As we have noticed, the Hindu-kush has only been an ineffective barrier when Afghanistan and Central Asia are organised as powerful states. The Himalayan range though infinitely more terrorstriking and fearful is also capable of being traversed by enemy forces at different places. Why it has so far not been penetrated for the purposes of attack on the Indian plains is not because there are no passes which open out to India

but because the Tibetan plateau was never till recently organised as a great military base.

The fact that the Chinese were unable in the past to organise a strong military area in Tibet had blinded us to such a possibility; but there was no doubt that an organised modern state in Tibet would alter the character of the Himalayan problem. True, neither the Himalayan passes nor the climate and resources of the country would enable Tibet to threaten seriously the security of its neighbours by a large scale invasion. But with the changing character of war and the possibility of attack by missiles and nuclear weapons, the protection provided by the Himalayas is not what it was in the past. It has now become necessary to provide effective air defence over the whole range of our northern boundary. In fact the problems of the defence of our northern border have to be studied in terms of the changed conditions. The Himalayan boundary is no longer the dead boundary that it was since the beginning of Indian history.

Consequently in the future, the Himalayas will undoubtedly become a major object of

political and economic interest. The study of Himalayan geography, geology, flora, fauna, its climatological phenomena and a hundred other matters connected with its life has now become most urgent for all students interested in the welfare of India. Already India has entered on a major programme of road building. Experiments are being conducted with regard to plants and crops which can be grown in high altitude. The problem of peopling these areas has also to be seriously taken up. The Himalayan mentality, like the Maginot Line mentality of France, became an unexpected source of danger. It has however awakened us in time to the changed problems of our northern defence and its immense importance not only to our continued existence as a free nation, but as providing us with opportunities of development, with sources of power and with vast areas for modern exploitation. It is India's New Frontier and though its immense problems may tax our ability, they would also help us to build a new life for our people.