

## WORKS ON LAHAUL AND SPITI

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"Many years ago, during Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi's historic trek to Bhutan, somebody referred to the fascinating, sometimes even scholarly, narratives by frontier officers of former days, and deplored the lack of initiative of their successors in office of more recent times. I felt, suddenly, the eyes of the entire company, and more particularly Nehru's, focus sharply on myself . . . . Nothing more was said, but the Prime Minister's reproving look clearly signalled that, if, with such a wealth of opportunity, I had not been inspired to creative effort, something must be seriously wrong !"

(Nari Rustomji: "Enchanted Frontiers" (1971), page 1)

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### HIMALAYAN WONDERLAND - TRAVELS IN LAHAUL SPITI

By Manohar Singh Gill. 180- xii pp. 18 b/w plates.

Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1972,

reprinted 1973. Price: Rs. 25 (hardcover).

Mr. Manohar Singh Gill spent around one year as Deputy Commissioner in Lahaul and Spiti during 1962, one year after the area had been reorganized into one administrative district as part of Punjab State. It took him five years to make the first draft, and other five to see it published in its present very readable form. There is no indication whether or not it took a Prime Minister to make Mr. Singh write about his experiences and observations as a "frontier officer" in the service of the Government, but it is encouraging that at least some officials now-a-days take the trouble to keep a record of their experiences, and a sympathetic interest in the people among whom they work.

Mr. Gill is at times a little hard to place - his footnotes are a strange mixture of Kipling, the Kangra District Gazetteer (1897) and Col. Bruce, the intrepid Himalayan traveller. If he spent ten years on the book, he could perhaps have done a bit more reading and research. (A short bibliography on

the area is attached to this review.) Of course, Mr. Singh does not pretend to write a scholarly book as such, but many of the legends and rituals which he has carefully recorded are important, and if for example the transcription of Lahauli words had been more systematic and clear, and if he had read a bit more on Tibetan Buddhism and its rituals, the descriptions and explanations would have been more precise.

The book is divided into thirteen chapters and a three-page glossary. The introductory chapter, which already includes a few legends, is followed by a narrative of a visit to the Spiti valley, and a rescue operation following an unusually heavy and early snowfall. Then there are vignettes of life in isolated Keylang during the long winter, legends, folktales, marriages, more legends, parties, funerals and a bit of history of the area.

Mr. Gill writes extremely well, but perhaps there could have been fewer references to the local consumption of *chhang*, which by and large is used like tea elsewhere in the sub-continent. (A description of contemporary India without mentioning teadrinking would be strange, but it would be equally strange (and tiresome) to mention every cup of tea consumed, particularly if one were destined to spend some time in Government offices...) The photographs are all exquisite, one only wishes there were more. The two aerial photos of the mountain massives (facing page 85) are very good. If another edition is contemplated, we hope the publisher would allow more photographs, a simple sketch-map and a few pages of statistics related to Lahaul and Spiti according to the latest census.

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THE HIMALAYAN BORDERLAND. By Ram Rahul. vi+157 pp.  
Vikas Publing House, New Delhi. IRs. 20

Ram Rahul's book is a survey of the whole Himalayan range from Ladakh to NEFA, or Arunachal Pradesh as it is now called. For those who had hoped for some up-to-date research and information on Himalayan areas other than Nepal, which has an enlightened "open door" policy towards legitimate scholars, the book is a disappointment.

The book is divided into four main sections: The Land, The People, The History, and Administration and Development.

Each of these four sections is subdivided into subsections on NEFA; Bhutan; Sikkim; Nepal; Uttarakhand; Kinnaur, Spiti and Lahaul; and Ladakh. The information in each section is rather loosely organized, generally out of date, and seems to have been thrown together in a hurry. Since the author has travelled widely in the

Himalaya, since he has got the Census of India publications and State Gazetteers at his disposal, and since there has been some work done by Indian scholars on these areas since 1948, it is disappointing to find that a large part of the material is a repetition of old British records, however valuable these may still be. This review will only concern itself briefly with the few pages of the book dealing with Lahaul and Spiti, but the observations made below apply largely to the book as a whole.

Regarding the chapters on Lahaul and Spiti: (1) The section "The Land" suffers from the absence of a simple sketch map, and there is no description of Lahaul at all. There should also be some photographic material available, both old and recent, which could have been included. (2) The section called "The People" contains no anthropological or linguistic information of significance, and hardly touches on the Lahaulis. (3) The chapter "The History" repeats information contained in Hutchison and Vogel, which is mainly based on Francke's *A History of Western Tibet* (see the attached bibliography). (4) The section "Administration and Development" should have been the most interesting and important, since both Spiti and Lahaul have been opened up by jeepable roads during the last ten years or so and travel by Indian nationals has been unrestricted. Development work in agriculture, horticulture, communications, etc. has been taking place, but this has hardly been touched upon. Passing references to the different tenancy laws in Lahaul / Spiti, alternative cash crops (to *kuth or putchok*), research in agriculture etc., a school for the higher education of the lamas of the area, and so on, are made, but no facts or details are given. It would also have been useful if a minimum of socio-economic, demographic, linguistic, and similar statistics could have been included in the book.

In these days of general carelessness on the part of most Indian publishers, it is a pleasure to see the quality of layout, printing and workmanship of Vikas' publications. They are to be congratulated both on the quality as well as on the reasonable prices of their books.

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