

From the Bhavan's President

Kailasa and Ksheerasagara

R. Venkataraman

The mountain or the ocean, both reinforce the majesty and the vastness of nature in stunning contrast to the smallness of man.

One always looks at the Himalayas in awe, wonder and admiration. This has been the abode of the ascetic and the meditating Siva and his consort Parvati, the daughter of the mountains. The Ellora temples and the Kailasanatha Temple at Kancheepuram were some of the earliest attempts to create the prototype of the Himalayas in sculptured stone.

The four Himalaya peaks are some of the highest peaks in the world. For instance, the Himalayan Peak K-2 otherwise known as Godwin Austin, in the Karakoram, is 28,251 ft. high and stands as the second highest peak, next to the Everest. The Kanchenjunga

which is 28,209 ft., the world's third highest peak, is held in great reverence by our people and no one is allowed to set foot on its crown. That is why the British Expedition led by Charles Evans halted at a very short distance from the crown. I had the blessing to fly alongside the Kanchenjunga and drink deep the ineffable charm and the grandeur of the mountain. On a bright sunlit day the peak dazzles like a huge diamond scattering different hues of the Vibgyor.

Kalidasa opens the first Canto of *Kumarasambhava* with a detailed description of the Himalayas. Calling them the *maanadanda* 'a measure of the earth', Kalidasa paints pictures of the Himalayas with its bright

gems which are used as substitutes for lamps, the medicinal herbs shining at night, the Devadaru trees, the deer, the caves affording shelter to the mountaineers, the *siddhas*, etc.

The Himalayas are as diverse as they are imposing in their solid magnificence. A fascinating gradation of temperatures takes place with changes in height. A vertical climb of a mere four to five miles in the Himalayas can take one through differences of climate as great as a journey of 200 miles North or South from the Equator. Naturally, the Himalayas constitute an environmental dreamland. Plants and animals of the tropical kind are to be found in the Himalayas up to a thousand metres. Between there and up to 3,000 metres, we come across plants and animals of the temperate lands; higher than that of the lovely Alpines. Rhododendrons and Azaleas are replaced there by Pine and Fir. Similarly, the tiger gives place to the snow leopard and peafowl to the snowcock. Mountaineers,

zoologists, ornithologists and botanists, no less than geologists and mineralogists find in the Himalayas what philosophers would find in the *Vedas* or astronomers would find in the stellar sky; an inexhaustible resource of study.

The Himalayas have always inspired the saints, sages and scholars and evoked their deepest thoughts in the lofty search for eternal truth. Today mountaineers, no less than geologists, and adventure sportsmen, are greatly attracted towards this mountain. I would here like to sound a note of caution on the attitude of people visiting the Himalayas. I am told that every team climbing the Himalayas unwittingly leaves behind some debris in the shape of cans, bottles and the like. Sir, Edmund Hillary who along with Tenzing first scaled the Mount Everest, has described the present condition of some Himalayan peaks as "a junk yard". I hope that this attitude will change and that people

would try to preserve the pristine purity of the great Himalayas.

Few countries have the natural resources that we in India have. But, then again, few countries have as little consciousness and respect for our resources as we in India have. Ecologists, environmentalists, voluntary agencies, no less than Government must help build a resource consciousness among our people, a consciousness that will lead to conservation and balance.

I have always wondered what attracts man more, the mountain or the ocean. Both reinforce the majesty and the vastness of nature in stunning contrast to the smallness of man. But the more we see them the more we love them. If the great Lord Siva chose Kailash as his abode. Lord Vishnu chose *Ksheerasagara* for his *sayana*. We, the people of India, have been blessed with both, and I hope we will strive to deserve the blessings of these two greatest gifts of nature.

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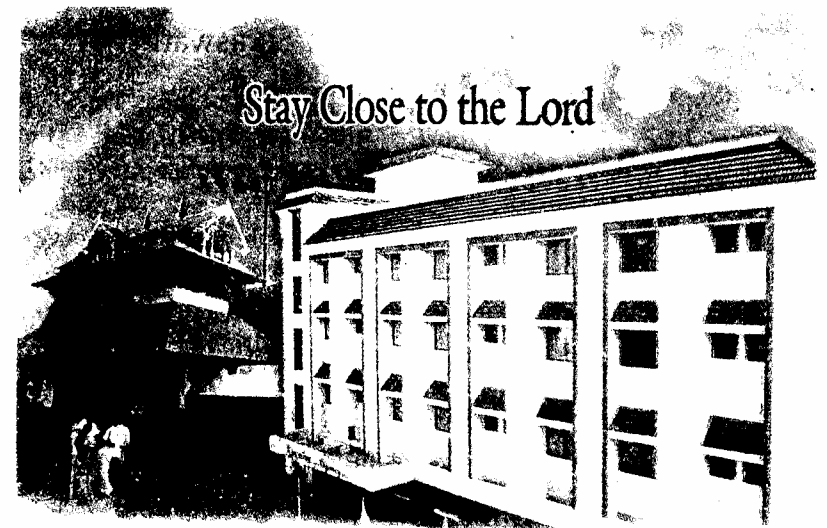
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