

Entering the Himalayas—Lord Shiva's Abode

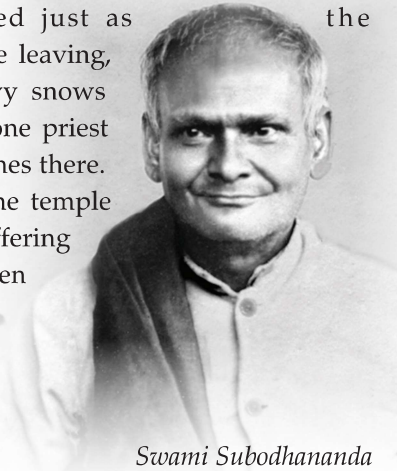
A Pilgrimage to Almora

PRAVRAJKA BRAHMAPRANA

An Oral Tradition

As a young nun I used to hear stories of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples, handed down to several of the pioneer Swamis in this country [USA]. One such story came from Swami Subodhananda, or Khoka Maharaj, a direct disciple, who related it to my teacher (Swami Prabhavananda). 'Khoka Maharaj once told us about an experience he had,' Swami Prabhavananda would begin, 'but he told it in a story form so that nobody would know who the devotee was.'

Once, a devotee went on a pilgrimage to Kedarnath. This temple is located very high in the Himalayas. Therefore it is closed half the year during the snow season. The devotee arrived just as the last priests were leaving, before the heavy snows came. He and one priest were the only ones there. He went into the temple and made his offering to the Lord. Then the snow began coming down. It was so heavy that the



Swami Subodhananda

devotee couldn't leave the temple, so the priest suggested that they play a game of chess. They played all night, and the next morning the snow stopped. The devotee could go on his way home. He didn't realize that six months had passed. Khoka Maharaj said to us, 'It was Lord Shiva who came in the form of the priest.' The way Khoka Maharaj told the story, I knew that he himself was the devotee who had played chess with Lord Shiva.¹

This poignant tale so mesmerized and captivated my imagination—I could almost feel the gargantuan shadowlike presence of Lord Shiva in the snowed-in Himalayan temple—that I resolved to one day enter the Himalayas myself and experience firsthand the mystic abode of Lord Shiva. And what better travel companion to take with me than Swami Vivekananda?

I began to read how, as a young boy, Naren, the future Vivekananda, used to worship Lord Shiva, the God of renunciation, and don the sadhu's loin cloth and thus proclaim to his mother: 'Look, I am Shiva! I am Shiva!'² But Vivekananda's mystic relationship to Shiva was not merely playful imagination. On the day of his birth, his future master, Sri Ramakrishna, saw in vision a streak of light

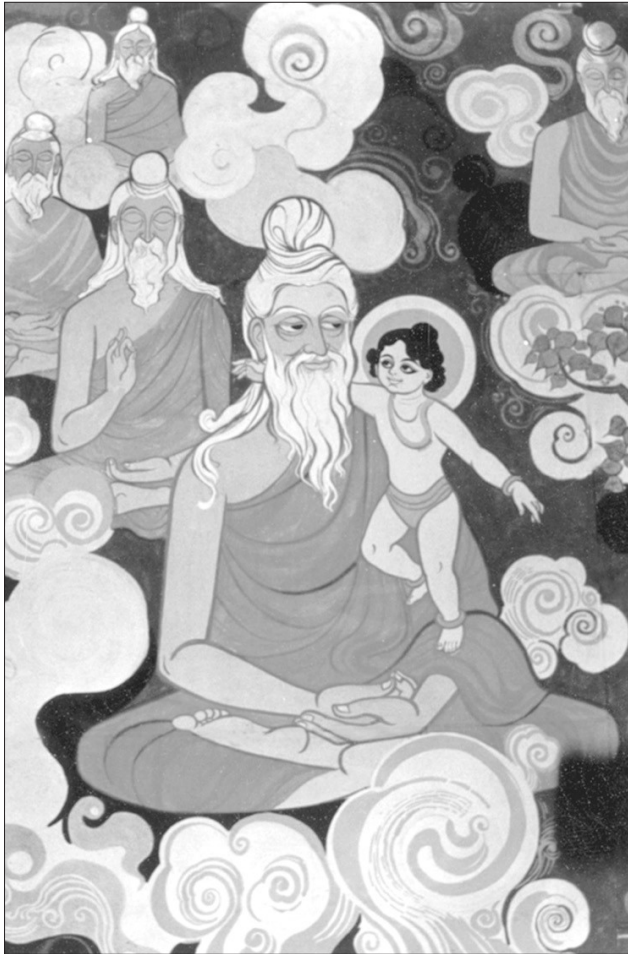


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flash across the heavens from Varanasi to Calcutta. 'My prayer has been granted,' he joyously prophesied, 'and *my man* (referring to Naren's spiritual nature as 'Nara Narayana,' or 'God as Man' with a capital 'M') must come to me one day.'³

Just before Naren visited Dakshineswar for the first time, Sri Ramakrishna further disclosed to others his mystic origins. 'One day I found that my mind was soaring high in *samadhi* along a luminous path,' the Master explained, 'until it entered the transcendental realm.'

There I found seven venerable sages seated in *samadhi*, who undoubtedly had surpassed even the gods in knowledge and holiness.



An artist's view of Sri Ramakrishna's dream

Lost in admiration I saw a portion of that undifferentiated luminous region condense into the form of a divine child, who tenderly embraced one of the sages and sweetly tried to bring his mind down from *samadhi*. The magic touch roused the sage, and he gazed upon the treasure of his heart. In great joy the child said to him, 'I am going down. You too must go with me.' The sage silently expressed his assent before entering again into *samadhi*. But a fragment of the sage's body and mind descended to earth in the form of an effulgent light. No sooner had I seen Naren than I recognized him to be that sage.⁴

Sri Ramakrishna later disclosed that the divine child was none other than himself.

After Sri Ramakrishna's passing in 1886, Swami Vivekananda became intent on establishing the Baranagore Math and forming the Ramakrishna brotherhood. Only after the monastery was on sound footing did he then yearn to go on pilgrimage. To test his own strength and become fearless, to gather experience of his motherland, widen his outlook, and to force his brother monks to stand on their own feet, Swami Vivekananda set out from the Baranagore Math in July 1890, never to return until his triumphant return from the West in 1897. Repeatedly the desire arose within him to enter the Himalayas—irresistibly drawn as he was to Kedar-Badri, Almora, and, after his second visit to the West, Mayavati among other remote Himalayan places of pilgrimage.

The inspiration drawn from such mountains was not lost on Swami Vivekananda. Once when asked why, in spite of India's grand non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy, Hindus remain idolaters, Swamiji turned on the questioner with flashing eyes: 'Because we have the Himalayas!'⁵ Swamiji had himself experienced firsthand that such unparalleled beauty and majesty in nature

simply compelled one to kneel in reverence and worship it.

And so the memory of Swami Subodhananda's haunting narrative and Vivekananda's own attraction for the Himalayas beckoned me to enter the Himalayas on three separate pilgrimages—my final destinations, Almora and Mayavati, places closely associated with Swami Vivekananda and Lord Shiva.

Pilgrimage to Almora

The drive to Almora [in Uttarakhand] was beautiful but difficult. Because the main road was washed out in some areas, Govind, my driver, and I took the narrow local road, past an interminable number of roadside stalls, herds of goats, cows and ponies, and local women gathering loads of firewood for kindling balanced atop their heads as they gingerly made their way home. I found myself studying the faces of these hill people, the women especially, etched as they were from deep lines of a hard life—honest, close-to-the-soil, subsistence living with a glint in their eyes that spoke of the joy of the Himalayas in their backyard.

Three hours into our trek, our deep-rutted dirt road suddenly turned into a fresh white-lined mini highway, and Govind simply couldn't resist stepping on the accelerator as

he took the mountain curves with ease and enjoyment. So I settled back to brace myself for two hours of tight mountain curves and a climb in altitude.

With one wary eye open, I spotted Almora's resort bungalows dotting the lush green, rolling hills. The colours of the landscape were stunning—a primary green reaching up to touch the intense sky-blue heavens, splashed with white billowing clouds. At last we rounded a bend, and there was the town of Almora before us—the hillside cottages, a canvas of tiny square splashes of sherbert greens, blues, yellows, and pinks. What a delight, a paradise nestled deep in the Himalayas!

Darshan at Sarada Math, Almora

I must have dozed off because suddenly Govind awakened me with: 'We're here!' It was after three o'clock. As the nuns of Sarada Math, Almora, quickly came out to the gate to greet us, Pravrajika Prabhaprana, the tiny smiling Mataji-in-charge of monastery there, immediately took my hands in hers. We both realized that we had met each other in 1979 at Sarada Math's headquarters in Dakshineswar, and for the next ten minutes we exchanged pleasantries and marvelled how time had changed us.

Trishul and Nanda Devi - View from Sarada Math, Almora

After a quick lunch, Pravrajika Prabhaprana took me to my guest quarters, which was quite basic and obviously little used. I was the Math's first and only American sannyasini guest. Altogether, there are three guest houses at this Sarada Math hill station—two for women and one for their Math driver where Govind also stayed. All three buildings stand erect on the hillside, connected by steep steps and dirt pathways winding through a garden of wild cosmos, marigolds, roses, and geraniums, while potted plants line the periphery of a horizontal patch of lawn around the convent itself.

Aside from the dispensary, the main building at the Sarada Math is a charming India-style chalet with a hall running the full length of the convent—kitchen, laundry, and

bedrooms (two to a room) on either side. At one end of the hall is the nuns' tiny dining hall, and at the far end, a sun room where the Mataji receives visitors. In the middle is a steep staircase ascending to the shrine room.

At Arati that evening the nuns' singing to the accompaniment of harmonium and cymbals was utterly sweet and elevating, and, to add to the ambiance, the meditation hall was lit by only candle light and a single solar lamp. Such an intimate space along with the eloquent silence of the Himalayas made for a meditation time that would lure me back each evening at the same time.

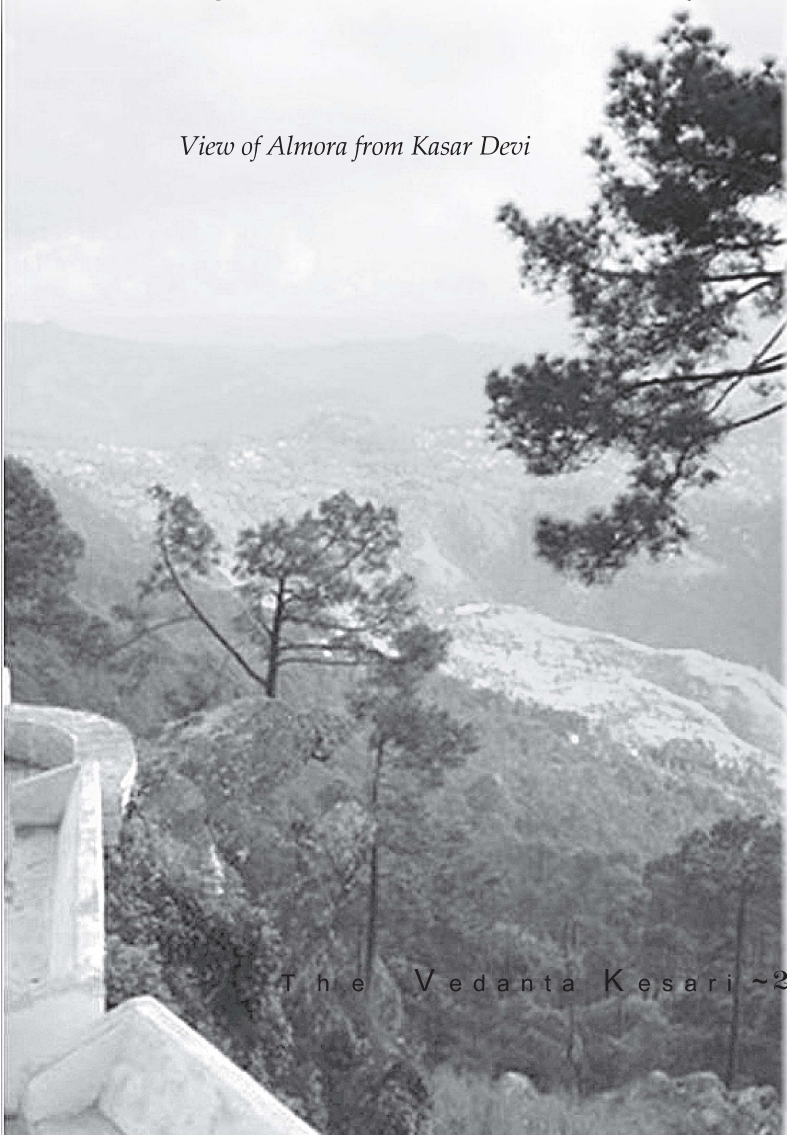
The next morning as I made my way down the hill to meditate, I spotted Nanda Devi—the highest snow peak in the range before us at almost 26,000 feet. By what majesty it rose up from the mist and white cloud cover near its base!

After breakfast I climbed atop the homeopathic dispensary's roof and sat all morning, gazing out across the valleys and hills to the distant white gods and goddesses. At times Trishul (Shiva) peak, at 23,500 feet, also emerged from the veil of clouds moving in a dreamy current before my eyes. He appeared as a phantom form of Lord Shiva lying on his back, with Nanda Devi at his feet. Haunting and alluring from across a vast expanse of hills and valleys and blue-white hazy space, his noble, ethereal presence is altogether immediate, immanent as it enters the heart to make his subtle body felt. This is the magic of the Himalayas for all who have eyes to see. And this is one of the many ways Lord Shiva gives his Darshan, an experience that surpasses words.

Kasar Devi

One day, after tea Prabhaprana took me to the nearby Kasar Devi temple, the local

View of Almora from Kasar Devi



presiding deity, right behind the Sarada Math hill, where Swami Vivekananda during his

This cave temple—now filled with a beautiful and powerful image of Mother



Kasar Devi Temple Compound



Image of Kasar Devi

early itinerant days in 1890 had wandered alone through a forest filled with huge boulders and caves. At last he had come to the hilltop and a cave that was believed to hold the presence of Kasar Devi, or Mother Durga. Therein Swamiji entered, sat in meditation, and became so absorbed that he began to merge in the Absolute. Then and there he yearned to drop his body. But suddenly someone from within, as it were, began pounding on his chest: 'No, get up! Get up! You must work!' And so the great monk obeyed this command from his Master and returned to consciousness to fulfill his preordained mission on earth—in India and the West.

Durga, tucked inside the slate folds of its cave walls, is so alluring that one can easily imagine how Vivekananda must have been drawn into it. As we circumambulated the temple and retraced his steps across the rock surface and down the hill, his itinerant days in Almora began to spring to life before my eyes. I surveyed the ground upon which he had walked, inhaled the air he had breathed, and touched the image of the Goddess, whose presence he had experienced. This is pilgrimage—to recreate and experience firsthand the divine *lila*, or play, of such a God-man as Vivekananda who walked the face of the earth just a little over a hundred years ago—his vibration still tangible and living.

(To be Continued. . .)



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A Pilgrimage to Almora

PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

(Continued from the previous issue. . .)

Paatal Devi

The next morning from my guest quarters, Nanda Devi’s unearthly visage was the first to greet me as I descended the steep hillside steps to the convent shrine room. After breakfast, Prabhaprana and I, with Govind as our driver, began our day-long pilgrimage. Our first stop was Paatal Devi, an ancient *Shakti pitha*—the sacred spot of a natural stone *yonis* etched into the floor of a small cave inside the temple. Here also Swami Vivekananda had come in the fall of 1890 after his stop at the nearby cave of Kasar Devi.

In 1777, the Paatal Devi temple had been erected along with simple kutirs for monks’ quarters adjacent to the *mandir*, or temple compound. The kutir where Swami Vivekananda stayed is now occupied by a poor, recently widowed mother. The local temple authorities had taken pity on this woman and her child and given permission for them to stay in one the monks’ quarters and clean the temple premises in return for this special favour.

It was at the spot of the Paatal Devi temple that Vivekananda first received

the word a telegram had arrived at Lala Badri Shah’s Almora home, divulging the



Paatal Devi



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shocking news of his sister's suicide. The Swami, torn with agony, was suddenly awakened to the plight of Indian women and later worked toward women's upliftment in India as part of his mission on earth.

Muslim Graveyard

From Paatal Devi we drove to the nearby Muslim graveyard where Swami Vivekananda almost passed away from hunger due to the exertion of his pilgrimage, and sank to the ground with exhaustion. The keeper of the cemetery, a Muslim fakir by name Zulfikar Ali, saw the swami's dire plight and offered him a cucumber, the only food he had. Vivekananda asked him to put it into his mouth as he was even too weak to do this much himself, but the Muslim protested, 'Maharaj, I am a Muslim!'

'That doesn't matter at all. Are we not brothers?' Swamiji declared with a smile. On that spot Gertrude Sen, wife of renowned scientist Boshi Sen, erected a memorial to immortalize Vivekananda's boundless gratitude toward this Muslim fakir to whom he owed his life. One could say that this simple monument is a testament to this living example of Advaita Vedanta—or what interfaith understanding can bring at its root level.

Ramakrishna Mission Kutir, Almora

From there we drove a mile or two to the Ramakrishna Kutir, a centre of the Ramakrishna Order, and descended the steep staircase past the library and guest cottages to the temple, erected on the spot where Swami Turiyananda had stayed for seven years,



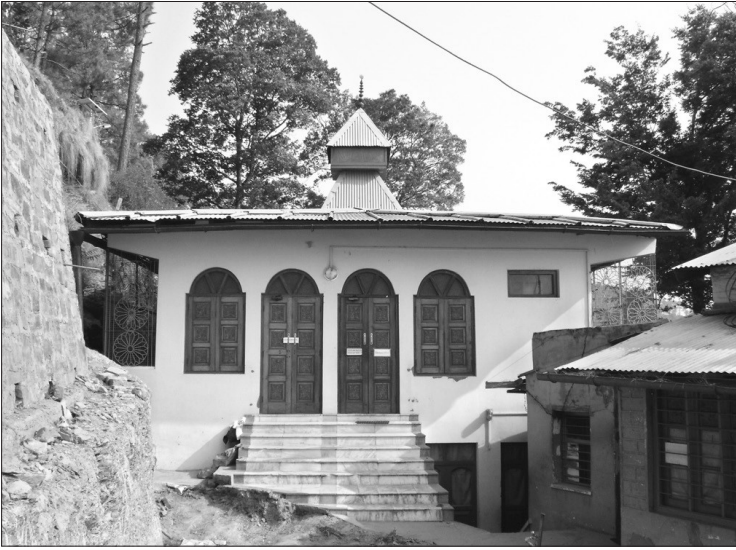
The way to Muslim graveyard where Swamiji was given cucumber

after Swami Vivekananda's mahasamadhi in 1902.

His bed upon which his photograph rests against the pillow is to the left of the main altar. To the right is a dazzling painting of Mother Durga, the Protectress of the Universe. On the left wall of the inner shrine and chapel are two wall-mounted glass cases where Swami Turiyananda's personal articles are kept—everything from safety razor, shaving cream bottle, food utensils, and spectacles to well-worn slippers and a crucifix, darkened with the years! It was difficult to leave one's seat in meditation; the atmosphere resonated with the sound of silence—palpably tranquil, like the shimmering calm of a vast, placid lake. Swami Turiyananda established this sacred space of utter peace in Almora as well as at Shanti Ashrama, in Northern California—a retreat *must* for any seeker who hankers for solitude and deeper meditation.

In the Footsteps of Vivekananda

After lunch prasada and a tour of the Ramakrishna Kutir, we left for Sarada Math. But on the way, Prabhaprana asked Govind to



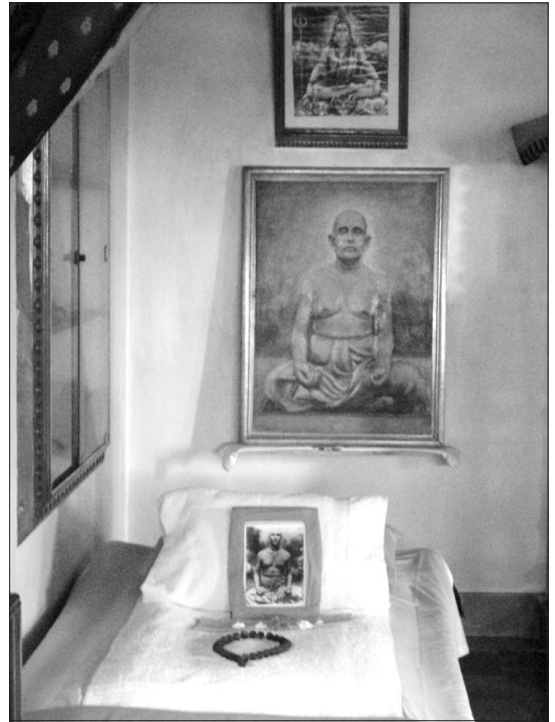
Swami Turiyananda's room, Almora Ashrama
pull over to view the sloping forest land below us. She then explained:

'One time in Almora, Vivekananda was with one of his brother disciples (probably Swami Akhandananda) as they made their way toward their next stop one evening.

Suddenly the swami turned to his brother-monk and said, 'You go by the road, and I will cut through this forest.' Swami Akhandananda agreed, but soon afterwards became curious and somewhat puzzled by this odd travel arrangement. So he followed Swamiji deep into the pine forest. Suddenly through the branches, he saw a white light ahead which became brighter and brighter as he approached a clearing. There he saw his brother-monk embracing Sri Ramakrishna. 'Ah, that is why you wanted to come alone into this leopard-infested forest!' he later told Swamiji.

At Lala Badri Shah's Home, Almora

After sharing this reminiscence, Prabhaprana and I returned to our jeep and rode further, past Boshi Sen's Institute, where he had made his cutting-edge discoveries of consciousness within plants, until Prabhaprana



Inside Swami Turiyananda's room



Lala Badri Shah

once again beckoned the driver to turn off to the side of the road. To our left was a



A recent picture of Lala Badri Shah's house

steep cliff and to the right a staircase leading upward to Lala Badri Shah's house. Lala Badri Shah was a wealthy landowner and close disciple of Swami Vivekananda. In May 1898, Sister Nivedita, Josephine MacLeod, and Sara Bull—all prominent Western disciples of Vivekananda—had stayed at his home in Almora. Every day Swamiji used to walk from Shah's Thompson cottage a mile or so away to his Oakley House for breakfast followed by several hours of conversation with Sister Nivedita and his two other women disciples.

Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita

It was here under a pine tree that Swamiji transmitted a nondual spiritual experience to Sister Nivedita and gave her a glimpse of Brahman—but only after a period of rigorous training. Sister Nivedita later divulged how her guru ruthlessly tore at her

British preconceptions of India as she butted up against his passionate love for Indian ideals and culture. But gradually her center of gravity was made to shift from a deep-rooted European world view to a more Indianized outlook of India's ancient tradition and culture. Only then did the painful assaults end and Vivekananda announced: 'There must be a change. I am going away into the forests to be alone; and when I come back, I shall bring peace.' In Sister Nivedita's words:

He lifted his hands and blessed, with silent depths of blessing, his most rebellious disciple, by this time kneeling before him. But though such a moment may heal a wound, it cannot restore an illusion that has been broken into fragments.

Long, long ago, Sri Ramakrishna had told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved Naren would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch. That evening, at Almora, I proved the truth of this prophecy. For alone, in meditation, I found myself gazing deep into an Infinite Good, to



Sister Nivedita



Nivedita Cottage, Almora

the recognition of which no egoistic reasoning had led me. And I understood, for the first time, that the greatest teachers may destroy in us a personal relation, only in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.⁶

Darshan of an Unpublished Reminiscence of Swami Vivekananda

Today Lala Badri Shah's home has become a hotel run by the Shah family. The proprietor greeted us as Prabhaprana and I climbed the stairs and walked to Sister Nivedita's corner room. Then we made our way to the room where Swamiji had stayed as Shah's special guest, at the opposite end of the mansion. This was to be Prabhaprana's special surprise for me.

Inside this beautifully maintained room, was the cot and easy chair that Swamiji had used, along with an armoire and standing mirror atop a chest of drawers. Various smaller articles the swami also used such as a lamp, water pot, and hubble bubble were encased in a wall-mounted glass case.

But above the chest of drawers was the most unusual first-generation tinted photograph of Vivekananda that I had ever seen anywhere. His eyes captivated me and I felt as though they followed me around the room—so living this photograph seemed. I was struck dumb—unlike his other photographs Swamiji's eyes did not bear the expression of Lord Shiva; they were, without doubt, none other than the lotus eyes of Lord Krishna.

When the proprietor's wife, Indu, entered the room, with her help I managed to take the best photograph possible. Then she and Prabhaprana shared their story:

Indu's mother-in-law, Janaki Devi, was just newly married when she went to the home of her husband's grandfather, Lala Badri Shah, a devoted disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Janaki Devi understood that her grandfather-in-law paid the utmost respect to all sadhus who visited his home. Therefore, one day when one striking sadhu came to his home, she brought him a tall glass of milk. The monk drank the entire glass, then asked her, 'Who do you love most?'

'Lord Krishna,' she responded.

'Very good,' he nodded with pleasure, then left. The sadhu was none other than Swami Vivekananda.

Shortly thereafter another sadhu came to Shah's home and gave the young bride a scroll that was securely wrapped in a tube, 'Don't open this for 20 years,' he instructed her.

Time past, then one day 20 years later as the woman was busy moving her household



A photo of Swamiji's portrait at Shah family's house

belongings, she found the scroll and opened it. It was a colour-tinted photograph of Swami Vivekananda, perhaps taken in San Francisco. A most extraordinary photo—it became living.

When Indu was newly married, she used to make fun of her mother-in-law, who long back was the young bride who had met Swamiji. Indu shared how Janaki Devi would stand before this photograph of Swamiji and talk to him. Later when Pravrajika Prabhaprana came to Almora, she used to go to the Shah residence to hear Janaki Devi herself divulge her stories of Shah, Swamiji, and his photo. She used to say: 'If I stand to the left of the photo, he is looking at me. And if I stand to the right, he is also looking at me. I talk to him, and he answers. You also can

talk to him and he will answer. Go! Go and ask!'

One day Indu's mother-in-law shared with Prabhaprana, 'He (meaning Swamiji) also tells me news before it happens.' Once when Janaki Devi was staying with her son in Haldwani, she suddenly awoke in the middle of the night to find Swamiji standing by her bedside with tears flowing from his eyes.

'What's wrong, Swamiji?' she asked.

'Please go to your home immediately' was his only reply. Then he vanished.

Thereupon the woman woke her son and insisted that they begin their journey to Almora immediately, in spite of all his protests. When they arrived, she found her husband, who was Lala Badri Shah's grandson, on his deathbed. She gave him Ganges water and he soon breathed his last. Such was how this photo of Swami Vivekananda became living and guided her life.

Stories such as this come from the real India, the spiritual India. And from such stories it is possible to touch the outer realm of the awesome giant of a Man, that special being, we call an *ishvarakoti*. Vivekananda had initiated the young bride by drinking her glass of milk, thus swallowing her karmas. And in his own inscrutable way he arranged for his photo, bearing Lord Krishna's likeness, to land in her hands. That the young bride could not help but be mesmerized by it, worship and adore it, was surely also his doing. By Lala Badri Shah's association with Swamiji, generations of his family members have been blessed, for rarely has the world seen such a spiritual giant as Vivekananda.

(To be continued. . .)



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Sri Ragunathji Temple, Almora

From Lala Badri Shah’s house, we then drove to the town of Almora and navigated the hilly streets to the Ragunathji temple,



A recent picture of Ragunath Mandir (on left, with steps), Almora

where Vivekananda gave his famous response to the town official’s address after his triumphant return from the West in 1897. The temple is located in the main Bazaar street.

It is recorded that along the street leading to the temple, local women, dressed in their

traditional full-length skirts and adorned with nose rings, offered arati to Vivekananda as he passed on his way to the temple. Suddenly Swamiji recognized the Muslim fakir in the crowd and offered him some money in token of his gratitude for saving his life seven years earlier.

To also honour this special occasion of their hero monk’s return to India, the Almora sweet-meat shop owners offered barrels of sweets free of charge to Lord Ragunathji, and the prasad was then distributed to the thousands who had gathered there. A hundred years later, in 1997, this celebration was re-enacted.

Jageswara Shiva

It is said in the Puranas that one of the twelve *jyotir lingas* (‘pillars of light’) is deep within a deodar forest. The deodar tree literally means ‘tree of God’. It is believed that this *jyotir Shiva linga*—a natural emblem arising from the earth—is Jageswara Shiva, once visited by the great seer-philosopher Shankara in the 8th century CE,



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and now worshiped within an ancient stone temple compound next to the Koshi River.

So after breakfast one morning, with Govind as our driver, Vina, a young brahmacharini, and I rode two hours through dizzying mountain curves to finally arrive at the sacred site of Jageswara Shiva—a temple compound that strangely emanated the same atmosphere as that of Badri Narayana, one of the four *pithas* [Joshi Math] of the Shankara Order, deep in the Himalayas near the China border. After we made our water and flower offerings to the *dyotir linga*, we selected a spot on the stone *mandir*, amidst the several dozen small stone Shiva temples, to meditate. The smell of a nearby *yajna* fire burning, the priests' Vedic chanting, the crisp mountain air, and the sound of the stream rippling nearby filled the outer chambers of our heart. At last we descended to the river to sprinkle ourselves with the sacred water of the Koshi River before wending our way back down the mountainous route to Sarada Math.

I have never slept more soundly than I have here in Almora, with the snowcapped



Jageswara Shiva

gods and goddesses in the distance standing guard over each of their sleeping devotees in the hills and valleys below. Complete stillness and tranquility reign as the night lights of bejeweled Almora glisten and twinkle below a rising Shiva moon.

Kakrighat

The next morning after our breakfast tiffin, with Pravrajika Bhumaprana as my guide, we started by jeep to Kakrighat, where Swamis Vivekananda and Akhandananda in their early wanderings through the foothills of the Himalayas—without any money and depending solely on alms for food—had stopped for the night under an old peepal tree. Kakrighat is where the Koshi River meets the Suial River—an auspicious confluence. 'This place is wonderful for meditation,' Swamiji told his brother. Washing his face, hands, and feet, he said, 'You can bathe, but I shall meditate here,' and immediately he became absorbed in meditation under the peepal tree.



Kakrighat—a view from the river

After 45 minutes he returned to normal consciousness. 'O, Gangadhar!' he then revealed to his brother monk:

I have just passed through one of the greatest moments of my life. Here under this peepal one of the greatest problems of my life has been solved. I have found the oneness of the macrocosm with the microcosm. In this microcosm of the body everything that is there in the macrocosm exists. I have seen the whole universe within an atom.¹

Shortly thereafter, he jotted down his notes pertaining to this experience with reference to the metaphysical meaning of Logos, which we now find in Swami Vivekananda's *Complete Works*.²

Pravrajika Bhumaprana and I removed our shoes and descended a steep path and staircase to the temple compound below the street level.

Beneath the peepal tree was a small ancient Shiva cave where Swamiji must have spent some time, so we also entered and meditated there with the sound of the confluence of the mountain rivers coursing beneath us. It being Sunday, we heard only the background drone of the river's gentle rumble as it made its way through the mountain valley and the occasional gentle mooing of cows in the distance as they drank from the river. Seated within this small cave, it seemed as though the gushing river current was coursing through the pathways of our mind itself, cleansing it of all thoughts as we entered the cave of the heart. This natural cave carried such a concentrated atmosphere—so intimate, quiet, clean—a most auspicious place for meditation.

At last we emerged from the cave and climbed up on the cement platform that surrounded the peepal tree. With the

Himalayas before us and the confluence beneath us, again we meditated. Then at last we descended to the river itself, past a small white-flagged cremation spot on the riverbank, to bathe as Vivekananda himself had bathed—face, hands, and feet in the cool river. Finally we made our way back up to the road and returned to the Math.

The Gift of Pilgrimage

That evening after supper, Pravrajika Prabhaprana took me to the Math library and presented me with what has become one of my most cherished gifts—a second-generation print of Vivekananda in his aspect as Lord Krishna—the same photo that had become living to the young bride, Janaki Devi, in Lala Badri Shah's home. My pilgrimage to the Himalayas was complete.

The next morning, after a hearty breakfast, I took one last look at Nanda Devi and Trishul peaks—my daily guardians in Almora, silently made my salutations to their snow-capped forms, and turned to bid adieu to my dear Prabhaprana Mataji and her precious flock.

My darshan of the Himalayas was over—rather it had now become internalized. And as I rode back into the veil and bustle of Delhi's city life, I reflected on Vivekananda's life—how he prayed that his last days would be spent in the Himalayas. For at the very sight of those mountains, he had said that all the ferment of his work—his world mission—that had been going on in his brain for years quieted down, and his mind reverted back to the one eternal theme which the Himalayas symbolize and imbue within us—detachment, strength, and renunciation—the sacred abode of Lord Shiva. □ *(Concluded.)*

Reference: 1. *The Life*, 1:250. 2. cf. 3: 57 and 2: 212