

# The Times of India

REFERENCE SECTION

BOMBAY

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## Of Peaks And Passes

### HIMALAYAN WONDERLAND:

Travels in Lahaul-Spiti: By M. S. Gill (Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, Rs. 25)

**E**XPERIENCE inspires the writer when it is unusual, and imparts to the account of it a tangible authenticity and vividness, when his virtuosity is adequate. Too often, unfortunately, the men who have had the experience lack the ability to communicate it, and their inspiration dissipates itself in mere verbiage, in pathetic outbursts of adjective-ridden prose and profuse unselective detail. Mr. Gill can write all right.

He was given charge of the administration of the sub-Himalayan tract of Lahaul and Spiti on the Indo-Tibetan frontier, cut off from

the rest of the world throughout the long, snow-bound winter except for the wireless. Mr. Gill spent his year here getting to know the stupendous peaks and chasms, the few passes offering difficult ingress and egress that get blocked up by the snow, the Chandra and Bhaga rivers that rise in the mountain and form the Chenab lower down by their confluence, the lamas and their losing hold on the people, and the people themselves, still leading traditional lives untouched by modern civilisation, and their legends.

He writes with zest and restraint of this overwhelming but captivating setting, and has obviously kept his eyes open during his long winter sojourn. He says that his interest in the way of life of the limited population lay partly in recording them, before they were influenced and altered by the forces of "progress" around them, but his record is warmly sympathetic and human, as is his account of those who come into this remote montane fastness from outside periodically.

The carping critic may point to a word here and there which lacks felicity or assurance, but these lapses could well be printing errors, from which the book is not free, and if the legendary lore of the people, set out in detail, seems somewhat dreary, that is only because it lacks the colour and more cultured charm of Hindu mythology, and because in any record of a period, the documentation requires the lore to be set down.

M. KRISHNAN