

BOOKS

LAHAUL-SPITI

HIMALAYAN WONDERLAND:

Travels In Lahaul-Spiti

M. S. Gill

Vikas Publications, Delhi-6.

Rs. 25

The beauty of the Himalayas fascinated Jawaharlal Nehru so much that he once wrote: "I dream of the day when I shall wander about the Himalayas and cross them to reach that lake and mountains of my desire."

The ambition to visit the valleys, glaciers and mountains of the Himalayas cannot but possess anyone who loves the mountains and high altitude scenery. But the life of the people who live in these high altitudes is very tough.

Except for those who have had the opportunity of working with or otherwise coming into close with the hill areas and their people, the usual pleasure-seeking visitor rarely understands the extent of the difficulties of the people of these areas who wage an everlasting battle with nature for their very survival. A narrative seeking to place on record the valour and struggle of these spirited and determined people of Lahaul-Spiti, a remote valley on the Indo-Tibetan border.

In the midst of his preoccupation with official duties, Manohar Singh Gill has written this book—a vivid description and a fine collection of events and portraits of men who had left a lasting impression on him during his official assignment for nearly a year as a Deputy Commissioner in Lahaul-Spiti.

In his book Shri Gill, as Smt. Gandhi has said in her "Foreword", "captures something of the majestic beauty of this area and gives us glimpses into the lives and

customs of the people and the difficulties of administration there".

The valley of Lahaul-Spiti lies between Tibet in the east, Ladakh in the north and Kulu in the south at a height of 10,000 feet to 16,000 feet above the sea level.

Though the summers are pleasant, life during winter is hard, for the valleys remain snow-bound and cut off from the outside world completely throughout a long and severe winter. The temperature, during this period, falls to 13 degrees Centigrade or even less and the valley is forced to live on its limited resources. In spite of all the hazards that accompany the climatic changes, the people, have a cheerful attitude to life and display indomitable courage in facing the day-to-day difficulties in their life.

Panorama Of Life

Written in a readable style, the 13 chapters of the book take one through the vast panorama of the life and problems of the people of Lahaul and Spiti. The complexity of the problems that arise because of the altitude, difficulties in communication, and the special problems that the people have to face during the winter are dealt with the first of the book.

What follows is a fairly detailed and interesting account of customs, beliefs and values of the people festivals and fairs and of the area, monasteries and lamas, their beliefs and their pattern of living.

In narrating the life of the sturdy and hard-working people of Lahaul, the book brings out how the social system of a people is determined by the environmental conditions.

The author states that he has tried to record everything as he saw it without any attempt to make comparisons or to impose his own judgements. He deserves credit for assembling a lot of valuable information which throws light not only in the life and values of the people of Lahaul, but also reveals the problems of our hill areas in general.

A choice selection of photographs enhances the value of the book.

K. R.