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Kangchenjunga: Imaging a Himalayan Mountain

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Introduction: Seeing Kangchenjunga

*Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish;
A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory*

Antony and Cleopatra

Kangchenjunga's identity as a sacred mountain and *abode of the gods* has been known to British and Europeans from the earliest times when the Darjeeling region was first colonized by British settlers.¹ Sir Douglas Freshfield, who offers us perhaps the greatest insight into the mountain's special allure, begins his account of an expedition around Kangchenjunga with the statement: 'In all ages the Waste and High places of the Earth have been peopled with creatures of phantasy, or recognised as the dwellings of Divinity. Mountain Worship in one form or another is as old and as widespread as mankind.'² And indeed, sacred mountains are as common in the Himalaya as they are around the world. Michael Wheeler observes that 'Many of the world's most famous mountains, including Olympus, Fujiyama, Kilimanjaro, Everest (or Chomolungma) and Sinai (or Horeb), are either the homes of the gods, or the sites of man's most direct encounters with God.'³ Kangchenjunga's sacred identity is not, therefore, in itself particularly unusual, but there are a number of separate and overlapping issues that make up the various different aspects of our western perception of Kangchenjunga as a sacred mountain or *home of the gods*. Firstly, and perhaps most significantly, there is the name itself: which roughly translates as: *the five treasuries of the eternal snows*.⁴ It is such an exotic and alluring name in all its various pronunciations and spellings (Sir

¹ British involvement in the region began in 1816 and the Raja of Sikkim granted the hill of Darjeeling, then more or less uninhabited, to the British on 1st February 1835.

² Douglas W. Freshfield, *Round Kangchenjunga: A Narrative of Mountain Travel and Exploration*, Edward Arnold, London, 1903; [re-printed by Pilgrims Publishing, Varanasi, India, 2000], p. 1.

³ Michael Wheeler, 'Inscribed upon its visionary sides': on reading mountains, in: *Sublime Inspiration: The Art of Mountains from Turner to Hillary* (exhibition catalogue), Abbot Hall Art Gallery, 18 June-14 September 1997, p. 17.

⁴ There are various translations of Kang-chen-dzo-nga. Other variants are: 'The Five Repositories or Ledges of the Great Snows' (Waddell, 1895); 'The Five Repositories of the Great Glaciers' (Waddell, 1899); 'The Five Sacred Treasuries of the Snows' (Band, 1955); 'The Five Treasure Houses of the Snow' (Tucker, 1955), etc. The Lepcha name for the mountain is *Kong-lo-chu*, or 'The Highest Screen or Curtain of the Snows'. See: L.A. Waddell, *Among the Himalayas*, Constable & Co., London, 1899, p. 387.

Douglas Freshfield mentions fourteen competing variants)⁵ that it must have made an immediate appeal to western tongues and imaginations ever since the first visitors to the region heard it and discovered what it meant. It seems self-evident that the mountain's name and its sacred significance are part of an understanding that grew quite naturally overtime in the minds of many generations of British and Europeans in India.

Of the four Himalayan peaks over 8500 metres, Kangchenjunga is by far the most easily visible. Even in the mid-nineteenth-century, long before the days of mass tourism, it was quite possible to make a four-day excursion from Calcutta to see the mountain, travelling by train to Siliguri and then by garry, or after 1879 when construction was completed, on the narrow-gauge 'toy railway'. From the Mall or Observatory Hill in Darjeeling the mountain, just seventy-two kilometers away, is in clear sight - provided, of course, that weather conditions are favourable. The prominence and accessibility of Kangchenjunga, or more precisely the *view* of it from Darjeeling - that particular hillside of Sikkim which became a British hill station in 1835 - ensured that Kangchenjunga would from the outset be known by its local name. Other more remote Himalayan peaks such as Everest and K2 (Mount Godwin-Austin), which were seen at first from afar and were located in forbidden territory, did not become known by their local names. The famous 'discovery' of Mount Everest,⁶ during the Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India, was of a peak so distant and crowded around by other tall peaks that it had first seemed insignificant until its height was calculated by scientific methods at Dehra Dun. The Superintendent of the survey, Colonel Andrew Waugh, eventually named the mountain after his predecessor Sir George Everest.⁷ Subsequently, in 1885, the pundit Chandra Das wrote an official report in which he identified Everest by one of its indigenous or regional names: *Chomokankar* (the Lord of the Snows) and Waddell supported this name in a later publication. Writing in 1903, Sir Douglas Freshfield also lent his support and did not agree 'in the propriety of imposing an english name on the highest mountain in the world. It would be a bad precedent to do so'.⁸ But the name Everest stuck and its sacred epithet: *Chomolungma* (meaning Earth Mother Goddess of the World), remained relatively obscure until recent times, although, out of deference

⁵ Douglas W. Freshfield, *Round Kangchenjunga*, p. 18.

⁶ In 1852. Radhanath Sikdhar, head of the Computing Office, Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India headquarters at Dehra Dun, burst into the office of Sir Andrew Waugh, Superintendent General, with the expected news: 'Sir, I have discovered the highest mountain in the world!' <http://www.sbg.ac.at/mat/staff/revers/mallory106.html>

⁷ The name was later given official approval by the Royal Geographical Society in 1865.

⁸ See Freshfield, *Round Kangchenjunga*, p. 201.

it is commonly used by westerners today.⁹ Kangchenjunga, however, like other peaks that are clearly visible from Darjeeling such as Jannu, Kabru and Pandim, has always been known by its local name and the resonance of that name undoubtedly adds to the allure of the mountain.

Kangchenjunga as a Sacred Space

Although in close physical proximity to Darjeeling, Kangchenjunga is often wholly or partially hidden from view; at certain times of day it seems to be disembodied from the surrounding foothills by low-lying cloud and appears to hover in the air. This phenomenon, along with Kangchenjunga's name, which when freely interpreted, can be taken to mean a kind of *sacred space*, has helped to fix in the imaginations of generations of westerners the idea of the mountain as an ethereal realm, disembodied from the world and periodically revealed in the same manner as a vision. This highly romantic conception of the mountain has often been expressed in poetry or prose as well as in the correspondence of some of the many tourists and travellers who have written about their experiences of seeing Kangchenjunga. One such example is a letter written by the traveller and sometime mountaineer Gertrude Bell to her father in 1903:

... there was Kinchinjunga whiter than ever. Then the mists rolled up again and an hour later nothing but the very tip-top of the snows was visible. This is when they look highest; you can scarcely believe that it can really be part of the earth right up in the top of the sky.¹⁰

Bell's letter was written in the same year that Sir Douglas Freshfield published *Round Kangchenjunga*, an account of his pioneering circumnavigation of the mountain. In *Round Kangchenjunga*, Freshfield describes the typical traveller's first sight of Kangchenjunga:

As he looks out of the carriage window, he will at first observe only the dark plain and the dim shadowy rounded outlines of the foothills. But when he lifts his eyes he will be aware, if he lifts them high enough, far up, at an incredible height in the pale tremulous sky, of a row of roseate fumes. They are not clouds. While he gazes they harden from the phantoms of a dream into

⁹ Ibid. Freshfield devotes some space to the use of local names: 'Where possible, local names should bear the stamp of the locality. In Arctic waters or North American wildernesses, where no man has ever come before him, the explorer may legitimately commemorate his sovereign, his patrons, his friends, or even himself. For myself, I dislike the practice; I would much rather the names of the Presidents of the Alpine Club had not been attached to certain peaks of the Far West. This however, may be regarded as a personal prejudice. But in the Himalaya the great mountains have native names, and I cannot think it either right or expedient that we should disregard them'.

¹⁰ Gertrude Bell in a letter to her father, 15th February 1903.

definite forms. They are the snow-peaks of Sikkim, the giants of the Himalaya, the greatest mountains in the world...¹¹

Frank Smythe, on an expedition to climb Kangchenjunga in 1930, echoed similar sentiments, describing the mountain in moonlight as ‘a glowing aureole of light. Imperceptibly the upper snowslopes were resolved from the darkness; ghostlike, unreal, they shimmered far above the world.’¹² The American poet Cale Young Rice (1872-1943) devoted a five-verse poem to describing Kangchenjunga’s ethereal and transcendent qualities, using ecclesiastical analogy to touch on its sacred and life-giving qualities:

I
O WHITE Priest of Eternity, around
Whose lofty summit veiling clouds arise
Of the earth’s immemorial sacrifice
To Brahma in whose breath all lives and dies...

II
For in this world too much is overclear,
Immortal Ministrant to many lands,
From whose ice-altars flow to fainting sands
Rivers that each libation poured expands.¹³

Kangchenjunga as Cloud

Mountains are notoriously fickle creations, dissolving and reappearing, like the ‘melting hills’ in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam* which ‘Like clouds ... shape themselves and go’. To the western writer or artist, immersed in Europe’s romantic tradition, the ephemeral qualities of Kangchenjunga when seen from the Mall in Darjeeling or from Sandakphu, can only add to its mystic appeal, as does another phenomenon that is sometimes evoked in descriptions of the mountain. A mirror opposite to the mutable cloud in Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* that in its various aspects can resemble ‘a forked mountain, or blue promontory’ and ‘mock(s) our eyes with air’, Kangchenjunga appears so high in the sky that it is sometimes mistaken for a cloud. The evanescent, cloudlike quality of Kangchenjunga (along with its sheer enormity) is perhaps what most frustrated Edward Lear when trying to paint it, observing: ‘Kinchinjunga is not so it seems to me, a sympathetic mountain, it is so far off ... so very god-like and stupendous’. In the various versions of Lear’s *Kinchinjunga*

¹¹ Freshfield, *Round Kangchenjunga*, p. 31.

¹² F. S. Smythe, *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*, Gollancz, London, 1930, p.265.

¹³ Cale Young Rice, *Kinchinjunga (Which is the next highest of mountains)*, published in Jessie B. Rittenhouse, (ed.), *The Little Book of Modern Verse*, 1917. See also Cale Young Rice, *Collected Plays and Poems*, 1915.

from *Darjeeling*, the mountain rises like an apparition above the tangled, tree-covered slopes of Darjeeling, in a composition similar to Samuel Palmer's *Bright Cloud*. Both are images that evoke the sublime, continuing a late eighteenth-century tradition of painting when, as the Reverend William Gilpin observed in 1791: 'Many images owe their sublimity to their indistinctness; and frequently what we call sublime is the effect of that heat and fermentation, which ensues in the imagination from its ineffectual efforts to conceive some dark, obtuse idea beyond its grasp.'

There are a number of instances in which authors have written about their experiences of mistaking Kangchenjunga for a cloud. Frank Smythe, for example, sleeping on the veranda of the Richenpung dak-bungalow in Sikkim, awoke one morning to just such a dawn vision:

As I raised myself in my sleeping bag, I saw between a gap in the nearer mists the crest of a great cloud high up in the sky aglow with the first pale light of day. But was it a cloud? It was too steadfast, too immovable. I rubbed the dimming sleepiness from my eyes. It was no cloud, but a snowy mountain.¹⁴

And in 1955, the mountaineer John Tucker wrote of the 'greatest impression' of Kangchenjunga when '...one suddenly realizes that the white tips to the clouds are not moving but still; that they are in truth the mountains one has come to see and perhaps to climb. At such times ... the mountains seem incredibly remote and take on an almost fairy-tale beauty. It is indeed hardly surprising that the superstitious hill tribes should have regarded them as the seat of an all-powerful god - a belief that persists to this day.'¹⁵

Kangchenjunga as an Abode of God

From the indistinct, ethereal qualities of Kangchenjunga which are so often remarked upon, and the climatic conditions that sometimes cause it to appear separated from the Earth, as if part of a *celestial sphere*, it is short step to imagining the mountain as an abode of God, as Thomas Gray had imagined the Alps when he went to the Grande Chartreuse in 1739, or as the poet Thomas Moore did when he went on a journey to see Niagara Falls. Moore wrote of feeling '...as if I were approaching the very residence of the Deity ... My whole heart and soul ascended towards the Divinity in a swell of devout admiration, which I never before experienced.' The Romantic tradition gives westerners ample license to imagine Kangchenjunga as a 'residence of the Deity' whilst many of

¹⁴ F.S. Smythe, *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*, Gollancz, London, 1930, p. 115

¹⁵ John Tucker, *Kanchenjunga*, Elek Books, London, 1955, pp. 13-14.

them have also added to it some understanding of local Sikkimese traditions and belief, obtained largely, it seems, through the books of L.A. Waddell, a long term resident in Darjeeling. Waddell writes:

The mountain Kanchinjunga, on the western border of Tibet, is known to most visitors to Darjiling and northern Bengal. This graceful mountain ... was formerly in itself an object of worship, as it towers high above every other object in the country, and is the first to receive the rays of the rising sun and the last to part with the sun-set. Kanchinjunga literally means 'the five repositories or ledges of the great snows,' and is physically descriptive of its five peaks ... But the Sikkim saint, Lhat-tsun Ch'enbo, gave the name a mythological meaning, and the mountain was made to become merely the habitation of the god of that name, and the five 'repositories' became real store-houses of the god's treasure. The peak which is most conspicuously gilded by the rising sun is the treasury of gold; the peak which remains in cold grey shade is the silver treasury, and the other peaks are the stores of gems and grain and holy books. This idea of treasure naturally led to the god being physically represented somewhat after the style of 'the god of wealth,' ... He is of a red colour, clad in armour, and carries a banner of victory, and is mounted on a white lion. He is on the whole a good-natured god, but rather impassive, and is therefore less worshipped than the more actively malignant deities.¹⁶

Through Waddell and others, the myth of the god Kangchenjunga gained a very wide currency and led many authors - some rather too frequently at times - to describe the mountain Kangchenjunga as 'the abode of gods' and to write of any elemental force, such as a Himalayan storm, in terms of the wrath (or sometimes beneficence) of the 'god' or 'demon' Kangchenjunga. Perhaps this is only a convenient way of exploring the different cultural manifestations of a single feeling: that sense of the sublime felt in the presence of great mountains and our sense of helplessness before elemental forces of nature, that is common to all mankind. Whatever the case, the appropriation of local Buddhist and Lepcha beliefs and their conflation with a Romantic convention, is a literary device used widely and with remarkable consistency in nearly all the literature about Kangchenjunga from Joseph Dalton Hooker's *Himalayan Journals* onwards.¹⁷ Frank Smythe and George Band continue the tradition, making occasional reference to the beneficence or malevolence of the god of Kangchenjunga in the accounts of their expeditions to climb the mountain.¹⁸

¹⁶ L.A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, W.H. Allen & Co., London, 1895, p. 371.

¹⁷ Apart from the *Phang Lhabsang*, smaller Lepcha ceremonies to propitiate the god Kangchenjunga or *Konchen* as he is locally known, are recorded, where offerings are made on small field altars in view of the mountain. See: John Morris, *Living with Lepchas*, Heinemann, London, 1938, pp. 153-7

¹⁸ For example Band: 'The God of Kangchenjunga was kind to us, for May 25 dawned fine.' (ibid., p. 52) and, concerning the death of Pemi Dorje: 'So, to the Sherpas, it seemed that, after all, the God of Kangchenjunga had demanded the sacrifice of one of the keenest and most likeable of their number.' (ibid., pp. 55-6).

The god or ‘demon’ of Kangchenjunga

A festival in veneration of the guardian deity of Kangchenjunga is still celebrated in Sikkim on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Tibetan calendar. This festival, known as *Phang Lhabsol*, is unique to Sikkim and has its origin in the Lepcha belief that the mountain is their place of origin. Chakdor Namgyal, the third *Chogyal* (King) of Sikkim introduced the *pangtoed* dance and dedicated it to the warlike deity Kangchenjunga although the actual origin of the festival is said to commemorate a pact of blood brotherhood between Thekung Tek and Khye-Bumsa, an ancestor of the Namgyal royal family. A week prior to the dance festival, the lamas of Pemayangtse monastery offer prayers, invoking the god Kangchenjunga (or *Dzonka* as he is popularly known). *Phang Lhabsol* is a dramatic spectacle, combining masked and warrior dances and Kangchenjunga is represented by a dancer wearing a red mask surmounted with five human skulls and flags. *Yabdu*, Kangchenjunga’s supreme commander, wears a black mask, while accompanying warriors wear traditional battle dress complete with helmets, swords and shields. The dramatic climax of the dance and of the festival is the entry of *Mahakala*, protector of *dharma* or faith. He commands Kangchenjunga and *Yabdu* to defend the faith and bring peace and prosperity to Sikkim.¹⁹

Sir Joseph Hooker makes reference to this festival, writing about the day on which offerings are made ‘by the pagan Lepchas to their genius of Kinchinjunga by holding it as a festival of the church throughout Sikkim’. On that occasion an invocation to the mountain is chanted by priests and people in chorus. It runs thus:

*Kanchin-jinga, Pemi Kadup
Gnetche Tangla, Dusha tember
Zu jinga Pemsum Serkiem
Dischze ubra Kanchin tong.*²⁰

Hooker also recorded how in the evening ‘the Lamas visited us, with presents of rice, fowls, eggs, &c., and begged subscriptions for their temple which was then building ... As for me, they said, I was bound to give alms, as I surely needed praying for, seeing how I exposed myself; besides my having been the first Englishman who had visited the snows of Kinchinjunga, the holiest spot in Sikkim.’

¹⁹ Rajesh Verma, *Sikkim a Guide and Handbook*, Gangtok, 1990 and later, p. 84.

²⁰ Hooker was unable to find the meaning of this incantation but was interested enough in it to have it transcribed for him by his fellow traveller Dr. Campbell.

Approximately fifty years later, in *Round Kangchenjunga*, Freshfield describes a 'devil dance' that may well have been part of the same service to honour Kangchenjunga:

Later in the day Rinsing arranged for us a 'Devil Dance.' The occasion was propitious, as a party of young Lamas were staying at the monastery previous to going up to Alukthang to offer a week's service to the God of Kangchenjunga. The dance itself is extraordinarily picturesque. At one moment I was reminded of the Dancing Dervishes of Constantinople, at another of Drury Lane. Since, however, the object in view is rather dramatic representation than the excitement of religious ecstasy in the actors, the performance inclines rather in the direction of pantomime. But no pantomimic artist of the London stage ever designed such terrible masques or such fantastic beasts as these Buddhist monks have invented. They are past masters of the Grotesque and the Ghostly. There were demons with horns and goggle eyes, demons with death's heads, a creature with a stag's head, resembling Actaeon after his indiscretion. The robes they wore were priceless ancient Chinese silks and brocades; the costume of each dancer was said to be worth on the spot some £50. What would they not be worth in London? As they whirled round and round, their skirts formed stiff hoops of colour under which appeared heavily bandaged legs, very unlike those of any European ballet-girl. Each separate dance had its meaning, symbolising some struggle between the powers of Nature, in which the friends and enemies of man fight with varying fortunes for the mastery. One 'pas de fascination' was said to represent the efforts of the demons of Kangchenjunga and Chomokankar to gain the affections of the fair spirits of the lakes and groves.²¹

The various ways in which the god or 'demon' of Kangchenjunga is introduced by various writers reflects both the outlook of the author and the period in which he or she is writing. The references to it made by Sir Douglas Freshfield, writing in 1903 in *Round Kangchenjunga*, are rather self-conscious, as for example when on the Zemu Glacier he witnesses a terrific snowstorm brewing in the sky above the mountain:

The sky, which had been deep blue, turned pale, then grey, then almost yellow, while dark, evil-looking streaks of vapour, not the ordinary honest, shining cumuli of noon, hung about then ridges. ... The sun looked sick, and was surrounded by a lurid ring tinged with faint prismatic colours, strange iridescences such as Tintoretto spreads about his Christ in Judgment.

I cannot pretend these these celestial appearances framed themselves into any positive symbol. Had I possessed the imagination of some of my friends, I might perhaps have recognised the tutelary Demon of Kangchenjunga, glaring at the intruder on his solitude.²²

²¹ Freshfield, *Round Kangchenjunga*, pp. 256-7

²² *ibid.*, p. 115

Towards the end of the book, in a further reference to the same storm that went on to cause devastation in Darjeeling, Freshfield describes the *Puja* that had been held afterwards ‘to propitiate the God of Kangchenjunga and expiate the insult that had enraged him’; and referring to his recent journey around Kangchenjunga as ‘our intrusion into the *Abode of Deity*’.²³ Writing in 1930, Frank Smythe uses a similar literary device to describe a storm he witnessed over the Himalaya from Darjeeling:

In the direction of Everest sudden floods of white light soundlessly illuminated the cloudy pavements of the sky, picking out in faultless detail the towers, minarets and cupolas of a cathedral of mist towering above the world. As though jealous of his supreme neighbour, the God of Kangchenjunga struck out with fierce blue swords and vicious darts of forked lightning. Somewhere over Bhutan and Thibet another cloud winked with bibulous persistence like some lesser mountain god delighting in this fiery combat of Himalayan giants. No thunder was to be heard. From the depths of the Rangit Valley beneath, mist wraiths swayed upwards like jinns from the confines of a monstrous battle.²⁴

To western eyes it is difficult to reconcile the sublime vision of the mountain Kangchenjunga with its embodiment in a minor Buddhist deity - a grotesque mask with goggle eyes - a demon that seems almost indistinguishable from *Mahakala* or the many other protecting deities of the Buddhist pantheon.

Perhaps the most remarkable way in which the sacred space of Kangchenjunga has entered and become part of a shared cultural and mountaineering history, is the expedition by a team of British climbers that put four climbers on the near-summit of Kangchenjunga in May 1955. The Sikkimese authorities had been reluctant to grant permission to climb the mountain, an act which they regarded as a form of sacrilege, but Charles Evans, the expedition leader, made a special journey to discuss the problem with the Dewan (‘Prime Minister’) representing the Sikkim Durbar:

His friendly and understanding mediation resulted in permission for us to continue with our plans, provided that we pledged ourselves to observe two conditions: not to go beyond the point on the mountain at which we were assured of a route to the top, and not, however high our reconnaissance might take us, to desecrate the immediate neighbourhood of the summit.²⁵

²³ *ibid.*, p. 261.

²⁴ F. S. Smythe, *The Kangchenjunga Adventure*, Gollancz, London, 1930, pp. 87-8.

²⁵ George Band, ‘Kangchenjunga Climbed’, *The Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XIX, 1955-56, pp. 33-56.

The agreement was kept by George Band and Joe Brown, who reached the near-summit on the 29th May, and by Norman Hardie and Tony Streather, who summited the following day. A remarkable colour photograph of the untrodden peak: a simple, white cone of snow against a dark blue sky, without flag or triumphant mountaineer, taken in close proximity just a few feet below the summit, is an outstanding document of mountaineering history. It is a rare image indeed; one in which we see Kangchenjunga conquered but un-violated, showing the achievement of outstanding climbers and, significantly, their respect both for the culture and the environment in which they climbed.

Despite growing pollution in the air above the town of Darjeeling, Kangchenjunga's omnipotent yet strangely illusive presence is as captivating today as it was when Sir Joseph Hooker first saw it over one hundred and fifty years ago. It continues to be seen and interpreted by westerners in different ways and in recent times many have brought to the mountain their own personal intuitions of its spiritual significance. The Russian philosopher, explorer, author and artist Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), explored theosophist ideas in a series of paintings of Kangchenjunga, where he imagined great treasures to be stored in subterranean caves and passages deep within the mountain leading to an unopened stone door.²⁶ The English born Sangharakshita (1925 -), head of the Western Buddhist Order,²⁷ following his ordination as a *shramanera* or novice monk, spent many years working for the good of Buddhism in Kalimpong. In *Facing Mount Kanchenjunga*, Sangharakshita wrote of the significance of the mountain for him and for his Indian friends, and of the act of taking *darshan* (an act of contemplation) in the presence of the Himalaya:

The climb was a stiff one, especially towards the end, and it was not until nearly midday that, having emerged from the pine forest, we found ourselves on the bare top of Dailo Hill. The sun was shining brilliantly. ... Aloft on the horizon, and extending in an unbroken line from farthest east to farthest west, were the snow peaks of the eastern Himalayas. There must have been hundreds of them. Except for Kanchenjunga and Lama Yuru, a pyramidal mountain so called from its resemblance to a meditating monk, I did not know their names. Nor did I care to know them. For me it was enough to sit there in that intense stillness, five thousand feet above sea level, simply contemplating those silent white forms. Contemplating them in this way - taking *darshan*, as my Indian friends would have said - I could begin to understand why the Himalayas has such a hold on the imagination of the people of the sub-continent and why they occupied so prominent a place in the

²⁶ See: Jacqueline Decker, *Nicholas Roerich: The Life and Art of a Russian Master*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989, pp. 199-202.

²⁷ Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha.

religious and cultural life of Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains alike. I could understand why Kalidasa, in an oft-quoted phrase, had described the Himalayas as ‘the congealed laughter of Shiva’, and why the author of *Skanda Purana* had gone so far as to personify the Himalaya or Himachala, in the singular and extol him as a deity...²⁸

Others have simply used the internet to share their own experience of seeing Kangchenjunga, such as a recent visitor to Darjeeling who saw the mountain from the Observatory Hill promenade and ‘immediately felt an enormous flow of energy into my consciousness’.²⁹

It was a moment of sheer joy, a feeling of great peace and love and light. I walked along for another few minutes and again [had] the same experience. I was overwhelmed by a surge of high energy, of unity of purpose, of great strength and peacefulness. This was the most profoundly moving experience that I could ever recall, sweeping my consciousness as I walked along, as I paused ever so often to catch my breath.’³⁰

²⁸ Sangharakshita, *Facing Mount Kangchenjunga, An English Buddhist in the Eastern Himalayas*, Windhorse Publications, Glasgow, 1991, p. 474.

²⁹ Rose Singer Halama, *Kangchenjunga and the Ancient Mysteries*, (2001)

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Ancient-Mysteries/message/1117>

³⁰ *ibid.*