

Manmohan Bawa An ocean in the sky

Better known as a fiction writer, Manmohan Bawa, primarily is an adventurer: a traveler in time and space. In his study he travels back to history and mythology, in his life he moves around the world. Being close to his heart and art as a painter, he always loves to be in Himalayas. *Tour and Trekking guide to Ladakh* is his latest work.

Before this he wrote *Aao Chaliye Barfaan De Paar* (Let's Go Beyond the Snow) *An-dithe Raste Uche Parvat* (The Unseen Trails and High Mountains) *Ikk Parvat Te Do Darya* (One Mountain and Two Rivers) and *Jungle Jungle Parvat Parvat* (Forests and Mountains) in Punjabi. But our language, like its people, doesn't seem to be much interested in Himalaya, keeping Bawa's appraisal confined to his fiction which of course is very close to the reality because of the social themes that are generally based on various periods of Indian history and mythology. Conversely the power of his travel writings lie in their fiction-like qualities, as the painter and adventurer in him discovered his self in Himalaya, a dream place of its creator. He has already published his *Adventure in the Snows* and *Adventure in the Mountains* in English, followed by *The Indian Himalaya*, a comprehensive touring and trekking guide spread over more than three hundred pages with a number of plates depicting visuals and maps.

The strength of Bawa as a travel writer lies in the fact that he himself has trekked the mountains several times in different sets of conditions. He tells that the initial presence of Buddhism in Leh and Ladakh is because of PadamSambava who was from Texila-Gandhar area and had linkages with Punjab; the Tibet influence is a historical development of later period.. After narrating the short history of Ladakh , the writer portrays the present scenario: the road conditions, the access,

weather conditions, available food, trekking restrictions and obtainable assistances.

Before giving the details of more than a dozen Gompas (Monasteries) of Ladakh area, he explains the structure and importance of Chortans (miniature Stupas) and Mani Walls. You can find yourself in Hemis, Thikse, Spitok, Alchi and Leh Gompas which are culturally rich, historically strong, religiously significant and architecturally fascinating. The writer also elaborates on all possible aspects of more than 12 different treks which include Darcha to Padam, Padam to Lamayuru, Leh and Markha Valley and Kargil to Padam.

Generally the trekkers and visitors in Ladakh go to see the well known lake (Tso) Moriri, 30 kms long and 5-8 kms wide store of water at an altitude of 4512 mts from the sea level. But Bawa talks extensively of Pangong Tso that has the biggest body of sea water, thousands feet above the ocean: 130 kms long and 5 kms wide, a major part of the lake being in the Chinese territory. It is said that when the Indian and Asian Plates, millions of years ago, collided with each other to form Himalaya, this water was arrested in between the resulting mountains. This lake is like an ocean in the sky.

If you are a traveler, the book assures you of being a reliable assistant; otherwise it helps you peep into the dream valleys and mountains of the north.