

When you travel within

by Paromita Goswami

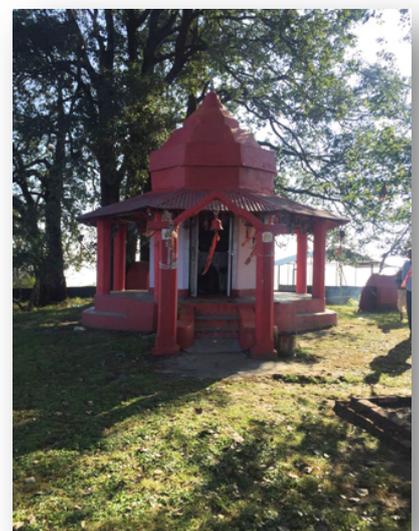
If you closed your eyes, you might have felt that you are Heidi. Those cow-bells sounded straight from Switzerland.

When you opened your eyes, you could see *Trishul* and *Nanda Devi* peaks. You could also run after magical butterflies. Else there is always silence. You learn that silence can be filling, not draining. The usually expressive you, who talks for a living, fails to find words sometimes. But lack of words is like smelling that *belia mala* loosely hanging from your long tresses.



When you look inwards, there is magic. And *Ameeta (di)* holds your hand when you try to figure out questions about goals, relationships, and life-purpose. At the end of the exploration, you might just discover that your questions were pointless . . . and you need to re-frame what you set out to seek. Or your answer can arise out of you in a deep meditative state, when the *agni* of aspiration sears your heart and soul, with tears wetting your cheeks and lips. And you know. You just know.

Meditative walk into the woods, or up to the ancient temple sitting atop a steep hill, peels off layers of mundane . . . like unnecessary make-up that hide the real glowing *durga*-you.





And then there is *raga malkosh* recital of the rare *rudra-veena* by a German *sadhak*-musician who also builds his own instrument. Allow the moon to gingerly wash off your earthly cares.

Even if you are not a foodie, you can't stay in your usual ascetic food-state when Harry Potter-ish spread is served from own-farm-



sourced organic delights. The *jungli* herb pickle will kiss your mouth with its sharp bite, and the triple-layer dark-chocolate dessert oomph you till the dark crevices of your desires gape wide open.

When you come back to your world, it's not the same. Neither you, nor what you called your world.

My experience at the Himalayan Retreat

by Ambika Rikhye

Before I begin talking about the retreat, I would like to talk about how much I dilly-dallied on whether to go or not to go. When my friend first told me about it, I really wanted to go; I had had a rough couple of months and I thought it would be a relaxing break for me. All was settled, my husband took leave from work to be home with my son. Just when my friend was booking the train tickets, I decided not to go. There was this devil inside me that just wanted to be lazy and spend that long weekend at home with my family. But two days later, when my friend had booked her train tickets, I decided to go. I was lucky enough to get a seat next to my friends and with an anxious mind, I left for the mountains. I was anxious because I had no clue, why exactly I was going, and how will I stay away from my child for six long days.

Though I am a very peaceful person and totally believe in tranquility but whenever a loved one would fall sick, I would kill myself with worry. My father fell ill during the summer and I was not able to think positive after that; I was in constant fear that I will lose my loved ones. Though my father recovered, but I couldn't. I kept myself busy to run away from my silly fears. Even during the train journey I felt this retreat was unnecessary. But how wrong was I!!

When I finally reached the retreat, I felt as if I have entered a calendar. It was so picturesque and divine. It was so quiet yet so chirpy!

It was so beautiful. The clear view of the snow peaked mountains, the Nanda Devi and the Trishul. We would wait for the sun's first rays to reach the peaks. That moment was so mesmerizing, and so golden. The sunrise was unbelievable. The colours of the sky. The chirping of the birds. Such exotic flowers, growing wildly everywhere. The fluttering butterflies. The fruit trees. The sunset and the starry sky; if I looked at it for a long time, it felt as if I am the universe. If I start writing about the beauty of that place, I will probably keep writing forever.

I did things that I had not even dreamt about. I meditated in the deep forest. I enjoyed the sounds of the forest for as long as I wanted. I realized that there is no sweeter fragrance than the smell of the forest. I saw and met the local villagers. Saw their houses and how they lived. The abundant fruit trees growing in every garden. It was like a fairy tale.

The ringing of the cow bells was more melodious than any other music and watching them grazing along the steep mountain was a delight. We had their milk and butter everyday for breakfast. The food was so delicious at the retreat. It was cooked with loads of love, I could tell. We were fed with so much affection and tenderness; it was just like a mother feeding her child.

I learnt how to invoke peace in myself. I learnt the power of meditation and prayers. I learnt that life is simple and it should be not be complicated. That we have the power to change our thoughts and our future. That there is something more powerful in us than the mind.

I made some amazing friends, probably for life.

After the complete program, my problems felt so trivial and I felt so light, happy and positive. I wish I could send all my friends and family for this retreat. How quickly and lightly these five days went by, it is like a beautiful dream. My husband still jokes about how the frequency of my calls just dropped after reaching the retreat. What I have gained in these five days, is a treasure for a lifetime.

LEISURE by William Henry Davies (1871-1940)

What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.

No time to stand beneath the boughs
And stare as long as sheep or cows.

No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.

No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars like skies at night.

No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance.

No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began.

A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.