



# PLACID PELLING

A spectacular Himalayan paradise.

By Brinda Ganesan

**W**ho says rain plays spoilsport? At least not in the hills. I am wiped out after an arduous journey of 16 hours (10 hours by train from Kolkata and six hours by road in the mountainous terrain). I am in Sikkim, the darling child of Mother Nature.

The place is Pemayangste a nondescript forested village near Pelling, a beautiful spot in the state. Our resort, a retreat of the erstwhile royal family of Sikkim is perched on a hilltop.

After the usual formalities, I sit in the lovely landscaped lawns sipping the welcome drink and savouring the beauty of nature. "The hotel overlooks the Sangalila range and Kanchenjunga can be seen at the farthest," says Vivek Oberoi, my host,

over phone. But the snowcapped peaks are clouded. Suddenly the clouds gather. Expecting some showers I retire to the lounge which has some excellent Sikkimese furniture. In moments, a fine drizzle begins to veil the hills and the entire surroundings.

I enjoy another cuppa and call for an umbrella to venture out and enjoy the April showers. As I move out of the hotel the downpour slowly comes to a naught. Again it is bright and I hear loud cheers. I scurry back to the garden. And lo! The heavens' sprinkle has acted like a wiper and the whole mountain range with snowy peaks comes into view in all its glory! The rain has pulled back the curtain over the hills which were cloaked in mist! Hence, rain only adds charm to the ambience and is not an impediment.

Back to the story, I return to my chamber where my valet has stowed my luggage. I am again in for a surprise! The room is large on all its sides and the lights twinkle from nearby Pelling! A gorgeous view is the USP of the Elgin Hotel. From the other window the blue-tinted snow and the sky mesmerises us. In the morning, I wake up to the call of fledglings.

Again, I walk up to the lawns. The zephyr, the daybreak, the verdant slopes, the flowers in full bloom (with dewdrops), the red-cheeked grass cutter – make my lips to spontaneously mutter the song *Khilte hai gul yahan* (a hit of Kishore from *Sharmilee*). I walk down the road for the morning constitutional.

Outside the hotel, the road forks into two. One meanders down to Pelling. The other seems to be



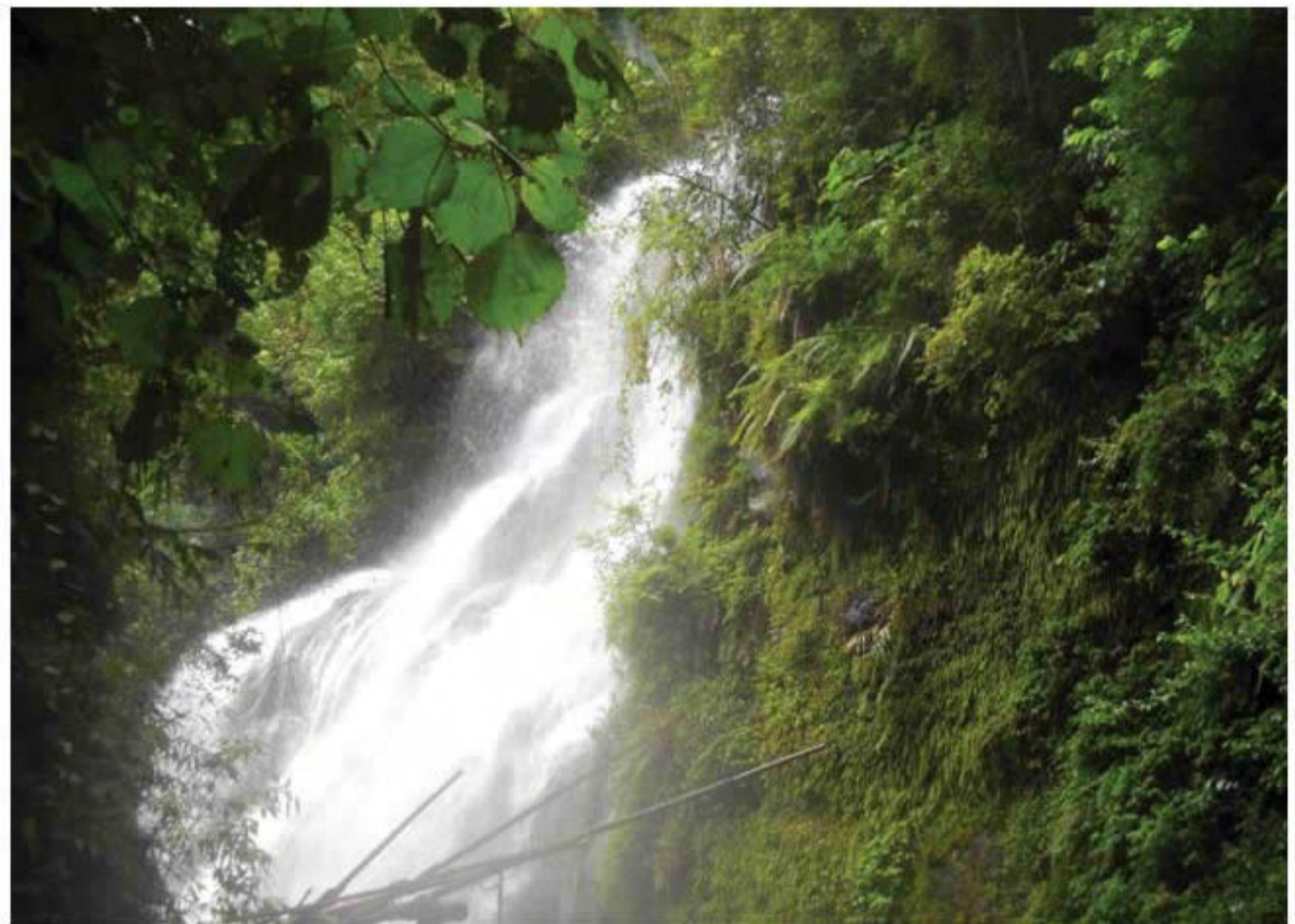
desolated and the ravages of time turned the royal capital into ruins. The *chortens* around the palace have, however, stood the test of time.

We have to clamber up a fleet of steps to reach the top of the monument. It has two divisions – the palace and the place of worship. The picturesque view from the top spanning across the subterranean valley to the occult heights of Kanchenjunga is something to be loved and etched in memory. In toto, a visitor to this place gets a glimpse of Sikkim's history while enjoying the striking prospect as well.

On the following day we had a literal sightseeing.

**Singshore Bridge (650 ft):** Spanning a deep gorge this suspension bridge connecting two hills, it is considered an engineering marvel, acclaimed the second longest of its kind in Asia and the highest in Sikkim. From the centre of the bridge you can get a fabulous view of the streams gushing out from the mountains.

**Kechopalri Lake:** We head for Kechopalri, a mystical lake supposed to be one of 108 sacred lakes of the Himalayas. Past the ruins of ancient towns below monasteries tended by red-robed lamas lie the crystalline, wish-fulfilling waters of the Kechopalri Lake. Revered by both Hindus and Buddhists for its magical power to heal, the lake is a mystery in itself. Encompassed by thick oak forests the waters of the lake are jade green with no signs of fish in them. A small temple stands at the banks. It is said that whenever leaves from the trees



fall into the water, the birds that dwell here swoop down and scoop them away from the lake.

Thus, the lake remains crystal clear. The lake is believed to have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche in the ninth century. As we walked up to the lake, we had pilgrims carrying incense sticks and other puja paraphernalia, jostling with each other. Right at the end of the jetty, the devout prayed and offered *prasad* to the lake, which was quickly gobbled up by a school of fish, thrashing about in the lake.

**Sewaro Rock Garden:** A small hydel power plant is situated on the left bank of the Rimbi River and provides power to Pelling and other nearby villages and towns. The department of tourism in Sikkim has developed the Sewaro Rock Garden

on the banks of the Rimbi. The park is beautiful with wild flowers growing everywhere in abandon, the Rimbi flowing by majestically and the hills are completely covered with lovely forests on either side of the park.

**Kanchenjunga Falls:** After witnessing our excitement at the Rimbi Falls, our chauffeur had been hinting that the Kanchanjunga Falls would be far more exciting. The

name itself conjures up images of the water coming down from the snow-capped peak of the great mountain and I must say, on seeing the waterfalls, we were left speechless. The main falls are hidden from view from the road and we have to walk about 500m which includes a short climb to view the spectacular waterfalls, a huge wall of roaring water crashing almost vertically from 150m or more, surrounded by dense foliage and moss-covered stones. To go near the falls, some people give us a helping hand to get over the rocks on the way. As we go near it is an amazing to marvel at the symbiosis of light and sound.

The Changey Waterfall is located about 10 km from Pelling on the way to Dentam. The road that runs past it overlooks the Dentam Valley from high above. The Changey falls from a