
 * THE *
 * NATURAL SCENE *
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Bihar's landscape is of the countryside, an unobtrusive beauty. It is not to be compared with Kashmir, the Himalyas, or any famous seaside resort. Bihar possesses beauty spots in its villages, unknown and unvisited, but offering the thrills of pioneering to those who happen upon them.

Let us start with the plains of North Bihar, a bit of country that at first sight offers nothing, being flat as a pancake with the occasional mango tope or Shisham grove to relieve the monotony of acres of cultivated fields. But here, too, a village with its square of palms and humble, thatched huts peeping through them, changes in colour from yellowish green to blue as the eyes travel to the sky. Palms, either in squares or/ in avenues, are a characteristic feature of the landscape here, and are surprisingly beautiful as they change colour with the varying intensity of the light. Every village has a pond or chaur mottled with leaves of the lotus, over which blow in royal splendour pink and white flowers. Leaping and flitting across these leaves may be seen the bronze wing-flashes of the jacana or the purple of the moorhen.

Surprisingly, these self-same acres of cultivation provide an admirable setting for a cold weather colour display. Journeys to outlying villages here are still performed by bullock cart, and the usual practice is to get off the train in the small hours of the morning and proceed onwards, reclining comfortably in a well padded bullock cart. There are several cart trails, and one of the best is from the wayside station of Bhaptiahi on North Eastern Railway to Dagnara near Supaul. On this trail, waking in a rose-pink dawn, you expect some startling scene, and there is no disappointment. Stright ahead, over the heads of the bullocks, stand revealed in the morning light the giants of the inner Himalayas which you would normally expect to see only after a hard trek. Dhaulagiri can be immediately spotted and so can a dozen other peaks, some over 25,000 feet high.

high. This is an added charm to the Bihar scene: from an absolutely flat plain with no suggestion of even a hillock can be seen, tier upon tier, a cluster of snow-clad peaks.

Several streams debouch into the plains of North Bihar, checking their angry, tumultuous flow as they broaden into placid, meandering rivers, to present a picture of charm and repose. In these rivers, as also throughout the course of the Ganga, are island-like stretches of sand called diaras. These have little vegetation and practically no human habitation. Beneath a moon their virgin whiteness is as entrancing as that of a snow field, and the rippling waves formed in the sand by the wind can, with a little imagination, be likened to Sastrugi! Often there are pools, remnants of a river, and these lend enchanting colour to a sunset, as the sun goes down slowly across the open landscape. The quiet sombre air in the failing light exudes a mysticism.

South Bihar has its quota of hills and forests. There is no district completely devoid of them, even the ~~most~~ almost completely urban district of Patna has its hills at Giriak and Rajgir. The Girial hills, have, unfortunately, been denuded by excessive grazing, and even the Forest Department has looked askance at the task of afforesting them. Rajgir still has its coat of greenery and is a well-known tourist resort. But the average visitor, after a round of the hot springs and the Buddhist shrines, may consider he has exhausted all the possibilities of the place. However, to anybody venturing off the beaten track Rajgir has a lot more to offer. An amphitheatre lies within a ring of surrounding hills, and here forests still cover the valley floor and the hillsides, though they are of a degraded kind. This amphitheatre was the true Capital of Bimbisara and Ajatshatru, and here, interspersed with the tangles of Euphorbias, are interesting archaeological remains. One of the most impressive is a couple of deep chariot ruts preserved in stone, with specimens of shell writing scattered on a number of rocks nearby. Sitting on one of the rocks, your imagination takes a wild leap through the centuries and pictures of rathas of kings and princes, generals and nobles, racing along these tracks, are conjured up. The spell breaks when a companion expresses a desire further to explore the area. And in this wilderness

wilderness, set in the heart of urbanity, wild animals maintain a foothold. Blue-bills are there today, and it is interesting to speculate if these animals were hunted in the time of King Bimbisara.

Of all the districts of South Bihar, Santhal Parganas is the most hilly and best wooded. The Santhal Parganas sanatoria, Deoghar, Jasidih, Madhupur, and so on, are well known, attracting hundreds of visitors every year. But away from these resorts, tucked away behind inconspicuous wayside railway stations, lie the real scenic beauties. Proceeding along the Burdwan-Kiul loop of Eastern Railway, two small stations that scarcely attract notice lead to some delectable spots. On either side of Sahebganj are Mirzachowki and Maharajpur. A start can be made from either of them. The trail leads to the same sabai and scrub-covered hills inside which lies a valley full of attractions. A stream cascades into a pool and carries water even in the hot weather. The fall is as yet unnamed. The pool is a natural swimming pool. It is far from habitation and an ideal place to sun and bathe on a winter's day.

The show piece of the natural scene of Bihar is, of course, the Chotanagpur Division, with its four districts of plateaux and hills, valleys and forests. Ranchi is famous as the wonderland of waterfalls, and no tourist itinerary is complete without a visit to the Hundru and Jonha falls, and the Damodar gorge at Rajrooppa. But if you leave the beaten track and follow lonely trails you will come across unexpected sights and scenes, all breathtaking in their loveliness. There is a choice of several trails, but let us take the main road from Ranchi to Chakardharpur, 72 miles away.

For 40 miles the road moves along the flat plateau, and then you suddenly come to the ghat section, which is easily one of India's most beautiful roads. After a few turns you come to the small river Hirni, which the road closely hugs as the only safe course through a jumble of hills. As the road descends into a valley a tiny woodland hides the secret of the Hirni's descent - a small waterfall which must be explored on foot. Proceeding, at the 56th milestone you see a finger-post pointing to the right, saying, "Rogod - 9 miles". On a sudden

sudden impulse you take the turn and plunge into Bihar's largest and finest stretch of forests. Twisting and turning on a red gravel road, you climb a hill and at the very top is the Rogod Forest Rest House. You decide to spend the night here, and wake up early in the morning with red light seeping through the window shutters. You get up to investigate, and see the sun inching slowly over the surrounding hills, the sky a blaze of colour, with the emerald green of the forests throwing up a thousand reflections. This place invites you to stay, but with a promise to return you move on to Gailkera. Gailkera is a lumber station with nothing to detain you, but climbing up to the Forest Rest House your gaze is restricted by the huge rise of the Kolhan hills, challenging mysteriously.

With a short pause for refreshments, you push on, through the leafy village of Kandbai and then through the Mitkodwar Pass, until the valley opens out and you are at Patung. Here again all your instincts are for staying on, but you feel that as the evening here is so lovely the morning will be a disappointment, and after a good look around you sneak away. You cross the Deo with some terpidation. It is a biggish show. Then bowling along a road lined with Hollorhena you reach Rajabassa, deep in a birdsong-haunted forest. The place is beautiful, a small brick-coloured cottage placed where two wooded spurs had failed to keep their promise of meeting. And through that window of mountaneous hesitation the glass shutters of the bungalow wink across the broad Karo river to another block of forests walled up by a towering blue range. These are the Saranda forests, and you recall the finger-post at Patung saying, "Salai - 9 miles", gateway to these forests and the mist-wreathed mysteries of Thokobad. You have not the time to continue along the trail and so tear yourself away to return to civilization, promising a long visit the next time, but feeling that perhaps like most promises this may not be fulfilled.

Recently, man-made changes have added to the manifold attractions of Chotanagpur. A National Park has been created astride the Patna Ranchi National Highway, some 12 miles from Burhi on the Grand Trunk Road. Here in an evergreen glade you may see and hear that great songster, the dhayal, or observe the paradise fly-catcher flit from tree to tree.

And there are the lakes created by the storages of the Damodar Valley Corporation - the Tilaiya lake with its maze of hills, the Konar lake, a glittering blue jewel set amidst green forested hills, and finally the Panchet and Maithon lakes, forming an arc with the lovely Tundi hills.

But one has to come to a close. This is only a sketchy description of the natural scene of Bihar, of trails leading to far-away places that create nostalgic longings and beckon again and again, of gentle hills and sloping downs, of charming glades and waterfalls.

 * SPRING *
 * IN THE JUNGLE *

Though Kipling in his "Jungle Book" proclaimed that there is no spring in the world like the jungle spring, the Indian spring tends to be forgotten, even ignored. It has not evoked the same enthusiasm among writers, painters and holiday-makers as spring has elsewhere.

It was hardly noticed during the two and a half centuries of Anglo-Indian life. Even before the British came to this country, the Indian spring had gone out of fashion during Moslem rule.

Of course in the more ancient and suppressed regions of our consciousness it has existed always. The Hindus, and before them the pre-Aryan aboriginals, recognized spring as the season of renewal of life and we have evidence of such recognition, in the gay vernal festivals like Mage, Basant Panchmi, Holi, Phagu and Sarhul.

The aboriginal Mage and the Hindu Basant Panchmi either anticipate spring or are its heralds though Mage is also a sort of thanksgiving for a successful harvest and agricultural year. Phagu and Holi are the aboriginal and Hindu festivities of mature spring. The aboriginal Sarhul comes towards the end of the vernal season when the advancing summer is fast withering the spring.

The Indian spring has not yet been induced into the garden. Hence the difficulty on the part of garden-lovers like the British and their predecessors the Moghuls to consider the Indian spring as significant. The British resident in India, at the time of spring used to be riven with dread of the coming Indian summer and nostalgia for the English spring. His own winter garden in the plains with its borrowed beauty of exotic plants used to intensify the memory of Northern and colder climates.

The pre-spring weather used to increase that nostalgia. For the previous two months strong West winds had kept down the temperature, and under

under clear blue skies, which rose to sheer heights of airiness and transparency, bees hovered over English flowers. A few birds, familiar from England, on their migratory Winter visit, hopped about the deep green doob lawns and conjured up an atmosphere too much like that of a European summer for anyone to prophesy that spring could be but far behind, right at the end of the cycle.

Like the English garden in the plains, the Moghul garden too was an exile. It was tied to Nature in Turkestan and Persia and to the Persian poet's lament over Autumn and the mourning ~~the~~ bulbul. The Moghul garden never woke up to the magic of spring because in India Autumn largely coincides with spring and recalls the saddest lines of the Persian and Urdu poets.

The Persian vernal festival, Navroz, was introduced at the Delhi court but as the current calendars were the Fasil and the lunar Moslem its observance required keeping track of the Persian calendar. It, therefore, fell into disuse. The Moghul observance of Holi was more successful but it is doubtful if the idea behind the festival was fully realised. The Moghul garden was more alive by night than by day and could therefore attain its full glory only later in summer when over the sound of running water could flow the cooling scent of the night-blossoming jasmines and the pandanus.

The shortness of the Indian spring also renders it less noticeable. Our tropical monsoon climate entitles us only to a hot dry summer and a less hot rainy season. But fortunately across the low mountains of the North-West, year after year, invade our land the four seasons of the temperate zone. In Winter when in the North-Western areas of the European land mass the Westerly wind belt shifts Southwards it extends to North India, bringing us under the European weather and climatic system. The result is six seasons instead of four or two: Basanta, Grisha, Varsha, Sarata, Hemanta and Seet. Basanta or spring is naturally of short duration, having to make place for the early maturity of the long summer.

Yet one day, after a fortnight through which it had been blowing colder every day, it is suddenly too warm for you to stray out in the garden during the day. At night a moist, affectionate breeze warmly pats you on the cheek. The

The breeze is unusually mild after the steady, strong West wind which throughout Winter has been shaking down leaves from the trees. It comes in forgetful gusts and you know spring has arrived while you were sadly watching your Winter garden fade and die.

Spring is come to the music of the rattle of the seedpods of the English flowers in the garden, making its way through withered brown grass and dead leaves heaped in sheltered places. So contradictory are the dying garden and the ensuing spring that you may not believe that spring has arrived and mistake it for the feverish long arm of the dread summer.

Convincing evidence is forthcoming if you will look for it. The next morning at least one Simul has broken through its crown of thorns and shows blood-red flowers. Near the jungle - and there ~~are~~ alone is spring ever in full glory - there are several paras limping under the weight of huge coxcombs of scarlet and orange flowers.

The date on which this change occurs varies from year to year but not so much as from place to place. Down in the South it is generally about the beginning of February that spring comes brooming the stale and the old^{out} of the jungle and touching trees with fresh hope and promise. Up in the North the first week of March brings in spring, but nowhere does it last longer than six weeks.

During those six weeks trees change leaves as if dressing for a festival. The dying leaves in their hectic colours of scarlet, silvered mauve, orange, yellow, beige and russet, flap against the brave new leaves with repeated, insistent warning that the follies of spring lead to Autumn. The unheeding young ones are red and yellow too but there is gaiety in their colours blushing with the shyness of ~~x~~ the green. The leaf-buds are plump with excitement about the new season.

In our strange spring, which is Autumn and spring together (so well shown up by the Mnda Mage festival) the debris of the past year settles deep on the forest floor - noisy in its dryness and alert to alarm the love-stricken wild animals. In the jungle there are no dusty winds as in the fields and the towns.

towns. Though russet is the predominant colour of the forest floor, wide patches glow a subdued lemon.

There are flowering trees apart from the Simil and the paras. The mostly leafless branches of the kachmar sprout erect little white, pink and purple flowers. You walk through a mixed clump of them as you would through a shower of rose petals. The panjan has long white plumes of flowers along the branches where the green and then the yellow leaves had been. Its tall shapely form rises like a spire of snow above the surrounding trees. On hot dry slopes towards the end of the season when the fire rained by the climbing sun (Ranchi is just on the Tropic of Cancer) is licking the extremities of spring and the flowering of the Sal has been celebrated by the flowery feast of the Sarzil, the leafless and gregarious yellow Simil or galgal paints the hillside in gold.

The colours of spring pertain more to leaf than to flower. The opacity, therefore, is less and there is more subtlety and delicacy. There are a dozen shades between sap-green and deep chrome in a single copse; there is plenty of vermilion, yellow and purple too but nothing like the extravagant red and yellow flowering of midsummer. Even the birds donot become so flamboyant as the brilliant yellow and scarlet of the minivet pair later in the year.

It is this subtlety which eludes those who donot watch spring creep up the naked branches of leafless trees. It is the memory of glaciation over 50,000 years ago retained in the racial unconciousness of many of our species which accounts for their leaflessness in a winter not cold enough to cause physiological drought. The miracle on the grey bark (tinged with suggestions of green, ~~whiskered~~ mauve and white fungi) of suspicions of green and yellow turning into enveloping leafiness, all silky and shiny, is a cavalcade of hues. Probably the sprinkling of colours in Holi was conceived as a symbol of this pageant. The Mundas and Oraons celebrating the corresponding Phagu are more specific and literal and stake in their village a flowered branch of the Simil.

They sport with colour too but with dye from the fruit of the vermilion tree or gara sanduri and ochraceous red soil brought with music and dance from

from long distances and interred in the village earth for some time.

There is such coldness and constraint about spring that many trees, Sal and mango inclusive, quietly flower into green spikes and before you are aware that inflorescences has occurred the trees are humming and buzzing with renewed life. Such ritualistic behaviour is common among those of our evergreens whose habits are half tropical and half temperate, for in the tropics the process of renewal goes on throughout the year, one dead leaf being replaced by a new one at any season. The ceremonial of spring is not theirs, not even in regard to flowering.

The influence of the European weather system has not ceased yet, though diminished. From time to time Atlantic and Mediterranean storms are blown in and keep the days cool with occasional showers which help to germinate the fallen seeds of the early flowering trees and replenish the forest for the glory of spring in the distant future.

The superimposition of a temperate cycle of seasons on a tropical climate is the key to the phenomenon of the Indian spring, giving us four kinds of trees mixed up in the same patch of forest. There are two types of deciduous trees, those shedding leaves in Winter and others, more in keeping with the climate and therefore more in number, doing so in summer. Then there are the semi-evergreens and the true evergreens.

In the first three types of trees spring plays an important function. With some of these, however, vernalisation seems only a relict of the glacial age. The Sal forest, which has as magnificent a spring as the Coniferous and the Winter deciduous in the hills (for teak, the remaining major forest type, is tropical in its habits and flowers after the rains), is itself probably an adaptation of a now vanished form to cold and frost when caught unawares by glaciation on the Chota Nagpur highlands.

Even the frenzied celebration of the Mage and Holi festivals is a harking back to ancient homes and past climates where and when dead life was resurrected by spring from underneath a shroud of snow.

Spring in the jungle is largely a function of one type of our flora -- the Winter leaf-shedders, for they alone flower now. These which drop leaf in summer flower later but some of them lend a bizarre contrast to the spring flowering trees, for the former's gaunt trunks stand out prominently. The evergreens with deep green foliage afford the background against which the delicate spring flowers show off. And all the types huddled together in the forest.

The red-breasted flycatcher and the common teal watch the pageant of spring and fly back to catch up with it on its slow Northward journey in lands where it is no rielact, nor adventitious to the main seasonal cycle. You watch their breasts and heads deepen in colour from the dull grey of Winter, and when they have changed fully into their nuptial plumage they are gone, flown off to cooler lands. The hot and loud summer is then on, for the sun has climbed high and will be directly overhead in another six weeks, and panting and thirsting you realise how soft and quick spring came and departed. It left the memory of a delicacy like that of the fragrance of the mango flower, tipped with which are the arrows of love shot by Madan, the Hindu counterpart of Cupid.

Spring, which came with the flowering of the Simul and the mango, is over with the flowering of the Sal and amaltas. You know then, while you gaze at the amaltas, that in spring Nature was a-courting, soft and subtle in its suit despite the symbolic show of fight by male birds over territory and noisy duels among stags, bisons and wild elephants for possession of the rutting herds. The rivalries of the animals had kept the jungle stirring by night and day and the defiant charging birds kept it trilling with song by dawn and dusk.

 * HOLIDAY *
 * ON WHEELS *

A finger post always fascinates, more so if the destination on it names a place almost unknown and marked only on large-scale maps. Leaving Calcutta by the Grand Trunk Road, the monotony of the landscape is broken by the huge massif of Parasnath Hill towering above its surroundings. The view from its top overlooks the forested foreland of the Hazaribagh plateau and the chequered fields of the valley of the Jamunia Nadi, with the river snaking its way in a series of prominent meanders. But Parasnath Hill is, of course, well known, and my purpose is neither to take you to well known landmarks nor present a tourist itinerary. A holiday in the truest sense is one when you choose any route that seizes your fancy for any reason, may be just because the destination of a road is a place with an intriguing name, one which you have not heard before.

So let us look at the finger posts leading away from the Grand Trunk Road at Dumri, the village nestling in the lap of Parasnath. The one pointing right says 'Giridih' and you lose interest, but the one pointing left is more interesting. It reads 'Nawadih' and below it 'Bokaro'. You vaguely recall Bokaro as the place with a big power station but Nawadih means nothing. You take the road, and only a few miles later plunge into a block of Sal forests. You motor on with the music of the wind sighing through the Sal leaves until, on crossing a wooden bridge over a stream, you find an open space on the left housing the Dak Bungalow of Nawadih. You can stay here for the stream provides reasonable fishing with a rod and the jungles around teem with quail and partridge. But perhaps your inclinations donot go that way, and after a pause for refreshments you push on.

As you proceed the forests become thinner and eventually peter out altogether. The landscape becomes dreary, and some 12 miles later you reach Bermo. Bermo is a coal mining station and here everything is covered with coal dust. Your ears are assailed by the shrieking and chugging locomotives, and your eyes watch a

a ropeway hauling coal to the power house at Bokaro, plumes of white smoke emanating from its chimneys are just discernable in the background. This is no place to tarry, and you speedily leave it. Soon you enter a forest belt: peacocks fly away at the approach of your car and once again you experience the soothing sensation of being close to Nature. The miles are steadily tossed aside and a colony of neat, cement houses comes into view. You wonder as to their identity and find the road heading straight for a 100-foot high structure of concrete. It is the Konar dam built by the Damodar Valley Corporation, and behind it is the lake formed by damming the Konar river. You pause a while to gaze into its depths. It is getting late now and the night can be spent at the D.V.C. guest house, with the agreeable prospect of long walks along the shores of the lake.

The forests are your constant companions now all along the Grand Trunk Road, mostly on both sides but always on one side or the other. You pause for a cup of tea at the Dak Bungalow of Barahkatha, and learn with pleasure that there is a hot spring known as Surajkund close by. Sparing a few moments for a glance at it, you resume your exploration. As you approach Burhi, to the right lie the green waters of the Tilaiya lake but nothing beyond, and so for once you take a well known route and turn left. Nearly the 12th milestone a surprise awaits you: "National Park Forest Rest House - 6 miles". You turn right straightaway.

A mile away from the main road, a huge, round, moat-like excavation with a circular mound sticking up like a pylon in the middle arrests your attention. You pause to investigate and learn that this is a trap by which the ex-landlord owner of these forests used to capture tigers. This trap is used no more and is maintained as a curiosity.

The National Park ~~Forest~~ Rest House is situated on an elevated knoll and is in complete isolation. Apart from the few buildings housing the forest staff, there is nothing here to distract your attention. A dammed up stream has formed a tiny lake on which geese and ducks swim about, and even the gurgling of the water is stilled. This is to provide water for the animals during the hot weather but is a favourite at all times. Beneath a waning moon you walk up the 100 yards

yards to the watch tower and there await events. If you are lucky you may see deer come to drink and perhaps the roar of a distant tiger will send a chill up your spine. But the nightjar sailing about on silent pinions and the rabbit shuffling about will always be there to interest you. You reluctantly leave the watch tower and return to the Rest House.

Leaving the National Park you hurry through the town of Hazaribagh and scarcely spare a glance for Ranchi, now in the throes of developing as the nerve centre of a vast industrial region. But you stop here all the same, as it marks a stage in your ramblings. Ranchi is the wonderland of waterfalls, and there are several within easy reach, but these do not interest you now. With a halt long enough to allow you to recover from the strain of the journey so far, you are on the road once again, bound for Neterhat, 100 miles away. For the first 85 miles the road meanders across the Ranchi plateau, and though running almost level is not flat and uninteresting. As you progress away from Ranchi, the hills in the distance are challenging, intriguing and inviting. At Bishampur you begin the ascent up the escarpment, and your car pants up the last 2 miles before you are over the crest and on to the plateau of Neterhat.

Neterhat is green with conifers, mostly cypresses and long leaf pines: Sal forests exist in the valleys leading away from the plateau. In the depths of the Chechari valley bison still graze and the Sadni falls are beautiful in their natural setting.

Beyond Neterhat the route lies over a red gravel road. Crossing the North Koel river by a low level causeway you plunge into the Baresand block of forests. Little button quails scuttle to the sides of the road for safety, peacocks jump on to the low branches giving a glimpse of their gorgeous trains, and in a clearing a herd of spotted deer graze peacefully. Do not be tempted to raise your gun if you have one with you, because you are in a sanctuary where wild life is sacred. See and enjoy them, they are far more interesting that way than as trophies in your drawing room. The forest block is large and traversing it through you come to the Forest Rest House of Maromar, its low, tiled buildings atop a hillock, a

a splash of white on a green canvas. Here you halt, and the next morning watch a wild cat go into the jungle and return with a big field rat in its jaws for breakfast. As you sip tea on the verandah bathed in early morning sunshine, a herd of monkeys make faces at you. Do not leave your breakfast unattended, the monkeys will make short shrift of it and leave you as hungry as ever.

The next stop is Kechki, past several rest houses, all inviting but left with lingering glances and promises of a visit in the future. The rest house here is built ~~up~~ on a tongue of land pushed out between two mating, sylvan rivers. Both flow quietly, as if conscious that any noise will disturb the peace and harmony of the place. And yet one of them, only half a mile upstream, near the railway station, cascades in a loud rapid over jutting rocks. The sands in front are peopled with adjutant storks, entertaining with their ludicrous mincing walk. In a small ravine at the back, of the rest house, are ant-hills, and these form a club for the avian folk of the neighbourhood. Intriguing calls summon you to the wire fence.

Kechki to Aurangabad on the Grand Trunk Road with a halt at Daltonganj, and you are at journey's end. As you sit on the banks of the Koel river adjoining the Dak Bungalow at Daltonganj, you recall the 250 miles you have covered, and think of the number of routes you did not take. The map showed that all these led to equally fascinating areas. Perhaps you recall the cuttings painted a gorgeous blue with a mass of Barleria blossoms or the sunbirds drinking nectar from the tubular red flowers of Woodfordia. And above all the charming purposelessness of the routes which formed their most attractive feature. None of them led to any places of importance, there were no guides to pester you or hotel staff expecting exorbitant tips. A quiet holiday in tune with your changing moods and desires was what you wanted, and that's what you got.

 * THE MONSOON *

The Monsoon as an annual replenisher of life and fertility does occupy in Indian life a higher place than any other season. But it is the season to stay at home; primarily because the agriculturist is busy sowing and transplanting, weeding and watching with fear and hope his main, sometimes only, crop. The Monsoon was not favoured for travel also because before the age of macadamized roads and railways all travel during the rains had to be a painful wallow along muddied roads. There was an element of risk too, at the river crossings.

The habit of centuries and millenia persists though now travel is easier and safe, and the Monsoon in cities is a dead season. It is mostly close and stuffy, and as the green tinting of moss creeps across the facade of buildings one feels completely smothered. The scenic beauty of the Monsoon - primarily a glory of sky, water and land and the fairy play of light - is shut out by the monotonous roof line. In the parks of course the greenness of the grass reminds one of the lushness elsewhere, but the park is a public utility, and utility and aesthetics rarely combine happily. The milling crowds on the maidan, locked up in competitive encounters, exercising or taking a breath of air are too tense with the pressure of living to be restfully recuperative. Such sad contrast with the main tone of the Monsoon, recuperation after the long drought, noisy only to the extent of the water's gurgle. No wonder one turns away from the parks and fields feeling utterly defeated almost wishing that one evaporated away with the rain steaming off the tarred road surfaces.

That one evaporated away from the mean constricting city road, rose and joined the clouds forming an awning over the gorge of streets. And then with the clouds was wafted across the country, for in our consciousness the classic symbolism of the Monsoon is Kalidasa's Meghdoot. The Monsoon is rain on a continental scale and cannot be enjoyed staring into the curtain of rain across the window. One must be out into the wide open country to watch the flying sky,

sky, the coursing water, and atmosphere washing itself clean and sparkling.

There has been much poetry about rain in other lands too, but everywhere else it has been viewed as an essentially local phenomenon. The quality of the Monsoon lies in its magnitude, sweeping across miles and miles of parched country at the rate of roughly ten miles a day. Kalidasa in spite of the limitations of his fifth century geography was aware of it and gave to posterity an epic of the Monsoon. Who is there who has lived in this land and not found for himself the beauty of the image of the Monsoon conjured up by Kalidasa - a flock of herons flying single file across a hair-dark nimbus cloud.

Babar did not love India, but the Monsoon evoked his admiration and several of the poetic passages in his memoirs are descriptive of it. Shah Jehan constructed two famous apartments in the palace at the Red Fort as homage to Monsoon. In one fountains imitated the drizzle of Sawan and in the other they poured like the cloud-bursts of Bhadon. Of course Tagore gave us a secular festival of the rain. There had been from before many celebrations of the rain but they had got associated with religious events like Krishna's birthday and the ritual of swinging his idol in a cradle, followed by crazy steering of boats on moonlit joy-rides in the river, the boats swaying from the water-level on one side to the other. In Orissa, Bengal and Chotanagpur the car festival gave opportunity for festivity during the rains, and on the days of the outward and return journeys of Jaggannath huge fairs were held. In these fairs as also the Somari or Monday bazars of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh seedlings of fruit and ornamental plants were the main things sold, for the rains are the season for planting, for laying out the foundation garden of the traditional Indian type.

All this urban festivity caught very little of the spirit of the Monsoon. The Monsoon is so different from all other seasons. There is no quickening of the blood as in Spring and the uproarious hilarity of the Holi could not fit the Monsoon. It is not rich in fruits as is Summer and the ceremonial of the first fruits could not be in this season. It is neither hot nor cold and on rainy nights one has to sleep indoors and on those stuffy nights when the leaves of the

the trees are too sulky to whisper a breeze one sleeps out. There is no definite return indoors and so no ceremonial about cleaning the house and illuminating it as Deewali. There are no major harvests either, and little feasting.

The overpowering mood of the Monsoon lies between hope and fear. Joy at timely and adequate rain growing into the hope of an ample harvest. Fear at prolonged intervals of drought or heavy downpours, either of which may ruin the crop, and if there is flood wash villages and take a toll of human lives. Anxiety is always present and calls for vigilance, suppression of joy out of a superstitious dread that it may be premature. There are memories of the past, hopes about the future, anxieties about the present.

It is this quiet, ruminative mood that discourages gregariousness. The cities are too crowded for it and one must get out. The hill-stations are too rainy and leech-infested to be enjoyable. On the beaches the Monsoon surf is a trifle too rough.

Yet there is magnificent Monsoon country for one to enjoy in mid-East India, in the hills and plateaux of West Bengal, Bihar, Santhal Parganas, and Chotanagpur, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. It is important that the place where one goes for a Monsoon holiday - as yet not one of the things done - should be easily accessible, free of heavy mud and should be so situated as to command a view of the country around. Hill top bungalows in the red-soil area of mid-East India seem the obvious choice for a Monsoon holiday. Usually they command magnificent views, the red soil is well drained and never loses its gravelly nature into the stickiness of mud. There are railways and all-weather roads connections to most places.

There is no attempt, here to guide you to any place, neither to suggest a place. A few indications about the type of holiday one can have and where, if one tries to escape the monotony of rains in a city, would not be out of place.

One does not seek long hours of outdoor life on a Monsoon holiday, for one gets drenched if it is raining and it is too hot for walking if the sky is clear. Yet one does not want to have his view shut in, or else one could have

have grown ecstatic about the slanting drizzle between two city houses and dance of the rain drops on the road. Wide views of the panorama of clouds, rain and land can be had from a hill top bungalow, and short walks can be had over tolerably dry earth.

Most of this Monsoon country has an elevation about 2,000 feet above sea-level. That is about six degrees cooler than in the plains; a right amount of coolness which makes the Monsoon exhilarating without turning it too cold. Over the greater part of it pyramidal Sal stands erect and shiny in its washed leaves over a moist reddish soil that looks cool and clean. The soil is rarely visible for there is abundant and quick growth of grass, and from the bungalow the view is mainly of shades of blue and green with an occasional patch of yellow. Blue and green are the main colours of the Monsoon, and it is surprising that carpet-weavers of Mirzapur do not use this scheme for their designs. For at Mirzapur the Monsoon is celebrated with great joy - parties through the mango topes at the foot of the Vindhya, rope up swings on the trees, and as they push up the wooden swings high up into the cool air till they see only the blue hills they sing the Kajri. The Kajri is the folk song of the rains, and with a change of note or two, becomes plished into the popular Desh and fabled Malhar ragas of classical music. The Malhar made historic by Tansen is, however, an incantation to rain, not an easy exultation in the easy liquid rhythm of falling water as the Kajri is.

At The hill-streams are full in the Monsoon country of mid-East India and at many places they cascade down bare rock faces with such beauty or glory. The waterfalls, obviously, can be seen best during the Monsoon, and it would be convenient if one's hill-top bungalow was near a waterfall.

I know of a few such bungalows. The dak bungalow overlooking the railway station at Maharajpur on the Kiul-Sahebganj-Barharwa loop line is barely two miles from Moti Jharna, where a small stream comes down a hill face in a cascade of pearl-like drops. The bungalow stands high on a hill and commands a view of a thin strip of plain country and the Ganga, which at that place is a majestic

majestic sight during the rains.

The best hill-top bungalow is of course at Rogod, 8 miles off the Ranchi-Chakardharpur road. That road itself is of much beauty during the rains as it loops hills deeply hidden under a thick cover of Sal. In many respects this road in its ghat section is more beautiful than Himalayan roads. There are few hairpin bends and the loops do not staircase up a mountain side, but the road enters at the head of a valley where the Hirni river takes a plunge down from the Ranchi plateau. The valley is open, not shut in by high hills as in the Himalayas, and there is an extensive view at each turn. The road is fully bridged and has a smooth tarred surface, and one can travel at fair speed even while the rain is falling and the windscreen wipers busy at work. Miles of good road through hills in heavy rain without fear of landslips - the experience is not easily forgotten.

The road to Rogod itself is a forest road, only passable during breaks in the Monsoon, but there are bungalows at Hessadih and Tebo in the forested ghat section of the main Ranchi-Chakardharpur road where one can wait for ~~the~~ the weather to clear. Both these bungalows command good views and time will never hang heavy for the valley of the Hirni is beautiful with nice gravelly streams and many orchid-festooned trees.

Rogod looks East and watches over the hills of the Ranchi plateau losing themselves through waves of ridges in the wide valley of the Sanjai which flows into the broader valley of the Subernarekha and thus to the sea near Digha on the Contai coast. The view is limitless, like an endless vista cut through dense forest.

If one is travelling to Ranchi from the Grand Trunk road one passes the bungalow at Chutupalu a little above Rangarh. This tiny one-roomed bungalow looks North across the forested Hazaribagh plateau and on exceptionally clear mornings to Parasnath Hill. One can do a lot of walking about this bungalow and there is small waterfall too.

The main waterfalls are Hundru, Jonha and Dassamghagh. At Hundru and Dassamghagh there are bungalows, prettily sited ones commanding a view of the

the long narrow gorges below the falls. There is small waterfall near Neterhat, which is a nice grassy pine-planted plateau, 3,000 feet above sea-level, overlooking the deep valley of the North Koel. There are several bungalows at Neterhat and there is an excellent coal-tarred road from Ranchi, 96 miles long, over which there is a daily bus service as well.

There are another class of hill-tops, but without bungalows, and today most of them are inaccessible. These are 'pats' of the Central Indian Highlands, extending from Chotanagpur into Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and the Vindhayas. Almost all of them have an elevation between 2,000 and 4,000 feet. Many of them have wonderful waterfalls, but there are no roads or railways leading to them, except in a few instances, forest roads. One will have to wait until communications improve and these 'pats' are connected to the rest of the country. When that comes about, these will provide the finest Monsoon resorts in the country.

 *
 * COLOUR *
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 * IN THE FOREST *
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There is a surprising beauty in the Indian forest, but this is not well known, and remains hidden in its sylvan recesses. Few before they venture into the forest can imagine what aesthetic delight they will get there. When we talk about the beauty of the Indian forest, let us not confuse the forest with scrub jungle. Real sylvan charm can only be tasted in the forests proper, i.e., almost entirely those areas that have been constituted into Reserves and are zealously guarded by the Forest Departments. Some people who have been to Himalayan hill-stations or seaside resorts are apt to agree with this assertion and say, "Oh yes, the pine forests of such and such a place are beautiful", or "The Casuarina plantations by the beach are delightful". There are few Casuarina plantations in the country, and wide distances separate them from the most populous areas. Similarly the coniferous forests of the Himalayas are generally inaccessible to people of slender means, particularly those living in the South.

The sylvan beauties described here are those of the ordinary broad leaved forests which grow over the greater portion of the country. To be specific, surprisingly beautiful forests are those of the Sal (*Shorea robusta*) which grow gregariously over a major portion of India. In some ways the Sal forests are superior to the coniferous forests. They grow as straight and almost as conical as the conifers - in fact the young Sal looks remarkably like the pine - and have the additional beauty of reflecting seasonal changes. It is an evergreen tree, with white and very fragrant flowers (February - April), which hang in bunches. But just before the Sal gets its flowers it becomes exceedingly pretty. It sheds its old leaves and flushes new red ones simultaneously. A Sal tree in early Spring has the combined beauty of the dying fanfare of colours of Maple or Chenar leaves in autumn and the more sober and intriguing range of the new leaves of the Willow in Spring; the poetry and exhilaration of sprays of its

its white flowers is similar to that of almond blossom. These comparisons with Northern trees are necessary because the seasonal beauties of the latter are famed and they afford a good basis for comparison. In case plant comparisons are obscure to some readers, it can be said that the Sal tree in Spring has pastel colours of russet, yellow and old gold in its dying leaves, and delicate tints of water colours from lemon to terre verte in the new leaves that come up to replace the ones being shed, and has lines of Chinese white in its flowers to give outline and form to the brighter colours. One wonders if there is any forest tree more beautiful than this. It makes, too, such large pure stands that for miles this colour scheme is repeated, so much so that if one is motoring along a forest road in that season one has the impression of travelling along the bottom of a gorge with red or yellow soil lying exposed in the roadway as a streak and on either side walls in which the colours would be proper for a dream of Kardinsky's.

Gregarious as the Sal is, the community is hospitable in the moister and drier localities to trees of other species. Early in Spring in the moister areas the Simal (*Bombax malabaricum*) puts up crowns of deep red flowers on its gaunt leafless scaffolding. But the real pastel colours come a little later and in the drier or felled areas (mostly fringings) where the Paras (*Butea frondosa*) paints acres and square miles with orange and scarlet flowers.

The Spring colours of a Sal forest are not exhausted by those mentioned. Ashy-grey, purple, white and yellow flowers burst out in a magnificence which can never be suspected if a visit to the same area is paid in any other season. Most of these floral displays are on trees whose annual leaf-shedding and flowering are coincident and the flowers get a wonderful display, the most common pattern being that of coloured sprays on bare branches. The most prominent of the flowering trees are the Galgal (*Cochlospermum gossypium*) which has large yellow showy flowers (January - April) and is frequently gregarious on hot, dry hill slopes. A lyric in colour are the Kachmars (*Bauhinia* spp.) with their white, purple and pink showy flowers on small trees in ~~the~~ Winter and Spring on moist

moist sites. A Kachnar in bloom is as beautiful as the famed Cherry Blossom.

Later in Summer on moist sites bloom the Amaltas (*Cassia fistula*) with their yellow flowers hanging in large pendulous racemes from their moderate sized trees. About the same time the forests become fragrant in the more open and drier areas by the flowering of the Siris (*Albizia* spp.) of which the White Siris has white-and-red mottled flowers, and the Black Siris greenish feathery ones. Both pave the floor of the forest with their dropped members.

The Dudhia (~~Indi~~ *Holarrhena*) usually a shrub, sometimes grows to the size of a tree in the more open places and has the tips of its branches covered with clusters of white flowers which have a nice sweet smell. It flowers late in Summer.

The beauty of the crown flowering in the Sal forest - different from the flowering of the undergrowth - is enhanced by a large number of creepers, which climb to the top of trees in their search for light. The most showy of the creepers is the Creeping Paras (*Butea superba*) which covers in Spring and Summer its host-tree with a cap of flaming scarlet.

Other creepers which climb to the crest of trees are Mahul (*Bauhinia vahlii*), Kukri (*Dioscorea*), Atkir (*Smilax*), and Phalanau (*Combretum decandrum*). Of these the Mahul makes the best show, being in flower throughout the Summer, and its white flowers and green foliage covering the host-tree from the bottom to the top.

The beauty of the Spring crown-flowering in Sal forests is best seen from the crest of aridge or the bottom of a valley looking up a slope. Traveling down ghat or hill sections through forests, or at the bottom of a broad wooded but open vale, gives the maximum view. Some flowering shrubs also merge in the surface seen, and make the hillside look like a gaily coloured carpet but distinctly billowy. The most prominent among such shrubs ~~is~~ is the Winter-and-Spring flowering Jirul (*Indigofera pulchella*) whose light blue and maroon flowers form patches on slopes. Similar patches of white and lemon are formed by flower-like coloured leaves of the Ochoicarak (*Boerhavia* spp.), a creeping

creeping shrub which makes large bushes. Patchy patterns of light and dark greens are also developed in Winter by the growth of Dhaura (*Anogeissus latifolia*) on dry sites in a forest otherwise mostly Sal, the distinction being of leaves.

While travelling through the forest, when views down and up hill-slopes are not available, colour and interest are also found about the middle of the distance that separates the floor and the ceiling of the forest. On the tree branches in late Summer and rains Orchids can be seen. Of these the *Vanda tassellata* is most numerous with its cream flowers hanging in tassels, blotched with violet. The *Vanda parviflora* is much more beautiful and quite plentiful. Its small yellow flowers with pink or bluish lips cluster along racemes up to fifteen inches long. The most beautiful of the Orchids of the Sal forest is *Dendrobium formosans* which has large showy clusters of trumpet-shaped white flowers with a yellow eye, looking almost like Lilies, growing twenty feet high on the tree-trunk.

About the same height are found some creepers like the *Convolvulus* spp., which have showy blue, white and cream Winter flowers. Other cold weather flowering creepers are two *Ipomeas* with white and rose flowers. About the same time also bloom the deep blue flowers of the Kivach nettle-beans (*Mucuna prurita*) and the white showy flowers of the *Thunbergia fragrans*.

 * THE INTERIOR *
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The words interior and exterior had an architectural significance for me, either blocking or encompassing space, and with two 'r's in each, placed almost symmetrically, their serifs making a sort of arch. That was so until I discovered the geographical sense of the word interior, that it did not in that context denote the familiar and homely indoors, rather the unknown wide space, unblocked and unencompassed.

But before I ventured into the interior of the 300-square miles Kolhan forests, I had a look at the map. The area was encompassed, a rectangular block within two railways, a road and a river. The threshold of this interior was a station on the railway, skirting the forest on the North. I thrilled as I saw a thin straggling red line showing a road plunge away from the railway into that neatly bounded block of green. The deepest inside was where I wanted to go.

The forest country, however, was deceptive. The threshold, the railway station of Gailkera on the direct Calcutta-Bombay line, itself lay sunk in a hollow- completely ringed by densely-wooded hills. The railway and a road entered from the East, slipping between the two ranges where the geologic process building the land had forgotten to seal the ramparts of this amphitheatre. The error had stolen from it the significance of the interior and Man had come in with his pneumatic drill and tunnelled the watershed to the West to turn into a corridor for a cross-country route.

The grackle and the large pied hornbill were aware of this sacrilege by Man. They shunned the amphitheatre, though only four miles from the threshold, in the concealed valley of Kendhai, one met them. And this too when the soft shales and shade-sheltered North-facing slopes of the girding hills nourished dense forest, and, as I discovered later, the harder slates on the other side, facing South and more exposed to the sun, supported only a thin growth.

Yet the grackle and the large pied hornbill beckoned Southward, out of the amphitheatre into the adjoining labyrinth, and I took the straggling trail that had appeared so promising on the map. We went in that particular year, 1948, because my friend had built a bridge on the road leading into the amphitheatre, and we could take a little longer on the tour, sure of being able to return by car to the district headquarters even if the rains broke early. Because of the new bridge there was a touch of pioneering about that 50-day trip, and this accentuated the sense of plunging into the interior, even though it lay just off a very used railway.

It was evening when we first turned to Kendbai's enclave; the grackles were flying South, heading for places beyond the Mirkodwar Pass. We climbed the road up to where the wall-like range of hills was cleft, and surveyed the panting road as it fell into the valley on the other side, losing itself among the traditional seven hills of aboriginal lore. The shadows of evening rendered the scene stranger than one of forests and hills. It was dense, forbidding, unlit. One is reluctant to enter a dark house at evening, and so we turned back from the Pass, ~~in spite of~~ though the homing grackle and the hornbill were flying South.

We took the trail the following morning. As we topped the Pass we flushed a crested serpent eagle. It, too, flew South, large and menacing, with its ominous shadow flung across our bonnet. The road wound like a corkscrew deep into the valley, so thickly wooded that we could only suspect a stream at the bottom but never saw one. All the while the eagle loomed above like Sindbad's roc in the valley of snakes and diamonds. What gems were we after? No exploration is adventurous enough if it is not itself a treasure trove. The gems I brought are with me now, for the exploration and treasure trove were like Poe's bug - they made me a convert to Chotanagpur, which is more than a place on the map: it is a cult.

We soon lost interest in the eagle. We were attracted by a lovely Ipomea, white and virginal, a variety we had never seen before. It wreathed a

wreathed a small coppice stump by the side of the road - a horde of flowers plugged into a stand instead of a vase. This arrangement was decoratively more suitable to a jungle interior. Soon there was a flock of the grey headed myna swarming over a Teak plantation and an orange headed ground thrush trotting about a clear-felled coupe, ~~sit~~ at home and confident, mocking our alternating feelings of entering a strange house and adventuring into remote forest country.

We passed a couple of peacocks, and were in a bird lover's paradise at Patung. The lunch-hour was also a feast of song and plumage, as we squatted on the grass by the Deo river and ate our meal. There were treepies, grey tits, whiteeyes, red vented bulbuls, spotted munias, and purple sunbirds, to name only a few.

The forest rest house we had avoided because its white walls and red ochre plinth were too loud. In the forest even the most gorgeous colours are subdued. The white breasted kingfisher shoots into your eye its blue and chestnut, but only for a split second, and if you want to see it again you have to search and discover. The bright eyes of the peacock's tail shimmer against the undergrowth one moment and the next are frozen into invisibility. The shower of golden showers that the Amaltas is, or the scarlet crown of the Flame of the Forest creeper, are hardly visible without a search. Beauty is for those who seek it, and not an exhibitionist parade obtruding on the unquesting. And yet the colours are bright and vivid - it is the scale on which the forest is built that makes the difference, puts ~~i~~ everything into tone, a rather shy and quiet one. The same flowers in a garden or park would be different, and hence to the forest lover flowering trees are never the same outside their natural habitat. There is something petty, showy, and vulgar about them elsewhere.

We crossed the river - forded it with our small car hard put to it ~~v~~ and took the trail where it would lead us. Now we were truly in the interior, for none of the two rivers isolating us from the main roads were bridged. The road soon petered out and we went bowling along a grass track for some time before a thick growth of Holarrhenas rendered further progress impossible, and we realised

realised that we had wandered off the road. We reversed and found the road -- a grassy track all right, but one which was weeded of tree saplings once each year and so was not impenetrable. We were at Rajabassa by tea-time.

The forest, as I have said earlier was thin at Rajabassa, but the place was remote. In the bungalow's log book there was no entry in the preceding three years. In the 16 years that the bungalow had been in existence there had not been more than half-a-dozen visitors. So here we were where I had longed to be, out in the wilds where few had been before. But my pleasure was not provoked only by a sense of uniqueness. A tiny brick-red hut snuggled where two forested ridges looked longingly at each other. And through that gap of separation, the glass windows peeped on across the broad bosom of the Kare river to more forests rising sheer and blue. The forest went all round in straight lines, coming close to the rear of the bungalow, but leaving a long rectangular patch of grass in the front. That patch was fringed with red Oleanders and for the fortnight we stayed there we lived with birds.

Along the woods fringing the open space were three pairs of magpie robins, contrastingly black and white in their breeding plumage. Each male had his favourite song-perches, and the territory of each was sharply marked out by boundaries of song. In the mornings we were woken from our beds in the open by their defiant songs. From perches on swinging twigs two males, facing each other, would pour out in passionate vehemence the sweetest of invectives. Think, even male jealousy can be poetic.

The shama had a perch at the far end of the lawn, where a small stream deepened and broadened into a pond. Its chestnut and white was set off against a tail longer than that of the magpie robin, and with a ~~sharp~~ white rump, which as it flicked its tail, it sang a rich tune, which had all the lushness of the forest distilled into melody. Its song was humid, tropical, and luxuriant.

The nights were loud with the calls of three nighjars, and at dusk as we sat on the lawn we saw them floating about and hunting in ghostly silence.

silence. Such soundless flight was it, that our rectangular space, bounded by the sheer walls of the forest all round, with the small bungalow lost in the veils of evening's hushed intimacies, seemed a haunted interior.

But the eerie silence was frequently rent by the loud, calls of the brain fever bird and the Indian cuckoo; the latter had long spells of monomania repeating "Crossword puzzle". It seemed to have pinned its hope on a big puzzle prize! The Hindustani rendering of its call is "Utho dekho", which means "Wake up and see". We did see that elusive bird, but not by getting up from our sleep at night. We ran it down in the day, a contrast of rich brown and creamy white, with a black band in the tail, because like the other cuckoo it was loud and clamorous at all hours.

Daylight was more memorable for the gems of colour, like stones inlaid, that scintillated in the jungle's half-light - that of the small minivet, ruby-like with the mating season's passion, the turquoise roller, and the merald (Jerdon's) Chloropsis. There were also the gold fronted Chloropsis, the crimson breasted barbet, the golden and the pied Marhatta woodpeckers.

The most flashy birds, however, were the scarlet minivets, then in their breeding plumage - the males all scarlet, and the females all yellow. They used to swoop down on our open bit of ground at all times of the day. Equally colourful were the black headed and golden Orioles. I have never seen as many orioles in all my thirteen years of bird watching. There would be seven or eight of them in flight together, circling about the bungalow. Their flight must have something to do with nesting, but I have not yet understood the significance of that communal wheeling.

More festively plumaged than any other bird, however, was the paradise flycatcher, with its black crest, chestnut coat, and white tail hanging in streamers. There were several of this species, and it was usual to see three or four together at the pool. Sombre and dignified was the large racket-tailed drongo, sailing gracefully about, and always solitary.

Such was our "Interior", but we felt keenly the absence of flowers.

flowers. Barleria reared up the roots of trees in foams of blue, like dado to walls of green fluted with chocolate columns of bark. The grass on the floor of the clearing was ripe and brown with summer, dotted like a carpet with tiny flowering white cups and yellow stars. But one can tire of blue and green, and the other colours were so insignificant in the decorative scheme of Nature at Rajabassa. We did not like to look up to the wide sky always for red and yellow flashing of bird's wings. So we searched the teeming undergrowth and brought two saplings of Amaltas and planted them below the bedroom windows. To get relief from the uniformity of the broad Sal leaf-form, we put in the pinnate Toon on the perimeter of the lawn. And I said to myself in five years it should be a still more beautiful place.

Yet we missed something more; the grackle had not come all the way down South with us. They had for some curious reason (bird distribution is so erratic) stopped by the Deo river and the large pied hornbill equally inexplicably insisted on flying every evening further away across the Kare into a different forest block. There were plenty of chattering common brown myna and common grey hornbill, but common and grey and brown are depressing attributes for neighbours and every ornithologist at heart is a snob, for he or she is ever seeking the acquaintance of the rare and the distinguished. The grackle were distinguished in their black coats; the pied attire of the large hornbill was equally formal and courtly; besides the latter are rather uncommon. These did not share the interior with us and I felt sad. Only a pair of river tern in the Kare meanders consoled me; they were hardly native but had made the place their home and laid eggs in small scrapes on the sand in hurried anxiety about the coming Monsoon flood. And the continuous flapping of their grey and white slim bodies up and down the river from morning till evening lent the right note of monotony which belongs to domesticity.

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 * SCENIC CHANGES *
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An essentially economic project may have far-reaching aesthetic and recreational implications. That is particularly true of the Damodar Valley project. In the first instance the 32,000 square miles of plateaux, hills and valleys that the Chotanagpur and the Santhal Parganas areas are, will be dotted over by nine lakes, of which four have already been completed. Technically speaking, these are only water-storages behind power and irrigation dams, but all of them present large water-surfaces adding considerably to the beauty of an already lovely land and afford facilities for holidays including yachting and fishing.

The two dams completed first of all are at Tilaiya and Konar, both short distances from the Grand Trunk Road and having storages of 28 square miles each. The man-made lake at Tilaiya is in an open rolling country, but that at Konar is girt by wooded hills. In fact so thick is the maze of hills there that there are three lakes - two fairly big and one small.

The two storages near Maithon and Panchet are bigger - 45 square miles each. The two roughly form an arc with the lovely Tundi hills and the majestic Paramath Hill - rising 4,480 feet sheer from the lowland - on the basal chord giving a background of blue forested hills. The lake at Panchet laps the base of the Panchet Hill - a very interesting land form rising up like a lopsided triangle with prominent terraces arranged like gigantic steps leading to the top, 2,110 feet above sea-level. Close to the South is granite country breaking into domes of hills, "Tors" which are such a tourist attraction in Devon and Cornwall.

Another lake, thirty miles to the North-East of the Maithon and Panchet storages (the two converge on Kulti with only seven miles separating them), is on the River Mor at Maissanjore. This has an area of 28 square miles in open rolling down, with the Phuljuri Peak (2,312) in the background. This, of course,

course, is not in the Damodar project, but lies in the same area.

The other storages which will come into being in the second phase of the Damodar Valley development will be at Aiyar (40 square miles), and at Bokaro, Bermo and Balapahari (each about 15 square miles). The waters of the Bokaro storage will wash the foot of the Gomea Hill (3,200) which rises straight as a wall and is a prominent landmark on the Gomoh-Barkakana loop railway.

Paramnath, which has possibilities of being developed as a hill-station, will be surrounded on all sides by fair sized lakes. Already the view from its top is grand: the Hazaribagh plateau with its chessboard of forests and cultivation in the foreground, with the Jamunia Nadi wandering away in a number of prominent loops.

The lakes will be an additional item of scenic beauty in a region already rich in it. All over Chotanagpur are plateaux rising to heights above 2,000 and 3,000 feet and commanding magnificent views, besides being cool. It is an area with large blocks of forest (about 8,000 square miles are under direct Government management and protection in the Damodar Valley operational area) and there are schemes to afforest the blanks. There are several waterfalls in the Kodarma Hills, immediately to the North of the Tilaiya storage, and on the edge of the Ranchi plateau, close to the Konar and Panchet storages. The most important of the waterfalls is Hundrughagh, with a drop of 243 feet which is easily accessible from both Konar and Panchet as well as the established holiday resort of Ranchi. And from Ranchi leads the road to Neterhat, pine and Cypress planted grassland ringed by Sal forest, 3,691 feet above sea-level and well supplied by Government rest houses. The Neterhat plateau overlooks the beautiful hill ringed Chechari Valley, on the other side of which are plateaux above 4,000 feet high and the Burha Nadi waterfall with a drop of over 400 feet. The Chechari Valley has numerous small waterfalls and the construction of a road from Neterhat via Mahmudnagar to Jamira Pat is bound to develop this 4,000 feet plateau into a beautiful hill-station.

The road from the Damodar Valley water-storages to Jamira Pat (only the

(only the last 25 miles have to be constructed) can be one of the most interesting motoring routes, generally running at an elevation of 2,000 feet and having feeders shooting off to waterfalls and to Ichadag, Pakhar, Khamar, and Neterhat, all plateaux above 3,000 feet elevation and excepting the last named, awaiting the construction of rest houses.

The change in the scenery of the hill and forest country is not the only one that the Damodar Valley development is likely to bring about. In the plains there will be 1,550 miles of irrigation channels, surely tree-lined. Though the minor distributaries may not have motorable service roads, the major canals will have, and West Bengal is bound to have about 300 miles of roads good for light vehicles running along canals as an avenue through belts of fast growing Sisham and Mulberry tree-belts.

A greater contribution towards changing the rural scenery, of course, would be the development of fuel plantations, giving each village a small copse and breaking the monotony of the unending rice-fields. The fuel plantations would eventually ~~save~~ save much valuable cow-dung manure, now burnt, which will go to enrich the million acres to be irrigated, ~~by~~ and enable cropping throughout the year. Imagine a million acres between Bankura and Howrah green throughout the year, instead of dry and brown in late winter and summer, and you can have an idea of what a tremendous change in the beauty of the countryside the Damodar Valley project will bring about. It is so far Man's greatest attempt to change the scenery in India.

 *
 * SYLVAN TRAILS *
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If you hate to jostle with the crowd along the Malls of popular hill-stations, the sight of hundreds of semi-nude human forms on the beach makes you sick, and the inanities of the guide lecturing to you before historic ruins drives you mad, you may take the lonely trails in the forests of Chotanagpur. But not otherwise, for if the gregarious instinct is strong in you, you may find it dull.

I presuppose you are bored by hosts of familiar, but still ~~un~~unacquainted faces, and so let yourself go. You rush for the most obvious spot, for that is the easiest way to plunge into the region. You detrain at Ranchi and do the one-day trips to the three waterfalls around and the Damodar gorges and then you stop and ponder if you have not wandered further and fared worse, having thrown yourself into a dull hill-station without the amenities of the better-developed similar places in the Himalayas and the Nilgiris.

And when you ponder, your real adventure begins for now you break off that ubiquitous thing - the tourist itinerary. You may take the road South to Chakardharpur, 72 miles away, and after a breezy drive across the Ranchi plateau you swing along a beautiful road. It rounds a few wooded hills to discover a small valley and then hugs it close as the only safe landmark in a tumult of hills. And as the river breaks on to that valley, you come across a small waterfall, and from its lip you gaze down a strange pattern of silver stream and asphalt road interlacing.

The road is not a magnificent achievement of engineering as some Himalayan roads are, and its hairpin bends are fewer, loops less stunning and gradients gentler. But it is more beautiful than most Himalayan roads in the sense that it is complete by itself. You are not aware of getting down to a plain or hanging by the edge of a precipice. Shut in by wooded hills on all sides it is a road to nowhere, and in its apparent purposelessness is its charm.

You pass a grassy lawn dotted with three white, low, long buildings which comprise the irresistible dak-bungalow of Hessadih - snug in its humility at the foot of a scarp dominating an enclosed valley. In the silence of the tiny acres of forest-girdled fields the voices of the multitude are stilled and you are by yourself, aware only of yourself, intensely. And something speaking to you, softly, soothing your city jaded nerves.

The bungalow is not a hotel, if you want to be left alone or if it is occupied, you move off to the next one ten miles away. You may leave the main road and accept the invitation of a low causeway over a gurgling brook to essay into rolling downs covered with a light park-like vegetation. You go up a long avenue that seems destined to burrow into the sheer hillside, till it abruptly loses its determined lines in the rambling hedge of the cosy little bungalow of Tebo, around which the hills sweep down the blue skies through miles of forest to scoop up the knoll on which it is built. Tebo, you feel, needs an entire week of lazing, and you decide to give it that time when you are a bit more free.

But a forest road never reaches a dead end and what lies beyond excites you to wander ahead and climb the other edge of the valley and find yourself twisting and turning down into the open valley of the Sanjai with the big marshalling yards of Chakardharpur pasted up like a scaly dragon flush against the high range of Hororangaburu as in a Chinese painting.

Something hurts within you at the very sight of that outpost of human toil and you remember one of the finger-posts you left behind with a mental note that you will explore its beyond some day. It had said "Goilkera Via Jate - 33 miles". And you drive back in an ecstasy of knowing again the miles you have traversed. The finger-post stands like a challenge and the kutchra road puts your sense of adventure on edge. You take that road, completely off the beaten track, and plunge into a block of forests, a little over one thousand square miles. After 16 miles of gravel singing below your tyres you run into the clean hollow valley of Jate. You stay the night there and take the road next morning, going over more and more hills, till the forest peters out temporarily in the scrub-dotted

scrub-dotted vallet at Gailkera, where the direct Calcutta-Bombay Railway, tired of panting up the steep gradient, pierces in two tunnels the watershed connecting Ranchi and Singhbhum.

Its a lumbering station, the biggest in Bihar, and the day resounds with the boom of tree-length logs dropped into loading wagons from the top of the cutting in which the railway yard is niched. The valley is so narrow here that the small village clammers the hill-slopes and you wind your way to the bungalow across a gentle sloping loop through vast stacks of timber and a grassy stretch dotted with mature umbrageous trees.

From the bungalow you look over the valley to the blue hills of Porahat among whom you had wandered the previous day, and behind you see the sheer rise of Ledaburu and the hills of Kolhan.

Perhaps the logging operations disturb you. Or more truly, the mystery of the Kolhan hills beckons you. You take the road, dusty with red crushed shales, and enter another maze of hills. They come piling up at you in waves, as you ~~x~~ curve round them one after another. You hover, along a tortuous narrow road, above a stream lost in a tree-canopied valley bottom, till it debouches into the Deo river.

You are at Patung and the view opens for the Deo is a big stream, and the hills keep away from it a respectful distance. It is a peaceful valley and the evening hush seeps through you as you sip tea in the open lawn of the bungalow. But you feel that while evening was perfect at Patung, the morning could never be equally good, and you are so morbidly in love with this place that you cannot bear the idea of seeing its face in the cruel sunshine withered as it would be through the passage of a single night.

So you decide to sneak away before dawn and you motor up the broad rambling valley till at the Sangajata fork you turn left. You donot know why you do so. Perhaps it is the vegetation that prompts you, because on the left the forest is dense and moist, and a shallow stream coquetting over a rocky bed fascinates and intrigues you. And to find out where it comes from you climb to

to the Baniaburu plateau where the stream widens out behind a weir into a placid fish pond; and you stop there watching her measured rippling gaiety. A delicacy overcomes you. You would not like to pursue the stream's origin to the humble trickle on the ridge beyond. It might hurt her vanity and you stop by the dense copse of stately Sal by its side. And there as you brood over the shadows of evening creeping up from the ground towards the bright blue sky, you long for the afternoon to linger. You dé the obvious for once and climb the only hill in the vicinity, to the bungalow at the top, from which you allow your hitherto restricted vision to soar like an eagle over range after range of blue-hilled distance, and the red hill at your foot sloping down below a thinned canopy of slim trees to the stream below.

Here seems peace after all, for you are in a Sanctuary for wild life where "Live and let Live" is the principle and the deep trench in the hillside is to prevent wild elephants toying with the instruments in the meteorological observatory. You feel you will stop here for ever, but like most pledged words you know that the promise you make yourself is false. You will have to go, but it will be painful like tearing yourself away.

You remember wistfully the finger post at Jate pointing towards Sarengda, which the map tells you is a bungalow pushed right out into the angle between two mating sylvan streams. And you remember your evening at Patung, which was like a deserted focal railway junction with roads leading out to Rajabassa in the deep Shama-haunted forests, or to Salai and the seven hundred hilled forests of Saranda and the mist-wreathed bungalow at Tholkobad. Memories of numerous roads that you did not take and which promised to lead you into the remotest mysteries of the forest come crowding upon you. The map shows that all of them turn away in good time from the industrial urbanism of coal mines and iron fields.

Probably the ferns in the road cuttings are browed off with the long hectic summer, the flowers had died in unwatched splendour and the orchids have not yet lighted up with the Chinese lantern like luminosity the green gloom of the forest canopy. Or you would like to see the clearings around the bungalows

bungalows flash with the scarlet and yellow wings of the Minivets in the summer noon. You may like to be woken up by the trilling songs of the Shama and the Dhayal in the jasmine scented dawns. And may be somebody has whispered to you the deepest secret of the ~~Singbhum~~ Singbhum forests, that every eight years the Strobilanthes flowers gregariously and paints blue entire hillsides and the last flowering was in the cold weather of 1961-62.

And as you prepare to motor the last 40 miles of your 200-mile journey to return to the main road, you decide to come again. You are converted for Chotanagpur is not only a convenient name for four plateaux and forest districts or an area on a map. It is much more. It is a cult of living in communion with Nature.

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 * FLORAL *
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 * SLEEPING BEAUTY *
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A deep secret, reserved for those who seek it, is unfolded periodically before them, who have a deep and abiding interest in Nature. Every six to eight years, the floor of over 3,000 square miles of forest in Singbhum and Palamau is carpeted thick with a blue flower. The shaded hill slopes and valleys for miles on end are smothered under it and one motors along roads as if in a blue haze, assailed by the heavy camphor-like aroma of the flowers. The flowers are of Strobilanthes auriculatus.

The hills are ~~then~~ then transformed for miles and miles with a blue mist, turning the forest into a fairyland. It is a sight, once seen can never be forgotten. The shrubs stand up about four feet and all round them are upright green spikes with purplish-blue flowers breaking out on the sides of the spikes like a Christmas tree with its candles flowered. Whichever way you turn, whatever side you glance at, there is nothing but the Strobilanthes to arrest your roving gaze; a carpet extending as far as the eye can see in fascinating luxuriance and blue brilliance.

As the sun inches his way over the hills, the shaded floor of the Reserved forests breaks into a thousand squares of light and shade. Wherever the golden shaft touches it, the flower slowly casts off the gossamer veil of pearly dew drops which has sheltered it from the cold throughout the night. But alas! As the light grows stronger and the heat increases, it wilts. It is a shy sensitive beauty, with its home deep in the forest, where there is ample shade and freedom from grazing and fire for the plant to thrive. But as the sun sinks towards the West, and the heat grows less and less, the flower revives, for the blue to glow bright and strong in the rays of the setting sun.

The auricultus flowering in Singbhum and Palamau faithfully followed a

a cycle of six years till 1945-46, and then suddenly like a coquette, conscious of her charms, quietly extended it. Instead of 1951-52 the flowering was in 1953-54, and then again in 1961-62. Perhaps aware of the keen interest aroused in the heart of ardent Naturalists, the sleep was extended to eight years. Over this gap of eight years, from the seeds scattered by their mother, who went to sleep for ever thereafter, the tiny seedlings pushed their heads higher and higher, inch by inch, until they were four feet high. During all this time, the mighty Sal nursed them in its shade, the moisture in the forest floor nurtured them, the monsoon rains bathed them, and the spring breezes invigorated them.

There are 181 species related to this flower, only one of which is found outside South Asia and over a hundred occur in India, growing as commonly as weeds from Assam to Madras. There is no part of India where some species of *Strobilanthes* does not flower in overwhelming gregariousness periodically. Five, six, eight, nine or twelve years are the hibernating gaps.

The periodic gregarious flowering which is scenically so striking is the main characteristic of the genus. North Bengal, Malda, Pyroea, Santhal Parganas and Singhbhum is the range of the yellow-flowered scaber. Along the East coast is the white *jeperensis*. In West India the species *lanthianus* paints blue the rolling upland country.

The member *callosus* of this strange tribe occurs throughout Western India and the Deccan from Mount Abu and the Ghimur Hills to the Nilgiris. It can be seen well at Khandala, which is quite close to Bombay. In the hills of Uttar Pradesh, near Chakrata, the species *wallichii* holds sway.

So much beauty, so liberally scattered, and yet so little known. So far the educated middle class have had only a romantic interest in the countryside, provoked by the love of Nature tradition in English literature from Spenser downwards to Hardy. To superficial seeming, our countryside compares badly with the English country depicted in the romantic literature upon which the emotions of our educated people have been nurtured. There is a poverty of wild flowers, and leafy country lanes and thickets seem to be fewer over here.

This poverty, however, of the Indian countryside, is not real. Even in flower-spangled England, cultivated fields have few flowers - poppies, cornflowers, etc. In India, leaving Kashmir apart, ploughing, grazing and intensive cultivation leave little chance for wild flowers to survive. Even then a closer look will reveal that our water courses, the few hedge banks, rice field bunds, waste lands, and grass patches have flowers often struggling valiantly against odds, the chief of which is the neglect of man.

The English countryside is no doubt rich in wild flowers, but the wealth is partially of nomenclature and popular knowing. The wild flowers are named, they have been listed in Nature study books, poets have sung about them, others have written about them in lengthy prose passages, and many gifted artists have painted them with the abandon that comes to creative human beings when they see the lavish use of colour by Nature. But all this literature and painting is possible only because the flowers are named and widely known. That is the initial step, and for the neglect of centuries we have to compensate with redoubled effort. Our flowers should also be known and named, not only for the idealist or romantic purpose of giving scope for emotional release through art and literature, not only to enable realistic local colour to be given to human living in this country, but also for the urgent purpose of stimulating interest in the countryside and forest. In England many people go to the country for flowers alone, and if the same stream of educated townsfolk could go to our countryside because they want to see some particular flower or flowers in bloom, the countryside would not long wear its present abandoned and neglected look.

To encourage people to visit the country on account of flowers or for that matter on account of any other rural appeal, the existence of wild flowers must be better known, the individual flowers must be known and people should know where to look for them and when to find them in bloom. So far even the *Strobilanthes*, unequalled anywhere in the world, has escaped our poets and artists.

the horizon. The stream still eludes you. Just when you have despaired of ever finding it, there it is, right at your feet. Not even a gurgle betrays its presence as it sways on in undulating curves.

The stream is pretty. Shallow, silvery water, amidst banks covered with green grass, through which blink clusters of tiny, blue and white, star-like flowers. The *Opuntia* bristles with thorns on the sands, and the sorrel breaks out in patches of yellow.

Of course, the herons and storks have discovered it long before you, and protest at your intrusion as they fly away. Fish and crabs scuttle in an effort to find a deeper pool and hide from your predating eye. The ringed plover and sandpiper prance about on their long legs, disturbed as they probed for insects in the soft mud. The roller, sacred to Shiva, takes off suddenly from the telegraph wire, hyphening the air with blue flashes.

Like everything else connected with Patna, this stream too goes back to the days of the Mauryas. In those days it was the Sone and in the strategic ~~xxxx~~ triangle marked by its confluence with the Ganga was the Mauryan capital, Pataliputra. Today the Sone has moved ten miles westwards, and the Capital of Chandragupta and Asoka is marked by the crumbling wood and ruins of Kumhrar.

But the palisades of the Mauryan fort followed the bank of this un-named stream for ~~kk~~ some distance - it still does. What history, what tales, is locked up in the breasts of this tiny stream! What scenes of amours, intrigues and jealousies must it have silently witnessed as delicate Princesses and voluptuous slaves indulged in their whims and fancies; their blood quickened by the scented breeze of Spring underneath a waning moon. Perhaps it is to forget those halcyon days, that the stream has abandoned the city to wander amidst the fields.

The water that flows in it still comes from the Sone. When the Sone irrigation system was constructed, this ancient bed was used as a distributary. Its banks are still littered with the remains of irrigation works; grooved stone pillars from which the sluice gates have disappeared. Carelessness and neglect have played havoc; at places even the masonry has been taken away by floods

But in spite of the neglect, at the height of summer, when everything is parched and brown, when living itself becomes tortuous in the surrounding plains; a thin trickle of water still flows in the stream. There are a dozen palms at one place, affording shelter from the noontday sun to men and animals, as they recline soothed by the wind sighing through the fronds. Along the stream grass appears before it does anywhere else, with the first showers; and stays on long after it has dried up elsewhere, provender for cattle starved by the heat.

Now it faces the danger of being wiped clean out of existence. Its course has been invaded by the water hyacinth. Racemes of lilac-blue flowers against a background of shimmering dark-green leaves, waving like the expanded hoods of hundreds of cobras. And they are as dangerous as cobras. The flower is slowly choking the very life out of this stream and the fields adjoining it.

Perhaps some one with imagination will realise the potentialities of this thread of water. He will visualise as a clear stream, flowing through parks and playfields, to the eternal delight of hundreds of children, young and old. He will eradicate the water hyacinth, resuscitate the channel, plant trees along the banks, and lay out children's parks on either side with quaint arched bridges spanning the stream as they do in Toyland. PERHAPS!!!