

A JOURNEY TO THE VALLEY OF GOD

BY DEBOJIT CHANDA



Figure 5.1: Yamuna Par; A4, Watercolor. DEBOJIT CHANDA

8.3 x 11.7" (21 x 30 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper

The way of life is an enigma, like navigating through an ever-changing maze that too on a pitch-dark night. In this strange journey, a hobby becomes a small lamp, revealing only a few steps ahead, just so we can push towards an uncertain end. Like many fellow travellers, I also hold two such lamps: painting watercolours and gazing at mountains. Though they seem worlds apart, they share a quiet truth. No matter how often you witness a mountain, each new glimpse unveils an uncharted face, just like every brushstroke produces something unforeseen, even for a seasoned painter. To steady my wavering path, last month, I chose to

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follow both lamps at once and trek into the Himalayas. And now, a few days later, soaked in the divinity of the great ranges, I couldn't help but also take you along on a visual journey to the Valley of God: *Har Ki Dun*.

As mundane as the train ride to Dehradun was, the drive to Kotgaon (6,520 ft) was equally charming. Lost in the pine forests unfolding at every bend, with sparkling rivers playing hide-and-seek between the ridges (5.1), I hardly noticed when the evening sun had already gilded the rooftops. By the time the village came into view, only the Swargarohini peaks stood tall, like watchful silhouettes behind the clouds (5.2).



Figure 5.2: From Kotgaon- Last Light; A5, Watercolor. DEBOJIT CHANDA

Approx. 5.83 x 8.27" (14.8 x 21.0 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper

The trek began the next morning (5.3) after obtaining entry passes from Sankri. With a bag full of clothes and a heart full of hope, we marched on towards our first stop – Gangaad (7,667 ft), a village beside the Supin River. Bathed in its century-old culture and frugal lifestyle, we fell asleep quickly, with the hymn of the flowing water. The last known memory of that place: golden mountains behind the quiet village, remained permanently engraved in my soul (5.4).

The next day, we started the ascent as the mountains slowly rose into our consciousness. Though occasional, traditional village homes on the slopes began to fade as we moved on.



Figure 5.3: From Kotgaon- First Light; A5, Watercolor. **DEBOJIT CHANDA**
Approx. 5.83 x 8.27" (14.8 x 21.0 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper

With every step, the trail itself began to feel like a prelude to something ancient, becoming nearly unwalkable for my city-grown feet. Seema arrived like a gentle pause – with a cluster of warm smiles and riverside serenity, it reminded us that even in the wilderness, hospitality thrives (5.5). From Seema onward, the trail widened and the valley opened its arms up, and a few miles later our first campsite, Kalkatiyadhar (9,960 ft), came into view. As the height and temperature grew apart, so did the layers under our jacket. Stranded alone beneath the Milky Way, all we could do was wait for the fated summit.



Figure 5.4: Sunset at Gangad; A5, Watercolor. DEBOJIT CHANDA

Approx. 5.83 x 8.27" (14.8 x 21.0 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper

We started the next day early, with the sun barely awake. Within a few minutes, the landscape lifted itself toward grandeur. And then, just beyond a bend that seemed to vanish in the sky, the first true glimpse of Har Ki Dun appeared, as we arrived at Boslo (10,430 ft), a calm panorama surrounded by the mountains, so sudden and so vast, that it demanded silence (5.6). The final stretch to the valley felt like walking into a myth; for the first time in the last few days, my legs did not want to stop. The meadows flattened into a broad cradle of gold and green, merging the trail with the banks of the Thamsa River, which led straight to the feet of Swargarohini, the God's valley (5.7).



Figure 5.5: Seema- The Last Village; A5, Watercolor. **DEBOJIT CHANDA**
 Approx. 5.83 x 8.27" (14.8 x 21.0 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper



Figure 5.6: Glimpse of the End; A5, Watercolor. **DEBOJIT CHANDA** 60
 Approx. 5.83 x 8.27" (14.8 x 21.0 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper

Circled by the Hata Peak, Har Ki Dun Peak, Jaundhar Glacier at one side, and Mt. Swargarohini I, II, III, Mt. Bandarponch, Mt. Kalanag on the other hand, snowfields glowed softly in the sun as streams braided themselves gracefully across the plains. Standing there, breathing in wind filled with cold purity, surrounded by the towering amphitheatre of peaks, time seemed to loosen its grip.

Har Ki Dun was not just the end of a trail; it was a place where story and landscape met. A valley whispered about in mythology, framed by mountains that looked unchanged since the days when gods were said to walk these paths. In that dangerously elegant quiet, with the world stretching away endlessly in snow and stone, the journey felt complete in the most profound way.



Figure 5.7: God's Valley; A4, Watercolor. DEBOJIT CHANDA
8.3 x 11.7" (21 x 30 cm) - Daniel Smith extra-fine watercolors on Chitrapat handmade paper