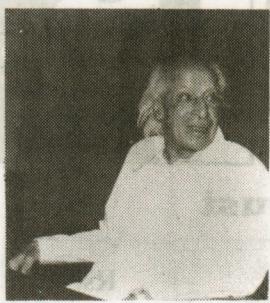


Uma prasad Mukhopadhyay – a devout Himalaya adorer.



October 12, 1902, the date coincided with Vijaya Dashami, signifying the departure of the mother Goddess Durga to her home after four days of festivities. One hears drum beats all around to mark the parting pangs. On that date conch shells began to blow at 77 Russa Road (now named Ashutosh Mukherjee Road) which was the residence of Sir

Ashutosh Mukherjee, popularly known as the tiger of Bengal. It was as if, before she had started for Kailash, the mother Goddess left in the hands of Jogmaya, wife of Sir Ashutosh, a baby of divine features. The child was named Umaprasad and since it was Vijaya Dashami, he was nicknamed as Biju.

Umaprasad was the third son among seven children of Ashutosh. The eldest of them was daughter Kamala, followed by three sons, Ramaprasad, Shyamaprasad and Umaprasad in that order and the next was daughter Amala. After them was Ashutosh's fourth son Bamaprasad and then Ramala, the youngest daughter. His nephews would all address Umaprasad as 'Sejka' as he happened to be the third brother. In later years his grand children continued to call him by this name. There after he became to be known as Sejka for all others.

After spending his childhood days in happy company of his brothers and sisters, he got admitted in Bhawanipur Mitra Institution. He cleared the Entrance examination in the first division from this school. Then to Presidency College wherefrom he took his Bachelor degree with Honours in the English language. He loved drawing and painting and got himself admitted in M.A. in Fine Arts and had fine result in the final examination. Although his intention was to live with painting, he had to give up the thought since his father wished him to read Law. Umaprasad took Law for Study and obtained a degree in this discipline too. Simultaneous with the studies, he enjoyed himself in physical exercises, sports and games, music and literary practices. He was a good tennis player and was also a qualified football referee. He was a founder-member of Calcutta Referees' Association. Classical music was ever a passion with him. Dilip Roy, the famous composer, musicologist and artiste, was a classmate of Ramaprasad, eldest brother of Umaprasad. Thus Umaprasad came very close to Dilip Roy, his mentor. Umaprasad could be located very often in reputed music conferences as one in the audience. Those were also the days when the Bengali Journal *Bangabani* was published from the Mukherjee's house. Elders Ramaprasad and Shyamaprasad looked after the publication. Umaprasad also associated himself with the journal and in course of time came to be acquainted with *Kathashilpi* Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay. The acquaintance became very close in the subsequent years. Saratchandra's famous novel *Pather Dabee* was serially published in this journal and it earned the disfavour of the British Government.

Later on, when the novel was brought out in the book form, its publisher was Umaprasad himself. He had been the secretary and treasurer of the memorial committee formed after Saratchandra's death. Robindranath was its president and Basanti Debi, Subhaschandra Bose and Shyamaprasad its vice-presidents.

In deference to his father's wish Umaprasad entered into the legal profession in the Alipore Court. Subsequently he joined the High Court at Calcutta. At the same time he was teaching in Law College. Inspite of this busy schedule of work, he would go out to his place of choice whenever he found the opportunity. In the year 1928 he started for the Himalaya on foot for the first time. Prior to this, he had visited Himalaya from Darjeeling and Mussorie like other tourists. Umaprasad was very fond of his mother, whom he took for a pilgrimage to Kedar-Badri. In those days no mechanical transport system was available for such journey in the Himalayan region, walking had to be started from Rishikesh and the tour took about two months to complete. After his first sojourn to the mountain he had a feeling that his real home was in the Himalaya. He no longer felt any attraction for the citylife. He would often pass him time in the coolness and splendour of the Himalaya. He visited Kailash-Mansarovar in 1934 and started writing his famous travelogues from that time. He had bound exercise book for writing the pages of which contained accounts of his journey in a language replete with his mastery over the language, details of his spiritual identity with the soul of the Himalaya. He would not give a thought about publishing these writings. All his enjoyment centred round his own pleasant journeys. He took his aged mother once again in 1949 to the Himalaya. But this time it was at Gangotri Jamunotri. In the meantime he lost his elder brother Shyamaprasad. Who died a tragic death in Kashmir. Jana Sangha, a political outfit founded by Shyamaprasad, proposed Umaprasad to join active politics, which he refused. He returned once again to Gomukh carrying the ashes of the pyre of Shyamaprasad. He cast the ashes in Gomukh. After coming back to Calcutta he wrote *Gangabataran*. This was his first printed book.

After the death of his mother, Umaprasad gradually retracted himself from the household. Unmarried Umaprasad gave up teaching and legal profession. His stay in Calcutta became few and four between. Twice a year he would go to a remote region of the Himalaya or else to remote forest. Kedar-Badri turned to be his private and personal place of stay. If he could not make it to other places of his liking, he would start for Kedar-Badri. He built a cottage in memory of his mother and named it *Jogmaya Kutir*, at Kedarnath. He would "migrate" to Madhupur in the family's *Gangaprasad House* during the rainy seasons and winter. He stayed there all alone. He was vegetarian and extremely moderate in his eating habits and cooked his own food. The few who had rare opportunity of having a taste of the food cooked by Umaprasad would never forget it. He was extremely punctual and carried on a very simple life according to his own will.

His wants were very few and he did not have to make big arrangements for meeting his needs. He had long spell of slack time at disposal throughout the day, which he would utilise in writing his exquisite travellogues. For spending his spare time he had also chosen Pandicherry. Nalinikanta Sarkar's residential house at Pondicherry had frequent evening sittings which was attended by Mohini Mohan Chattopadhyay, Bagha Jatin's Son Tejen Mukherjee, Dilip Roy's niece Esha Debi and many others. But Nalinikanta Sarkar and Umaprasad were the central figures in such gathering, while others were mostly listeners with a rapt attention. Hours passed by while they were on. Often Umaprasad to pay a visit to Sahana Debi and the grand old lady would regale Umaprasad with her immaculate rendering of Tagore songs.

Writings other than those on his travels also had the unique poetic quality of his language. His language had the power to carry the reads along the routes of his journey. Umaprasad wrote 27 books and these are many small articles published in various periodicals. He earned recognition for his brilliant writings in the form of Academy Award, Bankimchandra Gold medal, Dindal Roy Award and Sarat Award. His last sojourn by foot to Himalaya was in the year 1980 in which he was accompanied by a large group. The group went to Madmaheswar, Tunganath, Kedarnath and Badrinath. But that was not to be the end of his travels. He also visited Samashtha, Mumbai,

Pondicherry and other places.

From the beginning of 1993, he started to feel about his deteriorating health. His nephew Chitatosh would not allow him to travel any further. Kantisen Shroff arrived in Calcutta suddenly in the month of June that year. He took Umaprasad along with him to Mumbai to stay together for a four days. Umaprasad returned to Calcutta on the 18th July. From then his health worsened further. He was unable to come down from his room in the first floor. His movements became less and less over the days and required others help for taking a seat. The man with wheel in his legs turned to a still figure. He had to bear exernciating physical pain along with mental agony. All he had to do was to remain in bed and recapitulate the past.

On 26 September 1997 his condition became serious and he had to be admitted to ICU in the Ramkrishna Mission Seva Sadan. The pujas passed among from his world. Vijaya Dashami was on 11 October, when the mother Goddess left for Kailash. Before leaving she whispered in the ears of Umaprasad "I am leaving, you too come soon." The next day was his 96th birthday, and on that very day at 10-10 in the morning this devout Himalay lover started his journeey to his last abode.

 **Himadri Bhattacharya**

Photo Courtesy : Basudeb Ghosh

Kedarnath — A New Approach

The Temple of Sri Kedarnathji has been for ages attarcting thousands of people from every strata of the Indian Society. There had been preachers, pilgrims and, more recently, trekkers rushing to the Temple in the lap of mighty Kedernath Peak (6940m.). The busiest route for Kedar is from Gourikund. From the Bhilangana Valley one can reach Kedarnath over Maiuli Pass (4940m). Though this latter route has become very popular to the trekkers in recent years, a third route (From Ransi of Madmaheswar Ganga Valley) over Yonbuk Col (4663m), Bisali Col (4754m.) and Kedar Khal (4600m) saw only a few trekking teams since it's opening in 1980. The Survey of India — Trekking series Map (Badri-Kedar) shows a fourth route from the Kaliganga Valley. It crosses the Kaliganga-Mandakini watershed to join the Gourikund Kedar-Yatri route, somewhere near Ramwara. Our aim was to move northward along the Kaliganga valley and cross the Kaliganga-Mandakini wathrshed over an unnamed Col (4320m) between Matri Top and Bisali Top, so as to reach Kedarnath by a new route.

From Calcutta you are to reach Haridwar, either by the only direct (though uncomfortable) 3009 Up Doon Express, or by reaching Delhi/New Delhi (there are not less than six trains for the capital) and therefrom move to Haridwar by bus or train. From Haridwar it is about an eight hour bus journey to Guptkasi. Regular buses run between the two towns an inspite of the late arrival of the ill-famed Doon Express to Haridwar, you may be fortunate to catch a bus for Guptkasi. Alternatively, you may have a forced night halt at Haridwar. From Guptkasi

move to the trekpoint Kotma next day. A single bus plies between the two spots and due to its inconvenient timing you need to reserve a jeep from Guptkasi though lucky ones may get a shared Jeep for Rs 15 per head. In your return trip from Kedar there will be buses plying regularly from Gourikund to Rishikesh.

Fare :	(as in June, 1997)
Train :	Howrah to Haridwar (in sleeper Class) Rs. 305
Bus :	Haridwar to Guptkasi Rs. 86
Reserved Jeep :	Guptkasi to Kotma (rate negotiable) Rs. 200

Trekking Days :

		Distance in Km.
Day 1.	Kotma to Chaumasi	5
Day 2.	Chaumasi to Chhipi	12
Day 3.	Chhipi to Khadora	6
	Khadora to Bahujatiya	6
Day 4.	Bahujatiya to unnamed col	2.5
	Col to Kedarnath	7

Porter and Guide :

As this is a new route, the absence of any set infrastructure pattern of trekking may force you to spend a few hours or even a day, at Kotma to get porter and a guide. Or else, you may contact our guide (send a registered letter in Hindi well in advance) to make necessary arrangements on the specified date at Kotma. A day's advance through M.O. will earn his sincerity. The charge for porter-cum-guide is Rs. 80