

Siesta At Mansbal Lake

On a weekday, in the early afternoon, I reached Mansbal Lake. It is a small, pearl of a lake, placid, unpretentious. Its appearance and size makes you connect with it quickly. Unlike its famous sister, Dal Lake, Manasbal Lake is easier to understand and absorb. There were only a couple of dozen people in it during my visit. The mood was that of opulent tranquility, tender dreaminess.

Considered the deepest lake in Kashmir, at a maximum depth of 43 ft., it has engendered a myth that it is bottomless. A prodigious field of lotuses adorns it, which also makes it one of the largest sources of nadrus (lotus stalk), a popular item of Kashmiri cuisine. Then this is also among the top places to view aquatic birds. So many attributes for one splendid body of water.

After taking a wide and deep look at the lake and also taking all the photographs that I wanted to take, I decided to skip seeing the two important auxiliaries of the lake: a Mughal Garden, called Jarokha, built by Moghul queen Noor Jahan and the ruins of a 17th century fort called Darogabagh, also built by Moghuls, which used to serve as an inn for travelers journeying between Punjab and Srinagar.

Moved by the supine serenity of the place and privacy afforded by the virtual absence of people, I decided that I must take a nap under a tree, an image of bliss conjured up from my childhood.

I was very surprised by the choice of my activity, but I was being propelled by an inner force. I managed to land my aging frame on the ground, wrapped my camera round my right arm, and closed my eyes. I was amazed to see the Lady Sleep slowly curling her arms around me; I passed quickly thereafter. When I opened my eyes I saw that I had been in the other world for 45 minutes. Clearly Manasbal Lake inspired me to ignore everything: time of the day, public location, busy schedule, my past inability to sleep during daytime, and took me in her arms.

That was incredible to me, as I am almost never able to sleep during daytime. I was quite elated by my performance because coming from a materialistic culture, in which people are always looking at their watches, to find enough inspiration and peace of mind to cut myself off from the world was no easy task.

I took a few more photographs and once again looked deep into the lake, to absorb its spirit and charisma. Slowly, but reluctantly, I walked toward my waiting taxi. On the way to Dal Gate we passed through many villages and hamlets, and the town of Ganderbal. People looked so much simpler and less stressed than their counterparts in the Western societies.

The siesta at Manasbal Lake started to sink in me, and I realized it was one of the defining moments of my trip to Kashmir, for it symbolized that I had arrived at a stage in my life, when I could distance myself from the material universe around me for some time.

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