

Darjeeling and the wake-up call

by Suchita Malik

WE were on a holiday to the distant hills of Darjeeling this summer. A meandering drive to the getaway Zone and vicinity of the beautiful lush tea gardens glittering resplendently with rays of the morning sun offered a visual fiesta to the eyes.

The serenity of cool and calm surroundings was well complimented by the radiance of the village gals who, while picking leaves in the tea-gardens looked picture-perfect with their traditional dresses, dangling ear rings and jubilant laughter. The shy, curious glances at the passers-by, demure demeanour and a cane 'tokri' for a piggyback made

them look ravishing to the eye.

The brilliance of the landscape, the simplicity of its natives and the subtle aroma emanating from the expansive tea gardens were enough to make us forget the "din" of the towns and the cities and helped in "connecting the landscape with the quiet of the sky" to put it in Wordsworthian terms.

The resort, where we chose to stay, was no different in terms of the picturesque scenery than it promised. Also, it reigned abundant in solitude and was a great anodyne for our city-bred distraught nerves. We looked forward to a great peaceful time and lot of undisturbed sleep after hectic long days of sight-see-

ing and trekking. But that was not to be. We were all awakened in the morning, rather early to be precise, with a loud, hoarse but persistent hankering call. The cry in the wilderness was so consistent at measured intervals and amazing precision that our children too got up, all of a sudden, feeling disturbed and irritated. We all sat in our beds sleepy, tired and nonplussed. All our attempts to sleep after that were successfully thwarted by the incessant wakening call of the chanticleer. He seemed to have no intentions to dither or stop for the time being. My son was the first to protest.

"Papa, stop him... I can't sleep, it gets on my nerves and

I really want to sleep!" He was restive and persistent with his pleadings.

"What can I do? I am already at my wit's end, son," said my husband.

"Papa, please do something... make him stop, somehow."

"Beta, one can only wring his neck, if you so want but neither I nor anybody else can stop him forcibly," said my husband expressing his helplessness.

As the hapless conversation between the father and children continued, I drew the window curtains aside to have a closer look at the nature's eternal but marvellous time-keeper, I saw the wonderful, white chanticleer with a radiant, crowning

"*kalagi*" performing his duty diligently and determinedly, unmindful of the sleeping world around him.

His natural beckoning was a beautiful ode to the rising sun and its sheer beauty and perhaps also a call to his countrymen "to wake up" and rise! And all this poised brilliantly against the backdrop of the lustrous splendour of Nature that scoffed at the jet-set pace of our civilisation and its technical advancements.

Forgetting the reproaches of my still sleepy son, I couldn't take my eyes off the beautiful spectacle but could only marvel at the inimitable creation of God and its innumerable wonders! ■