

# BHUTAN



NAGENDRA SINGH



# BHUTAN

A KINGDOM IN THE HIMALAYAS

*Prof. A. C. Sinha*

A Study of the Land, its People and their Government



By

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भूतलगिरि सरसिजनिभमिह भूत्तानं यमस्मि वन्दितवान् ।  
पुस्तकमिदमथ सादरभरमर्पितमस्तु मे तस्मै ॥1॥

एतस्य च प्रजाभ्यो गुरुगुरवे पद्मसम्भवाय भुवः ।  
नेष्यति यन्नेतृत्वं नित्यं महिमालयं हिमालयकम् ॥2॥

अपि च प्रतिष्ठितानामपि प्रतिष्ठास्पदाय भूपाय ।  
जिग्मेदोर्जीवंग्चुक् शुभाभिधानाय देवाय ॥3॥

भूत्तान देशखिलराष्ट्र बन्धुतां शान्तिञ्च विस्तारयितुं प्रयस्यतः ।  
यस्येतिहासं सुयशः प्रपत्स्यते कार्तश्यतो मानविकी स्मरिष्यति ॥4॥

तं त्वां हिमालयगुरुर्भगवान् गिरीशोऽध्यात्मे गुरुश्च भगवान् किल बुद्धदेवः ।  
गोपाययेदनुदिनं तव चापि राज्यं प्राज्यं, प्रजाश्च परितः परितोष्येत्सः ॥5॥

(These few pages are respectfully dedicated to the mountain lotus of the world, in admiration of the country, its people and the greatest of all Gurus, 'Padma Sambhawa', whose light will ever guide the high Himalayas. And above all to the noblest of the noble king Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, whom history will ever cherish and mankind always remember with gratitude for bringing his noble men to join the world fraternity as a selfless partner in search for peace. May the God of the Himalayas, Lord Shiva, and the spiritual Lord Buddha protect thy kingdom and thy people always.)



# CONTENTS

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<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
Foreword	xi
Preface	xiii
<b>PART I</b>	
<b>Introduction</b>	
I ... Land	3
II ... People	13
III ... History	17
IV ... Art, Culture and Religion	56
<b>PART II</b>	
<b>The State and its Government</b>	
V ... Political Institutions	77
VI ... The Organisation of Government	97
VII ... Economic Development	113
<b>PART III</b>	
<b>Bhutan Enters the World Family of Nations</b>	
VIII ... Emergence of Modern Bhutan (1947-1967)	125
IX ... Nations Welcome Bhutan (1967-1971)	147
X ... Conclusion	166
Postscript	169
<b>APPENDICES</b>	
I ... Principal animals and birds found in Bhutan and its neighbourhood and their habitat	175
II ... Articles of the Treaty of Peace between the Honourable East India Company and the Deb Raja of Bhutan, 1774	177
III ... Articles of trade drawn up by Bogle in 1774 with the Deb Raja of Bhutan	179



IV	...	Translation of the Document which Mr. Eden signed under compulsion in 1864	...	180
V	...	Khureeta to His Highness the Deb Rajah intimating the annexation of Ambaree Fallacottah (dated Simla, 9th June 1864)	...	182
VI	...	Proclamation of the annexation of Bengal Duars (12th November, 1864)	...	185
VII	...	The Treaty of Sinchula, 1865	...	187
VIII	...	Proclamation of annexation of the Doars and other territory of Bhutan (4th July 1866)	...	189
IX	...	The Treaty of Punakha, 1910	...	190
X	...	The Treaty of November 1910 between India and Bhutan concerning extradition and other related matters	...	192
XI	...	Document executed in 1907 which recorded and solemnised the establishment of Hereditary Monarchy in Bhutan	...	193
XII	...	The Constitution of the National Assembly	...	195
XIII	...	Treaty between India and Bhutan, 1949	...	198
		Bibliography	...	201



# ILLUSTRATIONS

## Colour Plates

A glacier-fed lake in Bhutan	12— 13
Bhutanese monks	12— 13
A frescoe of a mandala at Paro Dzong	32— 33
Dharma Raja	32— 33
The inner entrance of a dzong	48— 49
Monks' orchestra	48— 49
Sword dancers at Domchen festival	48— 49
A guardian deity of Bhutan	96— 97
The Kichhu monastery in Paro	96— 97
A masked dancer	96— 97
Bhutanese stamps	144—145
Thangka presented to the Druk Gyalpo	144—145
Facsimile of the document establishing hereditary monarchy in Bhutan	193

## Black-and-white Plates

Archery, the national sport of Bhutan	16— 17
Bhutanese dancers at Thimphu	16— 17
A lay lama with Tashi Goma	64— 65
Precious burdens and mutual considerations	64— 65
An image of Avalokiteswara	112—113
A function at Government Secretariat	112—113
His majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk	112—113
Her Royal Majesty Ashi Kesang Wangchuk	112—113
Ugyen Pelri Palace	112—113
Bhutanese mother and child	112—113
His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuk	168—169

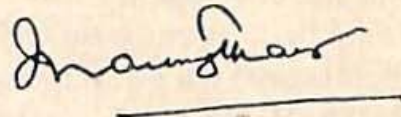
## Maps

Three



## FOREWORD

I welcome this book on Bhutan, a country which has recently been admitted to the United Nations. I am glad that this country has attracted the attention of Dr. Nagendra Singh, a distinguished jurist and friend of Bhutan. I have no doubt that this valuable treatise will interest not only students of history, law and politics, but also laymen, and thereby make Bhutan better known to the world.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'U. Thant', is written above a horizontal line.

(U. Thant)



## PREFACE

There are some rare occasions when the publication of a book becomes both a pleasure and a privilege to the author as also to the publisher. In writing this monographic study in history, culture and politics of the sovereign State of Bhutan which will ever remain nature's own creation in the mountain fastnesses of the highest range in the world, I have throughout felt an enthusiasm which has been a source of great pleasure by itself. Again, the admission of Bhutan to the United Nations has given a privileged position to the publication and more so to the author who has the honour of being the Constitutional Adviser to the Government of Bhutan. It is an occasion for celebration for every Bhutanese to see his motherland step into a new era. It is equally a privilege for anyone to be associated with the rise to statehood of this peace-loving mountain cradle of hitherto isolated human civilization which is at once distinctive in character, great in spiritual values and unique in its tradition, culture and philosophy.

At the moment Bhutan thrives with its unwritten constitution, although intention is expressed that one day Bhutan should have a written framework of its constitutional laws to regulate the activities of its political organs. However, as the State is developing fast, both economically and politically, it needs flexibility as the very essence of its progress. A written constitution might introduce unnecessary rigidity and place limitations and fetters on future development. At this initial stage in the new political life of Bhutan as a member of the international community, nothing should be done to introduce elements which would prevent the natural growth of the political and constitutional organs of the State. However, once the development has taken a distinct shape, it may be worthwhile lending clarity and precision by having a written constitution.

Meanwhile, the great strides made by Bhutan since 1907 have been, indeed, momentous. The unification of authority so necessary for the conduct of external affairs, the consolidation of the State machine internally, so essential for the maintenance of public order, and the economic growth and well-being of the State and its nationals, are but some of them. In fact, Bhutan has registered marked progress in every direction and a separate chapter has, therefore, been devoted to the emergence of Bhutan as a modern State almost in record time. (Chapter viii)

No study of modern Bhutan could be complete without a description of its picturesque land, its colourful people and its art and culture, which



all bear a special character of their own. Thus Part I of the book has been devoted to the aforesaid aspects alone. The religion of Bhutan stands on its own among the numerous faiths of the world. Taking its origin from the enlightened Buddha, the religion of Bhutan is a veritable symbol of peace based on non-violence in deed and thought.

Moreover, as the *raison d'être* of this study has been to describe Bhutan as a sovereign State, the political institutions, constitutional organs and the governmental authorities that constitute the State have been described in Part II in a historical perspective. The economic development of the State has also been narrated in a separate chapter.

As the publication of this work synchronises with the admission of Bhutan to the United Nations, Part III deals with Bhutan's entry into the world family of nations. The emergence of modern Bhutan is a fascinating study. There were many fields and directions in which progress and unification were required before Bhutan could consolidate its position, both internally and externally, as a sovereign State. First and foremost it had to end the diarchy of the *Deb Raja* and *Dharma Raja*, who were the two separate Heads of State, the former temporal and the latter spiritual. Apart from this need for the emergence of a single authority to be able to conduct external relations of the State, there was also the dire need for consolidating the internal authority by establishing supremacy over the Penlops of Bhutan, who in the Middle Ages had been so powerful as to partition authority on a territorial basis. Above all, there was the need to democratise and modernise the entire political machine of the State which, coupled with the aforesaid problems, presented a stupendous task. History has witnessed many complicated events leading to unification of the territories of countries and the establishment of an unquestioned single authority both within and without the State. Bhutan's story of rise to statehood has been its own inasmuch as it has throughout been marked by simplicity, straightforwardness and peace in all its stages and in all eventualities.

In this great process of unification, consolidation, and rise to statehood, the contribution made by the late King, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, has been outstanding. He has really been the architect of modern Bhutan. A separate book could be written on his personality alone. His untimely demise has, in fact, caused a great loss not only to Bhutan but also to all the friends and well wishers of peace in general and this State in particular. In the present context, therefore, this monograph on Bhutan would not be complete without an appropriate mention of his achievements.

The admiration which Bhutan spontaneously evoked from the members of the Security Council of the United Nations has been profound. An attempt has accordingly been made to reproduce the graphic account



given by representatives of the Member-States of the U.N. Security Council of Bhutan's culture, climate and life. They all hailed the distinct acquisition that this new Member State will make to the United Nations.

The purpose of this exercise would be more than fulfilled if this small monograph enables not only the members of the United Nations but also the world at large to appreciate that with Bhutan's participation in the United Nations, one more pillar of strength, deeply genuine in its intentions and crystal clear in its honesty of purpose, has been added to the building of world peace, a task so vital to the happiness and lasting prosperity of mankind.

I could not conclude this preface without expressing my gratitude to Dr. Blanche C. Olschak of Zurich, who helped me with material as well as coloured photographs of an exquisite character. In regard to the latter, I have to thank Madam Ursula and Mr. A. Gansser. The assistance of all three has made it possible for me to deal at length with the art, culture and religion of Bhutan. My sincere thanks are also due to Mr. Gibson, the distinguished Principal of Mayo College, Ajmer, who has recently retired, for his courtesy in giving me some of his valuable coloured photographs on Bhutan.

I am indeed grateful to the publishers who have undertaken this work with commendable zeal. Mr. L.R. Nair has extended to me his cooperation throughout the effort to publish this book, and I am personally thankful to him for what has been achieved.

Again, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the Surveyor General of India for his kind permission so promptly received, for the publication of the maps of Bhutan. In this connection, Mr. S. Bose, Curator at Rashtrapati Bhavan, has been exceedingly helpful in suggesting proper combination of colours for the maps which now appear so elegant.

I am also thankful to Mr. R. Bedi whose photographs show a genuine insight into life of Bhutan and Mr. T. Kashi Nath whose willing cooperation has been extremely helpful in the selection and layout of photographs.

New Delhi

**Nagendra Singh**

PART I  
INTRODUCTION



# I

## THE LAND

### *The Territorial Extent*

IF THE first *sine qua non* of a sovereign State is landed territory, it would appear essential, at the very outset, to attempt a description of the territorial extent, location and distinguishing characteristics of the land of Bhutan, a new member recently added to the international community of States. As location must logically come first, Bhutan may be described as a landlocked State of South Asia lodged on the hill tops on the southern side of the Great Himalaya range.

In his erudite account, Coelho, an official of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, has indicated the territorial extent of Bhutan by listing the frontier States which border Bhutan, when he observes as follows :

“Bhutan is bounded on the north by Tibet, on the west by Sikkim and the Chumbi Valley of Tibet and on the east and south by the Indian States of Assam and West Bengal.”<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the exact location of Bhutan according to the Surveyor General of India is to the following effect :

“Bhutan is situated along the southern slopes of the Great Himalaya range. It is bounded by the table-land of Tibet on the north; the plains of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang districts of Assam in the south; the Chumbi Valley (Tibet), Sikkim and Darjeeling district of West Bengal in the west; and the Kameng district of the North-East Frontier Agency<sup>2</sup> (Assam) on the east.”

<sup>1</sup>*Sikkim and Bhutan* by Coelho, V.H., Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, published by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup>The North East Frontier Agency or NEFA is now a part of the recently constituted Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh of India.



The most convenient method known to history to define the location of any territory of a political State is to take recourse to maps and the one\* on the opposite page may help to determine the geographical location of the ancient land of Bhutan.

As far as the area of Bhutan is concerned, it had hitherto been stated to be approximately 18,000 square miles. This is confirmed by the calculations made by Karan and Jenkins in their scholarly work : *The Himalayan Kingdoms*.<sup>3</sup> Again, there is a reliable publication of the Information Service of India on Bhutan which not only confirms the aforesaid area, but also gives the length and breadth in the following words :

“Bhutan has an area of about 18,000 square miles, roughly rectangular in shape and extending about 200 air-miles from east to west and about 100 air-miles from north to south.”<sup>4</sup>

The position, however, seems to have since been fully cleared through an official survey and measurement conducted by the Survey Department of the Royal Government of Bhutan insofar as *Kuensel*, the weekly official bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan, confirms that the total area of Bhutan is 18,000 square miles.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The Nomenclature 'Bhutan'*

The territorial extent described above has been known to recorded history as Bhutan, though there are various theories put forward as to the derivative meaning of that name. In the old Tibetan texts Bhutan was called 'Land of the Mon' (*Mon-Yul*) referring to the Monpa, aboriginal inhabitants of the Himalayas, who had found a retreat in the south-east of the country. Another characteristic name of these regions was 'Realm of

\*The map has been obtained from the Surveyor General of India and published by his kind permission.

<sup>3</sup>Karan, Pradyumna P., and Jenkins, William M., Jr., *The Himalayan Kingdoms: Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal*, p. 27.

<sup>4</sup>*Bhutan and Sikkim*, published by Information Service of India, Political Office, Gangtok, Sikkim.

<sup>5</sup>*Kuensel*, the Weekly Official Bulletin of the Royal Government of Bhutan, Vol. VI, No. 12, dated November 14, 1971, p. 10. Under the column 'Information Box', the *Kuensel* gives the following question and answer:

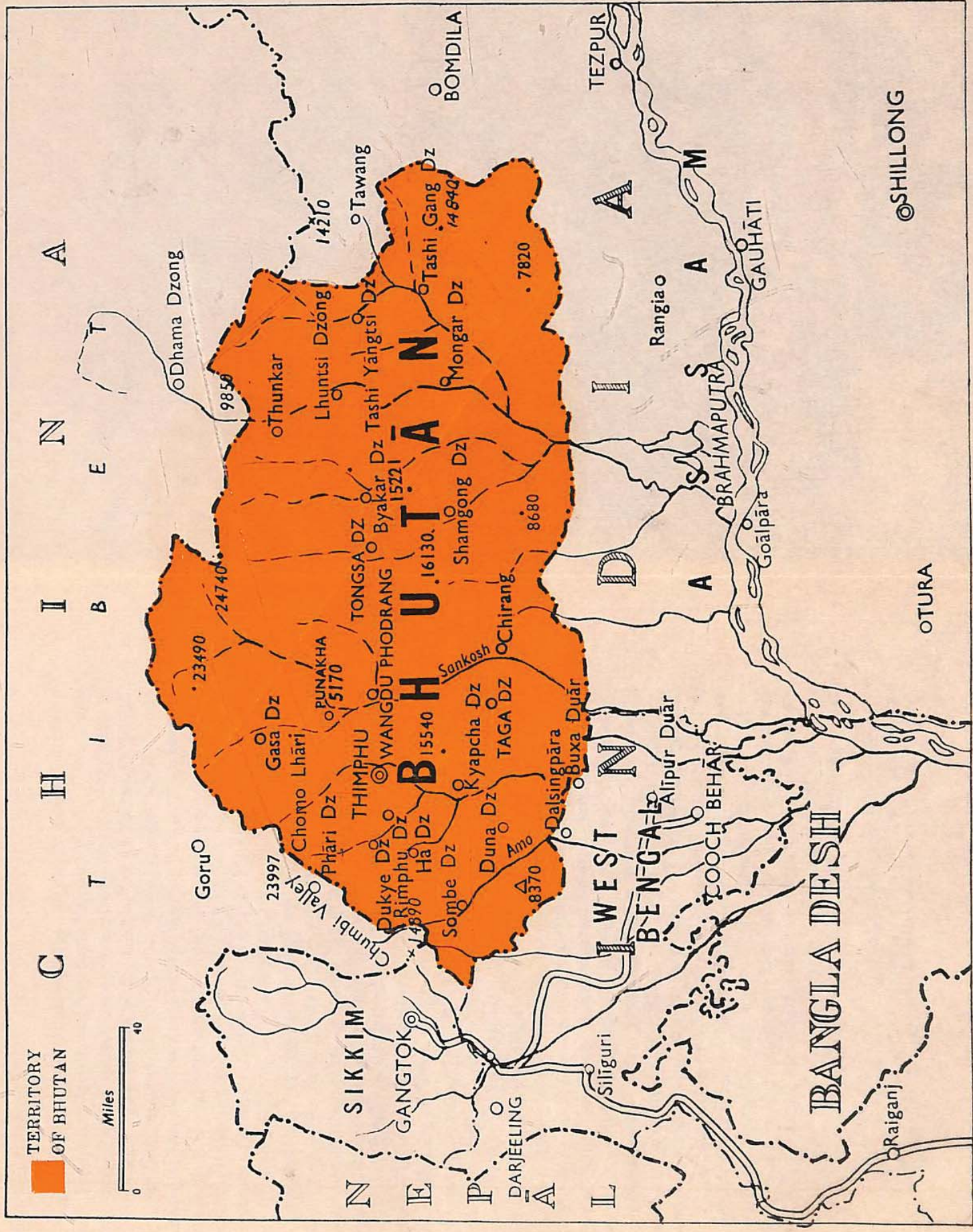
“N. Gyeltshen, Thimpu

Q. How did you find out that the total area of Bhutan is exactly 18,000 square miles and by whom was the measurement done?

A. I have a survey map in my office which you may come and see sometime and measure the area yourself. The survey and measurement was officially conducted by the Survey Department.”



TERRITORY OF BHUTAN



C T H I N A  
T I B E N A

N E P A L  
DARJEELING  
GANGTOK  
SILIGURI

WEST BENGAL  
COOCH BEHAR  
ALIPUR DUAR

ASSAM  
SHILLONG  
GAUHATI  
BRAHMAPUTRA  
RANGIA  
GOALPĀRA  
OTURA

BHUTAN  
Gasa Dz  
Chomo Lhari  
Phari Dz  
THIMPHU  
Dukye Dz  
Rimphu Dz  
Ha Dz  
Somba Dz  
Duna Dz  
Amo  
Sankosh  
TONGSA DZ  
WANGDU PHODRANG  
Byakar Dz  
Tashi Yangtse Dz  
Mongar Dz  
Shamgong Dz  
Chirang  
TAGA DZ  
Buxa Duar  
Dalsingpara  
Guru O  
PUNAKHA  
Thunkar  
Lhuntsi Dzong  
Tashi Gang Dz  
Mongar Dz  
Tawang  
Dhama Dzong  
BOMDILA



Healing Herbs', since the southern slopes of the Himalayas have been known from time immemorial for medicinal herb plants. There is also good reason why the ancient blockprints refer to Bhutan as 'Paradise of the South' and 'Lotus Garden of the Gods—Rich in Forests of Sandalwood and Sweet-scented Herbs'. The southern Mon districts have been described as 'Punakha' (*sPu-na-kha*), the region where oranges, bananas, citrus-fruit and sugarcane grow alongside bamboo, pines and firs. To the south, 'Pasamkha' (*dPag-bsam-kha*) was known as 'the end of the rainbow district of desires', situated at the foot of the Himalayas, an exchange-place for wares from the north and from the south.

However, the most plausible, logical and readily acceptable theory of the origin of the name Bhutan appears to be the one based on the Sanskrit descriptive phrase *Bhota ant* which means 'end' (*ant*) of Bhota (Tibet) indicative of the geographical location of Bhutan which is certainly at the end of Tibet. This is, indeed, a significant derivative interpretation because it helps to depict a separate integrity of this area from Tibet although adjoining the Tibetan land and its culture. Bhutan is in every sense of the word a borderland of Tibet, but it is by no means a part and parcel of Tibet, geographically, politically or otherwise. Another possible Sanskrit derivative could be *Bhu-uttan* standing for *high land*. With the marked influence of Buddhism and its Pali medium, there can be little doubt that the Sanskrit interpretation would be the most logically applicable in this case. However, apart from the aforesaid theory concerning the derivative origin of Bhutan, which has been supported by more than one scholar,<sup>6</sup> there is the well-known proposition put forward by David Field Rennie, which dates back to 1866. According to him, the word *Bhutan* simply means 'the country of the Bhots or Thibetians. More correctly, it should be spelt Bhotstan—*stan* in the Persian and Arabic meaning place: hence Hindoostan, Afghanistan and Beloochistan, the places respectively of the Hindoo, the Afghan, and the Belooch'.<sup>7</sup> As the Persian and Arabic influence in Bhutan is seen nowhere, the aforesaid interpretation of Rennie seems to invite epithets which were unknown in that region to both the traveller and the contemporary writer as well as the inhabitants. It may, however, be true that among the inhabitants of Tibet there was a section known as Bhoteahs and their migration to Bhutan is also a part

<sup>6</sup>Ram Rahul, *The Himalaya Borderland*, Vikas Publications, 1969, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>Rennie, David Field, *Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War*, first published by John Murray, Albemarle Street, London, 1866; Reprinted by Bibliotheca Himalayica, 1970, p. 3.



of recorded history. It is also noteworthy that the territorial area represented today by Tibet was not known in China as Bhote or Bot. It has been suggested that the Chinese words *Ta* and *Fung*, standing for 'the great wind' for which Tibet is well known, were responsible for giving the name Tibet to that geographical area. What appears to be clear is that a Sanskrit derivation is more appropriate than a Persian or Arabic one in this particular case. If this is accepted, it would stand to reason that the Sanskrit descriptive phrase *Bhota-ant* is the proper derivative origin of Bhutan. Even if *Bhot* or *Bot* does not stand for Tibet as such, there can be no doubt about the existence of *Bhoteahs* who were the inhabitants of the South-eastern region of Tibet. In the circumstances, *Bhot-ant* can still represent the geographical location of the land at the end of *Bhoteahan* habitation in Tibet.

It is, however, somewhat strange that as far as the inhabitants of the region are concerned, they have given their country the name 'Drukyul' or 'The Land of Thunder Dragon', and the terrain in turn has been designated as 'Drukpas'. The origin of *Drukyul* is the *Drukpa* sect of Lamaism, which held sway in the country from the early 17th century. There can be little doubt that 'Drukyul' is a name given to this land in recent history, whereas Bhutan still stands as the most ancient nomenclature of this small but fascinating nest of land perched in the ever attractive range of the Himalayas.

### *The Terrain*

It has been universally accepted by writers as well as travellers and visitors to this area that Bhutan is, perhaps, one of the most outstanding picturesque spots on the earth. Its main characteristic is lofty and rugged mountains followed by ravines of sublime scenery. In this connection, it would be worth reproducing the description of the terrain given by one of the early travellers of the 18th century, Captain Turner, who is indeed struck by the scenic beauty of the land.

"The prospect between abrupt and lofty prominences is inconceivably grand; hills clothed to their very summits with trees, dark and deep glens, and the high tops of mountains lost in the clouds, constitute altogether a scene of extraordinary magnificence and sublimity."

Not only in accordance with the physiographic setting, but also according to considerations of relief, drainage, climatic conditions and natural vegetation, Bhutan can be divided into three broad basic geographic



zones. The Himalayan foothills, which are often described as the Lower Himalaya, north of the Duars plains constitute the First Zone. This area adjoins the basin of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The Second Zone lies to the north of the first and is often described as the Inner Himalaya or the Higher Himalaya. It is the central or middle region of Bhutan which lies between the foothills to the south and the small, narrow Great Himalaya zone of high peaks in the north. The latter is the third high mountainous zone which borders Tibet and comprises the snow-clad Great Himalaya range.

The aforesaid three zones, primarily based on relief and the general drainage scheme of the terrain and its climate, determine the kind of vegetation as well as the different flora and fauna found in Bhutan. A somewhat more detailed description of these three zones from the aforesaid viewpoints of climate, vegetation and drainage would help us to get a true picture of the land that is Bhutan.

#### *First Zone*

As far as the physiographic aspects are concerned, the lower foothills of the Himalayas are made up of 'Gondwanas (Damudas), Baxas or Daling sediments and their respective metamorphics'.<sup>8</sup> The Gondwana rocks are known to contain quartzitic sandstone, which includes thin layers of coal in Eastern Bhutan. Again, from the viewpoint of drainage, all the rivers flow from the Great Himalayan range, which is the northernmost high mountainous third zone, and traverse down south into the plains. Thus, the flow of drainage is from the high alpine regions to the foothills of Bhutan and from thence everything appears to pour into the mightiest river of the region, Brahmaputra. The natural vegetation, therefore, in the first South Zone is tropical, being moist deciduous. In this case the vegetation is dependent on the humid subtropical climate. It is, therefore, an area which has the most cultivated land in the entire State. Rice grows in the plains as well as at heights up to 4,000 feet. It is true that in the ravines and the valleys of the central zone of the Inner Himalaya, there is considerable cultivation, but it is restricted to the valleys of the rivers, such as the Wong Chu, Sankosh, Manas, and their several tributaries. There can be no doubt that in the southern lower Himalayan region the greatest land use is for cultivation, which is reduced to isolated spots in the third alpine zone of the Great Himalaya.

<sup>8</sup>Karan, Pradyumna P., *Bhutan—A Physical and Cultural Geography*, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1967, p. 25.



As rainfall is a determining factor in the whole of the sub-continent of India and plays an important role even in the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan, it may be worthwhile mentioning how the first zone fares in this respect. The humid subtropical climate of the plains of Assam and Bengal also prevails at heights of 3,000 to 4,000 ft. in the summer months of Bhutan. The annual rainfall is, therefore, of the order of about 80 inches, and this inevitably helps in the creation of a thick tropical forest, or savanna.

As far as temperature is concerned, it decreases with increasing altitudes, and during the coldest months at altitudes of 5,000 ft. and above it registers less than 50°F. However, in the valleys and particularly in the subtropical duars, it varies from 40° to 75° depending on winter and summer.

### *Second Zone*

The Second Zone, which is described as the Inner Himalaya or the Higher Himalaya, constitutes the central belt through which the rivers pass in narrow defiles producing innumerable cataracts. *The Imperial Gazetteer* recites that 'one torrent is mentioned by Turner as falling over so great a height, that it is nearly dissipated in mid-air, and looks from below like a jet of steam'.<sup>9</sup> The valleys are at the height of 6,000 to 8,000 ft. The biggest of the mountain ranges separating the valleys reach heights of 12,000 to 15,000 ft.

As far as the soil is concerned, tourmaline granite is found in the upper valley of Paro Chu in the Chomo Lhari range lying along the Bhutan Tibet border. Again, a wide area of sedimentary rocks is to be found in the Lingshi basin, east of the Chomo Lhari range.

Of the rivers traversing the central zone of Bhutan, *The Imperial Gazetteer* describes Manas as 'the most considerable'. The other principal rivers are the Machu, Tchinchu, Torsha Malichu, Kuruchu, Dharla, Raidak and Sankosh. All the rivers of Bhutan exhibit the distinguishing characteristics of mountainous streams. They gave birth to narrow valleys by flowing between high rocky mountains and the streams, therefore, rush with irresistible fury. In the circumstances, not a single river of Bhutan is navigable in the mountains. Again, because of their great speed for several miles after their entry into the plains, navigation still remains out of

<sup>9</sup>*The Imperial Gazetteer of India* by W.W. Hunter, Director General of Statistics to the Government of India, Vol. II, 2nd ed., published by Trübner & Co., London, 1885, p. 412.



question. There are no flood problems in the mountainous regions, and it is in the low lying areas in the Duars and the plains in India that the threat of flood exists. The alluvium certainly helps the fertility of the soil. Thus in the first zone of the foothills of the Himalayas frequent floods are witnessed, but this is not a feature of the other two zones of Bhutan.

As far as the climatic condition of the second central zone is concerned, it may be mentioned that it is microthermal Himalayan climate. This zone may be distinguished from the other two zones in several respects. First, the middle region or the central area of Bhutan is a zone of frost, witnessed particularly at heights of 10,000 feet and above. Again, this area is distinguishable by its ancient methods of cultivation. The hardy crops of barley and potato can grow even in the mountainous region of Bhutan. As stated earlier, the concentrations of cultivated land are to be found. The valleys of the Ha, Paro, Wong, Sankosh and Manas and their tributaries have the highest cultivable land in central Bhutan. However, in eastern Bhutan excessive rainfall and dense vegetation restrict cultivation to small patches, where forests have been cleared. There are agricultural terraces found at heights ranging from 3,000 to 9,000 feet. It is also known that rice grows well up to 8,000 feet and buck wheat could grow up to 9,000 feet. However, potatoes and barley can grow at altitudes up to 14,000 feet.

Moreover, the central zone of high land has cool summers after severe winters. The population is sparse, and meat of yak and sheep apart from potatoes and barley constitute the main food. Again, the temperature remains somewhat uniform—usually between 35° and 45° F.<sup>10</sup>

A remarkable characteristic of the central zone is that it provides the most valuable forests of the country. The vast area between 9,000 and 10,000 feet contains magnificent forests of spruce, fir, khail, cypress and junipers. It is also well known that hardwood such as oak and maple can be found up to 9,500 feet. Again, timber is found in abundance from 13,000 to 14,000 feet, with birch predominating the heights below the timber-line.<sup>11</sup>

### *Third Zone*

The Third Zone comprises the alpine region of the Great Himalayan range. This area is composed of sedimentary rocks with strata ranging in geologic age from Cambrian to Tertiary. The main backbone of moun-

<sup>10</sup>Karan, Pradyumna P., *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup>Karan, Pradyumna P., *op. cit.*, p. 37.



tains rises to 24,000 ft. high peak in the west and runs eastwards with two prominent peaks about 21,000 feet high.

The climatic conditions are akin to the Tundra and the natural vegetation is Alpine. Cultivated land is restricted to few isolated plots in the high mountain valleys. The winters are exceedingly severe and the summers very short and cold. Just below the snow line between 14,000 and 15,000 feet, a grassy vegetation is provided by nature for yak grazing.

#### *The Features of the Land*

The terrain of the land makes this mountainous State of Bhutan generally inaccessible both from the north and also from the east and the west. A line of road communication exists from the Indian plains on the south, but it would not be incorrect to describe that the entire region is, by and large, inaccessible owing to geographical factors, such as thick forest growth and high mountain ranges. The roads that have to be built are bound to be expensive. Again, rail connection is rendered out of question for the present owing to prohibitive financial implication. Air link is possible but that too by helicopters and at selected places only. Inaccessibility is, therefore, one of the characteristic features of the country. Coelho has, therefore, rightly pointed out that "The first paved road from the border town of Phuntsholing to the capital, Thimphu, was completed as recently as 1962 making it possible to undertake a journey in seven hours that previously took twice as many days".<sup>12</sup>

Another distinguishing mark of this region is its sparse population compelled again by the nature of the physical terrain. The land mass in this area is generally hostile to concentrated habitation with the result that nowhere the population exceeds an urban growth of more than 10,000 or 15,000. This is to be expected in a region which is full of high mountains, thick forests and narrow torrential rivers.

The geography of the area, therefore, fosters isolation. There is not only isolation from the rest of the world but also isolation within inasmuch as cities are cut off by high mountain ranges and difficult geographical terrain.

Coelho is, indeed, very graphic when he describes this important aspect in the following words:

"Bhutan was cut off from contemporary civilization, as we understand it, until a few years ago. It evolved its own pattern of existence, cu-

<sup>12</sup>Coelho, V.H., *op. cit.*, p. 56.



riously without the impositions of religious or political reformers. Sparse population, rugged terrain, and poor communications discouraged the ferment of ideas. Down the centuries, there were a few travellers, hardly more than a dozen or so, who introduced novelties from the world outside, notably an Indian guru who brought Buddhism, a thousand years ago. There were some searchers after truth or adventure, lamas from Tibet, officials of the East India Company, and finally envoys of the British Empire. They travelled the hard way, along rough and dangerous tracks, over steep mountains and swollen streams; and many arduous days of journeying either from the plains of India or from the heights of Tibet were needed mostly on mule or horseback, with caravans of ponies to carry their camp outfit and personal effects."<sup>13</sup>

Another characteristic feature of the area is constituted by its vast and impressive forests. They remain by far the greatest wealth of the country. The denizens of this vast and valuable forest region are numerous and include stately animals ranging from the wild elephants and the tiger to the musk deer and the wild hogs of the snowy region. The description in *The Imperial Gazetteer* of the fauna of this region is at once interesting and is reproduced below:

"The lower ranges of the hills teem with animal life. Elephants are so numerous as to be dangerous to travellers; but tigers are not common, except near the river Tista. Leopards abound in the valleys, deer everywhere, some of them of a very large species. The musk deer is found in the snows, and the barking deer on every hill-side. Wild hogs are met with even at great elevations. Large squirrels are common. Bears and rhinoceros are also found. Pheasants, jungle fowls, pigeons, and other small game abound."<sup>14</sup>

What was true in 1861 about denizens of the forests of Bhutan holds true even today. A list of the principal animals and birds found in the region of Bhutan with their habitat is given as Appendix I and makes fascinating reading.

If, therefore, the nature of the land terrain can be said to determine the greatness of a people who inhabit it, the aforesaid description of the country has undoubtedly tended to make the population of Bhutan exceedingly hardy, capable of great effort and industry in its struggle for existence, fighting nature which has not been very helpful as far as comfort-

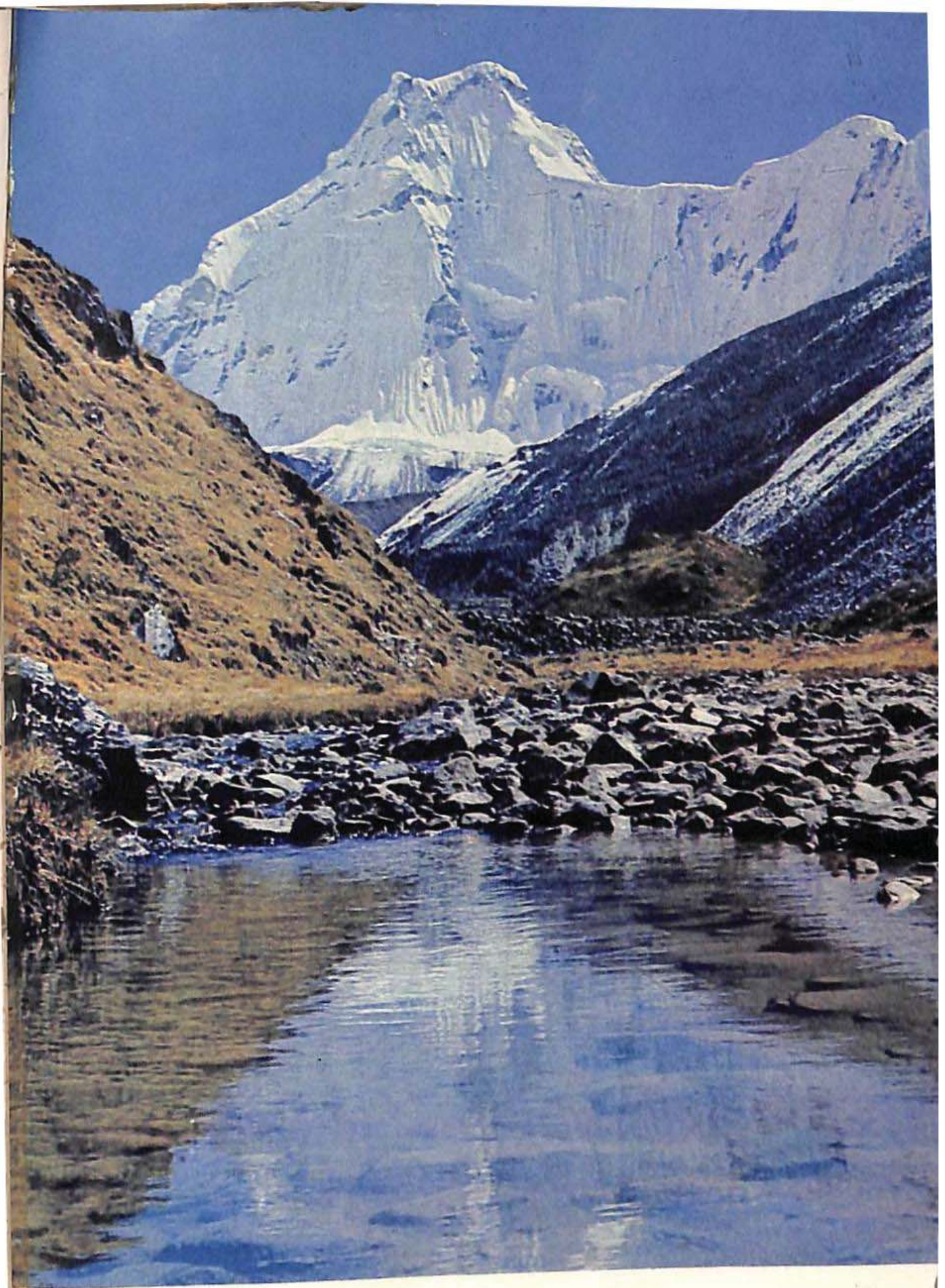
<sup>13</sup>Coelho, V.H., *op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>14</sup>*The Imperial Gazetteer of India, op. cit.*, p. 414.



able living conditions are concerned. This again has fostered a great sense of brotherhood and fellow-feeling for those who are fellow travellers of this region. This brings us to the people of the country and we may, therefore, end this chapter by concluding that Bhutan with its unparalleled scenic beauty and singular geographic position, full of novelties, is an exceedingly attractive new member of the international community of sovereign States.





A glacier-fed lake in Bhutan





Bhutanese monks



## II

### THE PEOPLE

IN 1864, the population of the country was estimated at 20,000. There has been no accurate census of the population of Bhutan before 1970 and hence the figures mentioned in all publications prior to that year have been at best an approximate estimate of the inhabitants of this State. In this connection there have been different estimates<sup>1</sup>, put forward by different authorities, ranging from 3,00,000 to a figure of one million.<sup>2</sup> All these estimates are 3 to 4 years old. In view of the census of 1970, it is now possible to state that the population of Bhutan is 1.31 million inhabitants in an area of 47,000 sq. km. or 18,000 sq. miles giving thereby a density of about 73 persons to a square mile. It may be mentioned that this stands in sharp contrast to the density of population of India which is 373 per sq. mile and that of Switzerland which is 330.

It is said that a large majority of the Bhutanese belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race.<sup>3</sup> However, in the southern regions, the original

<sup>1</sup>"Professor Spate, in his authoritative geographical study of the Indian subcontinent published in 1957, gives a figure of 300,000. In a paper published in 1962, Chantal Massonau estimated the population at 800,000. The 1962 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives a figure of 623,000, and the 1963 *Britannica Book of the Year* estimates the population in 1961 at 680,000. The State Department bulletin *Status of the World's Nations*, revised in 1965, places the 1963 population at 715,000. Two publications of the Colombo Plan Bureau, both appearing in 1963, give two distinct figures, 'barely 600,000' and a '1961 estimate' of 750,000. In the U.S. Army handbook, prepared at American University, 725,000 is given as the '1964 estimate'. Both the *Asia Handbook* (1965) and the *Statesman's Yearbook* (1963) estimate the population at 700,000. In the 1966 edition of the *International Year Book and Statesmen's Who's Who* a figure of '700,000 to 800,000' is cited. *The Asian Annual* 1966 estimates the population at around 750,000." See *Bhutan — A Physical and Cultural Geography* by Pradyumna P. Karan, University of Kentucky Press, Lexington, 1967, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>*Bhutan and Sikkim*, a publication of the Information Service of India, states that the population of Bhutan is 'approximately 8 lacs' (8,00,000). Again V.H. Coelho in *Sikkim and Bhutan* estimates the population at 'some 900,000' in 1967. Another 1970 publication *Lords and Lamas* by Michel Peissel, estimates the figure between 500,000 and one million.

<sup>3</sup>Coelho, V.H., *Sikkim and Bhutan*, p. 79.



inhabitants of Nepal predominate. These Nepalese settlers are to be found in the southern central region of Chirang. Moreover, since 1959 there have been 3,000 Tibetans who have sought refuge and rehabilitation in Bhutan. Before describing the various zones of population which are of interest since large parts of the State are virtually empty, it may be worthwhile describing the people in general terms. *The Imperial Gazetteer* has the following interesting account<sup>4</sup> of the people:

“The population consists of three classes—the priests; the chiefs or Penlows, including the governing class; and the cultivators. The people are industrious, devote themselves to agriculture, but from the geological structure of the country, regular husbandry is limited to comparatively few spots.

“Physically the Bhutias are a fine race, hardy and vigorous, with dark skins and high cheekbones. Their food consists of meat, chiefly pork, turnips, rice, barley-meal, and tea made from the brick-tea of China. Their favourite drink is *chong*, distilled from rice or barley and millet, and *marua*, beer made from fermented millet.... A loose woollen coat reaching to the knees, and bound round the waist by a thick fold of cotton cloth, or a leather belt, forms the costume of the men; a legging of broadcloth is attached to a shoe made generally of buffalo hide; no Bhutia ever travels during the winter without protecting his legs and feet against the effects of the snow; a cap made of fur or coarse woollen cloth completes the habiliment; the women’s dress is a long cloak with loose sleeves. The houses of the Bhutias are of three and four storeys; all the floors are neatly boarded with deal; and on two sides of the house is a verandah ornamented with carved work, generally painted. The Bhutias are neat joiners, and their doors, windows and panelling are perfect in their way. No iron-work is used; the doors open on ingenious wooden hinges. The appearance of the houses is that of Swiss chalets, picturesque and comfortable.”

If a brief resume of the people of Bhutan were to be attempted, the observations of Coelho are indeed worth reproducing:<sup>5</sup>

“The people are quaint, but they display social and economic characteristics based on traditions that make for national discipline. Their habits of dress and food, their customs, religious practices, pantomimic dances are their own, different from those of their neighbours near or far.”

In the field of sports, Bhutanese are known to excel in archery. The present King, Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, is himself not

<sup>4</sup>*The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, Vol. II, 2nd ed., 1885, pp. 412-13.

<sup>5</sup>Coelho, V.H., *op. cit.*, pp. 56 & 79.



only a keen archer but one of the finest marksmen of his country. As archery is a sport which had its origin in India, it can be said that the present keenness of Bhutan for archery is a legacy of the very ancient past when Aryavarta had contacts with Bhutan both before and after Christ. Whenever there is an occasion for festive celebration accompanied by dances, archery finds a place. The finest marksman always gets a reward. This sport of the Indian epic age so vividly described in *Mahabharata* has died out almost everywhere in the world except in Bhutan where it still thrives and is honoured. Again, whereas archery in Bhutan is exclusively ornamental and ceremonial, it is well known that in other parts of the world it is an instrument for hunting. This special place assigned to archery in this Himalayan Kingdom is the result of the observance of the Buddhist principle of non-violence.

In regard to the distribution of the population in Bhutan, it may be mentioned that it runs closely to the physical aspects of the land and its terrain character such as the high mountains, proportion of slope land and the degree of slopes, climatic variations and the major factor of productivity of land. The areas densely populated are the Inner Himalayan valleys of the central region. There are eight main valleys where population in central and eastern Bhutan is concentrated. They are: (a) Ha, (b) Paro, (c) Punakha, (d) Thimphu, (e) Ten Chu, (f) Trangs, (g) Bumthang, and (h) Eastern Bhutan.<sup>6</sup> The famous cities of Paro and Thimbu are inhabited by over 10,000 souls. In addition, there are several towns of 5,000 inhabitants such as Wangdu and Tongsa. Again, in the east, on Manas river, there is the city of Tashigang. Eastern Bhutan has the largest population, with Tashigang district being the most populated in Bhutan. Apart from the valleys where concentration of population is witnessed on the banks of a big river, so typical and symbolical of the accepted principle of growth of human civilization, there is also noticeable in Bhutan marked concentration of population in the low lands where there are areas of productive soil. Thus, for example, there is the town of Phuntsholing with over 10,000 population right down in the south where the State of Bhutan touches the plains of India. There are other towns like Sarbhang again in the same region but with a population of 5,000 inhabitants. Apart from these areas of comparatively concentrated population, most of the land-mass of Bhutan has very sparse settlements such as in the Great Himalaya region in the north which witnesses extreme

<sup>6</sup>*Bhutan and Sikkim, op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.



climate. Similarly in the Black Mountain and other ranges in southern Bhutan the low density population is characterised by physical factors such as heavy rainfall and thick forest vegetation or due to the steep southern slopes making any habitation physically impossible apart from the poor character of the soil in that area.

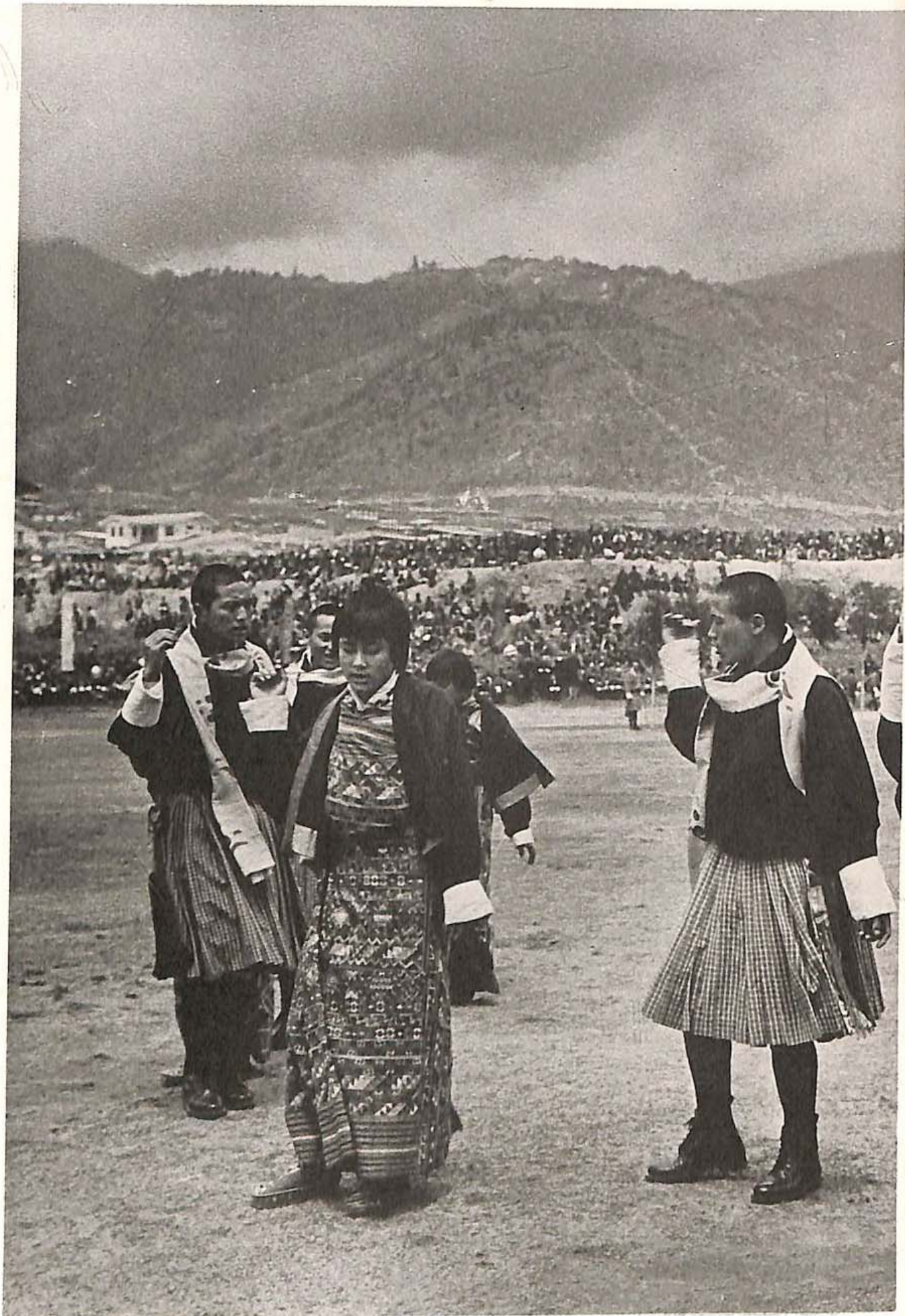
Another factor to be reckoned with is that the dense population concentrations correspond to historical centres of political power and the headquarters of the local government. Thus certain sparsely populated regions of the State are explained by the fact that they were far removed from the cultural and political centres of the country. In short, both the geographical terrain and the history and politics of the country have influenced the settlement pattern of the population of Bhutan. Here again, broadly, the population zones of Bhutan follow the three broad basic climatic zones which have been mentioned while describing the land factor of the State. There are, for example, compact settlements in the central region with the exception of concentrated population centres in the well-known cities situated in the valleys of the rivers which flow through the central middle region. The northern region which has extreme climatic conditions of the Tundras has perhaps no permanent settlement at all.





Archery, the national sport of Bhutan—a competition in progress





Bhutanese dancers at Thimphu



# III

## HISTORY

### *Background and Source*

BHUTAN, THE land of the Elevated Lamas amidst hills and dales of Himalayan heights, has a deep-rooted history. That it is an ancient land is undoubted. However, of all countries of the world, the one which has the most meagre source material for the presentation of a continuous narrative of history is perhaps Bhutan. At the very outset, one is faced with almost total lack of source material. The reasons for this are not far to seek. Bhutan had an authentic chronicle which got destroyed as recently as 1828 as a result of a fire which burnt the printing establishment of Sonagachi and the damage was completed by another fire at Punakha in 1832. This was not all since the earthquake ravages of 1896 completed the destruction of most valuable manuscripts of this country. It was indeed a great misfortune that Paro which had escaped the tragic disaster of 1896 was also burnt to ground a few years later. In the circumstances, the historian of Bhutan has to rely completely on very meagre resources furnished by the following:

- (i) Accounts given by travellers and British Missions from 18th century onwards. From 1774 to 1907, there were at least as many as eight British Missions: Bogle (1774); Hamilton (1775 & 1777); Turner (1783); Pemberton (1838); Eden (1864); White (1905 & 1907).<sup>1</sup>
- (ii) Accounts left by the East India Company and the British who built up relations with Bhutan onwards from 1772 A.D. and signed regular treaties with Bhutan.
- (iii) The few manuscripts found in the possession of the Tongsa Penlops which somehow survived the disasters of fire and earthquake. They form the basis of the accounts given by J.C. White, British Political Agent in Sikkim.

<sup>1</sup>However, Dr. Olschak has calculated that there were as many as 13 Missions from 1774 to 1921 A.D.



- (iv) Some manuscripts made available by Tibetan monasteries which have found a place in the name of Cheeboo Lama of Sikkim on which Ashley Eden has mainly relied.

The aforesaid sources certainly do not provide a continuous narrative of history particularly from the remote past. However, some sort of an incomplete pattern of Bhutan's colourful record can be gathered through legends, myths and manuscripts of the past. On the whole, therefore, the position may be said to be unsatisfactory from the viewpoint of a student of history. But even the scant material that is available is enough to establish that the ancient land of Bhutan has a distinct history of its own nursed by no less than three cultures of its nearest neighbours, India, Tibet and China. From whatever material is available, an attempt is made below to trace the history of this new-born State of the Himalayan region.

#### *Early Period*

Bhutan commenced its record much before the Christian Era when it is said to have been under the full influence of the rulers from India. Though no record is available till we come to about the 7th century A.D., on the basis of legends it can be stated with some precision that the ancient civilization of India had spread to this region and had dominated it both politically and socially as well as from the religious aspect. The earliest legend takes us back to about the seventh century before the Christian era when one Sangaldip from Kooch (modern Cooch-Bihar) in Assam subdued Bengal and Bihar and extended his sway to Bhutan. Thereafter and till several centuries after the Christian era, Bhutan was under the Indian rulers. Both Bhutanese and Indian tradition has it that Bhutan was ruled by Indian chiefs under the tutelage of Kamarupa right up to the middle of the seventh century when in 650 A.D. it separated from Kamarupa after the death of Bhaskaravarman and thus exposed itself to incursions from Tibet. The centuries-old political arrangement was thus disturbed and Kamarupa itself got disintegrated. No one king was able to impose his authority over the whole of Bhutan and the country split into several small and big units which fell an easy prey to the Tibetan incursions which swept Bhutan about 861-900 A.D.

#### *The Advent of Padma Sambhawa*

It was in such an atmosphere of political fragmentation that a dynamic personality appeared on the Bhutanese scene in the middle of the eighth century A.D. in the person of Guru Padma Sambhawa. He was an Indian



Bhuddhist monk from Nalanda. Khiji-khar-thod of Khempalung, in Upper Bumthang, and Naguchhi, King of Sindhu were the chief rulers of the time. The site of the latter's palace, Chagkhar Gome (the iron fort without doors) can still be seen near the old Bhutanese capital, Punakha. Naguchhi is reputed to have founded the Kingdom of Sindhu while his sons extended the realm to Dorji Tag and Har in Tibet and as far as Eastern Bhutan. Naguchhi lost his eldest son in the course of a war with Raja Nabudara who lived in the Indian plains, and was thus plunged into grief. It was at this time that the Indian saint Padma Sambhawa appeared on the scene and provided solace to the King, saved his life and convinced him of the efficacy of the Buddhist faith. The rival King Nabudara also accepted Buddhism. The Buddhism taught by the Guru was known as Ningma. Peace was thus restored to the land and a boundary pillar was set up at Nathang in Khen. Thus began the era of Buddhism in Bhutan and Padma Sambhawa may be said to have endowed the country with a semblance of loose cultural unity.

#### *The Rise of the Drukpa*

The peace which lasted for nearly a century was, however, terminated by the Tibetans during the rule of Langdarma (also Landarma), the apostate King of Tibet who reigned from 803 to 842 A.D. Two centuries later, Bhutan was again occupied by the followers of King Triral-chan of Tibet. The Tibetans who swarmed Bhutan often pillaging it, however, came to like the country so much that they refused to return to Tibet. These deserters were called Milog (those who did not return). In the later centuries, their numbers continued to increase with the arrival of more and more Tibetans into Bhutan. From about the twelfth century A.D., many Lamas started pouring into Bhutan. The first Lama to do so was perhaps Gyalwa Lhanangpa of the Nyo lineage, who was a student of Driking Jigten Gonpo's. Lhanangpa was the originator of the Lhapa Kargyupa, a subsect of the Driking Kargyupa. The Lhapha Kargyupa applied the dzong system of Tibet to Bhutan. Subsequently, Lamas of the Drukpa (Red Hat Sect) also started coming into Bhutan partly for missionary work and partly due to persecution suffered by them at the hands of the rival Yellow Hat Sect (Gelukpa) in Tibet. The Drukpa is an off-shoot of the Nyingmapa sect and was founded by Yeses Dorji at Ralung, a famous monastery about 30 miles east of Gyantse. Yeses whose full name was Gro-Gong-Tshangpa-Gyal-ras, was born in 1160 and died in 1210 A.D. He was succeeded by a young Lama Sangye-on who was given the name of Phajo-Druk



gom-Shigpo. He was the student of Wonre Darma Senggee's (1177-1237). Shigpo studied at Ralung for some years and was then sent to Bhutan where he settled at Cheri Dordam. His fame soon aroused the jealousy of the Lhapha Lama who had settled earlier in Bhutan. Lhapha launched an unsuccessful attack on Cheri but he had to flee. Lhapha had thus to come down to the Am-mp-chuu valley where the villagers accepted him. With the ouster of Lhapha, Phajo-Drukgom-Shigpo became more powerful. He was further assisted in the conversion of the Bhutanese to Buddhism by four other Lamas who had come to Bhutan. Although pitted against the powerful adherents of the rival Lhapha Kargyupa, Phajo-Drukgom-Shigpo and his companions succeeded in establishing themselves in Bhutan and by the end of the thirteenth century, Shigpo had built a small dzong named Dongon Dzong (Blue Stone Dzong) on the right side of the upper Wang Chu. With this started the emergence of a separate and distinct church of Bhutan which persisted through the centuries and is witnessed today. The majority of the aristocracy of western Bhutan claims descent from Phajo-Drukgom-Shigpo including the present royal dynasty which traces its ancestry to Pema Lingpa of the fifteenth century who was a member of this line.

The period between the thirteenth and the sixteenth centuries witnessed the rise and consolidation of the Drukpa (Red Hat) sect notwithstanding the rivalry of the Lhapha Kargyupa. There was a great religious fervour and many monasteries and temples were founded during the period. Bhutan thus came to have a religious identity distinctly its own though it continued to draw inspiration from its neighbours specially India.

#### *Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal*

The entire political arena, in spite of the loose image of cultural unity that was emerging, was still surcharged with a multitude of chiefs holding sway in their own territories and vying with each other in fratricidal struggle. From amidst the embers of this struggle for supremacy arose the man of destiny in the person of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, also known as Du-gom Dorji (1594-1651).<sup>2</sup> He came of a noble lineage and was the son of Dorji Lenpa Mephram Tempai Nymia by the daughter of Deba Kyishopa and belonged to the house of Gya of Druk and Ralung. He showed exceptional talent even when he was a child. He studied at Ralung under the

<sup>2</sup>Some scholars put the dates as 1534 A.D. and 1652 A.D., respectively.



Drukpa Lama, Padma Karpo, and was most suited to succeed the Ralung Hierarch. However, a rival claimant, Kerma Tenkgong Wangpo, supported by Deba Tsang-pa, proved too much for him and Shabdrung Namgyal, therefore, made his way to Bhutan by the Lingzi Pass in his twenty-third year in 1616 A.D. Possessed of great organising ability, he was a man of vision and courage. He destroyed what little authority the Lhapha Kargyupa and other sects still enjoyed and established himself as the theocratic ruler of Bhutan with the title of Shabdrung Rimpoche or Dharma Raja about which more is said later. During his rule of about 35 years, Ngawang Du-gom's ambition was to consolidate his spiritual as well as his temporal authority. The opposition he had experienced coming from the Deb Tsang-pa of the Ralung monastery and from the descendants of the Lamas, who had earlier settled in Bhutan, involved him in incessant discord and frequent and serious fighting. The host of his opponents included the Deba Tsang-pa, his rival claimant of the Ralung Hierarch, the descendants of the four Lamas who had come to Bhutan as mentioned earlier and of course the Lhapha Kargyupa and other sects. He was also opposed by the Hierarch of the Ralung Monastery, Pagsam Wangpo (1593-1641), a bastard brother of Dalai Lama V Depa Tsangpa Phuntsok Namgyal, the ruler of Tsang, was his another potent adversary. Even Dalai Lama V attempted incursions into Bhutan but the Bhutanese refused to recognize his authority over their remote valleys and thus maintained her independence. In 1644, Gushri Khan sent his Mongol-Tibetan troops to Bhutan but these troops were forced to retreat. Namgyal not only repulsed repeated attempts by the Tibetans to conquer Bhutan but he also obtained from the vanquished Tibetans large booty which swelled his coffers and led to his fame spreading to India, Nepal and Ladakh. The armour and weapons captured from Tibetans are still preserved in the old dzong at Paro. An old chronicler reports the crushing defeats suffered by the Tibetans, in the following words:

“It seems as though they (the Tibetans) had come merely to die and leave their bodies in Bhutan. They never besieged or stormed any of the Bhutanese forts, but simply filled the wilderness of Bhutan and Tibet with useless forts and redoubts.”

As his prominence and fame spread far and wide, Shabdrung Namgyal received friendly missions from the neighbouring rulers of Cooch Behar and Nepal. Raja Padma Narayan of Cooch Behar extended his hand of friendship and sent him presents. Drabya Sahi and Purandar Sahi of Nepal



also sent him presents and sought friendship. Even the far-removed Ladakh was moved to action. The King of Ladakh granted Shabdrung Namgyal for purposes of meditation and worship a number of villages in Western Tibet, namely Darchhen, Nyanri Gompa and Zuthuphu Gompa around the holy Mount Kailas Dengmar, Rimpung, Doba, Khorchag and Ge Dzong near Gartok and Itse Gompa besides a few other places as well. Up to 1959, a Bhutanese monk officer administered those villages from his summer headquarters at Darchhen and winter headquarters at Khorchag. The people of Thimphu who acknowledged Ngawang Namgyal's supremacy presented to him the Dongon Dzong when he visited the valley. In 1641, he constructed a larger dzong on the same site and re-named it Tashi Cho Dzong (Good Luck Dzong). The Tashi Cho Dzong suffered damage during the centuries by fire and other causes and the subsequent rulers renovated it from time to time until in 1960 the present King Jigmi Dorji Wangchuk constructed on the same site a new dzong which today serves as the seat of the Government of Bhutan. Shabdrung's fame as a sovereign is borne out by a historically recorded fact that some foreigners from a distant land called Parduku (probably Portugal) crossing the limitless oceans, made their appearance in Bhutan. They brought with them guns and gunpowder never seen there before and a telescope, and offered their services to the Shabdrung who declined their offer in due deference to the Buddhist principles. The reign of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal witnessed the building of many historical monasteries and forts in Bhutan. While most of them were destroyed by fire and earthquakes and have since been rebuilt or enlarged, there are a few which still stand as they were built. The Simtoka Dzong is perhaps the only structure still standing as it was first built. The next oldest dzong is the Paro Dzong built originally as a school of medicine. It was, however, destroyed by fire in 1907. Punakha Dzong was built in 1637 and was originally designed to house 600 monks. In 1905, there were at least three times as many monks in residence at this monastery. The Monastery at Angduphodang (now spelt Wang-duphodrang) dates back to 1638 A.D. while the Tashi Cho Dzong to 1641 A.D. The Shabdrung's private quarters can still be seen in the western corner of the fort at Tongsa.

#### *Deb Raja and Dharma Raja*

If consolidation of the Kingdom of Bhutan, howsoever loose, was an all-time laurel of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651 A.D.), it could also be said that administrative reforms and institutionalisation of the



political hierarchy of the State was an equally important boon which he conferred on the State at least for the time being. He bifurcated the duties of the ruler by creating two separate offices—one to look after the spiritual and religious affairs to be known as Dharma Raja (Shabdrung), and the other to be called Deb Raja (Desi) to look after the general administration of the State revenue and expenditure and dealing with foreign powers. This institutionalisation had its own role in the Middle Ages which helped the State but with subsequent deterioration in the institutions of Deb Raja and Dharma Raja, dual control came to ruin the unity of authority. This aspect is more fully brought out while dealing with 'Political Institutions' in Chapter V. However, in the 17th century, the two institutions worked well. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal himself became the Dharma Raja which office was vested with superior powers inasmuch as every important matter which related to signing any agreement with a foreign state or any other important matter within the State required his signature. To give an idea of the wide powers of Dharma Raja, it may be relevant to quote here from a Tibetan chronicler:

"In the intervals of peace the Dharma Raja (the Shabdrung) devoted himself with full energy to his various state duties, founding a body of priesthood, providing for and controlling them, giving instructions to those who were serious seekers after truth; in short, he was pastor, abbot, psalmist, rector, superintendent of carving (for printing purposes), architect of State and monastic buildings, overseer of book-binding and other establishments of the Kagyur library, settlement officer, chief commandant of the forces for quelling foreign aggressions, chief protector and ruler of his own adherents and followers, chief avenger and punisher of those who were inimical to the cause of Bhuddhism and the public peace. He was all these in one person, and fulfilled the duties thoroughly and efficiently. He introduced law into lawless Bhutan. His boast was that he never wasted any time in idleness or self complacency."

It seems that during the few decades following the birth of these two institutions, Dharma Raja wielded wide powers and became the symbol of law and justice. The Deb Raja had then the functions of a mere Regent. This distinction becomes all the more clear in view of the fact that while Dharma Raja followed the incarnations of the predecessor, the Deb Raja was elected by the Council of permanent members who were chosen from amongst the principal officers of the country. Though the state in Bhutan under the Dharma Raja was a theocracy the liberal tendencies were by no means absent. However, the Deb Raja, in the



course of history, developed strength and the two became separate heads of State, one in matters spiritual and the other in things temporal. This led to continuous conflict and intrigue and consequent weakness of the State machine. This development followed later and was clearly visible in the late 18th century when White visited Bhutan.

Interestingly enough, both the titles of the two highest functionaries of the State, namely Dharma Raja and Deb Raja derive their names from Sanskrit, Dharma Raja meaning the King (Raja) who upholds and rules by law (*dharma*) and Deb Raja meaning the King (Raja) who bestows well-being or restores material bounty (Deb which is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Deva* or *Devata*, the Giver). Again the concept of Dharma Raja being the symbol of law and justice at one and the same time is very near the Hindu concept of *Danda* and *Dharma* which has been mentioned in Chapter V.

#### *The Administration*

Having bifurcated the supreme authority of the State into Dharma and Deb Rajas and after having installed himself as Dharma Raja, Shabdrung Namgyal set out to improve the ecclesiastical and temporal administration of Bhutan. He appointed two of the faithful monks who had come with him from the Ralung monastery, one Nay-tan Pay-kor Jungnay, as the Chief Khempo (the religious head) and the other named Tenzing Dukgyag, the Amsed of Ralung, as the first Deb Raja. The Chief Khempo was entrusted with the duty of enforcing the strict observance of vows which bound the Lamas, supervising their studies and presiding over the religious ceremonies. The authority of the Deb Raja included among others the administration of the revenues and other resources of the State and the duty of providing the Lamas with food. In addition, Shabdrung Rimpoche Ngawang Namgyal is credited with the introduction of the dzong system in Bhutan. He appointed Penlops (Chiefs of Provinces or Governors) and Dzungpons (Chiefs of Districts) for the effective administration of the country. Subordinate to the Dzungpons were the Nieboos, who supervised scattered groups of villages. The Penlops were the senior members of a Central Council known as the Lenchen and they were expected to attend the Council whenever they happened to be present at the seat of Government. They were also liable to be summoned to appear at times of emergency. The Council included the Lam Zimpon, Chief Secretary to the Dharma Raja; the Deb Zimpon, or Chief Secretary to the Deb Raja; the Joom Kalling or the Chief Judge and the Dzungpons. It was this



Council or Lenchen which formed the electoral body for the office of Deb Raja. This administrative set up given by Shabdrung Namgyal centuries ago can be said to have laid the foundations of the administrative structure of the modern State of Bhutan since it has persisted in some form or other till today with the singular exception perhaps of the unification of the supreme authority of the State in the person of the King ever since 1907 when hereditary monarchy was established.

### *Doopgein Shepton*

Another outstanding figure who made history in Bhutan was Doopgein Shepton. No exact dates of his rule are available but it can be said that he ruled sometime during the latter half of the 17th century if reliance is to be placed on what is contained in the Report of the Honourable Ashley Eden who led an unsuccessful mission 'to Bhutan in 1864. Eden gives the period of Doopgein Shepton's rule as 'about two hundred years' prior to his Mission in 1864. Eden gives a detailed account of how Doopgein Shepton came to power and hails him as 'the only good ruler the Bhooteahs ever had'. Eden based his account on the information he obtained from Cheebo Lama, a native of Sikkim, of the Lepcha tribe, who, though a priest by profession, resided at Darjeeling as the political representative of the Sikkim Raja with whom the British Government was on friendly terms. Although Rennie<sup>3</sup> has doubted the authenticity and correctness of the statement made by Cheebo Lama, the interesting account given by Eden of Doopgein Shepton's rise to power is worth reproducing here:

"About two hundred years ago (i. e. prior to 1864 when Eden led the mission to Bhutan) some Thibetian sepoys were sent from Kampa by the orders of the Lassa Government to look at the country; a fight ensued; the Tephos gave way and went down to the plains, with the exception of a few who remained in a menial capacity with the Bhooteahs, and whose descendants are to be found still holding the lowest offices about the forts, and their appearance clearly indicates their plains origin. The Kampa sepoys took such a fancy to the country that they refused to return, and, remaining, formed a little colony without organisation or government. After a time they were visited by a travelling Lama from Lassa, named Shepton La-pha. He acquired great influence over the little colony, and they eventually made him their king, under the title of Dhurma Raja. He was a good and wise ruler, kept the country in good order, was beneficent to his subjects, and was supported entirely by voluntary contributions. There was

<sup>3</sup>Rennie, David Field, *Bhotan and the Story of the Doar War*, Reprint by Bibliotheca Himalayica, 1970, pp. 7-10.



at this time in a monastery of Kain, to the south-east of Lassa, a certain Lama named Farchoo Doopein Shepton; he was a very religious man, but was not bound by vows of celibacy, and had a large family. A few years after the election of Shepton La-pha to be Dhurma Raja, Doopein went to Lassa to see his tutor and religious guide, but on arriving there found he was dead. The other disciples of the deceased Lama told him that, just before dying, he had said, 'Tell my disciple, Farchoo Doopein, that if he journeys to the Lha-Lumpa (south country) he will become a great man.' He accordingly came to the conclusion that the south country must be Bootan, and went there and settled down quietly. By degrees he acquired a great reputation for piety and learning, people flocked to him and his wishes were more cared for than those of the Dhurma Raja, Shepton La-Pha. La-pha began to fear that the people would dethrone him and place Doopein on the throne, and so he wrote him a letter requesting him to leave the country. Doopein refused. On this the Dhurma Raja sent him an order banishing him from the country, on the ground that a married Lama was a scandal to the religion of Buddh. This letter he sent by a one-eyed messenger, a proceeding which, according to the Thibetian notions of etiquette, is a gross insult. Doopein, however, interpreted it otherwise, and sent back the following message to him: 'You have tried to insult me by sending me a message by a one-eyed man; but I see a good omen in this—it clearly indicates that you will soon have difficulty in seeing the country you now govern.' This was taken as a declaration of war. Doopein claimed the Rajaship, the people flocked to him, and La-pha was abandoned by his followers, and, being reduced to starvation, ran away into Thibet to place called Kongoo...."<sup>4</sup>

While the foregoing account by Eden relates to Doopein Shepton's ascendancy to power, Eden has the following observation to make about him as a ruler:

"Doopein Shepton was the only good ruler the Booteahs ever had. It was he who built the forts of Angdu Forung, Poonakh, and lastly, Paro. He made a code of laws for the protection of ryots (agricultural peasantry), forbidding the levy of anything beyond voluntary contributions. He appointed Penlows and Jungpens (governors respectively of provinces and forts) to administer the country, but kept them under control, and limited the number of their followers to twenty-five for each chief."<sup>5</sup>

It may be concluded from the foregoing that during the latter half of the seventeenth century Bhutan had a capable ruler in Doopein Shep-

<sup>4</sup>Report on the State of Bhutan by Ashley Eden (1865); See Rennie, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* The same tradition states that—"When Doopein Shepton became Dhurma Raja, he separated from his family; their descendants are still distinguished as the clan Chu-je, the chief family of Lamas in Bhutan."



toon who built forts, framed a code of law, perhaps the first ever framed in Bhutan for the protection of peasants, and not only appointed Penlops for each of the four provinces of Paro, Thanga, Thimbu and Tongsa but also kept the Penlops and Jongpens under his control which was indeed a rare achievement.

#### *Internal conflict*

As already mentioned, the Dharma Raja had necessarily to be an incarnation, and as a child he had to exhibit certain supernatural attributes before he could be accepted as the 'chosen one'. Accordingly, when Lama Doopgein Shepton died, he said, as the traditional accounts maintain, that if his body was preserved he would reappear again in Bhutan. His body was thus preserved in the Fort of Punakha, in a silver tomb called Shepton Machee (or the first Shepton), and tea and rice were daily put into the tomb. It was three years after his death that his incarnation reappeared at Lassa in the person of a little child, who, in due course, became the next Dharma Raja. This successor incarnation of Dharma Raja to Doopgein Shepton confined himself entirely to religious matters. This led to administrative and temporal matters and foreign affairs coming more and more within the domain of the Deb Raja who, in actual practice, became a pawn in a perennial struggle for power waged by the two most powerful Penlops, the Governors of Eastern and Western Bhutan with headquarters at Tongsa and Paro, respectively.

Throughout the eighteenth century, therefore, Bhutan witnessed intermittent internal conflict. The Penlops of Tongsa and Paro were usually at war with each other. The procedure of election in the case of Deb Raja was reduced into one of nomination by whoever of the Penlops was the more powerful. The Deb Raja consequently became a mere nominee of the strongest Penlop at any given time. The Penlops usually appointed the dzongpons or the district chiefs and when the Penlop fell from power, the dzongpons were dismissed with him.

#### *The Civil War*

The dualism of the Deb Raja and the Dharma Raja, one elective and the other hereditary in theory but depending on appearance of reincarnation in practice, brought weakness all round and consequent deterioration of authority which in turn led to endless strife. Whoever could manage to come into power and authority, assumed the title of Penlop and appointed the Deb Raja of his choice, his sway lasting only till he was ousted by a



still more powerful adversary. Consequently, the country came to be without a system of government which could be said to be lasting or effective. As a result, there were frequent outbreaks of civil war among the contending chieftains in which even the Tibetans joined hands such as in 1717 and 1730. This led to political instability in the country. The question of succession to the office of Shabdrung Rimpoche or the Dharma Raja led to a civil war in 1728-30. Wang Paljor, the eighth Deb Raja or Desi of Bhutan, installed Lama Chhole Namgyal, his own chief councillor, as Shabdrung Rimpoche II much against the wishes of Bhutanese clergy who had an important say in the matter. Thus neglected, the High Bhutanese Lamas resorted to arms. Wang Paljor was forced to take refuge in Lhuntse Dzong in North Bhutan from where he sought military support from Miwang Pholhane of Tibet.<sup>5</sup> However, before any tangible results of this approach to Tibetans could accrue, Wang Paljor was killed by someone who proclaimed himself as the successor Deb Raja. Meanwhile, the High Lamas had reinstalled their nominee and appointed a new Desi or Deb Raja. This led to the creation of rival factions, one supporting the nominee of the High Lamas and the other supporting the self-styled Deb Raja who had murdered Wang Paljor. The two factions clashed at Pangri Sampa near Thimphu under the respective command of the new Desi (Deba Raja) and Don-dub Gyalpo of Kabi. This invited Tibetan intervention and the frontier forces of Tibet marched into Bhutan towards the end of 1730 and forced recognition of Jigmi Dakpa as Shabdrung Rimpoche II (1724-61). Ultimately, armistice was negotiated at Paro as a result of appeals made to Pholhane by Panchen Lama II (Lobsang Yishi, 1663-1737), Karmapa Changchub Dorji, and the abbot of Sakya.

#### *The Conflict with Cooch Behar*

Ever since its establishment in 1510 A.D. Cooch Behar had been the target of repeated Bhutanese incursions which increased both in tempo and frequency with the passage of time. The seeds of conflict were sown by Vishwa Singh the brother and successor of Chandan who was the founder of the State. Vishwa Singh demanded tribute from the rulers of Bhutan. The Bhutanese ignored this demand which led to a declaration of war by Cooch Behar. The Bhutanese were forced to acknowledge the supremacy of Vishwa Singh and agreed to pay an annual tribute. Vishwa Singh's son Nar Narayan (1555-1587), the most powerful ruler of Cooch Behar harboured even greater ambitions to include Bhutan within his Kingdom and he succeeded in occupying the territory of Bhutan bet-



ween the Hindola and Sankosh rivers. However this encroachment was short-lived as Bhutan shook off its allegiance to Cooch Behar during the rule of Maharaja Bir Narayan (1621-25) and ceased to pay the tribute. Thereafter Cooch Behar was gradually on the decline until in 1661 it was conquered by Mir Jumla when Maharaja Prana Narayan<sup>6</sup> (1625-1665) fled for safety to Bhutan. In the factional feuds of a weakened Cooch Behar, the Bhutanese supported the Raikat (or Raja) of Baikunthapur, hereditary chief minister of Cooch Behar against Nazir Dev of Balrampur, hereditary Commander-in-Chief of Cooch Behar. Thus in 1711, the Bhutanese secured a compromise between Nazir Dev, Shant Naryan and the Mughal Subedar of Bengal, on the one hand, and Raikat Darpa Dev and the Bhutanese on the other. This strengthened the position of the Bhutanese who stationed in Cooch Behar their agent named Gya Chila along with an escort. Bhutan went a step further and struck the Ngutam (a silver coin) for circulation in Cooch Behar thus undermining the independence of Cooch Behar as a State. The Bhutanese also afforded protection to the infant Raja Debendra Narayan (1764-66) of Cooch Behar who was, however, got murdered by Nazir Dev Rudra Narayan who wanted to instal his own nephew Khagendra Narayan as the ruler of Cooch Behar. The Bhutanese, however, put up the step-brother of the late Raja as the successor to the throne of Cooch Behar but this attempt was thwarted by Nazir Dev by seeking the assistance of the East India Company.

In 1768, Shidar (or Deb Judhur) became the Deb Raja of Bhutan. He was an aggressive ruler. He ruthlessly suppressed the influence and power of the clergy at home and in order to strengthen his external position sought friendly relations with Tibet and Nepal by forging alliances with Panchen Lama III (Palden Yishi, 1738-80) and Raja Prithvi Narayan Shah of Nepal (1742-75). During the reign of Shidar, the Bhutanese kept Cooch Behar under control and carried out raids when necessary. In 1771, they kidnapped the Crown Prince and the Queen of Raja Dhairjendra Narayan of Cooch Behar. In 1772, the Bhutanese abducted the Raja also. At this juncture, Nazir Dev of Cooch Behar approached the British for help which came promptly. The British intervention in 1772 opened up a new era in Bhutan's history leading to ever-increasing relations between British India and Bhutan which aspect is dealt with hereafter.

#### *Relations with British India*

British intercourse with Bhutan commenced in 1772 A.D. Prior to this there

<sup>6</sup>Sen, Dr. S.N., *Prachin Bangla Patrika Sankalan*, p. 3 (Calcutta 1942).



is little on record to show that the British had any political relations with Bhutan. However, from 1772 A.D. until 1947 when the British transferred power to Free India, Bhutan came under the ever-increasing influence of the British India policies which gave shape to the building of Bhutan as a distinct political entity with the establishment ultimately of hereditary monarchy in 1907. The development of British India and Bhutanese relationship was so gradual and so well marked that the study of this period from 1772 to 1947 can be divided into the following three distinct stages:

- (1) Relations between India and Bhutan from 1772 to 1865 when the Treaty of Sinchula was signed.
- (2) From the Treaty of Sinchula in 1865 to the Treaty of Punakha in 1910.
- (3) From the Treaty of Punakha in 1910 to the transfer of power to Free India in 1947.

(i) *From 1772 to 1865*

*Relations between India and Bhutan*

As stated earlier, on being approached by the Nazir Dev of Cooch Behar for help against the Bhutanese on abduction of Raja Dhairjendra Narayan of Cooch Behar in 1772, the British extended prompt assistance. An agreement was thus signed on 5th April, 1773 by which Cooch Behar was required to pay immediately Rs. 50,000 to the British Collector of Rangpur to meet expenses of the troops deployed to assist them and, subsequently, to pay one half of the revenues of the State to the East India Company. This agreement served two purposes: succour to Cooch Behar and establishment of feudatory relations with the British for the first time. The British sent a small force and the Bhutanese were driven out of Cooch Behar and three forts of Daling, Chitchacotta and Passakha were also occupied. In their desperation the Bhutanese appealed to Tashi Lama who, during the minority of Dalai Lama, was acting as Regent of Tibet, as also his ally Prithvi Narayan Shah of Nepal. As a result of intercession by Tashi Lama, Warren Hastings concluded peace with Bhutan on 25 April 1774 at Fort William in Calcutta. The text of this treaty will be found at Appendix II. This treaty bound the Deb Raja to respect the 'Territory of the East India Company', to deliver up ryots running away from the Company's territories; to pursue any demands the Bhutanese might have against British subjects before the regular Courts of the British Government; to refuse shelter to all those



who were hostile to the English, and to allow English troops to chase them into Bhutan; to permit the Company to cut timber in the forests under the hills, and to protect the wood-cutters. The Bhutanese undertook to deliver up the captive Raja of Cooch Behar and his brother and to pay a tribute of five Tangun horses for the Fort of Chitchacotta. As the British now had access to both Bhutan and Tibet, Warren Hastings, sent trade-cum-intelligence missions to Bhutan and Tibet.

The first such British Mission was led by George Bogle of the Bengal Civil Service in May 1774. Warren Hastings was prompted to send this Mission by the friendly tone of the mediatory letter of the Panchen Lama on behalf of the Deb Raja. The purpose of this Mission, which was primarily sent to Lhasa since Bogle's letter of appointment of May 13, 1774 made no specific mention of Bhutan, was to 'open a mutual and equal communication of trade' between the inhabitants of Tibet and Bengal and to 'enquire into the nature of the road between the borders of Bengal and Lhasa and other countries lying between them'. This implied a visit to Bhutan as well since the Mission was to gain the Deb Raja's consent to passage of Indian traders to Tibet across Bhutan. Bogle, accompanied by Hamilton as Medical Attendant, left Calcutta on the 6th of May 1774 taking with him as presents a selection of philosophical instruments, cloth manufactures of Britain and India, cutlery, hardware, and firearms. These presents were also meant to serve as specimens of the articles that could be supplied. In addition, some valuables like strings of pearls, corals, brocades and shawls were also sent by the Governor-General to the Teeshoo Lama.<sup>7</sup> This description indicates that the main objective of the Mission was to establish trade relations between India and Tibet through Bhutan. Proceeding through Cooch Behar, Bogle was detained at Tassishujung when he entered Bhutan for passports. Travelling by the Buxa-Paro route thus traversing the western extremity of Bhutan, he reached Tashi-Cho-Dzong, the capital of Bhutan in July 1774, where he was well received and spent some time. During his talks with the Deb Raja, Bogle made known the desire of the East India Company to develop trade between Bengal and the northern nations and explained how Bhutan would stand to benefit from it provided it helped the movement of trade which had to transit through Bhutan. The reactions of the Deb Raja were favourable and he promised consideration of the matter on Bogle's return from Tibet. The Deb Raja also requested that his annual caravan to Rangpur be given British assistance and protection. This resulted in Warren Hastings sending

<sup>7</sup>Pemberton's Report. See also Rennie, *op. cit.*, p. 30.



a *perwana* to the Deb Raja for the encouragement of Bhutanese subjects who might wish to come with trade caravans to Rangpur and other districts under the Company's authority. The letter sent in November 1774 enclosing the *perwana* also made it clear that a regular list of articles of trade between the two countries should be drawn up. Bogle left Bhutan for Tibet in October 1774. After establishing a close friendship with the Tashi Lama and securing hearty cooperation and support for Indo-Tibetan trade, Bogle returned to Bhutan in May 1775 where he stayed for about a month to secure consent of the authority in Bhutan to allow the passage of merchandise through their territory to and from Tibet and Bengal. After protracted negotiations, the consent of Bhutan was forthcoming and hence the Bogle Mission returned to Bengal some time in April 1775.

In the absence of any records, it cannot be said if the Bogle Mission had been charged with any political errand as such. It is correct, however, that Warren Hastings did give Bogle a free hand to make the best possible arrangements. That the Bogle Mission was a success can be concluded from the fact that Warren Hastings entrusted him with another mission to Tibet in 1779 since Bogle had revealed a distinct possibility of the growth of Indo-Tibetan trade. He also prepared the way for the establishment of extensive tea-plantations in Bengal and Assam under the British management. It was he who reported that tea was a universal beverage in Bhutan and Tibet and was entirely imported from China. Bogle, therefore, argued that tea plantation in India could lead to the capturing of this lucrative item of trade from China. The need for extensive tea plantation later led the British to annex the Assam and Bengal Duars which indirectly paved the way for absorption of Assam within the British Indian Empire. Thus Bogle Mission had economic implications.

Before attempting a narrative of the subsequent Missions to Bhutan conducted by Hamilton in 1775 and 1777, it may be worthwhile making an assessment of the importance of Bogle Mission and to state briefly its achievements.

(i) To start with, Bogle Mission opened the door for trade and commerce with a highly inaccessible region and with two countries, namely Tibet and Bhutan.

(ii) Secondly, though there are no records left by Bogle, it has been possible to ascertain from the accounts given by Turner (1783) and White (1905 and 1907) who led subsequently Missions to Bhutan, that Bogle had concluded with Bhutan a treaty of considerable commercial importance.





A fresco of a mandala at Paro Dzong. The mystic spiral is surrounded by a flaming red circle of fire





The Dharma Raja or Spiritual Ruler, His Holiness Ngawang Namgyal (or Shabdrung Rimpoche), well-known for his efforts to unify Bhutan and establish law and order in the country (1594–1651 A.D)



According to this treaty, the Bhutanese were to enjoy the privilege of trade in Bengal as before, free of duty and hindrance; the duty levied at Rangpur on the Bhutanese caravans was to be abolished. The Deb Raja undertook to allow Indian merchants to pass through his territory between Bengal and Tibet; the exclusive trade in sandal, indigo, skins, tobacco, betel-nut and pan was to remain with the Bhutanese. These articles<sup>8</sup> of a trade treaty concluded by Bogle with the Deb Raja are given in Appendix III.

(iii) Again, we get a glimpse of the constitutional status of Bhutan from the account given by Turner who states that the Bogle Mission failed to obtain permission for the English and European traders to enter Bhutan. In addition, the fact that Mr. Bogle was detained at Tassishujung for passports is conclusive proof of the independence of Bhutan as a separate State.

(iv) It was the success of the Bogle Mission which furnished a great attraction and encouragement for the British to continue their follow-up action in relation to the Himalayan States.

Thus a further British Mission, the second in the series, was sent to Bhutan in November 1775 under Hamilton who had earlier accompanied Bogle during his first Mission in 1774. One of the objectives of the Hamilton Mission of 1775 was to examine the Deb Raja's claims to the districts of Ambaree-Falacottah and Jalpaish. After taking local evidence, Hamilton came to the conclusion that equity demanded their restoration to Bhutan and held that if restitution was made, the Deb Raja could be induced to honour his agreements with the British.

The third British Mission to Bhutan was again under Hamilton in 1777, this time to offer congratulations to the new Deb Raja on his succession.

In 1779, on an invitation extended by Penchen Rimpochi it was arranged that Bogle should meet him in Peking. This visit, however, did not come off since both Bogle and the Lama died suddenly. This came as a temporary setback. But it was not before long when intelligence reached Warren Hastings at Calcutta that the reincarnation of the late Penchen Rimpochi had taken place. On this auspicious occasion, Warren Hastings sent in 1783 a Mission under Captain Turner of the Bengal Army. Captain Turner was accompanied by Lieutenant Davis of the Bengal Engineers, as Surveyor, and Robert Saunders as Surgeon. Travelling via Murshidabad, Rungpur and Cooch Behar, the Mission arrived at Chichacotta

<sup>8</sup>White, John Claude, *Sikhim and Bhutan*, published by Edward Arnold, Publisher to the India Office, 1909, pp. 248-49.



on May 11, 1783 and then went further to Tassishujung reaching there on June 1, 1783. The Mission was detained at Tassishujung for over three months for want of permission from the Regent Teeshoo Lama to proceed further towards Tibet. When the permission did ultimately arrive, the size of the Mission had been limited to only two. Thus Lieutenant Davis had to return to Bengal leaving Turner and Saunders to proceed further. This incident brings out the full sovereignty and independence of the Himalayan States at the time. As in the case of Bogle Mission, there is nothing on the record of the Turner Mission to show that Turner whose errand was primarily to proceed to Tibet was charged with any specific diplomatic assignment in Bhutan. However, it appears from the subsequent account given by Eden,<sup>9</sup> who led the sixth mission to Bhutan, that Turner was authorised to cede to the Bhutan Government the district of Ambaree Fallacottah, hitherto a British territory. this ceding of the district was accomplished by Turner. On his return journey from Tibet, Turner reached Bhutan in December 1783 and stayed there for a month with the Deb Raja. Commenting on trade relations with Bhutan, Turner said in his report that the trade regulations for carrying on the commerce of the Company through the dominions of Bhutan by means of the agency of Indian merchants were settled by the treaty entered into by Bogle in 1775 (see Appendix III). Turner further observed in his report that: 'The Deb Raja having acknowledged to me the validity of that treaty, it became unnecessary to enter into another, since no new privileges and immunities appear to be required until commerce can be established on a different footing with respect to the views and interests of the Raja of Bhutan, by whose concurrence alone the proposed commercial intercourse with Tibet can be made to flourish.' This observation of Turner obviously shows the fairly important position that Bhutan occupied in the northern trade of India. It is also clear that the Bhutanese held the lever firmly in their hands. On the whole, therefore, the Turner Mission achieved nothing substantial by way of commercial facilities.

Comparative lull prevailed in the relations between Bhutan and the East India Company for nearly half a century from 1783-84 when Turner Mission was sent until 1826 except for the visit of an Indian official Kishen Kant Bose who was sent to Bhutan by the Judge of Rangpur to seek a settlement of the incessant border disputes.

<sup>9</sup>Rennie, *op. cit.*, p. 35.



*The Problem of the Duars*

In 1826, the relations of Bhutan and the East India Company headed for trouble. After the British had driven the Burmese out of Assam as a result of the first Burmese War (1824-26), the extent of the Indo-Bhutan boundary increased and with it increased the boundary disputes resulting from the unsatisfactory relations of the Assamese with the Bhutanese. The bone of contention was the conflict over the Duars of which there were as many as eighteen: seven Assam Duars and eleven Bengal Duars. At the base of the lower ranges of the Bhutan hills, there lay a narrow strip of country, ten to twenty miles in width, extending from Dhanasiri river in Assam in the east to the river Teesta, on the frontier of the Darjeeling district, in the west. This rich and fertile tract was known as the Bhutan Duars (Passes). Each Duar came to be known by the name of the pass leading to it, and the whole area came to be known as the Athara (Eighteen) Duars of which eleven known as the Bengal Duars were situated between the Teesta and the Manas, while the seven known as the Assam Duars were situated between the Manas and the Dhanasiri. Estimated at about 220 miles in length with an area of 4,400 square miles, these Duars were inhabited by Mechis and Kachari tribes and were administered by the Bhutanese Jongpens. However, the local administration of these Duars was in the hands of Bengalis, Assamese and Kacharis who were appointed by the *sanad* of the Deb Raja. While Bhutan had control over the Bengal Duars which they had wrested from the Muslim rulers of the country, the case of the Assam Duars was different. The Assam Duars were never under the absolute possession of Bhutan. They were controlled by the Ahoms who could not maintain law and order in the area and were, therefore, led to purchase security by making over their Duars to the Bhutanese in consideration of an annual payment of yak tails, ponies, musk, gold-dust and blankets. Thus when the British occupied Lower Assam, they renewed and continued the engagements made by the Ahom rulers with the Bhutan Government. These arrangements were so complicated that soon interminable disputes became inevitable. As the payments made by Bhutan were in kind, question frequently arose as to the value of the articles given and received. Their actual value often fell below the Bhutanese assessment thereof and this led to arrears of payments due from the Bhutan Government. When pressed for clearance of such arrears, some of the Bhutanese took offence and retaliated by plundering the frontier areas. Their first attack was on Chatgar in Booree Goomah Duar in October 1828. Such incidents embittered relations



between the British Government and the Bhutanese rulers and during the period 1828 right down to 1864 the relations between the two were far from cordial. During 1828-1836, there were as many as five serious outrages in which the Bhutanese attacked British outposts and carried off British subjects. It may be worthwhile mentioning here that although no records of British subjects on Bhutanese territory are available, 'grounds exist for believing that the faults were not altogether on the side of the Bhutanese and that a certain lawlessness of action prevailed on both sides of frontier'.<sup>10</sup> In any case, the British took punitive action and took over Booree Goomah Duar which was restored to the Deb Raja only in 1834. A special corps called Assam Seebundy Corps (later known as 2/8th Gurkha Rifles) was also raised in 1834 for the protection of the frontier.

In 1836, the British attached the Banksa Duar for arrears of payment due to them. Thereupon the Deb Raja and the Tongsa Penlop declared that the communications addressed by the British to Bhutan Government in connection with arrears of revenue had never reached them. They requested that the arrears might be made good from the Banksa Duar and the Duar itself should be restored to Bhutan. The British Government promised to surrender the Duar on condition that Bhutan entered into an agreement for the better management of the Duar and the extradition of offenders against the British Government. Unfortunately, an agreement was made with subordinate Bhutanese officials who, according to Eden, held very low ranks and could not commit the Government of Bhutan as they lacked authority. This agreement was, therefore, never ratified by the Deb Raja, although the Duar had been surrendered in anticipation of the ratification. It became clear later that all communications from the British Government were withheld by the Bhutanese frontier officials from the Durbar. This gave rise to the need for entering into direct communication with the Bhutan Durbar.

Accordingly, in 1838, the Governor-General sent Captain Pemberton to Bhutan as his Envoy to settle the terms of commercial intercourse between the States, and, if possible, to effect such an adjustment of the tribute payable for the Duars as might diminish the chances of misunderstanding arising from that source. The unfriendly relations that had existed for quite some time came in the way of the success of the Pemberton Mission which ultimately turned out to be a total failure. The draft treaty proposed by him was eventually rejected by the rulers of Bhutan. This treaty provided, *inter alia*, for the same privileges of free trade in Bhutan

<sup>10</sup>Rennie, *op. cit.*, Preface, viii.



for subjects of the British India Government as the Bhutanese already enjoyed in India. It was Tongsa Penlop who objected to the proposed treaty since his interests were directly affected by the arrangement for the punctual payment of the tribute for the Assam Duars. At his instigation, the Bhutan Government finally rejected the treaty.

The failure of the Pemberton Mission led the British authorities in India to think in terms of permanent annexation of the Duars as the only effective answer to Bhutanese incursions which continued unabated. In 1841, therefore, all the Assam Duars were taken over in return for an annual compensation of Rs. 10,000. In 1842, the estate of Ambaree Fallacottah was also taken over at the request of the Bhutanese. The annexation of the Assam Duars not only served the interests of security of the British frontiers but also, as already stated, fulfilled a major motive for economic gain linked with the growth of tea-plantations for which Assam was most suited.

The annexation of the Assam Duars, however, solved only a part of the problems of the frontier since Bhutanese incursions on the villages in that region continued for several years thereafter. Moreover, the Bengal Duars continued to remain a sore spot. The British would perhaps have annexed the Bengal Duars soonest possible. However, this had to be postponed due to the more urgent and serious problems which the British Government of India had to face on the Indian sub-continent concerning the Afghan War and the Anglo-Sikh Wars which led to the annexation of Sind and the Punjab, respectively. It was not until 1850 that the problem of the North-East Frontier came up again to be seriously considered by the British. Lord Dalhousie commenced action by appointing Jenkins to be in sole charge of the Bhutan frontier. The British Government adopted a clearly defined policy towards the Bhutanese. The Bhutanese raids on Goalpara, Cooch Behar and Rangpur frontiers were met with determined resistance by the British arms. In this connection, Ashley Eden, who subsequently led the British Mission to Bhutan in 1864 has observed: "For thirty years, scarcely a year has passed without the occurrence of several outrages any one of which would have fully justified the adoption of a policy of reprisal and retaliation." The British made representations to the Deb Raja and consequently the Deb Raja ordered the Tongsa Penlop to make good the losses. The Tongsa Penlop, on the other hand, addressed two letters to Jenkins, Agent to the Governor-General, asserting: "I am a Raja like the Deb Raja" and stating that the British should not have addressed the Deb Raja direct. This led Lord Dalhousie to direct



the Agent by a communication dated January 11, 1856, to send a stern warning to the Tongsa Penlop. The warning which was given in January 1856 demanded of the Tongsa Penlop an appropriate apology for the disrespect shown to the Agent. The warning also made it clear that any recurrence of Bhutanese incursions would be met by permanent occupation of the Bengal Duars. Further, the Deb Raja was told that he would be responsible for the acts of his subordinates. The British conveyed their warning in the following words:

“...His Lordship in Council is not unaware that the Deb Raja is the nominal head of the country, and that it is the conduct of the Tongso Penlow and his brother, the late Dewangiri Raja, and not the conduct of the Deb Raja, which has called for some measure of severity on the part of the British Government. But it is obvious that the Deb Raja, even though he may be ostensibly well disposed towards the Government, is unable, or unwilling, or remiss in his endeavours to restrain his subordinate chiefs, and it cannot be permitted that for this want of power, or want of will, or want of energy, the subjects of this Government should suffer. The Deb Raja must share in the penalty due to the delinquencies of those who own his authority, and for whose acts of aggression on British territory he must be considered responsible.”<sup>11</sup>

The British were known for their legalism wherever they went and in this case they made a strong legalistic approach. It is true that state responsibility arises for acts of subordinate officials, although the Government of the State may not be even aware of the acts of omission and commission of its lesser officials. The principle of vicarious responsibility was applied by the British in this particular case and for the injuries suffered causing damage, a demand for compensation was made. Accordingly, the British authorities promptly deducted a sum of 2,868 rupees from the Assam Duars compensation money being the value of the property plundered by the men of the Dewangiri Raja, the brother of Tongsa Penlop. In regard to this incident, the British had applied the correct principles of State responsibility accepted as valid in international law.

Meanwhile, even as the letters of apology were in transit, the hereditary zamindar of the Gooma Duar was kidnapped. This enraged the British Agent to the Governor-General who recommended annexation of the Bengal Duars as redress. However, it was decided first to make efforts to secure the release of the zamindar to which the Deb Raja replied

<sup>11</sup>Rennie, *op. cit.*, Appendix B, p. 400.



that the zamindar was his subject. Further incidents took place in 1856 but the British were unable to take any concrete steps owing to the Indian Revolt of 1857. With the British preoccupied with their problems in India, the Bhutanese again became active on the borders and it was only in March 1860 that the British took over the estate of Ambaree Fallacottah.

#### *Bhutan and the Revolt of 1857*

There can be no doubt that Bhutan's sympathies lay with India in her struggle for independence. Whatever might be the nature and the character of the Indian Revolt of 1857, it could be broadly categorised as a movement against the British rule in India. The numerous cases of incursions, raids and border harassments which the Penlops and the lesser officials of Bhutan organised during 1857 and soon thereafter were in sympathy with the struggle which was proceeding in the plains of India against the British rule. The attitude of the Bhutanese was based on the general mistrust and resentment against any encroachment upon their freedom and independence. Bhutan's attitude to the events of 1857 was sympathetic to the Indian aspirations. This was known to the British. This is clearly brought out in the conversation which took place between Eden, the Head of the British Mission to Bhutan in 1864, and the ex-Penlop of Paro, who informed Eden that "the confidential adviser of the latter (Tongso Penlow) was a Hindostanee, who came to Bhutan after the Bengal mutiny, bringing with him papers purporting to bear the seals of 'The Kings of Delhi, Lahore and Nepaul' and that he had proposed to the Bhutan Government to join a general war for the purpose of driving the English from India. All this, as will be seen hereafter, proved to be true".<sup>12</sup>

In the light of the aforesaid facts, the conflict between Bhutan and the British in India becomes more understandable in the sense that the true *raison d'être* comes to light. The frequent raids by Bhutan on British territory not only continued, but got multiplied after 1857. It was in 1861, for example, that some British subjects and residents of Cooch Behar were abducted by the Bhutanese. The British demanded surrender of the British subjects and release of the stolen property but the Bhutanese did not oblige. At this stage, Major Hopkinson, the Agent of the Governor-General suggested that the Government should either occupy a portion of the Bhutanese territory or send a mission to Bhutan to bring home to

<sup>12</sup>Rennie, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7.



the authorities in Bhutan the consequences of the predatory acts of their subjects.

*The Eden Mission*

In 1862, the Government of India decided to send a mission to Bhutan under the leadership of Ashley Eden. On August 11, 1863, Eden received his instructions, which were to the following general effect—matters of detail being left to his discretion:

- (i) To explain in a friendly and conciliatory spirit to the Bhutan Government, the circumstances which had rendered it necessary to occupy Ambaree Fallacottah, and withhold its revenues, and to inform it, that, in the event of the demands of the British Government being complied with the occupation would cease, and that, though the management of the estate would continue as formerly in the hands of the latter, the rents would be paid to Bhutan.
- (ii) To demand the surrender of all captives carried off, and the restoration of property taken from British, Cooch Behar and Sikim territories.
- (iii) With reference to the aggressions on the part of British and Cooch Behar subjects complained of by the Bhotanese, proof to be required, and such redress given as the circumstances may call for.
- (iv) To endeavour to effect some satisfactory arrangement for the rendition of criminals by the British and Bhotan Governments respectively.
- (v) The Bhotan Government to be made fully aware of the position in which the protected states of Cooch Behar and Sikim stand to the British Government, and that any aggression committed on them by Bhotan would be viewed as unfriendly conduct towards the British Government.
- (vi) To secure, if practicable, free commercial intercourse between Bengal and Bhotan as well as protection to traders and travellers.
- (vii) To obtain all the information possible respecting the nature, population and resources of the country.
- (viii) To try and secure the results of the mission in the form of a Treaty, a draft of such as would be desirable being furnished.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Rennie, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.



Accordingly, the Eden Mission was also given a draft of a Treaty by the Government of India before its departure and the Mission was required to reduce to written record any agreement negotiated with Bhutan. The Mission was further instructed that if the Bhutan Government refused to do substantial justice and to accede to the main principles of the draft treaty, Eden was to withdraw from the country and inform the Bhutan Government that Ambaree Fallacottah would be permanently annexed. In the event of further incidents of violence from Bhutan, the British Government would take such steps as might be necessary to secure the safety of their own and the Sikkim and Cooch Behar territories.<sup>14</sup>

The Eden Mission arrived in Darjeeling in November 1863 where it had to wait for more than a month, partly owing to Bhutanese reluctance to receive the Mission and partly due to the fact that Bhutan was busy with 'one of its periodical civil wars'. The Punakha Dzungpen and the Tongsa Penlop had deposed the Deb Raja and set up another Deb Raja to receive the Mission. Ultimately, Eden started on his fateful Mission in January 1864 and reached Punakha on March 15, 1864. He found the new Deb Raja a mere puppet in the hands of the Tongsa Penlop who had never forgiven the British for their annexation of the Assam Duars. The British Envoy was subjected to a humiliating treatment and Eden was made to sign a treaty proposed by the Penlop. The text of this Treaty signed in 1864 under duress is given at Appendix IV.

An examination of the wording of this treaty reveals that it throughout respected the principle of equality in bilateral relationship except for the demand to receive back from the Feringees (British) the tracts belonging to Bhutan. If Eden found the need for affixing the words 'under compulsion' after his signature on the treaty, it could only be in relation to the possible involvement relating to ceding of territory to Bhutan. In every other respect, commencing from the apportionment of the blame for thefts, robberies, incursions, raids, etc., to the surrender of offenders, there had been complete equality between the two parties. For example, this treaty recites that 'certain bad men on the Bhoteah side stole men, cattle, and other property and committed thefts and robberies, and the Feringees' (British) men plundered property and burnt down houses in Bhutan'. Again, in another place, the treaty says: "The Feringees (British) will surrender such offenders to the Bhotanese, and the Bhotanese will in like manner surrender offenders to the Feringees." Furthermore, the Treaty says that if any bad men committed any aggression 'the rulers of the place

<sup>14</sup>White, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-57.



in which the offender lives shall seize and punish him'. Another strange clause in the treaty was to the effect that out of the four States, namely Bhutan, Feringees (British), Behar and Sikkim, if any one committed an act of aggression on the other, the aggressor will be punished by the alliance of the remaining three States. This treaty is of historical value and of great legal interest but since it was repudiated by the British, it was totally ignored in actual effect. Some of the aspects of this treaty which would be of great legal interest and value to the student of development of international law concepts are given below.

First and foremost, it would appear that this is perhaps the only treaty on record which has been signed by a party by putting the words 'under compulsion' beneath the signature.

Secondly, this is perhaps the only treaty which recites the name of the negotiator Cheeboo Lama who acted as an interpreter between the Bhutanese and the British. This is of some significance because when the treaty was repudiated by the British, the Deb Raja of Bhutan wrote to Cheeboo Lama who was the interpreter-cum-negotiator and appealed to him to decide whether at any time force was used by Bhutan. Rennie has given a translation of the letter addressed to Cheeboo Lama in this connection which is reproduced below:

"The British say you were interpreter to the mission, we do not know what you said and Eden did not know what we said, but you know whether the treaty was not agreed to. We used no force, if we had, it should have been mentioned at the time, and you should not have afterwards allowed Eden on his return to deceive the Governor-General and lead him to write to the Dhurma Raja that we had used violence. Our Bhutan custom is this, that an answer once given is given, and a bargain made is made, so we did not tell the Deb Raja of this. If the treaty made last year is not allowed, if another right dealing person will come, or if a representative is wanted from hence, write so, therefore, we have sent this order to you, but if an attack made upon us is right or wrong, recollect that you are responsible as the go-between. We cannot make restitution of anything now. The low country is unhealthy also, and an envoy could not be sent; when the sickness is less send for one. The case as regards robbery and theft is as follows: In the Cooch Behar territory and ours, the faults are equal—besides the English Government has taken seven Talooks of the Dangsi Terai (the Assam Dooars), and the rent of Ambaree Fal-lacottah has been withheld for some years. These are causes for our declaring war, instead of which the British Government are doing it. Make them do right. If we can withstand them we will, if not we will remain passive. Now you are the originator of confusion, you are a Sikimese and we shall have something to say to you; remember



this and say it to the English Authorities. Well, if there is no confusion between the British and the Dhurma Raja, there will be nothing to say between us. Having considered all this, send your answer through the Jungpen of Dhalimkote."<sup>15</sup>

It may be mentioned here that Rennie has supported the contention of the Bhutanese that the fault lay on both sides. To quote Rennie again:

"The remark about faults being equal on both sides as regards aggressions against property, has very likely a fair amount of truth in it—at least such is my opinion, inasmuch as in compiling the narrative of the train of events which gradually brought matters to a climax, I formed the conviction that in the official sources from which my information was obtained, but one side of the case was prominently shown, and that as 'every medal has its reverse' so, in all probability, had the Bhutanese a story of complaint also. Several occurrences which are casually alluded to in the documents referred to our troubles with Bhotan, tend to favour the impression that a series of raids and counter-raids have been going on for many years—the state of matters, in fact, on the north-eastern frontier, having been somewhat similar to that which was for so long characteristic of the English and Scotch borders."

In the footnote, Rennie further observes:

"Notwithstanding all that has been written against the Bhotanese, some grounds exist for entertaining the belief that at one time they were not so bad as it has become the custom of late to represent them, as well also as to give rise to a suspicion that defects of government on our part on the frontier may have had something to do with the insecurity to property and person which seems to have existed there for such a length of time."<sup>16</sup>

The foregoing observation of Rennie is further confirmed by what White wrote after his visit to Bhutan in 1905:

"I cannot help thinking Messrs. Griffiths and Eden have exaggerated what they saw, and as we know with what discourtesy they were treated, it is perhaps not altogether unreasonable for them to have seen only the worst side of the people (of Bhutan)."<sup>17</sup>

The third point relating to this treaty signed under duress is that the

<sup>15</sup>Rennie, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>16</sup>Rennie, David Field, *Bhotan and the Sotry of the Doar War*, pp. 157-59.

<sup>17</sup>White, John Claude, *Sikhim and Bhutan*, p. 12.



British Government argued that the envoy had no authority to agree to such terms and that the treaty had not been ratified. However, Eden while affixing his signature did not write the words 'without authority' but used the words 'under compulsion'.

In the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties opened to signature and ratification on 23rd May, 1969, various legally admissible reasons are given for rendering treaties invalid such as error (Article 48), fraud (Article 49), corruption of a representative of a State (Article 50), coercion of a representative of a State (Article 51), coercion of a State by the threat or use of force (Article 52).<sup>18</sup> The aforesaid codified version of international law of treaties has superseded the old customary principle of international law by which duress did not vitiate a treaty. To quote Oppenheim:

“However, with regard to the freedom of action of the State as such, International Law as it existed prior to the Covenant of the League, the Charter of the United Nations, and the General Treaty for the Renunciation of War, disregarded the effect of coercion in the conclusion of a treaty imposed by the victor upon the vanquished State.”<sup>19</sup>

It may, therefore, be mentioned that in 1864 when this treaty was signed 'under compulsion' the law on the subject had not developed to the extent to which it has done now. However, it can be stated that the coercion of a representative of a State as against coercion of a State as such would have vitiated a treaty signed in the latter half of the 19th century. In any case, lack of authority has always been a valid reason for nullifying a treaty and the British advanced that plea when repudiating the Treaty. Moreover, in the light of the Vienna Convention on Treaties of 1969, this treaty would be certainly invalid if compulsion was used.

Apart from the aforesaid, it may be stated that the Eden Mission registered an utter failure. The Government of India was accordingly outraged at what had happened and promptly decided to annex Ambaree Fallacottah and, in addition, to withhold payment to Bhutan of subsidy for the Assam Duars. The annexation ordered by the British was conveyed to the Deb Raja by a *Khareeta*, a legal instrument special to the Indian region signifying some sort of a direction from a superior to an inferior power. The text of the aforesaid *Khareeta* of Annexation dated 9th June 1864 which was addressed to His Highness the Deb Raja will be found

<sup>18</sup>UN Doc A/Conf/39/27.

<sup>19</sup>Oppenheim, *International Law*, Vol. I, 7th ed. (1948), pp. 802-03.



at Appendix V. Apart from this demand of surrender of territory, the British made a further demand on Bhutan to surrender the Cooch Behar captives who were alleged to be illegally detained by the Deb Raja. It was further conveyed to the Bhutanese that their failure to give any positive response would lead to permanent annexation of the Bengal Duars and such other territory as may be necessary. The British interest in the Bengal Duars as well as the Assam Duars was largely economic because this tract was rich in timber and, as stated earlier, fertile for cultivation of tea, tobacco and mustard. As Bhutan refused to answer the British Khareeta demanding annexation of Ambaree Fallacottah, it became a matter of prestige for the British to resort to arms to maintain their authority in the region.

#### *Anglo-Bhutanese War, 1864*

The British accordingly proceeded with the annexation of the Bengal Duars and the Anglo-Bhutanese War ensued. The text of the Proclamation dated 12th November 1864 regarding the annexation of Bengal Duars will be found at Appendix VI. This order of annexation recites the so-called "outrages committed by the subjects of the Bhutan Government within British territory" and proceeds to state that "the Governor General-in-Council has, therefore, reluctantly resolved to occupy permanently and annex to British territory the Bengal Duars of Bhutan". The Proclamation did not declare a war but announced the decision to annex territory which led to the Anglo-Bhutanese War of 1864. Brigadier-General Malcaster and Brigadier-General Dunsford commanded the British forces and swept over Bhutanese strongholds in quick succession. Thus by January 1865, the military occupation of the Duars was completed. The Deb Raja could not reconcile himself to this fate. Even before the occupation of the Duars had been consolidated and normalised by the British, he addressed a manifesto to the British officers in command stating:

"In a tone of pained surprise that the Deb Raja could not believe that the Queen of Great Britain had ordered the seizure of his territory; that as the customary declaration of war had not been made, he did not consider that the British had occupied the Duars. If, however, they insisted on attacking his country without a declaration of war, he would send against them, a divine force of twelve Gods who were 'very ferocious ghosts'."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Ronaldshay, *Lands of the Thunderbolt*, pp. 209-10.



It would appear as if in this case Bhutan was guided by the ancient laws of India governing inter-State belligerent relations because Manu expressly forbids the killing of enemy personnel found sleeping, naked, combing hair, etc., which indicates that surprise action without notice was not permissible in accordance with civilized conduct.<sup>21</sup> It could, therefore, be stated that in 1864, according to the traditional mode of relations between States, a declaration prior to an armed conflict was at least customary as a pure matter of civilized behaviour. Whatever may be the legality, it was clear that the Deb Raja was not prepared to accept the annexation without a fight.

The threat given by the Deb Raja of invoking the ire of twelve Gods did not prove to be unfounded. The Tongsa Penlop, soon after, swept down upon the eastern post of Dewangiri with a strong Bhutanese force and cutting off its water supply compelled its evacuation by the British on 5th February 1865. Similar attacks followed all along the occupied territory and, for a time, there was complete disorganisation in the British ranks and reinforcements had to be called for. General Malcaster and General Dunsford were replaced by Brigadier-General Tombs, C.B., V.C. and Brigadier-General Frazer Tytler, C.B., respectively. The new Generals were given independent commands, the former of the Right, and the latter of the Left Brigade. It was not until March 1865 that the British could deliver a counter-attack and recapture the posts which they had been forced to evacuate earlier. A complete lull followed thereafter throughout the summer of 1865 and this proved instrumental in negotiating a settlement. The British threatened military action on an extensive scale right inside the territories of Bhutan. This threat made the Bhutanese relent and in October 1865 the Deb Raja informed the British that he had ordered his officers to meet and negotiate a settlement with the British.

The peace negotiations which followed resulted in a treaty with Bhutan. The text of this Treaty which was finally concluded at Sinchula on November 11, 1865, is given at Appendix VII. This Treaty is known to the Bhutanese as the Ten-Article Treaty of Rawa Pani and will remain one of the most important landmarks in the annals of British-Bhutanese relations. Though Article 1 of the Treaty aims at establishing perpetual peace and friendship between the British Government and the Government of Bhutan, Article 2 specifically mentions of 'repeated aggressions of the Bhutan Government' and concludes by stating that the eighteen

<sup>21</sup>*Manusmṛiti*, VII, 92. *Sukraniti* and *Mahabharata* also likewise forbid the killing of enemy personnel in specified cases.



Duars were to be ceded by the Bhutan Government to the British for ever. In Article 4 of the Treaty, Bhutan expressed 'its regret for past misconduct' and agreed to receive an annual allowance from the British Government. The grant of this annual allowance was itself subject to the condition that the Bhutan Government would check the violent activities of its subjects and would comply with the provisions of the Treaty. Again, under Article 8 of the Treaty, Bhutan Government agreed to refer all its disputes with the Rajas of Sikkim and Cooch Behar to the British Government and abide by its decisions. It may be mentioned here that Article 8 is typical of British bilateral diplomacy in India in so far as it takes full advantage of the internal dissensions of the Rajas of the area by appointing the British Government as the sole arbitrator in any dispute. The wordings of Article 8 to the effect that 'the British Government hereby engage to enquire into and settle all disputes and complaints in such manner as justice may require and to insist on the observance of the British decision by the Rajas of Sikkim, Cooch Behar and Bhutan' gives a position of political superiority to the British. The British Government gets installed as the supreme court of appeal over disputes of the Rajas. This reminds one of clause 30 of the Protocol signed on 18th February 1854 between Maharana Saroop Singh of Udaipur and Lt. Col. Robinson on behalf of the East India Company. This Protocol enabled the British Political Agent in Mewar to give final decisions in all disputes between the Darbar (Ruler) and the Jagir Chiefs (Feudal Nobles) of Udaipur. It was by this method that the British could have their subtle intervention in the region to maintain a balance of power in their favour. They also helped in the maintenance of peace this way. Furthermore by providing 'free trade and commerce between the two governments' and by granting 'all Bhutanese residing in British territory equal justice with British subjects', the British Government of India may have been thinking in terms of bringing Bhutan under its hegemony. In 1867, the Deb Raja was entered in the Salute List as entitled to a salute of 15 guns thereby implying that he was a subordinate ruler.

(ii) *From 1865 to 1910*

*From the Treaty of Sinchula to the Treaty of Punakha*

The Treaty of Sinchula signed in 1865 almost a century after the first British Indian political contact with Bhutan in 1772, may at best be said to have lulled the situation on the turbulent frontiers. As far as the implementation of the Treaty was concerned the clauses relating to subsidy



acted as a political lever. Thus, for example, in 1868, the payment of subsidy was summarily withheld when Bhutan sent an officer of inferior rank to receive it coupled with the fact that Bhutan had terminated inter-communication link between Bhutan and Buxa. The subsequent course of Indo-Bhutanese relations indicated resentment and distrust in the attitude of the Rulers of Bhutan who were keen to intrigue against the rising tide of British power which tended to eclipse Bhutan's independence. This feeling was perhaps inevitable after July 4, 1866, when a Proclamation was issued by the Governor General-in-Council (Appendix VIII) that "in pursuance of Article 2 of the Treaty concluded on the 11th day of November, 1865, the whole of the tract of the 18 Duars stood ceded to the British".

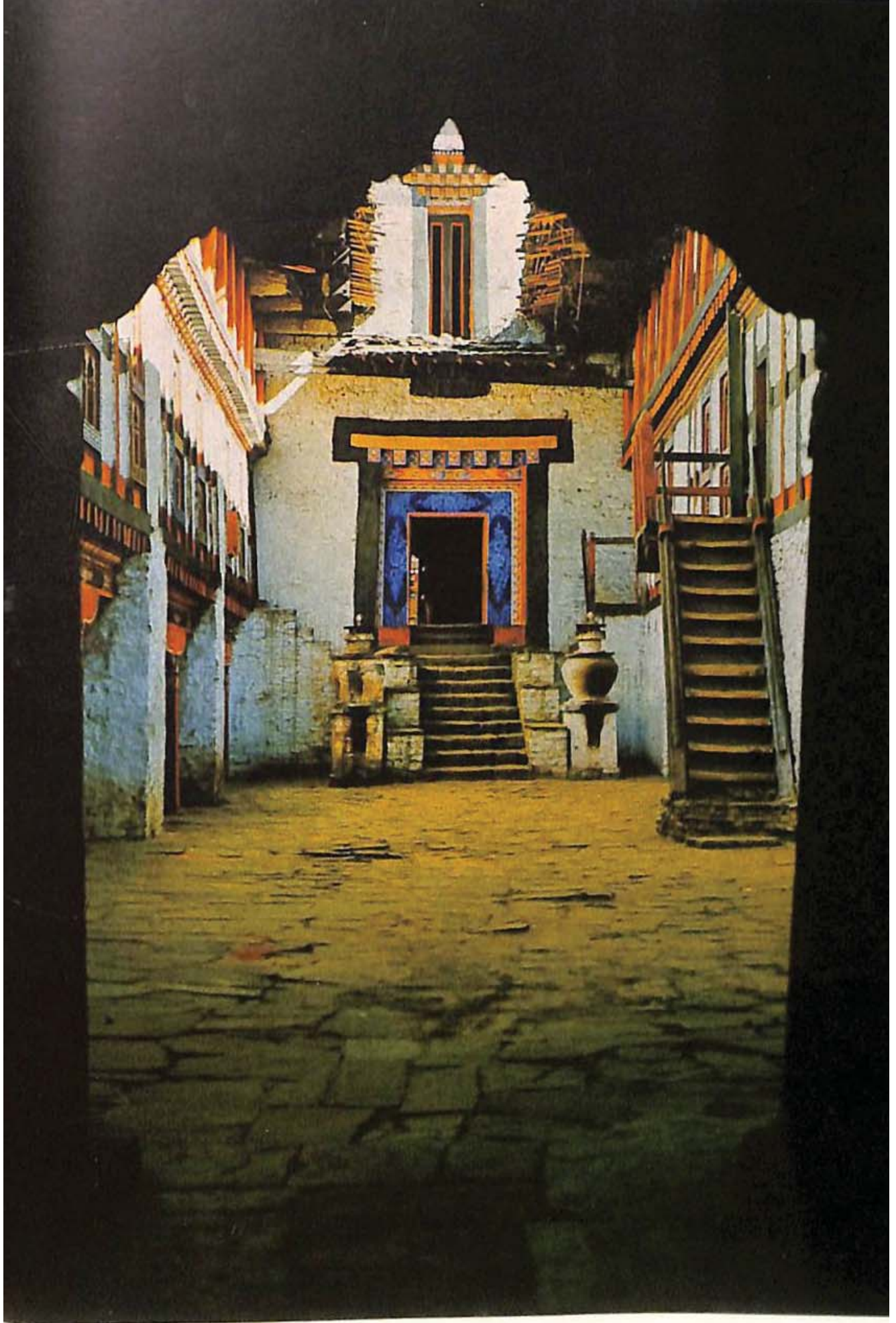
The military confrontation with the British had brought a certain amount of internal political unity in the State of Bhutan facing a common enemy. Thus in the period of comparative peace following the Treaty of Sinchula, internecine rivalries which have been the bane of Bhutan, again came to the surface. In 1869, a civil war broke out in Bhutan in which the Tongsa and Paro Penlops and the Punakha Jongpen rebelled against the Deb Raja who was supported by the Wangdu Phodran Jongpen. Both the parties approached the British who refused to intervene in the internal affairs of the State. This astute policy of non-intervention while making full use of the subsidy factor was elaborated in his letter by the Secretary of State as follows:

"The Secretary of State approved the policy of cash payment by the Government of India on the ground that it would conduct to the great objects of an enduring peace and the protection of the inhabitants of the frontier. It was not desirable to impoverish Bhutan by absorbing the entire revenues of the Duars for it would have deprived that government of the means of enforcing its authority over its chiefs and functionaries. Moreover, by non-payment of the stipulated sums in the event of any infraction of the terms of the treaty or commissions of acts hostile to the peace and security of the frontier, you will hold in your hands a material guarantee for the good conduct of the Bhutan Government and for the due observance of the treaty."<sup>22</sup>

Again, in 1877, there was another civil war caused by the pretensions of a rival claimant and Jigme Nam Gyel assumed supreme authority to crush the rebels. Yet another contest for the office of Deb Raja occurred

<sup>22</sup>Pol. Letters from Secretary of State, No. 4 of 1866, *Parliamentary Papers*, No. 13 (House of Commons), Vol. 2, 1865, p. 281.





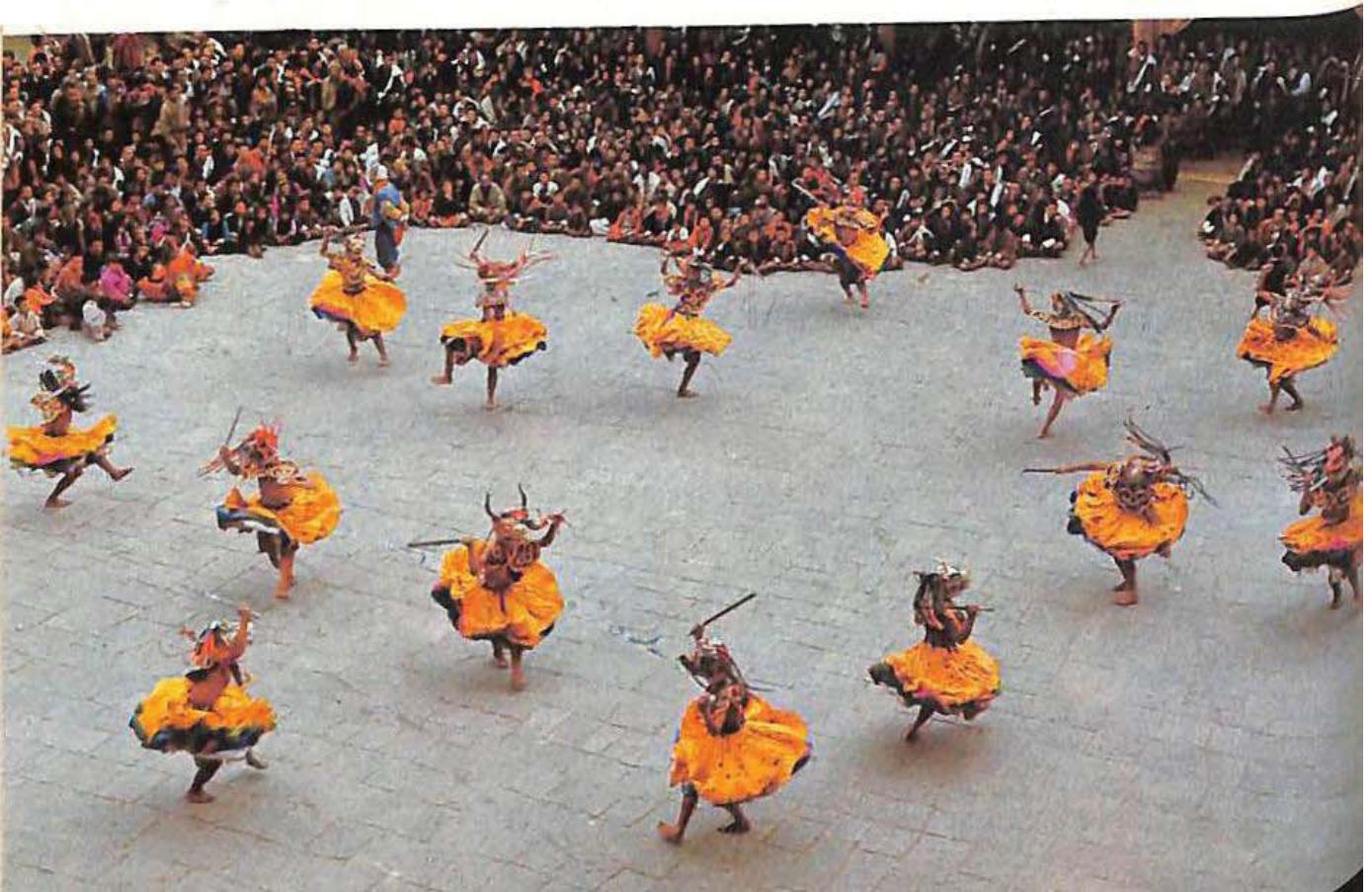
The inner entrance of a dzong in Bhutan





The monks' orchestra of Thimphu Dzong at a ceremonial function

A scene of Domchen religious festival at Tashichhodzong in Thimphu. Armed with swords, the antlered State dancers "Shachham" symbolize the blessings of God and demonstrate religious and moral lessons





three years later in 1880. During all these recurring internecine conflicts, the British kept aloof in spite of approaches by the rivals concerned for help. All requests for arms and ammunition were summarily rejected. As a result, the civil war in 1885 proved decisive and the Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk emerged as the virtual ruler of Bhutan. There had been a serious tussle for the election of the Deb Raja. The Tongsa Penlop, who tried his best to press for the appointment of his nominee, failed. Thereupon, the Tongsa Penlop kept the office of Deb Raja in abeyance, secured possession of its seal and emerged as the strong man of Bhutan. To consolidate his position Ugyen Wangchuk sought close and friendly relations with the British who also looked with satisfaction at the emergence of a strong man who could guide the destinies of Bhutan. In August 1885, the Tongsa Penlop decided to fill the vacancy of the Deb Raja. He got his nominee, Pang Sangye Dorzi, commonly known as "Yanpe Lopen" duly elected. The new Deb Raja was reduced to the position of a mere titular head as he was forced to abdicate all his powers in favour of the Tongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk. In order to consolidate his position further against his political rivals, the Tongsa Penlop adopted the conciliatory policy of obtaining British support. The Bhutanese could not, therefore, be pressurized by the Tibetans into joining them against the British expedition to Sikkim in 1889. During the same year, the Paro Penlop visited the British Political Agent at Kalimpong as a gesture of friendship. The Tongsa Penlop also demonstrated his keen desire to win over the British during the Younghusband Mission to Tibet. Ugyen Wangchuk was further instrumental in assisting Colonel Younghusband in communicating with Tibetan officials both during the march to Lhasa and during the period of negotiations culminating in the Convention of 1904. When the British Mission advanced into Tibet in 1904, the Tongsa Penlop accompanied the mission to Lhasa and showed great keenness to have closer ties with India. The Government of India was equally keen to have friendly relations with Bhutan through which ran the lines of communication from India to the trading posts in Tibet. The political affairs of Bhutan from 1903 were no longer looked after by the Government of Bengal. The Government of India assumed direct responsibility and the British Mission to Lhasa was also authorised to correspond directly with Bhutan. The friendly relations between Bhutan and the British were further strengthened when in 1905 a new political charge was created under the direct control of the Central Government of British India. A Political Agent was appointed by the centre in direct relationship with Bhutan.



Closer and friendly relations between the Government of India and the Tongsa Penlop went a long way towards reducing mutual suspicion. The efforts of the Tongsa Penlop were appreciated by the British who granted him the title of the Knight Commander of the Indian Empire. J.C. White was at that time the Political Officer in charge and he made a special visit to Bhutan in March 1905 to present to the Tongsa Penlop the Insignia of the Order. This was the first British Mission to go to Bhutan almost forty years after the Eden Mission and was the seventh British mission in the series. As against the earlier missions, the White Mission of 1905 was received with all warmth, enthusiasm and friendliness of which White speaks so eloquently in his historic publication : *Sikkim and Bhutan*. White was so impressed by the Tongsa Penlop that he later wrote: "Sir Ugyen is the only Bhutanese I have come across who takes a real and intelligent interest in general subjects, both foreign and domestic. I was deeply impressed by his sense of responsibility and genuine desire to improve the conditions of his country and countrymen."<sup>23</sup>

In view of the growing friendly relations with Bhutan, it was considered desirable that the Dharma-Deb Raja of Bhutan and the Tongsa Penlop should have an opportunity to receive the Prince of Wales (later King George V) during the latter's tour of India in 1906. The Tongsa Penlop was treated with great consideration inasmuch as the Prince of Wales and the Viceroy returned the visit of the Bhutanese Leader.

By 1907, Ugyen Wangchuk, the Tongsa Penlop, had greatly strengthened his position and was progressing fast to assume the Headship of the State. This process was hastened by the appearance of the new reincarnation of the Shabdrung Rimpoche in 1907 and the death of Deb Raja Cholay Tulku the same year. Again it was that very eventful year which witnessed the unique election of Ugyen Wangchuk by a unanimous vote of the Bhutan Chiefs and the principal Lamas as hereditary Maharaja of Bhutan. The British and particularly the Political Agent, John Claude White, helped in the establishment of hereditary monarchy as may be observed from what White said at the installation ceremony held on 17th the December, 1907:

"I am convinced that you have taken a wise step in thus consolidating the administration of the State. Sir Ugyen has been my friend for many years, and you could not have made a better choice. His integrity, uprightness, and firmness of character commend him to every one, and his accession to the Maharajaship is not only a gain to

<sup>23</sup>White, *op. cit.*, p. 165.



Bhutan, but is of great advantage to the British Government, who will henceforth have a settled government, with a man of strong character as its head, to negotiate with."<sup>24</sup>

The advantages that accrued to Bhutan by the creation of hereditary monarchy were immediately discernible. First and foremost, it led to internal political stability and peace externally which were the very foundations for the building up of Bhutan. Again, after 1907 there was great cordiality between the British and Bhutan. To put it in the words of John Calude White: "At the present comment Bhutan and its people are thoroughly and entirely friendly to the English, and wish beyond everything to enter into close relationships with them...."<sup>25</sup> Further observation by Claude White reveals the principles of British strategy in keeping close to Bhutan to ward off Chinese influence and thus help Bhutan in maintaining her political integrity. He observes: "I cannot pass over the fact that the present time is a critical one for relations between (British) India and Bhutan, and that if we do not support the new Maharaja openly and generously grave complications may be the result."<sup>26</sup>

Again, what Bhutan needed were concrete steps to ensure material well-being of the State. The far-sighted Ugyen Wangchuk, was not unaware of the fact that apart from political stability there was the dire need for betterment of his people. His first task after his installation as the Head of the State was, therefore, to open Bhutan to Indian agencies to develop its resources. He lost no time in this direction and taking advantage of White's presence he made a beginning straightaway. White himself has given an account of the approach made by the Maharaja and the discussions as recorded by White show the deep interest and the far-sighted statesmanship of Ugyen Wangchuk. White states as follows:

"I remained behind, at the urgent request of the new Maharaja and his Council, to discuss with them many projects and schemes for the welfare and improvement of the country. These covered a large area—schools and education, population, trade, the construction of roads, the mineral resources of the country and the best method of utilising them, the desirability of encouraging tea cultivation on the wastelands at the foot of the hills, which are excellent for the purpose and equal to the best tea land in the Duars.

<sup>24</sup>White, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-29. See also Chapter V which follows for the installation ceremony.

<sup>25</sup>White, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*



“The discussions were long and earnest, and the Tongsa and all his Council entered most fully into everything. The great stumbling-block to all advancement was the lack of funds, and this was clearly recognised by them all, as well as the fact that money must be raised; but the difficulty was how to do it. The sale of timber, mining concessions, and grants of tea land would all be means of bringing in a considerable revenue, and they decided to move the Government of India in the matter.”<sup>27</sup>

About Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, White observes: “I have never met a native I liked and respected more than I do Sir Ugyen. He is upright, honest, open, and straightforward, and I wish it had been possible to remain in India till he had at least commenced some of *his* schemes of reform. He has a very difficult task before him, and at this time especially requires help given to him sympathetically and directly, without the trammels of official red tape.”

The British were thus keen to further cement the relationship with Bhutan and proposed a new treaty to be concluded with the new Maharaja. White, the Political Officer, was strongly of the view that the Government of India should utilise “this unique opportunity of a new regime to enter into a new treaty and to increase the inadequate subsidy”. Before, however, a treaty could be concluded, Sir Charles Bell took over charge as Political Officer in May 1908. The question of a new treaty with Bhutan continued to receive consideration even after this change in the office of the Political Department of the Central Government and it was not until 1910 that the Treaty of Punakha was actually signed.

*(iii) From 1910 to 1947*

*From the Treaty of Punakha to the transfer of power to Free India*  
The Treaty of Punakha was signed on 8th January, 1910, by His Highness Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, K.C.I.E., Maharaja of Bhutan, on the one side and Mr. C.A. Bell, Political Officer in Sikkim, on the other, in virtue of full powers to that effect vested in him by Earl of Minto, the then Viceroy and Governor-General of India-in-Council who subsequently ratified the treaty on March 24, 1910. This Treaty amended Articles IV and VIII of the earlier treaty concluded at Sinchula on November 11, 1865. By amending Article IV, the annual allowance to the Government of Bhutan was increased from fifty thousand rupees to one hundred thousand rupees. Again, Article VIII of the Sinchula Treaty of 1865 was revised to make

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid*, pp. 232-33.



British non-interference in Bhutan's internal affairs dependent on Bhutan's acceptance of the British advice in Bhutan's external affairs. Some of the noteworthy features of the Punakha Treaty of 1910 are mentioned below.

The revised Article VIII has the provision relating to disputes in the region being settled by the arbitration of the British.

Another noticeable feature of the Treaty is that it has been signed on behalf of Bhutan by no less than 11 dignitaries beginning with the Dharma Raja, the Maharaja of Bhutan, the Tatsang Lamas and going down to the Penlops and Jongpens. It is strange, however, that the preamble to the Treaty recites His Highness Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, the Maharaja of Bhutan as the only other party to the Treaty. Nevertheless, the signatures of the Authorities in Bhutan mention the Maharaja of Bhutan as second immediately after the seal of the Dharma Raja. In order that the Treaty may be binding, it was considered essential by Bhutan to have the signature of the Dharma Raja as well as the Lamas, the Penlops and others. Whatever may have been the position on the Bhutanese side, the British were quite clear that Ugyen Wangchuk wielded the necessary authority and he alone was to be accepted as a party to the Treaty. This aspect had to be clarified and confirmed if Bhutan was to emerge as a sovereign State member of the international community. In 1949, therefore, the treaty signed with independent India witnessed this necessary change insofar as the Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan ratified the treaty of 1949 as the Head of the State of Bhutan whereas Shri C. Rajagopalachari, Governor-General of India, ratified it on behalf of the Government of India.

In addition to the Treaty of 8th January 1910, another treaty was concluded between the British Government of India and the Bhutanese Government in November 1910 which sought to simplify the antiquated extradition procedure. This Treaty was signed by Rai Ugyan Dorzie Bahadur, Deb Zimpen (Secretary to the Maharaja of Bhutan) on the Bhutanese side and by Mr. C.A. Bell, Political Officer in Sikkim, on the British side, in virtue of full powers granted to them, respectively, by the Maharaja of Bhutan and the Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

The texts of both the aforesaid Treaties are given in Appendices IX and X.

After the conclusion of the Treaty of Punakha, an era of friendly cooperation between the British Government of India and Bhutan ensued. There was such smooth sailing on both sides that no occasion arose as would have warranted British intervention in the internal affairs of Bhutan. In 1911, the Maharaja of Bhutan was present by special invitation at the



Durbar held in Delhi by the King Emperor. Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuk was keen to see Bhutan develop and for this purpose funds were needed. His occasional approaches for increase in the allowance payable to Bhutan under the 1910 Treaty did not bear fruit till 1941 when the allowance was increased by rupees one lakh during the reign of his son who succeeded him in 1928. However, the Government of India helped Bhutan by training Bhutanese students in various technical subjects.

Again, in 1914-15, an agreement was made for capturing elephants in the districts of Assam and the contiguous areas of Bhutan to improve finances of the State. While elephants abounded on the Indian side, the best stockade sites lay in Bhutan. Moreover, elephants crossing the frontier would be lost unless they were pursued across the frontier. To overcome difficulties, the area in question was mapped out into three Mahals which were named as the Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang Mahals. The first was to be worked during 1915-17, the second in 1917-19 and the third in 1919-21. Thereafter the arrangement was to be left open subject to confirmation, modification or discontinuance. The profits derived from the operation were to be shared equally by Bhutan and Assam. However, Bhutan was allowed the right of closer control over grazing, poaching and firing by the Nepalese settlers in Bhutan, in the adjoining reserve forests of Assam. These joint Elephant Mahals were profitably operated by the Governments of Bengal and Assam, and Bhutan. Again, when the First World War broke out in 1914, the Maharaja of Bhutan gave rupees one lakh to the War Relief Fund. In spite of this cooperation, and the keenness of Druk Gyalpo Ugyen Wangchuk to develop Bhutan, it must be stated that the progress was neither rapid nor substantial. With the wane of the Chinese influence in 1912, the north-western borders were comparatively quiet and from the British viewpoint, therefore, Bhutan's political importance also receded somewhat in the background. Consequently, Bhutan did not receive as much aid as was necessary for its rapid economic development.

The great Tongsa Penlop, Ugyen Wangchuk, the first Hereditary King of Bhutan since 1907, was succeeded by his son Druk Gyalpo Jigme Wangchuk in 1928. He was a worthy successor to his great father and maintained all efforts to achieve progress initiated by his predecessor. On the whole, however, this was an uneventful period of quiet and peace. The British Empire reached the pinnacle of its glory both at home and abroad with the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of King George V in 1935. Its reputation had spread so far and wide as to keep the inaccessible mountain King-



dom of Bhutan in continued friendly terms. But soon thereafter, World War II commenced and brought in its wake the disintegration of the British Empire in the East. This introduced a new chapter in the history of Indo-Bhutanese relations which aspect is dealt with later in Chapter VIII.