

SIKKIM AND BHUTAN

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Preface

My primary interest in writing this book on Sikkim and Bhutan was to assemble historical and cultural data to reveal a sympathetic description of the lands and their peoples and to give an idea of the present administrative and political structures which would serve to enlighten any reader who wishes to know something and understand more about these unusual Himalayan countries.

When one looks at the map of the world, Sikkim and Bhutan appear lost in the obscurity of the Himalayas. Nevertheless they stand out as unique and distinctive, in that they offer a great deal to the visitor or the casual tourist and even more so to those who are engaged in a deeper study of culture, anthropology and religion.

Sikkim came into world focus at the time China issued its ultimatum to the Indian Government to dismantle the so-called military structures on the Tibet side of the frontier between Sikkim and the Chumbi valley of Tibet. This charge was absurd but it provided or could provide, if the necessity arose, the pretext for the Chinese army to launch another totally unprovoked offensive against India, deserving of the contempt that Chinese aggressions have evoked in the eyes of the world. This event took place in September 1965 but somehow Chinese bellicosity at Nathu-la, the pass leading from Tibet into Sikkim, assumed no greater proportion than a few rifle shots in the air or outbursts of propaganda through loudspeakers.

Sikkim is situated directly in the path of the invading Chinese, if they choose to attack. The people of Sikkim, however, remain calm

and undisturbed but proudly determined to fight any intruder and to protect their homeland even with their native weapons, the Kukris.

The sense of determination in the Sikkimese is evident in many ways. For centuries they have held on to their land and have persistently adhered to their own special way of life. This is what gives Sikkim its unusual character. In addition, great natural beauty abounds, with an immense range of the snow-capped Himalayas delineating its northern and north-western borders. This majestic view is a heroic spectacle of grandeur, unforgettable to any one who has gazed upon it.

Bhutan is also a land of natural beauty with its turbulent rivers and jagged hills in the south. Another panorama reveals a landscape of forests and meadows which spread through valleys rising successively to the snow-capped peaks of the Great Himalayas in the north. Hardy men live here among the mountains also believed inhabited by spirits and demons, presenting an archaic picture of life, both of reality and mystery. The people have unusual characteristics which are apparent in their dress, customs and habits. They are hardly curious about the activities of the outside world and have preferred to be isolated from it. On the whole, they are friendly, hospitable and guileless.

Today, the barriers are gradually being broken down: new roads have opened communications bringing with them contemporary progress and technological development right into the heart of the country. Without a doubt Bhutan has wakened from the sixteenth century to find herself suddenly in the twentieth. What will be the reactions of the Bhutanese, believing as they do in countless spirits, to these drastic changes? How will the dzongs, the ancient symbols of religion and government, compete with the chimneys of factories, the new symbols of progress and energy?

During the last few years not more than a dozen people visited Bhutan each year. Over the preceding four centuries at most only ten or fifteen travellers came to the country. Some legends, a fact or two, fragments of history and some notes from the diaries of those who journeyed there, are all that has been recorded about the country. Bhutan has been and is even today an almost unexplored land but with its increasing contact with the outside world, its medieval history and traditional pageantry will gradually recede into the background.

The shock of the revolt in Tibet ten years ago and China's ruthless suppression of the freedom of the Tibetans jerked Bhutan out of isolation and into closer cooperation with India in a gigantic task of reconstruction and rebuilding. To stem subversion from China, or a Tibet dominated by China, Bhutan has indeed to be self-reliant and stable, economically and politically and then to develop as a progressive nation. This task of reconstruction, to which the Bhutanese are energetically devoting themselves, is to be accomplished without any of the fundamental characteristics of the land being lost, her essential

genius being preserved.

In writing this documentary on Sikkim and Bhutan I have had in mind a sincere wish to fill a much needed gap and to present, in a concise publication, information about the lands, the peoples, their customs and systems of government which might prove useful to the administrator, journalist, tourist or to the reader who wants to be informed about the lesser accessible and unknown countries of the world. The contents of this book are gleanings available from existing sources and some are based on personal observation and numerous conversations during my residence in Sikkim in 1966 and 1967 and my several visits to Bhutan in that same period.

This book was written in Gangtok in June 1967. The texts of several treaties and other official documents, as available in published sources, are appended to it for their historical value and as valuable information to the reader. For the guidance of those who might be interested in further study of Sikkim or Bhutan a bibliography of works by other authors has also been appended.

The author avails himself of this opportunity to emphasise that the views expressed in the book are strictly and entirely his own and do not represent the views of the government of India or of any of the persons whose names have been mentioned.

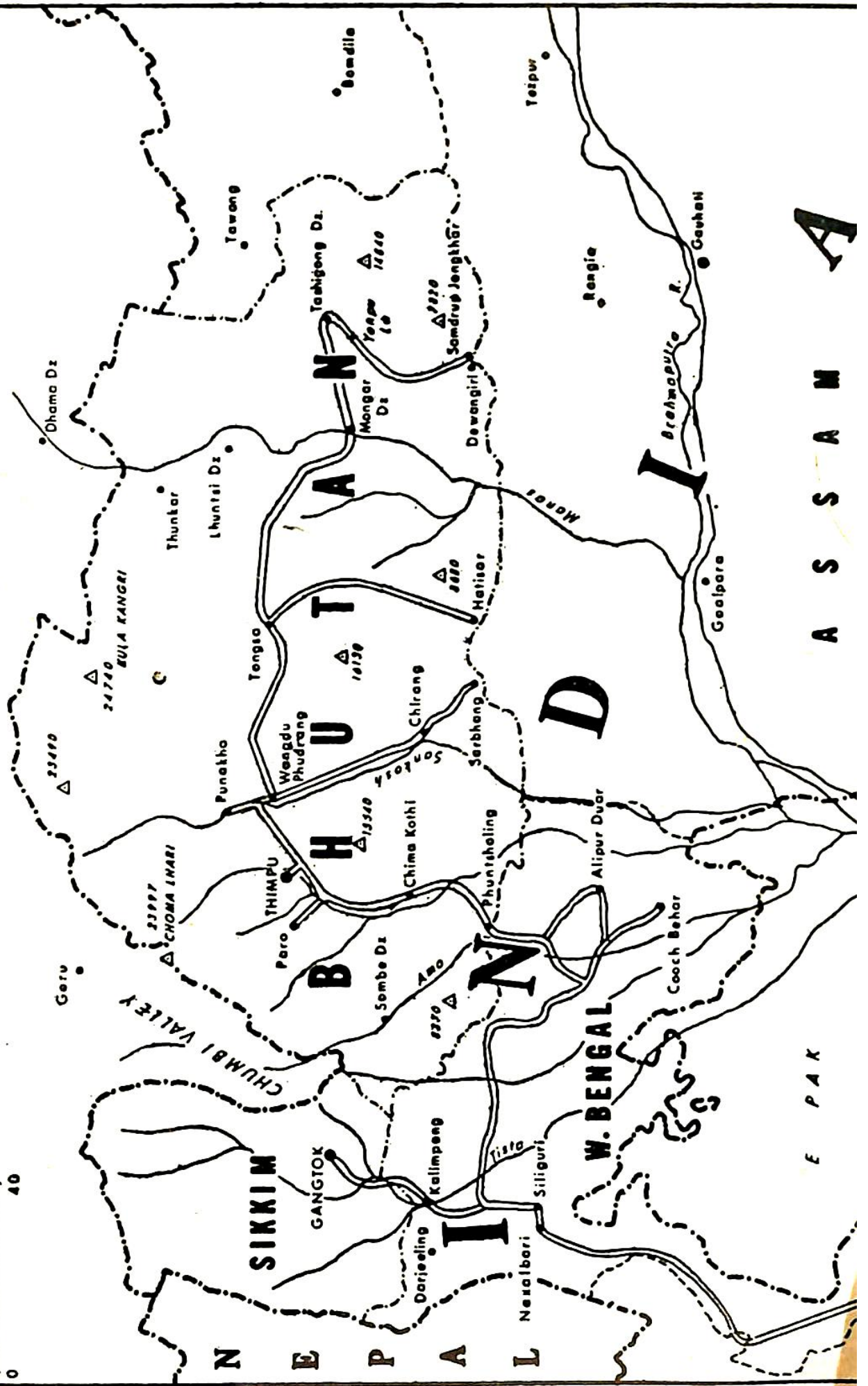
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June 1967

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T I I B E T



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The Land and the People

ON the northern border of West Bengal, the main range of the Himalayas spreads southwards and divides in two enormous spurs. These are the Singilela and Chola ranges. These almost impassable mountain barriers enclose three sides of a gigantic amphitheatre hewn, as it were, out of the Himalayas and sloping downwards towards the plains. The tracts of mountainous country consist of a tangled series of interlacing ridges, rising range above range even to the foot of the wall of high peaks and passes which make it the 'abode of the snows'.

This is the territory of Sikkim. The encircling wall of peaks and passes in the north and east forms the frontiers with Tibet, while in the west and south-west it divides Sikkim from Nepal. To the south-east the watershed of the Dichu is, in a way, a natural boundary between Sikkim and Bhutan.

The Teesta river winds its way through Sikkim. The main tributaries being the Rangit, the Rongni-chu, the Lachen and Lachung rivers, all snowfed torrents coming from the northern hills. Essentially, Sikkim is the catchment area of the source of the Teesta river. The boundary with Tibet was laid down in the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 17 March 1890 and is described as follows:

The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Tista and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu, and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi¹ on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.

The main mountain ranges are the Singilela, which runs from the Kangchenjunga with its well known peaks of the Sandakphu and Phalut and the Chola range which descends from Pauhunri, to the east of the Dongkya-la, and forming the water parting between the Teesta and the Am-mo-chu. The principal pass on the Singilela (also spelt Singalela) is the Chiabhanjan leading into Nepal, while the Chola has several passes, Jelep-la, Nathu-la, Yak-la and Thanka-la. In the north, the principal passes into Tibet are Kongra-la, Bamchho-la and Sese-la.

Sikkim lies in the direct path of the monsoon, and because of the geographical location of its valleys and its proximity to Kangchenjunga, it has a heavy annual rainfall from 140 inches in the lower regions where the Teesta river flows to 50 inches even in the drier upper valleys of Lachen and Lachung. The monsoon penetrates in fact far to the north, through the deep valleys, and the wet zone reaches almost to the snowline.

The earliest inhabitants of Sikkim were said to be the Lepchas or, as they call themselves, the 'Rong-pa', literally the "ravine folk". They were believed to have come from the east, along the foothills, from the direction of Assam and Burma. They have little resemblance to the Tibetans, since they are smaller and slighter in build, with finer cut features. These people of a mild and quiet disposition, somewhat indolent, love solitude and possess an extraordinarily rich zoological and botanical vocabulary of their own.

The Lepchas today are Buddhists and are generally very devout, though at one time they worshipped the spirits of the mountains, rivers and forests, a natural outcome of their surroundings. Mighty snows, raging torrents, the wind and the mist, the rolling thunder and the lightning of the early rains must surely have left a deep impression on the character of a people who lived in the midst of nature's striking manifestations.

Distinct from the Lepchas are the Bhutias, people of Tibetan origin, of good physique and Mongolian features. The Bhutias settled down in many parts of Sikkim, but in the north they were and still are traders and herdsmen by occupation rather than farmers. They preferred living in the higher, cooler regions rather than in the hot, humid valleys. The religion of the Bhutias also is a form of Buddhism, specifically called Lamaism, and their language is derived from the Tibetan tongue.

¹ Gipmochi also known as Gyemo Chen. The trijunction with Bhutan and Tibet (Chumbi Valley) is near Batang-la.

It is indeed curious that the largest group of people in Sikkim should be the Nepali, who migrated from Nepal and slowly pushed their way into the land. They are an industrious, thrifty people who have made excellent settlers, rising to important positions in business and administration. With the exception of the Sherpas, who are mainly in the extreme west of Sikkim, and the Tamangs, both of whom are Buddhists, the Nepalis are at present all Hindu by religion, with the usual division into castes.

There is, in addition, a fourth group, small but distinct, known as the Tsongs, originally settlers from the Tsang-po valley in Tibet in what is now the Limbuwana district of Nepal, which was at one time a part of western Sikkim. Some of the Tsongs overflowed into and settled down in Sikkim. There is also a very much smaller but economically stable and influential community of Indian traders. Of the present total population of 180,000², the Nepalis are 72 per cent, while the balance, except for the small group of Tsongs, is divided equally between the Lepchas and the Bhutias.

As is evident, there is a basic heterogeneity within the Sikkimese people; three or four distinct origins, as many languages, Lepcha, Bhutia and Gurkhali, and two principal religions with, here and there, a tendency towards syncretism. The term 'Sikkimese' has thus no single or common linguistic or ethnological interpretation. These differences and divisions among the people are reflected, as will be referred to later, in the administrative and political structure. Despite these factors, a widespread feeling of national consciousness has arisen and developed a strong degree of historic and cultural unity.

Lamaism

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The original religion of the Lepchas of Sikkim and the Bhutias of Bhutan was a form of nature worship, variously referred to as Pon (also spelt Bon) or Shamanism. It was a curious mixture of witchcraft and sorcery with the worship of spirits and ghosts. These spirits existed everywhere, some good but many others evil, in trees, rocks, on mountain tops and in the skies. They had to be worshipped and propitiated with offerings: a stone, a strip of cloth, a branch and so on. A sorcerer or a sorceress could evoke good will instead of ill. Thus expelling the evil spirits, who brought sickness and misfortunes, and propitiating them by the sacrifice of animals, sometimes even of human beings, were among the fundamental practices of Ponism.

The Guru Padma Sambhava, the Lotus Born, also known as the Guru Rimpoche, brought Buddhism to Sikkim and Bhutan through Tibet in the eighth century. He was a teacher of mysticism at the Nalanda University in the north of India and was well versed in Tant-

² The last official census was in 1961 and gave the population as 162,189.

ricism, an amalgam of Buddhism with primitive beliefs and nature worship, then current in India. The Guru Rimpoche, whose fame as a mystic and teacher had spread across the Himalayas into Tibet, was sought after by the Tibetan King, Thi-Srong De-tsan, who reigned from about A.D. 742 to 800.

This Tibetan King, Thi-Srong De-tsan, the son of a Chinese princess, had inherited from his forebears a strong leaning towards Buddhism. He sent a mission to India for books and teachers and started systematic translations from the Sanskrit and from some of the Chinese scriptures into the Tibetan language. He also sought to establish Buddhist temples and monasteries, but somehow his efforts were frustrated by a series of earthquakes which were popularly attributed to demons. He hoped to gain his ends with the help and advice of this mystic priest, Padma Sambhava.

Padma Sambhava arrived at Samye (Sam-yas) by way of Kathmandu and Kyirong in Nepal about the year A.D. 747. He vanquished the demons and through conversion established the first community of lamas. He also assisted the King in building the first monastery at Samye. Lamaism as then established was a superb mixture of Mahayana Buddhism with local mythology, mysticism and magic. The relics of Pon as well as Tantric practices in regard to *pranayama*, *asanas* and *mantras*³ were essential ingredients. From magic and rituals, through prayers and congregational worship, Lamaism established the path to altruism (the Bodhisattva ideal) and renunciation (the Sunyata objective).

The Guru Rimpoche is believed to have visited Sikkim and Bhutan during his travels in Tibet and its western regions. The establishment or foothold of Lamaism in Sikkim, however, dates from a later period: the time of Lhatsun Chhembo's arrival there about the middle of the 17th century, though by that time Buddhism had already come to parts of the country. It was in the latter half of the 17th century, in fact, that Lamaism had become a powerful hierarchical institution in Tibet.

This Lhatsun Chhembo was a native of Kongbu, in the lower valley of the Tsangpo, born in the fire-bird year of the tenth of the sixty-year cycles, corresponding to A.D. 1595. He spent many years in various monasteries and gained great reputation and fame by his learning and wisdom. He traversed the Kanglanangma pass and, finding no road beyond the cave of Kampa Kabruk, is said to have flown miraculously to the upper part of Kabru, and after a sojourn there of two weeks to have flown down to where his followers were collected. He then guided them by a road to Dzongre and on to Norbugang (Yoksam) in Sikkim.

³ The Sanskrit terms in Hindu philosophy describing certain postures and positions for meditation, recitation and incantation of prayers or sacred texts.

Lhatsun Chhembo arrived in Sikkim with two other lamas of the Nyingmapa sect, one of the many sects of Buddhism then prevalent. By the western gate of Singile la came another lama, (a Kartok-pa) named Sempah Chhembo, and a lama of the Ngadakpa sect, named Rigdzin Chhembo, who had opened the southern gate by way of Darjeeling and Namchi.⁴ The place where these three lamas met was named by the Lepchas, Yoksam, this meaning the "three superior ones".

The three lamas held a council and decided to look for a fourth. Lhatsun Chhembo said: "In the prophecy of Guru Rimpoche it is written that four noble brothers shall meet in Sikkim and arrange for its government. We are therefore, three and have come from the north, south and west. It has been told that there is, at this time, in the east a man named Phuntshog, a descendant of the brave ancestors of Kham in eastern Tibet. Therefore, according to the prophecy of the Guru we should invite him to join us."

Messengers were despatched, Phuntshog was sought and found, and consecrated Ruler by the three lamas as the fourth superior lama from the east. He was given Lhatsun's own surname of Namgye (Namgyal) and the title of Chogyal (Dharma Raja). He was 38 years of age at the time. This was believed to have taken place in A.D. 1642.⁵

As mentioned earlier, Lamaism had, by the middle of the 17th century, developed into a widespread and influential religion in Tibet. The fifth Dalai Lama who lived from 1615 to 1680 had also been given temporal power in Tibet by the Mongol chief, Gusri Tendzin Chogyal, who had defeated the then King of Tsang in 1642 and established himself as overlord of the entire territory of Tibet. With this combination of spiritual and temporal power the Dalai Lama became indeed the undisputed ruler of the country. From the time of the fifth to the present, the fourteenth, each succeeding Dalai Lama is not only the spiritual head but also the temporal ruler.

The Dalai Lama's spiritual sway extends not only in Tibet but also in Ladakh, Sikkim and Bhutan. He is the reincarnation of Chen-re-zi on earth—Chen-re-zi, the Lord of Mercy, and the patron deity of Tibet. The Dalai Lama may at times indicate before his death where he will be reborn. But if he does not do so within three years of his death the oracles at Ne-chung and Sam-ye will prophesy giving particulars of the parentage, location and abode and other intimate details for the identification and choice of the successor.

The most learned lamas of the three principal monasteries of Tibet then set out to discover the reincarnated one. Boys, born under strange circumstances, are sought after and certain distinguishing marks of the

⁴ Darjeeling is in North Bengal, India, and Namchi in Western Sikkim.

⁵ As related in John Claude White's Book on Sikkim and Bhutan. Present-day scholars, however, believe that the ancestors of Phuntshog were, for three generations prior to his consecration by the lamas, rulers of Sikkim. Phuntshog was the first consecrated Chogyal.

skin and body, resembling those of Chen-re-zi, are looked for. After a final religious ceremony the boy who is chosen is required to identify various objects and articles belonging to his predecessor as proof of his being the true reincarnation. This singular process of discovery and identification is unique in history. It applies also to the Panchen Lama the second pillar of Lamaism, as well as to other high incarnate lamas.

The Monasteries

The three lamas, as related earlier, brought religion to Sikkim and also found a ruler for the country. Gradually through the years, Lamaism became the state religion, and with its growth innumerable monasteries were built throughout the land. There are two sects of lamas in Sikkim, the Nyingmapa and the Kargyupa as represented by the Karmapa. A third, the Dukpa sect, is not currently represented.

The Nyingmapa, or the so-called traditional school represents the strict or formal style of lamaism and has three lower sects: the Lhatsunpa, to which belong most of the monasteries, with Pemiongchi at the head, the Kartok-pa, with the monasteries of Kartok and Dolling, and the Ngadak-pa, with the monasteries of Namchi, Tashiding, Zilnon and Thang-mochhen.

The Karma-Kargyu is one of the earliest branches of the Kargyupa, and was founded by Marpa and his pupil, Miljarepa. The first Karmapa monastery in Sikkim was built at Ralang⁶ about A.D. 1730 by its ruler, Gyurmed Namgyal, in homage to the ninth Karmapa Grand Lama, during a pilgrimage of this ruler to Tibet. Other Karmapa monasteries are at Rumtek and Phodang.

Specific and identifiable places of worship in Sikkim are: the Takphu, literally a rock-cave (associated with Guru Rimpoche); the Gompa, a monastery proper; and other gompas known as such in popular terms but more correctly designated mani lha-khangs which are to be found in villages. These mani lha-khangs minister to the religious needs of the villagers.

The approaches to the monasteries are lined with rows of tall bamboo poles with prayer flags attached to them, several moss-covered chortens and long mendong monuments. Chortens, literally receptacles for offerings, are solid conical structures originally intended to house relics but are now mostly erected in honour of the Buddha or his disciples. The shape and details of the chorten have an elemental interpretation and symbolize the five elements—earth, air, water, fire and ether into which the physical body is dissolved upon death.

The lower section is a solid rectangular block, and it represents the

⁶ Ralang in Sikkim is not to be confused with Ralang in Tibet which is referred to later in the book.

earth. Above it is a globe which represents *water*. The element of *fire* is represented by a triangular section and *air* by a crescent shape signifying the inverted vault of the sky. The whole is crowned by an acuminate circle symbolising *ether*.

The most holy chorten in Sikkim is Tashiding, owing its special sanctity to its reputedly holding some of the relics of the mythical Buddha, antecedent to Sakyamuni. It is a favourite place for pilgrimage, and the simple act of beholding this chorten is supposed to cleanse one of all sin.

Also frequently visible in the vicinity of a monastery is a stone seat called a throne for the use of the head lama when instructing his pupils in the open. One such reputed throne exists at the Pemiongchi chorten near which the visitors camp is usually pitched.

The oldest and the first monastery to be built in Sikkim is Hungri, founded by Ringzin Ge-dem.⁷ In due course, shrines were erected at Tashiding, Sang-nga-chholing and Pemiongchi built on locations consecrated to the Guru Rimpoche, and these in turn at a later date became the sites of monasteries. The Pemiongchi monastery was built to house the ta-tshang or "pure" monks, celibate and undeformed. It still retains this reputation for the celibacy and high social class of its monks. In Sikkim they are the only bearers of the title of ta-tshang, and their head lama has the special reserved honour of consecrating the reigning sovereign with holy water.

The Pemiongchi monastery supervises many others, as also the gompas of Lingthem, Simik and Phaggye. The most active and flourishing monasteries in Sikkim are the Pemiongchi and Phodang.

The most important part of a monastery is the temple or Lhakhang. It serves two purposes: as an assembly room and as a place of worship with its relics and images. Usually it is surrounded by a paved path to allow the pious lamas and devotees to move around it in a religious procession.

One enters the main door of a monastery by a short flight of steps. On ascending these steps one finds that the entrance is usually screened by a large curtain made of yak-hair or wool which is hung from the upper balcony. Upon entering the hall, the opening is guarded by figures of fiends. They are the demons of the locality. Then one notices a pair of hideous imps painted red and bluish-black. Among those portrayed are sometimes 12 'tan-ma' or aerial nymphs typical of Tibet who are believed to sow disease and to have been among the chief fiends subjugated by the Guru.

In the vestibule are four huge representations in fresco of the Kings of the four Quarters who guard the universe and heavens against the demons of the outer-space. They are clad in warrior armour and have

⁷ A list of monasteries in Sikkim with title and meaning, also date of construction, is at Appendix I.

a threatening expression. Two stand on each side of the doorway. The white Guardian of the East is King of the Gandharvas, the green Guardian of the South King of the Kumbhandas, the red Guardian of the West King of the Nagas, and the yellow Guardian of the North is the King of the Yakshas.

In the smaller monasteries of the villages, the mani lha-khang, or prayer barrel, is set within the temple and mechanically revolved by the hands of lay devotees, each completed revolution being announced by a lever striking a bell.

In the monastery is a large hall with a double row of columns which separate the space forming a nave flanked by two aisles. At the lower end of the nave is the altar. The interior is a mass of bright colour, the walls profusely covered with frescoes of saints and demons. The ceiling beams are painted red with a design of lotus rosettes and other emblems.

Three large seated figures grace the altar. These are the Three Jewels signifying the trinity of the lamas. The Sakya Muni, the Buddha is seated in the centre, the Guru Rimpoche to the left of him and on the right side Chen-re-zi, the Lord of Mercy.⁸ The Sakya Muni is of a yellow shade with blue curly hair, and sometimes he is attended by two standing figures, his closest disciples. The Guru Rimpoche holds a dorje, a thunderbolt, in his right hand. A human skull used as a cup which contains blood is in his left hand. A trident decorated with human heads rests on his left shoulder. In addition he is almost always attended by his two ministering wives. Chen-re-zi, the Lord of Mercy who plays the important role of the patron god of Lamaism, is white in colour with four arms: the front pair of hands are joined in devotion, the upper right hand holds a crystal rosary while the upper left a lotus flower.

The arrangement of the images is not the same in all temples. For example, in the Kargyut temples a special place is given to Karma Bakshi, the founder of the Karmapa lower sect. Another image which is familiar in Sikkim is Khang-chen Dzonga, the protective deity of the land, the literal meaning being "the five repositories or ledges of the great snows". He is a good-natured deity and differs in character being of a protective rather than of a destructive nature.

In some of the Nyingmapa monasteries there exist side chapels or special shrines, which are dedicated to Tamding and Dorje-phagmo as both of these are popular deities. On the second floor of the monastery which is reached by a narrow, rather steep staircase there are images of secondary importance, perhaps frescoes of Gon pos, or protectors of Mahayana Buddhism which are frightening since they are clothed

⁸ Sometimes Tara, the Goddess of Knowledge (Power), Amitayus, God of the Infinite Life, and Vijaya, the All Powerful, known together as the Trinity of Life Eternal, also find a place on the altar.

in human and tiger skin and adorned with writhing snakes, human skulls and bones. Also among these frescoes is the Sepai-khorlo which represents the cycle of existence showing the progressions of rebirth and the dreadful tortures of the damned.

A rebirth, according to Lamaism as is stated in the Indian doctrine of Karma, is determined by one's behaviour and deeds, although with faith, charms and rituals one can supplement good acts. If the virtues outweigh the sins, the soul is reborn as a god. If one is less virtuous then one is reborn as an ungodly spirit; and still less so as a human being. Those whose sins predominate and have fallen low sink into the lower depths of rebirth and are reborn as beasts or ghosts, the most wicked going either to a fiery hot hell or to an icy cold hell. Judgment is delivered by the King of the Dead, sometimes referred to as the "Religious King".

Many other objects are placed on the altar. For instance the lower shelf has offerings of rice, cakes, flowers and the sacred lamps. On the higher shelf there are musical instruments and ritual utensils. The temple lights are on short pedestal stands. A cotton wick is placed in the centre of the socket which is lit and fed by melted butter. The number of lighted bowls is an indication of the wealth of the temple and its numerous votaries.

The numerous monasteries in Sikkim, which as stated earlier are listed in Appendix I, I hope, will enchant the reader and also provide delightful information for the uninitiated traveller who would undoubtedly be rewarded should he undertake this journey.

Gangtok, the Capital

The seat of the government which is also the residence of the Raja, more recently the Maharaja, has changed through the years. The earliest records dating about 1640 locate it at Yoksam which is in the western part of Sikkim. Later, about 1670, it was moved to Rabdentse which lies further in the south-eastern region. A few years thereafter the capital of Sikkim was again moved to Tumlong, more to the centre of the valley, as Rabdentse as a capital was considered too close to the hostile Gurkhas. Security was the determining factor in choosing a location as the headquarters of the Ruler and his government. From time to time the ruler's summer residence was in the valley of Chumbi⁹ in Tibet.

From about 1894, the residence of the Maharaja (his title is now the Chogyal) has been at Gangtok which geographically and as regards communications with the rest of the world has proved to be a more central location. The administrative offices which comprise those of the Principal Administrative Officer, the Chief Secretary, and the

⁹Chumbi is near Yatung in Tibet.

various departmental heads are located here as is also the residence of the Indian political representative, the Political Officer as he is addressed by this title even today.

The capital at Gangtok is a picturesque town with a population of some 15,000 inhabitants. It is so located that it sprawls alongside the southern tip of one of the many disjointed spurs of the Chola Range of the mountains. On two prominent hilltops, not far distant from each other, stands the Chogyal's Palace and the residence of the Indian representative. Some 200 or 300 feet below, sloping down the hillside are the bazars and the city dwellings. The main highway passes through this living area, leading northward, and here is the residential section of private built homes. Also, from the highway the road zigzags climbing steeply upward to the bazars. If one descends 500 feet and follows the road about two miles distance one comes upon the newly built cantonment.

Sunday is the weekly market day and the bazars like a fair hum with activity. Farm produce from the neighbouring villages is brought to Gangtok, by crowds of colourfully dressed men and women, each wearing traditional clothing and adorned with earrings, necklaces and amulets. After the business of buying and selling is over which usually lasts till the early afternoon the village folk depart. During the week the small permanent shops in the bazars and side streets sell the many articles of daily use mostly of Indian make.

The paved highway continues to Rangpo, a town almost equal in population to Gangtok, which skirts the borders of Sikkim and North Bengal. Gangtok, the capital, is at a distance of 26 miles from this town. Beyond Gangtok, the highway continues a further 63 miles to Chungthang leading to Lachen and Lachung in a northerly direction. Eastward another branch of the highway winds to Karponang, Changu and Nathu-la, a distance of 32 miles. Nathu-la, the pass at an altitude of 14,700 feet is the main gateway to the Chumbi valley of Tibet. Across it, but for a short gap, the road continues to Yatung, Gyantse and finally to Lhasa in Tibet.

Gangtok is situated at an altitude of 5,500 feet and has a healthy, bracing climate throughout the year except for a three or four months' spell of the monsoon from June to September. The lowest winter temperature never drops below freezing and the highest temperature in the summer months seldom exceeds 75° degrees Fahrenheit. The rainfall, by comparison with some of the adjoining areas, is heavy: about 140 inches in a year. The winter months starting from November through February are indeed delightfully pleasant, bright yet cold, dry and invigorating.

With such a varied climate Gangtok has its richness of flora; vegetation that is really unique and indescribable. There are not only flowering trees and shrubs, rhododendrons, magnolias, acacias, bamboo but an unusual variety of tree ferns. Several hundred different types

of wild orchids bloom in the countryside and the sanctuaries and other wild flowers are to be found throughout the year, species of both the tropical and the temperate zones. Any botanist would enjoy the challenge since many plant varieties have never been identified or named.

The Palace and the complex of the Secretariat buildings including the High Court as well are constructed in a traditional Sikkimese style of architecture. There is also the Institute of Tibetology, a library of Tibetan manuscripts and a museum and research centre for Tibetan studies. The Cottage Industries Institute sponsored by the Gyalmo encourages the teaching and making of the traditional arts and crafts. There is also an emporium where one can buy the colourfully woven handloom rugs and the artistic wood carvings and ceramics. In addition to an agricultural and dairy farm there is also a paper making workshop which uses the residue of bamboo pulp, producing fine and durable paper for many uses. There are four high schools, one of which is run on public school lines, and several primary educational institutions; also a hospital, a clinic and several dispensaries.

Below Gangtok, a drop of about 4,000 feet, the river Rongnek flows northwards through an impressive valley with its terraced and cultivated gardens. It is one of the many tributaries of the Teesta. Across this valley on a clear day there is visible nature's most impressive sight—the range of snow-capped Himalayan peaks: the Gnarseng, the Kabru, and the towering Kangchenjunga with its elevation of 28,168 feet followed by the Simvo and the Siniolchu. Nature's beauty in and around Gangtok is awe inspiring.

Chapter II

Early History

TRADITION tells one how the three lamas of the nyingma-pa or red hat sect of Buddhism eventually after many wanderings met at the village of Yoksam in Sikkim under the shadow of Kangchenjunga. From here they sent for the ancestor of the Rajas of Sikkim by the name of Phuntshog (or Pencho) Namgyal, an influential Bhutia then residing at Gangtok. This Phuntshog Namgyal, it is said, was himself descended from Raja Indrabodhi, who was at one time ruler of what is today called Himachal Pradesh in northern India. In this dynastic tradition line there is also mention of a Tibetan hero, Khye-bum-sar.

Phuntshog Namgyal was born in 1604 and was consecrated with the title Chogyal (Dharma Raja) in 1642 and in time came to be known as the Denjong Gyalpo. (He spent his years conquering or winning over the various chieftains, such as the leaders of minor clans, who had set themselves up throughout the land.) He ruled over a wide-spread area many times the size of Sikkim of today. His authority extended in the north to Thang-la, beyond Phari in Tibet, towards the east to Tagong-la, near Paro in Bhutan and to the south to Titalia, near the borders of Bihar and Bengal in India. It comprised also to the west, the region of the Timar Chorten, on the banks of the Timar

river in Nepal. He then proceeded to establish a central administration, dividing the area into 12 dzongs (districts), each under a Lepcha Dzungpon (governor). He had a council of 12 ministers. Phuntshog Namgyal chose Yoksam as his capital.

This Ruler had an only son named Tensung Namgyal who was born in 1644 and who succeeded him about 1670. Tensung Namgyal moved the capital to Rabdentse. Tensung was married three times: His first wife was a Tibetan named Numbe Ongmu by whom he had a daughter, Pende Ongmu who was destined to play an important but disastrous role in the history of Sikkim. His second wife was a Sikkimese, Debasam-serpa who bore him a son, Chakdor; and his third marriage was to the daughter of a Limbu Raja. From this union with the Limbuni princess he had two children, a son, Shalngo-Guru, and a daughter, Pende Tshering Gyemu. His reign could be called a marital one but otherwise uneventful.

Chokdor Namgyal, the son of Tensung, whose mother was Sikkimese was born in 1686. He was a youth of 14 when he succeeded his father as ruler about 1700. Trouble arose between him and his eldest sister, Pende Ongmu, who assumed she was entitled to the accession of the throne. She thereupon engaged and allowed a Bhutanese force to invade Sikkim so as to help her evict her brother. Yugthing Teshe, a loyal councillor, came to the rescue of the Ruler, Chakdor, and took him to Lhasa trekking via Elam and Walong, which was then a part of western Sikkim but is today in eastern Nepal. In Lhasa the young Chakdor distinguished himself in the study of Buddhist teachings and Tibetan writings. He eventually became the favoured and official astrologer to the sixth Dalai Lama. For these services the Dalai Lama rewarded him with landed estates in central Tibet; which in turn were inherited by his successors and continued to be theirs to the end of the 18th century. Tibet re-acquired these estates during the time of Tsugphud Namgyal's minority rule when with the war between Nepal and Tibet a period of confusion prevailed.

However, in the meantime, the Bhutanese forces were successful in their invasion and captured the Palace in Rabdentse which was held by them for eight years. Upon the death of the sixth Dalai Lama about 1707 Chakdor Namgyal was prompted to return to Sikkim, accompanied by a Tibetan Lama named Jigme Pao. When he returned the Bhutanese forces withdrew and evacuated Sikkim west of the Teesta but still maintained their position at Fort Dumsong. This was a permanent loss to Sikkim in that it was never regained.

The bitter tension between the brother and sister continued and came to a crisis when Chakdor was murdered during a visit to the Ralang hot springs about the year 1717. A Tibetan physician overzealously allowed him to bleed to death by opening a main artery. Soldiers who supported the Raja were sent to Namchi, the doctor executed, and Pende Ongmu, the sister, strangled with a silken scarf and her corpse

was burnt. The Tibetan Lama Jigme Pao became the Regent for a while.

Chakdor Namgyal, the murdered Raja, was married to a Tibetan. She bore him a son in 1707 named Gyurmed. Gyurmed also married a Tibetan, the daughter of an abbot from Mingdoling. The story is told that she was so unattractive looking that he left her and retired to the De-chhen-ling monastery to be alone. Further dissensions within the country led to the loss of Limbuana which chose disassociation from Sikkim's rule and later annexed itself to Nepal. Gyurmed, the restless Ruler, went his own way disguised as a religious mendicant. He left on a pilgrimage to Tibet, and eventually returned to Sikkim but remained eccentric in his behaviour. For instance, he refused to take a second wife, his first wife having fled in the meantime to Tibet. This stubborn celibacy was of great concern to the court and to his subjects since there was no direct heir to the throne.

In 1734 Raja Gyurmed was taken seriously ill, and upon being asked on his death bed to name his heir gave the name of a nun in Sangna-Cholling stating that she was carrying his child who, when born, was named Namgyal Penchoo (or Phuntshog). This was realised in 1733, but it paved the way for trouble for Sikkim. One of the Dzungpons (governors) who were chosen traditionally from the Kazi families, Chandzod Tamding, rebelled and refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the nun's offspring. He appointed himself the Raja. Tamding ruled for a few years; but finally the Lepchas, under the leadership of Chandzod Karwang, a loyal supporter of Gyurmed, rose in favour of the nun's child Phuntshog, and forced Tamding the self-appointed Raja to flee to Lhasa to appeal to the Tibetans for aid in re-instating himself as the Ruler.

The Tibetans sent their emissary, a Rabden Sharpa, to make an enquiry into the dispute between Phuntshog and Tamding. He arrived in Sikkim and as the story goes established himself as the Regent for several years. However, he finally returned to Tibet after declaring himself in favour of Phuntshog and seeing him formally seated on the throne as the Raja and rightful heir.

During Namgyal Phuntshog's rule a number of other polemic developments took place. The Deb Raja of Bhutan planned an invasion of Sikkim in conspiracy with the Mangars who inhabited the south-eastern part of the country. The invasion did not succeed, yet the Mangar allegiance to Sikkim was lost. About 1752, an uprising by the Tsongs was in progress but the upheaval was suppressed by Chandzod Karwang. Then an uprising of the Gurkhas posed a new threat when Raja Prithivinarayan Shah of Nepal for a while undertook to support rebellious elements in Sikkim. Bhutanese forces invaded Sikkim a second time, but after negotiations at Rhenock in eastern Sikkim withdrew to the present boundaries. A treaty with Nepal was also concluded in 1775, establishing by mutual consent the Nepal-Sikkim

boundary line at Sango chu, Sangdi dzong, Malliayang and Lha chu. This treaty was not adhered to and was broken by the Gurkhas, who occupied Elam and Topzong in western Sikkim and proceeded to advance further into that region.

Namgyal Phuntshog married thrice. His third wife, a daughter of Deba Shamshed Khiti Phukpa, bore him about 1769 a son who was named Tenzing Namgyal. Prince Tenzing succeeded his father to the throne in 1780. He married a daughter of Changzod Karwang, the loyal Lepcha leader. Her name was Anyo Gyelyum. Their son, Tsugphud Namgyal was born in 1785. The intermittent wars first with the Gurkhas and then with the Bhutanese did not cease. Chandzod Karwang's son, Chandzod Chothup, had in these years acquired the skill of a competent military leader, and with his colleague Deba Takarpo, they combined to drive the Gurkhas from Elam. The Sikkimese forces actually penetrated as far as Chainpore in Nepal. But, then their luck turned and they were defeated in battle near Bilungjong about 1787 when Deba Takarpo was killed and Chandzod Chothup forced to withdraw.

Further active hostilities were discontinued for a while but the Sikkimese forces were lulled into a sense of false security. Suddenly in 1788-89 the Gurkha general Jahar Singh crossed with his army into Sikkim and with alacrity captured the capital Rabdentse. The Raja Tenzing, the Rani and their son fled from Rabdentse to Lhasa in Tibet in order to obtain help. In the meanwhile Chandzod Chothup and his loyal followers succeeded in dispersing and throwing back the Gurkha invaders. Raja Tenzing died in Lhasa in 1793 and the Tibetan government sent his young son, Tsugphud Namgyal that same year back to Sikkim. Tsugphud Namgyal returned to Rabdentse, the capital.