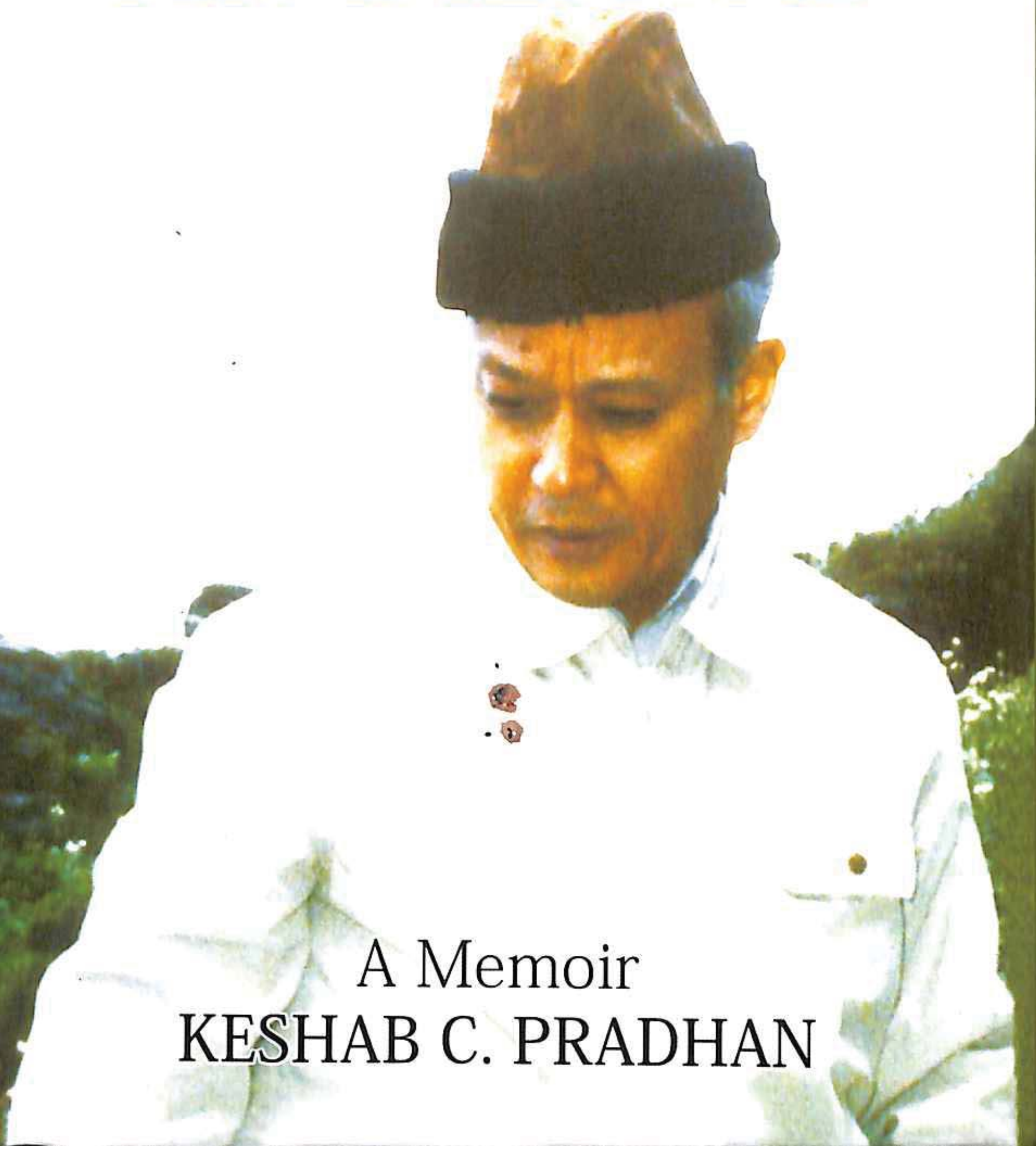


The Life and Times  
of a Plantsman in the  
**SIKKIM  
HIMALAYAS**



A Memoir  
**KESHAB C. PRADHAN**

It is a fascinating tale of a passionate plants man born and raised in the Indian state of Sikkim - a land exceedingly rich in natural resources. The farsightedness of the royal and aristocratic families of the erstwhile kingdom in the conservation of its rich legacy is told with passion. The author takes you on his personal journey of getting to know, understand, preserve and ultimately project Sikkim's natural heritage internationally whether it be orchids, rhododendrons, primulas or other alpine plants. His consideration and love of fellow plantsmen and fellow foresters who followed him during his long tenure in the Forest Service is told with compassion and love. The book for the first time has brought to light the contribution of the illustrious and extensive Pradhan family to the development of the region and their inter - relationships. It is book for everyone interested in plants - laymen, experts, explorers, foresters, floriculturists, nurserymen and the students of history, politicians, diplomats and administrators who would like to know Sikkim - this little Shangri-La better. Filled with many untold stories from a Sikkimese perspective, it is a historical record of an important time in Sikkim's history.



Keshab C. Pradhan (b.1935), former Chief Secretary and Advisor to the Government of Sikkim is the state's most versatile expert on forest resources. A post graduate from Yale University, USA. He was a judge at the prestigious first Japan Grand Prix International Orchid Festival '91 at Tokyo. Currently he is the President of Sikkim Nature Conservation Foundation and also Chairman, Sikkim Development Foundation. He was awarded the American Rhododendron Society's highest award – the ARS Gold Medal followed by the coveted Pioneer Achievement Award for the year 2003 & 2005, "in recognition of his leadership and tireless dedication to the advocacy, conservation, and protection of the unique rhododendron and other alpine floral legacy in India's eastern Himalayan State of Sikkim". He was at helm of affairs during the historic time in 1975 when Sikkim, ruled by the Namgyal dynasty for 333 years, became a constituent unit of the republic of India. Orchid hybridization and the development of horticulture is his current passion.

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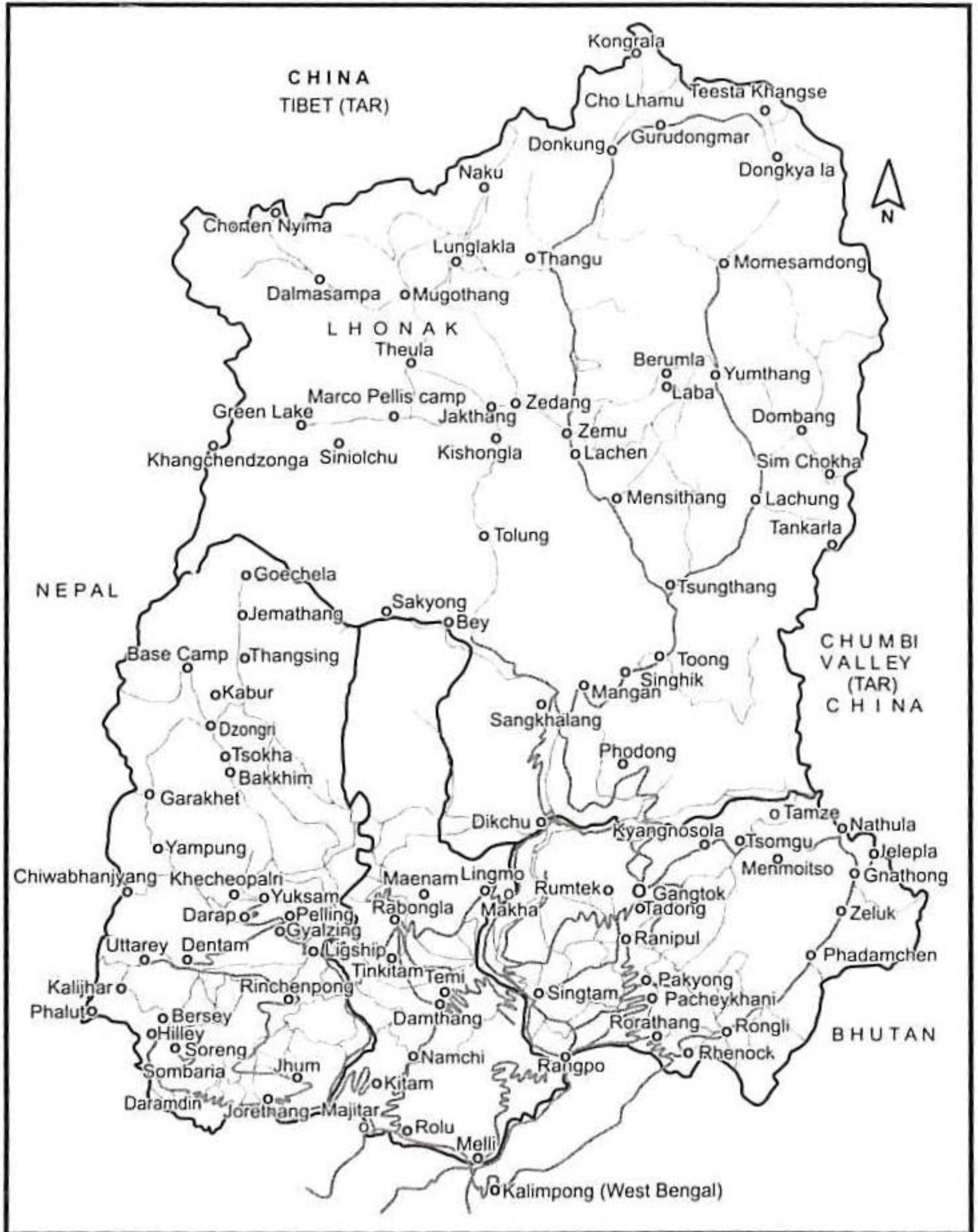
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# MAP OF SIKKIM



Map is not to scale.  
Names of places indicated merely to facilitate the readers.

-  Main Road
-  Tracks or Trails
-  District Boundaries

# Acknowledgements

The publication of this book took longer than expected - the chief reason being the exasperation of editors in Delhi and Chennai with the jumble of botany, politics and the tongue twisting names of people and places. This was further worsened by my chaotic thoughts going back and forth between the past and the present. One of the editors wrote, "This has been the most challenging book I've done in more than 11 yrs of professional editing, basically because of there being more than a thousand names, apart from inconsistency in L. (Latin) names, initial caps or not, rom. or itl." Sorting out masses of colour slides, scanning and cleaning mildewed ones was another tiresome exercise. And then, there were very few people who really showed an interest when I broached the subject. They advised me not to go into any controversies at the fag end of my life. It took me quite awhile to pick up the courage to go ahead with the attempts that I had already made.

On the brighter side, there were friends and well wishers who advised me to put down my long years of experience in words. Some of the persons that stand out are Sonam Tenzing, Sonam Wangdi, P.T. Gyamtso, M.C.Mathur, Naren Pradhan and Wangchuk Barfungpa.

When Sonam Tenzing was the Chief Secretary of the State he showed me the highest respect and always embarrassed me by introducing me to all as "The Gem of Sikkim". Whenever I visited Tashiling (Secretariat), which of course was very rare, he made it a point to send someone from Protocol Cell to receive me at the entrance and escorted me back to my car. These are small



gestures, but as one ages, such recollections make a deep imprint in one's memories. His untimely death brought an end to our many interesting conversations.

Sonam Wangdi, an intellectual and voracious reader, possessing one of the finest collection of records and books on Sikkim and former Chief Secretary and alumnus of the London School of Economics, is another who insisted I write. When I expressed my lack of expression in good English he was the first to tell me that there were many script writers who would do the job.

Another friend who always insisted that I leave my memoirs for posterity was P.T.Gyamtso, ex-MP and a bureaucrat cum sportsman. We crossed paths in the administration when he was the most successful Secretary IPR that I know of, handling all difficult media persons both at home and Delhi with ease. When I wanted to hang up my boots while still the Chief Secretary two years ahead of superannuation, he was the first person to come and meet me and ask me to reconsider.

Outspoken M.C.Mathur I have known since the days we were posted at Temi - I as a DFO and he as Principal, Teachers' Training Institute. Although a non-Sikkimese, his love and knowledge of Sikkim far surpasses that of most Sikkimese. In his many years of service, he has traversed the nooks and corners of the state on foot. Once retired, we met on several occasions over pegs of scotch at Naren and Om's elegant drawing room at Church Road, Gangtok. Both Mathur and ace architect Naren insisted that I must write, having seen the current history of Sikkim in its totality.

Amiable and highly cultured Wangchuk Barfungpa, a scion of the Lepcha nobility dating back to early 1600 AD and the foremost archivist in Sikkim with a wealth of historical records, was another family friend always pestering me to put my long years of experience in writing.

I was also inspired by Sunanda K. Datta-Ray. Impressed with the exhaustive details in his book on Sikkim, I asked for his permission to use some of the excerpts from his books as, besides the Chogyal, he was the only person privy to the several 'letters of exchange'. He allowed me to use whatever I liked with due acknowledgement.



He is a remarkable writer who never fails to place the erstwhile Kingdom of Sikkim in the context of the international political scenario.

Again, it was the large number of Pradhan families engaged in horticultural trade who insisted that I must record in writing the pioneering works of their fathers and grand fathers who were all plants men in their own rights. So if the book is painted 'pink' with Pradhans all over, it is because a track record of a hundred years in the field of horti-floriculture in the region is hard to ignore. Whether the attempt I have made will come up to their expectations and whether it will leave any mark in Sikkimese society is a question that comes to my mind as I wrap it up. Nevertheless I am thankful for their encouragement and support.

I am thankful to Joshua (Bijoy) Pradhan for taking the trouble of scanning, cleaning and digitalizing the slides some of which were 60 years old and totally mildewed but too precious to ignore.

My thanks are also due to Tarchem Tamang for having spent several hours on many Sundays formatting the pictures and texts.

Lastly, I am grateful to my wife Shanti who left me alone when I was engrossed in my writing. She probably knew what I was up to although I never told her!

None of these individuals, of course, are responsible for the conclusions herein. In acknowledging the debt I owe to all those mentioned above, I naturally accept full responsibility for my opinions and errors, if any.

Lastly I commend the revolution in information technology - the computers and internet which have made the whole process of putting down thoughts and retrieving information much faster and easier.

Keshab C. Pradhan, 2008



# Glossary of Terms.

ACF	Assistant Conservator of Forest
Aja	Grand father/uncle (Nepali)
Aji	Grand mother/aunt (Nepali)
AO	Agriculture Officer
APOC	Asia Pacific Orchid Conference
ARS	American Rhododendron Society
ARGS	American Rock Garden Society
Babu/babu	Father (Nepali) or fatherly figure or clerk in an office
Bhai	Younger brother (Nepali)
Bhauju	elder sister-in-law (Nepali)
CCF	Chief Conservator of Forests
Chu	River
C.F.	Conservator of Forests
Chogyal	King (Tibetan)
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (of wild flora and fauna).
CM	Chief Minister
Daju	elder brother (Nepali)
Didi	elder sister
DC	Development Commissioner
Dewan	Chief Administrator (Urdu)
DFE	Director of Forestry Education
D.F.O. /DFO	Divisional Forest Officer
Durbar	Court, government of a princely state, assembly of notables.
EC	Executive Councillor

GLOSSARY OF TERMS.

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F.G./FG	Forest Guard
FO	Forest Officer
Fr.	Forester
ES	Establishment Secretary
GBH	Girth Breast Height (in tree measurement)
GOI	Government of India
GOS	Government of Sikkim
Guruama	Lady Teacher (Nepali)
Gurubabu	Male Teacher (Nepali)
Gurus	Teachers, Experts
Gyalmo	Queen (Tibetan)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product (an economic jargon)
HMT	Hindusthan Machine Tools
HP	Himachal Pradesh
IFC	Indian Forest College
IPR	Information and Public Relation
Kazi	Gentries among the Bhutias of Sikkim (Urdu)
Lepcha	Indigenous people of Sikkim
Mali	Gardener
Mandal	Headman of a Village (Nepali)
Mit	Friendship by blood brotherhood (Nepali)
Mit-Ama	Mother by blood-brotherhood (Nepali)
Mit-Buwa	Father by blood-brotherhood (Nepali)
PM	Prime Minister
PCCF	Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
Rai Bahadur	British Indian title; higher rank.
RF	Reserve Forests
R.O.	Range Officer
Rai Saheb	British Indian title; lower rank.
RHS	The Royal Horticultural Society (UK)
SDO	Sub Divisional Officer (Engineer)
SF	Sikkim Development Foundation, an NGO.
SKM	Denotes 'Sikkim' for vehicle number plates.
SITCO	Sikkim Time Corporation
TAR	Tibetan Autonomous Region (of China)
Tso	Lake
WOC	World Orchid Conference



# Prologue

Though I was born in an illustrious Pradhan family of Sikkim, a clan of landlords living an enviable lifestyle and holding sway over the villagers around, my father, Rai Saheb Bhim Bahadur Pradhan, insisted that we lead an elegant but simple life. He had done his training in forestry from the Imperial Forest College in Dehradun way back in 1916 followed by training in horticulture at the Shillong Horticulture Centre. He headed the Sikkim forest department as the State's Forest Manager at the early age of 26. As a government employee his salary was meager and he had a large extended family to attend to.

My mother, Dewki Devi, who was from Shillong (then in Assam, now capital of the state of Meghalaya) got married at the rather early age of 16. Deprived of her parents at a young age, she was looked after by her grandfather, Capt. Kaloo Thapa, a well-decorated and eminent officer in the British Gurkha regiment. The Newars (of which Pradhan is a clan) were considered a rather cowardly race by the British and were not accepted in the army. So he changed his name to Thapa (a clan of a warrior race, the Magars). My mother and her brother, Gopal, were expert swimmers, a skill that no one in the family has inherited, much to our dismay. The story goes that he was ill-treated by his stepbrother's wife as a child, and had to catch a fish every day to earn his meals at home. The family was in Dacca then.

While our relatives sent their children to the best of public schools, my father, having lost his father, Chandrabir, while still a child of just 10, had to depend heavily on his eldest brother, Dal Bahadur. Through sheer luck, the other three brothers (the second was Lal Bahadur; the third Bhawani Prasad, and the fourth, my father Bhim Bahadur) could join the police, health and forest services respectively. The first two passed away when they were just around



35 years. Bhawani Prasad's eight children were young, and since my father was the only one government servant of prominence, the responsibility of taking care of them, along with the eight of us, fell upon my parents.

My father was meticulous in his work and his integrity was impeccable. That put him in good stead with all the British political officers -- the people who mattered at that time -- who had immense liking for him. He was the only person, I suppose, who religiously paid his radio license of Rs. 2 per year to the Department of Post and Telegraphs, a rule made when radio was first introduced.

I joined a school that everyone with modest means did. Attending classes barefoot at times, in simple but practical clothes, did not bother me. But I was particular that they were washed and ironed well. School uniforms were not in vogue. The best outfit I had was a bright green blazer with brass buttons from Whiteway Laidlaw-the Harrod's of yesteryear in Calcutta- when I was in class six. Though temperamentally I was quite different from my classmates, I did exceedingly well, topping the class all through my school years. I was engrossed in unconventional activities like making pen friends, collecting stamps, making scrap books of major events from the newspapers, entering competitions of the *Benji League* for children in the Sunday Statesman, and so busy experimenting with plant propagation that I had few friends. I wasn't close to any of my brothers and sisters either. I had a mind of my own, was shy and studious, and everybody left me alone.

College days at North Point, in Darjeeling, were equally lonely, mainly due to my lack of eloquence in English. But Presidency in Calcutta was different. My friends' lifestyles were frugal, but they were all brilliant and very studious. I was the only one owning a coat and a tie, possessions that were frequently borrowed for photographs by my hostel pals. It was Presidency that injected vigour into me and changed my outlook on life. Then on, life looked up. I was quite popular at the Indian Forest College, not by way of studies, as we had brilliant fellows like Sudhakar, Madan Gopal and Kesharman, but because of my acquaintances outside the forestry circle and way of doing things. Again, due to my avid interest in plants and flowers I started socializing with the elite of Dehradun and Mussoorie while still an ordinary probationer officer. In service later on, I had a certain advantage, being the son of the previous head of the Forest Department, a fact that did not escape notice or envy in the small circle of Gangtok.



At that formative stage of my career, I found a life partner in Shanti, an intelligent and charming girl with the correct background and etiquette well suited for the life that was in store for me. She brought me out of my shell and became a binding factor in our rather large extended family.

The Gyalmo, whose ideas and vision clicked with ours, appeared on the Sikkim scene. There was no going back thereafter. Two years at Yale and associations with the high and mighty, from DuPont's scions to Weyerhaeuser's, gave me -- rather us -- the finishing touches. Obstacles came our way, but they provided added impetus to pursue our goal with even greater zest. Throughout my 35 long years of service, I carried out the jobs thrown upon me with zeal. My actions were never questioned, and I did what I felt was correct. I carried along those who believed in my line of thinking, and just ignored those who were lukewarm or against me. I did everything in life that I wanted to with Sikkim's interest and image uppermost in my mind.

Post-retirement, I plunged into gardening while many of my colleagues couldn't quite adjust to a retired life. Through my network of international contacts, I acquired several plants suited to the Sikkim climate, and carried out experimentation wildly. It was a new lease of life. Time simply flew, and the recognition that poured in, though late in life, was gratifying. I consider my years in retirement as important and fruitful as the long years in service, besides being more enjoyable, with boundless freedom.

I am grateful to God, my parents, J.S. Lall, and, above all, the Chogyal and the Gyalmo, who made us what we are today. If I failed to be of help to the latter in their bad days, it was not because I had no allegiance to them. It was because times had changed, the world had changed, people's perceptions had changed, and the circumstances that befell us were beyond the power of little Sikkim to fend off. But the Sikkim of my dreams and my love and affection towards the Chogyal and the Gyalmo are deep in my heart, and will continue to remain so.

So come along with me on my journey to the fabulous world of plants -- the legacy for which Sikkim will be remembered The World Over-- and plants-people, a breed of their own, not forgetting the intrigues and might of superpowers at play in this little Shangri-La: the Shangri-La that we glorified but lost in the political melee.



# Introduction

The morning of Friday, March 24, 2006 was rather dull. I got up late, in no mood to plunge into the usual garden chores. The funeral of Man Bahadur Pradhan, the doyen of Indian nurserymen the previous day was hanging heavily over me. Of his lifespan of 93 years, a good two-third was devoted to all aspects of garden plants. Be they seeds, plantlets, bulbs or rhizomes, they were all dear to him. As I stood by his funeral pyre on the banks of the River Teesta, I deeply felt a wealth of knowledge - sadly unrecorded - floating away along with his ashes in the river. This gave me the idea that a memoir of my own work in Sikkim should be left behind for posterity. Hence, this book...

I was born seven and a half decades ago in a large family of eight. Ours was a really happy family residing then in an official cottage called 'Happy Valley', now named 'Development Area'. It was tucked away in a far corner of Gangtok surrounded by vast lands with rivulets nearby. It had all the microclimate we could think of, including a spring that we depended upon for our daily drinking water needs. We tended to a host of exotic plants as well as vegetables, the latter in enough quantity to feed the girls at the adjoining Paljor Namgyal School hostel, a Scottish mission school for girls. All my sisters had their schooling there, and I too had my primary education at the same school. My father headed the forest department as Forest Manager and was always on tour in the interiors.

My mother was a strict disciplinarian and guardian to all the womenfolk in that small township of around 100 families. She was



illiterate but had common sense of a high order. She always stocked the heirloom seeds of vegetables for our own garden besides doling them out liberally to others. Everybody knew everyone in that small community.

I used to tag along with my father on some of his routine garden inspections. They would start sharp at 9 in the morning after brunch, as was the practice then. It was the duty of the Brahmin cook (the *bhansey*) to prepare the main meal of rice, dal and curry, supplemented by salads and other vegetables from the garden provided by Mom and her helpers. The first inspection was at the Residency, the residence of the British Political Officer, followed by the Ridge Park and the Palace. The entourage always had half a dozen forest officials to take down notes. The inspection rounds lasted till 11 a.m. and I would be escorted back home by a forest guard, or at times had the privilege of riding back on my father's pony, which was half blind, but slow and steady.

We maintained a large garden. It had many exotic plants, bulbous, flowering, and ornamental. The work of tending, fertilizing and watering them was a routine affair, well distributed among the children. Saturday was strictly house-cleaning day, room to room, polishing one floor after another, under the strict supervision of my no-nonsense Mom. Tiffin at 4 p.m. daily was an important event as by then there was already a gap of six to seven hours after brunch. There would be not less than 10 to 12 persons present during tea-time. They were friends of my father and sisters besides the neighbours around. Dinner, rather the evening meal was usually around 8 p.m.



## Chapter One

# Our Garden

### 'Happy Valley' Our Home

Our garden had two huge trees of Himalayan cherry (*Prunus cerasoides*) on the eastern side of the compound. Besides beautiful blooms in autumn, they used to fruit profusely for us and the birds to enjoy. The one closer to the house had big, roundish, reddish-pink, delicious fruits. The other at the far corner had rather oblongish fruits, smaller, with less pulp, and we used to call it 'Chungthang cherry'. This variation within a species of plant, which I came to know about much later, is Mother Nature's way of facilitating continued survival of plant life and hence the buzz word '*biodiversity*'. Below it, there was a patch of around a hundred Sikkim lilies (*Lilium wallichianum*) with a sweet smell and trumpet-shaped white flowers nodding in the breeze every summer. There used to be many photographic sessions with us holding the flowers ever since my father acquired a Rolleiflex camera, exchanged with a German explorer, Ernst Schafer for a tall, seven-tiered brass lamp. Hee-Gyathang in Dzongu in north Sikkim is the lily's real habitat. <sup>1.2</sup>

There were two big, white azalea bushes at either end of a long bed of gerberas. The border at the northern end was planted with rows of red rhododendron (*Rhododendron arboreum*), which I don't think ever flowered. Rambling roses introduced by Col. F.M. Bailey and obtained from the Residency were all around, either as pergolas over the stone or yellow thornless banksias on the wall.

The house had initially been a veterinary hospital, and there was a wall on three sides of the house with neatly chiselled stones. The crevices were filled with purplish achimenes, mostly *A. mexicana*

(which surprisingly still abound). At the base of the wall there was a long row of ground orchid, *Calanthe whiteana*, named after J.C. White, the first British Political Officer in Sikkim. The orchid had spikes of yellow flowers during the summer, and was said to have been brought from Chungthang.<sup>3</sup>

Buddleia, when in full bloom used to be quite a sight with a pleasant perfume and butterflies hovering around. Unlike the shaggy plants we now have, those were special: hardy, with profuse, upright flowers. The fruit tree I remember most was a grafted plum. It had two huge branches with two different types of fruits. We later got a swing fixed on a branch.

There were rows of polyanthus roses leading from the gate to the main entrance, a distance of a good hundred feet. The gate itself was wooden, on which we used to hang and swing much to the annoyance of our mother. The entrance had two wooden racks with zonale geraniums flowering around the year. On the left side of the porch there was a well-established Chinese creeper, *Trachelospermum jasminoides* with fragrant white flowers, the plant rambling up to the roof of the porch. The *Asparagus plumosus* with beautiful feathery foliage was very popular to go with flowers for buttonholes. There were a few magnificent Brazilian plants (*Tibouchina semidecandra*) with velvety leaves and brilliant, satiny, violet-purple flowers in panicles. We loved to eat the berries to stain our tongues. Two erect, domed shrubs of *Thuja orientalis*, a good 5 metres tall with foliage in vertical plates were interesting and much used in floral decorations. There were rows of herbaceous, perennial, shell-pink, flowered anemones hugging the wall crevices with prolific blooming in late summer and autumn. Large, white, trumpeted, flowering datura (*Datura suaveolens*) and aromatic artemisia (*Artemisia vulgaris*) grew wild along the rivulets. Their leaves, mixed in equal proportions were used in polishing wooden floors as both plants contained aromatic oils that had antibacterial and light insecticidal properties. It was a practice adopted by all of us in later life.

The wild grove of *Leucosceptum canum* (locally known as *ghurpis*) along the rivulets used to attract many birds, especially *meghma*, the whiskered yuhina (*Yuhina flavicollis*). I remember we



would hang around in the grove with catapults to shoot out baked mud balls at them. Wild bananas were in abundance; the leaves were used liberally in all functions, especially religious occasions, and the pith used to make a Manipuri dish, *erimba*, mixed with dried fish. It was my mother's specialty, one that she had inherited from her parents' home in Shillong in the northeast. There was a big, thorny shrub of *Elaeagnus umbellata* with silvery white leaves glistening on their undersides. Creamy white flowers covered the branches in May, followed by round, red berries that we relished.

There were several bulbous plants: gladiolus, crinum, tiger lily, amaryllis and arum lily, among others. We also had a large bed of asparagus, which used to provide substantial shoots to be fried with egg batter. Mom used to put salt and cowdung manure in the asparagus bed. Years later, while we were staying with our friend, Arnold and Mary Cowmeadow in Michigan where Mary runs a stud farm, I saw Arnold growing asparagus literally on horse-dung manure which periodically gave them armfuls of plump, fine textured shoots with large tips. They were enough to feed the entire neighbourhood.

There was a beautiful grapefruit tree some distance away near the market at the residence of Mrs. Pestonji, wife of Pestonji Jamasji who was the Judicial Secretary in the early 1920s. It was a 'marsh seedless' variety. The fruiting used to be profuse and we could hardly see the leaves. In winter, it was my regular duty to fetch fruits for my father. I inherited my father's skills and could grapple with any grapefruit that came by. I still possess a grapefruit knife, stainless steel, well serrated with a curved tip to scoop out the segments. I paid quite a fortune for it at Harrods in London. I take care to hide it after use lest the helpers in the house try to hammer the tip to make it straight as I once noticed them do. They could not understand why the tip was bent.

We had about three or four cows. They were well looked after by the omnipresent Khawas, a man from a faraway village in Nepal. Manure or milk was not a problem. It was sad that after working for 20-odd years as part of the family, father had to fire him for bad behavior. This happened sometime in the mid-1950s. Some of his brothers hung around in Dzongu in north Sikkim, but we never



attempted to revive any contact.

The doob grass lawn was replaced with *kikuyu* (botanically called *Pennisetum clandestinum*): rather, the latter overran it. It was introduced from Kikuyu in Africa by Sir Basil Gould, Political Officer in the course of an ambitious experimental programme on fodder grass in the 1940s. It provided excellent fodder and was a good soil binder. In fact, in the early 1940s, it was mandatory for any government official on tour to engage a porter to carry a bagful of chopped *kikuyu* rhizomes and have them scattered throughout the countryside. Today you can come across this grass in the most unthinkable nooks and corners of the state. But as a lawn, it was a nuisance: not easy to mow, very soggy, and harbouring many leeches. As a soil binder in areas around 6000 feet (1800m) it proved to be a boon.

Since my brothers and I showed interest in plants, my father procured a collection of orchids suited for the Gangtok climate. They were all labelled and naturalized on a huge bottlebrush tree (*Melaleuca* sp) that bore whitish flowers in spring. The orchid roots seemed to relish anchoring on the spongy bark. We loved to chew the prickly light green leaves. Rattling off the Latin names was a daily affair. When I was 10, I could identify and reel out with ease, the names of all the orchids in our garden. The rather difficult Latin name of an orchid called *Eria convallarioides* and *Cirrhopetalum guttulatum* clearly enunciated by a Class 5 boy used to amuse guests in the house.

The plant that we used to dread at night was *amlisho* (*Thyssonolana accerifera*). We were told by our housemaids that the crushed marks at the centre of its long leaves were from witches' teeth, and that one should not be anywhere near it at night. Today, this versatile broom, which my father adored both as a soil binder and fodder, is a money-spinning crop in villages, the brooms finding their way into all the shipyards and households in Asian and Middle-Eastern countries. We had a tall magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) tree in front of our house. It used to have creamy-white, bowl-shaped fragrant flowers. We loved gathering the leathery leaves with rust-coloured felt underneath, and burning them for the noise they created in the fire. Once, when



the tree become too tall and the top crossed the rooftop, it was observed that things were not going too well in the house. I realized much later that in villages people do not allow the tree to cross the rooftop of any dwelling and resort to top-heading. So is the case with *Bignonia venusta*, a creeper rampant on rooftops with bunches of beautiful orange flowers. They are best planted along the hedges and allowed to creep up the trees.

<sup>1</sup> Note. Sikkim Himalayas also do have spring flowering cherry- a variant of *Prunus cerasoides* and botanically it is *Prunus carmesiana* (syn. *P.cerasoides* var. *rubra*). In early 1960s our lovable plant connoisseur Tse Ten Tashi coined it as *Prunus denzongensis* and our common friend Kees Sahin from Holland did distribute among various arboretums in Europe and they still hold it by this name. It was first observed by Sir Basil Gould, Political Officer and my father (Forest Manager Rai Saheb Bhim Bahadur) between Singhik and Toong in north Sikkim on 23rd February 1939. At my father's instance I got some scions in early 1960s and he got them grafted on autumn variety species (*Prunus cerasoides*) and raised some 50 plants. They were sent to various forest complexes in the State A few plants were also planted at GICI complex at Gangtok when Miss Basu was the Superintendent. A tree flushed to the wall, opposite Raj Bhawan lower entrance gate, could still be seen - poor tree struggling to survive being squeezed between the cement wall and the highway. It is the best form that I have ever seen- pendulous and flowering in bunches. Its real habitat is Denga Reserve Forests in north Sikkim opposite Mensithang and had occasion to see whole area a blazed with red -well mixed with poplar (*Populus ciliata*) during one of my visits. The fruits are so sweet and pulpy that the birds devour the moment they are ripe.

<sup>2</sup> Note: I happened to visit the area in the mid-1960s and was awe-stuck when I saw a whole hillside of around a thousand plants (Lilies) in full bloom in rather degraded land covered with imperata grass. The bulbs were boiled and eaten like potatoes by the local people and that worried me. My dreams of spreading the plant along the highway and across the river, wherever eyes could meet never materialized.

<sup>3</sup> Note: It - *Calanthe whiteana* - had been considered lost in its natural habitat till, taking a clue from my father's 1934 diary it was rediscovered at a place called Tsungthnag - Ship Gyer area by our knowledgeable orchidologist, Suddhizung Lucksom. He was specially assigned to hunt and rediscover it in the early 1990s after a gap of about 60 years. The plant population though is reported to be sparse and, the species as a whole, on the verge of extinction.