

# SIKKIM

## *A Short Political History*

LAL BAHADUR BASNET



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## Preface

Between the two most populous Asian countries, Communist China on the north and Democratic India on the south, lie the three Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, the last relics of feudal monarchy. Forming a buffer zone between the two giants, the three kingdoms are faced with a situation that at once poses a threat to their very existence and ensures the continuity of their anachronistic systems. Of the three, Nepal, with its Panchayat Democracy, buttressed by the ever-present threat of the Security Act, a powerful army, and an equally powerful police, has become a political hothouse; Bhutan, with its dark dungeons for the non-conformists, is perhaps the last Shangrila, a land closed alike to people and ideas from the outside world, despite its entry into the United Nations Organisation.

Hemmed in between Nepal and Bhutan lies the smallest of the three kingdoms, Sikkim. More advanced than either Nepal or Bhutan in many ways, not the least of which is the comparatively more liberal form of government that tolerates the existence of political parties, tiny Sikkim has her own cartload of contradictions. Being a 'Protectorate' of India, and therefore under the Indian defence system, Sikkim has a border with the Tibetan Region of China which often becomes uncomfortably 'live' to warrant its being flashed in the headlines of the world press.

Sikkim is a pseudo-democracy, the creation of the interplay of the "neo-imperialistic" policies pursued by the Government of India, the protecting power, and the vaulting ambitions of the ruling house, which, while posing as an enlightened monarchy had been successful in eroding whatever little of democracy was introduced in Sikkim in the first years of her contact with a

newly independent India. If the gains of the two parties had been satisfactory to them, the alliance would perhaps have continued indefinitely. But the ambitions of the ruling house took a shape that boded ill for the continued honeymoon of the two partners. It was only a matter of time before the essential conflict in their respective stands broke surface. The ruling house was eventually trapped between the resurgent wrath of the great majority of the people and the "special interests" of the Government of India.

The events in Sikkim following upon the independence of India provide a fascinating subject for study from many points of view. It is primarily this part of Sikkim's political history that has inspired the present work. There are few books written on Sikkim, and even these few suffer from the limitations imposed by the fact that either they are written by Indians, whose patriotism blurs their vision, or by other people whose objectivity has, more often than not, been seriously clouded by the lavish hospitality accorded them by the ruling house at the expense of the tax-payer.

The people of Sikkim, the ignored entity, has been utterly eclipsed, though both the ruling house and the Indian Government have always professed to be actuated by the interests of the masses in defending their respective stands. Thus far the Sikkimese people and its hopes and aspirations have been conveniently ignored. This book seeks to present the political history of Sikkim from the viewpoint of the masses.

The present book has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with the period antecedent to 15 August 1947, the day India won her independence from British rule. The second part deals with the interplay of political parties, the ruling house, and the Government of India, on the political stage of Sikkim, in the post-1947 period up to the end of May 1973.

15 June 1973  
Gangtok,  
SIKKIM

LAL BAHADUR BASNET

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**PART I**

**THE PAST**

**(.....to 15 August 1947)**



## CHAPTER I

# A Short Geographical Introduction

ON the map Sikkim appears as a narrow strip of territory, squeezed between Nepal on the west and Bhutan on the east. A tongue-shaped southward projection of Tibet, the Chumbi Valley, is driven like a wedge between Sikkim and Bhutan for more than half the length of Sikkim's eastern border. On the south lie the hill areas of Darjeeling District of West Bengal, India, and on the north lies the Tibet Region of China. Sikkim lies between  $27^{\circ}-5'$  and  $28^{\circ}-10'$  North Latitudes, and between  $88^{\circ}-4'$  and  $88^{\circ}-58'$  East Longitudes. It has an area of 2,818 square miles.

The truncated look that Sikkim wears on the map has been the result of pressures and conquests on the part of its neighbours, all of them, in the past. Sikkim, at one time, extended far to the west and included Limbuan (home of the Limbus), now in Nepal. Chumbi Valley and parts of Western Bhutan were then Sikkimese territory. Southward, Sikkim extended right up to Titaliya on the Bihar-Bengal border, and included the whole of Darjeeling District.

The whole of Sikkim is mountainous, with no flat land at all. The mountains of Sikkim shoot out of the vast snowy range on the south of the Tibetan plateau. A series of ranges proceeds in the general direction N-S from this snowy southern buttress of Tibet. These ranges are further cut into innumerable smaller ones, spreading in chaotic confusion in all directions. The Singlila Range forms the boundary between Sikkim and Nepal. On this range are Darjeeling, Phalut,

Sandakpu, and the famous peak of Kanchenjunga. Further to the east is the Chola Range. This range forms the eastern boundary of Sikkim with Tibet. The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet was fixed in 1890 by the Anglo-Chinese Convention, which laid down :—

“The boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain ranges 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 Gipmochi on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.”\*

The River Dichu forms the natural boundary between Sikkim and Bhutan. On the Chola Range are located numerous passes, including the Jelep-la pass and the famous Nathu-la Pass. Thus the north, east and west of Sikkim are highly mountainous. There are many lofty peaks, eternally under snow, and the loftiest of them all is Kanchenjunga (28,146'), the third highest peak in the world.

The Tista river with its tributaries is an important feature of Sikkim's geography. It flows through the whole length of the country, swelling with the water brought down by numerous mountain streams on the way, to debouch into the plains of India. Rungeet is the other important river.

Lying on the direct path of the south-west monsoon, Sikkim receives abundant rainfall. Owing to its topography, Sikkim has a wide range of climatic zones even for its small size. While *keeping this in mind*, Sikkim can be said to have a temperate climate.

Three distinct peoples constitute the population of Sikkim. The Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Sikkim. Next come the Bhutiyas, and lastly the Gorkhas or Nepalese.

Today the Nepalese are the most numerous and form roughly 75% of the total population of 20,30,95. The Lepchas and Bhutiyas are roughly 13% and 12% of the population. The very name Sikkim is the gift of the Nepalese people. The

\*See page 189 for full text of the Treaty.

Lepchas used to call their land Neliang (literally the country of caverns that gave them shelter). This was later supplanted by Ren-jong or Denzong (valley of rice). (In those distant days, when the Lepchas of Denzong and the Limbus of eastern Nepal moved freely into each other's territories—for, to all intents and purposes, these two lands formed one territory—a Limbu girl was married to a Lepcha chief.) When the bride entered her husband's house, she exclaimed in her own tongue "Su Him", new house. This word not only got currency but, with the passage of time, was corrupted into Sukhim, which was later anglicized into Sikkim.

An overwhelming majority of the population of Sikkim gets its living from the cultivation of the soil. Animal husbandry, pig-raising, and poultry form an adjunct to the practice of agriculture. The main products are paddy, maize, wheat, barley, millets, buckwheat, cardamom, potatoes, apples and oranges.

Sikkim is poor in mineral resources. Some copper is mined at Rangpo. Small quantities of zinc, lead, and graphite also occur.

Mahayana Buddhism, being the religion of the ruling family, enjoys a privileged position. Buddhist monasteries are given aid from the general revenue. The Bhutiyas are all Buddhists. A large number of Lepchas is also Buddhist, the rest being divided between spirit-worshippers and Christians. The Nepalese, barring a small Christian minority, are Hindus. The Nepali language is the lingua franca of Sikkim. The official language is English. Sikkim has few towns, the largest town, Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, has a population of 10,000. All other towns, such as they are, have populations below 5,000. Very few Sikkimese are in business. All trade and business is concentrated in the hands of Indian businessmen.

Before development works started in Sikkim, means of transport and communication, as everything else, were in a very poor condition. But now Sikkim has a nice net-work of roads and a tolerably good system of transportation. Beginning from 1954, Sikkim received Rs. 20·37 crores (dollars 27·16

million) aid from India for three plans ending in 1971.\* While the revenue of Sikkim Government in 1947 was only Rs. 60,000 (dollars 8,000), it has now gone up to Rs. 40 million (dollars 5.33 million). Even after making due allowance for the change in price index, the difference remains imposingly substantial.

Forests constitute about 1/3rd of the total area of Sikkim. In the sub-tropical zone, which extends up to 5,000' several varieties of bamboo, ferns, tree ferns, pandanus, and sal are found. In the temperate zone and in northern valleys are found cherry, laurel, oak, chestnut, firs, pines, maples and magnolia. At an altitude of 8,000 rhododendrons abound.

Sikkim is noted for its floral wealth. There are some 4,000 varieties of flowering plants. Some 600 species of orchids also occur in Sikkim.

For its size, Sikkim has a fairly wide variety of fauna. Panda, otter, ovis nahura, ovisamon, musk deer, ghoral, boar, leopard cat, tiger, barking deer, sambar and black bear are the wild animals found in Sikkim. There are about 500 species of birds and 600 species of butterfly.

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\*For Indian aid after 1971, see Chapter XX p. 154.

## CHAPTER II

# The Lepchas

THE Lepchas are believed to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim. The name Lepcha was given them by the Nepalese and is derived from the word 'Lapcho' or a cairn, the original Lepcha place of worship. The Nepalese changed the word into Lapche, a word still very much in use among both the Nepalese and the Lepchas themselves, and the British gave it the modern form of Lepcha. The Lepchas called themselves Rong-pa, *i.e.*, people living in ravines. There could not be an apter name for this people. Who were the first Lepchas, where did they come from, and what were their traditions and history are questions destined never to be answered ; for whatever written literature the Lepchas had possessed was systematically destroyed by the Tibetan priests during the first days of close contact between the two peoples. Some scholars hold that the first ancestors of the Lepchas came from Tibet or China via Assam. The Lepchas would, perhaps, have completely lost their identity by the time they first came in contact with the British representatives of the East India Company but for the fact that, in the early nineteenth century, when the British first entered Sikkim, the land and the people were yet untouched by the march of time, and Sikkim was a big jungle with scattered human habitations. And the Lepchas had managed, to a large extent, to preserve much of what must have been the dominant characteristics of their forebears and the scattered memories of their traditions.

Almost all the representatives of civilized humanity who encountered the Lepchas of Sikkim during those days are agreed

on the good nature, docility, honesty, and hospitality of these people. General Mainwaring, who took the Lepchas under his wing and studied their mores, language, and history, was so impressed as to think that the Lepchas were the original, unspoilt children of Adam and Eve who had managed to escape, somehow, the baneful effect of the curse the rest of humanity has had to suffer because of our erring first parents having eaten of the forbidden fruit. Mainwaring's researches into the linguistics of the Lepchas led him to conclude that the Lepcha speech belonged to a hoary antiquity, almost taking us back to the Garden of Eden. While all this would be going too far, the fact remains that the Lepchas were ideal children of nature even in the early nineteenth century, after more than three centuries of contact with the Tibetans. Based on the writings of these pioneers of civilization, we have the following picture of the Lepcha society as it must have been before the advent of the Tibetans :—

The Rongs (the word Lepcha was then unknown) were the archetypal lotus-eaters. They were hunters of nomadic habits, roaming at large in thickets in search of food. They had no settled life. "They lived in caves or bamboo huts amidst the vast, wild, magnificent forests, old as the hills themselves." Each family lived by itself, with the least interference from neighbours. Their needs were few, and the jungle provided almost all of them, including food. Cultivation of patches of land, where they grew dry rice, millets, buckwheat, and murwa, was also practised. The yield lent variety to the food and also supplemented it. The Rongs were indolent by nature and hard work was taboo. But they were good eaters and thrift was alien to their nature. Their improvident habits earned them the nickname 'Menthurgya'—people who do not think of tomorrow.

To say that the Rongs were mild, timid, and peaceful would be only partly describing their characteristics. The whole Rong outlook, his religion, mores, culture, and habits were so formed as to reduce strife to a minimum, if not altogether banish it from his life. So, the dominant characteristic of the Rongs was to yield to anything and everything that demanded the least strife. And that has at once been the virtue and the bane of the Rongs and their descendants. ) Apart from their outward conduct, the

religion of the Rongs also illustrates their basic character. The Rongs, being children of nature, worshipped nature or spirits of nature. The spirits were classified into two categories: the good ones and the evil ones. The Rongs were too indolent to care for or worship the good spirits, for the good spirits were good and there was no reason to fear them. But they were careful to propitiate the evil spirits and employed professionals (Boomthings) to ward them off. In primitive societies women constitute, more often than not, a major cause of trouble. The Rongs took care of this by so evolving their social code as to give a man the choice of copulating with a wide range of women relations and *vice versa*: a man inherited all the widows of his patrilineal relations, *i.e.*, brothers, uncles, and even grand-uncles; the sisters of all such women relations could be copulated with, of course with their consent, whenever time and opportunity permitted a couple. So sex was no problem for the Rong men or women—and a major cause of strife was removed.

The Rongs were ill-prepared for contact with the rest of humanity, the accursed majority of Adam and Eve's children. They seem to have had some form of organisation before the Tibetans overshadowed them. The Rongs were organised by one Turve, who was eventually given the title of 'Punu' or king. Turve Punu was killed during one of the frequent encounters with the Kirats, the forebears of the modern Rais and Limbus of eastern Nepal. He was followed by three successive Punus. With the death of the last king, Tubh Athak Punu, the Lepcha kingship came to an end. Gradually the tribe began to elect a venerable old man who exercised the mild functions of a respected elder rather than the authority of a tribal chief. The elder was looked upon as a teacher and guide. He also performed the functions of the tribal priest. The Rongs had their own alphabet and a rich folk legend. Their version of the 'flood' and the 'Tower of Babel' has been handed down to their descendants. The Tendong Hill is their Mount Ararat. This is all that remains of the Rongs' history before the advent of the Tibetans.

The Tibetan immigration was a mere trickle at first. There was land enough. The Rongs shifted their habitations in order

to remain aloof from the more virile, hardy, tough, and possessive immigrants. More Tibetans poured in. The Rongs could not go on shifting. They had to live as the Tibetans' neighbours, if not with them in the same village. Consistent with their dislike for strife, the Rongs further stretched their flexible social code and invented the degrading myth that they were lowly (A-den; literally, created or fashioned) and the Tibetans were high-born (Bar-fung-mo; literally, flowing from on high). Thereafter the socio-political fabric of the Rongs suffered a change for worse until it passed out of the memory of its children.



### CHAPTER III

## The Bhutiyas

IN the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries religious strife between rival sects in Tibet had resulted in frequent wars. As the Gelug-pas (Yellow Hat Sect) gradually gained the upper hand, priests of the rival orders fled with their chosen followers. Quite a few of these fugitives went southward into Sikkim. As has already been briefly noted, the Rongs tried to accommodate the immigrant Tibetans by assigning to them the status of aristocrats. For once the Rong docility paid rich dividends, even if temporarily. They could not have chosen a more effective protective barrier against the Tibetan tide. The obvious Rong subservience blunted the edge of Tibetan aggressiveness. They got what they wanted—land to settle on, and pasture for their herds of yaks—without any struggle, without any resistance on the part of the natives. The Tibetans could not, without compromising their newly acquired status of a superior people, at least in the eyes of the Rongs, mingle with them. The net result was that, during a considerable period, the Rongs were left very much to themselves. In character the two peoples were poles apart: the Tibetans were very property conscious, the Rongs were carefree; the Tibetans were vigorous and aggressive, the Rongs were timid and docile; the Tibetans were polyandrous, the Rongs detested polyandry and were polygynous; last but not the least, the Tibetans were Lamaist Buddhists while the Rongs were spirit-worshippers.

With the steady increase in the numbers of the Tibetan immigrants, the need for some sort of organisation was felt.

The Tibetans had come from a land where spiritual and temporal authority lay heavy on the populace. Habitual subservience to authority had eroded their natural sense of justice and made them unfit for peaceful co-existence with the simple Rongs. If the Rongs were not to be permanently alienated, some acceptable authority to ensure a modicum of law and order was essential. Besides this, the Tibetan lamas (priests) were also faced with the problem of bringing the easy-going, 'demon-worshipping' Rongs into the fold of Lamaist Buddhism. The lamas, used to a sacerdotal society, smarted under an anarchical system that did not permit them to wield their spiritual authority, with its wide range of privileges and prerogatives, except over the few Tibetans.

The Tibetan lamas in Sikkim were the pure product of the lamaist polity of Tibet. Having known no system other than the Tibetan one, the lamas, the only enlightened element among the people, set about to extend the Tibetan system into Sikkim. The only difficulty lay in the fact that the Rongs were the product of a very different environment, where they had neither felt the need for such authority nor known its restrictive applications. The initial attempts of the lamas to promote cohesion among the Tibetans and the Rongs and wean away the latter from spirit-worship had been frustrated not so much by the opposition of these people as by their indifference. A highly intricate ritual that sought to turn the Rongs and Tibetans into blood-brothers and enjoin perpetual friendship upon the two peoples had also failed to make any dent in the Rongs' preference for keeping aloof and free from any shackles.

But the Tibetans' perseverance had made some gains. That the Rongs did not oppose their participation in the 'brotherhood' ritual seems to have prepared them psychologically for the next step envisaged by the lamas to bring the Rongs, together with the Tibetans, under a spiritual and temporal yoke.

Three of the most venerable lamas met at Yoksam and decided upon organising Sikkim under a ruler, with spiritual and temporal authority, as the first step. In order to allay Rong suspicions, the whole thing was highly coloured with religious rigmarole—at which the lamas excelled—and lest

they should object to a Tibetan ruler being foisted on them, a highly impressive genealogy going back to a semi-divine origin was invented for the proposed ruler and, what is more, the sanction of the venerated Lepcha Elder, Thekong Tek, was interwoven with it. The legendary genealogy of the man chosen to rule Sikkim, one Phuntsog Namgyal of Gangtok, runs thus :—

Phuntsog Namgyal was the direct descendant of a prince who had, in the ninth century, founded the kingdom of Minyak in Kham, East Tibet. Many generations later, a prince of the Minyak House went on a pilgrimage. At Sakya, one of his sons, named Khye-Bumsa, married a daughter of the Hierarch. Khye-Bumsa settled in the Chumbi Valley.

Khye-Bumsa, being childless, was advised to seek the blessings of the Rong Elder, Thekong Tek. Khye-Bumsa crossed into the Rong domain, where not only did he secure the Rong Elder's blessings for three sons but also the prophecy that his descendants would become the rulers of Sikkim, while Thekong Tek's own people, the Rongs would become their subjects, and servitors. A blood-brotherhood was sworn between Khye-Bumsa and Thekong Tek at Kabi Lungtsok, signifying the unification of the Tibetans and the Rongs.

Though Khye Bumsa remained and died at Chumbi, his three sons crossed into Sikkim and settled there. Khye-Bumsa's youngest son was Mipon Rab. Mipon Rab's fourth son, Guru Tashi, shifted to Gangtok. Guru Tashi's eldest son was named Jowa Apha. Jowa Apha's son was Guru Tenzing, and Guru Tenzing's son was Phuntsog Namgyal.....

Divested of the embellishments that surround the ancestry of the Tibetan rulers of Sikkim, the plain facts of history record that Phuntsog Namgyal, at that time, was residing at Gangtok. Some accounts show him as having entered Sikkim via the Jeplela Pass in 1641, while others say that his family had been residents in Sikkim for some generations. Phuntsog Namgyal was a man of substance and commanded respect among not only his neighbours but also the people of the surrounding localities.

The lamas took Phuntsog Namgyal to Yoksam, where, amid great rejoicings and feastings, he was 'consecrated' the ruler of

Sikkim in the year 1642. The title of Chogyal (Dharma Raja) was conferred upon him, thus investing him with spiritual authority along with the temporal.

Phuntsog Namgyal and some other Tibetans of means married Rong wives. The Tibetans came gradually to be known as Bhutiyas, and the Rongs as Lepchas. The Lepchas were drawn, willy-nilly, ever closer to the Bhutiyas, which resulted in periodical outbursts of quarrel among the two peoples.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Kingdom : Early Years

THE Tibetans, with the 'consecration' of Phuntsog Namgyal, proceeded to consolidate and strengthen their position. Towards the west, Limbuan remained friendly as in former times. Towards the south-west was a small territory inhabited by Mangars, under a Mangar chieftain who seems to have recognised the Sikkim ruler by sending some presents. A delegation was sent to the Dalai Lama, who, as a mark of recognition and acceptance of the Sikkim ruler's vassalage, sent some presents and the traditional scarf. The matrimonial alliance Phuntsog Namgyal and some of his Tibetan friends had entered into with Lepcha families not only gave a new respectability to some notable Lepcha families but also went a long way in modifying the Tibetan immigrants' language into the present Bhutiya language and in evolving many common customs.

On the advice of the lamas, Phuntsog Namgyal divided the territory of Sikkim into 12 dzongs (districts), each under a Lepcha dzongpen or district chief. A body of councillors, composed of 12 Tibetans, was also formed. The lamas induced the dzongpens to symbolically surrender their lands to the ruler. After some initial hesitation and suspicion, this was done. Subsequently the lands were returned to the owners. This symbolic surrender has a significance in that some Sikkimese rulers have harboured the notion that the land belongs to them and that the occupants of the land are not the real owners but trustees of the land in their possession, from which they can be evicted at the will of the ruler.

As has already been mentioned in Chapter I, the kingdom of Sikkim was much larger during its infancy than today. This, however, is a point that has to be understood in its proper perspective. (At the time the Lepchas and the Bhutiyas were brought together, a small group of Limbus, called Tsongs in Sikkim, was also living in Sikkim. The Tsongs, according to Tibetan traditions, were originally inhabitants of the Tsangpo Valley in Tibet, from where they migrated to Sikkim and beyond to Limbuan, in what is today Eastern Nepal. The Tsongs of Limbus in Limbuan far outnumbered their kinsmen in Sikkim. There had been free intercourse between the Limbus of Limbuan and the Tsongs and the Lepchas of Sikkim before the advent of the Tibetans on the political stage of Sikkim. The establishment of Bhutiya (Tibetan) rule in Sikkim did not in any way affect the free intercourse between Limbuan and Sikkim. Since the Limbus were not organised under any central authority, and since they looked east rather than west for their dealings, this loose link has been interpreted as the 'whole' of Limbuan being a part of Sikkim of those days. The allegiance of the Sikkim Tsongs to the Sikkim ruler is primarily responsible for such misinterpretation.) A look at the population of the Bhutiyas and Lepchas will help dispel this false notion : in 1891, there were 5,762 Lepchas and 4,894 Bhutiyas in Sikkim. More than two centuries earlier, the Bhutiyas and Lepchas could hardly have numbered more than three or four thousand. The absurdity of Sikkim, with such a total population, extending its sway over the warlike Limbus of Limbuan at once leaps to the eye. The want of organised territorial units on its borders, at that time must have been another factor lending support to such claims.

**Emboldened** by their success in drawing the Lepchas into the net of Tibetan or Bhutiya rule, the lamas became aggressive in their zeal to spread their religion among the Lepchas. Though called Buddhism the creed of the lamas "has set aside the tenets of Buddha, and those retained are lost in a maze of ritual ; nothing remains of the original religion but the name". They persuaded the Lepchas to bring all of their written literature containing their traditions and creed, under some pretext. And they burnt all the Lepcha literature they managed to collect. If the lamas' high-handedness did not provoke any immediate

hostile reactions, it was mainly because of Lepcha timidity and sense of helplessness. But the suspicion of the Tibetan took deep roots in the Lepcha mind. No wonder then, the quarrels between the Lepchas and the Bhutiyas became frequent. The animus was carried higher up, and the Lepcha and the Bhutiya factions among the dzongpens and the councillors were destined to create trouble not only affecting themselves but the kingdom as a whole.

On his death, Phuntsog Namgyal was succeeded by his only son, Tensung Namgyal (born in 1644). Soon after his consecration in 1670, Tensung Namgyal moved his capital from Yoksam to Rabdantse. With the assistance of Lama Jig-med Gyatsho, who had come from Tibet, the monastery at Sangchelling was completed. This monastery was open to all alike, no matter of what descent. So another monastery was erected at Pemiongchi, and this monastery was meant for persons of pure descent, *i.e.*, Tibetans only. This building was erected on a site about half a mile to the west of the present gumpa of Pemiongchi.

Tensung Namgyal married three wives : a Tibetan, a Bhutanese and a Limbu girl. The Limbu girl, daughter of Chief Yo-Yo-Hang, brought seven maidens with her. These maidens were married into leading families of Sikkim. Tensung Namgyal reduced the number of councillors to 8 chosen from among the highest Lepcha and Bhutiya families. These councillors, in course of time, developed into the all-powerful kazis. Tensung Namgyal, by his three marriages, seems to have prepared the ground for the beginning of external incursions into Sikkim.

## CHAPTER V

### The Bhutanese Incursions

TENSUNG Namgyal died in the year 1700. Chador Namgyal, Tensung's son by the Tibetan wife, succeeded his father. He was then a boy of 14. His half-sister, Pedi Wangmo, daughter of the Bhutanese wife of Tensung, claimed her right to the succession by virtue of her seniority in age. Both sides mustered their supporters, but Pedi Wangmo had the advantage that she could count on her Bhutanese connections to help her. The Bhutanese were consolidating their kingdom at about this time. On the invitation of Pedi Wangmo, the Deb Raja of Bhutan sent a force to invade Sikkim. This incursion was to be the prelude to continued hostility between Sikkim and Bhutan in future years.

Unable to withstand the Bhutanese invasion, Chador had to flee for his life. With the help of a loyal councillor, Yugthing Yeshe, Chador fled to Tibet via Elam and Walong in Limbuan. In Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, Chador studied Buddhism and Astrology under the patronage of the Sixth Dalai Lama. So pleased was the Dalai Lama with the services of Chador that he granted him two fiefs in Central Tibet. Unfortunately for Chador, the Sixth Dalai Lama's career was cut short by a summons from China. The Sixth Dalai Lama was a 'gay young blade', in the words of the courtesans of Tibet, among whom he had many liaisons. The Dalai Lama took a fling at life with gay abandon, paying little or no heed to the conventions of his high office and the vow of celibacy that went



with it. On his way to China, he died—very probably he was killed.

Chador wrote a letter to the Deb Raja of Bhutan stating that Tibet was the father ; Bhutan, the mother ; and Sikkim, the child ; the three were one family, one nation. This letter, supported by mediations on the part of some highly-placed Tibetans, made the Deb Raja relent, and he withdrew his occupation force from Rabdantse in 1706. During the period of the Bhutanese occupation, the invaders had heavily colonised the eastern part of Sikkim that was contiguous to Bhutan. This territory, which included the modern Kalimpong and adjoining areas, was a permanent loss to Sikkim.

Chador Namgyal returned to Rabdantse accompanied by Lama Jig-med Pao and tried to clear the Bhutanese from such pockets as they had settled in. This nettled the Deb Raja and he sent a small force in support of the Bhutanese settlers. Chador had to accept the loss of some more territory.

Chador's long sojourn in Tibet had turned him into an ardent Buddhist of the lamaist variety. He founded the great monastery of Pemiongchi, the inspiration for the style of which was derived from Mindoling in Tibet, which he had known so well. He greatly expanded the monastic system and introduced many innovations. He also modified the Lepcha alphabet.

Though the Bhutanese incursions into Sikkim had come to a temporary halt, the original cause of their first invasion still smouldered. Pedi Wangmo's position had been greatly weakened by her having formed a liaison with the third lama of the Rabjungpa Sect. Since the vows of the sect were very strict, the liaison was considered a mortal sin. In the hopes of mitigating the erring lama's spiritual punishment, and as an expiatory offering for her share in the offence, Pedi Wangmo built the Guru Lakhang Monastery at Tashiding. Though apparently thwarted in her designs to seize power, Pedi Wangmo was far from reconciled with her half-brother. While the Raja, being unwell, had gone to the Ralang Hot Springs, in 1716, for treatment, Pedi Wangmo conspired with the physician, who opened the Raja's veins and thus caused his death. This did not help

Pedi Wangmo or her cause, for she was strangled to death for her part in Chador's death, while the physician was executed.

Chador Namgyal's son, Gyurmed Namgyal, became the Raja of Sikkim in 1717 at the age of ten. During his minority, Lama Jig-med Pao acted as regent. Gyurmed, not very robust, was subject to fits caused by a malignant disease that had afflicted him in his childhood. "He was at all events eccentric, if not actually weak in intellect".

In 1718 the Dzungar Mongols invaded Tibet. This led to the persecution of the Nyingma-pa (Red Hat) Sect. The Mindoling abbot fled and sought refuge in Sikkim with his family. The abbot had a daughter of Gyurmed's age. Gyurmed was married to the abbot's daughter. The lady was so exceedingly plain that the Raja would "not live or have anything to do with her". Accordingly he removed himself to Di-Chhin-Ling Monastery, near Geyzing. The Rani continued to live at Rabdantse. The Raja came increasingly under the influence of the Lepchas and their form of worship. This led to fights between the Lepcha priests and the lamas.

The Bhutanese raided inside Sikkimese territory from time to time. Their raids apart, they left no opportunity pass to foment trouble in Sikkim whenever distance from the capital led any group to grow restive. Such uprisings became frequent during Gyurmed's reign. He, therefore, set about to fortify Rabdantse against Bhutanese incursions as also against local adventurers. Impressment of labour had to be resorted to. Since impressment virtually amounted to forced labour without payment of any wages, many Tsongs, on whom the impressment sat heavy, fled en masse to Limbuan, the home of their kith and kin. The Tsongs became hostile to the Bhutiyas, which resulted in the total rupture between the Limbus of Limbuan and the Bhutiyas of Sikkim. Whatever little influence the rulers of Sikkim had over the Limbus of Limbuan was snapped. This alienation of the Limbus or Tsongs as the Sikkimese called them was to be the source of great trouble to the rulers of Sikkim some decades later.

Worn out by internal dissensions, and disgusted with his conjugal life, Gyurmed disguised himself as a mendicant and went on a pilgrimage to Tibet. Nobody in that country suspected his identity, until he came before Wangchuk Dorze, the ninth incarnation of the Karmapa Lama. That ecclesiastic penetrated the Raja's disguise and treated him royally. In consequence the Karmapa Lama is much looked upon by Sikkim Buddhists.

Fed up with the Raja's eccentricities and her blighted conjugal life, the Rani took the opportunity of the Raja's absence to go back to her parental home in Tibet, never to return.

Shortly afterwards Gyurmed returned to Sikkim. The Marriage of Gyurmed and the abbot's daughter had not resulted in any issue. It is very probable that Gyurmed, because of his affliction, was either sterile or impotent. Two facts point to impotence rather than to sterility. His wife was so dissatisfied with him that she went back to her father's house at the first opportunity that afforded itself, never to return. Secondly, Gyurmed, when pressed by his councillors to marry for a second time, flatly refused to do so. Now, a ruler, in his prime, knowing full well that he had no heir to succeed him, and having no means of ascertaining his sterility, would not refuse a second marriage so adamantly as Gyurmed did. The fact that his wife deserted him should have prompted him, as in duty bound, to marry for the second time, if only to beget an heir. Gyurmed's refusal makes sense only if he, poor fellow, was totally impotent.

All this was enough to make Gyurmed ill. Before long he died, at the age of 26, in the year 1733. The high lamas and councillors were sorely troubled as there were already factions ready to take advantage of such situations. By sheer good luck, a nun was found to be pregnant—by no means a rare phenomenon—, and a high lama had the brainwave to concoct the story that Gyurmed had, before his death, given out that this particular nun had been impregnated by him. The nun obliged by giving birth to a male child not long after, and thus the Namgyal dynasty was given a fresh lease of life. This was a happy solution to more than one ticklish problem. But even so, there was trouble that rocked Sikkim for quite a few years.

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## CHAPTER VI

# The Gorkha Onslaught

TROUBLE started as soon as the infant Namgyal Phuntsog, the nun's son, was installed as the new ruler of Sikkim in succession to Gyurmed Namgyal. While one faction led by Chandzod Karwang, leader of the Lepchas, supported the infant's cause, another faction led by the Treasurer, Tamding, leader of the Bhutiyas, refused to countenance the claims of an unknown nun's son, whose paternity was so obviously doubtful. Tamding, by the very nature of his job, had been a close confidant of Gyurmed. More than anybody else among the nobility, he had the opportunity to study the aversion displayed by Gyurmed to the company of women. The Tibetans have always had a robust attitude towards sex. Extra-marital connections are not looked down upon. Both sexes enjoy great freedom and indulge themselves freely. The rulers have always considered it their privilege to have intimate relations with beautiful women of the nobility as well as of the less privileged. While the women consider such favours with obvious pride, their menfolk, far from resenting such liaisons, feel honoured. Many a ruler has had a brood of bastards. Tamding knew, if anybody did, that Gyurmed's failure to indulge himself in this respect stemmed not from continence but from physical disadvantage. He could not digest the lama's story. Not only did he question the legitimacy of the child but also assumed the powers of the ruler himself. This slightly weakened his stand. Tamding managed to rule for three years.

The two factions could not, however, come to terms, and fighting broke out. Eventually, Taming was beaten, and he fled, in 1740, to Tibet to place his side of the case before the Tibetan authorities. The Tibetans mediated between the two factions and decided in favour of the infant, primarily because he was backed by the victorious faction, among whom were the high lamas. In order to preclude resumption of hostilities between the two factions, Tibet sent one Rabden Sarpa to act as regent until Namgyal Phuntsog came of age.

Rabden's regency is notable for two things. He saw that the Sikkimese were short of salt and had to travel long distances to procure it. So, whenever someone came to see him with presents for the settlement of disputes, Rabden gave him a quantity of salt. This resulted in almost a regular flow of visitors to collect salt. Rabden had the names of all the recipients of salt carefully noted in a roster. He thus succeeded in compiling a crude type of census. On this he based his assessment of land revenue, an event that seems to have been novel in the life of the people of Sikkim. That apart, Rabden Sarpa levied a tax on trade. Obviously, the assessment of revenue must have been restricted to a small section of the population, the people living not very far from the capital.

The second was Sikkim's rupture with the Mangars. During the regency of Rabden, the Mangar Chief happened to die. His son was chosen to succeed as the new chief. Keeping in mind the cordial relations that had obtained between the rulers of Sikkim and the Mangar chiefs right from the inception of the kingdom, the Mangars had sent an invitation to the ruler of Sikkim. Rabden, being unaware of these relations, and dreading travel to hotter regions, neither went himself nor had the foresight to send any delegation to represent the Sikkim ruler. As against such attitude on the part of the Regent, the Deb Raja of Bhutan attended in person the installation of the new Mangar Chief.

The young Mangar Chief felt insulted, and, as was the custom in those days, took advantage of the presence of the Deb Raja by planning a joint invasion of Sikkim's capital. Rabden, however, sought the intervention of Tibet, which exercised suffi-

cient influence over Bhutan, and the invasion was called off before much harm could be done. Though Sikkim was thus able to ward off the Mangar-Bhutanese invasion, its relations with the Mangars were permanently ruptured. Never again would the pride of the Mangars let them resume their old friendship with the Bhutiya rulers of Sikkim.

Towards the closing years of Namgyal Phuntsog's reign, a new power was rising westwards. Prithvi Narayan Shah, ruler of the small principality of Gorkha, in Western Nepal, had embarked upon a career of military exploits that was to result in the consolidation and unification of the numerous petty principalities scattered all over Nepal. One by one the valiant Gorkhalis (people from Gorkha) conquered these principalities and advanced in a relentless wave until Prithvi Narayan Shah was the unchallenged master of the whole of Nepal, except the east, the Rai and Limbu territories. Prithvi Narayan Shah died in 1775, leaving much of his projected mission unfinished. But he had succeeded in forging a new nation, creating feelings of unity among the many tribes inhabiting Nepal, and rallying them under the Gorkha banner. The nascent nation, in the first vigour of its birth, inspired by the example of Prithvi Narayan Shah and his valiant soldiers, and flushed by the victories of Gorkha arms, continued its career of conquest. With the establishment of the Gorkha kingdom's capital at Kathmandu, supplanting the Newar rulers of the Kathmandu Valley, Gorkha armies advanced towards the west sweeping everything before them right up to the bank of River Sutlej in the Punjab. Eastward lay the territory of the Rais and Limbus, and, further east lay Sikkim.

While the Gorkha threat was not yet imminent, the Bhutanese struck Sikkim once again. They occupied all the territory east of River Tista and ravaged the countryside. The Bhutanese, finding little resistance to their marauding advance, were lulled into a false sense of security. At Tama-la, below Mafi-la, the main body of the Bhutanese troops was ambushed and slaughtered to a man. This took care of the Bhutanese for the time being.

The Sikkimese could pay more attention to the Gorkha threat that was looming large. While the wave of Gorkha

advance eastward was still far away, it sent ripples that lapped the Sikkim marches. Small bands of Gorkha adventurers made their way right up to the border, and began their raids inside **the territory of Sikkim. The Bhutiyas and Lepchas of Sikkim** were successful in keeping the raids of these irregular bands of Gorkhas under check. At Namchi one such band of about a hundred men was trapped and killed to a man. The Bhutiyas and Lepchas jubilantly paraded the severed limbs of the slain Gorkhas. There were many such skirmishes. In these skirmishes, the Lepcha leader, Chuthup, distinguished himself, earning the sobriquet 'Satrajeet' (victor of seventeen fights) from his Gorkha adversaries.

In 1780 Namgyal Phuntsog died. He was succeeded by his 11-year-old son, Tenzing Namgyal. Tenzing Namgyal was married to Chuthup's half-sister, Anyo Gyelum, daughter of Chandzod Karwang.

(Towards the beginning of 1787, the Gorkhas were completing their conquest of Limbuan.) Two or three small bands of Gorkhas again started trouble in Sikkim. Chuthup and another eader, Dhakar Chandzok, chased them. Carried away by their success against small, irregular bands of Gorkhas, they underestimated the might of Gorkha arms and pushed their way far into the Nepalese territory, penetrating as far as Chainpore. There they met, for the first time in their military career, Gorkha troops, who were completing the consolidation of Limbuan before advancing further east. Chuthup, alias Satrajeet, and his companion, Dhakar Chandzok, were severely beaten by the Gorkha troops. Dhakar Chandzok lost his life. The Bhutiya-Lepcha force was scattered, and Satrajeet had to beat a hasty retreat. Satrajeet had met more than his match, and we no more hear of this valiant Lepcha's military exploits. The Gorkha invasion of Sikkim was about to begin in right earnest. Satrajeet's services were not available to Sikkim when she needed them most.

In 1788-89, the Gorkha General, Jahar Singh, crossed the Chiabhanjang Pass, taking the Bhutiyas and Lepchas by complete surprise, and made a lightning raid on Rabdantse. The capital was caught napping, and the most disorganised abandonment of any capital imaginable took place. Terrified by the sudden-

ness of the blow, the Bhutiyas and Lepchas fled for their lives. The Raja and Rani had to flee so precipitately that the very thought of saving any valuable property had to be abandoned. The Rani snatched from the altar a mask of Kanchenjunga and carried it in the bosom of her dress. One loyal kazi bore the infant son of the Raja on his shoulders. And the small band of fugitives fled during the night eastwards. So close was the pursuit that the Raja and his band of faithful followers had to subsist, for days together, on yam and other edible roots. The Lepchas' unrivalled knowledge of the jungle and its produce came in handy. After days of toil, the party made its way to Kabi. The Raja and his family lived in great misery, suffering untold hardship, and nursing bitter hatred for the Gorkhas. Tsugphud Namgyal, the infant son of the Raja, was to be afflicted with a perpetual trauma of the Gorkha terror and to transmit it to his posterity.

Any hopes of relief were further dispelled when the invaders were reinforced by another army under the redoubtable General, Damodar Pandey, who conquered the whole of Sikkim west of the River Tista. There, on the right bank of the Tista, at the confluence of the Tista and the Rungeet, the Gorkhas celebrated their victory on the Magha Sankranti day (middle of January) of 1789, cleaning their khukries of gore and making merry, an event the Beni Mela, at the same spot, commemorates to this day.

In the meanwhile the miseries of Tenzing Namgyal continued unabated. The Bhutiyas and Lepchas had fled "seeking shelter in caves and caverns, amidst thick jungles, abandoning their homes, hearths, and fields. There was no agriculture, hence no revenue. The Raja lived at Kabi with his family and a small band of faithful followers. Reduced to the direst of circumstances, some of the Raja's followers used to collect magenta dye and sell at Phari, and with the proceeds of the sale was bought the salt for the Raja's kitchen". Hearing of the Sikkim Raja's pitiful plight, the Deb Raja of Bhutan, exercising Buddhist charity, sent some supplies and twelve hundred rupees. Some kazis were also helpful with supplies. Unable to bear the hard life, Tenzing Namgyal sought asylum in Tibet, in 1790.



In 1791 a Gorkha army invaded Tibet, entering 275 miles into the forbidden land, and sacked the Tashilhunpo Monastery, the seat of the Tashi Lama. The following year, a huge Chinese army advanced towards Nepal. The Chinese had asked for such assistance as the Bhutiyas and Lepchas of Sikkim were able to muster. But when the victorious Chinese and the vanquished Gorkhas signed the Sino-Nepalese Treaty, the claims of Sikkim were conveniently forgotten by the Chinese General on the plea that there was no representative from Sikkim to stake her claims. In fact, the Chinese Army, in spite of its overall success, had been so badly mauled and battered by the Gorkhas that the Chinese General was in a hurry to get back home once the Gorkhas had accepted the suzerainty of China over Nepal and agreed to pay some tribute to the Chinese Emperor every five years. Whatever hopes Tenzing Namgyal had harboured of restoring his fortunes were shattered. West of the Tista the Gorkhas were still the masters. And Tibet swallowed up Chumbi Valley and the two fiefs granted to Chador Namgyal by the Sixth Dalai Lama.

Tenzing Namgyal died in Lhasa in the year 1793. His son, Tsugphud Namgyal, then a boy of 8, was brought back to Sikkim to be installed as the ruler over the tiny strip that remained as his inheritance. His troubles were destined to be removed by the British, who were then laying the foundations of their Indian Empire, only to give rise to a period of endless trials and tribulations for the House of Namgyal.

## CHAPTER VII

### Under the British Wing

EVEN as the Gorkhas were extending their kingdom in the Himalayan hills, the British were consolidating their position on the plains of North India. The British had been casting a longing eye on the Tibetan trade, but no opening seemed to be in sight. They were naturally interested in Sikkim, as one of the possible routes to Tibet lay via Sikkim. As yet no opportunity had presented itself for establishing contacts with the Sikkim ruler, who, as we have seen, had been reduced to dire straits as a result of the Gorkha invasion.

It was not long before the Gorkha expansion southward clashed with British interest in the Terai, south of the hills. This culminated in the Anglo-Gorkha War of 1814-16. Though Sikkim was in no position to help the British war effort, either in men or material, the British, with their customary foresight, asked for Sikkim's alliance in the common cause—they had carefully studied the loss of territory sustained by the Sikkim ruler and the utter neglect of his interests by the Chinese General who defeated the Gorkhas, and had promised the ruler the restoration of his former territories, and readily got it.

The British were victorious in the war. A treaty was signed at Segouli. The 'Treaty of Segouly' (Article VI) reads: "The Raja of Nepaul engages never to molest or disturb the Raja of Sikkim in possession of his territories; but agrees, if any difference should arise between the State of Nepaul and the

communities entertained suspicions of each other resulting, very often, in open acts of hostility. If the Lepchas grew powerful, the Bhutiyas resorted to all sorts of devious means to pull them down, for the Bhutiyas never ceased to look down upon the Lepchas, however high a Lepcha individual or family might rise. The Lepchas were acutely aware of Bhutiya superciliousness and never trusted them.

Tsugphud Namgyal's new capital was the scene of, perhaps, the most serious rift between the Bhutiya and Lepcha factions that had ever taken place, threatening to rend asunder the very fabric of the State. Raja Tsugphud was himself the son of a Lepcha mother. His maternal uncle, Chandzok Bolek, was the Chief Minister. The Bhutiyas began to poison the ears of Tsugphud Namgyal with the supposed or real treachery of Bolek. In 1819 there arose a serious quarrel between the Raja and the Chief Minister. This was patched up. Quarrels arose again in the following year and in 1824, each quarrel being followed by some sort of agreement. Matters came to a head in 1826.

Periodically gifts and offerings from all parts of Sikkim were brought to the ruler by his subjects. Only a part of these offerings, mainly from Western Sikkim, reached the hands of the ruler. The bulk of the offerings was intercepted by Bolek's men at Kabi, where the Chief Minister lived. It cannot be said for certain whether Chandzok Bolek had ordered the interception or the guards took such liberties on their own; word, however, got around to some Bhutiya kazis living in Tumlong. They resented this. A whispering campaign was launched against Bolek.

Eventually, the Bhutiya faction, led by Tung-yik Menchoo, father of the future Dewan Namgyal, succeeded in convincing Tsugphud Namgyal that Bolek was engaged in a conspiracy against the Raja's life. Tsugphud Namgyal was also persuaded to agree to subject Bolek to a strange test devised by the Bhutiyas. A deputation was sent with the Raja's summons to Bolek's house. The Chief Minister put on his best apparel and came to the door of his house to accompany the deputa-  
tion.

The deputationists, composed mostly of the conspirators against Bolek, had with them an assassin with a muzzle loading gun. The test the Raja had agreed to was that if the gun went off, when fired, it would be taken as Bolek's guilt ; and if it did not, he should be deemed to be innocent.

With the heedlessness of the innocent, Bolek stepped out of his house to be disturbed by the ominous click of the hammer falling on the cap. His suspicions were, however, aroused, and immediately confirmed by a second click. He turned and tried to rush into the safety of his house. The Bhutiyas cut down the old man. His protesting wife was also killed. Bolek's two sons tried to escape, chased by the murderous band of Bhutiyas. The two brothers hid themselves in a cave. The Bhutiyas used dogs to trail them. The cave was smoked. One of the brothers rushed out, unarmed as he was, only to be hacked into pieces. The other was killed with the sharpened tips of long bamboo poles.

The gun that had refused to go off in the first instance was now, by common consent, primed again and fired, successfully this time. The report of the gun reached the ears of Tsugphud Namgyal, bearing with it the 'proof' of the guilt of the treacherously slain Chief Minister. But the truth soon leaked out. The close relatives of the fallen Chief Minister fled to East Nepal with 800 Lepchas in a veritable exodus, seriously depleting the Lepcha population in Sikkim. The leaders of the exodus were later 'pardoned' by the Raja and persuaded to return to their land of birth. While some of them were returning to Sikkim, they were persecuted by the Khangsa Dewan, so they retraced their footsteps back to Nepal, more bitter than before.

These Lepchas had found willing adventurers among the Gorkhas of East Nepal to carry out raids inside the territory of Sikkim. To make matters worse, they had active sympathisers within Sikkim itself. These raids and their increasing frequency found the Raja helpless. With no other choice left to him, he turned towards the British, who, under the Treaty of Titaliya, had taken it upon themselves to protect Sikkim from the depredations of the Gorkhas of Nepal,

and were now only too willing to help the Sikkim Raja whenever any dispute arose between him and the Gorkhas. One such dispute arose in 1827 over Ontoo, a hill situated on the east of River Mechi. On the Raja's request for arbitration, the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck, sent Captain (later General) G.W.K. Lloyd and Mr. G.W. Grant, I.C.S., in 1828, to investigate and settle the dispute.

While in Sikkim, Captain Lloyd came upon a small village on a ridge called Dorje Liang (modern Darjeeling). He thought that the site was ideally suited for development into a hill station where the soldiers and civilians of the British East India Company could rest in summer, away from the debilitating heat of the plains. He submitted a report to this effect on his return to India. The proposal was favourably received by the Governor-General.

Apart from Darjeeling's suitability as a hill station, its utility as a window on Sikkim, from where a careful watch could be maintained on Tibetan intentions with regard to the opening of a trade route to that land, had not escaped the keen observation of the British. Since the cession of Darjeeling is still a live issue, and the last word on the subject has yet to be said, it is a matter of great relevance to any historical study of Sikkim and, as such, deserves to be dwelt upon at some length.

If the British had looked upon the Treaty of Titaliya as the 'open sesame' to Sikkim, and thence to Tibet, the immediate future was to belie this optimism. Tibet continued to be the 'forbidden land' and Sikkim, its gateway, equally closed to the British. So, the continued skirmishes between the Gorkhas and the Sikkimese, aggravated by the mass exodus of the Lepcha population following the assassination of the Bolek family, were a godsend for the British. Naturally, they were more than keen on acquiring Dorje Liang. The matter was discussed at the highest level and the Governor-General was of the opinion that the desire of the British Government should be communicated to the Raja of Sikkim and, if the Raja was willing to give his assent, the terms of the grant should be ascertained. He also suggested a compensation in money as the most convenient to the British Government in every respect.

The Governor-General's proposal was strongly opposed by some members of his council. Sir Charles Metcalfe was of the opinion that the Raja of Sikkim would not be agreeable to the grant. He further opined that the Raja might not deem it prudent to flatly refuse the grant fearing adverse reaction. And that, according to Sir Charles Metcalfe, would amount to undue influence, which it would not be fair to exercise. There were others of similar opinion. It was, therefore, decided that the gentleman who would be employed to make the overture to the Sikkim Raja should be instructed to apprise the Raja that he was perfectly at liberty to decline the grant of the land if he did not consider his own interests promoted by doing so. The consensus was that if the terms offered to the Raja "were not sufficient to overcome his reluctance in making the cession, the matter should not be insisted upon."

The subject, however, was not broached even though Captain Lloyd, in the meanwhile, had visited the site with Mr. Grant and Captain Herbert, a survey officer, and submitted a report favouring the acquisition and development of Darjeeling. The matter, nevertheless, continued to be very much in the minds of the people concerned with the furtherance of British interests in these parts.

The next opportunity afforded itself in 1834-35, when British good offices were sought by the Raja in making some border adjustment with Nepal. Luckily, Captain Lloyd (now Major), the man who had fathered the idea and nurtured it, was available and deputed for the job. He was entrusted with the task of negotiating with the Raja of Sikkim, on the first convenient occasion, for the cession of Darjeeling in return for an equivalent in land or money as the Raja deemed reasonable. Lest the Raja should be led to harbour any suspicions with regard to British intentions, Major Lloyd was asked to make it very clear that the climate of Darjeeling, and hence its suitability as a sanatorium, were the only reasons that had induced the British Government to seek its possession.

When the matter was put before the Raja, the original doubts raised by Sir Charles Metcalfe were confirmed, for the

Raja was not very happy with the proposal. The matter dragged on for some time. While the British were offering either money or land in the plains, the Sikkim Raja sought the retrocession of Debgong, which had once belonged to him, by the British. The Raja also asked the British to compel Ramoo Pradhan of Morung to account for the arrears of two years' revenue to the Raja.

The British thought that the Raja was being unreasonable inasmuch as he was annexing two conditions to the cession, namely, the retrocession of Debgong and surrender of revenue accounts by Ramoo Pradhan. The fact that Ramoo Pradhan had been depositing the revenue with the British authorities further complicated the matter. So the demands of the Raja were found too impracticable to be complied with. While letters were being exchanged between Major Lloyd and the British Government, the whole deal was given a curious turn by a small act to which the Raja and the British were to attach mutually contradictory meanings.

Raja Tsugphud Namgyal, on being first apprised of the Governor-General's wishes for the cession of Darjeeling, had not only stated what he desired as compensation but had also prepared a deed ceding Darjeeling to the British. When the deal was apparently stalled on account of the Raja's demands not being acceptable to the British Government, Major Lloyd who was in possession of the deed, wrote to the Raja that although he had already received the deed, he would forthwith return it if, in consequence of the Raja's not having obtained his two requests, he felt indisposed to cede Darjeeling. He added the **significant rider** that if the Raja "from friendship to the British Government, still thought proper to give Darjeeling, he should say so." The Raja's reply was that, having already **given the grant**, he could not depart from it.

The Raja's reply was given one interpretation while, as it turned out later, something very different was meant by the writer.

Major Lloyd concluded that Raja Tsugphud Namgyal had made the grant free and unconditional. He sent a letter

to the Governor-General, apprising him of the grant. The Governor-General wrote to the Raja, thanking him profusely for the "proof of friendship" and accepting the grant of the land. Darjeeling came into the hands of the British.

The Sikkim Raja's real intentions came to light when, after patiently waiting for some time for the fulfilment of his demands by the British, he was moved to protest against their unusual tardiness in discharging their side of the contract. The Raja, when he said that the grant having already been made, he would not depart from it, had meant that the grant was made and was binding on him as much as his conditions were binding on the grantee. In other words, if the British wanted Darjeeling to be ceded to them, they had to abide by the Raja's demands. If they could not honour the Raja's terms, it was assumed that the cession was automatically cancelled. Since the British had taken possession of Darjeeling, the Raja was now pressing for the fulfilment of his demands. Protest followed protest. At long last the British offered Rs. 3,000/- per annum. Raja Tsugphud Namgyal had no choice but to accept it. He made it very plain, however, that he was accepting the offer reluctantly, and added that the amount might be increased. The first payment was made in 1841, including the arrears from 1835 to 1840. In the year 1846, the amount was raised to Rs. 6,000/- per annum.

The loss of Darjeeling entailed further trouble for Sikkim. The Tibetans, always suspicious of the British, visited their wrath on the Raja of Sikkim by forbidding him to visit Tibet more than once in 8 years. The subjects of the Raja, who had enjoyed grazing rights across the Tibetan border in the frontier area, were thereafter denied these rights. The occupation of Darjeeling by the British was to herald the gradual penetration of the British authority, this time eventually to reduce the Raja of Sikkim to a cipher.

For the British the acquisition of Darjeeling was the realisation of their long cherished desire to get a foothold within the territory of Sikkim, from where they could apply themselves to more effectively building bridges to Lhasa. They, therefore, began to develop Darjeeling without delay. For the rulers of



Sikkim and Bhutan and Tibet, the British proximity was far from pleasant. They saw the British entry into these regions as the harbinger of a formidable challenge to their way of life. The Sikkim Raja's bid to keep the British at arm's length had failed. He now tried to devise ways and means to thwart the British in the implementation of their projected development of Darjeeling. Prompted by the instinct of self-preservation, and egged on by Bhutan and Tibet, the Raja was led to adopt measures that soon brought matters to a head.

A little knowledge of the outside world would have saved the Sikkim Raja and his councillors from embarking upon a course foredoomed to fail. But the very nature of their society precluded any knowledge except the lamaist teaching from reaching them. It was a very unequal struggle. On one side were the British—from the subaltern to the general, from the lowest district official to the Governor-General, every British representative considered himself a proud member of the mightiest empire the world had ever seen, and was fired by the highest imperialistic fervour in full knowledge of the fact that his every endeavour in the furtherance of the empire's interests had the backing of the whole might of the empire. Ranged against the representatives of such an empire was a coterie of councillors, nurtured on the exploitation of a primitive people in a puny, primitive land, with no financial and military resources worth the name.

The blatantly unequal struggle was further accentuated by the fact that the councillors of the Sikkim Raja were far from united amongst themselves. The Bhutiyas and the Lepchas were, as ever, split in factions. The British took full advantage of this rift. They found the Lepchas congenial and amenable to reason. On the other hand, they considered the Bhutiyas shifty, cunning, and obdurate. The British had their friends among the Lepcha councillors who kept them posted of the Bhutiya conspiracy against British interests.

The man who stood out in his relentless opposition to the British was Dewan Namgyal, popularly known as the 'pagla' (mad) Dewan or minister. Even the British had this to say of Dewan Namgyal: "He was a man of considerable

strength of character and real ability, a quality so rare in these parts." Dewan Namgyal, the son of Tung-yik Minchoo, the leader of the Bhutiya conspiracy against Bolek, was a man of standing among the Bhutiyas. Besides this obvious advantage, he deliberately chose a carefully calculated course for his elevation. Having studied that the Raja was partial to his concubine, by whom he had two illegitimate children—a son and a daughter—, Namgyal attached himself to the concubine and her children. Eventually he wooed and married the daughter. Thereafter Namgyal's elevation was only a matter of time. His natural abilities were already there. And soon he was the chief among the Raja's councillors, and the natural leader of the Bhutiya faction.

✓ So rapid was the development of Darjeeling under the British that it soon became an eyesore to the Sikkimese authorities. The population grew by leaps and bounds, chiefly by immigration from the neighbouring kingdoms of Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim, in all of which slavery was prevalent. There was free trade in labour and all other commodities in Darjeeling. There was plenty of forest land for settlers and every encouragement given to new arrivals. The increased importance of Darjeeling, under free institutions, was a source of constant jealousy and annoyance to the Dewan, whose interests as the monopolist of all trade in Sikkim were greatly hurt. The principal people of Sikkim, all of them slave owners, were also hurt by the loss of rights over slaves who settled in Darjeeling as British subjects. Threats and intimidations were practised on such people. Worse still, occasionally British subjects from Darjeeling were kidnapped and sold in slavery. There were many outstanding issues to be settled between the Darjeeling administration and the Sikkim ruler. It was at such a time, in 1848, that Dr. Joseph Hooker, the British naturalist, came to Darjeeling to explore the Himalayan region surrounding it.

On being asked by the British Government, Dr. Campbell, Superintendent of Darjeeling, wrote to the Sikkim authorities seeking permission for Dr. Hooker to travel in the territory of Sikkim. Dewan Namgyal tried his best to stall so innocuous a request, giving way after a prolonged correspondence. Dr.

Campbell felt that if he could meet the Raja of Sikkim, he would be in a position to clear any misunderstanding the Raja might have and thereby pave the way for better relations between the Raja's administration and the British administration in Darjeeling. Therefore, with the permission of the British Government, Dr. Campbell set out for the Raja's seat at Tumlong in November, 1848. Dr. Campbell reached the Tista River to be confronted by officials from Sikkim who would not let him cross the border.

After a great deal of stalling, Dr. Campbell was at last allowed to meet the Raja. While Dr. Campbell was far from successful in his mission of improving relations between the two administrations, he came back with a first-hand, albeit limited, knowledge of the working of the Raja's mind. His face to face encounter with Dewan Namgyal convinced him of that man's implacable hatred for the British. He knew that until there was someone from among the more congenial Lepchas functioning as the Dewan, there was no hope of any change in the Sikkim Raja's attitude towards the British. Right then there was no prospect of bringing about this change.

The next year, Dr. Hooker was making a second tour of Sikkim. Dr. Campbell accompanied him, and the two went right up to the Tibetan frontier and crossed it. Making a long detour, they descended upon Tumlong.

Dr. Campbell had very much been looking forward to a tête-à-tête with the Raja since Dewan Namgyal was away in Chumbi, and Dr. Campbell's Lepcha friend, Chebu Lama, happened to be officiating. But all the efforts of the Lepcha councillor were set at naught by the Dewan's supporters. Disgusted, Dr. Campbell set out with Dr. Hooker towards the Chola Pass at the Sikkim-Tibet border. Beyond Chola Pass lay Chumbi. A body of Tibetan officials met them on the other side of the Chola Pass and turned them back. It appeared that Dewan Namgyal had not been lying idle, for a body of Sikkimese men appeared at the Chola Pass and arrested the two travellers. While Dr. Hooker was not ill-treated, Dr. Campbell was tortured.

Led like ordinary criminals, the two members of the British Empire were brought to Tumlong and promptly locked up. About a fortnight later Dewan Namgyal returned from Chumbi. Drs. Hooker and Campbell were produced before the Dewan, who allowed them to write to their Government of their arrest. The object appears to have been to force Campbell to agree to the dictation of the Dewan regarding the giving up of the escaped slaves, and to detain him until the British Government should sanction what Campbell committed under duress. The British Government, however, declared that such extorted conditions would not be confirmed and that the Raja's head should answer for it if a hair of the head of Dr. Campbell or Dr. Hooker were hurt. This was enough to intimidate the Raja and Dewan Namgyal.

On 9th December, 1849, Drs. Hooker and Campbell set off for Darjeeling under an armed guard, having spent a month as the Sikkim Raja's prisoners.

The Raja capitulated when the British threatened to march into Sikkim. As a result of this episode, the Raja of Sikkim lost the Rs. 6,000/- per annum that he was getting as compensation for Darjeeling. The British also annexed the Sikkim Terai and the hill areas bounded by the Rummam River on the north, the Great Rungeet and the Tista on the east, and the Nepal frontier on the west. This additional territory was added to Darjeeling. Chebu Lama was appointed the Sikkim Raja's agent (vakil) at Darjeeling. Dewan Namgyal fell from power. Relations between the Sikkim Raja and the British administration at Darjeeling greatly improved.

Dr. Campbell was, however, far from satisfied with the mild reaction of his Government to what he considered an outrageous behaviour on the part of the Sikkim Raja. He continued to look for an opening that would afford him the opportunity to avenge himself. To make matters worse, Dewan Namgyal was, before long, back in power.

In 1860 some residents of Darjeeling were kidnapped by the Sikkimese. This had been one of the pin-pricks Dewan Namgyal had used right from the day the development of Darjeeling

had started under the superintendence of Dr. Campbell. Taking advantage of the pretext provided by the latest kidnappings, Dr. Campbell marched into the territory of Sikkim at the head of a small body of native troops, only to be pushed back by a stronger contingent of the Sikkimese. This sparked off real hostilities.

A small expeditionary force under the command of Lt. Col. Gawler, with Ashley Eden as the Political Officer, entered Sikkim. The force of 1,800 troops was sufficient to bring the Raja and his recalcitrant councillors to their proper senses. Dr. Campbell was a strong advocate of Sikkim's annexation to the British Empire, but his counsels were overruled in the larger imperial interests.

A new treaty, consisting of 23 articles, was signed between the British and the Sikkim Raja in 1861.\* While Sikkim remained theoretically independent, it had to make many concessions to the British. Dewan Namgyal was banished. Sikkim was opened for free trade with India. Sikkim also agreed to render all possible help to the British in their efforts to develop trade with Tibet. The Raja of Sikkim began to be addressed as the Maharaja, though there was no formal declaration to that effect.

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\*For full text of the treaty see Appendix 'B'.

## CHAPTER VIII

# The Gorkha Immigration

WHILE the 1861 Treaty allowed the British a great say in any matter that affected their interests in Sikkim, they still believed in using tact rather than their newly-acquired powers in gradually converting the Sikkim ruler to share with them their cherished desire to open trade with Tibet. The British saw to it that their own friends were placed in key positions in Sikkim. Their arch enemy, Dewan Namgyal, was banished from Sikkim, and the Treaty excluded not only the banished Dewan but also his blood relations from enjoying any office in Sikkim. The British were now all set for the opening up of Sikkim as a prelude to the next and more important step of opening up Tibet. Sikkim in those days was still covered with dense forests. The Bhutiyas and Lepchas together formed a small population, which always posed the question of labour shortage. It was at this stage that the solution of this problem was seen by the British in encouraging the immigration of Nepalese and settling them on the unoccupied lands of Sikkim.

The Nepalese, for whom the word Gorkha has been used in this book as a synonym, had had contacts with the Bhutiyas and Lepchas of Sikkim under far from congenial circumstances. In the strange ways of fate, the Nepalese, who had followed a career of pillage and conquest of Sikkimese territory beginning with the closing years of the 18th century, were ultimately to form not only the most numerous of the ethnic elements that formed the population of Sikkim but were also to lay the firm

foundations of the agrarian economy of Sikkim. But such transformation took many years. And the early years of the immigration of the Nepalese were full of strife on account of the opposition of the Bhutiyas under the leadership of the rulers of Sikkim, who had inherited an almost atavistic trauma of the Gorkha dread.

The British, for their part, had come under the spell, as it were, of the Nepalese following the Gorkha War of 1814-16. While it is beyond the scope of this book to dwell at any length on the burgeoning of British-Gorkha relations, a brief notice is necessary for the proper understanding of the immigration of the Nepalese in such numbers as to form the most important group inhabiting the entire region that includes Darjeeling and Sikkim.

The Anglo-Gorkha War had brought two brave and warlike peoples, the British and the Gorkhas, face to face in many encounters in the field of battle stretching from the Sutlej to the Tista. While the fortunes of war were ultimately to go to the British, the two adversaries had learnt, during the numerous encounters, to respect each other for bravery and other qualities. Soon after the cessation of hostilities, the British were to befriend the Gorkhas, enrol them in their army, and exploit them for the furtherance of British imperialist interests. History has recorded the gallantry displayed by Gorkha soldiers in many a far-flung battlefield in the cause of the British Empire. It was not long before the Gorkhas were the most trusted element among the soldiers in India, their stock rising with every trial the British Empire had to undergo.

This apart, the British had also studied that the Gorkha made as good a peasant in peace-time as he made a soldier in war. The combination of these two sterling qualities and the similarity between the topography of the Gorkha home in Nepal and Sikkim made him the ideal immigrant to fill in the empty spaces of Sikkim. The Bhutiyas and Lepchas made poor farmers partly because of their ignorance of the methods of cultivation and partly because of a natural indolence. The Lepcha had always been used to easy-going ways and was averse to hard labour or, for that matter, any other form of strife and

struggle. The Bhutiya, while having a natural aptitude for trade, was loath to physical labour. So, the British encouraged the immigration of Nepalese settlers to open up Sikkim. There were some among the Raja's councillors who shared this view of the British and took active interest in settling the Nepalese immigrants. These councillors, prominent among whom were the two Khangsa brothers (Phodang Lama and the Khangsa Dewan), were greatly rewarded for this farsightedness, for they were the first beneficiaries of Gorkha toil and industry. Wherever the Gorkhas were settled, they cleared the jungle, terraced the hill sides for the cultivation of paddy, and began a mode of agriculture that obtains to this day, and forms the very basis of Sikkim's economy. It was the Gorkha immigrants who brought cardamom seeds from Nepal into Sikkim. Cardamom, like rubber, was to flourish in its new home while its production in its original home languished into insignificance. In the years immediately following the 1861 Treaty, the Gorkha immigration into Sikkim had just begun with the British as its advocates, some important councillors as its supporters, and the majority of the councillors, headed by the ruler, opposing it tooth and nail. The Raja and his obdurate councillors were prompted by prejudice against the Gorkha immigrants, it being far beyond them to take into account the economic and the long-term benefits accruing to the country and the people.

Maharaja Tsugphud Namgyal, towards the last years of his rule, led a retired life, leaving the cares of the State to his son, Sidkeong Namgyal, who had signed the Treaty of 1861 as the 'Maharaja' of Sikkim even when his father was alive. In 1863, Tsugphud Namgyal died. Sidkeong Namgyal formally succeeded his father at the age of 42.

Sidkeong Namgyal had seen the operation of British power in Sikkim and was clever enough to draw his own conclusions. He went all out to ingratiate himself with the British authorities. It was mainly due to Sidkeong Namgyal's having established cordial relations with the British that the latter increased the Darjeeling subvention to nine thousand rupees in 1868, and to twelve thousand rupees per annum in 1874. The British also granted the Sikkim ruler a salute of 15 guns.



Fittingly enough, it was Sidkeong Namgyal who granted the first lease to the Gorkha settlers. In the year 1867 a formal grant of lease was accorded to two Newar brothers, the traders Luxmi Prasads. Emboldened by his rapport with the British, Sidkeong Namgyal requested permission for the return of Dewan Namgyal, but the request was turned down.

Sidkeong Namgyal died in 1874. His half-brother, Thutob Namgyal, became the ruler at the age of 14. He married Sidkeong's widow, Rani Pending, in accordance with Bhutiya customs.

To be able to understand the subsequent course of events, it is necessary to examine the family relations of Maharaja Tsugphud Namgyal. The genealogical chart is given on page 45 (based on Sikkim Gazetteer, 1894 Ed., page 23), with explanatory notes appended to it, will assist the reader in this.

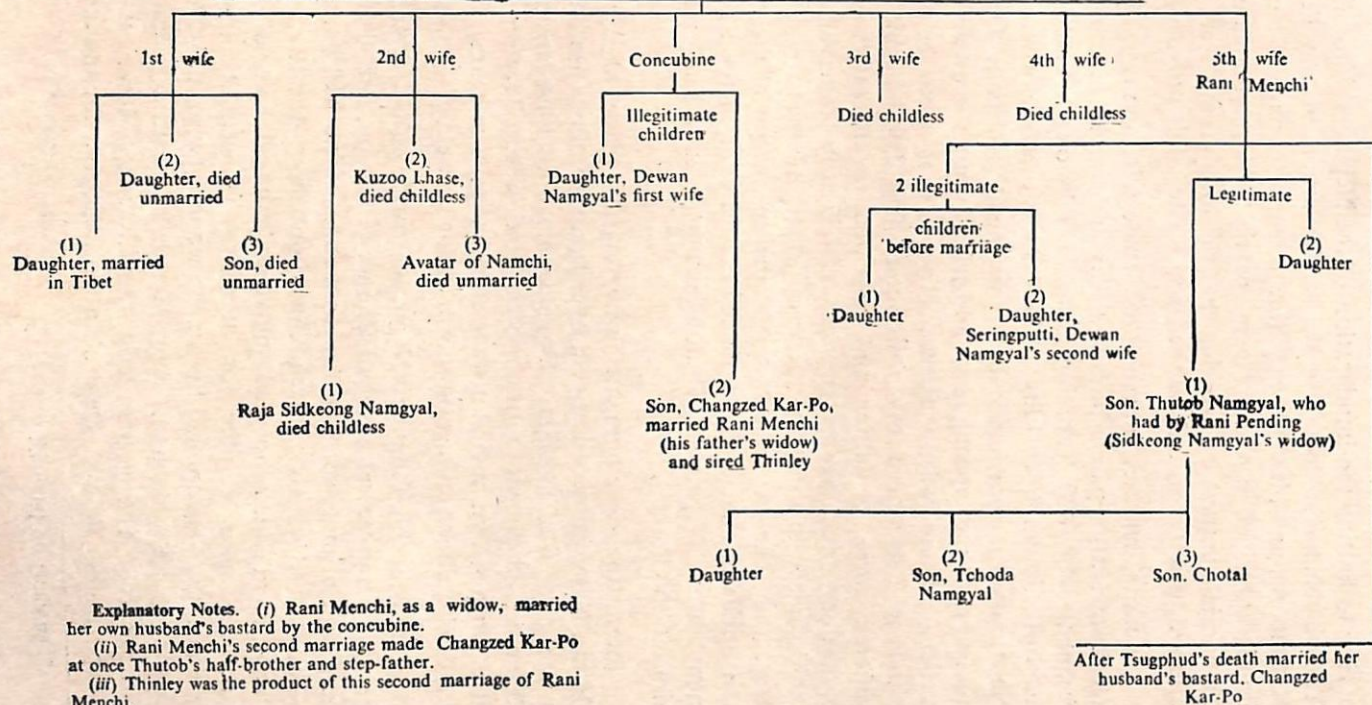
Thutob Namgyal had inherited from his father Tsugphud Namgyal an implacable hatred for the Nepalese. So when he began his rule, he set to undo, to the extent it lay within his powers, his half-brother's efforts in settling the Nepalese immigrants. As has been said earlier, some councillors had had the keen perception of the benefits accruing to them by the settling of the Nepalese. Following their examples, other landlords had also begun to settle the Nepalese on their lands and reap the fruit of the toil of the immigrants. This, naturally, aroused the ire of the reactionaries at whose head was the ruler himself.

While the pro-immigration faction led by the Khangsa Dewan was having a lively tussle with the anti-immigration faction, prominent among whom were Dala Athing Densapa and Tarching Lama of Pemiongchi, an embezzlement charge was laid against one Lasso Athing. On the charge being substantiated, the Khangsa Dewan ordered the attachment of the land under Lasso Athing and subsequently transferred the lease of the land in favour of Luxmi Das and his brother. This was enough to bring the matter to a head. The anti-immigration Bhutiyas joined together in support of Lasso Athing, paying little heed to the merits of the case, and petitioned the young ruler to approach the Governor of Bengal with

## Maharaja Tsugphud Namgyal

Married five wives in succession

Kept second wife's maidservant as concubine



**Explanatory Notes.** (i) Rani Menchi, as a widow, married her own husband's bastard by the concubine.

(ii) Rani Menchi's second marriage made Changedz Kar-Po at once Thutob's half-brother and step-father.

(iii) Thinley was the product of this second marriage of Rani Menchi.

a view to halting the immigration of the Nepalese into Sikkim. Thutob Namgyal met the British Governor, Ashley Eden, at Kalimpong, and pleaded with him for the stoppage of Nepalese immigration. The Government partially accommodated the Maharaja's request by ordering that the immigrants were to be allowed to settle on uninhabited and waste lands only.

Minor skirmishes between the Nepalese immigrants and the agents of anti-Nepalese Bhutiyas, lay and monk, became more frequent. In 1880, Tarching Lama of Pemiongchi came at the head of his lama and lay followers to Rhenock, where a new Nepalese settlement under the management of Luxmi Das and his brother had sprung up, and tried to use force to eject the settlers. There was a fracas. The settlers were helped by Phodang Lama and his followers. The Pemiongchi group suffered some casualties and retreated to the safety of their monastery. Much against the wishes of Thutob Namgyal, whose rabid hatred of the Nepalese was further inflamed by the incident, the Rhenock affairs was settled in favour of the settlers and Phodang Lama. This opened the way for increased settlement of the Nepalese. Thutob Namgyal, in a huff, removed himself to Chumbi.

Interesting developments were taking place at Chumbi. Dewan Namgyal was destined, once again, to play a leading role in the affairs of Sikkim. On account of his long residence in Chumbi, and the resultant close association with Tibetan authorities, with whom he had always enjoyed good relations, he had acquired quite an influential position for himself.

Rani Menchi, Tsugphud Namgyal's widow, had remarried,\* taking for her second husband Changzed Kar-po, her first husband's illegitimate son by the concubine. She had borne him a son, Thinley, alias Lhase Khuso, on whom the Rani doted. Dewan Namgyal, who had married Changzed Kar-po's sister, was once again eligible for marriage on account of his first wife's death. He applied himself to wooing, with the frenzied ardour of an old man, Rani Menchi's illegitimate daughter, Serringputti. The young lady would, perhaps, have continued to spurn the 'Pagla' Dewan's attentions, but for the fact that

\*See chart on page 45.

her mother, Rani Menchi, had her own game to play. And none but the wily old Dewan had the ability and experience to aid her in her machinations. It was largely through Rani Menchi's efforts that Serringputti agreed to reward the Dewan's attentions by becoming his wife.

In 1879, Changzed Kar-po paid a visit to Gyantse, where he met the Chinese Amban and some Tibetan officials. This visit resulted in the Chinese investiture of Thutob Namgyal with a button of the first rank (plain coral). Kar-po died soon after. The next year Rani Pending also died, leaving behind a daughter and two sons, among them the heir-apparent, Tchoda Namgyal.

Rani Menchi and Dewan Namgyal began to work in concert for the succession of Thinley and the removal of Thutob Namgyal from the Sikkim Gaddi.

Maharaja Thutob Namgyal, who had returned to Tumlong, had evinced no interest in a second marriage. Under friendly pressure, he finally agreed to remarry. In pursuance of this he procured two elephants from the Government of Bengal in 1881 and sent them to the Panchen Lama at Tashilhunpo and the Dalai Lama at Lhasa, seeking their blessings for a suitable match. The elephants and other presents and the proposal for marriage were entrusted to Nudup Gyaltzen (a brother of Phodang Lama) and the Kazi of Rhenock. These officers secured the blessings of the two Grand Lamas and arranged a marriage between Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and a daughter of Shafe Uthok, one of the leading men of Tibet.

Rani Menchi and her son, Thinley, accompanied by Dewan Namgyal, followed the officers shortly afterwards in 1882, apparently having secured from Thutob Namgyal his willingness to enter into a polyandrous marriage contract whereby he and Thinley were to be the joint husbands of the bride-to-be.

The reader will have seen how some of the marriages given in the chart on page 45 border on promiscuity, if not on outright incest. But even this hardly prepares one for the proposed elevation of Thinley to the same level as Maharaja Thutob Namgyal. While Thutob was the legitimate son of Maharaja Tsugphud Namgyal and Rani Menchi, and, as such, of right royal descent, Thinley was the son of Tsugphud Namgyal's ille-

gitimate son and Rani Menchi, who lost the title of 'Rani' as soon as she married Changzed Kar-po. By no stretch of imagination could Thinley claim royalty. Therefore Rani Menchi's efforts for the recognition of Thinley by elevating him to a status equal to that of Thutob were a little far-fetched. But yet such was the pull of the combined forces of Rani Menchi and Dewan Namgyal that they seemed to have been successful in their designs.

Soon after her arrival in Lhasa, Rani Menchi broke off the match arranged by Nudup Gyaltzen and Rhenock Kazi. Yishey Dolma, daughter of an inferior officer in the Dalai Lama's Court, was secured as the joint wife of Thutob Namgyal and Thinley.

The marriage was solemnised at Lhasa, where Thinley, the man on the spot, and the bride had their honeymoon. When Thinley and the newly-wed Rani left for Chumbi on 5 June 1883, the Rani was far gone in pregnancy. The Khangsa Dewan had learnt of the Rani's pregnancy and passed on the intelligence to Maharaja Thutob Namgyal. Thutob refused to countenance this. Apparently, Rani Menchi's zeal in having Thinley recognized as Thutob Namgyal's legitimate royal half-brother—~~itself~~ a climb-down from her first misguided efforts to have Thutob supplanted by Thinley—seemed to have misfired in the face of Thutob's obduracy.

To the young Rani Yishey, Thutob's anger did not make much sense, and she did not care overmuch to be in any haste to earn his embraces. Thutob had a forbidding hare-lip, and this, combined with the evident display of unreasonable temper, did not make him a charming customer. The Rani, used to Thinley from the very night of her nuptials, and whose child she now carried in her womb, was nothing loath, at first, to the consequences of Thutob's lack of interest in her; this left her wholly to Thinley. If there had been any other woman in place of Rani Yishey Dolma, she would, perhaps, have preferred the continuation of this arrangement, but the Rani was too gifted a woman to rest content with her position. She was brilliant, within the limitation imposed by her Tibetan upbringing and society, was a gifted conversationalist, and had a deep knowledge of Tibetan

Buddhism. She was an accomplished calligraphist and had many other graces to commend her in the eyes of men. So, before long, she set about to probe what lay at the root of Thutob's aversion to her.

Thutob Namgyal carried on the administration from Tumlong with the help of Khangsa Dewan and Sheo Dewan. Thinley's influence in Chumbi had become great. Rani Yishey Dolma had given birth to Thinley's two children.

In 1885, there was some trouble between the Tibetans and the Bhutanese. The Chinese Amban came down to Phari from Lhasa to mediate between the two disputants. Thutob Namgyal delegated Thinley, who was available at Chumbi itself, and some Kazis, to wait upon the Chinese dignitary. The Amban took it as an insult and asked for an explanation as to why the Maharaja did not attend in person. Informed of the Amban's anger, Thutob Namgyal approached the British for permission to travel to Chumbi to wait upon the Chinese Amban. The British readily agreed to this, urging upon Thutob to make the best use of his time for the purpose of broaching the subject of trade with Tibet, a perpetual obsession of the British. Thutob Namgyal went to Phari only to find that the Amban would not hear of granting him an interview. He wanted to be back, but the British pressed him to stay on in Chumbi until the arrival of a Mr. Macaulay from Darjeeling. The unenviable plight of Thutob Namgyal, sandwiched as he was between two great powers, China and Britain, was to dog him for many years in the future.

During Thutob's stay at Chumbi, Rani Yishey Dolma brought to bear upon him all the feminine charms and wiles she was capable of. By lavishing upon Thutob her unsolicited attentions, and by using influential friends, she brought home to the Maharaja that he himself had given his consent to the joint marriage, and had deputed his half-brother to represent him in the marriage ceremony. It was not long before Thutob Namgyal came round. Thereafter Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yishey Dolma were to remain on the best of understandings, and Yishey Dolma was to combine with her wifely duties the role of a friend and counsellor through all the thick and thin of Thutob's rule.

## CHAPTER I X

### The British Yoke

THE British could have annexed Sikkim to their Indian Empire, but they did not; for they thought that the gains accruing to them by the exploitation of their hold over Sikkim would, in the long run, outweigh whatever little they would have gained by outright annexation. They were not really interested in Sikkim. Their interest lay in Tibet and the Chinese territory beyond. The annexation of Sikkim would have seriously jeopardised their attempts to enter Tibet, for the fears of being invaded by the British had lain at the root of Tibetan opposition to the British getting an entry into their country. Apart from using Sikkim as the base from where to conduct trade negotiations with the Tibetans, the British had also counted upon the goodwill of the Sikkim ruler in smoothing out things with his northern neighbours. Before we proceed to recount the burdens Sikkim had to bear on account of its having been made the base for penetration of Tibet by the British, the relations then existing between Sikkim and Tibet, and between Tibet and China, need to be understood.

Sikkim had always looked upon itself as a dependency, a vassal, of Tibet, not because of any compulsion but because of a sort of voluntary submission springing from the Sikkimese Bhutiyas' origin, religion, and, above all, the proximity of the two territories. Tibet looked upon China as its suzerain, the Chinese influence in Lhasa fluctuating with the rise and fall in the power and prestige of the Celestial Emperor. The Sikkim

ruler had the same respect for the Chinese Emperor as a servant has for his master's master. While the Sikkim ruler's subservience to Tibet was total, the Tibetans' attitude towards China was largely determined by their own self-interest and was regulated by a careful appraisal of the Emperor's powers at any given point of time. While Sikkim could not imagine herself countering any of Tibet's mandates, Tibet could, and would if her interests demanded, devise means to defy Chinese orders. It was into this complex oriental world that the British were seeking ingress.

The British hold over Sikkim and their manifest zeal in extending their trade northwards produced only hostile reactions in both Tibet and China. The Tibetan ruling clique viewed the British endeavour with the greatest alarm since it posed a direct threat to the vested interest—the clique had in the Tibet-China trade, and also to Tibet's anachronistic theocracy; China was alarmed because of the threat to its monopoly of trade with Tibet and also because whatever hold it had over Tibet would very likely vanish once the superiority of the British over the Chinese were demonstrated to the Tibetans. It is not strange, therefore, to find that the more the British enthusiasm waxed at the prospect of finding their way to their ultima Thule, the more fearful the Tibetans and Chinese became. Their efforts to keep the British at bay were correspondingly increased. It was the misfortune of tiny Sikkim to be trapped between these two forces. The misfortune was all the more accentuated by the fact that, pathetically ignorant of the might of the British Empire, the Sikkim ruler and most of his councillors were not only subservient to Tibet and China but also regarded them as capable of successfully warding off the British. The Sikkimese understood and feared the Tibetans and the Chinese. They did not understand the British and regarded them with fear and mistrust.

The British quest for the road to Tibet had started towards the last quarter of the 18th century when, following an exchange of cordial letters, Warren Hastings, the then Governor-General of the territories of the East India Company, had sent George Bogle on a friendly mission to the Tashi Lama at Tashilhunpo in Tibet. The cordial relations established by Bogle could not



be exploited on account of the Tashi Lama's death shortly thereafter. Bogle had also died soon after. Warren Hastings had found another young man, Samuel Turner, to lead a second mission to Tashilhunpo in the year 1783. For diverse reasons this mission had been a failure. Matters had been further complicated by the Chinese invasion of Nepal in 1792, via Tibet. The Chinese victory over the Gorkhas had raised their stock high in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. Their influence had tangibly increased to the detriment of British interests. The Bhutan road to Tashilhunpo, used by Bogle and Turner, had been closed to the British. And there the matter had rested for long years.

With Darjeeling in their hands, and Sikkim under the obligations of the 1861 Treaty, the British had sought to establish a link with Tibet through Sikkim. The British had also learnt that the shortest route to Tibet lay through Sikkim. While Tsugphud Namgyal, under the baneful influence of Dewan Namgyal, had incurred the wrath of the British, and suffered some inconveniences, not the least of which had been the stoppage of the Darjeeling subvention, his successor, Sidkeong Namgyal, had been shrewd enough to befriend the British and regain much of the lost ground. In the year 1873, Sidkeong Namgyal had called on the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal at Darjeeling. At his request, the British had increased the Darjeeling subvention to Rupees 12,000 per annum. In return, Sidkeong Namgyal had promised to render all possible help to the British in establishing proper contacts with the Tibetans.

In the autumn of 1873, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, J.W. Edgar, had visited Sikkim and gone right up to the border with Tibet. There he had come against Tibetan opposition to his onward advance. The Tibetans had been dead set against the British entry into Tibet. Edgar had to turn back after some rounds of fruitless talks with the Tibetan jongpen (district officer) at Phari in Chumbi.

In the last chapter we have seen that Thutob Namgyal had been asked by the British to stay on in Chumbi until the arrival of Colman Macaulay from Darjeeling. Colman Macaulay had earlier gone right up to Khambajong, a small Tibetan town not

far from the northern border of Sikkim, where he had met the jongpen. He had returned with the impression that more than the Tibetans it was the Chinese who objected to the opening of Tibet for trade with the British. Among the Tibetans a section of the monks opposed the British entry, but this opposition, according to Macaulay, could be removed by suitable bribes and presents.

Thanks to the long arm of British power, and their improved relations with China, the Emperor of China had, at long last, agreed to the British sending a trade mission to Lhasa. Colman Macaulay, who had taken a leading role in bringing about this happy prospect, had been chosen to lead the mission.

The mission was assembled at Darjeeling in 1885-86. But then hitches began to develop. Despite the Chinese approval, the Tibetans were openly hostile to the mission's proposed entry into Tibet.

On learning from the Chinese Amban that the Emperor had granted the British permission at the Chefoo Convention to conduct a trade mission between "China and India, via Tibet," the Tsongdu (Tibetan Parliament) "held an emergency meeting and declared that Tibet was being harassed by the British from all directions and that the Emperor of China had no authority to give anyone permission to pass through Tibet. The Tsongdu members took an oath never to allow the British to enter Tibetan territory and put their seals to it".\*

That was what was happening at Lhasa when the British were assembling the 'mission to Tibet' at Darjeeling. "The District Officer at Phari asked the Sikkim ruler not to allow the British Expedition to enter Tibet through Sikkim. The Sikkimese ruler informed the Phari official that he was fully aware of the situation and had already written to Lhasa about the British intention of building a rest house at the Dzalep-la (Jelep-la) Pass on the Tibetan border, in spite of the fact that they had been informed that the Tibetan Government might protest it. The Tibetan Government was surprised at the Sikkimese report and sent two representatives, Khenche Drugyal and Tsepon Tsarong, to the border to confirm the actual

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\**Tibet: A Political History*, by Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa, p. 198.

demarcation of the Sikkimese-Tibetan boundary. An old resident of the area recalled that the original boundary was at Rhenock, which was now in Sikkimese territory."<sup>1</sup>

After months of cooling heels at Darjeeling, the Macaulay Mission was abandoned in 1886. The Tibetans, who had been fortifying themselves at the border, naturally took the dispersal of the mission as resulting from their hostility to it, and especially to their warlike preparations. Flushed by the success of their enterprise, they advanced into Sikkim across the Jelep-la Pass and fortified the hilltop at Lingtu at an elevation of 12,617 feet above sea level. While the British thought Lingtu to be sixteen miles within Sikkimese territory, the Tibetans "decided to establish a check-post at Lungthur (Lingtu), which was a little deeper in Tibetan territory than Rhenock. In spite of discouragement from the Sikkimese, who anticipated British displeasure, the fortified check-post was set up in 1887 and manned by an officer with 20 soldiers."<sup>2</sup>

When the British wrote to the Dalai Lama, through the Sikkimese ruler, asking him to remove the check-post, the Tibetan Kashag (Cabinet) replied: "There was no harm in protecting one's own territory and that the Tibetans were prepared to resist a British attack. Two Tibetan Generals, Dapon Ngabo and Dapon Surkhang, with nine hundred troops under the overall command of the Council Minister, Kalon Lhalu, were dispatched to the border."<sup>3</sup>

Maharaja Thutob Namgyal further complicated the matter when he tried to explain away Tibetan intrusion into Sikkim by saying that Lingtu was actually a part of Tibet and that the Tibetans had been graciously pleased to allow him to treat it as his own territory. The Tibetans began to demonstrate stronger signs of their possession of the territory by levying taxes on the people inhabiting the surrounding areas. The Sikkim Maharaja having contributed to the confusion by stating that Lingtu fell within Tibetan territory, the British decided upon thrashing out the matter of boundary, and also Sikkim-Tibet

1. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

2. *Loc. cit.*

3. *Loc. cit.*

relations, with him. The Maharaja was summoned to Darjeeling in May, 1887. Nobody was more surprised than the British authorities when Thutob Namgyal refused to budge from his capital. The British held out the threat of stopping the payment of Darjeeling subvention—a substantial amount in 1887—and Thutob, with a lofty disdain, continued to defy the British from his safe haven. He further told the British that he and his people had, in 1886, signed a treaty declaring that Sikkim was subject only to China and Tibet; that he was therefore unable to come to Darjeeling without the express permission of the Tibetan Government.

This was a curious development and came as a total surprise to the British. It appears that in 1886, coinciding with the apparently waning British influence, the Maharaja had signed at Galing, in Tibet, a formal treaty on behalf of the "people of Sikkim, priests and laymen." The treaty, "which is couched in the form of a petition to the two Chinese Residents, set forth that some Europeans, after petitioning the great officers of China, have, to the detriment of religion, got an order to enter Tibet for trade. 'From the time of Chogyal Phuntso Namgyal (the first Raja of Sikkim) all our Rajas and other subjects have obeyed the orders of China... You have ordered us by strategy or force to stop the passage of the Rishi river between Sikkim and British territory, but we are small and the Sarkar (British Government) is great, and we may not succeed, and may then fall into the mouth of the tiger-lion. In such a crisis, if you, as our old friends, can make some arrangements, even then in good and evil we will not leave the shelter of the feet of China and Tibet..... We all, king and subjects, priests and laymen, honestly promise to prevent persons from crossing the boundary.'"\*

The Chinese were as interested as the British in seeing the Tibetan soldiers vacate Lingtu, if only for the satisfaction of having their orders complied with. Much to the chagrin of the Chinese, the Tibetans paid little heed to their repeated orders asking them to vacate Lingtu. The earlier British expectations that "the mob of archers, slingers, and matchlockmen, collected on a barren, windswept ridge at a height which even Tibetans

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\*Introduction to Sikkim Gazetteer (1894 ed.); p. viii.

find trying, would speedily fall away under stress of cold and starvation", had been belied. The phlegmatic British lion, 'tiger-lion' to the Tibetans, would perhaps have gone on ignoring the Lingtu fortifications but the undermining of British prestige had some very unwholesome repercussions in Darjeeling and Sikkim. Darjeeling, where there was a sizable European population, and where these Europeans had invested considerable capital in the growing tea industry, was panicky. In Sikkim, the ardent friends of the British, the Nepalese, had "begun to ask themselves seriously whether it might not be necessary for their ultimate safety to cast in their lot with the Tibetan party. These men, although as anxious as ever to keep up their former relations, and fully hostile to Tibetan encroachment, had begun to doubt our (British) desire or our ability to assist them, and openly expressed their fear of being 'drowned,' as they worded it, if they persisted in trying to swim against the current now running in favour of Tibet."\*

With no alternative left, the British sent an ultimatum to the garrison at Lingtu that unless they withdrew by the 15th of March, 1888, they would be expelled by force. Ultimately, the British had to send a 2,000-strong force under Brigadier-General Graham, who expelled the Tibetans from Lingtu on 20th March, 1888, after a short fight. There were other isolated skirmishes which led to the temporary British occupation of Chumbi. The British advance into Chumbi complicated the matter by widening the issue. The Chinese Amban came rushing down to Chumbi for talks with the British. The British were at first represented by A. W. Paul, who had accompanied the expedition as the Political Officer. Later, the Foreign Secretary, H. M. Durand, conducted the talks with the Amban.

The talks were unduly prolonged, especially as the Chinese Amban was intent upon finding some means which, while being realistic in taking cognizance of the British interests in Sikkim, yet retained something of Chinese suzerainty at least as a face-saving device. In January, 1889, the talks came to an end without any satisfactory solution acceptable to both sides. But

\*Introduction to Sikkim Gazetteer (1894 ed.) p. x.

this situation was not desirable in view of the larger British Imperial interests, which demanded sound and healthy relations with the Chinese Empire. So negotiations were again revived and they culminated in the Anglo-Chinese Convention, signed by the British and the Chinese on 17th March, 1890.<sup>1</sup>

The Convention fixed the Sikkim-Tibet boundary as the crest of the mountain range forming the watershed between the river systems of the two countries. Article 2 defined the status of Sikkim vis-a-vis China and the British, thereby putting an end to whatever tenuous hold China had had on Sikkim. It read : "It is admitted that the British Government, whose protectorate over Sikkim State is hereby recognised, has direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of that State, and except through and with the permission of the British Government, neither the ruler of the State nor any of its officers shall have official relations of any kind, formal or informal, with any other country."

The Convention left some matters for discussion between the officials of the High Contracting Parties. These related to trade, communication, and pasturage. A Protocol to the Convention was signed in 1893<sup>2</sup> and appended to it.

The 1890 Anglo-Chinese Convention completed the British hold over Sikkim that had begun with the 1861 Treaty. The Treaty was the result of a clash between Sikkim and the British. The Convention had followed the Tibetan occupation of Lingtu and the resultant clash between the Tibetans and the British. The Tibetans had not only been worsted in the field but also completely brushed aside during the negotiations by their suzerain, China. Sikkim was sacrificed at the altar of Anglo-Chinese relations. Thutob Namgyal was thoroughly disillusioned, but it was too late for him to mend matters. His ordeals had begun before the Convention was signed.

Claude White, the Assistant Political Officer with the British Expeditionary Force, was appointed the Political Officer in

1. For full text of the Convention see Appendix 'C'.

2. For full text of the Protocol see Appendix 'D'.

charge of administration in Sikkim in June, 1889. The ruler's powers were curtailed to a minimum, all powers being exercised by the Political Officer. Thutob was allowed a small retinue and an allowance of Rs. 500/- per month. The British had been sorely displeased by Thutob's antics during the Tibetan occupation of Lingtu, and now they were determined to teach him a lesson or two.

Among the Sikkim notables, Claude White had been struck by the abilities of the Khangsa Dewan and his brother, Phodang Lama. While Claude White greatly favoured them for their progressive outlook, Thutob disliked them for this very quality. Claude White formed a Council with the Khangsa Brothers, Sheo Dewan, the Gangtok, Tashiding, Enchey, and Rhenock Kazis, and, as a sop to Thutob, Lari Pema of the Pemiongchi Monastery, as members, and himself as the President. The Council had a minority of Thutob's supporters. Worse still, soon after the formation of the Council, the British ordered Maharaja Thutob Namgyal to remove himself to Kalimpong. While Thutob Namgyal pined away at Kalimpong, with Rani Yishey Dolma as his sole companion, Claude White addressed himself to the administrative task that faced him. On the condition of Sikkim he observed :—

“Chaos reigned everywhere ; there was no revenue system, the Raja taking what he required from the people, those nearest the capital having to contribute the largest share, while those more remote had toll taken from them by the local officials in *the name of the Raja*, though little found its way to him ; no court of justice, no police, no public works, no education for the younger generation. The task before me was a difficult one, but very fascinating ; the country was a new one and everything was in my hands.”

Claude White had spent a year in Nepal before being appointed the Political Officer in Sikkim. He had studied the Gorkhas and their industrious habits. He encouraged the settlement of Gorkhas with a view to opening up Sikkim and strengthening its economic base. He also created a number of lessee landlords in his bid to ensure regular collection of land revenue.

When Thutob Namgyal was allowed to return to Sikkim, he found the administrative change not much to his liking. Supported by his strong-minded Rani, he tried to oppose Claude White, but to little avail.

The Raja and Rani were living at Nabey, some distance from Gangtok, the Political Officer's seat, when news reached them that one of the two sons of Thutob by his first wife had fallen ill in Chumbi. The Rani hastened to Chumbi on getting the news. Claude White thought that the Raja and Rani were plotting to flee to Tibet. He had the Raja arrested before he could move to join the Rani, and brought to Gangtok. The Sikkim Chronicle notes :

“Raja Thutob Namgyal was kept in solitary confinement, like an ordinary prisoner, for 13 days, when even food and water could be had only after repeated requests.”

The Rani and the second prince, Sidkeong Tulku, came to Gangtok post haste. The elder prince, the heir-apparent, however, stayed away, only to lose his right to ascend the Sikkim Gaddi. Sorely tried by an unabating succession of unkind events, and tired of an existence reduced to penury, Maharaja Thutob Namgyal, accompanied by the Maharani, undertook a pilgrimage of the monasteries of Sikkim. Misfortune dogged him even there. While at Rabdantse, the old capital abandoned after the Gorkha invasion, Claude White confronted the Maharaja with the accusation that he had used forced labour. He was asked to return to Gangtok. But Thutob had other plans. He wanted to flee to Tibet via Nepal. He proceeded to Walong, intending to cross over into Tibet. The Nepalese were, by then, firm friends of the British. Thutob was thwarted in his designs. After a long and weary journey under the escort of Nepalese troops, who treated him nicely, he was handed over to the British at the border.

Once again Thutob was kept in solitary confinement for sometime at Ging, below Darjeeling, and then removed to Kurseong. There he stayed for two years under strict surveillance. Only the Maharani and some carefully screened retainers were allowed to stay with him. There, in 1893, Tashi Namgyal, a future ruler of Sikkim, was born.



In 1894 Thutob Namgyal met Commissioner Nolan, White's immediate superior, and apprised him of his difficulties and blamed White for his excessive harshness towards him. Nolan told the Maharaja that he had to act according to the advice of the Political Officer if he wanted the British Government to consider his case favourably. Thutob thereupon sent an apology to the British Government for his past conduct, with promises to mend his behaviour. In 1895, Thutob and Maharani Yishey Dolma were removed to Darjeeling, where their lot greatly improved. They were allowed far greater freedom of movement and association. After some months at Darjeeling and equipped with a first-hand knowledge of British administration, the Maharaja and Maharani returned to Sikkim. The capital was also shifted to Gangtok, which was not only the Political Officer's seat but also far more centrally located.

Greatly chastened, the Maharaja and the Maharani thereafter hearkened to White's counsels and found the result highly satisfactory. Claude White, while blaming the Maharani for Thutob Namgyal's initial faux pas had this to say about her :

"Born intriguer and diplomat, her energies were unfortunately, but naturally, owing to her Tibetan origin, misdirected for many years, until, finding out her mistake, she frankly confessed that she had been wrong, and turned her thoughts and attention to matters which should lead to the welfare of her husband's state."

Pursuant to the Regulations relating to Trade, Communications, and Pasturage of 1893, a trade-mart was opened at Yatung. The British, if they thought that the 1890 Convention and the subsequent Trade Regulations would give them the keys to the gates of Lhasa, were to realise before long that they were as far from the goal as they had been before. They had not reckoned with the Tibetans' infinite capacity to stick to their chosen course, their suzerain's ratification of the Anglo-Chinese Convention being paid little heed to. The Tibetans had no intention of honouring the Chinese pledge, for the simple reason that they were not a party to it. Tibet was not Sikkim. And China lacked the means to compel the

Tibetans to honour the terms. Very probably the Chinese were secretly abetting the Tibetans, for thus their own interests were also safeguarded. While this setback was causing some headache to the British, the Tibetans went a step further in their calculated move to irritate the British by establishing a military post at Giagong, in North Sikkim, a few miles south of the watershed.

The British wrote to the Chinese Amban at Lhasa, bringing to his notice the violation of the 1890 Convention by the Tibetans. It was finally agreed that the boundary should be demarcated under the joint supervision of the British and Chinese Commissioners, the Tibetans also participating. The Tibetans not only failed to put in an appearance but also hindered the Chinese representative by refusing to provide him with transport. Under instructions from his government, Claude White began to demarcate the boundary unilaterally, only to find the boundary pillars knocked down after some time.

It speaks volumes for the great patience exercised by the British in their dealings with the Tibetans that the Giagong affair hanged fire for years. At the same time it reflects the vacillating border policy pursued by Lord Elgin, the Viceroy. In 1899, Lord Elgin was replaced by Lord Curzon, who, apart from his dynamism, had very fixed notions about the British policy to be pursued in such matters.

The Russians had begun to take an active interest in Tibet, or so the British thought. This was enough to set the whole British Imperial machinery rolling. The Giagong affair had lasted too long. A small force of about a hundred men pushed back the Tibetans from Giagong in 1902.

Tibetan obstinacy, Chinese weakness, and the growing fear in British minds of Russian penetration, culminated in the famous Younghusband Mission to Tibet, which passed through Sikkim, making heavy demands on its not very large labour resources, and took British bayonets right up to the forbidden city of Lhasa.

In the year 1906, the first modern type of school was started at Gangtok. Education, apart from religious instruction at the monasteries, was unknown before then. Among the first students at the school was Tashi Namgyal.

Rani Yishey Dolma died in the year 1910. Four years later Maharaja Thutob Namgyal also passed away.

## CHAPTER X

### Pax Britannica

LONG before Sikkim entered the 20th century, British paramountcy over the entire territory of India and the adjoining states had been established. Small states like Sikkim were effectively protected by Pax Britannica from the depredations of stronger and more ambitious neighbours. Sikkim had had the advantage of being administered by the first British Political Officer, who did his best to give some sort of shape to the chaotic conditions that had greeted his arrival. Needless to say, the Political Officer's role was a temporary expediency and was actuated more by the British Government's desire to punish Thutob Namgyal than by any policy of modernising Sikkim's administration. The basic feudal fabric remained intact. If anything, it was strengthened under British protection and systematization of revenue collection. British imperialistic and trade interests were better served by this limited function than if they had applied themselves to the welfare of the common people. Before long the administration reverted to the ruler and his Council, the Political Officer only keeping a watchful eye on them. His very presence had the desired effect of keeping the Maharaja and his councillors within bounds and earning from them a wholesome respect for, and fear of, the British power.

Thutob Namgyal was succeeded by Sidkeong Tulku, his son by the first wife. Tulku had had the benefit of sound modern education. He had also been to Oxford. Back from Oxford

The same year he was married to Kunzang Dechen, a Tibetan General's daughter, in consonance with the Sikkim rulers' practice of marrying Tibetan brides and also marrying their sons and daughters in Tibetan noble families.

While the 20th century moved on at a pace unprecedented in history, time almost stood still in Sikkim for the common man. His lot, always hard, continued very much as before, a bad feudal landlord making life a little harder, and a good one allowing him some respite. Removed far away from the mainstream of human progress, the Sikkim peasant plodded along bearing the yoke of feudal tyranny.

The decades rolled on. Tashi Namgyal's private life was blighted soon after the last of his six children was born. It so happened that Tharing, Tashi Namgyal's half-brother, had been ordained a lama. Consistent with his birth, he had been declared a Rimpoche or reincarnation. Tharing Rimpoche had gradually risen higher and higher in the lamaist hierarchy of Sikkim. He was tipped to be placed at the apex of the whole monastic system of Sikkim. Among his champions was Maharani Kunzang Dechen. Soon after the birth of her sixth child, the Maharani had shown an increasing interest in religion and had applied herself to the study of Mahayana Buddhism under the guidance of Tharing Rimpoche. Her espousal of Tharing Rimpoche's cause carried great weight and the Rimpoche was very near achieving his ambition.

Unfortunately, Tharing Rimpoche's secretary poisoned the ears of Maharaja Tashi Namgyal against his master. What is worse, the Maharani was also implicated with having illicit connections with the Rimpoche. There appears to have been enough evidence for Tashi Namgyal to order the Rimpoche to quit Sikkim. Tharing Rimpoche went to Tibet. Not long after the Maharani also followed him thither; she stayed in Tibet for a couple of years, nursing her grievances against her husband. If the Maharani had been the victim of vile calumny, her virtue, temporarily under cloud, would have been restored by time the healer. But she, perhaps, had no desire to vindicate her chastity.

Bhutiya and Lepcha peasants. His labour had changed the very face of Sikkim, and had ensured a substantial revenue for the State coffers. The Bhutiyas and Lepchas had learnt terrace cultivation from the Nepalese immigrants.

A great majority of the Lepchas had, willy-nilly, been brought into the lamaist fold. Even these Lepchas retained, in common with their animist brethren, many rites and rituals of their pagan ancestors. The Nepalese practised a healthy form of Hinduism which, while being free from the orthodoxy and bigotry of the plainsmen, was freely laced with animism. The absence of Hindu temples served to reduce the burden of religion to a minimum on the Nepalese.

The peasants, whether Bhutiyas, Lepchas, or Nepalese, groaned under feudal oppression. Sufferers under the same yoke, there was a vague consciousness among them of their common interests.

The landlords were a class apart. Though, in course of time, some Nepalese had also become lessee landlords, the Bhutiya element predominated both as feudal and lessee landlords. In the early days of Bhutiya-Lepcha contact, and for many decades thereafter, there had been inter-marriages between the Bhutiyas and the Lepchas of the upper strata of society, from among whom developed the later aristocracy. For much of the time, the Lepcha aristocrats held their own. But time, the Lepcha common folk's inherent sense of inferiority, and Bhutiya predominance, eroded the Lepcha aristocracy's confidence. They gradually lost contact with the Lepcha masses and began to identify themselves with the Bhutiya aristocrats, called kazis. The word Lepcha-kazi came to have a derogatory meaning. Before long the Lepcha-kazis were wholly absorbed by the kazi class, and they chose to forget their Lepcha ancestry lest the stigma of supposed inferior origins should cling to their names. This, while being a great gain to the Bhutiyas, was the Lepchas' greatest loss. The Lepchas lost their very protecting arm. With the Lepcha kazis gone into the Bhutiya fold, the condition of the Lepcha peasants plummeted, as it were, into an abyss.

The Lepchas had come to be bracketed with the Bhutiyas. While the Government showed an awareness for the need of protecting the Bhutiya-Lepcha peasants from the Nepalese peasants, the exploitation of the simple Lepcha peasant by the wily, rich Bhutiya peasant and feudal landlords continued unabated. The rich and privileged Bhutiyas made full use of the monopoly in the exploitation of the Lepchas. A large number of Lepchas migrated to the surrounding hill areas of Darjeeling, where most of them came under the influence of Christian Missionaries, who introduced them to the modern world by giving them education and looking after them in other ways. At home, too, the Lepchas in considerable numbers embraced Christianity and got rid of many handicaps that had been their lot while tied to the apron-strings of the Bhutiyas. Unfortunately, this element acquired the status of a separate entity, closer to the mixed Christian community than to the Lepcha peasant of the old stock. This further removed from among the Lepchas the cleverer members. No wonder many people thought that the Lepchas were a dying race.

Things were thus when, in August, 1947, the British left India, and their paramountcy over Sikkim, as over the Princely Indian States, lapsed. Sikkim suddenly discovered that the 20th century had arrived.

