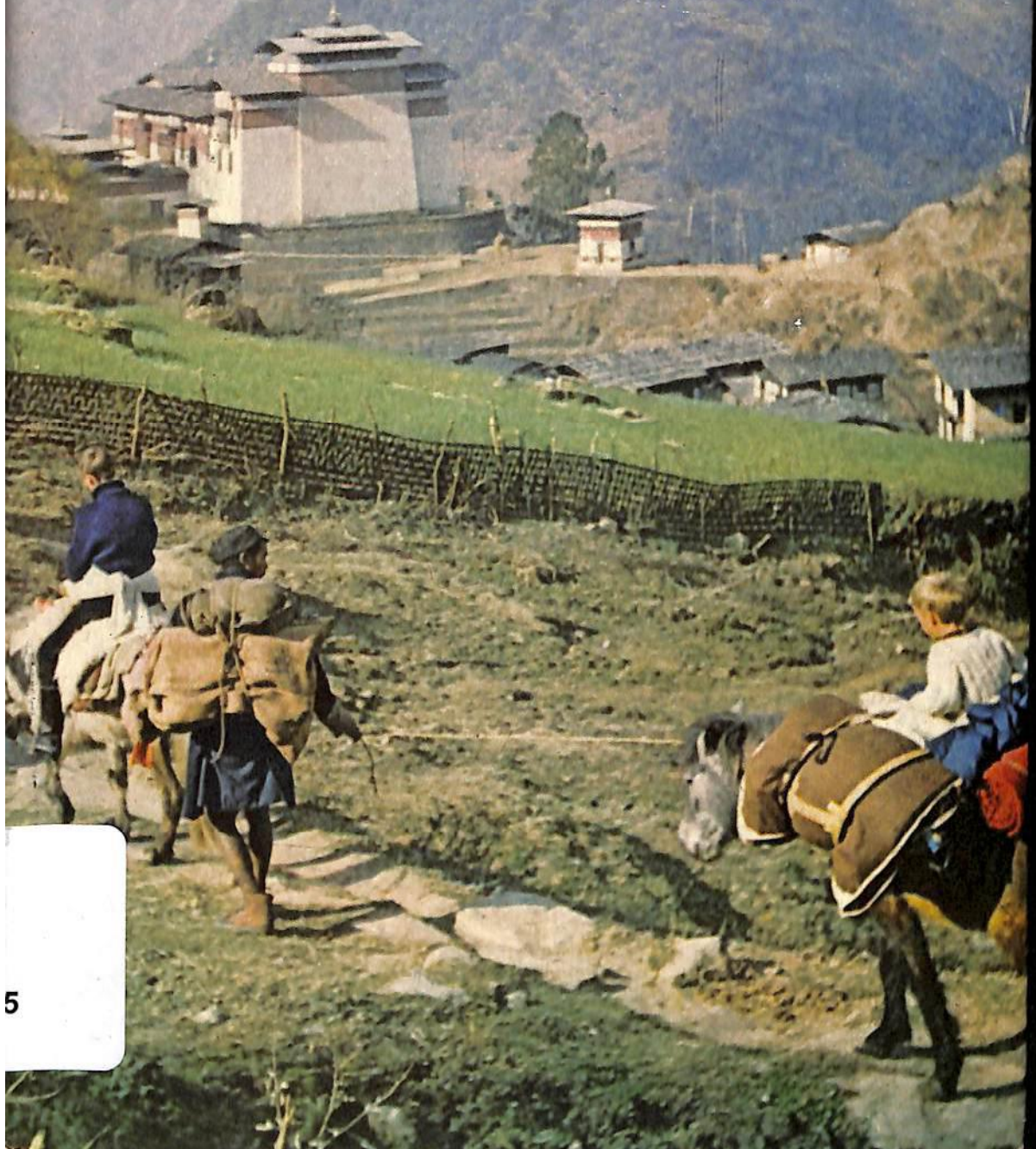
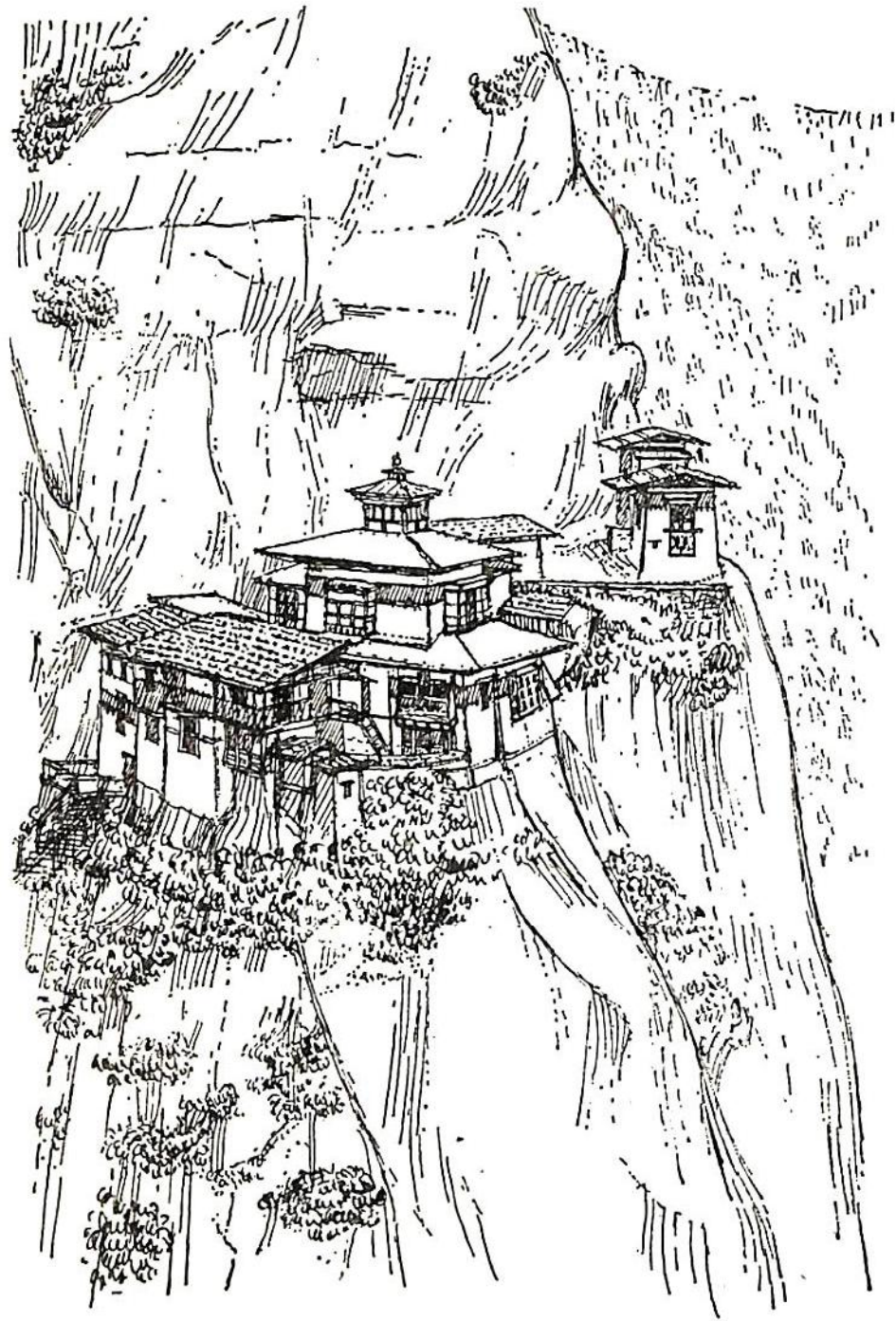


TWO AND TWO HALVES TO BHUTAN

A family journey in the Himalayas

PETER STEELE





Taktang Gumpa

TWO AND TWO HALVES TO BHUTAN

A family journey in the Himalayas

by

PETER STEELE

*Line drawings by
Phoebe Bullock*



HODDER AND STOUGHTON

To the wives and children of Himalayan travellers
who have had to stay at home,
and to Sarah, Adam and Judith
who didn't.

Sarah

GLOSSARY

N=Nepali T=Tibetan B=Bhutanese

<i>ayah</i> (N)	nursemaid
<i>bhatti</i> (N)	wayside inn, tea-house
<i>boku</i> (T)	man's costume
<i>chang</i> (T) + (B)	home-brewed beer
<i>char</i> (N)	tea
<i>chuba</i> (T)	woman's dress
<i>chura</i> (N)	roasted fried rice
<i>chorten</i> (T) + (B)	religious shrine
<i>chlu</i> (T) + (B)	river
<i>dal-bhat</i> (N)	lentils and rice
<i>dasho</i> (B)	senior government officer
<i>dekchi</i> (N)	cooking pot
<i>didi</i> (N)	woman, sister
<i>dzo</i> (T)	female yak
<i>dzong</i> (T) + (B)	fort, regional centre
<i>gaylong</i> (T) + (B)	young monk
<i>gompa</i> (T) + (B)	temple, monastery
<i>jangali</i> (N)	wild-looking
<i>kabngy</i> (B)	ceremonial scarf
<i>kira</i> (B)	woman's costume
<i>ko</i> (B)	man's costume
<i>kukri</i> (N)	Gurkha knife
<i>lama</i> (T) + (B)	monk, priest
<i>mane wall</i> (T) + (B)	prayer wall
<i>mendong</i> (T)	prayer wall
<i>momo</i> (T)	dumplings
<i>paise</i> (N)	money
<i>patouka</i> (N)	woman's waist scarf
<i>puja</i> (N)	religious ritual
<i>pukka</i> (N)	correct

<i>rakshi</i> (N)	home-brewed spirits
<i>stupa</i> (N)	shrine
<i>thankā</i> (T) + (B)	religious painting
<i>tsampa</i> (T)	ground roasted barley
<i>yak</i> (T) + (B)	mountain cattle

Place names have been transliterated by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names from field-collected Tibetan script according to the Gould-Richardson system. Points arising from this treatment of the names may be referred to the P.C.G.N. at the Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London, S.W.7.

The manuscript of this book has been corrected and approved for publication by His Majesty the King of Bhutan.

I wish to thank Mrs. Irene Fleming and Mr. Patrice Charvet for teaching me the elements of language and correcting the proofs and Dr. Tsewang Pemba for helping me with Tibetan and Bhutanese details.

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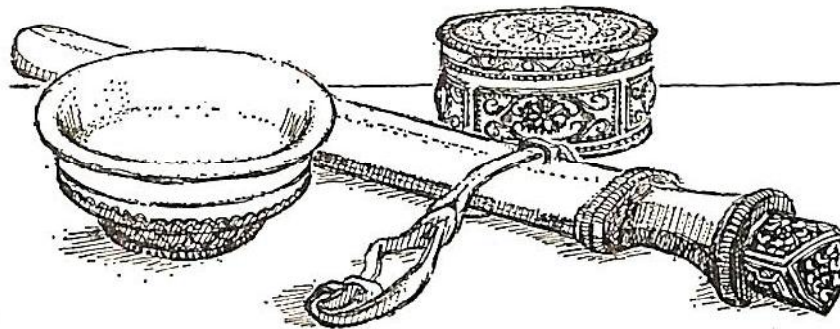
FOREWORD
by ERIC SHIPTON

The invasion and subjugation of Tibet by the Chinese Communist armies was one of the most tragic events of modern times; not only because it resulted in the annihilation and torment of countless innocent victims, but also because mankind is in imminent danger of losing one of its ancient and most successful cultures. For, whatever its imperfections in terms of modern democracy and in spite of its material poverty, the Tibetan theocratic system seems to have produced a people as content, as tolerant, as courageously independent and as free from cramping taboos as can be found anywhere. Today Bhutan is almost the only place where this remarkable culture still thrives on its native soil. Like Tibet itself, this small mountain kingdom has remained beyond the reach of all but a very few Western travellers. Like Tibet, too, it has in the past owed its immunity to foreign influence largely to the policy of the Government of India to defend the political integrity of neighbouring states. Unlike Tibet, it is still independent though how long it will retain this happy position few would dare to guess.

Following upon a spell of medical research in Nepal, Peter Steele was invited by the King of Bhutan to do similar work among his people. Travelling with his family in spartan simplicity, living and working in close contact with all classes of Bhutanese society, Peter took full advantage of his rare privilege for he was thus able to get on intimate terms with villagers and officials alike and to see far more of their way of life than most visitors. He gives us a penetrating and delightfully uninhibited account of this beautiful land and its warm-hearted people.

Peter is also to be congratulated in having a wife who shares his tastes. It is not every woman who would be willing not only to face the hazards and hardship of five months' rugged travel and rough living but to accept the responsibility and anxiety of taking

her two small children. People today are apt to forget how readily most children adapt themselves to strange circumstances; and it is not altogether surprising that these two met their adventures with complete nonchalance and enjoyed them as much as their parents – sometimes perhaps a good deal more. In fact they proved a valuable asset in helping to win the confidence and affection of the country people. Though, alas, they were both too young to remember their unique experience, much of it will surely remain to stir their imaginations in later life.



Bhutanese Silver Bowl, Knife and Pan-box

CHAPTER I

Place names have a quality of magic; but once the places are seen, even if their reputation stands, the magic is never as vivid again. Bhutan has such a ring of enchantment; a tiny kingdom in the Himalayas wedged between Tibet and Sikkim, few people have written about it, a fact that points to its isolation and gives it an aura of mystery.

Our voyage began in London one April morning in 1964. The trees in Hyde Park looked dank in the pouring rain and big red buses ploughed through puddles splashing half-awake office girls hurrying to work. I crossed Park Lane and dashed for shelter into the Dorchester Hotel where I had an appointment with the King of Bhutan.

I was shown upstairs and knocked with trepidation on a large door that was flung open by a member of the Bhutanese Royal Bodyguard wearing national costume, a silver sword tucked into the folds of his tunic. Without a word he led me down a dark corridor into an ante-room where I waited. Anxious to observe the correct etiquette for such an occasion, I had spent much of the previous day searching for a suitable *ashi kadar*, the white scarf given as a sign of respect and greeting by Tibetans and Bhutanese alike. All I had managed to buy remotely resembling my needs

was a two-guinea white silk evening scarf, which I had folded carefully in my pocket in case an occasion for presenting it should arise.

A door was opened by a retainer and His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk came in. He immediately put me at ease and my apprehension vanished as we talked quite informally.

"This is the day for seeing my doctors," he said. I was thereby grouped with four dozens of the profession and was deeply, though undeservedly, honoured.

The King was dressed in Bhutanese costume; he wore a gold and red hand-woven boku, a tunic like the Tibetan chuba, hauled above the knees and tied with a belt forming a voluminous pouch; his white cuffs were turned back six inches and he wore long socks and leather shoes. He was a man of powerful build, his face gentle in feature, heavily boned and strikingly handsome. He offered me a cigarette from an engraved silver case. I realised this was no dream – from the window I saw buses roaring towards Hyde Park Corner – reality had returned.

We discussed whether I could come to Bhutan in the future (I had just signed a contract to work in Labrador for a year and so was not free at that time) and he explained some of the problems of medicine in his country.

"You mustn't commit yourself to working in a country like Bhutan before you've seen what it's like," said the King. "When you find you're free, come to Bhutan and bring your wife, as she must like it too."

Once outside I sat down in the bus and put a hand in my pocket for a handkerchief; the silk scarf was still there.

For months my mind reeled at the thought of a visit to Bhutan and my head slowly came out of the clouds. Sarah, my wife, is used to my day-dreaming and in her quiet way left my bout of wild enthusiasm to burn itself out.

One miserable November day in 1966 I returned to our squalid little flat in Cambridge just after the results of the examination for which I had been working during the previous twelve months had come out. I felt we all needed a change after the purgatory of a year's hard study.

“Why don’t we go to Bhutan?” I asked Sarah, whose equable temperament is a complement to my own impetuosity. She was down-to-earth and practical and as I might have expected my question was coolly received. Her concern was what to do with our two children, Adam aged three and a half and Judith, whom we had adopted as a baby in Newfoundland eighteen months before. I said I had no intention of leaving the children behind and from that moment Sarah joined in the planning.

Permission – this word was much on my mind during the next weeks. My first step was to send a telegram to the King of Bhutan but no one on the overseas exchange could tell me how to do so as Bhutan was not then listed on the international coding. I described Bhutan to the operator in schoolboy geographical language as mid-way between Calcutta and Lhasa, east from Gangtok and west of Assam. Soon the problem was solved and the message went out:

“Doctor Steele available visit Bhutan for six months following your suggestion. Please signify your approval soonest. Deepest respects.”

Throughout the preparations I held the belief that the King would surely hold to the word of his invitation three years before and I had an inexplicable faith that somehow we would reach Bhutan.

From the earliest times frontier closure and isolation have characterised the history of Bhutan; the few foreigners who have been able to get permission to enter the country can be counted on one’s fingers. Present-day restrictions are not due to insularity or lack of hospitality, but rather to the fact that Bhutan lies within the Indian Inner Line security area, extending along the whole of Northern India within fifty miles of the Tibetan (now Chinese) frontier. The Indian Government has no control over the independent kingdom of Nepal, which forms a breach in their Himalayan border, but it does advise the autonomous kingdoms of Bhutan and Sikkim on their external affairs and defence, although committed not to interfere in their internal administration. It is not possible to enter Bhutan from the south without crossing the Inner Line, for which a permit is required, and the Indians have been unwilling to allow travellers into these buffer

areas between China and herself. This political sensitivity has been heightened since the 1962 Chinese invasion of India in the Ladakh region of northern Kashmir and in the North East Frontier Agency (N.E.F.A.) region of Assam, which lies within a few miles of the eastern Bhutanese border.

Permits are given to foreigners only on the request of the Government of Bhutan to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi and this virtually means only by personal invitation of the King or a member of the royal family. So I refused to believe my permit would not arrive some day, somehow, even if I had to go and look for it myself – which I did.

I had applied for permission to go to Bhutan; but for what reason could I go? This problem was easily solved. First, I had planned an endemic goitre research project in 1962 to be carried out in the Gilgit region of the Karakoram Himalaya following my work in Nepal. This had fallen through because the Sino-Indian war broke out at the time of our proposed entry, so transferring my plan to Bhutan was not difficult. Second, I had been introduced to Dr. Mourant, the world expert on blood group distributions, who wanted to have specimens from central and eastern Bhutan in connection with his work for the International Biological Programme. Third, there were mountains to climb and new ground to explore.

I met Dr. Mourant in the Serological Population Genetics Laboratory at the back of a tall Victorian office block off Smithfield Market. He helped me to tidy up the details of my endemic goitre survey and to plan a genetics study of blood groups and abnormal haemoglobins, for which I was given a generous grant by the Royal Society.

I was also supported by the Mount Everest Foundation, a fund set up after the climbing of Everest in 1953, with money earned from the film and from lectures, to encourage scientific work in mountain regions. I met Eric Shipton, whom I had known for some years, in the Royal Geographical Society and we searched out all the maps of Bhutan – few existed and the detail of these was thinly spread; in the west and north some mapping had been done but the centre and east of Bhutan was almost blank. His interest encouraged me and I half jokingly asked him if he would like to

accompany me. I told him that if I could get permission when I eventually reached Bhutan myself I would cable him. Tentatively we agreed to meet on April 1st at Bumthang in the middle of Bhutan; sadly this never came about but the margin by which we failed was only a hair's breadth. I was given permission for his entry by the King but he failed to receive my cable. Grateful for his help and encouragement I returned from the heights of dreamland to the mundane round of a general practice locum tenens in Cambridge, squeezing all my preparations in between surgeries and visits. Cambridge was in the season of mists that rose from the river, permeating and dampening every corner of life. The era of the mini-skirt was launched and I treated the first mid-thigh chilblain of my career; even in Labrador vanity never rose so high during winter.

During the days of frenzied preparation many people gave me the benefit of their experience. I spent an hour in the library of the Travellers' Club with Sylvain Mangeot, a journalist who had attended the royal wedding and coronation as a friend of the Queen of Bhutan from the days when she was being educated in England. Over china tea and asparagus sandwiches he described the recent history of Bhutan, which sounded like some fantastic historical novel, and he explained the complex events accounting for the country's recent disruptions.

In moments of discouragement when I was ready to abandon the whole scheme Sylvain Mangeot's often repeated words, "Peter, you *must* go," spurred me on. He introduced me to Tsewang Pemba, a fellow trainee surgeon sitting the same exams, who gained the prize for top marks in a field of four hundred competitors – a remarkable achievement for a Tibetan. Three years of his adventurous life had been spent in Bhutan, where he worked as a doctor and married a Bhutanese wife. He gave me a first-hand picture of life in Bhutan and explained some of the problems we would meet.

December was approaching and still no word had come from Bhutan. Adam and I went for walks along the river kicking up cascades of dead leaves; Judith kept Sarah company at home. Our two children were leading a very conventional town life and little did they realise how different their routine would be in

three months' time. Sarah did, but she preferred not to think about it and just carried on, stoical and unperturbed.

Two days after I had taken flight to India on my own to seek out the reply to my telegram, a cable arrived inviting me to Bhutan.



Tibetans

CHAPTER 2

The heat was stifling in the east of Arabia and a haze shimmered on the tarmac where our plane was parked for refuelling. Arabs glided noiselessly about their business casting a sinister air on a situation that seemed strangely clandestine when I paused to consider why I was there. The date was December 9th, the arbitrary day I had chosen to go to India to search for our permits if they had not already arrived. Sarah and I had reluctantly agreed there was no guarantee that the permits would come; we could not wait indefinitely as I would soon be out of work and our flat lease was expiring. I had decided to go to India and to summon Sarah and the family when all plans were smoothly laid for our entry into Bhutan. Meanwhile Sarah would take the children to her home in Suffolk for Christmas.

The chatter of Urdu rose to a pitch as evening fell – the hour of prayer. On board a time-worn jet aeroplane of an Arab airline a motley crowd of Pakistanis and Indians were returning home. A small metal plaque on the engine casing inscribed “Rolls Royce” boosted my sagging confidence. Since the moment I had bought my ticket at half the normal fare from a travel agent in London

the journey had assumed the character of an illegal exploit. I had to pay cash to the agent, who excused himself and slipped across the road to collect the tickets from an undisclosed intermediary. Next day after taking leave of Sarah in London I was flown by Swissair to Zurich, where we changed to a Lebanese airline. We rose across the Alps, tinged in the pink twilight afterglow and spectacular in deep shadowed relief.

In Beirut I scribbled a postcard home to reassure my family and drank a cup of black Turkish coffee, the fragrance of which stimulated many memories of our journey through the Middle East in 1962, when shortly after our marriage we had motored to India.

Again we changed planes for our onward journey to Karachi and Bombay, where we landed after a journey of nineteen hours.

Meanwhile at home Sarah was dealing with many problems concerning the medical equipment and drugs we had ordered; she was also packing up our flat in Cambridge and preparing for Christmas in Suffolk. During this time she thanked me neither for my mad schemes, nor for leaving her alone with so much to manage. Sarah's mother eased the burden by handling some of the business matters. The children were not at their easiest in the days after their typhoid inoculations and Sarah assured me she was at a low ebb by the time Christmas arrived.

I was met at Bombay Airport by Sateesh Gupte, a doctor friend; he drove down the middle of the road into Bombay talking and gesticulating wildly as if to catch up on lost time. Impressions of India came flooding back. Bullock carts ambled down the centre of the heavily cambered road, their drivers occasionally aroused from sleep by the raucous honking of cars that swept past heading them towards the ditch. Young girls in rags carrying brass pitchers on their heads moved with a graceful poise that overshadowed the poverty and filth of the hovels they lived in. Lanky men in dhotis with umbrella handles stuck in their shirt collars balanced along the narrow sewerage pipes, which ran across boggy marshland and refuse tips towards the centre of the city. High-gaffed fishing boats, their nets drying, were drawn up on the beach. The "Queen's Necklace", the

long curving waterfront of Bombay, was spectacular in its nightly illumination. In the centre of this highway holy cows meandered unmolested, lay on the pavements or chewed at vegetable leaves from the stalls of barrow merchants.

People were everywhere; a pulsating mass of human beings; the seething millions of India. I was reminded of a headline in a Calcutta newspaper at the outbreak of the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962 which read, "One third of the world's peoples are at war with another third."

At Sateesh's home we had a hot curry dinner, eating with our fingers off large metal plates; sweat broke out on my forehead and no water would quench the burning of my tongue – a foretaste of many meals to come. I was tired after the long air journey and lay awake for a while listening to fans whirring, cicadas chirping in the oleander trees and the gentle lapping of waves on the sea shore close by that lulled me to sleep.

Next day I had to move on to Delhi so Sateesh took me to the airport. I was "chance no. 3" on the reserve list but obtained a seat, arriving in the capital two hours later. While waiting for my baggage I watched the apparently purposeless comings and goings of a mass of people; Sikhs in coloured turbans, handsome and arrogant; little Parsees and men in Jinnah caps with high-buttoned jackets; swarthy airforce officers with handlebar moustaches in blue blazers with club badges; well fed ladies in saris, rolls of flesh protruding from under their short-cut blouses; and the ubiquitous depressed looking coolies hanging around in expectation of a few paise.

During the next few days in Delhi I stayed with Suman Dubey, a friend from Cambridge who was on the successful Indian Everest Expedition of 1965. I spent the daytime rushing around government offices; in the cool of evening we sat on wide lawns under pipal trees sipping iced drinks carried by uniformed bearers. Flowers bloomed everywhere, trees were in blossom and the temperature was never more than pleasantly warm. Once again it was difficult to draw myself away from such warm-hearted Indian hospitality but my business lay in Calcutta.

At the station I was involved in a demonstration by a protesting horde of students who were delaying our train. We barricaded

ourselves into the compartment and drew all the blinds as a howling mob marauded up and down the platform, smashing glass. A serviceman in my coach had a rifle which he appeared quite ready to use should the need arise. The mob eventually quietened; we left several hours late and travelled across the endless Ganges plain through Agra, Kanpur, Benares and so to Calcutta, where my friend Shamiran Nundy's family were my hosts on and off for the next few weeks.

I visited the Bhutan Trade Commission where all Bhutanese business going through India is transacted. I was expected and received a letter of welcome from Dr. Tobgyel; a large army parade was due to take place in Thimphu that week so he suggested that I should wait until after Christmas before going up to Bhutan.

My Inner Line permit was assured but my main problem was to establish the fact that Sarah and the children were following shortly and that their permits should be hastened. Much confusion and interchange of telegrams took place before the matter was settled. In a moment of elation I wrote to Sarah:

"I am allowing myself to get excited for the first time as I really see us going to Bhutan in the next weeks, whereas up to now it has all been a tenuous myth, an improbable dream. It is just as well we had faith in our hard work, or we might well have given up in the many moments of doubting."

In the next few days I was busy with preparations. I ordered foam rubber mattresses, asked a firm to make insulated boxes for cooling blood specimens, procured some large plastic bags, bought chutney and chocolate and did a hundred little business errands – a familiar story to those setting off for long periods of time into the unknown.

On December 22nd I flew from Calcutta to Bagdogra adjacent to the foothills which rise sharply to the north. I shared a taxi to Darjeeling with a Japanese tourist, an Indian clerk going on holiday and a Gurkha soldier returning home on leave. On the plains around Siliguri are many large tea plantations; uniform rows of short bushes are interspersed with tall eucalyptus trees, which offer shade to the pickers. We soon entered dense forest similar to the jungle strip of Terai below the Mahabarat Hills of Nepal, an

area rich in tigers and other big game. The sun set quickly after a brief twilight and we raced on into the darkness.

Our Nepali driver held the wheel in one hand spinning round sharp turns, his other arm hung out of the window and banged ecstatic greetings on the car door every time he passed a friend approaching from the opposite direction. Both cars simultaneously put off their headlights and drove with sidelights alone. An additional hazard was the railway track which followed the course of the road, sometimes crossing it and rising by a series of sharp angled bends and complete loops. We could hear the distant noise of the train hooter and see the engine spotlight above us approaching through the trees. Soon it was upon us; we mounted the bank to get clear of the track and were enveloped in reams of thick smoke, which cleared to show the red tail light of the guard's van disappearing into the jungle below. In the darkness we remained unaware of a precipitous drop from the outer edge of the road that plunged several thousand feet to the valley. At halfway we stopped to let the engine cool and to refresh ourselves with tea served in glasses and laced with sugar that crusted the rim and lay thick on the bottom; sickly sweet pastries and biscuits settled heavily on the stomach. Beside us in the bhatti, or tea-house, Nepali coolies squatted on their haunches resting before the next stage of their journey. These hill people contrasted markedly with the countless masses of Calcutta, so recently left behind. Darjeeling is in the province of West Bengal but its character and population is almost pure Nepali.

Late that night the lights of Darjeeling appeared like a sparkling ribbon stretching along the hillside spur on which the town is built high above the Rangit Valley. Mrs. Pemba welcomed me, Tsewang having asked her to arrange my accommodation. I received the traditional Tibetan cup of hot butter tea with grease floating in globules on the surface, the strong flavour of salt making it taste more like broth than tea. A plateful of momo, minced meat covered with boiled suet, was produced and I exchanged polite greetings with the many Tibetans present. I passed on news of Tsewang to which they listened with rapt attention as if to the epic of a conquering hero. After a congenial meal I was escorted up the hill by several Tibetans wrapped in their long chubas and

previous night, docile no longer. They had jet black hair, narrow eyes and bright red cheeks like all Tibetans. We made our way to the Buddhist shrine on the hill above the Chowrasta where the family performed their religious rites, the puja, in front of the lama's enclosure. Butter and flour were laid on an altar over which home-brewed beer, or chang, was poured; some pine needles were then thrown into a small oven making a fragrant smoke. The lamas proceeded with their devotions quite unconcerned with four exuberant children clanging bells and spinning prayer wheels. Red robed priests with saffron shirts walked round the shrine murmuring the sacred Buddhist text, "Om mani peme hum." Kangchenjunga could be clearly seen through a forest of prayer flags flapping in the breeze from high poles, carrying their worship towards the distant mountains; only from Pokhara, lying at the foot of Annapurna, have I seen mountains appear so close. Looking down into the deep intervening valleys I remembered the toil of cresting similar ridges and always underestimating the distances. The Tibetan name Kangchen-dzo-nga means "The great snow mountain with the five treasures" (the five separate peaks).

Beside a leafy bamboo grove a short way off some Tibetan ladies wearing long chubas with richly coloured aprons were having a picnic, a favourite Tibetan pastime. In their Lhasa days they would have ridden a little way out of town to the parks where willow trees lined the streams, and there they would have erected large gaily decorated tents. With food and chang in abundance the party would have danced its way through several days and nights until, finally exhausted, they returned to their homes within the city walls under the dominating Potala Palace.

As I looked far below on the side of the hill where the houses and huts of their refugee encampment stood, I felt a deep sympathy for the Tibetan people. There lived a community of Tibetan families, who had gravitated to this and other centres along the Himalayan border when their country was invaded by the Chinese in 1950. Under the guise of enforcing their suzerainty over the Tibetans by the treaty of 1913, the Chinese armies entered the country and took over the government, installing a puppet in

the place of the Dalai Lama, who fled to India. During the honeymoon period of the next six years there was a reasonably peaceful co-existence between the invaders and the indigenous population. After the flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959, monasteries were sacked, lamas murdered and children transported to China for indoctrination. A steady trickle of Tibetans, discontented with the Chinese domination, left the country but after the 1959 purge a mass exodus got under way and many thousands of Tibetans fled south to Nepal and India.

During our work in Kathmandu in 1962, Sarah and I had many dealings with Tibetan refugees as patients and friends, for their camp stood close to the hospital. Then under the care of the International Red Cross, their conditions were pitiable. They lived in bamboo huts, rarely dry during monsoon rains; many of the older ones suffered from tuberculosis and the babies from malnutrition. The stories of recent arrivals to the camp from Tibet were full of horror amounting to insidious genocide. We made several friends to whose houses we went in the evenings, where we were introduced to the courtesy and humour of these people. West of Dhaulagiri we met many nomadic Tibetans wandering and attempting to trade; others were scratching a living from smallholdings. All were without roots, refugees deprived of their homeland and their way of life.

The popular picture of Tibet as some idyllic Shangri-La is false. Life was feudal and harsh for the peasants and a mighty gulf existed between them and the rich. Yet their natural disposition is one of cheerfulness and pride, and keeping these qualities in evidence when they have been deprived of so much is hard. I spent much of that day at the Tibetan centre where a self-help scheme is in operation. All their skills are pooled, be it carpet making or needlework, dairy husbandry or carpentry, so that the Tibetans in the community are no longer dependent on the financial aid of the government or of outside supervision.

At sundown the school children put on a play in their dormitory. Three tiers of bunks were crammed with excited faces of all ages and every inch of floor space was occupied. A make-shift stage had been erected and curtains hung from the rafters. The play was a three hour long epic depicting Lhasa before the invasion, the sub-

sequent misfortunes of the people at the hands of the Chinese and their escape from Tibet and flight into India. I found difficulty in following the details but the expressions of rapture, horror, delight and joy that passed over the rows of faces acted as an emotional barometer to the happenings in the play. The audience were appreciative and attentive, creating a tangible atmosphere of unity among these people reliving a tragic recent chapter of their history that will be the mainstay of the folklore of Tibetans in exile for generations to come. Few of those children had ever been in Tibet yet the events were as fresh as if they happened yesterday. The performance took place under a huge photo of the Dalai Lama, their God-King, whose powerful personality has been a force welding together this scattered remnant of the Tibetan people and keeping their culture and religion intact.

On Christmas Eve a loudspeaker in the bazaar broadcast carols over the town; I felt downhearted at being separated from the family at this time and sent a telegram to Sarah asking her to come out on the first possible flight after January 1st. There were times at home with the children howling and work pressing, when I dreamed of nothing better than to be transported on my own into the heart of the Himalayas where I could be at peace. Now that the situation was real I missed them and Sarah greatly. To fill the intervening time I decided to walk north towards Kangchenjunga along the Singalila ridge which divides Nepal from Sikkim and Bengal.