

*Franz Madsen*



# THE DRAGON COUNTRY

NIRMALA DAS



# THE DRAGON COUNTRY

(A HISTORY OF BHUTAN)

[Text-Book Edition]

NIRMALA DAS



ORIENT LONGMAN

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**LONGMAN GROUP LTD.**

LONDON

*Associated companies, branches and representatives  
throughout the world*

*First published 1973*

© *Orient Longman Ltd. 1973*

Rs. 50  
Rs. 6-00



PRINTED IN INDIA

by P. K. Ghosh at Eastend Printers, 3 Dr Suresh Sarkar Road,  
Calcutta 14 and published by R. N. Das, Regional Manager,  
Orient Longman Ltd., Calcutta

*Dedicated to*  
**THE PEOPLE OF BHUTAN**



# Preface

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Till very recently Bhutan was considered the remotest country in the world. Its remoteness lay not only in its isolation but also in the complete lack of knowledge of the country's origin and history. While the country has shaken off its isolation, in the absence of any reliable published material Bhutan is still considered remote and, to some, the last Shangrila of this earth. This book seeks to overcome this problem to a limited extent.

Due to the non-availability of authentic material on the early history of Bhutan, that is, prior to the 16th century, it is difficult to compile a reliable documentation of Bhutan's history. Even after the 16th century, the country's isolation for centuries has prevented a proper study. Neither the Bhutanese nor any foreigner has so far undertaken a serious study of the subject and the little published material available today consists of some of the old works of the British Political Officers based on their ceremonial visits to the country and the knowledge that was available on the close links of Bhutan with Tibet in the spheres of culture and commerce.

The history of Bhutan can be divided into three periods. The first period is from the origin of Bhutan till the time of the advent of Tibet's influence. No documents are available for this period and the facts are based only on the little known history of the various adjoining Hindu kingdoms established in Assam during that period. The second period starts from about the 10th century till the consolidation of Bhutan as a national entity in the 18th century. This period was marked by the disappearance of the original inhabitants, advent of Tibetan influence, consolidation of Buddhism under the Drukpa hegemony and emergence of Bhutan as a national entity. The third is the period of Indo-Bhutan relationship both under the British and the Indian Governments and covers the period from early 19th century to date. The material available for

the second phase is sketchy but the documentation in the third phase is considerable and reliable.

No history of Bhutan can be written without a good knowledge of the history of the two most important sectors in the country's life, the Dzongs (literally meaning a fortress) and the Monasteries, around which the life of the country centres. Each one of them has its own story, its own character. Their stories are linked to the history of the country. They depict the happy blending of the secular with the temporal and the emergence of a system akin to that of Tibet in a way, unique in the world. The architecture is of sublime beauty and depicts the inner feeling of a nation which is so deeply imbued with a sense of their cultural heritage based on their religion. That is why readers will find an exclusive section on the Dzongs and Monasteries in this book.

I am extremely grateful to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo, who so kindly made available to me valuable material on the subject. Without his encouragement and blessings, it would not have been possible to make even this modest effort.

I have ventured into this field with great hesitation. The subject is vast and still unexplored. The facts collected by me are only a drop in the ocean. My study not being academic, this book is meant for the general reader only and it does not reflect the views of the Royal Government of Bhutan.

NIRMALA DAS



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*PART I*

THE GENERAL HISTORY OF BHUTAN



## *Chapter 1*

# Origin and Early History of Bhutan

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The early history of Bhutan is shrouded in mystery. According to ancient Sanskrit works, Bhutan was known as Bhotanta, the word 'Bhot' standing for Tibet and 'anta' meaning the end. In other words, the country at the end of Tibet was described as Bhotanta, the present-day Bhutan. This theory is disputed by Prof. S. S. Bhattacharya, an Indian scholar.

According to him, Bhutan was originally a Hindu kingdom, inhabited mostly by the tribes of Indo-Mongoloid origin. The country was known as Bhusthan. It was not unified under one king but was ruled by chiefs of different tribes in their ethnic areas. The close similarities in the frescoes, rituals and musical instruments of Bhutan with those of the ancient Hindus are cited as proof of Bhutan's origin as a Hindu kingdom. He further bases his theory on some ancient Sanskrit works, according to which Bhutas are referred to as the children of the great Hindu sage Kasayapa by his wife Bhuti. The children were called Bhutas and their country Bhutavata or Bhusthan. The Bhutas were followers of the Hindu God, Shiva or Mahadeva. Lord Shiva was also known as Lord of the Bhutas and hence his name Bhutesa or Mahadeva. (The word 'Bhutas' is not to be confused with 'Bhutias' whose origin is Tibetan.) The God worshipped by the Bhutas and the Hindu God Shiva are known by the same appellation Bhutapati or Bhutesa.

There is no conclusive evidence on the original inhabitants of Bhutan, though what Prof. Bhattacharya says is most plausible. It is clear that there was no geographical entity as Bhutan then and the Bhutanese of today, called Drukpas, were not the original inhabitants of the country. The similarity in the frescoes, rituals and musical instruments with the Hindu ones,

shows considerable Hindu influence in this region earlier. The common mode of worship has also been mentioned by Capt. Pemberton in his report on Bhutan, as late as 1838 A.D. The affinity of the then inhabitants of Bhutan with the people from the plains of India is mentioned by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1959 which mentions that 'according to the best Bhutanese records, Tibetan troops invaded the country at the end of the 9th century A.D., drove out the Indian princes and their subjects, and then settled down in occupation of the land.'

*The Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Vol. III, Oxford, New Edition, 1908) says that Bhutan formerly belonged to a tribe called Bhotia Telphu, who are believed to be of the same race as the Kacharis and Koch of the adjoining plains (of India) and who were subjugated by a band of Tibetan soldiers. The people of Eastern Bhutan are even today different from the Drukpa Tibetan stock of people inhabiting Central and Western Bhutan. They are more akin to the tribes of the North-East Frontier Agency and Assam in India. The indigenous people of Bhutan were given the name of Lhoman and Monpa by the Tibetans—meaning Southern people.

According to the account of the famous Chinese traveller, Hiuen Tsang (600-664 A.D.), Bhutan did not have a separate status outside the political framework of India in the very early period. A line of Indian chiefs, under the tutelage of Kamarupa (Assam), ruled Bhutan up to the middle of the 7th century. Kamarupa's effective influence over this area disappeared after the death in 650 A.D. of King Bhaskaravarman (605-650 A.D.). Thereafter started a period of instability leading to strifes, inter-tribal wars and incursions from Tibet.

According to Sir Ashley Eden, who had visited Bhutan in 1864, the present day Bhutanese or the Drukpas, as they are known, overran the country only about four or five centuries before Eden's visit, displacing the then natives of Bhutan who had settled in the area from Cooch Behar (an adjoining district of Bengal, in India). The invaders came from Tibet and were led by a Lama called Dugpani Sheptun.

From the accounts given earlier, it is more or less certain that till the middle of the 7th century A.D., Bhutan had no geographical entity as a nation state and was ruled by several Hindu chiefs. The prominent rulers came from the Kamarupa area of Assam. Their decline coincided with the emergence of Tibet as a powerful neighbour of Bhutan. This led to several incursions from Tibet, first of the Lamas of Tibet and then of the troops. Although Buddhism had come earlier, the consolidation of this religion took place only with the increase of Tibetan influence in this area. The Tibetan invasions and the consolidation of their hold over Bhutan between the 9th and the 17th centuries led to the disappearance of the original settlers of the country and the emergence of a new ethnic group from Tibet—now called the Drukpas.

## *Chapter 2*

# Advent of Buddhism and Beginning of Tibetan Influence

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The first reference to Buddhist influence on Bhutan is traceable to the reign of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo (630-649 A.D.). Songtsen, having become a Buddhist, declared Buddhism to be the State religion of Tibet. He built 108 monasteries and temples in and around Tibet, including the famous monasteries of Kyechu and Jampe Lhakhang in Bhutan in the valleys of Paro and Bumthang. At this time, Tibet's power was in the ascendancy and continued to be so for the next two centuries. Indian Buddhist scholars were invited to Tibet and Buddhism was firmly established there. This naturally had its effect on Bhutan which bordered Tibet.

The next reference to Buddhist influence in Bhutan comes in the early 9th century, when the great Indian Buddhist sage, Guru Padma Sambhava, came to Bhutan twice, first in 807 A.D., then again in 809 A.D., at the invitation of Sindhu Raja (Naguchhi), an Indian, who had become the King of Bumthang (Central Bhutan). Sindhu Raja, the second son of King Singhala of Serkhya (in India), founded the kingdom of Sindhu in Bhutan and his son extended his realm and power to Dorji Tas and Hor in Tibet and as far as Sikkim. The Guru is supposed to have travelled extensively in Bhutan, from west to east. Many monasteries and Gompas all over Bhutan are associated with his name.

During the course of a war with the Raja of Nabudera (in the plains of India), Sindhu Raja lost his eldest son and sixteen of his councillors. Sindhu Raja became very ill and invited Guru Padma Sambhava to Bhutan. The Guru offered prayers in a nearby cave, called Dragnar Duje Tsegpe Gurkhang and restored the health and happiness of Sindhu Raja. The legend



says that a struggle between the Guru and the evil spirits lasted for seven days in which the latter lost. At the end of the week, the body marks of the saint appeared on the nearby solid rock. The Guru's foot imprints in the cave can be seen even today. The legend further says that the cypress tree growing near the cave was the stick belonging to the Guru which grew up into a tree.

Guru Padma Sambhava restored peace by converting both Sindhu Raja and King Nabudera to Buddhism and a pillar was set up at Mua-Thang (in Khem) to demarcate the boundaries. He made both take oaths not to cross each other's boundaries. This place is known as Nathang or Nab (place of oath). The Guru acquired great fame and established a Buddhist sect in Bhutan called Nyingma. The Bhutanese consider him as an incarnation of Buddha.

The dynasty of Sindhu Raja lasted for nearly one hundred years and was later destroyed by the Tibetan invaders during the time of Lang Darma, the apostate King of Tibet (836-842 A.D.). The Tibetan influence then began to grow in Bhutan and she gradually came under Tibet's cultural influence. This was the beginning of a change in the ethnic and cultural transformation of Bhutan.

With the deaths of Harshavardhan, King of Kanauj (India), in 647 A.D. and Bhaskaravarman, King of Kamarupa (Assam, India), in 650 A.D., the Indian influence in Bhutan declined and was replaced by the Tibetan influence which made headway from the time of the rule of the Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. As stated earlier, Tibet's power was on the rise and with Indian influence in Bhutan on the wane, Bhutan came under the cultural and religious influence of Tibet, particularly in the western and central valleys. Tibet at this time was able to increase its influence in the upper Himalayan region, thus disturbing the arrangements in the Eastern Himalayas also.

H. E. Richardson in his book, *Tibet and Its History*, says that Bhutan at this time was under the political authority of Tibet. This, however, is an exaggeration because during this

period and much later, there was a constant struggle between the Tibetans and the Bhutanese and Tibetan troops invaded Bhutan several times. This period can, therefore, be considered only as a beginning of the Tibetan influence and that too in the spheres of religion and culture only. At this time, a number of Lamas from Tibet started coming to Bhutan and established their sects and built several monasteries, as will be seen in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

# Tibetan Influence and Establishment of the Drukpa Sect

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During the reign of the Tibetan King Tritsun Desten, commonly known as Ralpachen (816-836 A.D.), a contingent of Tibetan troops came to Bhutan on the invitation of some Bhutanese who sought Tibetan assistance to drive out some of the invaders from the neighbouring kingdoms of India. These troops ultimately settled down in Bhutan and came to be known as Milog.

According to Lhoyi Chhojang (history of the Dharma), a war took place in 824 A.D. between the Tibetan King and the then Indian ruler of Bhutan. The Tibetans drove out the Indian ruler. The Tibetan troops liked the country so much that they said *Milog*, meaning that they will not return. They then settled in the valleys of Lho (south country to Tibet, i.e. Bhutan) and came to be known as Milog. This area came to be known as Tshochhen Gyed: the eight parts or divisions consisting of Wang, Be, Med, Kawang, Chang, Thi, Thim and Lar. This was the first known Tibetan settlement in Bhutan.

Lama Tsangpa, son of the Tibetan King Sadnalog (elder brother of Ralpachen and Lang Darma), was sent to Paro (in Bhutan) to spread the Buddhist religion. It may be of some interest to readers that Lang Darma got his brother Ralpachen murdered and himself became the King of Tibet. During his reign (836-842), Lang Darma indulged in large scale persecution of Buddhists in Tibet, leading to a considerable influx of Tibetans into Bhutan. Even after the murder of Lang Darma in 842, the situation did not improve until the arrival of Indian Buddhist scholars in 978 A.D. leading to the renaissance of Buddhism in Tibet.

According to Claude White, the first British Political Officer,

Bhutan was occupied by the followers of Tibetan King Tiral-Chan in the 11th century. The extent or manner of occupation is, however, not clear. Till the beginning of the 17th century, when Nawang Namgyal came from Tibet and established his effective rule over Bhutan, as far as one can see from the available facts, besides minor invasions from Tibet in a limited sector there was a constant movement of Lamas to Bhutan and the period was mostly devoted to spread of Buddhism and its various sects.

The Lamas who came to Bhutan from Tibet from the 12th century onwards, established only a small measure of temporal control in western and central Bhutan. Gyalwa Lhanampa of Nyo-Lineage was probably the first to do so. He started the Lhapa Kargyupa sect and applied the Dzong system of Tibet to Bhutan. He also built the famous Tangu monastery which still exists.

The subsequent history is mostly concerned with the origin and spread of the Drukpa sect founded by Yeshe Dorji at Ralung. Yeshe or Dro-Gon-Tsangpa-Cyalras, as he is known, was born in 1160 A.D. and died in 1210 A.D. Yeshe Dorji's Guru, Pema Dorji, who came from Lingpa, had founded the Lingpa Kaju subsect. When Yeshe Dorji was building a monastery called Seva Chang Chhup he saw dragons in the sky. From this moment he changed the name of his subsect from Lingpa Kaju to Drukpa Kaju. It is believed that Guru Padma Sambhava had prophesied that one of the followers of Yeshe Dorji would go to a valley of the dragons and would establish a monastery there. A young Lama, Sangyeon, became Yeshe's successor and was given the name of Fajo-Duk-Gom-Shigpa. After his studies at Ralung, he came to Bhutan via Lingshi and Paro. Lama Fajo and his wife started living at Cheri Dordam. Jealous of his fame, one rival Lama called Lhapa, belonging to Dri Gong Kaju sect, attacked Cheri but was defeated and had to flee to Amo Chu Valley where he was warmly received. He, however, treacherously betrayed the people to the Tibetans who seized the valley.

Having defeated Lhapa, the power of Lama Fajo increased

greatly. He sent his Tulpise (disciples) to various places in Bhutan to spread the cult of the Drukpa sect and to administer these areas. Fajo died in 1251 at the age of 68. Most of the aristocracy in Bhutan claim their descent from him.

The Sakya Lama, Thimbe Rabyang, came in 1152 A.D. and built many famous monasteries. Two of them are Chising Gompa and Langkar Ritsog. The Sakya sect, started in Bhutan, had a limited success and faded away after a short time.

The first group of Tantric Lamas, called the Tertons or Tertonpas, came to Bhutan in the 13th century and settled down in the Paro Valley. They are called Tertons because they could reveal the hidden treasures of Guru Padma Sambhava (Ter = hidden treasure; tonpa = to reveal). In the 15th century, an incarnate Lama called Terton Pema Lingpa was born at Bumthang in Bhutan. He was considered an incarnation of Guru Padma Sambhava and his task was to reveal the secrets and objects hidden by the Guru, at an appropriate time. He composed a famous dance, on the basis of his mission, called Nga-Ging meaning the 'Druk Dance of Wrath'. A legend says that when Pema Lingpa went to the heavenly abode of the Guru he saw the place of the Guru, called Zang Dong Peri, surrounded by rainbows, where religious dances were going on. On his return to earth, he composed three dances called Pa-Chham which are very popular in Bhutan even now. The main theme of these dances is to lead all people to heaven in their next life. The famous Gampo of 'Gante' between Wangdiphodrang and Pelela range was built by Pema Lingpa.

Lama Pema Lingpa and his descendants fully established themselves in Bhutan. His grandson, Kunga Gyaltzen, son of Kunga Nynpo, built the famous monastery of Dramitse where he got the famous dance 'Dramitse Nga Chham' copied from one of the dances performed at Zang Dong Peri, and performed at the consecration ceremony. Jigme Namgyal, great-great-grandfather of present King was the seventh direct descendant of Pema Lingpa, according to one view.

Many other Lamas came from Tibet and one of them was

Ne Nyingpa who came in 1361 and built the two Dzongs called Changtsa and Jhase. He established monastic schools for propagating the Ne Nying Kargyupa teachings. Later, his monastery changed its affiliations to the Geylupa sect, the Yellow Hat Sect of the Dalai Lama.

Another well-known Lama called Drukpa Kinley came in the 15th century. His name is associated with several places in Bhutan, especially Paro. Between Wangdiphodrang and Punakha, one can see the statue of Drukpa Kinley in the temple called Chimi Lakhang. Legends credit him with supernatural powers and it is believed that he once warned the other Lamas of their approaching death, but no one believed him. Soon they all died, and Lama Kinley and his dog went to heaven through the nose of the statue, Lhasa Jou in Jokhang. The keeping of pet dogs by Lamas of Tibet and Bhutan is attributed to this legend.

The decline of Buddhism in India had come about by the end of the 12th century. This meant that Tibet which traditionally looked to India as a Guru on Buddhism had no longer a teacher. It was then that the different orders or sects originated in Tibet. A number of sects including Nying-ma-pa (older order of Padma Sambhava), Kadampa (Atista's doctrine), Kargyinpa (practical Yoga, first in magical, later in mystical, sense) and Sakyapa became prevalent. Each sect tried to increase its influence in Tibet and adjoining countries. When the Mongols became a formidable power, the Sakya Abbot submitted to them on the understanding that in future the Sakya Abbots were to rule the whole of Tibet under the Mongol Emperors. This was not always acceptable to the other orders. The emergence of Tsong Khapa, a great reformer, helped the Sakyapas to ultimately lay the foundation for his later successors, the Dalai Lamas, and his sect came to be known as the Yellow Cap. The other sects Kargyupa and Nying-ma-pa came to be known as the Red Caps.

The Red Caps were persecuted in Central Tibet but they almost took possession of the Southern Himalayan countries

like Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim. The majority of the people of these areas, being agriculturists and thus attached to the land, did not like the purified doctrine of the Yellow Cap, that everything was illusory and transient. Almost all the Buddhist population of Bhutan are followers of the Red Caps.

## *Chapter 4*

# Emergence of Bhutan as a Drukpa Country

---

The 16th century can be described as the beginning of stabilisation of Buddhist influence from Tibet on Bhutan. In 1506 Lama Nawang Cheoki Gyalpo and his followers built many monasteries in Paro and extended the Buddhist influence up to Eastern Bhutan. So far, the Buddhist influence had been confined only to Western Bhutan, which had an easy access from Tibet. The earlier chapter has already described how the visits of the Tibetan Lamas and their followers gradually spread their influence and tried to establish their own sects. At this time, five different sects, namely, Ningma, Lhapa Kargyin, Kamtsang Kargyin, Sakayapa and Geylupa had been established, but their influence was localised and none spread over the whole country. It is significant to note that, during this period, a constant rivalry was going on in Tibet amongst these sects and each one was trying to establish its predominance in Bhutan as well. In spite of so many Lamas having visited Bhutan, they only served as heralds to symbolise the final advent of Nawang Namgyal, who ultimately brought the country under one rule and unified it.

In 1616, Nawang Namgyal, a scion of the house of Gye of Druk at Ralung and the head of the Drukpa Kargyupa, came to Bhutan. He was the reincarnation of Lama Lunchen, Pema Karpo, and his origin was from the nobility, being the son of Dorji Lenpa Mephram Tempa Nyma, a direct descendant of Lhabom, brother of Yeshe Dorji (the founder of the Drukpa sect). He was gifted and of remarkable intelligence. His early life needs to be mentioned to give an insight into his character and what led him to come to Bhutan.

As a child, Nawang studied under the Drukpa Lama, Padma



Karpo, at Ralung. He had hopes of becoming the successor to the heirarch's chair, but a rival claimant, Karma Tenkgong Wangpo, backed by Deba Tsangpa, proved stronger. Nawang, disappointed, left on a long pilgrimage and ultimately landed in Bhutan in 1616 at the age of 23. But for this incident, the history of Bhutan might have been different.

The legend says that Nawang had a dream in which one of the protecting deities of Bhutan, Pal Yeshe Gampo, showed him the map of Bhutan and urged him to go there. He lived in Bhutan for 35 years and died at the age of 58. During these years, he was continuously engaged in wars to consolidate his temporal as well as spiritual hold in the country. He ultimately came to be known as Shabdung Rimpoche. Henceforth the people of Bhutan came to be known as Drukpas, people of the thunder.

On his way from Tibet through Lingshi (in the north-west of Bhutan), he stayed at Tangu Gompa. There he was cordially received by the Head-Lama of Chari, Gyaltson Tenjin. Later he went to Pangri Sampa, which was the seat of Lama Nawang Chogyal. While he was staying at a place called Dansa Do Chholing (Paro), the Deba Tsangpa sent an invading army against him. With the help of the local people, he was able to defeat the invaders. The legend says that at the time of the invasion, the protecting deity of Bhutan, Pal Yeshe Gampo, appeared in a dream and told Nawang Namgyal that he would be victorious. After his victory, his influence spread rapidly in other parts of Bhutan. It is also said that due to repeated harassment by Deba Tsangpa ruler (of Rinpong dynasty) of Tibet, he performed a Tantric ritual at Yulsarkha, which destroyed the Deba and his family. In gratitude to the protecting deity, he composed a dance called Zor Chham, which is still performed by the Lamas.

Nawang Namgyal's victories spread his fame to the neighbouring kingdoms. He received friendly missions from Cooch Behar, Nepal and Ladakh. The ruler of Ladakh made a gift of a few villages for the purpose of setting up monasteries. As late

as 1958, a Bhutanese monk-officer used to look after this property.

This starting of the dual system of administration in Bhutan, temporal and secular, is attributed to a dream which Nawang Namgyal had. The legend says that his father Tempa Nyma spoke to him in a dream asking him to rule Bhutan through a combination of the monks and the laity, which would bring peace and happiness. Thereafter he formed a monastic council of 30 consisting of his Tibetan followers and his new local devotees. This council assisted him in his rule and spread of religion.

In 1629, he built the famous Dzong of Simtokha, which till today stands near the entrance to Thimphu Valley and has now the largest monastic school in Bhutan. A son was born to him in 1631 at Simtokha and was named Jamphal Dorji. During his travels in Southern Bhutan Shabdung Rimpoche received gifts and messages of respect from the Raja of Cooch Behar, Prem Narayan. In acknowledgement, Shabdung wrote a letter to the Raja advising him to believe in three gems, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (monk) and in Jaitongpo (sacred Buddhist literature containing religious teachings in 8000 verses written on palm leaves).

In 1636, he started building the famous Dzong called Druk Poong Thang Dechen Phodang, later called Punakha Dzong. It was here that he started his dual system of Government called 'Chhosi' and made Punakha the capital. Though Punakha is now no more the capital, even today the installation of the King and the Head Lama, Jey Khenpo, takes place in this Dzong.

Nawang Namgyal appointed one of his Tibetan monks, Paykar Jugnay, as the Chief Khenpo or Nayten whose duties were to enforce the strict observance of priestly vows amongst the monks, direct their studies and preside at religious ceremonies. He appointed another monk, Tenzin Drukgyal (Umze), as the first Dug Desi or Deb Raja, whose duties were to attend to the general administration of the State, to deal with foreign

affairs, to manage all financial and economic matters and to look after the needs of the Lamas. The Naytens and the Deb Raja shared between themselves the administration of the country, the former for religious affairs and the latter for secular matters.

It was during Nawang Namgyal's rule that the first Europeans, two Jesuit Portuguese priests, Estevao Cacela and Joas Cabral, visited Bhutan in 1629, en route to Tibet. These priests are reported to have brought some guns and a telescope, which they offered to the Shabdung. These gifts can still be seen at Cheri where they are kept now. They also offered their services against the Tibetans, which were refused. At that time, he was still fighting against the Tibetans.

In 1639, Shabdung Rimpoche was able to establish peace with the Tibetans. As a result, the son of his ardent enemy, the late Deb Raja Tsangba, his Council of Ministers and a number of Lamas came to Punakha to pay their respects to the Shabdung.

Around this time, the Yellow Hat and the Red Hat sects were fighting amongst themselves for supremacy in Tibet. The Mongol Army led by Gushi Khan overthrew the Rinpong dynasty of the Tsang province to establish the Dalai Lamas. Having crushed the vast army of Tartars led by the Khan of Kokonor, who espoused the cause of the Red Hat sect and having further defeated the King of Kham, a follower of Bon religion, Gushi Khan proclaimed his authority over Tibet and appointed the fifth Dalai Lama as the sole spiritual and temporal ruler of Tibet, thus establishing the supremacy of the Yellow Hat sect. In order to spread the influence of the Dalai Lama, Gushi Khan sent a large army of Mongols and Tibetans to the borders of Bhutan. A fierce battle raged with the Bhutanese army near Kabang Dzong, led by Nawang Namgyal himself. The invading army was defeated. Some of the captured weapons are still kept in the Punakha Dzong.

Due to this great victory, the prestige of Nawang Namgyal reached its zenith. He was given the title of 'Ngaki Wangpo,

Chhotham, Cheley, Nampa Gyalwa, Nawang Tenzin Namgyal' meaning master of speech, victorious in all directions, incomparable and precious protector of the LHO (Bhutan) country. The Tibetan chronicler describes the work of Nawang Namgyal in these terms . . . 'In the intervals of peace, the Shabdung Rimpoche devoted himself with full energy to his various state duties, founding a body of priesthood, providing for and controlling them, giving instructions to those who were seekers after truth. In short, he was pastor, abbot, psalmist, rector, superintendent of carving (for printing purposes), architect of State and monastic buildings . . . Chief Commander of the forces for quelling foreign aggressions, chief protector and ruler of his own adherents and followers. . . . He was all in one person and fulfilled the duties thoroughly and efficiently. He introduced law into lawless Bhutan.'

Jealous of the increasing authority of Nawang Namgyal, Sonam Chhopel, the Desi under the fifth Dalai Lama of Tibet, sent a strong army to Bhutan. The struggle went on for several months. According to a legend, Shabdung built a Thos (heaps of stone representing four guardians) in each of the four directions to make the Tibetan army ineffective. (These symbols can be seen in the courtyards of almost all the monasteries of Bhutan.) The Tibetans were finally defeated, and the authority of Shabdung recognised by the Tibetan King, who presented him with his personal symbols, including a conchshell. Shabdung Rimpoche went to Punakha and performed a Puja called 'Drupcho Tsenmo' for the deities of Bhutan.

To celebrate one of his earlier victories against the Tibetans, Shabdung built the famous Dzong of Wangdiphodrang. In one of the chapels here, the image of the God of War is located and warriors used to go there to pray before going to fight.

## *Chapter 5*

# Post-Nawang Namgyal Rule and Tibetan Incursions

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By this time, the Drukpa Kargyupa sect was well established in Bhutan. Shabdung Rimpoche became the undisputed ruler. He proceeded to build many monasteries and Dzongs in different parts of the country. He specially built a Chorten (a building where relics are kept sealed), called Jeva Chorten, in memory of those killed in various battles. He put in it 150 images of Boddhisattvas made by himself.

After subduing his enemies, he promulgated a new law based on King Songtsen Gampo's (king of Tibet from 630-649 A.D.) ten religious and sixteen worldly edicts. With these, he ruled Bhutan most effectively. The post of Deb Raja was made elective. He also created administrative areas with the Dzongs as headquarters and appointed Governors or Penlops for these. These areas or provinces were further sub-divided into districts, and Dzongpons were appointed as their head.

The dual system of government, and particularly, the elective nature of the post of Deb Raja, greatly influenced the subsequent course of the history of Bhutan. While the system worked effectively under Nawang Namgyal, it subsequently led to civil wars on the question of succession and control of power. The history of Bhutan, after the death of Nawang Namgyal, is full of strifes till 1907 when the hereditary monarchy was established.

Nawang Namgyal decided to retreat to the caves in 1651 at the age of 58 and handed over the administration to Umze Khenpo. He passed away after a while. Umze concealed the death of Nawang Namgyal for five years.

Umze Khenpo, Tenzin Drukgyal ruled the country as Deb Raja for six years after the death of Shabdung Rimpoche. He

was a renowned astronomer and his contribution is recognised till today in Bhutan. During his tenure, an attempt was made on his life by his enemies. His rule was uneventful except that he took several measures for the welfare of the monks. His period was marked by trouble, created by his numerous enemies and most of his time was spent in subduing them. He passed away in 1657 while giving a religious discourse at Densa Chari monastery.

During his lifetime, in 1655, he appointed Tenzin Drukdag as Chila Head Lama of Rinchenpong Dzong (Paro). After Umze's death, Tenzin became the Deb Raja, the second since the system started. He was called the Chhoje. Having spent his childhood with Nawang Namgyal and having had a proper religious training, he was known to be a person of intellect. He was keen on medicine and collected a lot of herbs. His significant contribution was the writing of Kanjur (words of Buddha) in 108 volumes in gold letters.

At this stage, it is necessary to go back to 1612 to get an idea of Bhutan-Tibet relations till 1657. When the rule of the first Deb Raja Umze Drukgyal ended in 1611, Karma Tonsuang Wangpo, Chief of Tsang (Tibet), whose capital was Shigatse, died and he was succeeded by Marpa Phuntshok Namgyal. He fought two wars with Bhutan but neither Tibetan nor Bhutanese records reveal the ultimate outcome. In 1612, the first Panchen Lama visited Bhutan. The records are silent on the reasons for this visit, but it can be presumed that he probably came to mediate and end the fighting. After this period, Bhutan's relations with Tibet have already been dealt with in the account of the rule of Nawang Namgyal. In 1646, Tibet and Bhutan signed an agreement of peace which confirmed the status quo in regard to the relations that had existed between the Bhutanese and the Monpa tribes in Southern Tibet before the fighting broke out. It may be mentioned that Gushi Khan had sent his Mongol armies in 1643 to attack Bhutan at the request of the Monpa monasteries (on the southern borders of Tibet with Bhutan). It is said that during

the rule of Desi of Tsangpa, the Bhutanese used to give annual offerings of rice to Tsang, but under the new agreement, these offerings were sent to Genden Phodrang (Central Government of Tibet under a Dalai Lama). This peace did not last long, and in 1647 the Tibetan troops again attacked and reached Paro via Phari. The Tibetans lost the battle and the weapons captured are still displayed in the Government Museum at Paro in the Tag Dzong. Next we hear of another attempt by the Tibetans in 1657. It is said that one of the Bhutanese chieftains, Chosje Namkha Rinchen, who had close contacts with Tibetans, was killed along with twenty members of his family by his local enemies. This gave the Tibetans an excuse for invading Bhutan to avenge his death. The details of this battle are not clear, but apparently the Tibetans were unsuccessful and probably were involved in a small local attack.

Thus, Bhutan really had no peace during this period and it is interesting to note that these invasions by Tibetan armies started in earnest only after the Tibetan influx through Lamas started in Bhutan in the 16th century. As spheres of influence were built in Bhutan under the various Lamas, it aroused the jealousies amongst the various chieftains or important Lamas in Tibet leading to frequent invasions of Bhutan. Most of these battles, but not all, took place in the western sector of Bhutan, which had the easiest access from Tibet. These troubles continued till as late as the 19th century, as the future course of events will show. Bhutan too got involved in attacks on neighbouring areas soon.

## *Chapter 6*

# The Rule of the Deb Rajas

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The rule of the Deb Rajas was marked by civil strifes and struggle for power amongst the various factions. The very fact that there were as many as fifty-six Deb Rajas from 1651 to 1907, the year of establishment of the hereditary monarchy, speaks for itself. Though the post of the Deb Raja was elective, various pressures including force were sometimes used to instal a particular person. This period was also marked by an aggressive attitude on the part of Bhutan and incursions into neighbouring Indian states like Cooch Behar. In spite of these factors, the rule of the Deb Rajas preserved the integrity of Bhutan and any foreign domination was strongly resisted.

After the death of the second Deb Raja, Tenzin Drukda, who had ruled for 12 years, Chogyal Minjur Tempa or Thamcho Luntrup was elected in his place in 1667. He was born in Tibet in 1613 and had entered the monastic order as a child. Extending his domain to Eastern Bhutan was his outstanding contribution. He built the famous Tashigong Dzong in Eastern Bhutan. In 1668, he faced an invasion from Tibet, instigated by the third Desi of Tibet, Tenzin Dayan Khan. The Tibetan sources ascribe this invasion to an attack by the Bhutanese on the Achok tribe of Southern Tibet. The Tibetans, however, were looking for the slightest pretext to invade Bhutan. The invaders suffered a crushing defeat. The legend ascribes this defeat to a Tantric Puja (worship) by the Deb Raja in which the protecting deity predicted the defeat. According to Shakapa, the Tashilhunpo Lamas negotiated for peace and the agreement of 1615 was revived.

As a result of an internal power struggle, Chogyal was dethroned in 1670 and was succeeded by Sangye Tenzin Rabgye as the fourth Deb Raja. According to a legend his appointment



was predicted as early as 9th century by Guru Padma Sambhava who said that a person of this name would rule Bhutan one day. It is said that Sangye Tenzin was a reincarnate of King Thusrang Detson of Tibet. This King had invited Guru Padma Sambhava to Tibet.

Being highly religious, he believed that the salvation of Bhutan lay only in the spread of the Dharma. He, therefore, asked all the important families who had three sons, to send their second son to the monastic order. This increased the number of monks, lending strength to the Church. Since then, it has always been considered an honour to send one of the sons to the monastic order. Sangye Tenzin built the famous monastery of Taktsang in Paro. His other contribution was the starting of a school for logic.

He too faced an attack from Tibet in 1675, when the invaders burnt down the Tendong Dzong. In spite of repeated efforts, no agreement could be reached and all the trade between the two countries came to a standstill, leading to the sealing of the borders in the western sector. A dispute with Sikkim also arose in 1676 on the question of the borders. A Tibetan monk-offical, Chendon Gyathang, came to mediate but his anti-Bhutan views were not liked. The monk died in suspicious circumstances. The legend ascribes it to a Tantric Puja performed in Bhutan for his death.

In 1682, the fifth Dalai Lama died. His successor was neither strong nor ambitious and, apart from that, the Tibetans were having trouble with the Mongols. As a result, the Bhutan borders enjoyed some peace. The Deb Raja's rule lasted till 1694. He enjoyed fame and power and was known to be gifted with supernatural powers. It is said that people saw him in two different forms at Taktsang Monastery.

His successor Gendum Chhopel ruled Bhutan from 1694 to 1701. His rule was marked by his political acumen in settling the disputes with Tibet.

In 1695, Bhutan invaded and captured Cooch Behar (an Indian State in the bordering areas of West Bengal). The ruler

of Cooch Behar sought the help of the Moghul ruler of India, who expelled the Bhutanese and appointed Rup Narayan as the new ruler of Cooch Behar.

Druk Rabgye was appointed the eighth Deb Raja in 1707. From 1701 to 1707, there were two Deb Rajas, Nawang Tsering and Yunze Penjors, whose rule lasted for three years each, with no significant contribution. Druk Rabgye was a Dronier in Tashichho Dzong at Thimphu, when he won a battle against Tempa Wangchuk of Punakha Dzong and was elected Deb Raja.

At this time, a controversy arose between Tawang Dratsang Monastery (of Dalai Lama's sect, Gyelupa) in Tibet and Druk Rabgye. Lhazang Khan, grandson of Gushi Khan, had become the chief of the Mongols in Central Tibet in 1697 and was protecting the Gyelupa sect. He objected to Druk Rabgye's interference and threatened to invade Bhutan. Druk Rabgye sent a rude reply quoting the past Tibetan defeats. Thereupon, Lhazang Khan invaded Bhutan in 1714 from three sides—Paro in the west, Bumthang in the central region and Tashigong in the eastern region. Lhazang suffered heavy casualties in Bumthang and advised his army to stop fighting and return to Tibet. A peace treaty was hurriedly signed. At this time Lhazang was also facing trouble in Tibet on the question of the installation of the Dalai Lama.

In 1730, trouble arose in Bhutan over the incarnation of Shabdung Rimpoche Gye Kunga Gyaltzen. Two Lamas were backed by Druk Rabgye and the retired Deb Raja Chhopel respectively as the real reincarnates. Rabgye, defeated in this attempt, sought the help of Pholohanas, a Tibetan General who had become a powerful figure then. Druk Rabgye was murdered for this by his enemies, following which the Tibetans invaded Bhutan. They forced the Bhutanese to recognise the Lama supported by Rabgye as Shabdung and also occupied some Bhutanese territory. The Bhutanese promised to uphold peace and agreed to send a representative to Lhasa to pay his respects and give presents to the Tibetan Government. According to

Shakapa, an ex-Tibetan Minister, this system known as 'Lochak' continued till 1950. The Bhutanese account of this system is different. They say that under the agreement arrived at, the representative was sent as an envoy of Government of Bhutan and there was no question of any subservience to the Tibetan Government.

Chogyal Nawang Gyatse succeeded Druk Rabgye and after an uneventful reign was succeeded by Mephram Wangmo as the tenth Deb Raja in 1736. He visited Tibet to pay his regards to the Dalai Lama and Pholohanas and was received with cordiality and full honours. Both sides were keen to improve their relations. Following this, a high ranking Tibetan Lama was sent to Bhutan to build the shrine of 'Avalokiteshwara'.

However, the improved relations did not last long and in 1740, during the reign of the eleventh Deb Raja, Khu-Wo-Chor, Bhutan attacked Sikkim. The ruler of Sikkim, a minor, sought the help of Pholohanas. The Tibetans drove out the Bhutanese and Repten Sharpa, a Tibetan, was appointed to administer Sikkim.

## *Chapter 7*

# Internal Trouble and Relations with Neighbours

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Nawang Gyaltzen, the twelfth Deb Raja, had a short and uneventful reign. He was succeeded by Choggyal Sherap Wangchuk, who had a long (nearly 20 years) and peaceful tenure. He was duly recognised by the seventh Dalai Lama, the Chinese Emperor, and the rulers of India, Nepal and Sikkim.

He was succeeded by Druk Phuntso and Druk Tenzin who had short tenures in office. At this time, trouble on the borders of Cooch Behar was developing. Bhutan was actively interfering in Cooch Behar affairs and frequent incursions were being made.

In 1768, Shidhar, or Sonam Lhundrup, became the 16th Deb Raja. He had already acquired a reputation as a skilful administrator while he was Dzongpon of Wangdiphodrang. At that time, he was sent by the Deb Raja to mediate between the Ruler of Ladhak and his Ministers. It is interesting to note that up to this time, all the Deb Rajas were chosen from amongst the Lamas. This is corroborated by Captain Turner who visited Bhutan in 1783. According to Turner, the monasteries were the main channel to public office. Not only the Deb Rajas, but nearly all the Government officers were chosen from people trained in the monasteries.

Shidhar was an ambitious man. In order to become independent of the priestly order, he tried to follow a more secular line and began to improve his relations with the King of Nepal and the Panchen Lama of Tibet on the political level. He invaded Sikkim in 1770 and kept it under his rule for six years till Tibet came to Sikkim's rescue. It is said that a senior Sikkimese officer, who was kept as a prisoner, was heavily bribed and released. He betrayed his country at the negotiations

on the border areas, as a result of which Bhutan got Daling Kote, Dzongsa and Sangbey areas, which originally belonged to Sikkim.

At this time, the British influence and control was spreading in Eastern India. As a result, Shidhar came into conflict with the British over Cooch Behar. This was the first direct involvement of Bhutan with the British in India. The Bhutanese had established considerable influence in the politics of Cooch Behar after the death of Raja Nar Narayan in 1587. Raja Nar Narayan had annexed some territory of Bhutan. Bhutan not only got this territory back, but also stationed their agent Gya Chila in Cooch Behar and used him to influence local politics. Deb Raja Shidhar laid a claim to Cooch Behar and invaded it in 1772. The Bhutanese soldiers captured Raja Durandar Narayan and his brother Dewan Rao. Cooch Behar sought the intervention of the British, who sent a detachment of troops under Capt. Jones. The British not only drove out the Bhutanese but also captured the forts of Daling, Chehacota, and Buxa.

Panchem Lama, who was the Regent at this time in Tibet during the minority of the Dalai Lama, mediated and a truce was signed on 28 April 1774 at Fort William. The Bhutanese returned the Raja of Cooch Behar and his brother, and surrendered their claims to the Cooch Behar territories.

Deb Raja Shidhar installed Chhoki Gyaltzen as the third Shabdung Rimpoche. In the last years of his reign, Shidhar had to face a rebellion in which he was killed. His prestige, so high at one time, had received a setback after his defeat at the hands of the British. According to Bogle, one reason for the rebellion was the re-acceptance of the seal of the Emperor of China, whose help and protection was sought by the Deb. According to Sir Claude White, the practice of granting a patent of investiture and the seal of office to the ruler of Bhutan was revived by the Chinese Emperor Chien Ling in 1736. The practice later fell into disuse.

The Chinese claim of Bhutan having been a tributary state of the Chinese Empire is not supported by any tangible evidence.

Giving of gifts or receiving of the Emperor's seal, which the Chinese considered as evidence of their authority, did not in any way affect Bhutan's sovereignty. Though the Chinese tried hard to influence the politics of Bhutan, it was done mainly through the Tibetans, who themselves were engaged in frequent invasions and suffered some ignoble defeats at the hands of the Bhutanese. The very fact that the British never accepted any Chinese say in Bhutan's affairs or that the Chinese never posted their Amban in Bhutan, amply proves this. In fact, at no stage did the British ever involve the Chinese in their negotiations or treaties with Bhutan and the same stand was taken by the Indian Government in 1947.

This was not so in the case of Tibet where the British implicitly accepted Chinese suzerainty, though obtaining the rights to negotiate directly with the Tibetans. While the Chinese always contested the right of Tibet to enter into any arrangements with the British without their concurrence, this question never arose in the case of Bhutan. Also, the Amban posted at Lhasa was the Chinese representative for Tibet only and never for Bhutan.

Some historians have also stated that Bhutan was under the political hegemony of Tibet. One can easily dispute this position in view of the several invasions mounted by the Tibetans who suffered successive defeats, and also because, beyond a short period, Bhutan could never be occupied by the Tibetans. Though the Drukpas were themselves of Tibetan stock, they never accepted Tibetan control and successfully fought to preserve Bhutan's integrity and sovereignty. The deep cultural and religious influence of Tibet, no doubt, made its impact on Bhutan over the centuries but there is no evidence to prove Bhutan's subservience to Tibet in the political sense, except that events in Tibet affected the internal situation from time to time.

## *Chapter 8*

# Beginning of Relations with the British

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It has already been mentioned that a conflict was going on between the Bhutanese and the State of Cooch Behar. It is necessary to go into some details on this aspect to indicate how a third party, the British, got involved and thus began the period of active interest by the British in Bhutan.

The Kingdom of Cooch Behar was founded in 1510 by Chandan. During his successor Vishwa Singh's reign, a tribute was demanded from the Bhutanese. On the demand being refused, Cooch Behar attacked Bhutan. The Deb Raja was forced to pay a tribute. Dominance over Bhutan was further forced by Vishwa Singh's successor Nar Narayan (1555-1587). This dominance was shaken off by the Bhutanese during the period of decline of Cooch Behar between 1621-1625. After 1665, the Bhutanese were strong enough to invade Cooch Behar and frequent incursions took place thereafter. In 1772, when Bhutan invaded Cooch Behar, the latter appealed to the British for assistance. Warren Hastings came to Cooch Behar's aid and not only drove out the Bhutanese but captured the Bhutanese forts of Daling, Chehacota and Pasakha. Tashi Lama of Tibet, whose intervention was sought by the Bhutanese, advised the Deb Raja to desist from attacking Cooch Behar and the British East India Company agreed to conclude a peace treaty on the basis of the status quo ante. The treaty, which was concluded on 25 April, 1774, bound the Bhutanese to respect the territory of the East India Company. This treaty, at the same time, initiated the policy of British interests in Bhutan for the trans-Himalayan trade. This is evident by the concessions given to the Bhutanese in matters of trade in India and transfer of Baikantapur area of Cooch Behar to Bhutan later.

At this time Kunga Gyaltzen succeeded as the seventeenth

Deb Raja. The British had started taking keen interest in Tibet to open an area to British trade and commerce from India. Since Bhutan was a neighbour both of the British-protected territories and of Tibet, it automatically came within the gambit of British politics.

Warren Hastings decided to send an emissary, George Bogle, to Tibet via Bhutan to initiate a policy of commercial contacts with Tibet. Bogle reached Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, in July 1774, and was well received. He conveyed to the Deb Raja the keenness of Warren Hastings to establish close contacts with Bhutan which would gain considerably by the trade which the British hoped to establish between North Bengal and the northern kingdoms. The Deb Raja promised to consider Bogle's suggestions favourably. Bogle returned to Bhutan in 1775 from Tibet and after protracted negotiations, secured the consent of the Deb Raja to allow the safe passage of merchandise through their territory to Tibet.

Encouraged by the success of Bogle's mission, Warren Hastings sent another emissary, by the name of Hamilton, to Bhutan. Hamilton reached Thimphu in May 1776. One of his objectives was to examine the Deb Raja's claims to the districts of Falakata and Jalpaish. Hamilton again visited Bhutan in July 1777, with the ostensible purpose of congratulating the new Deb Raja, Jigme Samgey, but in reality to secure greater facilities for trade.

Warren Hastings continued this policy of close contacts with a view to opening a new vista for the British trade in the Himalayan belt and beyond to Tibet. Following this policy, he sent Capt. Turner to Tibet via Bhutan. Turner reached Punakha in June 1783 and met the Deb Raja. During his stay, he witnessed a rebellion by the Penlop of Wangdiphodrang, which was ultimately crushed by the Deb Raja. Though Turner's mission was not clearly defined, the very fact that the district of Falakata was ceded to Bhutan, in 1875 indicates that he wanted to convey to the Deb Raja the goodwill of the British and extract further concessions for British trade and commerce.



His report that 'the Deb Raja having acknowledged to me the validity of the Treaty (entered into by Bogle in 1775), it became unnecessary to enter into another . . .' clearly proves it. However, Turner failed to secure any more concessions other than what Bogle had secured.

The events at the end of the 18th century, however, upset the good work done by Warren Hastings. Earlier, Nepal had invaded Sikkim. For abstaining from assisting the Sikkimese, the Nepalese gave some land in Nepal to the Bhutanese for their monasteries. This was later lost in 1788, when Bhutan actively helped Sikkim against the Gurkha invasions from Nepal, with which Bhutan was also threatened.

Meanwhile, the internal struggle for power in Bhutan went on and there was a quick succession of Deb Rajas. In 1789 Druk Tenzin succeeded but was removed in 1792 and Yunze Chap Thapa was elected as Deb Raja the twentieth. At this time, war broke out between Nepal and Tibet. The Tibetans suspected British complicity and asked for Chinese assistance which was given. The prospects of trade with Tibet became dim and the importance of Bhutan as a highway became nil. The Deb Raja sent two of his emissaries, Sharup Dayo Chogyal and Lama Thindrukya, to mediate in the war but to no effect.

While Tibet-British relations went on deteriorating, Bhutan was plagued with her own internal troubles, which led to a weakening of the authority of the Deb Rajas and quick successions. Sonam Gyaltzen officiated as the Deb Raja when Thapa resigned. He was soon followed by Druk Namgyal. But for six years (1792-98) both ruled Bhutan jointly, an unusual thing. In 1799, Sonam lost his power but managed to become Deb Raja in 1803 after having conspired the murder of Druk Namgyal. His successor Sangye Tenzin in 1805 had to retire within a year and was succeeded by Yunza, the twenty-fifth Deb Raja. He too ruled for only a short time and there were further quick successions.

In 1810, Jigme Dragpa, who was the fourth Shabdung, became the twenty-eighth Deb Raja. He combined the offices of

the Deb and Dharma Rajas for one year. He made Yesha Gyaltzen the Deb Raja in 1811 who ruled for four years. His successor, however, died within five months. As many as five Deb Rajas ruled till 1838. This instability led to the weakening of the Deb Raja's office and the emergence of powerful officials who did not find it useful any more to remain under central control. The frontier officers kept on invading the Duars (the low-lying areas near the foot-hills of Bhutan). These Duars once belonged to the Ahom kings of Assam but were annexed by Bhutan in the 18th century. These Duars were rich in cultivation but as soon as any landowner or farmer made any money, the frontier official would take away all the money by force. There was also a constant friction between the Assamese and the Bhutanese on the question of the Assam Duars.

The First Burmese War (1824-26) led to deterioration in the relations between Bhutan and the British. By driving out the Burmese from Assam in 1826, the British extended the length of the Indo-Bhutan boundary, thereby inheriting the existing bad relations between the Bhutanese and the Assamese engendered by the Duars, which lay both on the Assam and Bengal sectors. The Bhutanese had wrested the Bengal Duars from the Muslim rulers of India. They, however, could not assume full control over the Assam Duars, which led to repeated incursions by the Bhutanese. The Bhutanese ultimately forced the Ahom rulers of Assam to purchase security by handing over the Duars to the Bhutanese on an annual payment of various Bhutanese goods. When the British inherited these arrangements after 1826, differences soon developed and the issue was forced by a long series of incursions by the Bhutanese between 1828 to 1846. This led to the taking over of the Buxa Duars by the British in 1836.

## *Chapter 9*

# Indo-Bhutan Relations During the British Period

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Seeing the deteriorating relations with Bhutan and the trouble mounting up in the Duars, the British decided to send Capt. Pemberton to Bhutan in 1838 for negotiations in spite of the objections of the Bhutanese. At this time, the internal situation in Bhutan was not too happy and power had passed into the hands of the Tongsa Penlop who controlled the actions of the Deb Raja and his Council.

Pemberton's mission was a failure. He was obstructed on the way by the Bhutanese, who made several attempts to send him back. Pemberton, successfully resisting these attempts, was finally permitted to proceed through Eastern Bhutan, which was controlled by the Tongsa Penlop. He found himself in the midst of a civil war. Pemberton managed to have prolonged discussions with the Deb Raja on a proposed treaty of trade and commerce and the prevention of Bhutanese incursions into India. Though reluctant at first, the Deb Raja agreed to sign the treaty but was prevented from doing so by the Tongsa Penlop. Pemberton returned disappointed and recommended permanent annexation of the Assam-Bengal Duars by the British, especially the Assam Duars in which Tongsa Penlop was deeply interested. He also recommended the posting of a 'European functionary' to be permanently stationed at the court of the Deb Raja 'to watch and counteract the evil consequences of unfriendly external influence and of internal misrule'.

The failure of this Mission led to the 'forward' policy of the British in the North-East region. In 1839, the incursions became more pronounced and the Bhutanese carried away twelve British subjects. This was a tragedy and Bhutan played into British hands. As there was little hope of acquiring the

Assam Duars by consent, the British took them over in 1841 in return for an annual compensation.

In the meantime, struggle for power in Bhutan was constantly going on. In 1838, Dorji Norbu became the thirty-seventh Deb Raja, after being victorious in the Civil War. After nine years of rule, under the patronage of Tongsa Penlop, he was succeeded by Wangchuk, who was murdered in 1850. This was followed by a quick succession of Deb Rajas, who were either murdered or made to retire prematurely.

Chogyal Damcho succeeded to the post in 1852 and managed to bring some peace for a short time by his ability and by combining in himself the office of the Dharma Raja also. His successors, Jampal, Una Tan, Kunga Palden, Phuntso Namgyal, Tsewang Sithup, Tsetin Younten and Kagin Wangchuk—all had a short tenure. Their rule was full of strifes and civil wars and indicative of the beginning of the end of the rule of the Deb Rajas.

At this time, the British were occupied with their own problems in the North-West region of India and the Afghan War. They did not, therefore, follow up their forward policy in the North-Eastern region with determination till the problems in the western sector had been settled. The Mutiny of 1857 in India also withheld the British from taking any strong step on Bhutan borders where the frontier officers of Bhutan went on with their incursions in spite of several warnings being given by the British. It is interesting to note that the Deb Raja's authority had so weakened at this time that the Tongsa Penlop was in direct correspondence with the British Agent to the Governor-General. In fact, in one of his letters he claimed: 'I am a Raja like the Deb Raja'. In March 1860, the British took over Ambari-Falakata district.

The relations between the two sides went on deteriorating and the British found it impossible to deal with the Deb Raja, in view of his complete lack of authority. The Agent's report of 1861 gives a clear picture of the situation. He stated: 'I am myself inclined to think that it is almost unreasonable to expect

any satisfaction from the Deb Raja, and that we are in correspondence with him and nothing else. Nothing short of our having a European functionary permanently stationed at the court of the Deb could give assurance of our communications reaching him. The Penlops are supposed to divide the Government of Bhutan between them and in most instances, probably dispose themselves, in the name of the Deb Raja, of such references made by us to that authority as fall into their hands. But this is not all, for as the Penlops usurp the authority of the Deb, so, in turn, their authority is encroached upon by the Zimpons or Subahs.'

The British Government of India then decided to send a mission to Bhutan with their demands and to explain the consequences if these were not conceded. The mission headed by Ashley Eden waited for a long time in Darjeeling in 1863, partly due to a civil war raging in Bhutan and partly due to the Government of Bhutan's resistance to receive the mission. The Deb Raja had been deposed by the Penlops of Poonakha and Tongsa and a new one installed. Eden, not hoping to get a response, proceeded to Bhutan and reached Punakha in March 1864 after suffering severe humiliations on the way. His efforts with the Deb Raja could be of no avail, the Tongsa Penlop controlling him. Eden was grossly insulted and threatened with imprisonment. Eden could only succeed in getting away after signing an agreement under compulsion, by which the British were to restore to Bhutan all the areas claimed by her.

On Eden's return, the British annexed the Bengal Duars which forced an armed conflict between the two sides. Though the Bhutanese army was no match for the British, the Deb Raja threatened to send 'a divine force of twelve Gods who were very ferocious ghosts.' And he did. The Tongsa Penlop attacked several British posts in occupied areas in Eastern Bhutan and forced the British to retreat. However, in 1865, the British counter-attacked and recaptured the posts vacated earlier. The British Viceroy threatened to send his troops deep into the country if the Bhutanese did not accept his earlier

conditions. Realising the futility of further resistance, the Deb Raja agreed to hold talks.

As a result of these talks, a treaty was signed in November 1865 between the two sides. The Treaty was called the Treaty of Sinchula. The Bhutanese version of the Treaty was called 'The Ten Article Treaty of Rawa Pani'. The signing of the Treaty could be called a landmark in the history of British Indo-Bhutan relationship and formed the basic framework of the pattern of relationship which subsequently emerged during the British regime in India. For the first time in her history, Bhutan was forced to accept a subservient status, which did not occur even with the Chinese, whose claim of Bhutan being a tributary state of theirs was completely untenable.

Under the Treaty, the Bhutanese agreed to the release of all British subjects, free trade and compulsory reference to the arbitration of the British Government of all disputes relating to Sikkim and Cooch Behar and accepting such arbitration as final.

In return, Bhutan got a subsidy of fifty thousand rupees which too was dependent on the good conduct of the Government of Bhutan in controlling its officials and the implementation of the clauses of the Treaty. The British gained the Duars, an area now rich in forests and tea cultivation, a direct access to Tibet and a frontier which served British interests well. The fact that in 1867 the Deb Raja was included in the list of other Indian Princes entitled to a fifteen-gun salute, speaks of the British intentions to subordinate Bhutan to the status of one of the Princely States of India.

## *Chapter 10*

# The Establishment of Monarchy in Bhutan

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The already unstable conditions within Bhutan worsened following the defeat of the Bhutanese. Though there was peace on the borders, the internal situation was boiling over. In 1869, a civil war broke out in which the Penlops of Tongsa and Paro rebelled against the Deb Raja. The British, having decided on a policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of Bhutan, refused to assist either side.

Tongsa and Paro Penlops were the major figures in the power struggle in Bhutan. Jigme Namgyal (the great-great-grandfather of the present King) became the Tongsa Penlop in 1853 and Deb Raja in 1870. He retired in 1873 and appointed his brother Kyitsalpa as the Deb Raja, who ruled till 1879. This shows that in the power struggle Tongsa Penlop emerged supreme. Jigme Namgyal defeated his rival, the Penlop of Wangdiphodrang, in a battle. In 1876, Kyitsalpa completed the defeat of his remaining rival, Tsewang Norbu, the Paro Penlop. The Paro Penlop and the Punakha Dzungpon, Shawonudup, escaped to Kalimpong in India and sought asylum there. The British refused to deliver them to the Bhutanese.

In 1881, there emerged a personality on the scene who ultimately changed the destiny of Bhutan. Ugyen Wangchuk, son of Jigme Namgyal, became the Paro Penlop and later the Tongsa Penlop in 1884. A civil war broke out in 1885, in which the Thimphu and Punakha Dzungpons, namely, Alu Dorji and Phuntshok Dorji, opposed the Tongsa Penlop on the question of the election of the Deb Raja. Dau Penjor, the Paro Penlop and a relative of the Tongsa Penlop joined the Tongsa Penlop's side. A battle was fought in Changlimithang at Thimphu (the present helipad) in which Phuntshok was killed

and Alu Dorji ran away to Tibet where he sought the help of the Dalai Lama, which was refused, apparently on the advice of the British. Thus the outcome of the civil war made Tongsa Penlop the virtual ruler of Bhutan.

The policy of the British after 1865 was to establish greater economic and political relations with Tibet. The growing menace of Russian advance into Central Asia threatened British interests, and one way to counteract it was to gain a foothold in Tibet. Bhutan figured very much in this policy, as it lay on the route to Tibet and the British trade from north-east India could pass through Bhutan unhindered. Sir W. J. Hersehall, Commissioner of Cooch Behar, wrote in 1874: 'Our relations with Central Asia via Phari are beginning to take shape and must, before long, under the influence of railways and trade, become of great practical value. Bhutan must have a part in these relations, though a subordinate one.'

In pursuance of these policies, the British Government opened a channel of contact with the Bhutanese, particularly the Deb Raja, abstained from interfering in the internal affairs and insisted on the observance of the Treaty of 1865. The Deb Raja appointed one Fentook as the Bhutanese agent at Buxa to maintain liaison with the British. However, the efforts of the British to maintain personal contacts with the Deb Rajas failed, due to frequent contests for power amongst the Penlops in Bhutan and quick successions to the post of the Deb Raja. The British kept aloof from the internal troubles, and even when, in 1884, the Thimphu Dzungpon called a Chinese and a Tibetan officer to Bhutan to arbitrate between the contending factions, the Viceroy refused the Deb Raja's request for arms aid.

The British were, therefore, happy at the emergence of a strong man on the Bhutan scene in 1885—Ugyen Wangchuk, the Tongsa Penlop. Unlike his father, Ugyen Wangchuk was keen to develop his country's relations with the British and strengthen his position inside the country. It is significant that the Bhutanese refused to come to the aid of the Tibetans in the Anglo-Tibetan War of 1888-1889 and Shipanjoo, father of



Ugyen Kazi (who was the Trade Agent of Bhutan in Kalimpong), actually warned the Tibetans of the consequences if they did not come to terms with the British. In 1885, the Tongsa Penlop had managed to get his nominee Sangey Dorji, commonly known as 'Yanpa Lopen', appointed as the Deb Raja. Sangey resigned in 1889 in favour of Ugyen Wangchuk. This led to an even closer contact between him and the British.

Ugyen Wangchuk was a strong and ambitious personality. He realised that Bhutan's future lay in stabilising the internal situation by having a strong man at the helm of affairs. Too long had the civil wars gone on and once for all the causes must be removed. He correctly analysed the situation in coming to the conclusion that a close association with a strong Government on his borders—the British—would give him the support he needed to establish his supreme authority within the country. British-Tibetan relations had worsened and Tibet could not for long withstand British pressures and power. Lord Curzon's forward policy into Tibet, to serve the interests of British trade and commerce and to counteract the Russian influence, increased the importance of Bhutan. Ugyen Wangchuk saw in this an opportunity to gain an advantageous position for himself and Bhutan. The Chinese, who showed some interest in Bhutan by sending their Amban from Lhasa to Paro (Bhutan), with the seal of the Emperor for Tongsa Penlop, were received with due courtesy, but it was obvious to Ugyen Wangchuk that China at this stage had no real power to compete with the British. Thus Ugyen Wangchuk, by his sheer brilliance in assessing the situation correctly, decided to back the winning horse and obtain for his country a secure position.

The contacts with the British, therefore, started at a personal level. In 1889, the Paro Penlop visited the British Political Agent at Kalimpong as a gesture of goodwill. When the British, in 1903, under Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty, decided to teach the Tibetans a lesson by sending an expedition under Younghusband, Ugyen Wangchuk decided to give full support. He even accompanied the Mission to Lhasa. He acted as a

mediator through his contacts with Lama Kunzag and gave valuable help to the British in getting the Convention of 1904 signed.

This was a turning-point in the history of Bhutan. The department of political affairs relating to Bhutan was transferred from the Government of Bengal to the Government of India, indicating the importance which the Viceroy attached to Bhutan. To show their gratitude, the British sent their Political Officer in Sikkim, J. C. White, in 1905, to Bhutan to present Ugyen Wangchuk with the insignia of the Knight Commander of the Emperor of India. This was the first Mission after 1864 when Ashley Eden made a disastrous trip to Bhutan. The Mission was received very cordially and J. Claude White wrote: 'Sir Ugyen is the only Bhutanese I have come across who takes a real and intelligent interest in general subjects, both foreign and domestic. I was deeply impressed by his sense of responsibility and genuine desire to improve the conditions of his country and countrymen.'

Claude White also described the internal situation prevailing at that time. He met Sangey Dorji, the 56th Deb Raja of Bhutan, whom he described as a 'great recluse' who occupied himself entirely with the religious affairs of the country. He held the office of the Shabdung also, as no reincarnation had been found after the previous Shabdung in 1903. The temporal affairs were managed by the Tongsa Penlop and his Council.

The British, in view of the growing friendly relations with Bhutan, decided to invite the Dharma-Deb Raja (the offices being held by one person) and the Tongsa Penlop along with the rulers of the Indian States to receive the Prince of Wales (later King George V) in 1906. Although the Tongsa Penlop was given the honours due to an Indian Ruler, he was accorded the special honour of a reception and a return visit by the Prince of Wales and the Viceroy.

Meanwhile, Sir Ugyen, to stabilise the country's position, started thinking on the lines of a hereditary monarchy for Bhutan. Claude White, the Political Officer, who had also now

become the Political Officer for Bhutan in addition to Sikkim, actively supported this idea. In 1907, the Deb Raja, Choley Tulku, died and the monks and other chiefs of Bhutan unanimously decided to invite Sir Ugyen to become the hereditary ruler of Bhutan. Sir Ugyen was duly installed as the first Maharaja of Bhutan on 17 December 1907, thus starting the hereditary system of monarchy which continues till today. The British Government was represented by Claude White who spoke on the occasion thus— ‘I am convinced that you have taken a wise step in thus consolidating the administration of the State. Sir Ugyen has been my friend for many years and you could not have made a better choice. His integrity, uprightness and firmness of character commend him to every one and his accession to the Maharajaship is not only a gain to Bhutan, but is of great advantage to the British Government who will henceforth have a settled Government with a man of strong character as its head, to negotiate with.’

## *Chapter 11*

# The Treaty of Punakha—1910

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The emergence of monarchy in Bhutan led to political stability in the country. The factional strifes amongst the various groups ended and the dual system of Government by the Dharma and the Deb Rajas, which was started by Nawang Namgyal in the 17th century, came to an end. Bhutan came under the political influence of the British which afforded her a protection not available so far. The Political Officer recommended to his Government generous and open support to the Maharaja who was 'thoroughly and entirely friendly to the English'.

At this time the Chinese were taking an active interest in Tibet and consequently Bhutan. This danger was clearly seen by the British Government and they began to devise a system to counteract the interventionist activities of the Chinese. The Political Officer mentioned in one of his despatches that 'Chinese influence is more active than ever on this frontier, and Bhutan, from lack of active help and sympathy on our part, may, against her will, be thrown into China, who, as we know, is not likely to lose such an opportunity, when the expenditure of a few thousand rupees will gain her end.' How prophetic were these words! Independent India faced the same situation in the sixties when Tibet came under the complete control of the Chinese and India had to go all out to help the development of Bhutan to prevent the Chinese designs.

The British Government decided to amend the Treaty of Sinchula to prevent any other power taking an interest in Bhutan. Claude White suggested the amendment of Article 8 of the Treaty of 1865, which provided for arbitration by the British Government of all disputes with Sikkim and Cooch Behar. He suggested adding the words 'and any other neighbouring States' to Article 8. His successor Charles Bell pressed the issue

further and amplified it by saying that in view of the importance of the interests involved, British Government should obtain the assent of Bhutan to place her foreign relations under British control. This would prevent any foreign power, particularly China, getting a foothold in Bhutan. At the same time, Bhutan will be left free to deal with all her internal problems without interference.

The British Government initiated action, in 1908, to start the negotiations. The Viceroy's despatch to his Secretary of State said: 'We cannot afford to let the Chinese establish influence in Bhutan . . . it (Bhutan) rolls down on the South in low hills and shades away over a mere geographical line to the Duars. . . . Moreover, it is fast becoming a Nepalese State. Already, three quarters of the population of Sikkim are Nepalese and the Gurkhas who are multiplying fast are streaming over into the vacant places of Bhutan. For obvious reasons, it is of real importance to keep the Gurkha States under our control. Indeed, the establishment of Chinese influence in Bhutan could not fail to raise complications of a grave kind on the North-Eastern Frontier and might eventually necessitate the location of a considerable force on our side of the border where, now, two companies of native infantry afford sufficient protection. We are strongly of opinion that time has come to frustrate the evident designs of China on Bhutan, and local conditions are favourable for a blocking policy. The Maharaja of Bhutan is well disposed towards us and is highly incensed with the Chinese. . . . Moreover, being in urgent need of money, he is anxious to develop his country. . . . Indeed, in the circumstances that have arisen, it is the corollary of the policy which necessitated our withdrawal from Tibet, that China should not be allowed to get a footing in Bhutan and thereby bring into being a North-East frontier question. . . . Our position in regard to the exclusion of foreign influence and intrigues from Nepal and Sikkim is entirely satisfactory, and the circumstances of the present occasion offer a peculiarly favourable opportunity for establishing our position, in this respect, satisfactorily in

Bhutan'. These views were expressed in 1908 but how important and prophetic these words were, came to be realised by the post-independence Government of India, which faced similar problems with the Chinese occupation of Tibet and a much talked-about Himalayan Federation, inspired by the West and secretly supported by China.

Secret negotiations went on, first, at the level of the Bhutan Agent in India and then directly with the Maharaja of Bhutan and his Council by the Political Officer who visited Punakha in 1909. The Political Officer explained personally the new provisions which envisaged that Bhutan must not enter into any agreement with the authorities of foreign States without the consent of the British Government and that the Maharaja must not, without the same consent, permit agents or representatives of foreign powers to reside in Bhutan, or part with land to the authorities, representatives or officials of any State. These clauses were accepted by the Bhutan Government without any pressure or threats by the British Government. Sir Ugyen, pragmatist that he was, realising the dangers arising from Chinese and other threats to his southern borders, agreed to enter into a fresh treaty with the British to ensure the stability and security of his country.

The Treaty of Punakha was signed on 8 January, 1910. The Government of British India under this Treaty undertook to refrain from any interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part, the Bhutanese Government agreed to be guided by the advice of the British Government in regard to its external relations. The second change in the Treaty brought about an increase in the annual subsidy paid to Government of Bhutan from Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,00,000. The British Government retained the right to suspend this payment in case of non-implementation of the clauses of the Treaty of Sinchula, vide Article 5. By another Treaty, signed in November 1910, the procedure of extradition of each other's subjects was also defined and made simpler.

Some historians would argue that the Treaty of Punakha

altered the status of Bhutan materially and brought her on a par with the Indian princely States which were under the tutelage and control of the British Government. The issue is debatable but many facts go against the assumption that Bhutan became a part of the British Empire after signing of the Treaty of Punakha. In 1910, the Secretary of State refused, in spite of the Treaty of 1910, to regard Bhutan as an Indian State. For instance, when the Treaty had been signed, Charles Bell, the Political Officer, said: 'By one o' clock the signing and sealing of the Treaty were over and Bhutan was incorporated in the British Empire.' This position was not accepted by the Secretary of State who clearly stated: 'Some of the language used by Mr. Bell might be taken to imply a change in the fundamental relations of the British Government with Bhutan and in the status of the Maharaja's subjects. No such change is indicated by the present Treaty.' The other point is whether the British Government exercised suzerainty over Bhutan. The term 'suzerainty' is a vague and indefinite one and has always been indiscriminately used as in the case of Tibet. There is ample documentary evidence to prove that the British left the position undefined, and sheer expediency dictated British policy on Bhutan. They found many contradictions in their policies. They, therefore, treated Bhutan according to the needs of the occasion. It suited the British purpose. They projected their power as and when occasion demanded and kept their interests secure through this process. In spite of these factors, one cannot deny that Bhutan became a subservient state of the British and the latter interpreted the Treaty of Punakha as it suited them. But for the political decision at the top, in London, the British Government in India were fully prepared to incorporate Bhutan into their Empire as one of the Indian States. This position continued till 1947 when India became independent and it was Nehru who refused to consider Bhutan as an Indian State and treated her as a neighbouring country bound to India by special ties.

## *Chapter 12*

# Bhutan's Relations with Post-Independent India

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Sir Ugyen Wangchuk passed away in 1926 after an eventful rule of 19 years as the first Maharaja of Bhutan. His rule stabilised Bhutan and eliminated all conflicts. Known for his strict discipline and strong character, he was respected by all. His son Jigme Wangchuk, born in 1905, succeeded to the throne in 1926. The Political Officer represented the British Government at the coronation.

Brought up under the strict and personal training of his father, he was eminently fitted to consolidate the good work done by Sir Ugyen. As the country's internal policies had stabilised, Jigme Wangchuk decided to undertake important reforms in the country. He established several schools and hospitals in Bhutan, undertook large-scale repairs of the monasteries and ruled Bhutan with a firm hand till his death in 1952. A son, Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, was born to him in 1928, who was the ruler of Bhutan till 21 July 1972. Jigme Wangchuk's rule in Bhutan was free from turmoil and devoted to the strengthening of Bhutan as a nation. His relations with the British remained cordial throughout, though the persistent requests of the Government of Bhutan to increase the annual subsidy, remained unacceptable to the British. The Maharaja's request for the return of Dewangiri was also rejected. On the contrary, the Maharaja extended his active support to the British during the Second World War.

In 1946, the Cabinet Mission, sent by the British Government to India, gave its proposals for constitutional reforms in India. The Government of Bhutan took this opportunity to present a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission in which it affirmed its separate identity from the Indian States but confirmed its



close ties with India as well as Tibet due to its geographical location and as a neighbour. But it overshot the mark in trying to establish its separate identity by bringing in extraneous factors of happy relationship with the British and indirectly hinting at its reservations and doubts vis-a-vis the Indian Government that was to take over from the British Government. The Cabinet Mission made no commitment beyond reaffirming Bhutan's special position which was to be given due consideration when the time came.

The imminence of Indian Independence in 1947 led the Government of Bhutan to request the Government of India to open negotiations. In April 1948, a Bhutanese delegation came to Delhi to negotiate a fresh treaty. The negotiations lasted till August 1949. Prime Minister Nehru assured the Maharaja, of India's goodwill, and emphasised the non-colonial attitude of the new Government whose policy was to befriend all her neighbours. The Bhutanese agreed to a new treaty which was signed on 8 August, 1949.

As a gesture of goodwill, the Government of India agreed to return the area of Dewangiri in Eastern Bhutan. The preamble of the Treaty specifically mentioned the promotion and fostering of the relations of friendship and neighbourliness between the 'two countries'. For the first time the Maharaja of Bhutan was mentioned as Druk Gyalpo (the King of the Dragon Country or Druk-Yul). It may be mentioned that the British had firmly opposed for decades the return of Dewangiri, which they had captured by force.

The Treaty of 1949 incorporated some provisions of the Treaty of Sinchula as amended by the Treaty of Punakha of 1910. Some provisions were modified and some new ones added, mostly to the advantage of Bhutan. Thus the Treaty was between two 'countries' as the preamble states and the Bhutanese desire to be treated differently from the Indian States was fully met. Under Article 2 of the Treaty, Bhutan agreed to be guided by the advice of India in her external relations. Both Governments had very much in mind the

external pressures and threats likely to arise with China's emergence on the northern borders, and the cold war prevailing at that time amongst the big powers. India did not want her northern neighbours to become a pawn in the big power game and thus weaken the new Government's northern borders. Bhutan, in her own interests, appreciated this point and agreed to Article 2 of the Treaty. The situation was the same and the reasons as valid as were enunciated by the British Government in 1908.

The Indian Government further agreed to enhance the subsidy from Rs. 1,00,000 to Rs. 5,00,000 under Article 3 and stipulated that this subsidy shall continue as long as the Treaty remained in force and its terms were truly observed. Free trade and commerce between the two countries was provided for. The Government of India further agreed to grant every facility for the carriage, by land or water, of Bhutan's produce throughout India. The element of so-called subordination implied in the Treaties of Sinchula and Punakha was altered to a manifestation of the desire on the part of India to treat Bhutan as a partner. Thus the Government of free India started with a new approach in her relations with Bhutan, keeping very much in mind her pronounced anti-colonial attitude. This opened a new chapter in the history of Bhutan.

Bhutan had lived in its happy isolation for centuries. Her life and economy were geared to this pattern. But the emergence of China as a neighbour and the atrocities committed in Tibet changed the situation radically. No more could Bhutan be safe from external threat and internal subversion. She realised that she could not live in isolation and must modernise herself rapidly to meet the challenge of the time.

In 1952 emerged a personality on the Bhutan scene who was to change the destiny of the country. Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, grandson of Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, succeeded to the throne. A person endowed with a keen intellect and foresight, and extremely democratic in temperament, he realised in no time the dangers which Bhutan faced. A firm believer in Bhutan's

destiny, he proceeded to modernise Bhutan rapidly and in this process, he decided to associate the people directly with the country's affairs. Bhutan had no resources beyond her normal civil revenues and the Government of India's annual subsidy to undertake the task of modern development, particularly the development of the means of communications, was welcomed.

In 1958, the late Prime Minister Nehru visited Bhutan at the invitation of the King, the first Prime Minister or dignitary of equivalent rank ever to visit Bhutan. In the absence of any roads in Bhutan, he had to enter Bhutan via Tibet over the Himalayas. The two leaders discussed the political situation and Nehru agreed to assist Bhutan in her development.

Indian aid, both in men and material, started flowing in. Thus Bhutan entered a phase of quick change, from the bronze age to the twentieth century. Roads were rapidly built and communications developed. The First Five-Year Plan was inaugurated in 1961 and today Bhutan has just begun to enter a period of planned economy under the Third Five-Year Plan. The face of Bhutan changed rapidly. In terms of the modern world, she is only ten years old but the pace at which she decided to develop was remarkable.

Inevitably such quick modernisation created its own problems. The barter economy changed to money economy. Village life was affected and education brought its own problems. Realising this, King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk decided to deal with these problems directly through the people. Without the people being involved in the rapid changes, the dangers would be there. He therefore decided to divest himself of his absolute powers in spite of the unstinted support he had from every section. The King decided on major constitutional reforms by converting the absolute monarchy into a constitutional monarchy and gave the powers of veto and removal of the King to the country's National Assembly, called the Tsongdu. He even went to the extent of having a regular vote of confidence in the King every three years by the National Assembly. His actions seemed to be too drastic and radical for the people to

understand. But his guiding philosophy in these changes was that only the people were permanent and an individual, however great or powerful, like a king, is merely a passing phase. The people must, therefore, have a stake in all matters. This is perhaps the only recorded case in history where an absolute monarch had voluntarily decided to give up his powers for such a cause. While Sir Ugyen Wangchuk was a strong leader who stabilised his country for the first time after centuries of turmoil and became its first ruler, King Jigme Wangchuk not only carried this task forward but also gave his countrymen a sense of national pride, status and honour which never existed before.

The Government of India's policy of treating Bhutan as a neighbour and as a friend rather than as a subservient satellite, as the British had done, fully justified itself. Bhutan was assisted in becoming a member of the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee and was elected to the Universal Postal Union on India's sponsorship. The year 1971 saw the final fulfilment of Bhutan's aspirations when the Security Council decided to unanimously recommend her for U.N. membership on India's sponsorship. Thus, under the wise leadership of the King, Bhutan not only shed her isolation but entered a new era of the modern world, taking her rightful place in the comity of nations.

In July 1972, this great King died unexpectedly at a young age of fortytwo. He was succeeded by his only son Jigme Singhe Wangchuk aged eighteen. He is the first King of Bhutan educated abroad. The Royal Government of Bhutan is the youngest Government in the world today. The Head of the State is only eighteen, while his two sisters, who are members of the Royal Cabinet, are nineteen and twenty, while two other Ministers are under thirty.

## *Chapter 13*

# The Future

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Amongst many, the word Bhutan still invokes a feeling of remoteness, mysticism and suspense. Bhutan is neither the scene of a Hollywood mystery nor the land of the lords or the lamas. Seven days or even seven months are not sufficient to understand the people or the country and the first impressions are invariably the wrong ones—particularly in Bhutan.

The country had remained isolated for centuries and this hinders an objective attitude, so necessary to write on Bhutan. The history of a people is determined by their ethnic origin, nature, religion, culture and their struggle for existence. Bhutan, a mountainous and rugged country with absolutely no modern development before the 1960s, required a race of hardy people with a self-sufficient economy. The frequent invasions of Bhutan by the Tibetans led to a constant struggle for power and instability. Religion played a dominant role in the country's life as it controlled not only the spiritual life but governed the day-to-day affairs of the people. Thus the social values and economy of Bhutanese society developed on a pattern which suited the environmental conditions.

Very few countries had the concept of social justice and equality which Bhutan developed over the centuries. There were no classes or castes as such, and either merit or one's power determined one's status. Dignity of labour was the predominant factor in life. A criminal would readily accept his guilt, suffer punishment for his sin and yet return to society and be rehabilitated as a normal person having paid the penalty as enjoined by his religion. Respect for 'authority' arose out of the traditional supremacy of the elders in the family and spiritual attainment was the highest form of existence. The commoner could aspire and hope to reach the highest position

by sheer dint of courage, learning or loyalty to a superior. Marriages between all classes were a normal feature. A woman enjoyed equal rights with men in matrimony and separation. Yet each society has its own evils and Bhutan has its own share of this.

Modern ideas and the economic development of Bhutan are undoubtedly taking their toll. One cannot escape the facts of modern life and Bhutan like every other country will have to pay its price. Already the hardy nature of the people is giving way to love of ease and comfort. Village life, geared to self-reliance, is giving way to dependence on governmental assistance. The expectations and demands of the people are rising and the official agencies are getting more and more involved in the common man's life. Education is changing the aspirations and the social structure of the people. The middle class, non-existent so far, is emerging. The lure of foreign ideas and things is obvious. But the danger does not lie in these, as these changes are inevitable. The inherent danger lies in the widening economic disparity between the haves and have-nots, which was marginal in the olden days. Such disparity will inevitably bring in political ideologies and a complete change in the social values of the people.

If Bhutan can sustain her traditions and culture and maintain her religious approach to everyday life which has enriched her for centuries, if the Bhutanese can retain their hardy nature and self-reliance, if she can remain unaffected by foreign ideologies and pressures and develop her economy in a manner best suited to her requirements without creating the disparity mentioned above, she has a bright future. Unlike other Asian countries, Bhutan is neither over-populated nor has any significant problem of the landless or the unemployed. Nature has bestowed a rich soil and other resources all unexploited so far. She has the unique advantage of a strong and benevolent leadership giving a stability that is lacking in many countries. Her problems are limited and can easily be solved. What she lacks today is a devoted and trained cadre of people to undertake the

responsibilities so essential in a developing country. With plenty of job opportunities in every sphere, this problem can be solved in the next decade and some progress has already been made.

The geo-political factors are such that Bhutan will have to keep out of the pressures and pulls of the big powers and yet develop close links with such countries as can help her attain the cherished goals of security, economic prosperity and stability. For the first time in her history, she will come in direct contact with other countries through the U.N., thus bringing her within the arena of power politics. To steer clear of the pitfalls involved, Bhutan will have to evolve a policy which suits her national interests. The words 'alignment' or 'neutrality', so frequently bandied about a decade ago, have no relevance in today's world. The earlier rigid interpretation of these political terms has given way to flexibility in international relationships. The facts of geography, external threat and economic interests determine a country's policy rather than its ideology. Bhutan will have to devise a similar policy of enlightened self-interest.

Bhutan's history has been full of turmoil. Whenever there was a strong ruler, like Nawang Namgyal in the 17th century, the Wangchuk dynasty from the early 20th century, the country enjoyed stability and progressed rapidly. As soon as a strong and stable rule was followed by weaker elements, instability crept in, causing internal strifes and the weakening of the administration. This is true of every developing country but more so of Bhutan. The character of the people and the system are geared to a highly strong and centralised administration. The twentieth century has seen a continuous period of stability in the country and if it persists, Bhutan would not have to look back.





*PART II*

THE DZONGS AND MONASTERIES  
OF BHUTAN



# The Dzongs and Monasteries of Bhutan

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The Dzongs and monasteries dominate the secular and temporal life of Bhutan. Without them, the life of the people would be incomplete. They incorporate the history of Bhutan and each tells a story of the past.

## DZONGS

The word 'Dzong', literally translated, means a fortress. However, the Dzongs combine in themselves the functions of an administrative centre and a monastery and in olden days, were the citadels of defence against any attack. That is why they are located at all strategic points; particularly at points in valleys which were prone to outside attack. Today, the major Dzongs are the seats of district administrations.

The Dzong system is Tibetan in origin and was introduced in Bhutan by Gyalwa Lhanampa, a Tibetan monk who came to Bhutan in 1153 A.D. from Desung.

Most of the important Dzongs were built according to a common plan. The site selected is always a commanding one and generally on a ridge overlooking the entrances to a valley, with the primary object of defence. As the high ridges had problems of water supply, underground passages were built to connect them with the river as in the cases of the Drukgyel and Byaker Dzongs. Some Dzongs also had protecting towers. The architecture of Tibetan and Bhutanese Dzongs has a general resemblance, but there is a lot of difference in matters of detail.

The Dzongs gradually became the strongholds of powerful governors, called Penlops, who ruled their respective areas from these Dzongs. The capture of a Dzong, held by a Penlop, by a rival inevitably meant a victory in battle for supremacy. The whole population of a valley used to take protection in the Dzongs in the event of a war. It was only after the unification of Bhutan in 1907 under the Wangchuk dynasty that the Dzongs

lost their historic role of being fortresses and were converted into purely administrative and monastic centres.

The Dzongs also played an important role in the religious life of the country. Each Dzong had a central monastery to house the monks, and religious training was imparted there. At present, four Dzongs, namely, Punakha, Simtokha, Paro and Tongsa, have regular monastic schools where young monks get their education and religious training. The Punakha Dzong is the seat of the Jey Khenpo, the Head Lama of Bhutan.

Under the present arrangements, the important Dzongs define the districts in Bhutan and are administered by a senior civil servant called the Dzongda.

Most of the Dzongs are designed as parallelograms, divided into several courts. The construction is mostly of beaten mud and the structure is of timber making them highly susceptible to fire. A number of them did in fact catch fire but most of them were rebuilt in the same style. The only modern touch one sees in the present-day structures is the corrugated iron roof which has replaced the traditional shingle roof.

## MONASTERIES

Monasteries are the most common feature of Bhutan. Besides those located in the Dzongs, most of the others are located some distance away from settlements or villages. Some of them are located at extremely isolated places. It was only later that the villages grew up surrounding some of the monasteries. Isolation from the world, a guiding principle of Buddhism, determined these remote locations. A monk was supposed to avoid temptation and meditate in peace and solitude.

In the Tibetan language, a monastery is called 'Gon-pa', commonly known as Gompa, which means a solitary place. Many of them are believed to have passed through the stage of cave existence. It was the practice to select a solitary spot with caves and when the monks were able to collect enough money, they built a monastery nearby. Most of the monasteries face

east to catch the first rays of the sun and are built on the long axis of the hill. The next best facing direction is south-east and then south.

Before a Dzong or a monastery is built at a particular spot, the place is first consecrated. The lamas congregate and the local deity's blessings are invoked to protect the place. Prayers are offered and a few relics, particularly in a copper vessel, are deposited in a hollow stone at the site.

A number of prayer flags, inscribed with pious words, charms and religious prayers, flutter most picturesquely from long poles all around the monasteries. Several large and small chortens line the approaches. The prayer flags do not merely confer merit on the planter but are for the benefit of the whole countryside. The flags are torn and strips of these fly out with the wind carrying the message of 'Dharma' to all. The last sentence on the flag is usually 'Let the doctrine of Buddha prosper'. On the flags in the cremation grounds the following words are written:

'Om Ma-ni Ped-me Ho-ng' (Avalokiteshwara on the Lotus)

Each of the six syllables in the sentence represents a different 'Lok' like heaven, hell, earth, the animal world, the ghosts' world, etc.

## CHORTENS

These literally mean the receptacles for offerings. They are solid structures of conical masonry and were originally intended to be relic-holders. Now they are mostly built as cenotaphs in memory of Lord Buddha or other saints. Some also commemorate the visits of various saints.

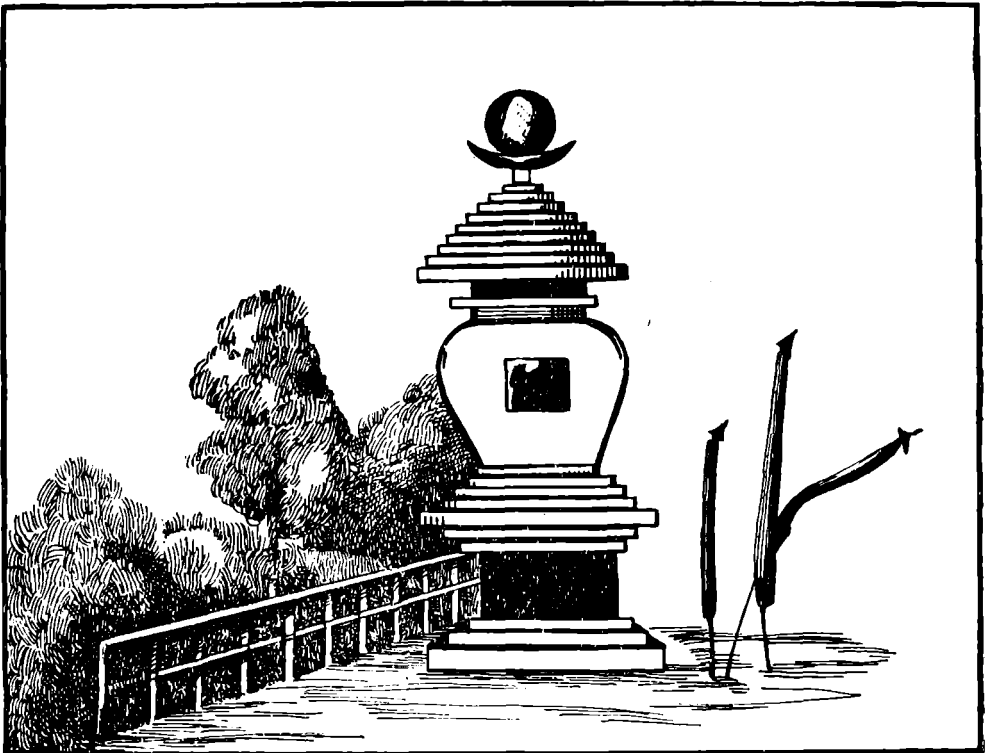
According to the Bhutanese religious books there are eight different kinds of chortens. They are described as follows:

<i>Tashi Junge</i>	A prayer shrine as a source of blessing
<i>Jangchup Chorten</i>	Buddha's own
<i>Chukhor</i>	For the spread of the religion

<i>Lhabhup</i>	Representing Buddha's return to earth from heaven
<i>Yendhum</i>	For peace and tolerance in religious disputations
<i>Jinlap</i>	To make people understand their religion
<i>Namgyal</i>	To make religion respected, well known and appreciated
<i>Nyamgde</i>	To recall the enlightenment and Nirvana of Buddha.

A chorten's construction is unique and interesting. Through them the whole Buddhist philosophy can be explained.

The whole countryside is full of chortens. They are religious monuments set on a base of steps crowned with a top bearing



A Chorten

a ball and crescent which is called 'Nima-Dawa', sun and moon that move around the earth. Within some of these monuments, which are normally sealed from all sides, are kept old relics. All chortens must be passed on the right hand side in the same way as the prayer wheel moves.

Miniature chortens of metal, wood and clay are also made. They often contain relics and are placed on the altar. Some of these contain many small images of saints and deities and are called 'Tashigoman' (Glorious Chorten). They are often built on a cart and, on auspicious days, are carried from place to place for the benefit of the common man.

### LHAKHANGS (TEMPLES)

The original form of Buddhism did not know of temples. After the theistic development and the introduction of relic worship and idolatry in Buddhism, temples appeared. They are called Lhakhangs, meaning houses of God.

A Lhakang is normally the centralmost building in a monastery and is separated from other buildings. But a Lhakang can also be the only building at any auspicious place. The roof is furnished with one or two ball-shaped domes, which are normally of gilt-copper. It has rows of prayer wheels, which are inserted approximately three feet above the level of the path. These wheels are turned by a visitor sweeping his hands over them as he proceeds. As one enters the temple one normally finds four guardian deities (the four Kings of the Directions) and the 'Wheel of Life'.

The walls have frescoes of many deities and the scenes from 'Jatakas' or the former births of Buddha are depicted. The altar occupies the central position. A large silk parasol hangs over the altar which has two tiers. On the lower one, offerings of water, rice, flowers and butter lamps are placed. A butter lamp, which must be kept burning for twenty-four hours, is placed either on the altar or in front of it. On special occasions, as many as 108 to 1000 butter lamps are burnt at the altar.

These details have been given to enable the reader to understand the significance of these buildings and their history. Unfortunately, except for a few important Dzongs and monasteries, their history is not clear nor is material available to trace their origin. The reader will, therefore, find the history detailed only in a few cases, while the rest have been set out without any material details.

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### SEMTOKHA DZONG

This Dzong is located at a place called Simmodokhang, about eight kilometres from Thimphu—the capital. It was built by Nawang Namgyal, the first Shabdung Rimpoche, and the



Semtokha Dzong



foundation was laid in 1627 A.D. It is one of the oldest Dzongs in Bhutan today.

It is built on a projecting ridge. Its unique feature is a row of square slabs of dark slate, carved in low reliefs with pictures of saints, instead of the usual row of prayer wheels. The reliefs are a beautiful collection of the engravings of successive lamas of the main school of Tantric lamaism, namely, Nyinma-pa which was brought by Guru Padma Sambhava and Karbyupa which originated from Naro Panchen of Magadha (an Indian Kingdom) and was introduced into Tibet by Mar-Pa-Lotsava at the beginning of the 11th century, from where it passed on to Bhutan. The engravings on black slate outside the main prayer hall include six ornaments and two excellences. These are the eight great Indian saints and philosophers who are celebrated by Buddhists all over the world. Their names are as follows:

Nag Arjuna, Aryadeva, Asango, Basu Bandhu,  
Dik Naga, Dharma Kirti (six ornaments)

Akash Garva and Shritigarva (two excellences), Tong Shag (thirty-five Buddhas) are also beautifully depicted in these engravings.

There is one temple called 'Gen Khang' in which three protecting deities, namely, Yeshing Gompo (in the centre), Gompo Jharo Dongchen (on the right), Palden Lama (on the left) are kept. This can be visited only by the lamas.

Inside the main hall the central image is of Buddha and here also images of the eight Bodhisattavas, namely, Jampel Yang (Manjushri in Sanskrit), Chana Dorji (Vajrapani), Chen Rezi (Avalokiteshwara), Sai Hingpo (Shritigarva), Dupa Nampasel, Namkhe Hingpo (Akash Garva), Jhampa (Maitriya, future Buddha) and Kuntu Sangpo are kept.

Jampel Yang (Manjushri)	represents the wisdom of all the Buddhas.
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Chana Dorji (Vajrapani)	represents the power of all the Buddhas.
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- Chen Rezi (Avalokiteshwara) represents the compassion of all the Buddhas.
- Sai Hingpo (Shritigarva) is omnipotent and omnipresent.
- Dupa Nampasel dispels the ignorance of all living beings.
- Namkhe Hingpo (Akash Garva) stays in the sky and looks after the welfare of living beings.
- Jhampa (Maitriya) is the future Buddha who will, it is believed, bring peace and happiness to the world.

Apart from these, there is the 'Netenchudrug', which depicts the sixteen famous 'Sthaviras' or elders who preached Buddhism in various mythical islands or continents of the Buddhist cosmogony. It is believed that they were invited to China by Princess Wun-Shing Koyo, daughter of Emperor Than-Ju.

This was the first Dzong built by Nawang Namgyal, who came to Bhutan in 1616 A.D. To obstruct the construction, Desi Tsangpa of Tibet sent five lamas, who, with others, surrounded the place, cut off the water supply and made a nuisance of themselves. A short fight took place in which Nawang Namgyal defeated the intruders from Tibet and the Dzong was duly completed. In 1630-31, the Desi of Tibet again sent an invading force against Nawang Namgyal and they took possession of Semtokha. After a little while, the Dzong caught fire suddenly and the roof collapsed killing the invaders occupying the Dzong. The Dzong was rebuilt by Nawang Namgyal. It was at Semtokha in 1629 that the first two foreigners, Portuguese Jesuit priests, who came to Bhutan offered gifts to Nawang Namgyal and volunteered their assistance to fight against the Tibetans. On being rebuffed, they left for Tibet.

Semtokha Dzong houses the largest monastic school of Bhutan and has some of the prettiest and oldest frescoes. It is

located at a strategic and commanding site overlooking the whole of Thimphu valley covering three sides.

## TONGSA DZONG



Tongsa Dzong

This massive Dzong is situated on the trail linking Eastern and Western Bhutan. Having been the seat of power in Eastern Bhutan, it is historically very important. To appreciate this, the position of this fortress needs amplification. It is located at an extremely strategic position which covers the only connecting trail between the eastern and western passes. Because of this, the Governor of Tongsa was able to maintain effective control over the surrounding country at a time when the important Penlops were fighting amongst themselves for supremacy. It was ultimately the Tongsa Penlop who emerged victorious and started the Wangchuk dynasty of the hereditary Kings.

The Dzong was built by Nawang Namgyal in 1648 to check the inroads from Eastern Bhutan. Initially, it was a small structure, having been built in a hurry. Nawang Namgyal, at that time, was busy consolidating his power and wanted to take quick measures to guard his eastern flank. It was later enlarged by the Governor Mingyur Naitgyal and Desi Shidar. In 1897, it suffered serious damage in an earthquake. It was extensively repaired by the Tongsa Penlop Jigme Namgyal (great-great-grandfather of the present King). The first King of Bhutan, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, who was also Tongsa Penlop, had the Dzong decorated. Near the Dzong is the residence of the Penlop, where King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk was born. Above this house and facing the Dzong is a small circular Dzong called Tag Dzong which was used to store weapons and ammunition and a number of outposts were built round it as watchposts to defend the Dzong.

The unique feature of the Dzong is its architecture. Its irregular structure with different levels of roof makes it unique and strangely attractive. Through the Dzong runs a passage connecting the two sides of the valley. In olden days, no one could pass except through this passage which gave this fortress complete control over the approaches from the east and the west.

Sir Claude White gives an interesting account of this Dzong which he visited in 1905. According to him, the Dzong's original name was Chue-Khor-Rab-Tsi which arose out of the peak of the Dharma Chakra which moved by the flow of the river. These prayer wheels are still there below the eastern wall in the ravine.

This Dzong is the spiritual and the political home of the Wangchuks. The first King installed here a huge statue of Buddha about 20 ft. high. He also brought about several improvements in the building and decorated it beautifully. His audience hall, still preserved, speaks of his utter simplicity, yet rigid authority.

One of the most priceless collections of Rhino-horn sculptures, dating back to the 11th century, is kept in this Dzong.

There are beautiful frescoes of the four guardian deities or the Kings of Four Directions (North, South, East, West).

A wall painting of the deity 'Phurpa' in the main prayer hall attracts the eye of every visitor. This deity has six hands. The first right hand holds a vajra, 'Dorje' and the left hand holds the eternal flame, 'Meris'. The second right hand holds Vajra with five spokes, 'Dorje Tsengapa' and the second left hand holds a 'Khatang' (a rod-like thing). He holds a nail between his fifth and sixth hands on his chest.

A statue of Geje is kept in a glass almira in the main hall. 'Kargyupas' have nine types of this deity. Geje depicts Manjushri (God of Wisdom) in anger. He has a Buffalo's head and is depicted as a terrifying protector of the faith.

Another wall painting which is rather new is very interesting. It depicts scenes of the court of Ugyen Wangchuk, the first hereditary King of Bhutan.

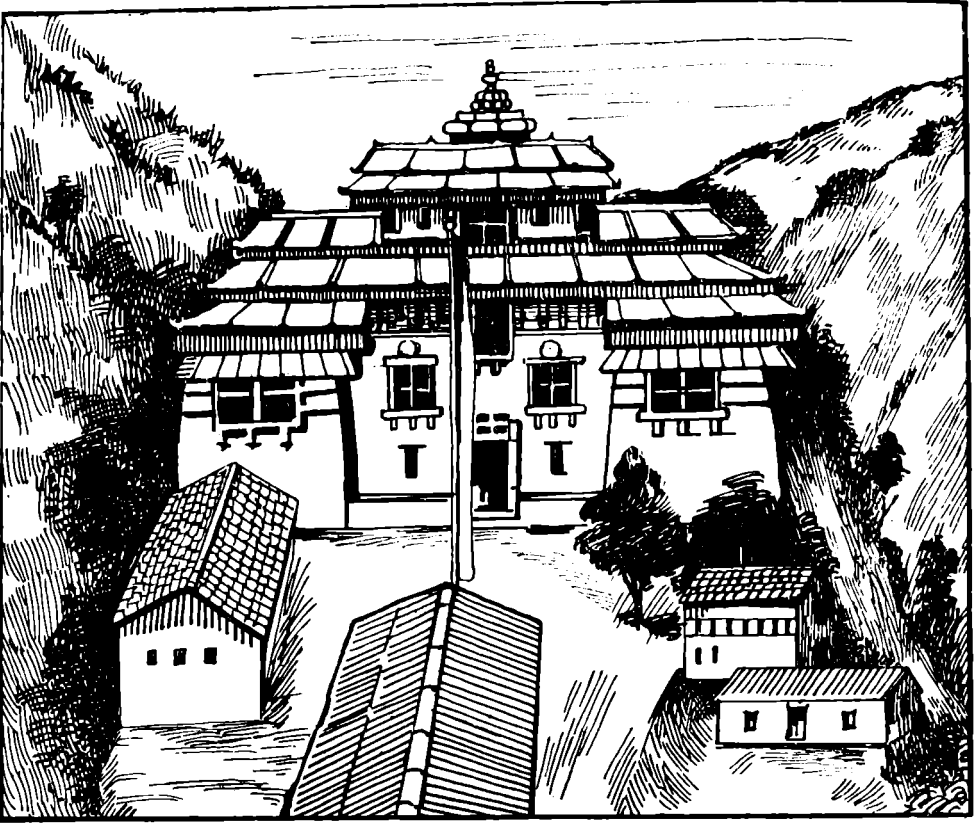
The post of Tongsa Penlop was abolished a long time ago. A Dzongda now holds charge of the Dzong and the district administration.

## TASHIGONG DZONG

The Dzong is located in the most important and populous area of Eastern Bhutan at Tashigong. It stands on a high ridge between the rivers Dangma Chu and Gamki Chu and overlooks the Manas river. The district of Tashigong is only forty miles from Tawang in the north-east frontier of India, adjoining Tibet.

The architecture of the Dzong is of traditional Bhutanese pattern. Its courtyards and citadels are very attractive. Two massive tusks support the altar in the central monastery. The temple has some of the finest frescoes and statues.

It was built in 1667 by Chhogyal Minjur Tempa, the third Deb Raja, who extended his authority up to Eastern Bhutan. The Dzong was the stronghold used to dominate the eastern region.



Tashigong Dzong

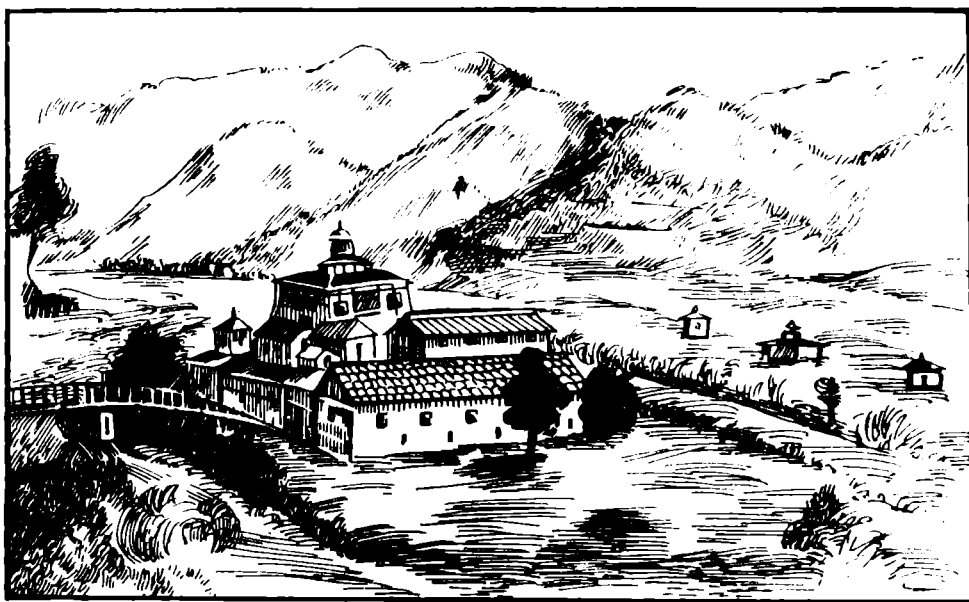
There is a statue of Gasin-Rje or 'Yama' in this Dzong. He has become a great dreaded god of the people, who with magic and sacrifices try to conciliate, to coerce or to deceive him. He is more than god of Death, he is the King of Law, who weighs good and evil at the end of each life. He is regarded as one of the great protectors of the faith and as the dark aspect of 'Avalokiteshvara'.

There are many dances which are performed by Lamas only on this theme. The whole court of Yama is depicted in dance drama on religious days in Bhutan.

There is also a statue of god Chenrezi with eleven heads.

## POONAKHA DZONG

It is one of the most important and historical Dzongs in Bhutan and located in the old capital. It is built on a tongue of



Poonakha Dzong

land running down between the rivers Mo Chu and Pho Chu, just above the junction. The Dzong was built by Nawang Namgyal in 1636-37 A.D. Before building this, he had built a small Dzong called Dzong Chu (small fort) just in front of the present Dzong, where he had installed the statue of 'Sange' Buddha. It is said that the chief architect Palep was made to sleep in front of this statue and while sleeping he conceived the design of the present Dzong in a dream. On completion of the Dzong, Palep was given the title of Tubizo. It is interesting to note that even as late as 1966, the Chief Architect of Bhutan built the new Dzong at Thimphu without any sketches or proper designs and built the huge structure to perfection merely on the basis of a mental conception. On completion, the Punakha Dzong was named Druk Poong Thang Deva Chen-poye Phodrang (Palace of Great Happiness).

Later, to commemorate the victory over the Tibetans and the Mongol army, in the battle near Kabang, Nawang Namgyal built a chapel to honour the protecting deities. A special ceremony of prayers called Tangrang was held, and all the captured war material was kept in the Dzong, which is still there.

The architecture of this Dzong has some interesting features.

The main entrance has a steep flight of wooden stairs about 20 ft. high. This was purposely built so that it could be removed in time of war. These steps lead to a massive wooden gate which is closed at night. After passing through this, one reaches a courtyard. The main citadel called Uchi, approximately 40 ft. at the base and 80 ft. high, is situated to the south of the courtyard. Inside the citadel, the remains of Lama Pema Lingpa are kept in one of the rooms. Beyond this courtyard, there is another one where two halls are located. In the smaller one, the first hereditary King Sir Ugyen Wangchuk was presented the insignia of the Knight Commander of the British Empire in 1905 by Sir Claude White, the then Political Officer.

In an adjoining courtyard stands a chapel of Machin Lhakhang in which the body of Nawang Namgyal (first Shabdung) is kept inside a gold and silver casket. The casket is sealed with the seal of the Government of Bhutan and the Jey Khenpo (the Head Lama) and cannot be opened. Apart from the two lamas called Machin Zimpon and Machin Simpon, appointed to look after the temple, only the King and the Jey Khenpo are allowed to enter this room. Before assuming their office, the King and the Jey Khenpo are required to come to this room to take the blessings.

Beyond this courtyard, there is another large courtyard at the centre of which stands a congregation hall of one hundred pillars. This was built by the second Deb Raja Tenzin Drukda and has some of the finest frescoes. He also built a two-storeyed temple called Nga Yul Bum. By tradition, the retiring Jey Khenpo (who has a tenure of three years) spends a day or two in this temple before retreating to the caves where he spends the rest of his life meditating. In front of this temple, the Jey Khenpo is cremated with all the appropriate religious ceremonies.

In 1676, the Governor of Punakha, Gyaltsen Tenzin Rabgye, had a gold dome built on the central structure. In 1720-30, Gyaltsen Nawang Gyatso built two cantilever bridges across the two rivers. He also placed the Kanjur, written in gold letters in 108 volumes, in the Dzong. In 1744, Sherab Wang-



chuk, the 13th Deb Raja, had a temple built in the Dzong to offer his thanks for his victory over Karbi, the Dzongpen, who had revolted against him, posing a serious threat to Paro Dzong. The gold statues of Buddha, Guru Padma Sambhava and Shabdung Rimpoche were installed in the temple. These statues are now kept in the main assembly hall. He also donated the Thong Dol Chen Mo (a printed scroll) of Shabdung Rimpoche, which is displayed to the public once a year. It is 108 ft. wide. People travel from long distances to see it, as it is believed that as soon as one sets eyes on it, one's sins are washed away. Sherab Wangchuk got the Dzong re-roofed with brass sheets which had been sent to him by the VII Dalai Lama, Kalzang Gyatso (1708-1757).

In 1789, the Dzong caught fire but was repaired by the then Deb Raja, Jigme Sangye. Again in 1792, the Dzong was destroyed by fire, in which some valuable books also were destroyed. The then Deb Raja, Sonam Gyaltzen, with the help of the Head Lama Jemyang Gyaltzen, had the Dzong rebuilt and added Lama Lakhang (a place where the statue of Shabdung Rimpoche is always kept), Genkhang Chhenpo (the temple of Mahakali and Mahakala) and Nange Tesum (receptacles for the relics of the saints), to the Dzong.

In 1800, the Dzong caught fire, which was a deliberate act on the part of the supporters of the 22nd Deb Raja, Druk Namgyal, who was killed by the supporters of the retired one, Sonam Gyaltzen, who thereupon again became the Deb Raja and got the Dzong repaired. The Dzong again caught fire in 1831 and was repaired once again. The floods during the rule of the 46th Deb Raja and the earthquake of 1897 damaged the Dzong further.

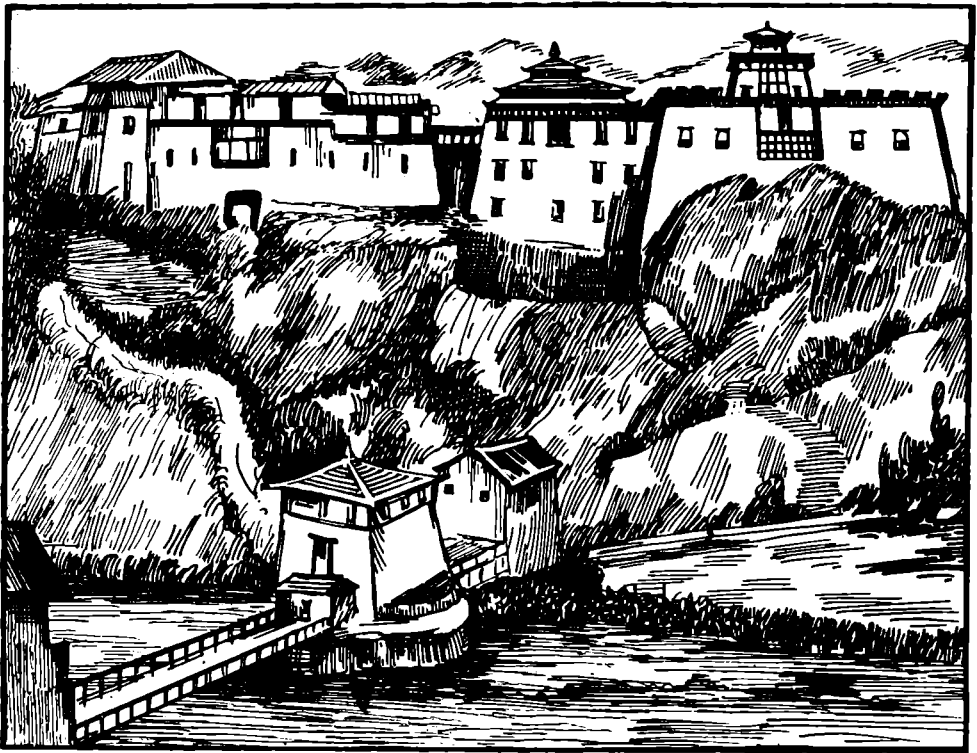
The Dzongpon of Poonakha played an important role and wielded considerable influence in the country's politics. The Dzong became an important factor in the struggle for power between the contending parties.

The Dzong is now in a bad state but still commands a majestic view of the valley. It was in this Dzong that the first

seeds of democracy were sown when King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk founded the first National Assembly of Bhutan (called Tsonqdu) in 1952. The Head lama of Bhutan, Jey Khenpo, resides in the Dzong during the winter months.

### WANGDIPHODRANG DZONG

This Dzong is located in the valley of Wangdiphodrang, 68 km. from the capital, Thimphu. It stands on a rocky hill between the rivers Sankosh and Tang. It was built in 1638-39 by Nawang Namgyal. It is said that Nawang Namgyal had a dream in which he was told by a deity Mainapo that if a Dzong was built of the shape of a sleeping bull, peace would reign in the country. When he sent people to select a site, four crows were seen flying away in four directions from the present site. This place was immediately selected as the flying of the crows in four directions was considered auspicious and depicted the spread of religion in all directions.



Wangdiphodrang Dzong

Choji Nangkha, who was appointed the first administrator of the Dzong, added the golden roof which still adorns one of the temples in the Dzong. In 1837, the Dzong caught fire but was repaired. It suffered great damage in 1897 during an earthquake.

Its proximity to the Poonakha valley, which was the seat of power, and the capital increased the importance of the Dzong. The Dzongpons of this Dzong were always appointed from among the allies of the ruling Deb Raja. Historically, it was the seat of the third most powerful chieftain, Tongsa and Paro being the first two.

One of the most beautiful bridges in Bhutan was the one linking the Dzong. It was believed to have been built 300 years ago by Lama Soproo. The bridge did not have a single metal part. Unfortunately, the bridge was washed away in the floods of 1968 and there exists now a Bailey bridge.

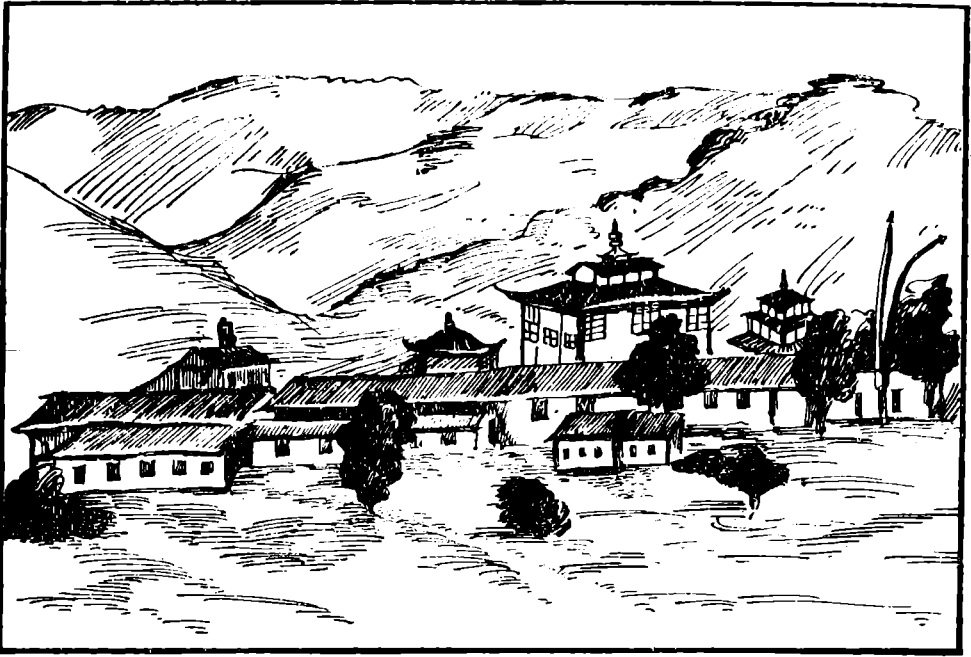
The big prayer hall in the Dzong has beautiful statues of Buddha, Guru Padma Sambhava, Shabdung Rimpoche. The walls of this hall are full of beautiful frescoes depicting scenes from 'Jatakas'. These are the stories of the early lives of Buddha.

On one of the walls outside the hall, 'Sridpal Khorlo' (Bhavachakra in Sanskrit) is beautifully painted. Literally translated, it means the wheel of existence. It belongs to early Buddhism and can be seen in quite a few temples as a visual synopsis of the doctrine. It is also called 'the actions and their fruits'.

The small circle at the centre depicts the urges to action. The hog, cock and snake depict ignorance, passion and hatred respectively. By conquering these three, one goes to the three upper worlds of gods, men and titans. But if subdued by these, one goes to the lower worlds of animals, tortured spirits and to hell.

All these forms of existence are temporary, including that of gods. That is why a monstrous being holds the wheel in its claws. True salvation is possible only through the complete liquidation and elimination of the three fundamental evils.

## TASHICHHO DZONG



Tashichho Dzong

Located in the capital, Thimphu, its name means the fortress of the glorious religion. It is now the most important and modern Dzong of Bhutan. It has been newly built and houses the offices of the King and the Royal Government. It is also the summer residence of the Jey Khenpo. Unlike most of the other Dzongs, it is situated on the bed of the valley.

This Dzong has an interesting history behind it. At the present location, there was first a monastery called Do-hon (blue-stone) which was built by Lama Phajo Dugom Shagpa, who had come to Bhutan from Tibet in the 13th century. In 1641, it was converted into a Dzong by Nawang Namgyal and the name Tashichho was then given. In 1694, the Dzong was enlarged by Gyalwa Tenzin Rabgye, the Governor of the region. In 1730 A.D. the Peace Agreement between Tibet and Bhutan was signed in this Dzong. By this agreement the Bhutanese agreed to station their representative at Lhasa. This custom lasted till 1951. The Dzong was further enlarged in 1755 by the then Governor Sherap Wangchuk. It caught fire

in 1771 and again in 1869, losing most of its precious possessions, including some rare books. In 1870, Jigme Namgyal, the great-great-grandfather of the present King, had the Dzong repaired and a new temple was added.

Sir Claude White, who came to Bhutan in 1905 and 1907, describes the old Dzong as "an imposing edifice in the form of a parallelogram, the sides parallel to the river being twice the length of the other two. It differs from other forts in one particular: it possesses two large gateways, one on the south; the other, on the river-face, and protected on the west and north by a wide fosse filled with water. .In the south-east angle of the courtyard beyond are the public or living quarters of the Dharma Raja, and on the west front those of the Thimbu Jongpen, where we were hospitably entertained. The northern and smaller section of the castle is occupied entirely by the Ta-tshang, or State lamas, and is not usually open to laymen. The dividing wall is surmounted by a row of white chotens, protected from the weather by a double roof, and in the centre of the inner courtyard is an extremely fine hall of audience or worship, 120 feet square and at least 50 feet high. It is well lighted, and decorated with fresco paintings, and when the silken ceiling-cloths and embroidered curtains and banners are hung, it must look extremely well, but the lamas were absent at Poonakha, and all the decorations were either carefully put away or taken with them. A succession of chapels was built on the west side, one of which, a splendid example of good Bhutanese art, the door-handles of which, of pierced ironwork inlaid with gold, were exceptionally beautiful, had been presented by the Deb Nagpo. It was said to contain 1000 images of Buddha, and the number is very likely correct, as I counted more than 600, while the pair of elephant's tusks supporting the altar, which I have remarked as an essential ornament to the chief altar in every Bhutanese chapel I have visited, were larger than usual."

The new Dzong, built under the direction of the present King and completed in 1969, has some of the same architectural

patterns as mentioned by Claude White. The central monastery, where Jey Khenpo resides, is the old building. The entire Dzong with more than a hundred rooms, has been built without any drawing and without a nail having been used in the joints of the structure. The King has a beautiful and imposing audience hall where he receives all important visitors. All the Royal Ministers are located inside the building. The National Assembly or the Tsongdu holds its sessions in one of the large halls in the adjoining courtyard in the north-west. The annual festival of dances called 'Dom-chu' is held in the main courtyard. Facing the Dzong, the King lives in a small cottage located near the river bank. Across the river, facing the Dzong, a banquet hall is coming up, where all the important State guests will be entertained.

According to the Bhutanese custom, no lady is permitted in a Dzong before sunrise and after sunset. This Dzong was the first to break this tradition in 1968, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, stayed there as the guest of the King. A special dispensation was obtained from the Jey Khenpo on the ground that the guest being a Prime Minister, the criterion of a lady did not apply.

Near the Dzong, at a distance, is a flat ground called Changlimithang, which is now used as a sports ground and a helipad. This is a historical site inasmuch as the Wangchuks led by the Tongsa Penlop were victorious on this battlefield over their rivals, which ultimately led to the establishment of the hereditary monarchy of the Wangchuk dynasty, replacing the old system of Deb and Dharma Rajas.

Cement statues of four guardian deities of the four directions are being built in the courtyard of the Dzong.

<i>Yulkhorsung</i>	in white colour (the King of the East)
<i>Phagchepo</i>	in blue colour (the King of the South)
<i>Chen Mizang</i>	in red colour (the King of the West)
<i>Namthöse</i>	in golden colour (the King of the North)

According to the Buddhist philosophy, the world is not

round and the centre of the world is the 'Sumeru Mountain'. This mountain is believed to be the seat of God Indra. The four guardian deities (explained above) are supposed to guard the four directions of this mountain.

In the temple inside the Dzong, there are many statues of local lamas who are supposed to have attained Buddha-hood. 'Vairochana' (meditative Buddha) with female companion or Shakti is also shown. Besides these, the altar is adorned by the beautiful statues of Buddha, Guru Padma Sambhava, Shabdung Nawang Namgyal and Lama Karmapa (the line of Karmapa incarnation, head of Red Hat Sect, is older than that of the Dalai Lama). The present Karmapa has fled from Tibet and lives in Sikkim. He is held in great respect in Bhutan.

Guru Padama Sambhava is holding (in the statue) the Tantric Buddhist symbol of Vajra or the thunderbolt sceptre representing truth.

The entrance of 'Uchi' (the central structure) is decorated with Tantric symbols. A little distance above the Dzong there is a small monastery of Dechen Phodrang, which used to be the summer residence of Thimphu Penlop. This monastery is still in good shape and one lama from Thimphu Dzong always goes there for worship. In this monastery, there is a statue of the first Shabdung, Nawang Namgyal, which was built during his rule in Bhutan (1616-1651).

## DRUKGYAL DZONG

This Dzong is now in ruins, but still shows its past glory and strategic importance. It is located 15 km. away from Paro on a hill facing the traditional route to Tibet. It was built, probably in 1649, by Nawang Namgyal to commemorate his victory over the Tibetan army. The name means 'victorious'.

Located on the crown of a rocky hill which it occupies entirely, it rises steep on three sides and is accessible only from one side which is defended by three prominent towers. For the safety of the communication lines during a siege, they were

connected by a double wall. It is said that around each of these towers, near the top, a broad ledge used to project, the edges of which were fortified by a mud wall with holes for use of bows and arrows or muskets. The northern side had two round towers to guard the road from Tibet. A unique feature of this Dzong, to be seen even today, is a double wall enclosing a passage coming down from the fortress to the bank of the river on the far side of the valley to ensure a regular supply of water in time of war. It is believed that the passage was a covered one and there were small towers at regular intervals. These must have been built either to help bring reinforcements to the towers or retreat to the safety of the Dzong above. One view of the Dzong gives a clear idea of the strategic importance of the location which overlooks the most vulnerable area from the point of view of attacks from Tibet. The very architecture, so unlike other Dzongs, proves this.

This Dzong was said to have the finest armoury in the country which was located in a room with a large low window facing south and looking down the valley. From this Dzong lies the nearest route to Phari in Tibet, a distance of two days' march. The same route was used by the Chinese when one of their missions had brought a decoration for the Tongsa Penlop in 1886 from their Emperor.

The Dzong was burnt down in 1950 due to the negligence of a lama named Nyahsme. It was not repaired after that and is now a protected monument. All the articles which escaped fire were transferred to Paro Dzong.

The central rectangular structure, five storeys high, had escaped fire but is deserted now. It used to have a beautiful temple of Mahakala and Mahakali.

### RINCHEN PONG DZONG—PARO

It is located in the beautiful valley of Paro at a height of just over 7,000 ft. overlooking both sides of the valley, thus controlling the entrances, one of which was from Tibet via Drukgyal





Rinchen Pong Dzong

Dzong. The location is a very commanding one and in Bhutanese history, it was considered one of the strongest and most important fortresses.

The Dzong was built by Nawang Namgyal around 1646. One of the main purposes of building this Dzong was to strengthen the defences of this valley which was liable to attack by the Tibetans. The only entry point to the Dzong was a wooden bridge on the western side, which could be removed in time of war, leaving unbridged a wide gap of the river. One can see three buildings located on the opposite side of the Dzong on a mountain. These were designed as watch towers. They defended the three sides of the Dzong, the fourth side being made inaccessible by the removal of the bridge over the river running at the base of the rock which is perpendicular to the Dzong foundations.

Its architecture is a fine example of Bhutanese art. This large rectangular building surrounds a hollow square, in the centre of which is a large tower with seven storeys. The outer building has five storeys. An interesting feature is the gateway on the eastern side, ornamental and beautifully engraved, which leads

straight to the third storey. A huge prayer wheel about 10 ft. high is located here which is turned by a catch which is so arranged that at each turn a bell is rung.

Prior to the building of this Dzong, a small Dzong named Hungre existed at Paro. This was built by the villagers some centuries ago for a monk called Dingdog, who was known in this region and the adjoining areas of Tibet for his scholarly abilities. When Nawang Namgyal came to Paro, the successors of Lama Dingdog donated the Hungre Dzong to him. The present Dzong was built at this site with stones instead of beaten mud. After completion, it was named Renchen-pong, meaning heaps of jewels. Later, it came to be known as Talepma.

In 1649, the first Governor of Paro, Tenjin Drukda, had the central monastery, called Uchi, built. This is seven storeys high with beautiful frescoes and statues. The Dzong caught fire in 1907, causing great damage but was rebuilt in 1908-9 and life-size statues of Guru Padma Sambhava, Buddha and Shabdung Namgyal were installed. These had been brought from the Karsa Lhakhang. One of the most precious possessions of the Dzong, a huge scroll (Tankha) called Thondrol, 60 ft. by 60 ft., was luckily saved during the fire of 1907. It is an exquisite piece of the craftsmanship of a famous painter, Rinchen Gedan. Every year it is displayed during the Paro dance festival (Chechu) in spring. A number of rituals and ceremonies accompany the display of this magnificent scroll. The Lamas carry it in a dance procession and it is shown to the public (who come from far and wide) for two hours before sunrise. The portrait of Guru Padma Sambhava occupies the centre of the 'Tankha'. There are many wall paintings in the Dzong. A particularly attractive one is the large painting of Shabdung Nawang Namgyal.

This Dzong remained the headquarters of the Penlop of Paro (Governor) until very recently. The Paro Penlop was one of the most powerful factors in the battle of succession for the post of Deb Raja and supremacy in the country. The last battle for supremacy was fought by the Tongsa Penlop against the

Thimphu Penlop, with the help of Paro Penlop, leading to the victory of the former and it ultimately brought about the hereditary monarchy in Bhutan, the first King being the Tongsa Penlop, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk. Till as late as 1968, the late King's half-brother was the Paro Penlop and the King himself was the Paro Penlop before becoming the King. Since the beginning of the monarchical system, only a member of the Wangchuk Royal family is appointed as Paro Penlop by the King.

Just above the Dzong stands the small Tag Dzong which is now the National Museum of Bhutan with a fabulous collection of antiques depicting the past history of Bhutan.

Tag Dzong is very important historically. Ugyen Wangchuk (the first hereditary King) was earlier kept a prisoner in this Dzong by Agey Tamchu who was fighting Jigme Namgyal (father of Ugyen Wangchuk), the Tongsa Penlop.

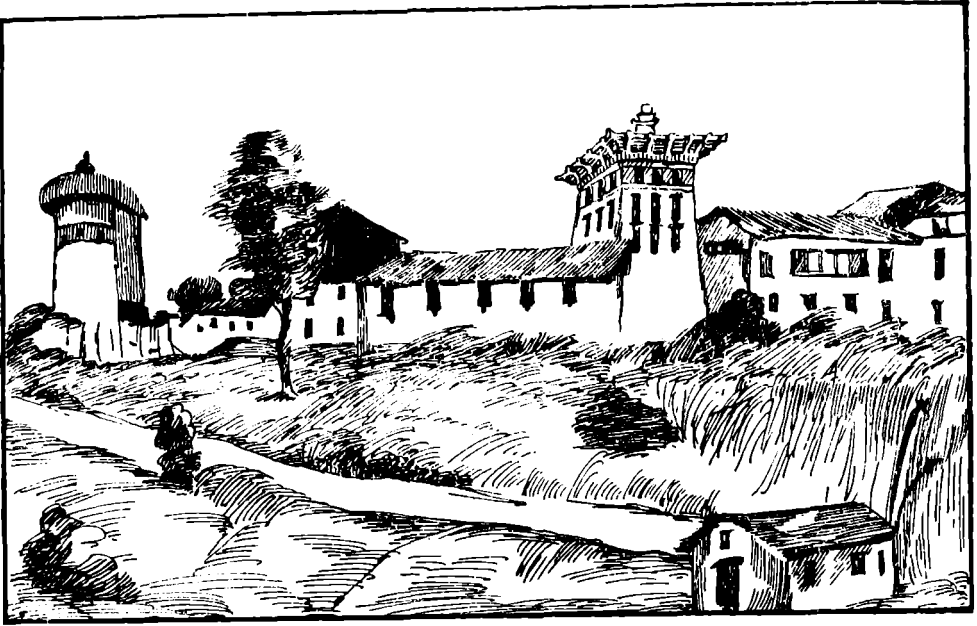
An interesting feature of this Dzong is the underground alley leading to and out of the Dzong. During the time of a siege these passages used to serve a very useful purpose.

## BYAKAR DZONG

Byakar Dzong is located in the Bumthang valley in Central Bhutan, overlooking the Bumthang river and the important village of Wangchukling. It is considered to be probably the biggest Dzong in Bhutan, the wall surrounding which is approximately one mile in circumference. The fortress has an elongated shape and has a very high central tower nearly 150 ft. high. The unique feature of this Dzong is the covered passage leading to the water spring, to ensure a sustained water supply during a siege or war.

It was built by Deb Raja Gese Tenzin Rabgye in 1676. Nawang Namgyal is said to have stayed in a small hut which existed at the present site of the Dzong. The Dzong was damaged twice, once by fire and a second time in an earthquake, in 1897. It was rebuilt in its original style.

Byakar Dzong was in the periphery of influence of the Tongsa Penlop and served as a stronghold for Bumthang valley.



Byakar Dzong

Beautiful frescoes of the gods of Tantric Buddhism adorn the walls of the prayer hall. There is a very beautiful painting of Vajrapani. This Bodhisattva gives expression to the importance of the terrifying deities in Buddhism. Its Tibetan name is 'Phyag-na-rdorje'.

Various episodes of the life of Mila Raspa are also shown. He was a wandering Buddhist mystic and poet who lived in Tibet in 11th-12th century.

## HA DZONG

One of the recent ones, it is located in the fertile valley of Ha in the western sector of Bhutan. The valley has easy access to Tibet, but never played any important role in the history of Bhutan.

There was a small Dzong earlier, a little way from the

present one, which was destroyed and the new Dzong was built only as recently as 1915. At present, it is used as a training school for the Royal Bhutan Army.

The Dzong and the Ha valley have been the traditional stronghold of the Dorji family to which the dowager Queen, Ashi Kesang, belongs. The first member of the family to come to Bhutan was Kazi Ugyen to serve the then Tongsa Penlop, Jigme Namgyal. His grandson Jigme Dorji became the Agent of the Government of Bhutan and was assassinated in 1964. Though he was known commonly as the Prime Minister of Bhutan, no such office ever existed formally. Most of the property in the valley, including the Dzong, now belongs to the Queen-mother of Bhutan.

### LHUNTSI DZONG



Lhuntsi Dzong

The Dzong is located between the two rivers Khom Chu and Lhobrak Chu in north-east Bhutan. It is built on a spur and has

two large cupolas. The temple inside is beautiful with lovely frescoes.

To frighten the people of this area (in order to convert them to Buddhism), Tantric Buddhist deities are shown in their most terrifying splendour. Guru Padma Samhbava is shown holding the Tantric symbol of Vajra or thunderbolt representing truth. The Vajra has five spokes. It represents five Jinas or Buddhas in the upper half and the five mother-goddesses in the lower half. The five Buddhas are Vairocana, Amoghasiddhi, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava and Amitabha and they depict five wisdoms. The five goddesses are Mamaki, Pandaravasini, Tara, Locana and Vajradhatvisvari. These goddesses represent five elements.

Apart from being on the trade route to Tibet, the Dzong had its importance when Tibetans were aggressive and were invading Bhutan frequently. The Dzong has now become dilapidated.

### LINGSHE DZONG

Lying in ruins now, it was built on a strategic spot over a mountain top, very near the Tibet border in the western sector of Bhutan to guard the approaches to Tibet. The third Deb Raja, Munigir Tempa, built it as a protection against the Tibetan invaders.

It must have been a large and beautiful building as the ruins indicate. The earthquake of 1897 destroyed the building.

Shabdung Nawang Namgyal on his way from Tibet had stayed in a cave very near the Dzong.

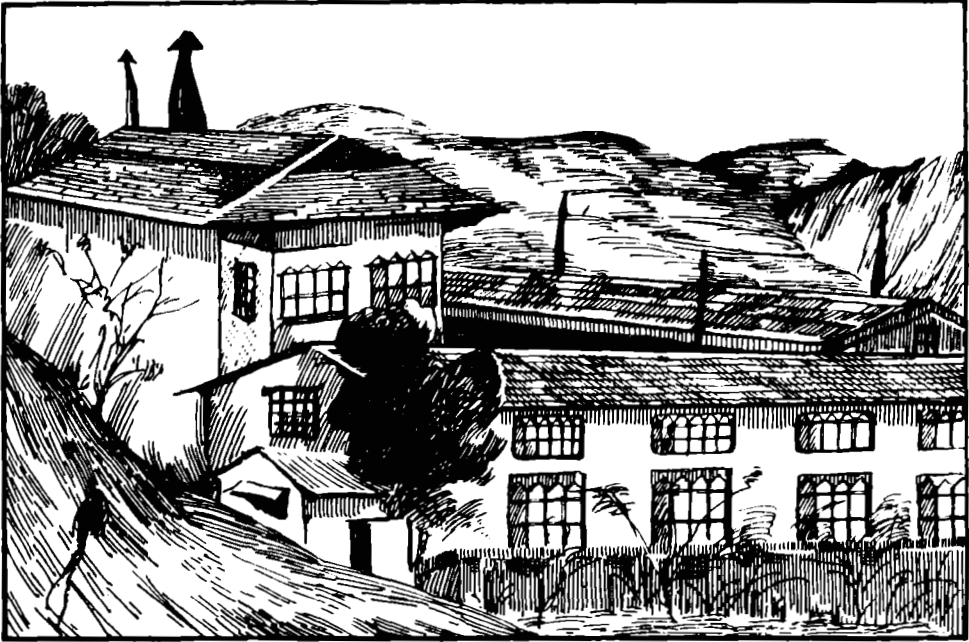
It is said that the Dzong contained a very beautiful gilded statue of Shabdung Namgyal.

### MONGYAR DZONG

It is a new Dzong which was built around 1930 A.D. The architecture of the Dzong is quite similar to the old Dzongs.

The images on the altar are very attractive.

The central image is of Tsepame (Amitayush, one of the Adi Buddhas). On the left of this is the image of Shabdung Rimpoche (Nawang Namgyal); on the right, of Guru Padma Sambhava.



Mongyar Dzong

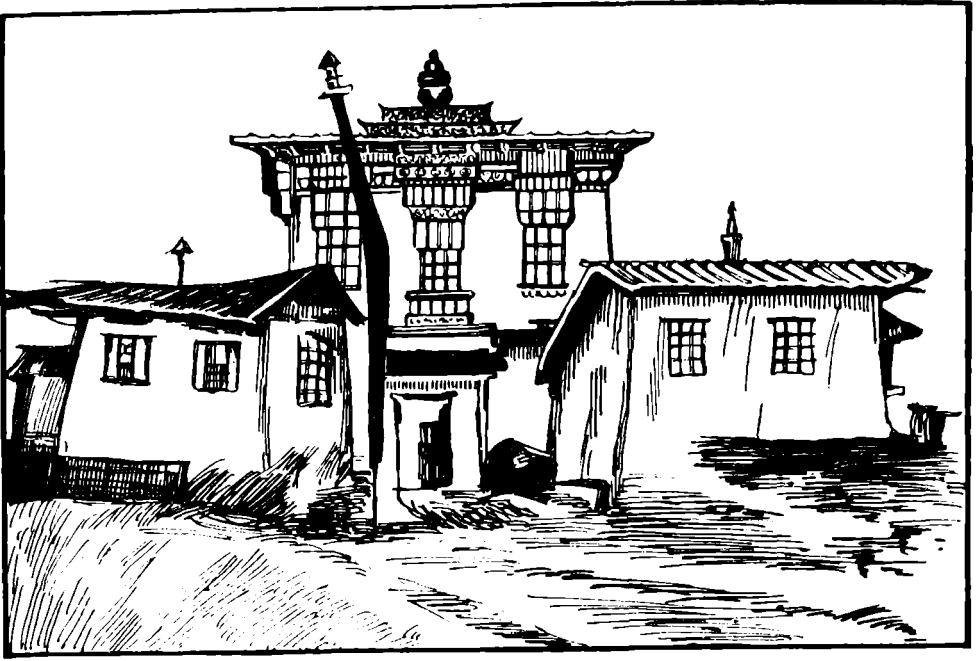
A road is being built which will connect the remote valley of Mongyar to Tongsa (Central Bhutan) and Tashigong (Eastern Bhutan).

### SHAMGANG DZONG

It is an old and dilapidated Dzong which is situated in the village of Shamgang in Central Bhutan.

Beautiful frescoes of the four guardian deities decorate the walls of the Dzong. Besides these, there is a wall painting of Chenrezi with eleven heads. These eleven heads represent the eleven stages of 'Buddhahood'.

Beautiful frescoes of Buddha with his two chief disciples



Shamgang Dzong

Shari Purta and Maudhgalayan Putra and 16 Sthaviras specially attract the eye.

### GASA DZONG

It is located at a vulnerable spot near the north-west belt adjoining Tibet and lies on the old trade route to Tibet. Nawang Namgyal built it in 1646 soon after one of his victories over the Tibetans and named it Yulgyal Dzong meaning the victorious Dzong.

The Dzong caught fire and was rebuilt. Now it lies in ruins.

During the 17th and 18th centuries when there was a lot of trouble on the Tibet-Bhutan borders, this Dzong was used to keep troops as a safeguard against Tibetan attacks.

It is believed that the Dzong had beautiful statues of 'Yeshing Gampo' (protecting deity of Bhutan), God of War and of Nawang Namgyal.



## KYICHU MONASTERY

It is a very beautiful monastery located between Paro and Dukhey Dzong. The architecture is extremely interesting and the surroundings are picturesque. Overlooking the Paro river, it has two sections, old and new.

The old monastery was built in 659 A.D. when the Lhasa monastery for Sakya Muni was being built. The King of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo, built this monastery as one of the 108 monasteries which he was building to spread Buddhism. He built Kyichu at Paro and Jampo Lhakhang at Bumthang to convert the people of Bhutan to Buddhism.

Some believe that this monastery was built in 639 A.D., one year before the Lhasa monastery. The statue of Vairocana, the chief of the five 'Dhyani Buddhas', was installed in the monastery. Later, the monastery caught fire but was rebuilt and a statue of Sakya Muni (on the pattern of Lhasa monastery) was installed in it. At that time there were no buildings surrounding the main temple.

In 1830 A.D. the then Jey Khenpo, Jampel Sherup Gyaltzen, and the Paro Governor, Haptshadthrim Namgyal, had the surrounding buildings built. They also got the golden roof put on the monastery. Two statues of Avalokiteshwara were also installed. Among other statues there is a statue of 'Vajrapani' also. To describe the importance of this god, a very interesting legend relating to Guru Padma Sambhava is often related. According to this legend, when Guru Padma Sambhava was going to Tibet the native gods of Tibet tried to stop him. The mountain God 'Nyam Chen-thang-la' created a mist and snowstorms to obstruct his way. But Guru Padma Sembhava became very angry and meditated in front of Vajra-Pani (Phyagna-rdo-je). All the gods became very fearful and the mountain god was subjugated and bound by an oath.

The new temple adjoining the old one was built by the present Royal Mother. Its architecture blends very well with that of the old temple. In the new one, besides other statues,

there is also a statue of Tara. It is said that the two Buddhist wives of King Songtsen Gampo of Tibet were deified as Green Tara and White Tara, the Nepalese wife being green Tara, and the Chinese wife the White Tara. Tara is a Hindu goddess. When Buddhism accepted foreign gods under pressure from the lay population, the goddess Tara was soon one of the favourites. She is believed to be part of every good and pious woman. In Tantric Buddhism, she also took on demonic shapes and started being portrayed in red. She is called Ku-Ru-Ku-Le in Tibetan.

Three skulls (in the new part of the monastery) catch the eye of every visitor. According to one explanation, these are kept to remind everyone of his previous, present and future lives.

Kyichu monastery is supposed to be one of the holiest places in Bhutan as it marks the advent of Buddhism into Bhutan.

## PARO LHAKHANG

This beautiful Lhakhang (temple) is located on the left hand side of Paro Dzong in the valley of Paro. The architecture of this building is quite different from that of other buildings in Bhutan. It was built in the 11th century. All the three storeys of the building, which are called hell, earth and heaven, are full of beautiful frescoes of Tantric Buddhism. Among these, the following are very interesting.

*Bde-mchog (Samvara in Sanskrit)*: He is shown in Yab-yum (with his female partner). Samvara is the name of a pre-Aryan Indian God. But his Tibetan name which means 'perfect bliss' makes it clear that he no longer retains any connection with his past. He has become a Tantric God. The so-called mystic Buddha's demonic character is depersonalised in him, and as such he is the terrifying aspect of the supreme Buddha.

*Dpa-bo Dur Khrod Buag-po (Yabyum)*: These are the two skeletons in coition which represent the God of Death, 'Gsin-rje' (*Yama* in Sanskrit) in conjunction with his female partner. They are shown in the centre of a vehemently blazing

fire and are of most frightening appearance. According to mystical interpretation, it represents Buddhism's obsession with death and eternity.

*Rnam-sras*: He is called Vaisravana in Sanskrit. This is the God of Wealth and is considered as one of the eight great protectors of Buddhism. He is shown with three heads and ten arms.

*Gsin-rje* (*Yama* in Sanskrit) and *Tsamundi*: There are many scenes which represent aversion to incest, condemnation of sexuality and contempt of women. In a celibate order, to which Bhutan belongs, this depiction is understandable. The cult of the demonic protectors forms the link between Bon Po (native religion) and Buddhism. The demonic aspect is more important to the laity than the protecting aspect because these are the gods who threatened life.

In Tibet and Bhutan the Buddhist monks had to admit the gods of Bon Po who were later made the defenders of the faith.

In this connection, it is interesting to note how the taming of God Pehar by Padma Sambhava was visualised and depicted in painted serolls and frescoes in this temple.

'Pehar' appeared to Padma Sambhava in full power and splendour. Impressed and shocked by this appearance, Guru Padma started meditation. A layman appeared in front of him looking very much like an Indian popular god. He turned out to be 'Pehar's' son who started negotiations with the Guru. He set forth his conditions which clearly showed that Pehar was the potential destroyer of physical well-being and material possessions.

## TAKSANG MONASTERY

One of the most beautiful, it is built on a ledge with a sheer drop of nearly 4,000 ft. One wonders how it was possible to build at such a dangerous and difficult spot. A legend says that when the construction started, there was not enough support



Taksang Monastery

for the foundation and the building could not come up. When some angels came, they cut their long hair to serve as the support for the foundation.

It is believed that in the later half of 8th century, Guru Padma Sambhava, known as the Second Buddha in Bhutan, meditated at this spot in a cave. In 1646, Shabdung Rimpoche

visited this place. It was, however, only in 1684 that the monastery was built by Gese Tenzin Rabgye, Penlop of Paro.

Taksang, perched like a nest on a rocky knoll (also called Tiger's Nest), gives a view of severe sublimity. It is a complex of many buildings. Amongst these, there is a temple of Phur-bu (a three-sided dagger) with which the Lamas are supposed to stab the demons. It is a ritual object and is a symbol of the magical aggressive tantric Buddhism. Sometimes it is depicted as a god whose body is like a magic dagger. In the monastery, there is a large ten-foot idol of the main deity, Guru Padma Sambhava, draped in costly silk and rich brocade. Other deities on either side are encased in a large glass cupboard. Amongst the complex, is a Chorten where it is believed that the body of a lion named Langchhen Pelgi is kept. According to the mythological story, Garwha Nakpo (Guru Padma Sambhava) had come to Taksang riding this lion. The most sacred place in the monastery is a small cave where Padma Sambhava meditated. In this cave, there is a small gilded Chorten which is full of gilded copper images of various saints.

In 1950, a fire destroyed six surrounding temples. These were repaired in 1957. A beautiful Gompa (temple) has been recently built atop the Taksang granite by the Royal Mother. Its ground and first floors are dedicated to the lesser deities with demons guarding them. The amorous poses of Gsin-Rje Gsed and Rod-Rje Rnal-Byor-Ma depict the Tantric influence.\* The top storey holds the image of the God of Mercy—Chen Rezi—with multiple arms and heads.

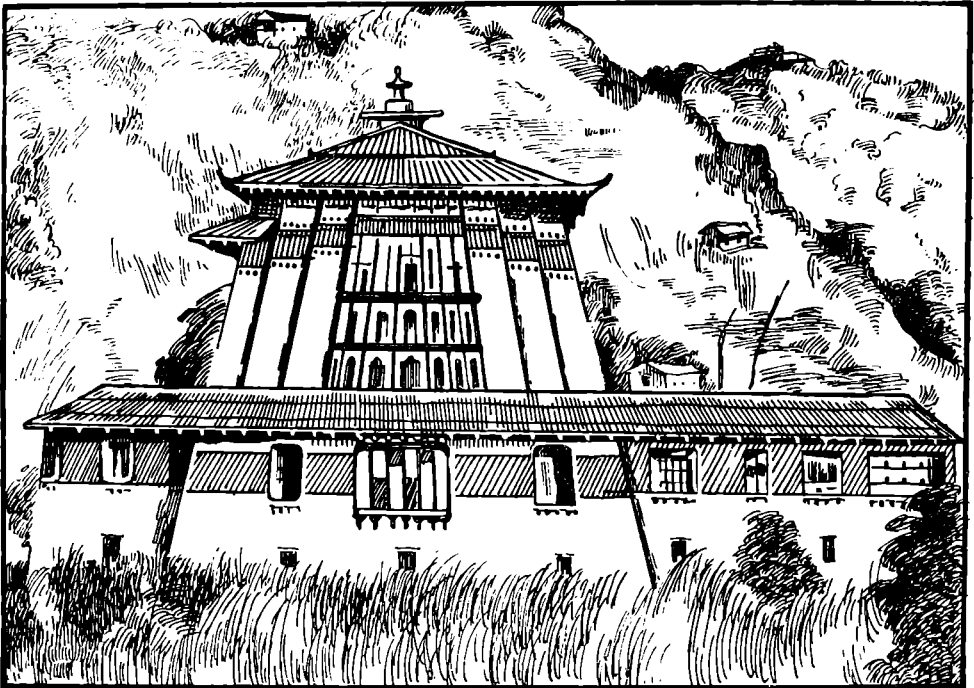
*Rdo-Rje Rnal—Byor-Ma*: In Sanskrit it is called Vajra-Yogini. In late Buddhist mysticism, 'dakinis' are the female symbols of those inspiring forces in man which enable him to make the leap from temporality to timelessness. They are shown

\* *Gsin-rje Rjgsed* is a god with sixteen legs and thirty-four arms who is supposed to have conquered the God of Death, and is shown in sexual union with his mystic partner. He is the protector of the faith. In theology, which distinguishes five Buddha-families, he belongs to the family of Vairocana where he represents the terrifying aspect of peaceable Manjusri.

naked because they depict the knowledge of the unshrouded reality. The most important of them is Vajra Yogini—the symbol of highest and ultimate insight. In her right hand she holds the knife and in her left hand the skull bowl. She wears a crown and a chain of skulls.

### TANGU MONASTERY

One of the prettiest, and unique in its parallel architecture, it is located at a distance of one day's march from Thimphu, the capital. It was built in the 15th century by Lama Choeji Drukpa Kinley who had come from Tibet. His descendants looked after



Tangu Monastery

the monastery until 1617. When Shabdung Nawang Namgyal visited the place, Chawang Tenzin, descendant of Choeji Drukpa, presented the monastery to Shabdung Rimpoche. As a mark of gratitude, the Shabdung himself carved a sandal-wood statue of Kha Sarphani (He that moves the sky—a name of Avalokite-

shwara—God Vishnu) and presented it to the donor, Chawang Tenzin.

At this time, a battle was going on between the Tibetans and Bhutanese. Shabdung Namgyal meditated at Tangu in a cave as a result of which the invading forces sent by the Governor of Tsang (in Tibet) were defeated. It is said that the Governor and his wife died within a month.

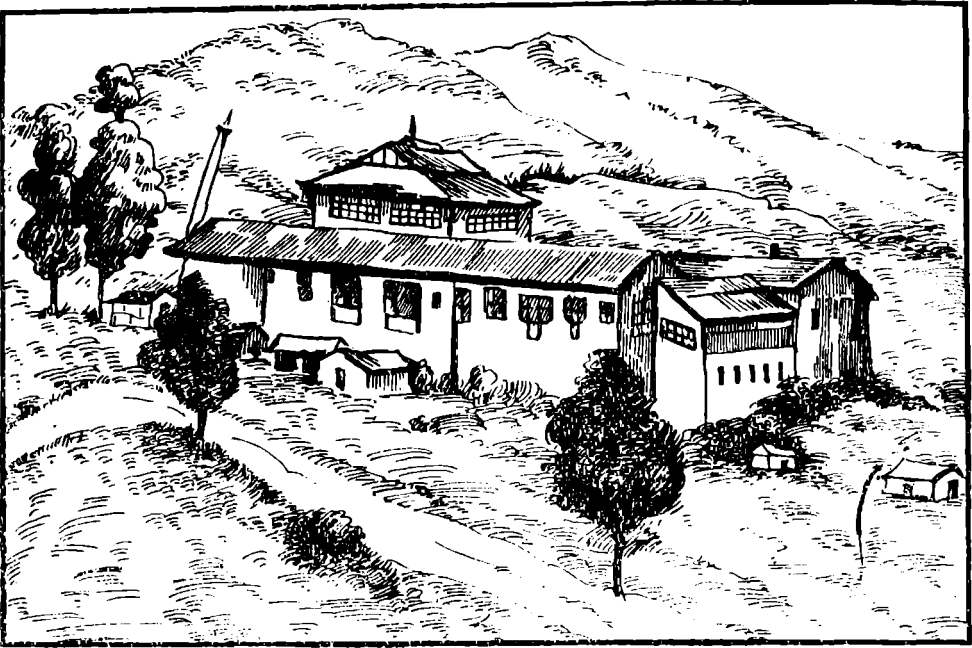
At the cave of meditation, there is a statue of Rta-Mgrin Tamdin. This deity has a man's body and horse's head which is supposed to neigh, to frighten the enemies of Buddhism. The Hindu version of the deity is Haya Griwa, quite a few shrines of whom can be found in Assam.

In 1727, the eighth Deb Raja of Bhutan, Druk Rabgye, constructed the existing three-storeyed pinnacle of the monastery with twelve corners. He also built a number of buildings surrounding the monastery. One of the later Shabdungs—Jigme Chhogyal—built a golden roof over the monastery and a beautiful statue of *Span Ras-Gzigs* (Avalokiteshwara in Sanskrit). This Bodhisattava is essentially of pity and compassion. It is believed that each successive Dalai Lama is a reincarnate of Avalokiteshwara. To depict his compassion he is sometimes surrounded by the manifestations of the Buddha in the six worlds: the white Buddha in the world of gods, the green Buddha in the world of Titans, the yellow Buddha in the human world, the red Buddha in the world of tortured spirits, the blue Buddha in the animal world, the smoke-coloured Buddha in hell.

## BUMTHANG JAMPE LAKHANG MONASTERY

Located in Bumthang, this is one of the two oldest monasteries of Bhutan. It was built (together with Kyichu of Paro) around 640 A.D. by Songtsen Gampo, the King of Tibet (630-649 A.D.). This was one of 108 monasteries which he built for the spread of the Buddhist religion.

In the 9th century, when Guru Padma Sambhava converted



Lami Gompa

Raja Sindhu of Bumthang to Buddhism, this monastery was repaired by the Raja.

This place is considered very sacred because during his stay in Bumthang, Guru Padma Sambhava is said to have visited this place.

It was repaired several times by the successive Tongsa Penlops. Towards the end of the 19th century, the then Tongsa Penlop (great-grandfather of the present King) donated the golden roof for the central tower of the monastery.

Sir Ugyen Wangchuk had, during his governorship of Tongsa, built a temple of 'Dus-Kyi-khorlo' on the left side of the main temple; Dus-Kyi-khorlo means the famous 'Kala chakra' of Buddhism which introduced the worship of the supreme deity under the designation of Adi-Buddha.\*

\*Dus-Kyi-Khorlo means 'wheel of time'. It is important because it is the name of the last theological system by means of which it was attempted to save an increasingly decaying Buddhism with the help of still more foreign elements. It was introduced into India in 966 A.D. and into Tibet in 1026 A.D. Hoffmann describes this system to be founded upon astronomy and astrology, and its starting-point is the strict identity of the macrocosm of the universe and man. It comprises many Tantras, divided into mother tantras, whose subject is the



Sir Ugyen Wangchuk is said to have built this temple after winning the war against Phuntsho Dorji (of Punakha Dzong) and Alu Dorji (of Thimphu Dzong) who were fighting against him at that time.

Later, another temple of Guru Padma Sambhava was added on the right hand side of Jampe Lhakang by Chimmi Dorji, the administrator of Byakar Dzong.

A stupa for Lama Pentsen Khempo, who was the priest of the first and second Kings of Bhutan, was built by Ashi Wangmo (the great-aunt of the present King of Bhutan). She also got the statues of Karma Karguiama installed in the temple.

#### (BUMTHANG) KYIE DAMAR TSEKPA MONASTERY

One of the most sacred places in Bhutan, this monastery is situated under a rocky bluff of a mountain which is very attractively depicted by the name of the monastery 'Damar Tsekpa', which means red rocks piled one on top of another.

The monastery can be divided into two portions. The smaller and the older portion was built by Sindhu Raja (in the 9th century). This is built on the rock which forms the back wall of the monastery. It is believed that Guru Padma Sambhava had meditated at this place. On this rock, there are impressions of his back as he sat leaning against it and of his 'bumphu' or holy water bottle. Outside this building, there is a beautiful weeping willow tree. According to a legend, this was the Guru's staff which he had inserted in the ground and it brought forth water in this rocky place.

The larger portion was built by Sir Ugyen Wangchuk when he was the governor of Tongsa. On the advice of Tembe Nima, an incarnate Lama from Tibet, who had become his priest, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk got this 'Gompa' made and installed a very

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highest insight and father tantras dealing with active compassion. The new system, designed to make Buddhism more attractive, was unable to save it from downfall in India but had a great influence in Tibet.



Kujay Lhakhang

large image of Guru Rimpoche. This is supposed to have brought peace to Bhutan. When Sir Ugyen became the first monarch of Bhutan, he had a golden roof put on this Gompa.

Ashi Phuntsho Chhoden (grandmother of the present King of Bhutan) had the older section of the monastery repaired and its walls painted and engraved. She also installed the life-size statue of Guru Padma Sambhava, statues of 25 disciples of Guru (Jabung Nyernga) and 16 'Sthaviras' or saints who preached Buddhism in various mythical islands and continents of Buddhist cosmogony.

Besides these, there is a statue of 'Maitreya' (future Buddha) in the monastery.

## CHERRI MONASTERY

This monastery is one of the very sacred ones of Bhutan. In it lie the remains of Tempi Nima (father of first Shabdung of

Bhutan). This monastery was built in 1620 by Shabdung Nawang Namgyal in memory of his father.

It is believed that after the death of his father in 1619, Shabdung Rimpoche meditated in front of the statue of 'Khasarpani' (Vishnu) during which he was told by his father that he should build the monastery at Dorden Cherri.

Later it was converted into a nunnery (ani-gompa) and there are even now a few nuns staying here.

It is a beautiful building built in the traditional Bhutanese style with white walls and an orange border. It is about two days' march from Thimphu. It is believed that in a cave above the monastery, Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava) had meditated when he had come to Bhutan in the 8th century.

Beautiful frescoes of saints, who have attained Buddhahood, adorn the monastery, including a very beautiful statue of 'Tara'.

## PARO CHHUMPHU MONASTERY

Located in Paro Valley, there are two parts to this monastery.

The higher one is supposed to be a very sacred place. Like Taksang, Guru Rimpoche is supposed to have sanctified this place as well. There used to be an earlier monastery here but due to some trouble amongst the lamas, everything disappeared from this place. Except for a brass worshipping vase, which is said to have been taken out from the rock, there is nothing left of the place now.

The lower part of the monastery has a rock where Guru Padma Sambhava is said to have imprinted his footmarks which can be seen even now.

In the vicinity of this monastery, there is the lake of 'Dorji Famo'. She is a popular goddess of the Karapa sect who is said to have frightened and vanquished the enemies of Buddhism by manifesting herself in the form of a sow. It is believed that her spirit becomes incarnate in each successive lama who presides over the monastery of Samding on the shore of Yamdok lake (in Tibet).

A temple of Dorji Famo with a large statue of Dorji Famo was added to the monastery later.

### SANG-TOG PERI MONASTERY (PARO)

The name of the monastery means 'heaven'. It is situated above Taktsang on a projection spur. In this, the natural features of the ground have been most picturequely utilised. It was built in the 17th century.

Around this, there used to be many monasteries including nunneries but most of them are deserted now.

One gets a very beautiful view of the whole Paro valley from this monastery.

The monastery has very beautiful frescoes and statues of Buddha, Guru Rimpoche and Shabdung.

Every visitor to the place is asked to throw the dice by which the resident lama predicts the future. This practice entered Bhutan with the influence of Tantrism and has become very popular.

There is a statue of God 'Za Byed-Rdo Rje-Mka' in this monastery. According to the custom, seeds were burnt in the open mouth of the god before a certain form of meditation by the lamas of advanced degree. In the meditation all the sins of man are eaten up by the god. Ritual action seems to be a sensory symbol of what is actually achieved spiritually in meditation.

### SANGNAH CHHOCKHER (PARO)

This monastery was built in 1753 A.D. by Sakya Tenzin. The main building is double-storeyed with eight columns. There are many buildings surrounding it. The third incarnation of Shabdung, Chowki Gyaltzen, presented the monastery with a pair of consecrated worshipping water pots of gold, Kanjur (words of Buddha which were written in Sanskrit and later translated into Tibetan; they contain 108 volumes) and Tanjur (commentaries by various Indian scholars and philosophers

which were translated into Tibetan). In 1931 the monastery caught fire and was rebuilt by Tendin Penjor, the then Dzongpon of Paro.

The monastery, though old, still commands a beautiful view and worship continues regularly. The lama is always chosen from the monastic school of Paro Dzong.

The frescoes in the monastery depict many interesting scenes from the 'Jatakas' (previous life histories of Buddha).

### DENSA DOCHOLING (PARO)

On his arrival in Bhutan in 1616, Shabdung Nawang Namgyal Rimpoche came to Paro. He stayed at a place called Densa Docholing where the monastery stands today. Desi Tsangbo of Tibet sent an army to fight against him. It is believed that the protecting deity of Bhutan, Yeshing Gampo, appeared and assured Shabdung Rimpoche of his ultimate victory. The legend goes on to say that at this place people saw Shabdung as Army Commander and his soldiers as 'Tokdens' (saints).

To commemorate the event a monastery was later built here. Lamas still live in the monastery which has been repaired and enlarged from time to time. Statues of many Kargyupa lamas adorn the monastery.

In a temple called 'Gon Khang', statues of protecting deities Yeshing Gampo, Maha Kali, Maha Kala are kept.\*

According to Tantric scriptures only those people who are initiated in various Tantras can see these deities.

\*Maha Kali (Lha-mo) is one of the most powerful and frightening of the protective deities of Tantric Buddhism. She is always depicted in an image of terror. She represents ruin and death. In one story, Lha-mo killed her son, skinned his body and ate his heart, when she could not convert her husband and son to Buddhism. She is considered to be the greatest protector of the faith.

*Maha Kala (Nag-po, Chenpo)*: Maha Kala (Nag-po, Chenpo) is a counterpart of 'Shiva', a Hindu God. Saivism had a great influence upon Buddhist Tantrism and consequently on the Tibetan and Bhutanese form of Buddhism. This deity is one of the eight great protectors of the faith.

## PHO-JU-DING MONASTERY (THIMPHU)

It is situated on a commanding height and is a very large monastery. It overlooks the Thimphu valley. At one time it used to be one of the richest monasteries, but evil eyes fell on it a long time ago and thus it has become very poor and is in a dilapidated state. Most of the wealth of the monastery has either been stolen or has disappeared.

In this monastery Guru Padma Sambhava is shown in his terrifying appearance. He has a sword in his right hand and a bowl made of a skull containing blood in his left hand. He is shown as the protector of the faith and in 'Yab-yum'. Yab-yum is the physical symbolisation of spiritual two-in-oneness, the mystic unity of right action and correct insight. In original Tantrism the 'Shakti' (the female partner) sat in her partner's lap only, but Tibetans turned it into coitus.

The yogic path that runs from India to the mountains of Tibet and Bhutan is set here in symbols with utmost consistency. Here it is attempted to make good the Tantric view that it is only by strengthening and purifying the passions that man is liberated. Hevajra Tantra states that by passion the world is bound and by passion it is freed.

Sakya Tenzin had built this monastery in 1748 A.D. He had built 20 huts for meditation around the main building. Its original name was 'Wogmin Namgyal Khangzang'.

The monastery was later provided with 'Thongdrol Chhenmo' (large painted scroll), Kanjur (Buddha's words in 108 volumes) and statues, etc. by Gyalwa Sakya Rinchen.

Later on, Jey Khenpo Sherup Sange built another monastery adjoining the previous one and named it 'Wogmin Nyipa'. The main statue in the monastery was the life-size copper statue of Shakyamuni.

## DECHEN PHUK MONASTERY, THIMPHU

The beautiful monastery lies in ruins in a beautiful side-valley which is situated about 3 miles from Tashichho Dzong. The whole place around this monastery is deserted and one finds broken houses everywhere. A very interesting reason was given for this phenomenon. It seems this monastery was founded by one of the early pioneers of Buddhism who belonged to a different sect of Buddhism. When first Shabdung Rimpoche came to Bhutan, the monks refused to acknowledge him. The local population sided with the local Dechen Phuk monks. Shabdung Rimpoche summoned a terrible demon to his aid and destroyed the population completely. Since then no one dares to take up abode and settle down there. The guardian deity of Thimphu Valley—Geyonen Chakpa Mullen is located in this monastery.

# THE DRAGON COUNTRY

## *NOTE ON THE AUTHOR*

Born to a historian father, Mrs Nirmala Das also graduated in history. She came to Bhutan in January 1968 with her husband Mr B. S. Das who opened India's first Diplomatic Mission in this country. During her stay here, she became interested in the history and art of the country, and having access to some original manuscripts, decided to write this book which is her first. Mrs Das is a gifted artist, being both a painter and a sculptor. She put up an exhibition of her paintings on Bhutan in 1970. She is widely travelled. At 42, she is happily married and has two children.

[A de luxe edition is in preparation. Price Rs. 40]

Cover Design by Pratima Bapat



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