On The Himalayan Front

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This was scribbled while I was plodding through the Himalayan passes and flying over its snowy peaks. I was caught by the Tibetan drift at its full force, during my flights over the snowlines.

My taking up of the cause of Tibet and the Himalayas in the Indian Parliament in 1954 and my joining the Khampa guerrillas in March 1959, when the Dalai Lama was on his desperate bid for safety to India, were ventures incomparably beyond anything I had ever done before, between the Arctics and the Andamans.

On the tenth of March 1959, the Dalai Lama, while leaving for the Himalayas and to freedom, firmly reasserted the full independence of Tibet. Though that voice of a new Asian revolution against communist colonialism was hardly audible to the outside world at the moment, it did prove to be 'an atomic explosion over the Himalayas', giving birth to a number of chain reactions.

Immediately the armies of Communist China went through a blood-bath in Tibet. Red China did its best to exterminate the Tibetan people. Condemned to inhuman tortures and cruel deaths, the Lamas carried the images of the Buddha at the risk of their lives, and unfortunate Tibetan mothers hid their babies in their ragged 'bakkus' to save them from the bayonets of the Communists. In the company of such nomadic contingents, under the hotly pursuing Chinese gunfire, I often felt myself lost. Only the snowline over the Himalayas held the spots where we stood some chance of escaping death.

Our country was caught unawares by the developments on the Himalyan borders. The Chinese had decided that in order to keep Tibet under their heels, they needed the control of the passages through the Himalayan barrier, pastures, forests and fertile lands of the border regions, all belonging to India. In course of their enslavement of Tibet, the Chinese military designs against India have become fully exposed.

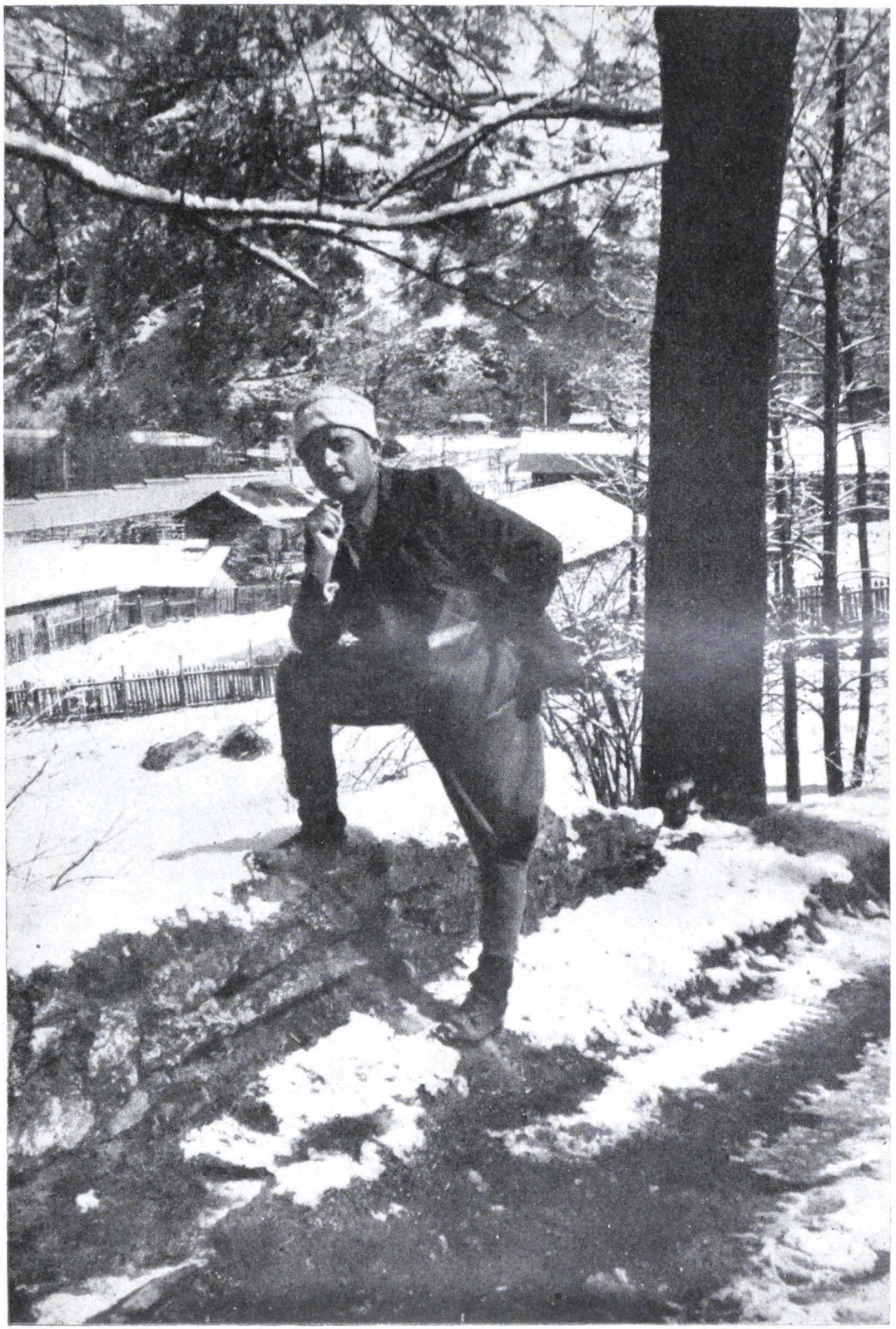
At such a turning point of Asian history, the happenings in Tibet and the developments over the Himalayas since March 1959, are the only experiences which give us a correct forecast of the events still to come—events which are vital not only to India, Tibet or China, but to the whole world.

The Tibetan and the Himalayan fights remain unfinished. Now more than ever, they demand action in defence of human rights, dignity and the heritage of mankind.

May these scribblings on what has been going on behind the snow-curtain rouse man to that great assignment, and lead him onward and ever onward.

Buddh-Purnima, 1960. SATYANARAYAN

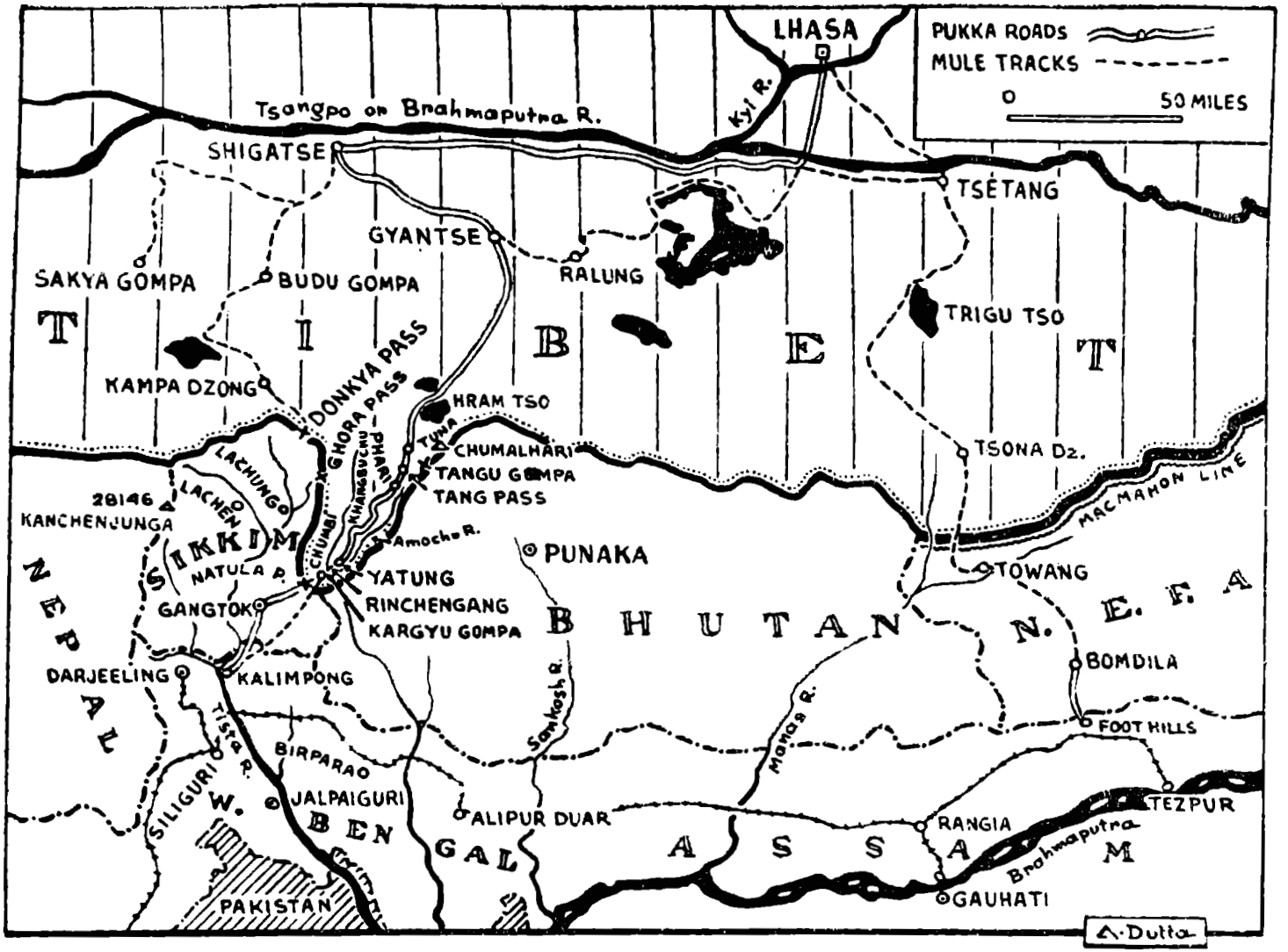
High Himalayas from the air.



The author in snow-covered Tibet. In the background the Chinese walls around their military headquarters.

PART ONE

THE TIBETAN AFFAIR



Two 'arms'—possible routes of advance and the 'dagger' shaped Chumbi valley military bases of the Chinese directed against the vital parts of India.

1. *DUST-STORM OVER DELHI*

I

"OM MANE PADMAHAM!"
('Honour to Lotus-Jewel Lord!')
"NAMO TASSA BHAGVATO . . . !"
('Glory to that Lord Buddha!')

On they went chanting—one in a cracked bass and the other in a baritone of the spring. The voices were the same I had so often heard over the snow-covered Himalayan passes.

A gust of hot wind awoke me. Last night I had spent on soft grass under the open mid-summer skies of New Delhi. Overhead hung a blinding dust-storm. All life seemed to be caught in a swoon.

Somewhere a radio hummed a song of Rabindranath—

'When the heart is hard and parched up,
Come upon me with a shower of mercy.'

And again—on they went repeating the voices of the Himalayas.

II

They stopped at the garden fences. The Lama raised his hands in a gesture of blessing and the young Tibetan girl saluted in oriental style. They were my friends—an incarnate monk of Tibet—Sange Rimpoche and his ward Pema.

"Never dreamt of meeting you in this Delhi heat, Rimpoche!" I said removing the fencing gates to let them in—"And how have you changed, Pema?"

"We are refugees from Tibet. Are you not surprised to see us come out of the dragon's mouth alive?"

Since my childhood I had often met Rimpoche in sacred

Buddhist places and had come to know him rather well. His natural half-closed olive-shaped eyes had made me feel that he had mastered many miracles. Expressions on his face often indicated the inherent mystic power of the Lamas.

Pema was the daughter of one of his close devotees. For the first time I had seen her at Bodh Gaya when her parents had come on a pilgrimage. She stayed on for her schooling in India, and she visited Santiniketan as well. There the music of Rabindranath seemed to flow into her blood. Later on, during our struggle for independence when I had to seek refuge abroad, she had arranged my shelter in a Tibetan village. Since that time, she had left a deep impression on me not only of charm and innocence nor only of her bubbling figure revealing itself through the close fitting colourful Tibetan attire, but also of an overpowering throbbing perfection of life. To my imagination her tender beauty far surpassed what she possibly was in reality.

I led Rimpoche and Pema into the drawing room where we squatted before a statue of Lord Buddha. Pema's saffron coloured 'bakku"—Tibetan costume, orange blouse and creamy face were drenched in sweat. Part of her body exposed to the sun was glazed with a thick coating of blood-coloured sand.

Following the Lama, she threw herself prostrate on the dusty floor and whispered repeatedly through her parched lips—'The Lord of the Lotus-jewel is our shelter.' (Om Mane Padmaham).

III

"Lord Buddha has sent us to you," said the Lama.—"It is his command that your country and people should help in driving out the Chinese Imperialists from Tibet."

To visualise a distant place and to foresee the future the

Lama closed his eyes in meditation. After a while he murmured softly—"In 1950, I was in Potala, the palace of the Dalai Lama at Lhasa. Then the State oracle said—'Chinese bandits will occupy our land and also invade the sacred land where Lord Buddha was born, where he attained Enlightenment and turned the wheel of the law for the great Emancipation of humanity. Death by starvation and shooting on a large scale, what the Chinese will call 'liberation', will take place. The Huns will destroy our sacred monasteries, kill our Lamas and also torture and shoot down many Indian brethren. Even the Dalai Lama will leave Tibet and escape in hiding to the Land of the Buddha.' "

"Lord—" Pema interrupted—"who is the Jewel in the Lotus—will he have no mercy on us?"

"Yes, ultimately he will come to our rescue. The Dalai Lama will get unexpected help and support from the countries beyond the seven seas, and finally, the Chinese invaders will leave the sacred soil and our land, and go back to Peking in disgrace and utter humiliation. Then, along with Tibet, there will be peace in the wide world—beyond the mountains, seven seas, and the moon and the sun. The Tibetans have great faith in the oracle's predictions. And for this we seek your help."

"What help do you expect from us?" I asked.

"The same we asked of you when the Chinese started invading Tibet in October 1950," said Pema.

"We never made any request for military assistance," said the Lama and looked for some papers he always carried between his body and the Tibetan dress, which served not only as a pocket but as a suitcase of considerable size.—"Here are all my worldly possessions. One of the papers I have is the second Indian note to China, dated October 31, 1950. In this note the Government of India clearly say that

'they cannot help thinking that military operations by the Chinese Government against Tibet have greatly added to the tension of the world and to the drift towards a general war . . . ' This basic fact should be the sheet-anchor of your foreign policy."

The Lama was interrupted by a courier who came to deliver some parliamentary papers and the morning newspapers. The front page of the paper dated 15th May 1954, displayed in headlines an event, a very important one—the agreement between India and China in regard to Tibet. That very day that agreement was going to be debated in the Parliament.

"This is a question of life and death for our country, people and culture of Tibet." The Lama continued—"And this important assignment has brought me so urgently at your doors. You are a member of Indian Parliament, so you must see to it that your country takes a correct decision at the critical turning point in the history of the world."

"Do you attach so much importance to this Indo-Chinese agreement?"

"In the light of what has happened in 1950, this question is of decisive importance not only to Tibet but to India and the world at large. The Chinese occupation of Tibet by force of arms and fraud is fatal for Asiatic progress and a mortal blow to Indian security and integrity from the side of her northern borders."

With considerable heat in his voice he took out a map from his 'bakku' pocket, spread it on the floor and pointed out—"Look, here is a Chinese map which explains their ultimate aim—conquest of India. Once India having acquiesced China holding Tibet by force, the Chinese already claim all territory north of Brahmaputra in Assam, of Teesta in West Bengal, the whole of Bhutan, Sikkim and Nepal. In

short, the entire northern territory right up to Ladakh—the crown of your Motherland is already in their bag. They can snatch away all the strategic protection of the Himalayas from you and make it a jumping ground to trample down the sacred land of the great Buddha. Once you appease an aggressor he is sure to devour you completely flesh and bone—this has been the great lesson of history."

"Have we appeased the Chinese?"

"You cannot deny history. As late as 13th November 1950, the head of the Indian mission at Lhasa reported to his Government that the Chinese Communist forces were still in the Chamdo area and were not less than 300 miles from Lhasa. It was also pointed out in the Indian and foreign press that although the Tibetan army, nominally about 10,000 strong and equipped only with a limited quantity of small arms, could hope to offer little effective resistance to the Chinese Communist forces, the rugged Tibetan plateau, with an average elevation of 12,000 ft. above sea-level, offered very great physical difficulties to an invader. Besides, much of Tibet would be snow-bound with the onset of winter, and an invading force would have to traverse two of the highest passes in the world, those of Shargung-La (16,700 ft.) and Tro-La (17,100 ft.). But all these great obstacles before the Chinese invading army were removed very easily by your Government."

"How?"

"The Chinese brought their military commanders and technical personnel with plenty of equipment and provisions to Calcutta. From there all facilities were given to them to enter Tibet through the good roads via Kalimpong and Gangtok. This proved to be a stab in the back of the Khampa warriors on the Chamdo front and fatal to the fight for Tibetan independence. The entire population of Kham took

to guerrilla tactics, but that was not of much use. The Chinese took away their means of subsistence and launched a campaign of murder and terror. One of the victims you have before you—this Pema. Now you will know of many Pemas from your own border areas."

His statement made me feel guilty for the marks of torture and suffering on Pema's face. As if in an effort to atone my guilt, I asked—"What would be practical for us to do now?"

"To save your border people from the same deplorable lot the Tibetans had to suffer."

"Are we not doing it?"

"Right now I am coming from Gangtok and Kalimpong. Chinese experts stationed outwardly to supervise their transport are making detailed maps for their infiltration and recruiting fifth-columnists to fit into their invasion plans. This is detrimental to your own interests."

"I shall keep it in mind," I said getting up—"now I must get ready for the debate on the Indo-Chinese agreement in our Parliament."

"Is it not a coincidence? You are discussing the fate of a Buddhist country on the eve of the 'Vaisakhi Poornima' day, the day when the greatest Saint of Peace, the Lord Buddha was born, the day when he achieved Enlightenment, and the day when he attained 'Nirvana'. On such an auspicious occasion should you not think of the survival of Tibetan people, physically and culturally?"

"What will be the correct thing to do?"

"In no case India should accept the Chinese claim that Tibet is an integral part of Chinese territory, and the problem of Tibet is entirely a domestic concern of China. Historical records prove that the slogan of Tibet being ever an integral part of China, will not be endorsed by anyone,

except the aggressors, Communists and idiots. Whatever may be the theoretical position about the so called 'suzerainty', the political status of Tibet as a sovereign power is indicated by undeniable facts."

In support of his point, the Lama again took out a document from his bakku pocket and read aloud emphasising every word—"Before the end of 1912 the last of the Chinese forces had been driven out of Tibet, and on January 11, 1913 the Dalai Lama proclaimed the independence of his country by concluding a treaty with Outer Mongolia, the preamble of which is worded as follows: "Whereas Mongolia and Tibet, having freed themselves from the Manchu dynasty and separated from China have become independent States . . ." Both China and Tibet freed themselves from the yoke of the foreign Manchu dynasty, more or less about the same time."

Pondering over the force of the Lama's argument, both of us came out of the house. Pema stayed on to take some rest.

IV

Those days the Parliament used to meet from eight in the morning. As the Lama was deeply interested in the Tibetan debate, I promised to get a visitor's card for him.

Passing through Lytton Road we saw a small procession being formed at the gates of the Chinese Embassy. They unfurled some red flags and while marching forward shouted slogans:

"Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai!"
(Indian and Chinese are brethren.)
"No military bases on Indian soil."
"Liberate India from foreigr
influence hostile to China."

Some faces amongst the demonstrators were familiar to me. Quite frequently they had been marching past the Parliament House. I accosted one of them who was known to me—"Do you understand the meaning of the slogans you are shouting?"

"What have we to do with their meaning? We are paid well to shout whatever they want."

"Who are they?"

"The Chinese, of course."

"How much do they pay you?"

"They pay two rupees for half a day of shouting, marching and demonstrating."

"Is that all?"

"No, they provide us also with some tea and biscuit."

"Is that enough?"

"Well, whatever we are paid by the Chinese, is a fair amount. But the Communist Party which works as the agents of the Chinese and recruits us must have its fair commission."

We had reached a crossing. We took a short cut to the Parliament House.

V

The Tibetan problem or connected with that the problem of the security of India's Himalayan borders had hardly the place it deserved in Parliament debates. In place of Tibet if there were the question of Mars or Jupiter, that could not have taken less time of the House.

A new philosophy of Panch-sheel was introduced into the preamble of the Indo-Chinese agreement on Tibet. There were no reasons whatsoever on our side ever to go astray from those noble principles. But for the Chinese counterpart or their communist agents it was obviously something like a smokescreen to hide their sinister designs against the

security of India. A vague promise to adhere to those principles gave them time to consolidate their military position in Tibet and to impress upon us a false sense of confidence in their goodwill about the inviolability and sanctity of our geographical borders. According to Chinese calculations the Panch-sheel was to work as a dose of opium to put India in a state of torpor about her vital interests.

It was only the scars inflicted on Pema's face by the Chinese that reminded me of their cruelty. Her face had become for me the symbol of Chinese cruelty in Tibet. That made me restless and urged me to take up the cause of Tibet when my turn came to have my say in the House.

But my earnest pleadings sounded out of tune in the quarters I had intended to reach.

VI

Sange Rimpoche was more agitated than ever before—"India has conceded more to the Chinese than they themselves had ever expected."

"But does not this Indo-Chinese agreement on Tibet cement the friendship of the two largest Asiatic countries?"

"No—" the Lama made a very lively observation. "This treaty of agreement on Tibet does not preclude a Sino-Indian clash. It has greatly whetted the appetite of the Chinese aggressors. This is China's declaration of war on India."

The heat outside the Parliament House was getting more oppressive. Somehow, it did not seem to affect us anymore. Soon we stepped out and walked into the all engulfing fire-coloured storm.

2. *THE GIRL FROM KHAM*

I

Pema hummed a Tagore song:

'Renew the old in me,
In fresh forms of delight;
And let the wedding come,
Once again in a new ceremony of life.'

It was Buddh-poornima, the full-moon of Lord Buddha's incarnation, attainment and the final extinguishment from the mortal world. From early morning Sange Rimpoche had begun his loud recitations of the Tibetan scriptures. Occasionally he stood erect, recited softly some mystic teachings, and lay prostrate before the image of Buddha. This physically difficult performance he managed to accomplish hundreds of times.

Pema had changed her Tibetan 'bakku' for a new saffron-coloured Bengali-style 'sari'. Taking some lighted candles and camphor in a shiny brass dish she moved her arms around Buddha's bust performing what they call 'Arati.' Some more candles were lighted right around the pedestal upon which the Lord's image was placed. Those lights brightened Pema's fair complexion and her oval features. Carelessly she had let her 'sari' slide down from her shoulders. For a moment her peculiar charm, innocence and sweet softness of youth seemed to return in their original way, close to her image in my imagination.

Having finished 'arati', she readjusted her dress and said with a smile—"After my Santiniketan days I haven't used 'sari'."

"But by putting on a 'sari' you do really remind me of the beauty of Rabindranath's 'Srimati'."

"Don't you remember, they always used to make me act the part of 'Srimati' during the staging of that dance-drama before Gurudeva Rabindranath! Did that all happen to her in actual life as told in the story?"

"Nothing is impossible."

"How cruelly they beheaded her for offering prayers to Lord Buddha? That reminds me of the Chinese atrocities in the Tibetan monasteries. Oh! I can't narrate them to you. Let me live again in the 'Srimati' of the stage."

"What was the prayer you hummed?"

"That is the one addressed to the Lord of Life."

II

While pouring tea Pema whispered to me—"These Lamas are good fortune-tellers. Shall we not ask ours?"

Sange Rimpoche overheard and smiled—"For that you will have to consult nature and then I can interpret what is going to happen. Today is an auspicious day, we may go out and try our luck."

We walked along the broad avenue—the Raj-Path. Parallel to it there was a shallow artificial tank. At the first sight of water we stopped and saw something strange. A crippled bird fluttered slowly and cautiously at the water-edge. Nearby, a trembling twig bent downwards over the struggling life. By every puff of wind, they both held fast to save themselves from the danger of slipping over the edge. Next moment, by the force of a strong gust, they were both overbalanced and fell down.

Fortunately, the soft grass coming out between the brick embankment served as a cushion. There they lay more sheltered and secure.

"Nature behaves motherly," the Lama commented—"It

reminds us of softness and affection even in this hostile sandstone atmosphere of New Delhi."

III

Quite soon it had become clear to us that the mission of our Tibetan friends had failed completely. Literally, no one was going to give them any support not even a patient hearing. They had come all the way from the Tibetan province of Kham to warn India not to trust the Chinese.

Some sketches and maps which the Lama carried were undoubtedly drawn by the Chinese army command in Tibet. Those documents made it abundantly clear that the intentions and the instructions of the invading Chinese units were not to stop on the Tibetan borders but to push on further towards the Indian territories through the Himalayan passes. Even technically, it was not possible for the Chinese to stop at the inhospitable Tibetan heights. They needed suitable climate, wood and pasture and locally available food for the stationing of their troops. Since these amenities were not available on the other side of the Himalayas, they had planned to push on towards the Indian side.

The Lama had to go through terrific hazards and dangers in bringing those documents to India. As he put it, he did it out of reverence and gratitude to the Land of Buddha. He had hopes that by explaining to the Indian High Command the way the Chinese had behaved in Tibet he would be able to make the Indians alert in their dealings with the Chinese. Pema had come with him to prove to what extent the Chinese are capable of committing inhuman atrocities upon the population of the areas they pass through.

But none in the responsible quarters with whom I brought them in contact believed our Tibetan friends. Every one laughed at the realities of the mortal danger India was to

face later on, due to her acceptance of Tibet as a province of China. No one even cared to follow what was really happening in Tibet. They did not see the Tibetan affairs in the light of what the Tibetans narrated on the basis of their own suffering. Rather every thing was looked through the glasses of the 'China Pictorial' circulated practically free in large numbers throughout India. Seen through the distorted Chinese glasses Tibet had become a land of milk and honey after its occupation by the Chinese.

"It is 'Chou-mantar' here." The Lama came to the conclusion—"India is under the spell of Mr. Chou."

Even those who were most considerate to the Tibetan cause on humanitarian grounds showed their reluctance to hear any wrongs of China because of their adherence to Panch-sheel. This idle hypocritical luxury of the Indian politicians caused irritation to the Tibetans.

"The Panch-sheel" Sange Rimpoche repeated with contempt—"First the Chinese invaded Tibet, robbed everybody there, appropriated all the earth and wealth, took away women and children to torture and killed all those who stood in their way, and then they signed the pact of Panch-sheel—forbidding to rob and kill. How preposterous that India and China signed Panch-sheel pact after China had enslaved Tibet!"

IV

After lunch, the Lama retired for solitary meditation. Pema relaxed on the cool cement floor, her hands clasped and in a posture as if she had finished climbing and reached her goal—a mountain pass. She was now trying to think out her future plans. In that connection she related her story incoherently.

Completing her school education in India, she returned

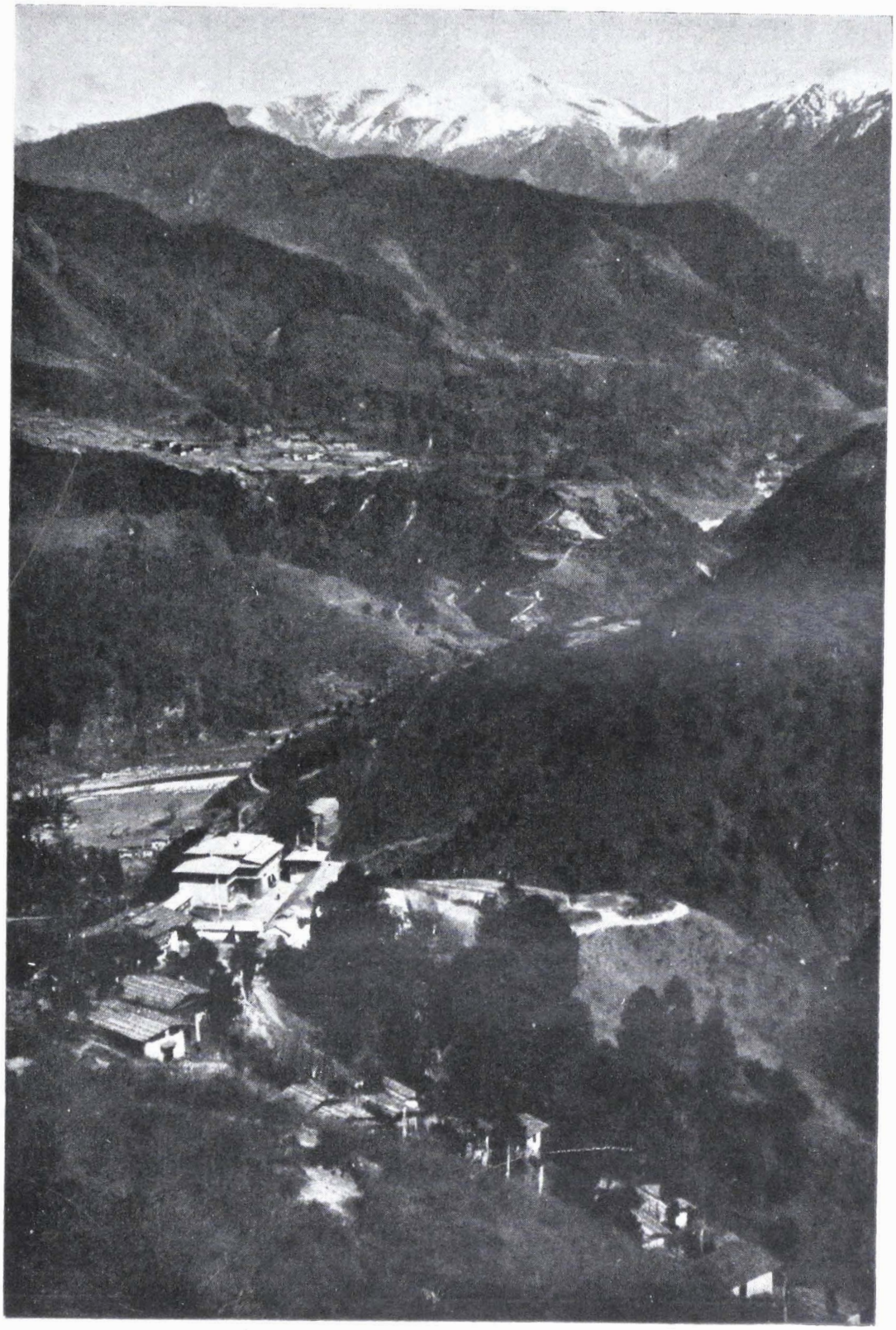
to her birthplace—Chamdo, the capital of Kham in Eastern Tibet. Her well-to-do parents agreed to her plan for starting a school on Santiniketan lines. Barely the construction of a suitable building had started when the first units of the communist invading army reached the borders of Tibet. Pema's father had an important voice in the council of the elders of Kham. The council decided unanimously to stop the Chinese from entering Tibet. They sent word to Lhasa for support and emissaries to India to secure arms and ammunition. Lhasa showed reluctance to fight and the Indian checkposts refused to allow the Khampa emissaries from taking out arms from India.

One by one the Kham fortifications began to succumb to the superior arms and fighting methods of the Chinese. Getting desperate, all able bodied Khampas joined fighting and retreated to remote strategic positions to get organised on guerrilla lines. They left their womenfolk in the villages and towns in charge of some old lamas, believing that the enemy would be chivalrous like themselves and would do no harm to the helpless unarmed population left behind.

"The Chinese units entered Chamdo. Till then I had not known horror or bestiality," said Pema—"I began to vomit blood, and expected the end of life any moment. Our menfolk who had survived Chinese bullets rushed to the towns and villages under cover of darkness and caused havoc amongst the Chinese. The Chinese command was in a hurry to break through the Kham region to reach Lhasa. So, they made a truce with the Khampas. We rejoined our menfolk and made for the regions still inaccessible to the Chinese. There our men reassembled and regrouped themselves for new battles.

"In the meantime, a Tibetan delegation had reached Peking for talks to stop bloodshed in Tibet. No discussions

Main entrance to the 'Chuen-chue House' — the Chinese Divisional headquarters at Yatung. India's tricolour in the Indian trade agency compound.



The Kargyu Gompa in Tibet.

took place. The Chinese took a roll of paper and bamboo brushes and carved out a 17-point 'treaty with Tibet'. Since the Dalai Lama or his Government would have in no case agreed to that treaty, the Chinese made a faked seal of Dalai Lama themselves and affixed it to the treaty."

"On this forgery of the Chinese is based the recognition by India of the Chinese suzerainty over Tibet." The Lama added entering the room—"India has the official motto—'Truth alone prevails.' Why was not truth ascertained in the matter of Tibetan affairs?"

V

We waited for the full moon to cool down the pink sandstones of the Buddhist temple. When we reached there, the service was about to end. Everything was festive.

Inside, it was full of people representing practically all parts of Asia—from Trans-Himalayas to the Indian Ocean. On the right stood women in their gay-coloured bakkus, saris or Burmese costumes of varied patterns. Both rich and poor bowed together. The congregation gave the impression that there could be nothing ugly or cruel in the human race.

The priest took around a copper dish of burning camphor. It lighted Pema's face and her olive-shaped eyes beamed with rapture.

"May your happiness be eternal." The Burmese priest blessed her particularly, as if she had become the centre of the ceremony. He allowed her to go to the altar to offer her flowers. Another Ceylonese priest there picked up a white bud from the feet of the statue of Lord Buddha in a standing posture to drive away fear from everyone. He gave it to Pema as a token of special blessing.

The crowd dispersed with the cries of—'Namo Buddhaya.' They repeated it again and again as they left.

Some beggars stopped us at the steps. Pema asked from me for some small coins, gave all she had in her hand, and pulled me out—under the open sky, into the soft silvery haze of the full-moon.

VI

On our way back home, we noticed that we were being followed. The persons, who had demonstrated for the Chinese the other day followed us closely.

"Why are you shadowing us?" I stopped to enquire from one of them who had once worked in my house as a servant.

"Master," he pulled me away to the other side of the road and confided—"You gave me bread once when I starved. I was going to see you at your residence to warn you about a certain trap being laid against you. I owe it to you, I have eaten your salt."

"What's that trap?"

"Since you spoke against friendship with China in the Parliament, the Chinese have alerted their agents against you."

"Who are those agents?"

"Some of the trusted members of the Indo-China Society like myself."

"What have you been asked to do?"

"You are a politician. It must be obvious to you that the task of reporting your talks with your Tibetan friends is assigned to us."

"So you are given espionage duties by the Chinese?"

"They pay us very well, particularly, for a special type of job."

"What is that?"

"Look, you have two Tibetans with you who are obviously anti-Chinese. Suppose, the Chinese decide to liquidate them,

they would pay us very well to carry out that job. But I promise your person will never be harmed."

"Do you go that far?"

"Our gang works on hire. Every job has its price."

"And you are so outspoken about your dirty job? I would like to report it to the police."

He laughed—"That won't matter much, Master! Police is our partner in such jobs. However, I have disclosed this plot to warn you, because it concerns you, who once gave me my daily bread."

I was surprised to hear about the boldness of foreign official interests in organising subversive crimes of a murderous nature on our soil. But connected with this affair, there were other bigger surprises in store for me, just round the corner.

VII

Next day I returned from the Parliament, dejected and depressed at the turn the Tibetan affairs had taken. I was trying to get back some confidence in myself in order to be able to face my Tibetan friends when the electric door bell began to ring like an alarm. On opening the door I found a high police officer in smart uniform waiting for me. He pushed the doors wide open saying—"Sir, I have been directed to this place on an urgent and most important business of international importance. I do expect your whole-hearted cooperation in the interest of law and order."

"What has happened?"

"The Chinese have approached us with a serious complaint that in this house two of the most dangerous criminals from Tibet are hiding. We have to get hold of the culprits and hand them over to the Chinese authorities for their immediate deportation."

"Did they tell you anything about the exact type of crime these Tibetans are said to have committed?"

"The Chinese Counsellor who rushed with the request to our office himself was greatly agitated about this affair. According to him both these Tibetans were posted in Tibet by the Americans with military assignments of top significance. The man in Lama's garb had succeeded in stealing some papers of the Chinese armed forces. He had also smuggled a large quantity of gold from the Tibetan region of China. The girl accompanying the Lama is the most dangerous American secret agent. Her assignments in connection with securing information about Chinese army movement can compare well with the famous Mata-Hari of the Germans in the First World War. The Chinese accuse the girl of poisoning and murdering many fairly high ranking Chinese communist functionaries and army officers posted in the Tibetan region of China. Furthermore, the Chinese Embassy has definite proof that these two criminals are here to contact the American Embassy to arrange their escape to safety. This must be stopped at any cost."

"Have the Chinese the right to dictate to the Delhi police what action it should take in such matters?"

"Well, for the crimes committed by their nationals and to apprehend them, they have to approach us."

"Directly?"

"They may come through our External Affairs Ministry. But in view of the most cordial relations existing between China and India, such directions through the External Affairs are mere formalities. We cannot afford to waste time, because the culprits might make good their escape. Those usual writs are being made ready. In the meantime I have to take the criminals to my custody."

"You can't take the law in your hands this way?"

"Then how are we to apprehend thieves and murderers?"

"Through the usual course of law."

"We have enough powers to arrest anyone. I can get the Lama involved in a theft and kidnapping case now going on in the Connaught Circus area and arrest him. The girl can be arrested on a charge of infanticide. Such charges are very easy to frame. Subsequently when they are in police custody, the nature of the charges may be changed."

It seemed he could chalk out the whole course of investi gation and his attractive reward including that from the Chinese in advance. With a smile of contentment showing how expert he was in untangling murders and mysteries, he gave his verdict—"Some high personality like an M.P. or a diplomat might be implicated with that Tibetan beauty. Not only Delhi but the whole country will soon talk about this top scandal. I request you, not to get entangled in it. Don't allow the criminals to go out in your own interest. In any case they can't escape in this heat and find a new place since we control every house. In an hour's time I shall be back with necessary papers and armed escorts."

Taking it for granted that I should have to act according to his instructions, he drove away in his motorbike.

VIII

My Tibetan guests had overheard the conversation. The very idea of being handed over to the Chinese had frozen them with fear. Scarcely a human being could have been more terrified on his journey to the gallows.

"We are lost and doomed," Pema broke the silence—"I had a different conception of the Indian laws. Here are quite a large number of Communists and the so-called members of China-India Friendship Society who indulge in the stealing of State and military secrets in the interest of the

Chinese. Since those charges cannot be proved easily they remain free. These Commies are so well looked after that at the slightest complaint of headache, their employers take them abroad for treatment."

"I know of a case," the Lama said—"when an underground Chinese agent charged with actual political murder was introduced to Indian leaders as the patron and model of China-India friendship. Who does not know that the Chinese in Delhi are in close contact with the Communist Party of India for espionage work? Obviously they have much closer contact than their Embassy has with the Foreign Office of India. In order to keep their own criminal activities covered the Chinese are misleading the Indian police by focusing their attention on us, poor Tibetans."

We had to act quickly to escape the clutches of the police. We emptied some bottles of cold water and a few mangoes for lunch. This nourishment struck an extraordinary cheerful note in us. As if released from a coma, Pema asked—"How far are the Himalayas from here by car?"

"About five hours drive."

"I prefer to have my grave there than in the dungeons of the Chinese."

"Yes," the Lama supported her. "There, it is just heaven. We shall have a full view of the snowcovered peaks beyond which lies our dear Tibet."

Hurriedly we got into the small Olympia car I had. A leap from the steaming Delhi to the heavenly heights was well within our reach.

Sange Rimpoche raised his hand in a gesture of blessing to us and said in his usual calm voice: "We must have great patience and a will of iron, and then leave the rest to the Great Tathagata."

3. *UNDER THE SHADOWS OF THE HIMALAYAS*

I

We had a glorious sunset at a sharp bend of the Ganga. Varieties of colours melted into the calm river. The sun covered with a layer of pink clouds hesitated before a dip down below the horizon.

Dust, heat, horror and shadowing by the police on the plains were left far behind. The road along the river climbed towards the approaching foot of the Himalayas. It seemed to be cooler there.

From the top of a hill we had a view of Hardwar. A neat oval island was crowded by a congregation of visiting pilgrims. The evening rays washed everything—the people, the township and the fast flowing stream.

"This view reminds me of Gyala on the Tsangpo what you call the Brahmaputra and connected with it is an incident—" said Pema—"I was a mere child then. There was a sudden flood in the river and to me it was very exciting. In my mind, the muddy waves carried strange caravans loaded with the wealth of unknown kingdoms. Mother had great difficulty that evening in putting me to bed. At night, I was shaken from my dreams of meeting the unknown, handsome prince of untold riches. The waves rushed around in a terrific swirl. They overleaped one another to seize yaks, human dwellings and the market-square. I leaped to the window to save myself from the gushing and hissing waters sweeping over the floors. It appeared like a wild dance of the evil spirits. My father fiercely fought but was compelled to abandon the house asking me to jump over his shoulders. Our village perished. Only a few who had climbed the roofs survived."

"Such floods are common on this side of the mountain also."

"Tibetans and Indians are children of the same Himalayas. The mountain and the rivers inspire the same emotions and feelings in us. Our ways of worship of Nature and the Lord are the same. Then why should Tibet belong to the Chinese with whom we have nothing in common?"

"We will drive out the Chinese from Tibet," the Lama said from the rear seat.

As we climbed higher it became more windy outside. I was about to shut the windows of the car, but Pema stopped me—"Don't deprive me of the mountain air for it reminds me of Tibet. The thunder high up and the Ganga below give me a new life."

II

When the rains were about to break upon the mountains we noticed that we had reached Mussooree, the 'beauty queen' of the Himalayas. It does not enjoy the distinction of being the summer seat of any Government, so the place is free from the rigidity and selfishness of official snobbery. During the hey day of the feudal aristocracy, this place was favoured specially for musical gathering and beauty contests amongst the 'Ranis'. After the abolition of landlordism, the cost of living in the hill-town had gone down, and now it could suit the pockets of the common people as well.

What one could call the special attraction of Nature here is the shade of the valley below and the cool bright light of the sun high above the ridge on which the township stands. Due to the sudden steep rise of the magnificent green hills from the plains of this region, the shape of the clouds and their play in sunshine always assume contrasted colours. In this countless play of heavenly light and shade, our Lama

had an ideal 'book' from which he could read for us the fortunes of Tibet and India.

Our objective—a small wooden cottage was situated on top of the tallest hill in the northern area known as the Happy-valley. From that dominating point we had a clear view of various snow-ranges where the pointed peaks looked like a white forest. Amongst those, the contour of the most sacred ones—Badrinath and Kedarnath looked solemnly meditative.

The cottage was owned by a 'Raja-Sahab' of Lucknow who had won it in a gamble and forgotten all about it. Being located far from the inhabited areas and accessibility also being difficult, no 'changer' ever came to stay there. Even the watchman never cared to climb to the top. This uncared for and unrepaired place suited me ideally. For a small tip to the watchman and a few annas to his daughter to let her enjoy a cheap matinee show, I had occupied the 'sky-touching' cottage for as long as I wished on previous occasions.

This time while driving to Mussooree with my Tibetan friends in a predicament, I had the same place in view. We sought out Tara, the watchman's daughter, and she opened the cottage for us.

Haunted by fate and shadowed by mysterious men having a hostile intent, groping through the mist, without knowing our destination, we thus suddenly discovered that we stood on the threshold of our shelter.

III

Missing glass-panes showed the Eastern horizon getting bright. The golden pink of the dawn covered a large part of the sky. Night began to turn into day.

The strange far away panorama was thrilling. Quite a number of unknown and unnamed peaks stood silently as

sentinels of Heaven. Their stillness was so complete that even the beating of nature's heart seemed to have stopped.

Suddenly, a light rosy apron was removed and there stood two peaks in their majestic grandeur. Pema stopped on her way to the spring, in prayer.

Sange Rimpoche had climbed the top rock for meditation. Though it was cold outside, he removed his upper garments and lay flat over the rock with his hands stretched by way of greeting the horizon. His vision must have reached the 'Gompa' in Tibet with the statue of the divine Buddha. He stood erect to look far away and to bow. He bowed many times.

Visibility faded. The peaks put on their aprons of thin haze and thick clouds. Soon, several layers accumulated over them. The grand view of the Heavens disappeared.

Putting on his garments, the Lama greeted us—"Salutations to Buddha!"

Both of us responded—"Salutations to Lord Buddha!"

IV

Pema prepared in the kitchen some Tibetan tea, which is a substantial food and invited us to take it there. She lit a nice fire around which we took our seats on some logs of wood. Everything was so agreeable that Sange Rimpoche commented: "Truly, human being is created for inspiration, for sweet songs and for prayers."

"No, Bhante! (Reverend)"—replied Pema—"we Tibetans seem to be doomed to suffer and weep."

"History has never allowed such woe to prevail for long. Of course, at the moment the Chinese dream of swallowing the whole of the Himalayas along with the Everest, all the hill-people and even the sacred land of the Buddha as a piece of cheese for their dessert."

"Sure I am, the Chinese stomach will burst sooner than they can grab so much."

"A well aimed bullet must be fired before they digest Tibet."

"That is what we shall do," Pema said as if making a vow to the burning fire—"We shall make plans for new decisive battles right here."

V

Outside, the monsoon seemed to have arrived in full swing. Rain and violent wind struck the corrugated roof over-head.

We had little protection against it. But along with it rushed in the mountain freshness, which was most welcome. Without caring to wipe out the fine particles of rain which covered her face, Pema continued—"The music of my life and that of my country is destroyed by the Chinese."

"Why do you talk of music only"—the Lama interrupted her—"The Chinese plan is to exterminate the entire Tibetan race—this exactly is what they mean by liberation'."

"The most unfortunate thing is that Tibet is mute. Our cries of agony are drowned in the trumpeting of the Chinese victory. The outside world believes only in the Chinese version. No man outside believes that we ten million people of Tibet are human beings, that we laugh in pleasure and weep in pain. That day when the Chinese forces entered Chamdo, they most inhumanly pressed literally all life out of us, and threw us out into the street—cold, naked, bleeding, starved—dying. They dragged our bodies to the market-square and took photographs—to show how dirty we were before the 'liberation'. Then they brought good food, good clothes, medicine and the pictures of their ruthless leaders.

Not even a morsel of food, an inch of cloth or a drop of medicine was given to the Tibetan population. And the whole world sighed with relief—Tibet has been relieved of the oppression of the Lamas, its exploiting rich class and its historic backwardness."

The rains began to soak her but she remained ignorant of it—"Tell me, can the most inhuman torture and slaughter of ten million Tibetans remain an internal affair of the Chinese? Have the Chinese the right to wipe out a whole race for its only crime of believing in Buddha? And the whole world witnesses it and admires the Chinese for their unprecedented achievements!"

"By such behaviour the cultured nations forfeit their right to call themselves even human, not to speak of being cultured and civilised," the Lama said sipping the last gulp of tea from his bowl.

"We do not know yet anything about the Chinese atrocities in Tibet," I intervened.

"That is the greatest tragedy," said Pema feeding the fire—"The entire Tibetan race will be wiped out from the face of the earth silently, without the outside world knowing even that the Tibetans died fighting like human beings and in defence of human dignity. They suffered tortures and agonies of a blazing hell for the noblest aspirations of mankind. Human history will never record these facts : that will remain the greatest of human tragedies of all times to come."

"They will speak only about suzerainty—" the Lama put down his empty bowl—"Due to that undefined legal enchantment, the Chinese action will be justified according to the laws made by men."

"May be, history may take a different turn even now"—I tried to assure them.

Pema got up saying—"Let's hope, it does. They have talked of the French revolution, the American, the Russian, the Chinese and the Indian. Why should not they now talk of the Tibetan revolution?"

Outside the weather had cleared and we imagined we could see up to Tibet. Looking in that direction the Lama said something like a prophecy—"Children! the Tibetan revolution is right there; you have only to recognise it as a reality of the greatest historic magnitude in the long line of human destiny."

VI

A fresh gust of wind and shower seeped through our hut. Pema inhaled it greedily and said excitedly, "If I could only talk of the proud bravery of our Khampa fighters that would become the greatest story of the tragic trial and the surprising survival of the human spirit breathing on the high altitude of the top of the world. That is sure to turn world opinion in our favour. Human beings will have to recognise the magnitude of human agony and tragedy in the cry coming from the depth of the soul of ignorant nomadic Kham people. Then the great and small nations will jointly say—'You Chinese Imperialists! You are a shame to humanity! Your highest enjoyment has been to maim the Tibetan soul, and when that soul wailed in agony you enjoyed it as a sign of your cultural victory. You consider yourself worthy of world admiration for piling up death by the blood-thirsty brutes—you call your liberation army. Throughout Tibet, what a grand tornado of raging hell have you started! Since that raging hell is bound to be spread by you also in other parts of Asia and the world, we stand against you, if for nothing else, to retain at least the right of calling ourselves—Man."

It was alternately sunshine and drizzle which brightened and darkened our 'shelter'—the closed verandah.

But above all, it was the mountains which spread a magic spell over Pema.

VII

After a week of heavy shower, thunder and mountain storms indicating the peak of the Mussooree monsoon, the weather cleared. Once more sunshine and clouds played 'cat and mouse' in the morning sky. The woods danced in relief.

On one day particularly, following his religious tradition, the Lama had to go to several doors to ask for alms. We took his permission to go for an outing to the Gimti falls.

The mountain miracle worked wonders. Pale and peevish as Pema had been in Delhi now she turned into a 'lovely princess of gold'—the 'swarnapari', as they say in common folklore. Catching hold of me she said—"Let's run and see who goes faster . . ."

"Goodness!" After a short distance she stopped to catch her breath—"How heavy my legs are! Out of practice!"

We had to walk five miles to reach the falls. The narrow uneven path passed through a thick forest of tall pine-trees. The fresh air we inhaled had the fragrance of the far away Tibetan snows where the wind came from. Our hands were joined together for safety, we walked silently over the thick carpet of green 'pipe-needles' shaken down and spread out by the storm which had passed over the area.

The Gimti river swollen in rains jumps from a good height without caring for what is going to happen next. Surely, it is possessed with some spirit seeking its best expression of unbounded joy and liberty.

We took an untrodden path. It went through rocks, cliffs and precipices. Turnings were sharp and from every bend

we had a new view along the rushing course of the stream. Finally, we had a view of the stream falling into a wide river—the Jamuna. Pema wanted to get it confirmed—"Your big rivers originate in the Himalayas. Isn't it so?"

"They do."

"Our Tsangpo, too."

Reconnoitiring the place we came across a young foreign couple of our age. Both of them had only bathing shorts on. The girl nearer to water tried to judge its depth in order to reach a spacious cave beyond with trickling water from its roof like a shower of heavy drops.

"Ai-Hilfe! Hilfe!" came the voice of the girl.

"What is she afraid of?" Pema asked me.

"Of crocodiles"—The foreigner laughed.

"They are not so bad as the Chinese"—Pema assured him and proceeded towards the water—"I will make friends."

We saw the two girls talking more with signs than with human sounds. And when the sound came, it was an outbreak of laughter. They both entered the water, swam and played 'carom' on the water-board. Then they decided to go to the other side—to the caves.

Reaching there, they stood as a pair under the shower of dripping water. No ballerina could have looked more superbly beautiful.

They danced—'awakening of the angels' in real life.

VIII

We got introduced to each other. Willy Krafft was a journalist from Berlin and his wife—Hanna—came from Vienna. Our talk turned to Tibet when he came to know that Pema was a Tibetan.

"In the eyes of the world, India has let down Tibet very badly," he said—"Before I came to your country, we heard

so much noise about peace and non-violence from your part of the world that I thought inter-Asiatic politics would be free from violent conflicts. But the way China is trying to colonise Tibet, surpasses even Mussolini's brutality in Ethiopia and Hitler's ruthlessness against the Polish Jews. No doubt, the Chinese are famous for their inhuman cruelties. What has surprised the world is India's tacit condonation of the Chinese misdeeds—crimes against humanity, in the name of Panch-sheel. This very mistake may embolden the Chinese to march against other Asiatic countries, including India. In the fair name of the five principles the Chinese try to cover the worst atrocities of the human history. This has shocked the whole world."

Pema and Hanna returned from the caves holding each other in friendship of school girls and chattering in German and Tibetan. No salon of beauty could have managed to enrich them with so abrupt a change in such a short while. They were conscious that they had become different, and were almost surprised when we still called them Hanna and Pema.

IX

All of us returned together to Mussooree. Against the background of the sky, the many coloured lights, switched on, looked like hanging jewels. They helped us in finding out our way ahead. Promising to meet again, we parted from our new German friends at the gates of Charleville Hotel where they were putting up.

That night before falling asleep, Pema asked me—"Don't you think, you are ruining your brilliant future by joining us in our fight for Tibet? I must be a burden to you already?"

Sange Rimpoche replied on my behalf—"You can't judge others."

X

Days passed in expectation of new happenings in Tibet and changes in our life, which, we were sure, were bound to fall to our lot one day. The waiting was quite long.

But they did come quite unexpectedly when I left the ground on a flight to Tibet.

4. *ON A FLIGHT TO TIBET*

I

The Library-Bazaar is situated at the top entrance of Mussooree. From a band-point at this spot, the view of the wide expanse of the Doon-valley unfolds scene of romance in nature's creation. Accessibility being easy, the place always attracts a number of people of various tastes.

One afternoon, having purchased some sweets for Pema, I was about to return to the hill-top cottage, when some one called from a roadside tea-house window—"Doc!"

Turning in that direction I recognised him and replied—"Pal!"

He was my flying instructor and later on pilot of many unexplored regions including the Kanchanjunga and the Nanga-Parbat massives. His call was, as on previous occasions, a call to new adventures.

Inviting me for tea he remarked—"Your defence of Tibet seems to have chopped off your wings in politics, but I suppose you haven't given up flying altogether?"

"For quite some time I haven't been in the air."

"All the more reason to soar higher."

"How?"

"With your flying instinct, you can kick off the smug people around you and experience the bliss of high altitude. What happened to the L-5 plane you had acquired?"

"Can't afford the fuel for it."

"These are hard times, but precisely to get rid of the depressing atmosphere, you should keep at least your basic flying hours."

"With your encouragement, I should be able to do some flying."

"You are always welcome. You may come tomorrow for a short hop if you feel like."

"Where do we go?"

"That's immaterial. I have to test the performance of the new engines I have installed in the plane."

"What plane you have?"

"It's a private DAK which operates in Assam but is chartered whenever there is any demand for it."

"What brings you here?"

"A rich newly married couple coming over to Mussooree for their honeymoon chartered the plane. The nearest landing ground is at Saharanpur. The deteriorating weather gave me a chance to hop up to this height for a cup of tea."

"In what direction you intend to fly now?"

"Well, we have now new DC-4 engines. We can take the plane for an altitude performance test."

"Fine. The Badri-Kedar peaks were very alluring this morning."

"Feel like flying over them?" he asked with a smile—"We can fly over Tibet as well."

"This is most exciting. When do we start?"

"Had we our own transport, two in the morning will be ideal to leave Mussooree."

"I have my Olympia here. From where do I pick you up?"

"From this very tea-house. The owner is a friend of mine. He always fixes up a room for me here. His charming wife is a Bhotia of Tibetan origin. You never see one like that in the pictures of the Hollywood beauty contest even. She makes you fly without planes."

"I know also a Tibetan girl. They have a golden charm in their beauty."

"Some day we shall give these two a joy ride. If there are two beauties, we need not fight a duel in the air."

II

A chance to fly over Tibet was breath-taking. In the direction of the high peaks it was clearing up, an indication of good weather the following morning.

I took out the road map of India from the car, spread it on the rocks where the Lama used to pray, and began to study the landmarks we were to pass over during our flight. Luckily not only the roads but also the peaks and the rivers originating in those regions were clearly indicated in the map. Provided the weather favoured us, we could easily cover the air-space between the Gangotri and the Nandadevi.

Pema and the Lama were even more excited with joy. They thought, if one could cross the Himalayan skies to reach Tibet, that would be a performance of the supreme miracle not achieved so far by any man.

"I will be praying for you all the time," said Pema.

The Lama predicted—"Heavenly gods will equip you to kill the dragon threatening Tibet and the Himalayas."

III

Everyone was in deep sleep when I reached the car, released the brakes and allowed the vehicle to roll downhill. Pal too got in silently.

We felt being pushed forward also by a greater force than that of the engine. It was still dark, but we were sure, at day time, we were going to have unusual, exceptionally brilliant superhuman experience.

IV

"You know," experienced pilot Pal explained—"flight over our Himalayan peaks or to the roof of the world beyond does not involve flying out of the ordinary. Modern aviation has developed to the extent that you can shoot up

millions of miles into the space and orbit round the moon, the sun or the Mars or any other planet."

"Here in our country we don't even dream of such adventures."

"It is because our everyday petty problems being paraded as 'spiritual' by us pull us back with a stronger gravitation than that of the earth."

"But that is degenerating our manhood."

"It is. A peaceful fossil is a dead and gone thing of the past. Why? Because what you do not renew constantly cannot be called life."

We had reached the air-strip.

V

"Everything ready" one of the crew standing at the doors of the plane reported—"All tanks full. Engines warmed up."

"Let's shoot up!" commanded Pal, showing me the co-pilot's seat.

The first rays of the sun infiltrated through the red pack of clouds. The dawn had a laughing face. Millions of dew particles over a grassy landing-strip lit up our run-way ahead. The star-board side where I had my seat was reflected in a shallow patch of rain-water. Our own imagination conjured up whatever it wished in the reflection. Perhaps it was the influence of our Tibetan friends.

We had a feeling as if an unknown, invisible powerful being came over to accompany us as our guide to the unknown heights we had planned to reach. Our climbing gear which we pulled up had the smooth indication—'Nothing can go wrong now.'

Shaking off our touch with the earth, we became air-borne. Mango groves making an offering of their fruits had a

blessing for us. A mendicant resting there looked at us, and reminded me of Sange Rimpoche saying—"Your wishes will be fulfilled."

Rapidly we gained height. In a matter of moments we hovered over Hardwar. The sacred island encircled by the Ganga had the shape of an awakened saint meditating before the sky-touching mountains.

We bumped against some white clouds with a jerk. Pal said, throwing a glance at the instruments—"We better follow the course of the Ganga."

"Right up to its source at Gangotri," I suggested.

"That's easy."

To our left was a game-sanctuary. The thick forest looked asleep. The winding course of the Ganga made it clear, the river must be roaring with the joy of getting rid of the long arms of the hills on both sides. Even nature had her own way of the expression of freedom.

Further up on our course the green hills rose taller, and the river which divided them sharply looked like a flat blade of a long winding sword. Pal pointed out—"Look! That confluence of two streams is that of Bhagirathi and Alaknanda, it will lead us to the Badrinath peaks, and if we follow the Bhagirathi we shall reach Gangotri—the source of the Ganga."

"We follow the Bhagirathi," I suggested.

The panorama ahead had taken the pattern of an amphitheatre. Green ranges reached the heights above tree-level, and after appearing in innumerable waves merged into the white snowline of the horizon. There was nothing comparable to the confluence ahead, anywhere in the neighbourhood. The two upper arms of the Ganga swayed in parallel directions towards the peaks. The left one looked more enchanting.

Gradually, a big mound of snow to our left raised its head higher over the snowline. It had a peculiar shape of an animal. As it came in view, clearer lines of detail helped us more and more to guess what it could be. In the meantime, another pointed peak rose above the snowline and raced high towards the skies. The exact formation was now unmistakably recognised, the left one was Bandarpunch—the Monkey-tail-peak, 20,720 feet high.

From a different angle I had seen that peak quite a number of times from Simla. Often, while skiing at sun-set time, on that particular peak I had seen the last rays reflect and create an illusion of a man standing at the top. My skiing companion, Major Jayal, had actually been once to that top and had related his unique experience.

Today no one stood on the peak. Perhaps it was this missing imaginary figure that somewhat dwarfed Bandarpunch in comparison to its neighbouring Gangotri, 21,890 feet high, which stood to our right.

The snowlines of the Himalayas lay right below us. Here it looked as if the mountain pointed its hundreds of white spears towards us. Maybe some gods resting there too, tried to touch our wings with their white pointed figures. Rarely have human beings dared disturb the eternal solitude of these heights. Many who had dared in the past were beaten back. Powerful motors were at our command, which this time subdued the rage of the elements. They were unable to create any fear in us. Our feeling was the same as one feels when sailing in a calm lake without ripples.

Pal was very enthusiastic—"We shall push further ahead. We have plenty of oxygen on board, in case our brains get foggy."

"When you go to gods, naturally, you go around the

temple. We shall make a circuit around the holy peaks," I suggested.

The sharp blade-like Bhagirathi's course disappeared somewhere in the Gangotri massive.

We began to locate the origin of the Ganga. But a new peak emerged from the white haze. We located it as the 20,120 feet high Srikanta. The name correctly catches the beauty of the peak and its place of eminence in that divine panorama.

VI

None of the peaks surrounding us were ever climbed. The possibility of man setting foot on a majority of them was remote. Three or four peaks which looked insignificant from here, were of course, conquered by a dozen or so most daring men. They despised death to reach their targets. But even then, their feet remained rooted to earth. That greatness of the panorama facing us had remained unapproachable to them.

VII

What we saw was the grand masterpiece of Nature at her best. Not even in the fairy-tales man had ever lived through such experience. The grand painting of Nature's supreme genius made us dizzy. We came in direct physical and spiritual communion, not only with that grandeur but with the Infinite.

It made us spell-bound, breathless, full of joy and terror at the same moment. Human consciousness expanded and contracted. The very feeling of existence became dormant. Space . . . Only vacant space . . . Nothingness . . . Nirvana in Life.

VIII

Suddenly, the nose of the plane went down. We dived a little and this made us terror-stricken. I felt like being in a coma.

Quietness was only an illusion, incessant noise of the engines dominated every other sound. Two men were talking —the pilot and the mechanist:

"We have flown close to the down-windside below the summit of Gangotri."

"May strike terrific down-drafts."

"I have no intention of diving down on the Ganga and on to the sea."

"But I don't think it is possible to take a turn."

"Neither can we go round the peak!"

"The only course left to us is to go ahead."

"That way we enter Tibet and may be, through some other draft-free pass we may return."

"What about switching on for a met-report?"

"No observation points in these regions are available."

"What about endurance?"

"Another five hours."

"That's plenty. And Oxygen?"

"Must economise now."

"I'm opening the canopy."

Icy air hit my face. I revived and woke up again. Once again the eyes struck a tent-shaped peak. Dazzling snow made the view amazingly different from what could have been in reality.

The form of a snnow-sage crystallised! His hair compared to a milky forest from which a glacier trickled. Below that transparent ice-river a spirit lay dormant in isolation. Molten-steel-coloured rays of the sun touched the sleeping spirit like

a magic stick. A throbbing life under the glacier-ice burst in and rushed for freedom.

Someone whispered to me—"Birth of the Ganga."

IX

Having now braced up, even my physical discomfort gave me a pleasant feeling of joy. Icy breath had something new in it—a sweet fragrant taste.

The pilot asked—"Are you now free from aeroembolism?"

"Was I affected?"

"Anyway, we have recovered from down-drafts."

"Where are we heading for?"

"Tibet."

"Nature in that direction does not look inhospitable."

"Well, can't say how we shall fare further up. While you dozed off, I got alarmed by a down-draft which sucked us down. To come out of it we had to run for Tibet in any case."

"It saved us from death," said the mechanist.

"You must not think of death when you are on your own over the Himalayan heights—" The pilot corrected him—"The only possible way forward for us is an iron determination not to strike the peaks. We dare not slip any more."

X

"What's our position?" I enquired.

"We are over Mana-Pass, which is 18,410 feet high," replied the pilot pushing aside the map from his lap—"We are right in the centre of the roof of the world. This whole area is listed as unexplored. These maps are so inaccurate that the distances they show are grossly misleading."

In front of us lay a rugged country as far as eyes could reach. Outside blew a strong wind which made us feel as

if we were crossing high-seas on the ocean-liner. Here again, we faced terror which had a faint lining of joy."

The pilot asked—"What course should we take now?"

"Where do we hit if we fly straight?"

"Gartok, where the Chinese are. They are so secretive about their position that in case we make a force-landing there, they will arrest us as spies and eat us up raw without salt."

"I have no intention to have my residence inside the stomach of a laughing Chin-Chan-Chinaman," said the mechanist.

Ahead of us at some distance, there was a sharp cut by a blue dazzling ribbonlike blade into the rugged terrain, devoid of any greenery. The contrast between the deep-brown rocks and the dark-blue line of the stream was very sharp.

"Look," said the pilot—"There is our Sutlej which flows through my birthplace. We shall follow its course to reach back home."

The Sutlej was coming nearer. Reminded by its flow the pilot continued moving his fingers around—"All this territory which contains the source of our life-giving rivers and some of our sacred peaks are now under the forcible occupation of the Chinese. What do they look for here? Nothing. They have absolutely no justification in setting foot on these sacred regions of ours as cruel invaders. These territories are our places of pilgrimage and a source of inspiration to our people from time immemorial. The Sutlej runs in both directions here, the West and the East. Tell me, which side we should turn."

"West—" suggested the mechanist—"Shipki-La, the beautiful pass is not far from here. Through it we can return home—or we can press on to the Rohtang-pass."

"Isn't it the pass where the Pandavas are supposed to have

perished on their way to the Heavens?" the pilot enquired and conveyed his decision—"I have no desire to reach Heaven so early, therefore, I won't like to take that course."

Actually, by turning west, we had to face a strong head-wind. Saving of our spirit and aviation-fuel was very important.

We took the eastward course of the Sutlej.

XI

Now, straight ahead, we saw a towering peak which was truly the most beautiful of all those we had come across so far. Its shape was reflected in vast sheets of water at its foot, in romantic silence eternally unperturbed.

"Kailash—" the pilot whispered to me—"by the side of Gurla Mandhata, 25,355 feet. Below, the Mansarovar."

So, we had reached Lord Shiva's abode. According to mythology, the God of ceaseless creation and destruction lived there. And there was the prime fountain of all we have been, we are, and ultimately, we shall be.

On the western slope of the peak, the lake gave birth to the Indus, what we call the Sindhu. The Brahmaputra rose from the same source in the East. These two are the mighty arms of our Motherland—one reaching the Arabian sea and the other the Bay of Bengal.

On our right was a long gallery of white pillars which held up the skies over their pointed crowns of diamonds. Summits which we could recognise were those of Gangotri, Badrinath, 25,447 feet high Kamet and the 25,645 feet high Nandadevi massives. Innumerable streams trickled from the foot of these mountains which not only watered land but gave birth to our civilisation, culture, and promoted the growth of the very soul of our being.

All that we saw was the frozen beauty of the magnificent imagination of nature.

XII

Gurla-Mandhata—the sound reminded me of my plans to climb the peak with Major Jayal. Nothing came out of it because my companion found his snowy grave somewhere near a peak called—Cho-oyu—26,870 feet high.

How easy it is now with the advancement of aviation to reach the Mount Kailash!

Weather around the 16,628 feet high Niti-pass was uninviting. A strong tail-wind was taking us further east faster. Looking towards an opening to the right, the pilot murmured—"Here we must make a bid to return home safely."

"Where are we now?" I asked.

"Over the Darma pass."

"That sounds like the 'Dharma', the Law or what the Buddhists pronounce 'Dhamma'."

"Buddham Saranam Gacchami"—the pilot repeated the famous enchantment—"Buddha is our shelter."

Our prayers brought another view soon in sight. Taking advantage of the clear weather between the Nanda-Devi and the Nanda-Kot, we flew over the Pindari glaciers.

Snowlines were left behind. The Pindar river led our way to the planes. The thick jungle could not mislead us. Trekking to the Pindari glaciers once had left an unforgettable imprint of the landscape in my mind.

Effortlessly we buzzed over Ranikhet and Nainital. A couple of sailing boats stood motionless in the midst of the mountain-lake. From the height we were flying, the sails made a perfect formation resembling the two olive-shaped eyes of the Tibetan girl, Pema.

Pictures of Heavenly mountains were replaced by angels of the human world.

We looked at an even, grassy patch of land below and came to an immediate decision—"Here is a landing strip. It must be Haldwani. We shall just slip in."

Smooth as a duck over water we came to a stop.

Looking behind, my glance struck the hills covering themselves shyly with an impenetrable haze. Beyond them were hiding the 'Heavenly-belles' whom I felt quite close to me.

Now I know, what they meant to me, to the people around me and to our country.

5. *THE BEAUTIA SUPERBA*

I

Still possessed with a real exhilaration and overflow of joy over our accidentally successful flight to Tibet, we took off from Haldwani after refuelling. As there were no night landing facilities available at Saharanpur, we headed towards Delhi. The pilot was a little apprehensive of what awaited us there—"We can expect from the Delhi authorities only abuses and punishment for making this flight, if they ever come to know about it. We shall somehow manage to keep it secret."

"Now, let come what may"—trying to keep him encouraged I said—"You do deserve the warmest congratulations for this amazing flight."

"Just imagine," the mechanist said—"How many months of severest hazards you have to go through to make a pilgrimage to Badrinath and Kailash Mansarovar. And here, in comfort, as if going on a luxurious stroll, we have covered the highest mountain range of the world."

"We have done this pleasant joy-ride in a sportsman's spirit," the pilot said—"Flying is not any more at the mercy of the gods of the sky or the whims of nature. Successful flights under difficult conditions have been made possible now, because man has gained sufficient control over the elements. Correct knowledge of the advancement of aviation enables you to shake off your timidity and to go in for dangerously thrilling ventures."

"It may have also practical utility of great value"—the mechanist said—"Suppose some day we have to defend our Himalayan borders and passes, of what immense value such flights will prove to the cause of the country."

The pilot advised—"For the time being let's forget all about it."

II

New Delhi's Safdarjang airport was being enveloped in dusk when we landed there. Recontact with earth reminded us of everyday problems and their strange solutions. Coming out of the cockpit was like getting into a furnace. Locking up our plane, we walked towards the tower.

The wide entrance of the building had some flowerbeds around it. It was surprising how those plants had not only survived the terrific heat but blossomed in multi-coloured flowers. A row of ladies lined the steps. Their features were not clear from that distance but the colour of their 'saris' stood the ground in competition with the flowers. Many of them carrying bouquets in hand had probably come to receive some top men of politics and wealth, or some beauty-star.

We did not come into that envied classification. Naturally, no one cared or even looked at our shabby dress and dusty faces. We silently stepped aside to make a passage for the air-conscious passengers coming from Srinagar in a service plane which had just come to a stop. Amongst them was a lady distinguished for her gaudy clothes, who proceeded towards the car park reserved for Very Important Persons. Actually, a bright skyblue glistening Cadillac was parked under a nearby tree. Growth of that tree had been forcibly and effectively stopped by a creeper. Wherever the tree had tried to show its independence, the arms of the creeper had wrapped around, pulled it down and gave it distorted, crooked, ugly looking twists.

The lady stood before the green foliage and the big red flowers of the creeper, compared herself with a smile, and

perhaps, felt convinced of the strange similarity. Red shiny flowers of the creeper looked exactly her prototype.

"The Beautia Superba—" pointed out our pilot. I could not guess whether he meant the creeper or the lady.

III

A battery of press-photographers had already trained their lenses towards her. She obliged them generously with an air of display usually shown by cinema stars.

Approached by airport reporters, she took out a paper from her hand-bag and read from it in dictation speed—"I have returned to the capital for a day to suffer the steaming heat in the great cause of China-India friendship. The anniversary of the signing of the treaty of Friendship over Tibet between our two great countries falls tomorrow. This is a historic day in the annals of Asia and the world. The main functions and receptions connected with this historic occasion will take place tomorrow at the newly opened Ashoka Hotel, at which I shall have to preside."

Disposing off these formalities, she turned to the cadillac driver in uniform and asked—"How! have you come alone?"

"Sahab and the Seth have gone to Chandni-Chowk to pick up the garlands made from the flowers which have arrived from Mysore by plane this morning. They will be here any moment. The arrival of your plane earlier than the scheduled time has upset our plan for your reception."

'Hm, they don't know even how to receive a person." She glanced around to locate some known faces; she recognised me, and said in a pleasant voice—"Ah, Doctor . . . what an agreeable surprise?"

"You have'nt forgotten my name?"

"Why should I? You were the only one to teach me ice-skating. Was it at Geneva or Paris . . . . No, no, it was

at Frankfurt-sur-Main in the palm-garden. Don't you remember?"

Finally, I could recollect her—Ranisaheba Vimla.

During my diplomatic service days in Switzerland, I met her first at Geneva, where she was taking lessons in French. The well-known Lucknow family she came of was fabulously rich and had acquired many titles during the British days. From her childhood she was educated in England. Her parents arranged matches for her, but she discarded and despised them all. She wanted to choose a partner over whom she could have complete control, and could twist or mould him anyway she liked. Such a man she found in a high official coming originally from a ruling state family. He was a widower and according to age could have been her father. To the great surprise of all who knew her, and in spite of the resentment of her parents, she married the white-haired highly placed 'Raja' officer, calling it love for the snowy-head at first sight.

I met her again in a hotel at Frankfurt when she accompanied her husband on his way to U.S.A., on some Government assignment. On seeing skates in my hand she had come with me to the ice-rink and asked me to teach her a dance on ice. Finding her a dull partner I had to leave her alone.

Now she had become a great celebrity and socialite of New Delhi due to the pull of her husband in Government circles ; also for the beauty of her face which was much above the average. In the estimation of certain foreign Embassies she was capable of influencing high policy matters even.

Since the fashion and inclination of Delhi's diplomacy had turned towards China, Rani Vimla became an ardent admirer of everything Chinese, including their wooden chop-

sticks, calico designs, closed-neck blouses and even the nasal pronunciations. My lack of admiration in such matters had annoyed her during our chance meetings at the various receptions in New Delhi. But above all, she had never forgiven my Frankfurt impertinence of which she reminded me now. —"You rejected me. Now come and tell me about your Sonya with whom you skated that evening. Was she Sonya or Tonya?"

"Never seen her since that evening."

"That's what I call passé. Any new choice? They say you have gone crazy about a Tibetan girl. How horrifying? Are they not the dirtiest on earth? The Chinese are bringing some civilization to them. Can you not wait until the Tibetan girl learns to wash her face?"

"Rani Saheba!" some one interrupted with a garland for her.

"Seth Motu-Mal!" Rani Vimla turned to him—"Did the car you were coming in collapse under your weight?"

"Only the engine coughed and the chassis gave way —though I'm still a younger brother to the Chinese fatty."

"You will attain your goal when your Tibetan business gets into full swing. By the way . . . " turning to me she introduced—"From the girth of Sethji you could have got his right name—Motu-Mal. Until recently he was quite a thin and insignificant figure with a small shop in an obscure place called Kalimpong. Since he secured his agencies to supply to the Chinese in their Tibetan region of China, you can see for yourself how he has prospered. He is our treasurer of the China-India Friendship Association. Such a generous.....And here at last comes my Darling!" She addressed her husband who had just turned up— "Darling dear! The State responsibilities have made you so

thin that I shall have to use spectacles to find your person. Dear, dear...This waiting for you has burnt up my skin. How do you compensate?"

"The best suite in the Ashoka has been reserved for you—" said Motu-Mal.

"I thank my stars, the hotel is just outside this Safdarjang runway," she said and touched the overhanging red of the "Beautia Superba" creeper while entering the car. Before the doors closed, she looked at me again and said—"You must come to our functions tomorrow—that will cure you of the Tibetan dirt."

IV

"Congratulations?" Pal came forward with outstretched hands.

"What for?"

"You have worked miracles on our boss."

"Who is he?"

"That Motu-Mal. He owns the plane we fly. Since you were introduced by Rani Vimla so admiringly, he has asked us to bring you along to Ashoka Hotel. They have a room for us also there, you will be most comfortable."

"What type of man is your Motu-Mal?"

"Hardly literate and practically uncultured—devoid of any sentiments. You will find in him an exceptionally interesting person—though very greedy in accumulating wealth and stingy in spending it unless sure of a profitable return."

An exceptionally tall and stout person, perhaps a retired bodyguard of the President stood in a Swiss Hotelier's uniform before the revolving doors of the hotel. He came forward to open the doors of our taxi and then ushered us in by giving a mild push to the thick sheet-glass.

We landed in a different world, heavenly cool and intoxicatingly luxurious.

Members of our crew exchanged some comment—"Look at this paradise! One need not run to the Himalayas or to Europe to save oneself from the Delhi heat."

"All air-conditioned! This is the best hotel in India."

"Not only in India but in the whole of Asia, maybe in the whole world. Could you improve upon it?"

"Certainly not. It has cost twenty five million rupees. Just imagine—in a country where per capita income is sixty rupees a year."

Pal enquired at the counter about our arrangements and tried to telephone his boss upstairs. My eyes got lost in the spacious parlour and found refuge in a wall painting. They had tried not to copy but to improve upon the imagination of the centuries old Buddhist frescoes of Ajanta. Outstanding feature of this wall painting was the thin pencil like limbs of the nymph while her bust matched a hillock. A similar caricature was made of nature, history and modern art.

Some foreign guests who passed by paid compliments to a hotel officer, perhaps a retired civil servant who was supposed to be an outstanding art connoisseur, and who was supposed to have ordered the frescoes. The officer felt flattered by the compliments paid to him for that 'superb example of ancient oriental art.'

Our mechanist of the plane explained the painting in a different way—"It is symbolic of our Indian life—limbs denote the working people, they must starve. Concentrated wealth represents beauty—invariably, the fat ones amass the greater wealth."

The topic changed when Pal came in to tell me, "The boss wants to talk to you some business. The lift will take you up.

Come to our room 556 when you get free. So long.....Wish you good luck....."

V

'Motu-Mal' was printed in thick letters on the entrance to the suite indicating the name of the occupant. The room-boy opened it and let me in into a salon.

On a wide sofa rested the bushy black body with a naked, huge bulging stomach. Three experts in massage simultaneously scrubbed his tree-like thick thighs, arms and the main trunk and a barber in milk-white apron plucked out hair from his nose and ears.

"I waste no time—" his voice was hoarse like sound coming from a broken earthen drum—"They look after my body while I continue my business talks. Tell me, was it not you who attacked in Parliament my business with the Chinese regions of Tibet, calling it anti-national? Did you not know that my business is in line with our national policy and I am a great patriot and philanthropist? Yes, I deal in bullets and dynamite. And the profits . . . did I not share with all concerned? The Chinese got their share for paying their Indian sympathisers, the communist party got its percentage for its active support to the civilising mission of China in Asia, the local politicians at Kalimpong got donations from me for their elections. I built shelters for the cow, and am now financing the China-India friendship celebrations. You should see that doing harm to my business is a national crime, treason, tantamount to sin for which God condemns culprits to hell.

"Your speech fell on deaf ears. Those who have to manage foreign wives and English standard of living must depend on our type of business. I can suitably utilise your services too. My pilot told me you can fly. But I have no need for

this talent. I need a man of your position in Delhi to keep an eye on stupid politicians so that they don't harm my business. Perhaps you can talk to them so that our poor country does not lose the cherished friendship of China."

He talked business and politics in one vein, and was not accustomed to interruption. Only when he turned the other side to get the rest of his body massaged, he broke his link for a moment and asked—"On what salary will you work for me?"

"I'm not looking for any job."

"Then why did the rascal of a pilot enroll you? You have seen now some of the areas on the other side of the Himalayas where we propose to do some supply-dropping. The Chinese have promised to pay me well, and I can give you a good salary if you go as a navigator on my plane on those flights to Tibet."

"I won't."

"Then why did Ranisaheba Vimla recommend you to me? I shall ask her. Anyway, never try to harm me. I must tell you—God loves me because I am good, I'm the darling son of the goddess of wealth Lakshmi, I always keep truth in view, feed so many, I have stretched out a helping hand to people of all ranks—from the highest in authority to helpless orphans and beggars. Keep it in mind, and God will be kind to you as well."

There was a tap at the door, and some one from the reception desk stepped in—"Miss Li of the Chinese Embassy whom you have invited for dinner and dance has arrived."

The normal tone of Seth Motu-Mal was loud enough, but this time, he shouted—"Boy . . . I'm Idiot . . . Dammed! Dress me quick in my dance 'achkan'! No! it will be a fool-dance, no, ball-dance—in my London-cut suit . . . "

VI

The gala-reception of the China-India friendship was arranged in the largest specially decorated dance-hall of Ashoka Hotel. The usual crowd on such occasions—political celebrities, functionaries of the foreign Embassies, high Government officers from the ministries and the unignorable captains of trade and industry had all trickled in. I was still hesitating to join them when the magnificently dressed door-keeper announced in the old Moghul court style—"Her Excellency the Great Ranisaheba Shrimati Vimalendu-mati . . ."

Everyone stood in attention in honour of the little, plump lady who entered in small slow steps matching her grandeur and gorgeous dress. It was evident, she demanded and thought herself that she deserved a pompous reception.

She had put on a deep red sari with wide golden embroideries. Tight fitting green blouse with creamy flowers gave prominence to her energetic youth. A large portion of her body between the sari at the waist and the blouse very high up, remained uncovered, displaying her wheatish complexion—finely blending with the colour scheme of her appearance. Carelessly she allowed her sari to fall down from her shoulders to bring into prominence her pretty doll-like round face with big glittering dark eyes.

A Chinese girl in coarse blue communist uniform of her country stepped forward to shake hands with the Ranisaheba. Everyone clapped, and those two ladies as a living symbol of the friendship of China and India became the centre of attraction.

Seth Motu-Mal read his address—"We heartily welcome Miss Li as the ambassador of charm, grace and goodwill of her country on our soil." There was prolonged clapping, then he continued—"We welcome as India's ambassador of

friendship towards China the most popular queen of Delhi who actually rules. Her orders are never disobeyed in any department—may it be a matter of permits or appointments or even foreign relations . . . "

"Enough of your oratory—" the Rani stopped him—"You are not on the floor of the Parliament here. There comes my husband. I must talk to him—Darling! Miss Li is all praise for you. Talk to her. You should not be so pensive. You must feel happy on the occasion of our China-India friendship day."

Her husband wore a look of overwork and showed an exaggerated sense of State responsibilities on his head, as is usual for men of his position placed very highly in official hierarchy. Ranisaheba touched her husband's hand to shake off his absent-mindedness—"You are sorry because I'm leaving you again tomorrow morning. I wouldn't have cared for Mussooree, leaving you again tomorrow morning. I wouldn't have cared for Mussooree, were it not that I was tied up with so many engagements there. Are you not proud of me that I have been repeatedly declared the beauty queen of the hills? This year I'm sure to get the title 'the beauty-queen of the Himalayas.' How proud you must be—Darling."

She would have gone on if Miss Li had not pressed her hand tightly as a signal to make a break to let her husband open his mouth.

The husband came out with a high-sounding story of his State worries—"Never heard of any quarrel over an air-space during all my years of service."

"Who is quarrelling now—Darling?"

"The Chinese planes have very often crossed the Himalayas and hovered over our territory; we never protested. Now, they have come out with a protest that one of

our planes had yesterday morning violated their air-space near Gartok, in the Tibetan region of China."

"It couldn't be yesterday morning, Darling! Motu-Mal's plane couldn't reach me at Srinagar ; it had been grounded somewhere on account of bad weather, and I had to take a service plane only when the weather cleared in the afternoon."

"My enquiries have also proved that none of our planes were in the Himalayan region at the moment. But they say—the plane was spying over Tibet."

Could it be a foreign plane?

"We suspect if it could be the job of American spies."

"But wherefrom could they operate?"

"The devil knows," Rani's husband stretched out his hand to Miss Li saying—"I must return to office."

'O, Darling! Can't you postpone your work?"

"No, I must prepare the reply to the Chinese protest. It will take the whole night."

"What a pity! But definitely I shall expect you next week at Mussooree. You will feel so proud of me when they elect me 'the beauty queen of the Himalayas.'

Miss Li took her husband aside and beckoned Motu-Mal to join. The merchant's whisperings were loud enough to indicate that he talked about steel, chemicals, machinery, dynamite, Chinese dollars, foreign exchange and the issue of necessary export licenses. Then Miss Li pulled them away until their talks sounded all Chinese.

A small group talked about the latest Delhi gossip and mentioned the disappearance of a Tibetan girl.

Ranisaheba gave the signal for dispersal—"I'm tired now," she told Motu-Mal—"I can't afford to let my skin dry in this Delhi heat. Ask them to keep your plane ready. Tomorrow I have to reach Mussooree."

Then she walked away towards the exit in the same ceremonious way she had entered.

VII

Next morning, we reached the airport before sunrise. There, I hid myself in the cockpit of the plane like a stowaway until we landed at Saharanpur.

Only when Rani Vimla's car left the air-strip, I came out to inhale fresh air.

Even on my drive back to Mussooree, I was finding it difficult to shake off a feeling of disgust. Mountain air was the only hope left for a full recovery.

6. *TIBET IS NOT LOST YET*

I

The Tibetan people groaned under the cruel trampling of the spiky boots of the Communist invaders from China. Their bones literally cracked. But the heights of the Himalayas obstructed their agonised death-moan from reaching the outside world. Whatever faint noise of the blood-soaked last breath could penetrate Delhi along with the North-wind, disappeared into the thumpings of the newly polished dance floors of Ashoka Hotel by beauties like Miss Li and Ranisaheba Vimla.

Miss Li's forefinger nail was particularly remarkable for its sharpness and real blood-colour. At its slight movement in a drawing-room or on a type-writer, it was capable of setting in motion a whole Governmental machinery as a turbine which resulted in pressing out and extinguishing life out of thousands of tall, healthy, fearless Khampa fighters of Tibet.

Chinese lines of communication between China and the Himalayan borders of India were very frequently cut off by the Tibetan fighters for freedom. Hardly any supplies could move on those thousands of miles-long hazardous routes on which nature also put its barriers. The life line of the Chinese troops posted particularly on the Himalayan snows hung in balance. On occasions like this, the forefinger of Miss Li moved in New Delhi and every type of stores, even those which were not available at Peking, reached the Chinese armies on the Himalayan heights.

Outside observers reported that India had invited the sinister Dragon at its door and was fattening it with milk and honey. About Tibet, the only reports available were

from the Chinese sources, which maintained that the process of liberation had gone far ahead there, and very soon that would be completed. Our own country preached that we had tamed the great dragon to the extent that it had given a solemn 'Panch-seel' promise never to thrust its teeth in India's body, and therefore, the new regime in Tibet was allowed to reign and to give complete order and peace of Chinese design to the Tibetans.

Reaching our cottage at Mussoore, we looked towards the snow-ranges. They seemed to be covered by the shadows of a dragon, gradually trying to widen its jaws.

II

Sange Rimpoche and Pema had borne both good and bad things of life indifferently. They just allowed life to go on as it came. Accustomed to a much more rigorous climate, keeping their bodies alive at Mussooree was no problem. Some chowkidars and petty shopkeepers of the neighbourhood became kindly disposed towards the Lama, when he stood at their doors. They provided him amply to maintain two human beings. The Tibetans didn't expect more from Providence.

When I tried to tell them about my flight over Tibet, they were excited to know the details. The Lama put in his own way—"What you see of me here is only my body, my soul is still restless wandering somewhere in Tibet. Your flight seems to unite these two."

His vision struck the snow-range but didn't seem to return. His mind crossed those barriers and reached Tibet—"Could you see any of our countrymen?"

"From that height we could not see any men. We didn't fly low or land because, the Chinese, in case they saw us, would have shot us down."

"But the Tibetans would have been overjoyed to see you," said Pema.

"We had a great longing to be amongst them, in their heated kitchen to have some tea."

"A large number of those houses do not exist any more," she sighed.

"The Chinese claim that they have liberated a large part of Tibet and no trace of anything reminding of Tibetan freedom remains there."

"No, my friend!" the Lama got agitated—"The Chinese reports are not correct. Most of the Tibetans are accustomed to the hardest possible nomadic life. In the usual course even, they set up their yakhide tents on inhospitable, stormy, high altitude plateaus. You are surprised to see that a man not only survives but actually leads a whole life under the constant attacks of the severest step-motherly furies of nature. The Tibetans having been schooled thus, it will not be easy for the Chinese to annihilate the total population of Tibet, however hard the Communist militarists may try for it. Tibetans will survive even the blazing hell created for the total extinction of that noble people with thousands of years of old chivalrous history behind them. Tibet has to survive and shall survive."

Our glances struck against the most distant peaks in the north. But they did not pose themselves as barriers for us anymore.

All three of us had a feeling that the great Lamaland was quite close to us.

III

I related to them also my Delhi experiences at Ashoka Hotel. That made them thoughtful. Any chance of returning to their homeland seemed infinitely shifting away. The

Lama had not moved his eyes yet from the distant peaks. As if getting fresh inspiration from them he said—"We have to keep alive our distinctive Tibetan characteristic—the essential spirit of survival, then however hopeless the situation may appear, we shall come out victorious."

Pema suggested that we all three would go for a long walk before we should fix up our future plans. Only a little distance we had walked when we came across the Kraffts—the Germans, we had met at the Gimti-falls.

"We were looking forward to contact you—" Krafft said, "Today I have received from our press a good number of newspaper cuttings which have flashed a very important news. The Chinese have massed a large number of troops on some strategic points on the other side of India's Himalayan borders. From their moves it is apparent that they are going to encroach upon Indian soil. Our press needs confirmation of certain details from me since I am here in the Himalayas. But it is amazing that the Indian press is completely silent on this affair, rather they are giving quite a lot of space for the further cementing of the China-India friendship. It is a paradox that right here when we are in the Himalayas, we are farthest from the alarming developments threatening these very regions. Anyhow, the Chinese military moves on Indian borders will have very far reaching consequences."

"Where will it lead to? What's your appraisal of these sensational happenings?"

"India is a big country, her people have a high sense of self-respect and great love for their soil. Once they realise the true implications of the Chinese designs, they are sure to drive out the Chinese invaders beyond the northern borders of Tibet, in the interest of permanent security of their land. Yes, your country is capable of achieving this

aim. As a result of these changes taking place, Tibet is bound to regain its lost independence."

"There lies the way—" the Lama supported Krafft—"Our Tibetan guerrillas have been waiting for such an opportunity. Their active support in cutting off the long lines of communications of the Chinese will contribute substantially to the victory of the Indian forces over the Chinese. The Great Lord always sees to it that the forces of good are victorious over the forces of evil."

Breathing the fresh mountain air deeply Pema said—"Tibet is not lost yet!"

IV

Sange Rimpoche returned to the cottage for prayers. The Kraffts invited Pema and myself for roller-skating.

We had still a long way to reach the rink. Hanna and Pema arm in arm looked like two school girls on a picnic. Krafft went ahead depicting the current political situation, "This impending Chinese encroachment on the Indian soil is a great challenge to Indian integrity and intelligence. It seems history is going to bestow a great honour upon India. Any country which enslaves others must go down and suffer defeat. China has not only enslaved Tibet but committed serious crimes against humanity there. Therefore, it has fallen to India's lot not only to free Tibet from inhuman brutalities, but also to destroy the poisonous teeth of the big wicked Dragon threatening world peace and humanity itself."

"Do you think it will be easy for India to do justice to this historic assignment?"

"We Germans consider such situation in terms of the firepower at the disposal of the country involved. This firepower takes consideration of the armed forces, their equipment, the

industrial production and the economy of the country, the morale of the people and the international position. Calculating all these factors, the odds and hazards fall very heavily upon the Chinese. Roughly speaking, one Indian soldier will be equal to seven Chinese soldiers in the coming fight for the Himalayas. The Indian fighting material is of a very high quality, the whole world knows it. The average officer and soldier is very high class, stout, courageous, well disciplined and daring besides being technically minded and intellectually trained. Therefore, there are no doubts in the mind of expert observers that India will not only successfully defend its Himalayan frontiers, but will make Tibet a free country again and drive out the Chinese hordes from where they came, in case they survived their snowy graves in the Himalayas, which is very hard.

V

Quite a pleasant evening we spent at the rink. Though insignificant, compared to the beauty and speed of the ice-skating, the rollers in our feet proved to be a good medium to enjoy the cheerfulness of the rink. Hanna had regained her Viennese elements. She had no skill as an acrobat but did justice to the graceful movements. Innumerable figures she executed to impress upon us the real grace of the Strauss Waltzes in the 'Viennese woods'.

Pema had also tried the sport at the Darjeeling gymkhana during her school days. But being out of practice, occasionally she fell down while practising the movements of the Austrian Donau Waltzes. Hanna helped her saying—"Don't mind the fall, you will learn a good deal from it. On skates it is just as in actual life."

"But my feet are paining—" Pema complained—"This 'sari' also obstructs. I may squeeze my heels."

"Never mind!" Hanna consoled her—"If you had nothing to complain of, I wouldn't teach you with so much affection."

Seeing our deep interest in the rink-life, the keepers kept it open for us long after the dull unsportsmen crowd of the visiting spectators had left. Time passed unnoticed. When we came out, we found, the weather had deteriorated. Showers came intermittently.

"You are so different from the English girls I had known during my school days at Darjeeling!" Pema asked me to translate it to Hanna.

"Tell her, I'm a genuine Viennese. The salt of our life is—whatever may befall—we remain gay and carefree."

VI

We got drenched until we reached Mall—the main thoroughfare of Mussooree. Rains had stopped, but the wind coming from the open Doon-side was ice-cold. Pema said, that wind came from Tibet, but Hanna named it the "Donauwaves." Intervening, Krafft declared, "This is east-wind. Don't you see the lights and the people walking under it keep the look of the place so warm! This is autumn in Berlin."

A glittering rickshaw climbed uphill where we had stopped for a moment to find out a new shortcut to our place. The rickshaw-pullers had shiny uniforms and they were more in number than required for ordinary ones for hire. That indicated, the rickshaw was a private one, belonging to an outstanding rich owner of some State.

"Trapped by the treacherous weather?" the lady occupant of the rickshaw asked us, freeing herself out of the thick blankets she was wrapped in. From the display of the broad gold embroidery covering the diamond rings we recognised—Ranisaheba Vimla.

She beckoned us to come near and asked—"Are you competing for the skating championships?"

"We are very far from it," replied Hanna.

"Look, Miss Vienna! Don't mind calling you so. I don't remember your name but this honourable title you rightly deserve. I have put your name in the panel of judges for our 'beauty-contest'."

"That's too big an honour for me!"

"No, no. You can't disappoint us."

"Was not this contest held a few weeks ago?"

"No, it couldn't be. It had to be postponed a number of times. First, the weather was bad, then the Chinese Embassy personnel was detained for urgent work at Delhi. Tomorrow's date is final. Miss Li herself is reaching here tomorrow evening."

"Excuse me, who is she?" enquired Hanna.

"Don't you know her? She is the most outstanding personality amongst the people of all the Embassies represented at New Delhi. Delhi has gone crazy after her charms and abilities. She is one person who has helped most in bringing the great country of China so near to India. Tomorrow, we are going to award her a special medal inscribed—"To Miss Li—the living symbol of Peking's overwhelming goodwill and everlasting warmest friendship towards India." People think that our China-India friendship's ladies' wing is inactive. Dear—dear . . . If they only knew, what an exertion it is to promote in action, the goodwill between our two great Asiatic countries! It takes away all your life. Even in this bad weather I have to look for tomorrow's arrangements till so late at night. But this is a work of great national importance!"

"You mean, tomorrow's beauty-contest?" Asked Hanna.

"If you all four do not turn up tomorrow evening at Hackman's I shall take it as a personal insult."

"How dare we think of insulting you?" said Krafft.

"So, it is final that you have agreed to act as a judge—Miss Vienna! And you all four are attending our function! If you fail, I shall have to get an externment order issued against you," she added with a cunning smile on her face.

Conversation would have continued, had our teeth not cluttered. The Rani looked at Hanna with all the force of her commanding and threatening smile, and pulled the golden end of her sari over her diamond earrings as a signal for the rickshawpullers to move.

Pema said with a shiver—"She seems quite capable of carrying out her threat!"

Giving an outburst to her contempt, Hanna showed her tongue out in the direction the rickshaw had vanished, and said—"The snouty old hag. . ."

VII

Next evening, Hanna persuaded us to go to Hackman's. Pema was adamant in her refusal—"I prefer the rink. What have I in common with that crowd. They are so snobbish that I feel sick in their company. Rather I would feel happier in the company of wild man-eaters."

"But I have promised Ranisaheba also on your behalf."

"In no case they will miss me. Ranisaheba won't even remember that she asked you to bring me along."

"Not she, but I would feel it. For my sake—do come."

"I don't know why I'm terribly scared to go there. There will be people from China and Delhi, who will recognise me even in my 'sari', that I am a Tibetan. My face has been always a target of their mockery and insult."

"I too know them a little. They won't harm you in my presence."

We struck a compromise. Hanna took it upon herself to see to it that we got our seats in the dimly lighted corridor, overlooking the Doon. It was possible to remain obscure there. In case we felt awkward, we could easily slip away through a side-door.

The Kraffts were sure that an embarrassing situation for us could in no case arise.

VIII

Reaching Hackman's, we found, the international, or to be precise—the China-India gala party had already begun.

Were it not for the 'saris' of the ladies and the dark and the yellow complexion of the people, they would have compared well, if ever a China-India fancy ball-dance was arranged in the 'Savoy' of London.

The centre of the spacious hall had a nicely prepared dancing floor. Ladies in costly Chinese-silk or georgettes and gents looking like old 'mandarins' in their evening dresses, twirled and spun round and round. The Savoy hotel ball-dance teacher was there to pair them off or to chain them up, according to the music of the orchestra, brought especially from Delhi Imperial hotel for the occasion. An Anglo-Chinese damsel bellowed at the top of her voice the latest American dance hits, and explained intricate figures with the twists of her snakelike body for others to follow.

Opposite the orchestra was the dais for the chosen beauties of the evening. Miss Li in her communist uniform and Rani-saheba in her most costly gold-studded sari occupied special red-velvet 'thrones'. Other beauties—Chinese and Indian, remained in the background so that the two heroines of the evening could outshine everybody. Rustling their dresses,

they gulped champagne or orange-juice, and never stopped laughing by turns.

Rumbas and rock-n'-rolls were reaching their pitch and thunder.

IX

Occupying our inconspicuous, somewhat broken chairs, we followed the running commentary from the neighbouring tables occupied by 'Connoisseurs'.

"Do you know," an excited voice said—"The Viennese girl has toppled down the beauty-cup?"

"How has she?"

"You know, the decisions about the beauty-contest and awarding of the medal were already made in Delhi. Here, this function was to be a mere formality to announce the prizes to Ranisaheba and Miss Li. Don't you see, how sure and proud those two are of their victory? I'm told, beauty experts were specially flown from Peking and Bombay's filmworld to dress them up for this evening. Now, if they are not crowned, I'm afraid, the thud won't be less than the bombing of Delhi."

"What has made them change the Delhi decisions?"

"The Viennese says, it is a disgrace and insult to beauty to take decision not on merits but for the sake of flattery. She believes in shock-treatment. When the judges had retired for a show of secret deliberations, she made damaging remarks about the two heroines of this evening. Bluntly she said that the teeth of Miss Li were protruding and it seemed as if Tibetan blood was still dripping from it."

"And about the Ranisaheba?"

"Hardly less complimentary. The Viennese said—If the Ranisaheba had accumulated a little less fat robbed from poor Indian girls, I would have qualified her for the com-

petition. She is also a shameless exhibitor of her body. She has everything that goes with money and power, and now she wants also beauty—a gift of nature. As if nature also is obliged to flatter and bolster her and Miss Li, by showering its precious gift only upon them!"

"But the Viennese is not the only judge?"

"She won over the other. The owner of Savoy hotel is another judge. His wife has always considered Ranisaheba as her competitor. So, when his wife was not going to be crowned, he readily cast his vote in favour of a girl without any make-up. They are trying to find out such a girl who does not disfigure the work of nature by trying to improve upon it."

"Now we are worried, this change will bring an 'earthquake' in the social, economic, political, diplomatic and even Governmental circles, who financed, and were deeply interested in the success of this Sino-Indian friendship spectacle."

X

The hall had become stuffy with its strong odour of powder, eau-de-cologne, scents and champagne. Pema pressed my hand and asked—"Do we leave the place?"

"Why should we?"

"Perhaps you don't understand the serious implications."

"What can they do to us?"

"They can swallow us up all right."

A small crowd of maids and off-duty waiters, not entitled to enter the dance-hall, jammed the exits to have a peep inside. Unmarked, we too stood with them on tiptoes to have a better view.

All was set for the crowning of two 'angels' from two big countries. Two best dressed gentlemen stood near the

glittering 'crowns' to lift and to place them on the heads of the two beauties—just now bestowing a broad smile upon them. Behind them stood in line a row of personalities, according to their respective ranks in protocol, to garland and to congratulate the proud winners. It was obvious, everything here existed for Miss Li and Ranisaheba, because they were the centre of all attraction and attention.

Thumping of the last Rock-n'-roll had barely subsided when the owner of the Savoy held the mike to announce—"Now, I have to perform the most pleasant duty of delivering our judgment. In our opinion, the most charming Miss Himalaya is. . ."

He paused for breath. The crown and the garland bearers had already begun to move towards the two 'supreme-beauties', when the loud cracky voice came out—"an unknown Tibetan girl—Pema."

A cannon-shot could not have been more stunning.

After a moment's silence an uproar broke out.

Everyone turned away from the symbols of China and India. They began to locate some one not present in the hall. Not being timely warned of the surprise, as previously arranged, the orchestra burst into a jazz noise which drowned all human voice.

That pandemonium had given an opportunity to us to vanish. Hanna had come to pull us out into the open. There we saw Miss Li and Ranisaheba still hand in hand, cursing "The American agent has torpedoed China-India friendship."

XI

We were in deep sleep when the watchman of our cottage turned up—"A high police-officer from Delhi is down the hill with a warrant to arrest Pema. She is charged of poison-

ing and murdering an employee of the Chinese Embassy. They say, she is sure to get hanged if caught. I have misdirected the police towards our big house at the Camel-back. Though it is very steep, take the Vincent-hill route for getting out of Mussooree."

We walked over to our car in darkness. Occasionally, the vapour got transformed into large drops of water which we felt on our faces.

At sun-rise, we were on the road which met the horizon.

7. *THE CRASH TOWARDS THOSE PEAKS*

I

During our long drive through a flat countryside, we often pondered over the tricks.fate and the Chinese were playing with Tibet and our Himalayas. It was difficult to judge, where we were, specially where my Tibetan friends were going to land ultimately—into a great joy or a great misfortune.

One thing was clear—in no case were we going to give up our rights as man, to fight against the Chinese tyranny. Reports received from Tibet were that the Tibetans in the Kham-Golok area had risen in numbers in a drive to remove the Chinese invaders from their plateau, lying 14000 feet above sea level.

Sange Rimpoche used to say, in an outburst of hatred towards the Chinese tormentors—"We monks are forbidden to take life, but the Chinese tyranny has compelled us to renounce this vow and to take up arms against them. Quite a large number of Lamas from our monasteries have joined the guerrilla warfare, led in some cases by our abbots. No one abhors human blood more than we, but it has fallen now to the lot of us Tibetan people to be after the blood of the Chinese in the interest of our survival and human dignity."

Such hatred added to the frustration suffered by them due to the failure of their mission to Delhi. Pema thought out her plans loudly—"The most important thing for me now is to save myself from getting arrested. I won't survive the trial and the torture of the Chinese."

Our road ran parallel to the Railwayline. A train passed with boards hanging on its coaches indicating its destination—"Lucknow."

"Let's drive to Lucknow," Pema suggested.

"What for?"

"I'm told that the city has the sweetest melons and music. There lives also my Santiniketan friend—Jinnat, whom we hear so often on radio. You can also fix up your plane for the mountain airways you had planned to operate."

"Excellent idea. Tell me something about Jinnat. I have never met her, but am a great admirer of her voice, which sounds like coming from a higher world."

"We were together in the music class. She used to boast that her great-grandfather was the last Nawab of Oudh—Wazid-Ali-Shah."

"That's what every old resident of Lucknow takes pride in."

"But her case is on a different footing. She has documents to prove that her great-grandmother was one of the most colourful women of history—Begam Hazrat Mahal."

"You mean, the beauty who commanded the revolutionary forces in 1857?"

"Yes, the same. The last Nawab wrote in his diary about her. She hailed from a very poor family. Possessing unmatched beauty, she was purchased by the royal agents for the ruler's harem. There, she rose to the position of a Mahal, with the title of Iftkhar-ul-Nisa—pride of women. Later on, not that title of the harem, but her leadership in actual battles of freedom gave her the coveted place in history she amply deserved. Jinnat is rightly proud of her revolutionary great-grandmother."

"What happend to her in the end?"

"She died in exile somewhere in the Himalayas still a free and proud woman. Due to her Lucknow in my mind is associated with beauty and struggle."

II

In the outskirts of Lucknow we passed through a mango-grove with a small neatly built temple in its midst. Sange Rimpoche said—"Such groves have been the halting places of Lord Buddha. Drop me here to pray. When you start for further drive, pick me up."

Pema and myself selected the retiring room at the Charbagh railway station. It was more comfortable than any hotel of the place.

While we carried some luggage from the car, a mail-train pulled in. One of its coaches consisted of a long air-conditioned saloon whose entrances were guarded by armed policemen. Pema was scared at the mere sight—"I must lock myself in, into the retiring room."

Some one held me at the newspaper stand—"What are you doing at Lucknow?"

He was a friend from Delhi who had publicly supported me in my stand on Tibet, when I was practically isolated. He confided—"So many rumours are circulating about you!"

"I haven't heard any so far."

"Some friends had a bet—you have disappeared in Tibet as a Lama!" He laughed—"Others say, you were having romances in the Himalayas!"

"What brings you here?" I asked him in my turn.

"I am accompanying the 'Grand Moghul' as his courtier."

That was the title we had given to a typical high dignitary of Delhi. Though holding very high offices of influence and responsibility, this grand personage lived in a peculiar world of his own, had peculiar evaluation of the problems facing the country and very simplified methods of their solution. Even when people made fun of him, he was incapable of understanding it, and most of the time took that for a compliment. The real tragedy lay in the fact that the

fate of a large number of people depended upon his whims and vanities. Repeating his pet word, I asked—"Is he on a mass-contact tour?"

"More important assignments he has this time. Courtiers like myself who are more interested in drawing our travelling allowances than in anything else have impressed upon him that by making a trip to the flood affected areas and getting a glimpse of the Himalayas, he can authoritatively speak about the relief works and the Chinese threat to India. Won't you like to see him for a minute? You may have some relexation from your serious work."

He led me to the saloon. There, he peeped through the curtains—"Ah! the Grand Moghul is still at his toilet. It takes him a couple of hours to cover the wrinkles of his face with specially imported rose-scented cream-powder from France. No one except his secretary—that too on rare occasions—is allowed to show his face at this hour. Today he is there. After all the Grand Moghul is a public man. He can't afford to lose time. Have a look. . ."

Had I the talents to paint, I had a perfect model of an old Chimpanzee at toilet. The odour of perfume was nauseating. I had heard of the vulgarities the Grand Moghul indulged in, but this was the first occasion I observed his green room.

"What? What?" he was shouting in his hoarse voice—"The newspapers haven't announced my arrival at Lucknow?"

"Sir", his secretary pleaded with folded hands—"Sir, the original plan—Sir—was to take you—Sir—by plane from Delhi—Sir—so that your honour—Sir—could have inspected the inundated areas—Sir—as well as the Himalayan problem—Sir. But Sir—due to bad weather—Sir—planes were grounded—Sir—and your high honour—Sir—had to bear the discomfort—Sir—of a train journey—Sir."

"You will lose your job. You don't know, how to plan my tour. You fellows are fools."

"Sir . . . is . . . yes, Sir!"

"Don't you know how the public feels when we don't come at the time of their need? You all are champion idiots."

"Yes Sir, . . . your Honour is . . ."

"Why doesn't the press publish anything about me? My services to the people—are they not great?"

"Sir, Your Excellency surpasses everyone—Sir."

"The floods must have disappeared after my suggestions to the first plan."

"Sir, they have. Honourable Excellency, Sir."

"Don't stand like a statue. Call a press conference for my statement on the Tibetan threat to our Himalayas."

"We have called—Sir, through the telephone exchange Sir . . ."

"You are good-for-nothing! Has the Lucknow astrologer come to predict when I shall . . ."

"Sir—the astrologer Chandulram, Sir, always complains of nonpayment, Sir."

"Why? Motu-Mal must have paid him—I got all the permits he needed for his trade to Tibet. And what about my new 'Sherwani' ?"

"It has gone to Delhi, Sir!"

"And the photographers?"

"They are travelling in the train, Sir."

"Khansama! My second breakfast! Only four or five courses will do. I must sympathise with the flood and the Chinese affected people."

Since the Grand Moghul was about to make a move in our direction, I hastily got down from the saloon. My friend commented—"Is not the Grand Moghul the most typical of the Delhi authorities through whom the big problems

facing the country are solved now-a-days? It is they to whom the country has to look forward in times of trial and turmoil."

A few peasants driven away from their villages by flood had appeared on the platform in search of alms. They stood before the armed policemen in armed submission, taking them to be the real representatives of the Government.

The peasants opened their mouth to speak. The train moved and a gust of wind passed throwing dust into the mouth of the waiting peasants.

III

On occasions when I felt depressed a solo-flight in the air invariably brought back my cheerfulness. I planned to try the same remedy this time again. Pema pressed for coming along.

We drove to the hangar of the flying-club at the airport. The people there had known me since the days I had qualified for a flying license through their training. They always put some plane at my disposal whenever I felt like soaring high into the air.

This time too, though they were about to close their work for the day, they showed me a 'Piper'—"It behaves beautifully, only it is not designed for acrobatics. You can take it and be off. On return park the craft inside the hangar. The endorsements in your logbook can wait till tomorrow."

Pema occupied the instructor's and I took the pupil's place in that trainer, and we left the ground with full throttle. It was her first experience in the air which made her intoxicated with thrill—"Never imagined—it could be so wonderful—it is simply ecstatic!"

Lucknow looked quite different from the air. The Gomati river seemed to raise the green parks and the Nawab's palaces high towards the sky. Crowds in the Aminabad park and on the Hazratganj roads stopped to smile and greet us cordially.

"We must fly in it to Tibet." In her irresistible enthusiasm she said, "All the people will come out in the open and make offerings to us of bread and butter. The Lamas from the Gumpas will throw scarves at us—and we will be far higher up than the prayer flags fluttering. Let's fly straight there."

"The cross-winds over the Himalayas are tricky; and suppose we overcome them, what about the Chinese? They will shoot us down."

"First we shall drive them out, and then take this plane to Tibet!"

"How would you like if we made everyday Mussooree-Mansarovar and Lucknow-Lhasa flights?"

"That would be a life of pure bliss! But that seems to be beyond my expectation."

"Through those flights the wishes of many will be fulfilled. Religious minded people will have an easy way to reach the highest temples and Gumpas of their gods. Sportsmen and lovers of nature, geographers and scientists will have an outlet to express and to see the achievement of their aspirations."

"And the supreme joy of life will be made so easy to man," she added.

We made several circuits, and each time when I tried to bring down the plane, she pleaded—"No, no—one circuit more, one more that should be the last and the widest one—please, please, please."

"Wait a bit . . ." I was startled to see that the fuel had practically run out. Motors were about to stop.

"What shall we do now?" feeling herself guilty for the dangerous fun she asked.

"The aerodrome is not very far. We may glide and make for it."

The weather had gone windy with the approach of the evening. So we were undershooting the run-way.

"There, on our way is a pile of stones with a flagstaff—" she pointed out—"It looks just like the middle of a high pass over the Himalayas. Shall we get across . . .?"

Before she had finished the sentence, wheels struck the bushy pile. Right wing hit a ditch and got stuck up. As a result, the plane toppled over with a thud. A part of the smashed up fuselage hit Penma's head.

My seat-belt was torn off by the impact and I was thrown out of the plane. Luckily there was no fire. As soon as the dust subsided, I extricated her from the debris.

I carried her to the car on my shoulders. She lay unconscious.

IV

The mango-grove where Sange Rimpoche had got down for prayers was nearby. With his help I laid her on the ground and poured some cold water over her forehead. There were no serious injuries. It was only shock.

Opening her eyes a short while after, she laughed dryly and whispered—"I'm back from the Heavens."

"It's a part of the game," the Lama encouraged her—"Get up, we shall be off."

"When do we fly again?" she asked adjusting clothes and rubbing her eyes.

"Later on." Sange Rimpoche said—"after a crash one goes for a pilgrimage first. We shall start right now."

We drove the whole night and stopped at Sarnath at

dawn. The first golden rays were just washing the tops of the 'Chaukhambi'—the exact spot where two thousand and five hundred years ago Lord Buddha had delivered his first sermon—The Turning of the Wheel of the Law.

V

There was a great commotion amongst the Tibetan pilgrims at Sarnath. What they had not dreamt of even in their imagination of the void, named 'Tulku' by them—had come true. The Dalai Lama had shattered the Chinese chains and was on his way to the Land of Buddha—for his own salvation and that of his country.

The Lamas, Bhikkus and the lay followers of Buddha from various nationalities—Tibetans, Ceylonese, Burmese, Indians—men and women alike, went round and round the Dhamekh-Stupa with burning candles and camphor-sticks in their hands, chanting the eternal truth of the first sermon of the Lord in his original Pali—"Yam Kinchi Samudayadhammam sabbam tam nirodhammam ti." —Whatsoever is of an originating nature is subjected to cessation!

Lamas like our Sange Rimpoche interpreted it, "Whatsoever is of Chinese slave-making wickedness is now coming to an end."—thus has the Blessed one spoken today. All the Devas are raising the cry—'The Dalai Lama is fording the turbulent Tsangpo river. On our side of the river there are fifty thousand Khampa warriors whom the Chinese have never succeeded in enslaving. The aeroplanes of the Chinese are in the air to massacre the fighters of our freedom. The Dalai Lama, an incarnation of Avalokiteshwara Buddha—the sublime and compassionate Chenrezigs, patron of Tibet, is going to establish the unsurpassed Kingdom of Righteousness, which has not been established before either

by an American, Russian, English or Indian or by anyone in the world."

Special prayers were held for the safe journey of the Dalai Lama who was honoured not only as a sovereign but more as a super-human, endowed with a mythological biography. The Chief Abott of a famous Gumpa in Tibet said—"Rarest of the rare opportunity has come to us. At the same time, the greatest man-hunt by the Chinese is at its height. Latest news is that the Chinese communications on the main Indo-Tibet trade route have been cut in different places. Thus a large number of Chinese forces which could trap or forestall Dalai Lama before he entered India are pinned down to their positions. Now, the Dalai Lama has to turn south from the Tsangpo—at what point, it should remain our sacredly guarded secret. Confusing statements must be passed on to the Chinese, so that they may dispatch their pursuit forces on wrong tracks. We all will try to enter Tibet with the big news that we were there to meet the Dalai Lama who was coming along that route."

They all agreed to that excellent strategy and decided to leave for Tibet that very day.

VI

Led by Sange Rimpoche, Pema and myself went round the sacred monuments. The Lama pointed out, "The old name of this place is Isipatana or Miggdava—the Deer-park. When Buddha arrived here, he met many saintly hermits to whom the wild deer would often come and spend the night, justifying the name of the place. Here is the exact spot, where upon Buddha's arrival his first disciples stood up and saluted him. Let's walk now sixty paces to the north where he first preached the Eternal truth . . . That should be here. And twenty paces still further north, Buddha communicated

the prophecy that when too much bloodshed would take place on earth he would incarnate Maitreya as the coming Buddha to reestablish humanity and peace."

"From here, fifty paces to the south—" the Lama pointed out with his forefinger—"the dragon, Elapatra had asked Him—'when shall I be freed from his dragon body and be born a man?' You know, the present rulers of China are the children of that dragon Elapatra, they have still to be man."

Then he turned to history—"During the eleventh century after the Nirvana of Lord Buddha, that is to say in the sixth century A.D., we had a king called To-tsong-detsen in Tibet. So early as that the Chinese had tried to create confusion in our mind. So, Kamalasila, a monk from the monastery of Vikramasila—your home area, came to us and defeated the Chinese in public controversies and we expelled the Chinese from Tibet. A century later, our Great Srong Bstan Gampo, the then King of Lhasa, defeated the Chinese Emperor Tai Tsun and forced him to send him as wife one of his daughters, the Princess Wen Tchen. This marriage took place in 641 A.D. And now the same Chinese had the audacity to take away from us Amdo where our famous founder of the Sect of Gelugs pas, the Yellow Caps—Tsung Khapa was born, and to include it in their Chinghai district. The same Chinese have now occupied the whole of our Tibet. Be sure, the coming away of the Dalai Lama is the beginning of the end of the Chinese dragon's grip over Tibet. Another Kamalasila will turn up now, and we will drive away the Chinese Elapatra dragons."

VII

In the last fading rays over the 'Chaukhambi', Pema came to take leave of me. I was hardly prepared to let her go,

"You are a marked person now. Will you be able to cross over our last checkpost safely?"

"I too have heard people say that the Indo-Tibetan borders are sealed. But we must do our best ; that's what we owe to our country."

"And your head-injuries haven't healed yet!"

"I don't suffer from that. The flying was so good for me. If it hadn't been for you . . . ."

The small procession of the Tibetans had already gone ahead to the railway station. One of her companions who had stayed back to escort her was getting impatient. We had no time left for the parting chat we both wished to have.

The train stopped for a brief while. The third class compartments came crowded from the previous stations. The Tibetans had to push themselves somehow to get standing room only. Two days and two nights they had to travel until they reached the final point of the railhead at the foot of the Himalayas.

After Pema had got into a carriage, I too climbed up to hand her over a small envelope containing some currency-notes. She pushed it back. Our arms and shoulders got pressed together. At the same moment Sange Rimpoche, putting his hand on the head of both of us, and bringing our heads still closer recited the mantram—"Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arhato Samma-sambuddhassa.'—Honour to Him, the Blessed One, Arahat, the Fully Enlightened One."

The train moved. Gradually gathering momentum, it went round a curve, reminding me of the Bakku pattern of Pema, and disappeared into darkness.

VIII

For a long time I could not sleep. My duty in defence of our Himalayas had just begun. Tibetan friends were not sure

of reaching the high passes to chant their prayers. Pema could land in prison or even get beheaded by the Chinese.

Mechanically I got into the car and drove off in the direction the train with the Tibetans had left that evening.

Early next morning I found myself at the Patna airport. A pilot friend said that next day he was scheduled to fly to Purnea, and if everything went well, he could drop me at a landing strip on the foothills of the Himalayas. Chances were that I could possibly meet the Tibetan friends before they crossed our borders.

Actually, I just made it. When I reached there, they had crossed our final checkpost and were having their last cup of tea with a Sikkimese border-patrol. To avoid detection by the Chinese on the other side, they had decided to cross the border pass before daylight.

Silently we marched on snow hardened by the night-frost. The big Changgu lake at 12000 feet height was totally frozen. Further ahead the 14000 feet high Natu-La pass was buried deep in snow. Just a faint stroke of pink had appeared over the Bhutan skies when we reached the summit. But even that slight colouring made visibility so good that we could see the white tall massive of the Chumalhari sixty miles away.

We put some flags, biscuits and stones in honour of the mountain and the pass. Softly the Lamas chanted their prayers.

"Shall I go?" Pema asked having made sure that no one overheard us.

"It is not a good-bye!"

"I shall return for a pilgrimage and meet you again."

"We are not returning empty-handed."—Sange Rimpoche said in a whisper, "The cause of Tibet and the Himalayas has become the cause and concern of the entire freedom loving world."

They marched towards the land of the snows, where a number of peaks had begun to raise their heads. Except some mist and a shower of wet snow there was nothing in their way to stop their onward march.

"Look!" she bent down to uncover some snow and pick up something—two flowers. "They indicate that the spring is there. Do we exchange? Yes! It is sure to bring goodluck to both—Tibet and the Himalayas."

Holding one from me between her lips she put both her hands into mine with the flower, pressed them, and rushed downhill to catch up with those others who had gone ahead.

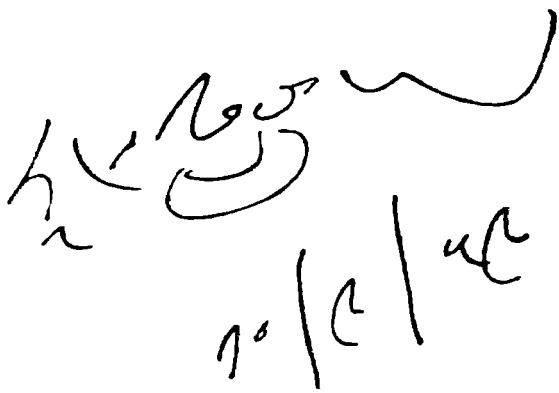
IX

Soon there was a drone of motors in the direction of Yatung. Some flashes like lightning were visible and immediately came a crashing noise.

But the Tibetans marched ahead. Even a voice like Sange Rimpoche's was there, low and hardly audible—"They can't kill the whole of Tibet."

Pema and the sacred peak of the Chumalhari became one in the distance.

Both were sure to SURVIVE.



DILAI LAMA'S AUTOGRAPH

PART TWO

IN KHAMPA'S TIBET

I

"Over this pass the fate of a global-war or a universal peace hangs in the balance," said Jigme—our patrol-officer who had turned up at that 14000 feet high pass to persuade me to turn back to the plains. Through my frequent crossing of the Indo-Tibetan border, we had become good friends. Holding an important and responsible post he had always helped me whenever I undertook a trip to Tibet. Since these were the days of the latter half of March 1959, when the Dalai Lama was still on his way to safety on the Indian soil, Jigme tried to give me a correct appraisal of the historic developments on our borders.

Snow had begun to fall and it coated us white. But that did not hide completely the grand panorama of Tibet before our eyes. Jigme continued his observations—"Normally, this Natula pass accounts for ninety per cent of contact between Tibet and India. Realising this strategic importance, the Chinese have connected this slope with the road to Lhasa and then further on right up to the Chinese border. This entrance to the trans-Himalayas is called the Chumbi valley, which in reality is the actual gateway to Tibet. As soon as the Chinese entered this valley ten years ago, they began to garrison this valley on army scale and built up fortifications which threatened and endangered the security of India. In any map, you will find that this Chumbi valley has the shape of a dagger thrust into the spinal-chord of India. The moment, the Chinese move forward shooting along this valley, there is bound to be a flare-up, which may cause a conflagration."

"Are the Chinese planning to move into this sector?"

"So far as our information goes, this week they have alerted their troops all along this route from Lhasa. Their explanation is that those troops are to entrap the Dalai Lama who is to reappear somewhere on the Bhutan border. In all such moves the Chinese intentions are always quite unpredictable—they may be merely pretending that they are after the Dalai Lama, in reality their move may be to grab some favourable fertile strategic Indian areas for future penetrations of their dagger directed towards the heart of India. Anyhow, the present movements of the Chinese along this part of our borders are quite alarming."

The snowfall became heavier and that gradually put a thick veil over the Tibetan panorama. From the same cover emerged two tiny Chinese patrols with sub-machineguns slung over their shoulders. They stopped five yards ahead of us, and cried in Hindi: "This is Chinese territory—clear out."

"Get out!" Jigme too whipped out his revolver in reply—"This is Indian territory! Go back!"

Awed by his stature and quick command of the weapon in hand, the Chinese grinned in an effort to pursue their point by peacefully repeating twice—"Chini-Hindi Bhai-Bhai!"

Observing closely we found that they were thin miserable lots wrapped in tattered cotton-padded stuff tied around by some discarded string. They actually begged for some Indian money and food. When I gave a two-anna piece one of the Chinese said showing the gratefulness of a beggar—"What you have given me is our two days' wages in hard currency. We get from our Government only paper-money which has no more worth than the paper-flags of the Tibetans over these passes. Our superiors often ill-treat us and gobble up our rations themselves. We are no better off

than the hungry rats of these mountains. Our orders are to point our unloaded guns at the head of the praying Tibetans and grab their food."

"If such are the affairs, why do you serve your Communist masters?" asked Jigme.

"What else could we do? They have our family members in China as hostages. The moment we desert the Chinese army, all our family members back home will be liquidated. And where can we go after deserting these posts? To India? They will hand us back to the Chinese authorities who will torture us to death. We are constantly watched by others who will shoot us down before we can escape from their clutches."

Their description of a soldier's life in the Chinese army was very amusing. It was quite different from what we were supposed to imagine and believe in India. I offered another two-anna piece to the other soldier who too came out with a story—"we are not permitted to talk about our real life to any one. But the times are changing fast. As we have gathered, there may be largescale engagements with the Indian troops in the near future. Our officers have been talking about it openly. Now, this may give us a life's chance to escape from the Chinese command. If the Indian side could give us only some hope that they would not hand us back to the Chinese, the world would be amazed to see the exorbitantly high percentage of desertions in the Chinese army. Not only battalions, but entire brigades or entire Chinese divisions may walk over to the Indian side laying down their arms, when the two armies come to actual grips. We hate the Communist propagandists in our units to an extent that we may direct our guns towards them before training them against the Indian troops."

It was my first experience of meeting such talkative

Chinese soldiers. They expected some more alms to continue their tale, but Jigme warned me, "Don't give them anything more. They are a band of Chinese robbers trying to find out how much money you carry. Had not this revolver been aimed at their head, they would have murdered us both only for the four-anna bit you have taken out from the pocket."

Our fighting strength had actually done the job. The Chinese had tried to scare us by their show of guns just as they do to the Tibetans to rob them of their food. Their superiors had not trusted them with any bullets and this had kept them in check in spite of having shiny weapons in their hands. From their side, there was no reason to doubt that Jigme's revolver was loaded and he meant action. I could not help expressing my surprise at the audacity and bluff of the Chinese patrols.

"We are amply indoctrinated by our propagandists before we are sent to this border for patrolling." The Chinese who looked like their leader said—"Only this morning they have briefed us about the attitude of the Indian soldiers we were supposed to encounter at this pass."

"What was that briefing?"

"That was accompanied by drinking toasts to our Prime Minister, Mr. Chou En-lai. You know, only our officers of the highest rank can afford the luxury of some liquor. We soldiers have to depend on methylated spirit. That also we have to dilute to save ourselves from getting whipped if caught stealing that precious State property."

"What sort of toasts were proposed?"

"Our political instructor stood up with the glass of spirit and preached—'Glory to our great Chou who achieved this remarkable feat. The success of his foreign policy has immobilised two or three Indian armies on this

front. Now, the initiative for capturing hospitable and fertile regions of India lies in our hands. You need not spend a bullet for it. The Indian side has orders not to shoot at you, so you may claim China's boundary on the other side of the Himalayas as far as you find unguarded. March forward and have a good time!' Had the Chinese soldiers possessed good morale, the Chinese borders could have been shifted far deeper into India. But you see, how disgruntled and demoralised the Chinese troops have become in Tibet! You can't expect much from them, not to speak of taking a stand during a shooting war."

Snow had covered all the demarcations on top of the pass. Only some white flags fixed on the highest mound by Tibetans in honour of the mountain-God and Lord Buddha remained uncovered. Pointing them out to the Chinese patrols, Jigme taught them—"Have respect for those heights which belong to us. Don't come further up than that Chumbi village which our Government has generously handed over to you."

Without any argument the Chinese patrols stepped back and disappeared over the downward slope on the Tibetan side. Replacing his revolver into the holster, Jigme pulled me up saying, "No one can stop you from entering Tibet. But Tibet is not running away. Let's have some food, and I shall fix you up for the trip."

II

Fine snow was falling fast. Everything got lost to sight. Knowing his track well, Jigme took me to his cottage he had built on a lake-side not far from the pass. When we stumbled right against his fence, I asked him, "Where is your daughter—Nima?"

"Last year she married a Khampa from Rinchengang in Tibet about a day's march from here."

"Is she doing well?"

"You know what a hell of a place Tibet has become these days. Considering all that, we hope, she may be still alive."

His small room was lighted by a burning splinter. An old rifle and a discarded army overcoat hung on the wall. Showing them to me Jigme offered, "They are spare ones. You may take them for your protection. They are still modern enough to be used in Tibet."

He made some tea for me and opened a box of biscuits he had preserved for rare guests. Outside, the wind howled and the snow was coming down in large flakes. There could be no question of continuing my journey ahead. No place previously occupied had ever seemed to me so welcome. I decided to get ready for spending the night on the stove, but Jigme said—"I shall have to go out on duty again."

"In this snowstorm?"

"This is part of my every-day game."

"Where will you go now?"

"There is another pass only a few miles away which is unguarded. Some Chinese may try to infiltrate there having this snowstorm as their cover. Besides, I must inform our checkpost about our meeting the two Chinese patrols today on our side of this pass."

Lying on the warm stove in Tibetan style I dozed. The hissing song of the mountain lulled me to sleep. But at this height feeling of reality passes into dreams.

It seemed to me I was already in Tibet. The snow storm was still raging and I was wandering with a Lama and his ward—the girl Pema, or may be Nima in the snowy desert. Suddenly some Chinese soldiers attacked us. They snatched away all we possessed, tied us down to a boulder and com-

manded the girl to follow them. From a little distance they aimed at us but their guns did not go off. At that moment I woke up. Jigme held me by the hand, saying—"Come out, your trip to Tibet is arranged."

III

The mountain-blizzard had subsided. The sun was shining on the dazzling snow all around. Hearing the details of my dream Jigme said—"This is a kind of prophecy against which you must remain fully guarded."

On our way to the checkpost we met a mule-caravan coming from Tibet. Jigme enquired about the latest news from the other side of the mountain. The muleteer related—"The latest fashion of the Chinese forces in Tibet is to hold public flogging. Neither the Lamas nor Indian nationals are spared this torture which is far worse than death by shooting."

"Are you sure that Indian nationals too have been flogged by the Chinese?"

"Let me quote one example of Chinese cruelty which occurred only three days ago and some of it just before my eyes. A trader of Nepali origin, undeniably an Indian subject, had some stock of cloth and medicine in his shop which he wanted to dispose of quickly to return to India. Some Khampas purchased his stock and paid him in silver. The trader carried that silver in his luggage. When he came across the Chinese checkpost, they searched him, and confiscated all his belongings. Besides, they imposed upon him an additional punishment of two hundred lashes to be administered publicly for having sold goods to the anti-Chinese Khampa rebels. The trader remonstrated on the plea that he had done no harm to the Chinese and that being an Indian subject the Chinese had no right to punish him that

way. But the Chinese commandant saw to it that his orders were carried out immediately."

"Who was the actual executioner?"

"A Chinese butcher of the village whom the military authorities have given legal rights to take away the sheep and the yaks of the Tibetans, to slaughter them and to supply meat to the Chinese forces in exchange of paper money issued by the administration."

"What happened to the Indian trader after he was flogged?"

"They left him at the execution place to die. But the trader was of a powerful build and possessed courage. In the darkness of the night he regained consciousness and escaped. The Chinese captured him and were going to hand him over to their butcher to chop off the wretched prisoner's hands. Some fleeing Khampas rescued him before the Chinese could take him to the place of punishment. Though half dead and covered with wounds, the trader reached the Indian borders and actually managed to cross over into Indian territory. There the pursuers captured him again. They pounced upon him and crushed his head into pulp between two heavy stones. When they heard the sound of the approach of the Indian border-guards, they dragged the body of the trader to a precipice and dropped it down the abyss. This is what the Chinese have done to an Indian trader."

"We shall investigate this case"—Jigme decided.

"How can you do that on Tibetan territory?"

"Through our trade agencies."

"What a stupid idea!" The muleteer laughed—"Your trade agents are confined to their compounds guarded by armed Chinese sentries. We are sure, the Government of India will take no steps in such matters."

We were approaching our checkpost. A desolate mountai-

nous terrain intersected by swordlike streams and ravines stretched around. All was covered by snow. The setting sun was bringing down the temperature below freezing point. Jigme turned to me and asked, "Hadn't you better turn back?"

"What for?"

"While in Tibet you too may fall victim to the Chinese cruelty!"

"Not necessarily."

"If you are so determined no border guard can stop you. Rather I shall arm you with proper travel documents, warm clothes and good protecting friends."

His confidence gave me new courage to face the unknown hazards ahead.

IV

They issued a trader's pass in my name easily. Jimge had secured the support of a Bhotia-trader for me which was of great help. That trader named Norbu was an Indian national but his shops in Tibet belonged to his family for several generations. Due to his endorsement on my application for a trader's certificate I at once became a person known to be customarily and specifically engaged in trade between India and the Tibet Region of China.

It was pitch-dark when we reached the Bhotia-trader's hut with a pass to Tibet. Sheltering a lantern under his 'bakku', the landlord met us at the gate, and let us into a room where lots of packing were going on. Norbu himself was a man of about fifty, looking like a pure Tibetan, active and well-preserved.

"The Chinese are not so clever as you imagine them to be," Norbu said ; he had come in close contact with them— "If you know their typical characteristics, it is not very

difficult to dupe them. Since the time they have become the rulers of Tibet, I have been using my wits and getting on very well with my business. Tomorrow I too am leaving for Tibet, and in my company you will be all right. You will pick up the art of confounding the Chinese with their own weapons. This experience is necessary to defend your borders from their 'bluff and grab' expansionist tricks."

We arranged to meet at the mountain-pass next morning, and I accompanied Jigme to spend the night on the stove in his lakeside cottage. A little distance we had covered when we met a Lama who was apparently impatient to convey some news of vital importance to Jigme. Still gasping for breath, more due to excitement than to the altitude, he related, "Three days ago a great misfortune befell your daughter. What a day! What horrors?"

"Is she alive?"

"No one can tell with certainty."

"What has happened to her?"

"All happenings in Tibet now are connected with the disappearance of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa. The greatest man-hunt of all times is now at its height in Tibet. The Chinese suspect every Tibetan hut from where the Dalai Lama might reappear. Tall Khampas who are mainly responsible for Dalai Lama's escape and safety have become now special targets of the cruelty and vengeance of the Chinese. Why do you forget that your daughter is married to a Khampa?"

"Has he been captured by the Chinese?" Jigme asked with inexpressible anxiety.

"No, he got out of their trap along with Nima at the last moment," the Lama answered—"You know, their hut was situated on the Lhasa road. When a large convoy of Chinese troops on their way to the Indian borders on the pretext of

being in pursuit of the Dalai Lama appeared there, the Khampa fell upon them and disappeared with quite a good number of Chinese arms and a huge quantity of provisions. After getting reinforcements, and regrouping the Chinese went all out for the total annihilation of the Khampas systematically. The worst casualties and cruelties to suffer were the Khampa women whose husbands were known to be fighting the Chinese. Rape and torture, stoning and crucifixion became the normal routine of the day. Few are left now whom the Chinese have not tortured to death."

"Tell me, when you saw Nima last."

"That was three days ago. Early morning the Chinese troops passing that road entered my 'Gompa' and desecrated it. They shattered our Buddha carved on stone, and made the shrine filthy like a piggery. They asked me to join in the desecration. On my refusal they beat me with their guns until I became unconscious. Later on, a shoemaker carried me to his hut and revived me. Nima came with her husband to see me. They promised to call back in the evening after their return from the forest where they were going to get some wood. In my presence she put her small child in the arms of another woman for being looked after for the day."

"Who was that woman?"

"Their neighbour named Kando." The Lama made a grimace as if what he was going to say further was a painful affair—"Barely had Kando set her foot with the sleeping child in her arms on the terrace of your daughter's house, when another wave of Chinese troops appeared on the road. Perhaps they had previous reports about the occupants of that particular house. Two soldiers caught hold of Kando from both sides, using filthiest language—You daughter of the slave of Indian Imperialists. We are going to teach you

a lesson!' They removed her 'bakku' and tied her down stark naked to a pole with fluttering prayer flags. All the time she kept the child clinging to her bosom. Then the beasts hurled big stones at her. She begged to be shot mercifully, but that was denied her. Her last muttering was a prayer to Buddha. Having made themselves sure by prodding with their guns that their victims were lifeless, the brutes jeered, laughed, danced and then continued their march towards the Indian border."

We remained speechless for a while, then the Lama led us to the lake-side cottage. There he lay down on a bench, Jigme stretched himself on the floor and I stayed on the stove.

Everything now became calm and cold.

V

Next morning we were roused quite early by the Lama's prayers and the distant sound of tinkling mule-bells. On looking out of the door, I saw the fading moonlight had spread another netted sheet over the frozen lake and the snowy mountainous landscape.

Silently, so as not to disturb nature's sleep, we reached the mountain-pass. Norbu's caravan had gone ahead but he himself was waiting for me. This was the place where Jigme had persuaded me the other day to turn back. Today he waved me a happy journey.

We descended quickly on the northern side of the pass. It was already Tibet proper.

2. *THE SARAI AT CHUMBITHANG*

I

Skies in the Chumbi valley look as if they have been placed over the shoulders of the high mountains around. Weather too is most unpredictable. Before sunrise there was only a small patch of cloud over the eastern horizon, but suddenly the wind began to rise.

"Look—" Norbu pointed with the whip—"how it sweeps the snow!"

"What does it matter?"

"We have a severe snowstorm ahead."

Actually the sky got covered with thick layers of white clouds. Visibility vanished and whirlwind raged around us. The wind howled ferociously. We got covered with snow; our eyes even.

But we marched ahead. A great drift of snow heaped over our track covering the imprints of the caravan which had just passed. It was difficult to know where we were.

We looked around in the hope of seeing some sign of the track, but could distinguish nothing. Norbu remarked, "We are lucky."

"I thought differently."

"Surely, we are lucky. The Chinese will not be able to trace our track."

We caught sight of something black, moving towards us. It was a Tibetan porter who asked—"Do you know where the mule-track is?"

"We are standing over it," Norbu replied and enquired in turn—"Could you guide us to the forester's homestead?"

"Turn to the left and you will make it straight."

Instead of descending further down we climbed into a forest. There was no gap between the tree line, but Norbu stopped and made a sound like a thirsty mule. Someone replied still hidden behind the trees, "This snow is sure to flood the Amochu."

Norbu winked significantly and replied in riddles, "It will wash away some logs and pebbles."

"Not the Gompa?"

"The priest has gone to cure a lamb."

I could not understand their conspiratorial jargon, but guessed that they were talking of some engagement with the Chinese units.

A Tibetan dog was let loose, which instead of barking at us, showed us the way. In a forest thicket we entered a hole and got into a spacious cave. It was lighted by some fire in a corner. Norbu pointed out a log for my seat and said—"Warm yourself. I have to fix up some business here."

I had landed in the frontier den of the Khampas—Tibetan fighters for freedom. They had previous intimation of my visit to Tibet, so a responsible officer was there to receive me. His stature and appearance were striking. He was broad-shouldered and had a pleasant face with crafty expression. He wore a rough peasant-like Bakku and parted his long hair in the middle of his forehead.

"Dorje—" he introduced himself, and added with a smile —"Pema's brother—so, no further particulars necessary."

"Where is Pema?"

'She had to leave on a very important assignment, but we hope, she may be returning in a week's time. You have come to us at the time of the most decisive battle of our freedom."

"The outside world knows so little about it."

"That is our greatest handicap. I spent my student days at Darjeeling which has given me an idea of the struggle of other countries. Every country forcibly occupied by a brutal foreign military regime deserves some support in its struggle for freedom. In most cases, other countries have rendered active support to the victim. Only the case of our Tibet is an exceptional one. We had expected some sympathy from India but we have been painfully disillusioned and disappointed. They believe in, and go on repeating what proves advantageous to the Chinese, enslavement of Tibet."

"How?"

"From the very beginning of their occupation the Chinese have been claiming that they have full control over Tibet and that the question of Tibetan fight for freedom does not arise. This assertion is a pure lie. Except for the Lhasa area where the Chinese troops outnumber the Tibetan population, in every other part of Tibet the fighters for freedom have given no rest or peace to the Chinese to stabilise their cruel colonial rule. Just to prove to the world that the Chinese claims are totally wrong, we have planned that the Dalai Lama should leave Lhasa and go to India for organising new moves for ending the Chinese rule over Tibet. The success of Dalai Lama's bid for freedom should prove the organisational capacities and the effectiveness of the armed units of the Tibetan fighters for freedom."

II

Rich Chinese food was served to us in grand style. In surprise I asked Dorje—"From where do you get all these Peking delicacies?"

"Our raids on Chinese supplies always bring good returns."

"What about your weapons?"

"We have been able to provide good arms to about forty

groups of a thousand or more men each from all the tribes and regions of Tibet. As you know, we are quite active from Chamdo in the east to Gartok in the west. In the beginning we had antiquated weapons—some were left over from the days of the British and some from the American army in China. We have also some German Mausers and Lugers. But the pride of our armoury we have acquired from the Chinese themselves with marks of Russian manufacture or of the Chinese Central Arsenal. The Indian check-posts make our arms smuggling quite hazardous. But the Chinese do get some through their agents. Recently we have succeeded in pushing forward our sympathisers as Chinese clearing agents, and through them we get some arms originally meant for the Chinese. Anyhow, this procurement of arms and ammunition remains a constant problem with us."

There was no end to the courses of food served to us It was far more sumptuous than anything I had ever before. Dorje explained—"Today, the 25th of March 1959, is going to be a landmark in the history of Tibet. It is a full moon day, considered auspicious throughout the Buddhist world and also in your country. Just before you entered our cave, we received news that the Dalai Lama had declared for the reassertion of full independence of Tibet on March 10 of this year. The national aspiration for which we Tibetans are shedding our blood has received a concrete shape. Have not we good reasons to celebrate this day?"

My curiosity to know the whereabouts of the Dalai Lama could hardly be suppressed. Dorje told the details—"I do not know whether you are fairly acquainted with the topography of our country. About sixty miles south of Lhasa we have a lake called Trigu situated at an altitude of 15,500 feet.

That area has been the very heart of our resistance movement directed against the Chinese. Now, today the Dalai Lama is there, and he has inaugurated the new government and reasserted the full independence of Tibet. This ceremony is being carried out with all the traditional pomp, and this day is set off for celebrations."

"How could you come in touch with the Lake Trigu area?"

"Tibet is the most primtive country in your mind, is it not so?" Dorje said with a mischievous smile—"But many Tibetans have not been to the modern cities of India for nothing. We have acquired from there a number of amateur transmitters. Previously the Tibetan postal communications were managed by India. After they were handed over to the Chinese many trained Indian personnel became unemployed. They have joined hands with us and we are running our wireless communications in no way less efficiently than the Chinese. Here, the adjoining cave is fixed up as our wireless room, and it is operated by one of your countrymen whom we call—Ramu. Ramu has become a synonym to us for the science of wireless."

"Having known that the Dalai Lama is at Lake Trigu, will the Chinese not bomb the area?"

"It is not very easy to destroy our stronghold. The Chinese have tried a number of times but they did not succeed in penetrating our fortifications. Dalai Lama too now is quite safe. No harm can be done to him, that is why we have thrown an open challenge to the Chinese to test all their wicked weapons."

III

Offering coffee with fresh cream to me, Dorje reached a bottle of whisky for himself saying—"Coffe is not a Khampa drink."

I asked him—"What is the next move from the Chinese side you expect?"

"Since the pockets of our resistance are getting more formidable, the Chinese would attempt to skip over us and rush for some passes belonging to India. That way they would like to maintain their manoeuverability and at the same time try to impress on the world that they have succeeded in wiping out Khampa resistance in no time—so firmly they are entrenched in Tibet."

"How would you counteract that move?"

"We know, having Lhasa and Shigatse as their main base they will have four important lines of communications to reach the Himalayas. First, the Shigatse-Khampadjong-Lachen line. Second and the most important one, because only this one will provide them a road for vehicular traffic, will be the Gyantse-Yaung-Chumbi line.

"The third will be the Lhasa-Lohbu-Punaka line. And the fourth one will be Tsetang-Trigu-Towang line. For the present, they will find it easiest to bring their troops and supplies along the second line, with the intention of making their divisional headquarters of Yatung and most advantageous advance base. Once their troops and supplies reach Chumbi on a large scale they may spread to their adjacent lineheads on the Himalayas. Their last mentioned move may prove very dangerous to us, because their swing may result in capturing the Dalai Lama before he reaches the Indian border. For these reasons we have to concentrate our strength to cut off the Chinese supply lines between Gyantse and Yatung. Entrenched as we are, we expect some serious engagements with the Chinese in the course of the next few days."

Dorje's quick and keen grasp of the strategic position astonished me. The celebrations too were tempting enough to stop for the day.

IV

The weather took a cheerful turn towards the evening. A few Tibetan huts called the village of Chumbi were situated only a couple of miles away on the main tract to Yatung. In a warm sunshine glittering over the thawing snow of the gorgeous landscape, I went out for a stroll accompanied by a Khampa guide.

A patch of old track was abandoned for carving out a shortcut at a bend of the village square. The villagers had removed the earth between the two tracks and converted the place into an underground marketplace—town-hall cum caravanserai. For roofing they had covered the place with some tin, tarpaulin or ordinary timber.

People coming from far away localities had also assembled there that evening to celebrate their declaration of independence day. Khampa messengers with their powerful "arrow-speed" had served invitations to them. On previous occasions they had approached the populace with the argument that it was better to give food to the Khampas than have it seized by the Chinese. Today they were told that they had accumulated plenty of food for the population through their raids on the Chinese supply lines.

The enthusiasm of the gathering was great. They had come with all their valuable possessions still left to them—wife, yak, mules, chicken and children. There was plenty of room for all to halt at the serai.

In the centre of the spacious place Norbu installed a portable gramophone. A Khampa youth operated the machine and played some Indian records of Himalayan music blended with Tibetan songs. The audience went wild with thumpings on mule-backs, and the smashing up of the big earthen pot full of their favourite drink—the tchang.

Young Khampa warriors passed around trays loaded with bread which we shared smilingly with their yak, mule, sheep and children. Tea thickened with tchamba—(parched barley powder—sattu) and yak butter began to be consumed in enormous quantities. It seemed everyone was going to store up enough food in his system for the whole of the coming week.

The women too had come out of their hiding places in the forest. Those Tibetan women in their bright national costumes were incomparable. Their marks of misery inflicted by the suffering under the Chinese cruelties had temporarily disappeared. Their enthusiasm at the celebrations was intoxicating. In affectionate regard towards their brave Khampa heroes they showed them their tongues.

Every celebration in Tibet has traditionally a religious colouring. Here too the pride of feeling independent mingled with love for the Dalai Lama. A number of huge bodied monks came in to participate in a dance-drama which was going to be staged. Their physique showed a combination of professional wrestlers circus giants. My Khampa guide told me that those mountainlike Lamas were members of the Dalai Lama's personal body-guard.

As those overpowering man-mountains stepped forward on the stage, the ground began to tremble. The famous drama about King Lang Darma began to be enacted. Never had I imagined that the Tibetans of that remote village would be able to perform a drama with such superb skill.

According to the historical narrative, there was a king named Lang Darma in the ninth century. He was a great oppressor of Buddhists in Tibet. I expected the Lang Darma to look like 'Ajatashatru' of Rabindranath's play. But in this I was disappointed. The tyrant donned the uniform of a

communist Chinese General. Many in the audience identified that oppressor on the stage as the General Tang Kwan San, the greatest murderer in Tibet of the present time, in actual life. The brute on the stage drove farmers off their land, pulled down figures of Buddha, burned sacred books, kidnapped women, bayoneted the devout and carried off to China the sheep, yak, children and the most beautiful women of Tibet. Those scenes raised the blood of the simple onlookers to the boiling point. The entire serai and the Chumbi-valley resounded with cries—"Ta-kho-se-sho, ta-kho-se-sho!" (kill him, kill him!)

A huge two-handed sword was now handed to a Mountain-Lama, who drew it out of its sheath. Next he seized the neck of the Chinese general—the King Lang Darma of the stage, threw him down on the stage and jumped over his chest to show that the tyrant was killed.

This was actually the last act of the drama and the last item of the jubilations. While they were still shouting with joy and scaring their animal friends with devil-masks on their heads, I returned to the cave of the Khampa-command.

V

Nima awaited me there. Dressed like a poor peasant woman she looked pale and thin in her dishevelled hair. A jug of water covered with a piece of bread before her indicated she had not touched any food. Her expression reflected some secret resolve accompanied by a strong will to live.

"We must snatch away from the Chinese their satisfaction in seeing Tibet die in misery." A Khampa youth consoled her—"We must not give way. We will not. We refuse to give in. You shall be happy some day again."

"Never!"

"We have had too much misery and unhappiness since the

Chinese occupied our country. A change will come ; it must. You shall be happy again."

"How are we to survive? We cannot."

"We can. We will," said Dorje who had just come into the cave—"At Darjeeling I was at a convent as a child. We began our classes after our prayers before a crucified Christ. That picture has left a deep imprint on my mind. There were also pictures of Madonna with child in the chapel. It is only in Tibet that the Chinese have so brutally crucified the madonna along with the child in her arms. Kando, crucified with your child in her arms, has become a martyr. It is sure to rouse the conscience of mankind and assure the liberation of Tibet from the Chinese."

"It is time, we returned to our post," the youth consoling Nima reminded.

"Sure," Dorje said with determination—"The example of one Joan d' Arc changed the course of European history. Kando's crucifixion is bound to change Asiatic history. The difference, however, is that the British colonisers had a sense of guilt, while the Chinese in Tibet are totally devoid of any feeling whatsoever about their wicked action."

A number of Khampa youth gathered in the cave for quick deliberations. Most of them were clad in native costume, but about a dozen wore discarded British uniform and carried rifles and other light equipment similar to those of our troops. These they seemed to have obtained from the stores of their latest smuggled items.

Having finished his 'command items' Dorje turned to Nima, "On occasions when the greatest agonies are inflicted on our souls, we should pray to Lord Buddha. You know the learned abbot of the Kargyu Gompa, who prays for the fighting Khampas. You should go to him. He will be able to guide and strengthen you for the new fights we have to face now.

VI

The fighting Khampas moved at night. We passed the snow-covered serai at Chumbithang which was now bathed in the light of the full moon. That reminded Nima of something lost for ever. In a whisper she asked, "For what crime did they crucify my . . .?"

There was no reply.

3. *THE KARGYU GOMPA*

I

Tibetan landscape shows often silhouetted dots of high flying prayer-poles, temple shaped stupas called 'chorten' in Tibetan and monasteries on high rocks looking like carved out caves for gods on the canvas of nature itself. These contributions of man to his natural surroundings are a spontaneous expression of the life he wishes to live in his imagination. Being part and parcel of each other—nature and man here, what they call religion, becomes simply a way of life most essential for survival.

The first chorten we came across on the descending slope was shrouded in the milky shell of illusion created by the fading light of the full moon. We took the structure to be a huge statue of Buddha in meditation carved out of the rock before us. A begging Lama going around the chorten with a prayer wheel in hand stopped at the noise of our footsteps, and enquired—"Are you going to the Kargyu Gompa?"

Several of us nodded simultaneously. The Lama looked surprised, and asked—"Do you not know that the Chinese are in occupation of the Gompa for billetting their troops?"

"We did not know."

"Because all that happened only yesterday late in the afternoon."

"Tell us about it."

"You are well aware, all national rejoicings and religious dances are now outlawed. Yesterday being a full moon day, the Lamas residing at the Kargyu Gompa had made preparations for their usual celebrations. Hundreds of monks

were attending to thousands of butter lamps and clusters of incense-burners in the Gompa. The prayers of thousands echoed, without ceasing, throughout the Amo-chu valley. Then turned up a Chinese contingent. An officer asked an abbot—'In whose honour are these celebrations?' Looking white as death, the abbot replied—'Lord Buddha and the Dalai Lama.' The officer slapped the abbot—'You snake! Don't you know, everywhere we have pulled down and thrown out Buddhas, and the Dalai Lama has turned a traitor to China?' Without washing his blood-stained fist, he went right up to the altar, put his feet upon it and began smoking, drinking and shouting filthy commands at gods and men alike."

"What a shame!"

"That was not all. He commanded his soldiers to destroy all the priceless costumes, masks and musical instruments collected through generations in that famous monastery. And every time a priceless piece of art was destroyed, he burst into laughter like a devil bragging, that he would destroy every stone of the Gompa because Khampas came there for their prayers."

Morning mist had evaporated from the valley. Far away snow ranges lifted a few peaks on their shoulders which reflected their faces in the distant Amo-Chu river. The golden rays of the sun washed away every particle of dirt from the grand panoramic architecture of the Kargyu Gompa, majestically dominating the surrounding.

"What happened to the thousand Lamas residing there?" we asked the mendicant Lama.

"All have been turned out. Most of them are put to hard labour on strategic road building. A few who dared refuse to join in the desecration have been taken to Yatung to be flogged publicly."

"Do you know the whereabouts of Tulku Rimpoche?" Nima enquired.

"Thank the Lord, he was not at the Gompa when the Chinese came. You see that village on the Bhutan border? Some of his devotees invited him there to recite full moon prayers, and he is still there."

We crossed a cold stream and taking advantage of the thick shrub to remain out of sight of the Chinese, made our way to the distant village situated on the barren rocks just on the snow-line.

II

Tulku Rimpoche was in deep thought over a passage of the sacred scripture he had kept open before him. Having received his blessings through signs in response to our greetings, we took our seats respectfully at one side on some boulders spread over the place. Nima came out with her problem—"I shall pray if I get what I have lost ; otherwise I leave this world altogether."

"Poor child! whom are you so angrily denouncing?"

"The whole Buddhist religion."

"Why? Has the Compassionate Buddha taken away your child?"

"No, he did not."

"It is, as the Blessed One himself had put it—as if a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his friends and companions, his relatives and kinsfolk, were to procure for him a physician or surgeon ; and the sick man were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until the physician brings back to me the same unsmeared, untorn cloth I had, exactly in the same shape and colour before the poisonous arrow had pushed through it tearing it off and smearing it all with poison and blood. What will happen?

The physician cannot bring back what is gone, and the patient will die because the arrow could not be taken out. Is it the time to think about 'the cloth', however valuable that might have been once and to die of pain inflicted by the poisonous arrow?"

"No, Revered Sir."

"Is it not wise to get the poisonous arrow out of the body first and get cured, then only to think of getting another similar 'cloth'?"

"It is."

"That is what the Blessed One has taught us. As the greatest physician of all time he has taught the science of misery, the origin of misery, the cessation of misery and the path leading to the cessation of misery, he has explained."

"How does that apply in my case or that of our country?"

"For that you will have to go deeper in our Buddhist religion. Don't trust those, whose business is to amuse at the cost of our religion and to vote for the anti-religious communist occupation of Tibet. With a little trouble taken to understand, one can soon get assured that our great Buddhist religion is a religion of the bravest of the brave. It forbids you to succumb to the injuries inflicted by the enemy, it heals your physical and mental wounds and inspires you to fight back until you have become victorious. With this potential immortal strength of our religion, we are sure to defeat the Chinese aspirations of dominating and annihilating us."

"Your telling of stories from the sacred books has always been soothing to me. Will you not please read something out for me today?"

"For every ailment of mind the Great Tathagata has given an example of cure. I shall read out to you a story from the

Maha-Vagga which tells you how to behave in such an unhappy situation as you have been placed today."

We requested the Lama to put the story in as simple a form as possible, which he did thus:

"The powerful king Brahmadatta of Kashi went to war against Dirgheti of Kosala, and defeated him. Dirgheti fled like our Dalai Lama, and having wandered from place to place, went at last to Banaras to live in hiding. He sent his son, Dirghayu, away for getting all kinds of training so as to be able to defeat Brahmadatta ultimately and get back his own kingdom. As bad luck would have it, one day the defeated king was captured, and he was taken to the place of execution. Before the axe fell on the neck of Dirgheti, he said for the benefit of his son—'Do not look long, do not look short, for not by hatred is hatred appeased." The son correctly interpreted what his father meant by those words. By 'not long' was meant that one should not let one's hatred last long. If Tibet confines itself to only hating China, that will not take the country forward. By 'not short' was meant that one should not hastily fall out with friends. Tibet should not fall out with India. And by saying that 'not by hatred appeased' was meant that one had to rise much higher, higher than the enemy in technique and skill to defeat him. Dirghayu correctly followed the instructions of his father and ultimately succeeded in regaining his father's kingdom and having the daughter of the usurper king as wife. In the same way, if Tibetans today under the leadership of Dalai Lama act wisely and prove superior to the Chinese in the international political chess, we are sure to regain our freedom. The moral of the story is that one should not think that everything is lost for ever. With wise action one can get back what one has lost, perhaps with compound interest."

The warmth of the sun was so agreeable that we requested the Lama to read more from his sacred books. He obliged us by telling us the following parable of the Mustard Seed from the original text of the Anguttara commentary, adding to it his own commentary at places:

"Nima has reminded me today of the story of the Kisa Gotami. Gotami was born at Savatthi in a poverty-stricken house. When she grew up, she married, and after a time gave birth to a son. But when the boy was just old enough to play, he died. Extreme sorrow overwhelmed Gotami. Taking her dead son to her bosom she went about crying, 'Bring back my son!' People took her to be out of mind and laughed at her. One day she appeared before the Exalted One, and said—'Give me medicine for my son!' The Teacher said—'Go around the entire city first, and from a house where no one has ever died, fetch some grains of mustard seed.' But in the entire city there was no house where none had ever died. The same way, Nima can wander today throughout Tibet, she will not find a single household where the Chinese have not massacred a child in one form or other or ruined his whole future. Overcome with emotion, Gotami carried her dead son to the burning ground, and said—'You are not alone who had been overtaken by death. This is a law common to all." Casting her son away in the burning-ground Gotami realised the eternal truth. In the same manner, our Nima should forget her loss and dedicate herself to the cause which would deprive the Chinese of the joy of their satanic lust to see that the whole Tibetan race is exterminated."

The Lama's stories worked as a good medicine for Nima. Regaining her will to live, she went out to collect some flowers for an offering to Tathagata.

Left alone in the company of Tulku Rimpoche, I asked

him, "What is your advice to the Tibetan people at this time of their greatest ordeal?"

Keeping his eyes half-closed, as if in meditation, he replied —"The last words of Tathagata—'Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help.' "

A little later he sang the last hymn from the Mahaparinirvanasutta:

"Who wearies not, but holds fast to his truth and law,
Shall cross this sea of life, shall make an end of grief."

III

Before coming to Tibet I had imagined the Lamas to be mostly an idle section of society, quite a burden to the country's fight for freedom. Only a little closer contact with them filled me with admiration for some of their rare and remarkable qualities. Now, I could easily compare their role in the vanguard of a national movement with that of any other country. Tulku Rimpoche's contributions reminded me of the great humane feeling of men like Mahatma Gandhi. In that obscure shelter of the Lama in a small Tibetan village, I felt like having made a pilgrimage to some 'Ashrama' where Gandhi himself had lived and from where he had directed the national struggle of India.

It was evening as soon as the sun went down behind the high mountains. A number of people who did not come out in daylight for fear of the Chinese bullets now began to trickle in at the Lama's place for serious deliberations and further planning of the resistance movement. Those operating on the Bhutan border were the first to point out a significant strategy.

An old shepherd said—"Lately I have observed a good

deal of movement of mules from Bhutan. That may prove harmful to us!"

"I have persuaded them to turn back—" a shopkeeper explained the matter—"Those mules carried rice for the Yatung market. Obviously that would have provided food to the Chinese army whose supplies had run short. I asked the Bhutanese merchants to sell the rice to us, but they demanded 300 rupees a maund, that was what the Chinese would pay them at Yatung. How could we pay them that exorbitant price? Then I told them, the Chinese could pay that amount because whatever amount they paid was the wealth robbed and plundered from the Tibetan people and their monasteries. The Bhutanese, as our good neighbours should not feed the Chinese murderers at the cost of the innocent people of the land of Tchamba, as they call us in their fairy tales. The greedy merchants are not ready to accept our request; the price paid by the Chinese is too tempting to them."

"At the same time, we cannot fight on the Bhutan front to stop the supply of rice along their 200-mile long fertile border", said a Khampa officer—"But we must disrupt that supply line of the Chinese at any cost. These border regions are under our control; once the Chinese manage to oust us they will be in a position to establish direct contact with Bhutan, Sikkim and India. As a result our escape line will be cut off. Therefore, I propose that we give a warning to the Bhutanese merchants that the rice they will try to take to Yatung will be forcibly taken away by our units. I shall direct our guerrillas to act accordingly."

The next point raised was the capture of women and children from the village surrounding the Khargyu Gompa, which the Chinese had raided. To explain that point the same beggar Lama had appeared whom we had met that

morning at a chorten. My first impression about that Lama was that he must be an absolutely illiterate person, but here in the meeting the way he placed matters, proved that he must be in possession of a fine intellect. Tulku Rimpoche told me out of hearing of others—"He is our intelligence man."

"The Chinese had arrested about 200 women and children during that forenoon's raid on these surrounding villages. They could not get hold of a single able-bodied man. Neither could they get any cattle for slaughter. Their original plan was to turn the Kargyu Gompa as their forward base and proceed further to the borders to seal off any route that the Dalai Lama could possibly choose to take. But they were disappointed. Reports have reached them that large-scale fighting has taken place between Gyantse and Phari and their reinforcements on way have suffered severe losses. This unforeseen difficulty made the Chinese change their plans in these areas. Now they have vacated the Kargyu Gompa and returned to their divisional headquarters at Yatung. While they were driving the 200 arrested women and children like a flock of cattle, our forces ambushed them on the mule track slope just before Rinchenganj. The surprise did not come upon the Chinese quite unexpectedly. They seemed to have been prepared for it. For a few patrols from the side of the Rinchenganj bridge turned up in their support which frustrated our plans for recovering all our women and children from their escort. Still, the majority of them, we guess, have slipped into the forest. Only about 20 have been forced to cross the bridge to reach Yatung side. A few have been thrown down from the height to the bed of the Amo-chu. As soon as we make sure that the Chinese patrols have gone back to Yatung, we shall come out of the ambushed area to bring back as many folk we shall

find alive or wounded there. We are also deeply disturbed about the twenty taken to Yatung."

Such reports made it clear that the fighting had spread out in Tibet on a national scale. To see their monasteries plundered was painful to them, but the barbarous treatment meted out to their women and children, really made their blood boil. Hearing the reports of the day, Tulku Rimpoche said—"My advanced age will not let me chase the Chinese hordes out ; and here is an occasion when I may die a good Buddhist death. I have long prayed to Lord Buddha that when my time comes, I may die in battle for the holy Buddhist cause led by Dalai Lama. And so it has come about. Nowhere and never there could be a more glorious death for an old Buddhist than here in Tibet."

IV

After a meagre dinner of Tchamba and tea, those who had to return to their posts lay down for a few hours' rest. Only Tulku Rimpoche remained at his seat of prayer. I asked him—"Do the Lamas also participate in encounters with the Chinese where killing takes place?"

"Of course, in many cases the abbots fire the first shots."

"How do you reconcile their action with the Buddhist belief not to kill."

"To kill or not to kill is not the real conflict of the Buddhist faith."

"In our country too, certain historians have pointed out that Buddhism is to be blamed for not fighting and losing the battles when the first foreign invasions took place on India."

"If that was the case, that was an act of cowardice, not of Buddhist faith. What Buddha has really taught is to go beyond killing or not killing, and conquer death. Fearless-

ness is the main thing. Buddhism is a religion of the brave. The moment the enemy attacks you to kill, he has thrown you in the clutches of death, now it is the duty of your religion to save yourself from the jaws of death. You are within your rights if you achieve that main purpose even by killing your enemy. But we have not to go so far in philosophical discussions. You have to look to concrete facts."

"What facts?"

"It is a law of nature that you always destroy that criminal force which tries to uproot the means of creation. The women are actually the means of creation of human beings and the Chinese have raised their weapons against them particularly. Such a crime can never be condoned. It has been a lesson of history that when the women of a country are raped and killed, the people of that country never, never, never, never forgive the aggressor. The fight takes an emotional turn, and ends only in the ultimate defeat of the aggressor. The Chinese have attacked our monasteries and women and children, all that we love most in life ; therefore the spiritual, sentimental and emotional forces of the whole Tibetan people are canalised towards attaining one objective—to kill all the Chinese who have dared trample the Tibetan soil. The Tibetan people will never forgive the brutal Chinese atrocities. They will fight to the bitter end, and I can assure you that ultimate victory will be ours."

"No one will be more pleased with that result than we Indians."

"Do you know, what we actually preach in our monasteries to reach our aim? We tell our people that our Tibet was in reality the "Happy Land" (Sukhavati) of the Amitabha-Buddha. The Chinese have insulted that Buddha and his incarnation—the Dalai Lama has been forced to leave Tibet ;

that is why misfortunes are bound to make us their prey. As real Buddhists we shall have to kill the Chinese who have committed those unheard of atrocities in our land. And in that effort even if we die, we shall be born in that 'Sukhavati' Happy Land, live in delightful palaces, surrounded and honoured by seven times seven thousand 'Apsaras'—the most beautiful celestial nymphs. Our cause of Tibet is the cause of the Amitabha-Buddha—the Lord Buddha of the Happy Land."

The beggar Lama turned up for his final instructions. Though the night temperature had gone down much below the freezing point, the poor Lama was dressed in his old rags full of holes. I asked Tulku Rimpoche—"Does not that Lama feel any cold?"

"He has put on that garb of Lama as a vow to avenge the wrongs the Chinese have done to his wife."

V

The moon had climbed over the mountains when I came out of the shelter of Tulku Rimpoche. I had decided to push on to Yatung and beyond—to the roof of the world to observe the great happenings expected shortly there.

The beggar Lama was also going the same way. He promised to help me avoid the traps laid by the Chinese, saying—"I can smell the Huns miles ahead. That will hold you to the right track."

We walked silently without exchanging a word. Our path went along the course of the Amo-chu river. The roar of the river engulfed completely the sounds of our footsteps.

Towards dawn we stopped at the opening of a forest. The river too had taken a sharp bend there. My companion detected something, slowed down his steps, and began to proceed very cautiously.

From the water-edge of the river at a particular spot, emanated a terrific smell—that of a dead body. That stopped me from moving a single step forward, but the Lama went near it. He turned the dead body over to one side, looked at its face for a moment, then suddenly exclaimed:

"Dearest Kando! My wife!"

The roaring river could not drown his shriek.

He laughed and laughed in pain—stark mad.

4. *THE CHUEN CHU HOUSE AT YATUNG*

I

Amo-chu's sharp cutting of steep gorge on its push ahead to Yatung unfolded a bold plan of action for me. On the approaches of the Rinchenganj wooden bridge the Tibetans had carved out of rock a huge Buddha in the pose of awarding fearlessness to everyone who looked at it. There at its side an enterprising local villager ran a small shop. I entered it to refresh myself with some tchamba and tea.

"Are there any Chinese outposts here?" I asked the middle-aged couple who owned the shop. They were coming out in sunshine to warm themselves.

"We thank Buddha, they are not here," the man said—"And why should they be? You are in Tibet—not in China. The only Chinese in this region are in the township of Yatung a few miles further ahead."

"At Yatung, of course, they can show their short noses—" the shopkeeper's wife said—"The moment they dare push those ugly noses into our interiors, our snipers blow them off."

"Have you got many such sniping-posts?"

"We shall tell you, if you will introduce yourself first."

"Tulku Rimpoche has sent me this way."

"Then I can take you to be a friend of Tibet. As a matter of fact we do not hate or distrust anyone except the Chinese. Since you are a friend of Rimpoche . . . I must talk some business with you. But, first let us have tea together to cement our friendship. Wife, serve us some hot 'monos' (a Tibetan flour-dish) and tea."

The woman, wrapped in a long bright-red check-costume, laughed, swinging a smiling baby on her back. She

cheerfully exhibited her tongue as a form of most cordial greeting and put some tea in tumblers before us.

"My wife comes from Lhasa—." The man sat down on the bench by my side, and continued—"Since our all-out war with the Chinese, they have taken away by force a large number of our womenfolk to Peking for forced labour and for breeding short-nosed mushrooms to increase their ferocious communist hordes. My wife has escaped with great difficulty. But here we lead nomad's life. This shop is just a cover."

Having ascertained that no one overheard us, he said—"You were asking whether we had many sniping posts. Leave aside the Lhasa-Yatung trade route where vehicular traffic in support of the Chinese troops is possible, though we have cut off this route also at several places; all other areas in Tibet where there are no roads, are under our control. Practically in two-thirds of Tibet, the Chinese have not yet succeeded in setting their dirty feet. All monasteries, tea-houses, peasant hamlets and mountain-curves are our shelter, and we turn them into sniping posts whenever needed. Except some Lhasans—accustomed and addicted to city luxury, there are few in Tibet who are on the side of the hated communist enslavers. The oppressors distrust us and we despise them, there can never arise any question of compromise. Ultimately the Chinese must leave our country."

His wife filled our tumblers again, and he continued—"Even from the Yatung-Lhasa route the Chinese could be dislodged in no time if your countrymen had not provided them with rice and bullets."

"Do they supply bullets?"

"Lots of them they smuggled out from India and sold them to the Chinese at fabulous price. I shall request you to go

to Yatung and stop this business at least for the period of our hardest fighting. If the Indian merchants at Yatung do not supply provision and ammunition, the Chinese troops, cut off as they are from their base at Lhasa, will not be able to cover the Bhutan border to entrap the Dalai Lama or to encircle our brave warriors. This job is very urgent. After fixing it up, you may contact me, and I shall take you to any part of Tibet for pilgrimage, sight-seeing or business—whatever you wish."

I spread a map of Tibet on the floor and looked at it carefully. The couple looked over my shoulder inquisitively. Finding me a bit worried, the shopkeeper said—"You don't need a map to reach Yatung. As soon as you are about a mile on the other side of this bridge, you will see a huge blood-coloured gate through which one must pass to enter Yatung. That's actually the gate to the slaughter-house established by the Chinese. Since you are an Indian national and must be carrying a pass, they won't touch you. But if we dare to visit someone in the township, the devils will powder our bones to smear their dirty faces."

Taking out of my pocket the passport which the Indian checkpost had issued to me, I studied it minutely. It was clear, according to the Sino-Indian trade agreement of 1954 and the reciprocal arrangements made between the two governments, that I was entitled on the basis of that pass to proceed across the Chinese lines right up to Gyantse through Yatung and Phari.

And so, I proceeded towards Yatung.

II

The unpaved road ran along the steep bank of the Amo-chu. I had a feeling that I was going to move behind the

enemy lines. The reflections in my mind were mostly of the melancholy nature.

At the gate two Chinese soldiers pointed their automatic guns at me and escorted me to their office room. Holding my pass upside down they tried to scrutinise the alphabets strange to them, trying to impress upon me that they had tremendous authority over me. They asked me what I guessed, "Indian shopman?"

I nodded.

"Report to our Communist Party office."

A mile-long walk brought me to some wooden huts on both sides of the road. That was the township of Yatung which has played so important a role in India's border problems and in the history of Tibet.

It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, but the sun had already set behind the tall mountains. A cold wind comparable to the Arctic regions cluttered the corrugated tin and the wooden roofs violently. There was no life whatsoever visible anywhere. The inhabitants seemed to have deserted the place due to some shocking epidemic.

Further ahead, a loudspeaker installed in the middle of the road barked some words with a funny jeering sound. When I raised my eyes I found to my astonishment that I stood before a partly demolished and purposely dirtied Tibetan monastery. A short-statured Lama in tattered clothes with a revolving prayer wheel in hand looked in vain for the entrance. Another poor layman with some alms in hand turned up from a stinky side-lane. Barely had I a chance to watch them when a well-clad Chinese-style Tibetan with a Chenghiz-Khan face came out from a newly constructed building higher than the monastery to challenge me in my mother-tongue—"Your pass?"

I handed my pass to him. Hastily he put it in his inside

pocket which could have comfortably accommodated a couple of fair-sized living pigs as well. Immediately after, he rushed to the Lama and the poor Tibetan. Without giving them any warning or asking any questions, he dealt them a few hard blows on their faces and marched them off towards a sloping lane leading towards the Amo-chu river.

Automatically I went forward to follow them when one of my countrymen from a corner shop shouted at me—"Have you gone mad?"

I introduced myself. The man took me inside his shop to a burning fire to keep warm, and said—"That slope leads to the torture-house where they break the bones of suspected resistance fighters and throw them down into the Amo-chu river."

"Why do they do it?"

"They interrogate for knowing the whereabouts of the Dalai Lama and the fighters for Tibetan freedom. In a couple of hours you will hear what happens to the two arrested Tibetans. The town supervisor of the Chinese will 'doctor' them himself. Here in Yatung he is mentioned as the Brute.

The man knew me from the newspapers, so he talked freely—"Life here has taken the brutal communist pattern. As you see, I have packed up and am leaving for India tomorrow."

"Why?"

"They insult Buddha whom we pray at every step. Previously, according to the Tibetan custom, a monastery was always the highest building of the locality ; now in order to show that Mao can be greater than the Buddha, the Chinese have built that Communist Party office higher than the monastery just opposite it."

"That can't be the only reason for you to leave Tibet?"

"Well, since last year, along with the religious, cultural and other aspects of life, trade also has turned to treachery."

"What do you mean by treachery in trade?"

"The Chinese export from here millions of silver dollars to their agents at places like Kalimpong in India. Those dollars are converted to rupees. Ten per cent commission as handling charges goes to the Communist Party funds in India for espionage, sabotage and propaganda in the interest of the Peking Government. With the rest of the amount strategic goods are smuggled which the Chinese cannot secure from the outside world or which are difficult to be brought into Tibet because of its most difficult communications with China. This way they abuse our treaty, goodwill, neutrality and also the friendship of our country. Recently they have smuggled quite a good amount of explosives which they are using to blast open some secret military roads into Sikkim. A large number of Tibetans including Lamas who have been arrested during recent weeks are put to forced labour on that strategic road to Lachung. How can we old traders help the Chinese in threatening our own security? Only the communists of our country gladly do such treacherous jobs ; that is why practically all the Tibetan trade is now being handled through their agencies, often with fictitious names. This is the situation which is driving away genuine traders like myself out of Tibet."

Outside, it had become dark. I was getting ready to make a move to find out some night shelter in a tea house. The shopkeeper stopped me—"These days you are not supposed to set your foot outside your residence after sunset. Without any previous warning, some bullet may get you through. You better lie down where you are. We shall share the meal I have cooked at noon."

Barely had I taken a piece of bread in hand when we heard a loud wail.

"They are working on the unfortunate Lama and the poor Tibetan," said my countryman—"Does not Peking claim that their regime is established here to protect the poor Tibetans? Yes, they are protecting the poor Tibetans right—by putting round their neck heavy stones. If they are convinced that the arrested person cannot be of any use to their military intelligence, and he is physically not fit to work sixteen hours on high altitude road-building, they just go on piling up stones round his neck until he is stiffled to death. A bullet could be merciful, but the Chinese are short of them, and keep them reserved for the Khampas whom they can hardly come near."

The wailing gradually became fainter and then totally stopped. Stretching himself near the fire, my host said—"Tomorrow you can see their bodies between some boulders floating into the Amo-chu."

Darkness around gave such a deep cover that I was sure, the outside world would never know the amount of cruelties the Chinese forces had performed in their endeavour to keep Tibet down as their slave colony. It was making me sick, but my more experienced countryman said—"You have not seen anything yet. The Chinese-walled military fortress called the Chuen-chu house is a real factory for murdering Lamas and Khampas on a large scale. It is well guarded, but we won't be much off the mark, if we say that this can compare in inhuman brutality to any of the Jewish annihilation camps of the Hitler regime."

III

Next morning I got up dejected and worried about the passport the brute had taken away from me. Without that

document of identity in my hand I felt myself totally at the mercy of the Chinese occupying forces. My host promised to help me in every way explaining the complications to me—"That brute had a dirty career from the beginning of his services. When the British were here, he served in their trade agency, did some dirty work, and got the title of 'Rai Bahadur' for that. When the Chinese came, he was the first Quisling to present to General Tang Kwang Sun a white scarf of welcome, accepting Communist control over Tibet. As a reward, the Chinese have appointed him a controller of foreigners and interrogator of prisoners under their guidance. This brute is a bully ; unless he realises that you are a strong man and can do him some harm, he won't comply with your reasonable and fully justified requests. We shall have to do something about it. I have a personal friend who is an employee in our trade-agency here. I am going to see him about your matter."

Left alone in the shop, I looked at the terror-stricken Indian faces which passed along the road occasionally. I compared them to the Chinese residing in our country. There, they are free even to organise fifth columnists for future eventualities with slight or no secret cover at all. And here, in the Chinese occupied places, all Indians are treated as deadliest spies of the enemy.

Returning from the visit to his trade-agency friend, my host advised me to go to the residence of the brute to collect my passport with a fore-warning—"Avoid at any cost to agree to any interrogation. Once you are dragged into it, it will not take them very long to squeeze your bones and extract statements damaging to our country."

The house of the brute was only a couple of minutes' walk from the shop on a cobbled street. Some sort of noise

always going on inside the premises distinguished the place from others. When I reached there, a young woman was in the process of being dragged out of the house, the brute himself was shouting—"I shall prove it that you are a Tibetan swine and not a Sikkimese!"

The hair of the woman was closely cropped as a distinguishing mark that she was a Chinese prisoner. Her face had bruises and patches of black blood, indications that she was badly tortured. In a weak and thin voice she pleaded—"I live on the other side of the Natula Pass. We have been always coming for pilgrimage to the Kargyu Gompa without any papers. Only yesterday for the first time the Chinese soldiers who raided the Gompa rounded us up in its vicinity. I am an innocent person, have pity for the sake of the Lord . . ."

Her voice had a peculiar softness which struck me as if I knew her. Observing her a little minutely, I did recognise her—Pema.

Several brutal methods were adopted to disfigure her. It was hard to believe that she was the same person I had seen off in the milky light of the snowy reflection only a few days ago. She was cruelly robbed of the exceptional charm and beauty she once possessed.

On seeing me standing before his door, the brute gave a hard push to Pema thrusting her inside a room which he hurriedly locked. Then turning to me he said—"You seem to be a very important businessman. We had enquiries from the trade-agency about a businessman's stay at Yatung. I am sure, you will help our trade and that will bring you good profit in silver. For such bona fide purposes, there would be no difficulty in your visit to Tibet. I shall return your pass before noon, after showing it to the Foreign Bureau Department. But I warn you—do not come in contact with any

Tibetan! If you disobey this rule, even God will not be able to save your bones."

There was thumping from inside the room. The brute grinned viciously in that direction, declaring—"Your case has been written off. There are no appeals."

A passerby interpreting it murmured—"Another death sentence. . ."

IV

A pair of Indians who had known me as a public worker, came to see me at the shop I was staying in. One was a wine merchant and the other had a transport business. Their conversations convinced me that I could trust them. Realising the urgency of the work, I put it to them—"Can we not do something to save Pema?"

"We may try," promised the transportsman.

"She says in her statement that she is a Sikkimese. In case, without making any investigation she is put to death, that would be a very bad precedent."

"I have an idea—" the wine merchant proposed a plan—"Suppose I give a couple of bottles of liquor to the scavenger who lives in our trade-agency, he will surely get some daring results. The brute's house is next to the agency railings, one need only remove a couple of planks to get her into our compound which enjoys diplomatic sanctity. Even if the brute comes to know about it, it will not be so easy for him to get back the person taking shelter in the trade-agency. The only snag in this plan seems to be that the trade agent himself may be against our plans, because he wishes to remain above suspicion at all costs in the Sino-Tibetan affairs."

"Once the girl is out of the brute's house, it will be my job to take her to safety," said the transportsman.

"How shall you do it?"

"Today a horse-wagon owned by a Nepali has come from Phari. The cartman is the cleverest smuggler I have come across so far. He is on the best of terms with the Chinese check-point. If we pay him well, he will hide the girl amongst other commodities and take her out of the controls of this township. Once outside Yatung, there are many roads which lead to the freedom of the Himalayas."

The most important factor was the timing. One had to execute the plan of escape before the brute returned from his reporting at the Foreign Bureau of the Chinese. That meant one had to go into immediate action without wasting a moment.

V

While others became active according to plan and their respective assignments, I waited impatiently for my pass at the shop where I had spent the night. The intervention of our trade-agency friend brought good results and I got my pass back before noon as the brute had promised.

So deep in a valley the township of Yatung is situated that the sun appears only at noon and goes down about three hours later. Then suddenly darkness falls and along with that the curfew imposed by the Chinese military authorities begins. Aware of these difficulties, I slipped into the spacious compound of the trade-agency by climbing over the railings and proceeded towards the hills in the direction of Phari. This way I was able to avoid the Chinese checkposts situated just outside the town.

The sunshine stayed longer at the hill top I had climbed than on the roads of Yatung. From there I observed that a cart driven by a horse passed the Chinese checkpost without a halt and began to climb up the road. Just before darkness

fell over the township, I imagined that the brute must be standing at the gates of the Chuen-chu house, the Headquarters of the cruel Chinese oppressors. In order to please his masters he must be on the look out for another prey for torture in place of those escaped from his clutches.

Soon I turned my eyes in another direction in which the cart was proceeding. It was a spring evening. On the previous night it had snowed through a freak of storm. Now, by the evening the snow was falling from the trees with a heavy thud, and practically all of it melted away quickly.

I followed the trotting horseman. Darkness, wet snow and the icy-wind did not stop our progress onward.

5. *ENCOUNTER AT CHUMALHARI*

I

Late at night a reddish moon came out to show up our way. The 'white lady of the snows'—what is meant by Chumalhari in Tibetan, beamed its white peak in the horizon. The devilish claws of Yatung were left far behind.

Mohan Singh, the horseman, stopped the cart and got down to check up his living cargo. First everything looked silent, with no sign of life whatsoever. But when the tarpaulin was removed, Pema's body showed some movements. Trying to make out the objects about her, she asked—"Have I slept very long?"

"Yes," replied Mohan Singh—"You would have slept for ever had we not got you out of the jaws of the brute!"

"Tell me, where I am now."

"Keep your peace, you are away from the Chinese."

"They had practically choked me by pushing my neck into that door. How did I come out?"

"What good will it do you to know how you escaped? All you need know is that you are out of death-chamber."

"My whole body is aching. I feel unbearable pain in my head."

"I have to get you out of danger. If anything leaks out, they may chase us in a car. No, let us go."

Turning towards me she asked—"Can you stroke your hand on my head?"

"Make yourself comfortable—" said Mohan Singh and spread the packing grass like a springy mattress. It was cold and we were dressed not very warmly. The wind full of

snow particles was also quite strong. Heavy joltings of the cart made sleep quite impossible.

"Do I look very, very ugly after they have cropped my hair—" she asked without taking her head fully out of the tarpaulin cover.

"It will grow again."

"I haven't looked at my face in glass—is it too horrifying?"

"Don't worry—the wounds will heal."

"What terrific scars they will leave behind?"

"They too are removable."

"No, not from the face of a Tibetan girl. Many in your country say that all Tibetan girls, even those untouched by Satanic hands also, are not beautiful. Do we really stink?"

"You do not have to take certificate from those who themselves are hideous and unwashed."

"Your hands are so warm and soothing. I won't need any bandage or medicine!" She pressed both my hands as if to express what she had struggled so hard to hide—". . . a new lease of life . . . yes . . . a new life. . ."

II

At daybreak we had plenty of excitement. A roadside stonewall called 'mani' by Tibetans was unrolling like a scroll. There was light enough to read the inscriptions—'Om Mane Padmahum.' I wondered at the strange similarity of the Tibetan letter 'P' with Pema's cheek-bones. Pema was lying awake but with closed eyes, her head out of the tarpaulin in the cold.

Suddenly there was a thud. A heap of dust and stone-chips fell upon the cart covering us in a shroud. Mohan Singh shouted in Tibetan—'Oh! Don't shoot! We are Tibetan partisans."

As soon as the dust had settled down, we saw two Khampas

coming towards us with loaded guns pointed at us. They demanded—"Get down from the cart!"

Actually a small wooden bridge ahead was blown off. Had the cart proceeded another ten yards, we would have gone down into a fast flowing stream.

"We hate every wheeled traffic on this road. Now, we have blown off the bridge so that the Chinese will not reach us so easily on the other side of the road. From the Yatung direction we have made ourselves safe."

"You should have waited another minute and allowed our cart to get over to the other side."

"We took you to be carrying some stuff for the Chinese. You are lucky that the bridge was blown off a minute earlier, otherwise you would have been rolling down the stream by now."

"How am I to carry a wounded Khampa partisan now?"

"You mean that girl in the cart?"

"Yes."

"If she is a Khampa partisan, there is nothing to fear—she must be used to greater hardships. Anyway, you can unharness the horse and we shall put a Tibetan saddle on it. That way you can carry her to the next village where they will provide another transport for your further journey. We shall dismantle your cart and keep in our safe-keeping until we get full control of this road."

They made arrangements as they had said, and directed us to follow a mule track to the next village which was about two hours' walk. Soon we found to our surprise that walking was more comfortable than riding on the cart over the uneven road.

The 'village' turned out to be a single stone hut with no windows—similar to a cave. A herd of yak loitered before the door. Two women in dirty rags peered through the single

opening of the hut. They helped Pema to get down from horseback and directed us to wait inside until the owner of the hut turned up.

The owner was none other than the Khampa youth I had come across at the Chumbithang caves while he was trying to console Nima, the daughter of the Indian patrol. His name was Tchiring.

III

"Did I tell you, how Sange Rimpoche was killed by the Chinese?" Pema asked throwing herself carelessly on the cobbled floor.

"For the first time you mention it to me."

"That sight has killed in me everything good the great Lord had given me even to imagine in life."

"How did the end come to him?"

"It is a nightmare weighing heavily upon me. Telling it to you might rid me of it."

"When did it happen?"

"The day the Chinese raided the Kargyu Gompa. Some of their soldiers had plundered a village tchang shop. You know, if you keep that stuff in sunshine for some time it becomes highly intoxicating. The Chinese helped themselves to a large quantity—so thirsty they had become, and boasted 'Only Tibetan blood would have tasted more delicious.' And at that stage they were ordered to march back to Yatung. On their way they looked for Tibetans just as hunters looked for wild beasts. For a long time no one came in sight, so they got more noisy and filthy. We could hear that from our hide-out near Rinchenganj.'

"Could you not get outside the range of their guns?"

"We had no time for it. Our menfolk were confident, they could ambush that small Chinese detachment and make the

area free of Chinese troops. Great misfortune befell us when their plans did not materialise. We women of several villages had taken shelter at one place, not being sure which way the Chinese will turn up. As bad luck would have it, some drunken Chinese soilders rolled off the mule-track and were able to find out our camouflaged wooden hut covered with green leaves."

"Where was Sange Rimpoche at the moment?"

"He was the first the drunkards found out. Being in a prayerful mood he had gone out alone for meditations to a place from where he could see the Buddha carved on the rocks not very far away. I was standing at the door of the hut, so I could observe clearly what happened immediately after."

"I know when he prayed he always forgot about the surroundings, perhaps his own existence too."

"An ugly brute of a Chinese soldier trained his gun towards the head of Rimpoche. I felt like offering my head by putting it between the gun and what he aimed at. It was not possible. He pressed the trigger just at the moment when Sange Rimpoche had uttered loudly—'Namo Budhae' (I bow before Buddha).

"He bowed his head before the rock statue of Buddha and the bullet whizzed over his head without touching a hair even. Rimpoche raised his head again with quiet pride and repeated loudly—"My head will never bow low before a tyrant—it will bow only before Lord Buddha."

She posed as Rimpoche had done at the moment when deadly blows by the butt of a gun were inflicted on his head, and she continued—"That hellish torture made my hair stand on end. The executioner was a typical Chinese devil—a complete stranger to human feeling."

Tchiring had entered the hut and following the conversa-

tion commented, "Such cruelties upon our learned Lamas are bound to inflame the revengefulness of the Tibetan people."

"Sange Rimpoche bore the torments and tortures like a rock. Not a cry, nor a groan was heard during the shower of blows on his head. As a last sadistic measure, the Chinese torturer thrust a bayonet in his eyes, and Rimpoche cried out in the agony of his soul, "Do my prayers reach you—my Lord Buddha?"

"They have reached the Tibetan people all right," Tchiring assured us all.

" 'Glory to Buddha'—was our cry in helplessness when the Chinese turned upon us with bayonets from which Sange Rimpoche's blood was still dripping." Pema shut her eyes and continued "They shouted at us—'these wretches don't deserve bullets, that would be too luxurious handling to them. Come out of the hut. If you don't, we are setting fire to it. But that too would be too lenient a treatment to you. We have caught our rabbits--and we know how to fry to make them tasty.' "

"How horrible!"

"Horror is hardly the word for what we had to go through. Without waiting for our movements, the Chinese lined up at the door of the hut. One of them caught hold of my hair and pushed me out with a kick that darkened everything before my eyes. Another pig commanded—'Begin with her.' At that time I wore my hair in two braids as you had seen me in India. One rascal pulled them and held so fast that it hurt me. Another chopped them off close to my head with a bayonet, which also made cuts on my face and blood flowed and obscured my vision. With one braid he struck me again and again across the face and the other one was stuffed into my mouth and tied round my neck. After that two of them

threw me over a rock holding me fast to damage the pride of my very existence. Before I lost consciousness, I heard their leader shouting—'next', and all of them laughed."

"Mad dogs behave better," said Chiring.

"Those are the most crooked people on earth—most heinous!"

"We must kill them wherever we can find them on our Tibetan soil," Tchiring expressed the determination of his people filled with hatred for the Chinese occupying forces.

V

In fact, a Khampa army of more than fifty thousand men operated between Lhasa and the Indian border. This was no longer only a small detachment of partisans to harass the Chinese occupation. No, the entire Tibetan people had arisen, for their blood had reached boiling point with hatred against the Chinese. They had arisen to avenge the violation of their land and women, the shameful humiliation of their custom and religion, the desecration of their monasteries and their cultural heritage—all that had so long nourished their hatred had taken an explosive character.

Tchiring told us about the latest developments—"Our forces have won some spectacular victories over the Chinese in the Lhasa-Tsetang-Towang sectors. It is unimaginable for people in the outside world. They are overawed with the idea of Chinese superiority of arms and manpower over us. Considerations of peculiar Tibetan terrain and the unquenchable hatred for the invading troops have not carried much weight with them. This outstanding victory of the last few weeks is sure to turn the mind of the outside world in our favour."

"What is the position in this sector where we are?" I enquired.

"You mean this Lhasa-Yatung sector? Of course, here the Chinese have overwhelming advantage against us on account of the motorable road. We are doing our best to counteract that disadvantage to us by cutting off the road at several points. We have received an urgent command from our headquarters at Trigu Lake to demolish the Tuna bridge and to capture the Tang Pass in this Phari Gyantse sector."

"The bridge and the pass are of great strategic value."

"Their importance is obvious. Chinese divisional headquarters at Yatung are formidable. Our forces on this side of Yatung are unable to cross that strong point to reach our Chumbithang outpost. Through this bridge and pass if the Chinese take over enough reinforcements, quite easily they can overrun our Chumbi outpost, and threaten Bhutan and India, both unguarded."

"What results those threats will bring?"

"There will be an effort to compel India by the threat of encroachments on Indian territories to refuse asylum to the Dalai Lama or to any other Tibetan. We can counteract that move by keeping the Kampa Dzong Dongkya-pass route open to us to enter Sikkim safely. This can be achieved in turn only if we demolish the Tuna bridge and capture the Tang pass."

"Are your resources not sufficient to fulfil this task?"

"Fearless manpower we have in plenty, they are also willing to sacrifice their lives to achieve that objective, but we have not got any good long range weapons. Topography is so peculiar that the Chinese units entrenched there will be able to mow us down before we get them within the range of our gunfire."

"Under the cover of night or of the shrubs perhaps you can plan a surprise attack."

"Our losses will be enormous and fulfilment of the assignment may still remain doubtful."

"On such occasions you adopt the technique of infiltration—" said Mohan Singh intervening in our conversation—"I have been a soldier all my life. During our campaigns in Ethiopia against the Italian strongholds, we adopted that technique in a number of occasions, always with good results."

"The position in Tibet is quite different"—replied Tchiring—"Here is no question of a Tibetan partisan approaching a Chinese patrol without resorting to shooting at first sight. Under the present set up it is impossible to approach a Chinese so near even for faked fraternisation."

"Perhaps I can be of some use to you in this matter," I added.

"Nothing like that," said Tchiring—"We shall not be able to appreciate such help when Tibet is being strangled."

"Some Yatung Indians were trying to impress upon me that you had already some contact with the Chinese." I expressed my doubt.

"Quite correct—" Mohan Singh said catching my point—"I have to clear my own accounts with the Chinese, and I am only bidding my time. There is no question of my betraying the cause of Tibet, India or Nepal—I can assure you outright."

"What is the real cause of your bitterness towards the Chinese?"

"Take it from me, it is an axiom—no one excuses the abductor of his wife. I married a Tibetan girl and had a happy family life. The Chinese came and took me also as a Tibetan since I married a Tibetan girl. So far, it does not sound wrong. What they actually meant by

making me a Tibetan was that I should agree to be a slave to the Chinese and do all sorts of dirty job for them. I am never prepared to do that. They offered me money and asked me to go to India or Nepal to do some espionage work for them. As a guarantee that I would not betray them, they wanted to keep my wife here—sparing her life if she remained concubine to one of their cooks. It is unheard of that such a rascality can be proposed. Naturally I refused, and they kidnapped my wife. I must look for her amongst the Chinese organisation, for that reason I have established contacts with them."

"We know you for so many years—" said Tchiring—"You are an honest man and a good soldier. Once Tibet becomes free, you can have high promotion in our armed forces."

"I don't need that incentive, I am ready to shed my blood working for Tibet which means also saving my own country from Chinese invasion. I have understood your problem, and shall immediately start work for its solution."

"What will be Pema's programme next?" I enquired anxiously.

"You need not worry on her account," Tchiring assured me—"We never leave our wounded soldiers uncared for behind our lines. Our next caravan meant for India leaves in a few days time, she will join it, and most probably cross the Donkya Pass to reach Lachung in Sikkim."

"They will take good care of me in Tibet," Pema said with confidence—"I am worried about re-entering India. Sange Rimpoche on whom I relied since the murder of my father, is no more."

"Don't get disheartened—" Tchiring encouraged her—"For girls like you who have been made orphan, the ultimate help is always—Lord Buddha."

VI

Three days' long march with a Khampa company hardened me physically and mentally for the Tibetan cause. We lived on tchamba and slept in tents made of yak hide. Mohan Singh did his best to lighten my burden of a blanket while marching, also lit fire with yak dung for warming whenever he could.

This way, we reached the summit of what is called and literally is the topmost plateau of the world. Villages surrounding 'Phari' have the highest altitude in the world. The hardest obstacle to fight so far was the strong gale blowing most of the time at that height.

One evening we reached the Lhasa-Yatung road again. Mohan Singh disclosed to me his plan—"I shall be disguised as a motor-mechanist and you will pose as a rich Indian merchant. When we meet the Chinese, I shall tell them that you loaded your truck with valuable goods for Lhasa but the machine broke down and the Khampas might loot it, which would mean a loss to the Chinese of precious articles like watches, fountain pens, binoculars and radio-sets. We have come to request the Chinese to render us some help for making the truck mobile again, for which we are ready to pay them in kind. We shall see how they react, accordingly we shall make the best use of our visit to their camps."

With foresight he had procured an old sparker and a broken bearing of an old truck to convince the Chinese of the genuineness of our purpose.

No lights were there to warn us before we stepped into a Chinese patrol post. From inside a yak-tent when someone challenged us in a strange tongue, Mohan Singh replied—"It's us, men from the motor-trade. It's us to fix up your vehicles."

"Go in!" said one of them and opened the gate erected as

a barrier to block the road. A little ahead we saw a number of loaded Chinese army vehicles parked at the roadside. Mohan Singh whispered—"We have plenty of material as booty."

Next was a barracklike structure, scantily lighted by a single hurricane lamp. The hall could accommodate about three hundred soldiers. Though it was only evening, they had been ordered to bed presumably in order to be able to go into action as soon as alarm was sounded. From the same direction came a howling sound to which Mohan Singh replied in the same way as at the previous post. A stout fellow came near to look at our faces. Mohan Singh's knowledge of Chinese came to our rescue—"Comrade Colonel! Our truck has got stuck a few miles up the road. . ."

"You lie, you devil's son!" said the stout soldier—"First I'm only a corporal. Secondly, we know definitely that the Tuna bridge has been blown off by the Khampas this morning. How could your truck reach this side of the road?"

"I was talking of the other direction, comrade officer of Heavenly honours!"

"Nothing to do with that direction. There is another officer further down. Go and talk to that dog who always files complaints against me before the party bosses. Sentry! Let them pass and go to the hundred devils and Satan's mother! Admit no one else this way to disturb our sleep."

Instead of another officer's quarters we bumped against what turned out to be 'foreign technicians rest house.' The man on duty here accosted us in Russian—"All beds are vacant here. Our advisers and technicians are held up on the other side of the Tuna bridge which is gone. You must be belonging to the same units?"

I nodded. He was convinced more by my Russian. Showing us a well-furnished room, he brought a register to note down

our arrival, saying—"You have simply to fill it up. In the meantime I shall get some food for you. What would you prefer—a Kiev chicken or a Peking pig."

"Both the dishes—we shall share it amongst ourselves."

"It has been most daring for us to have come here," Mohan Singh advised—"Do not give them a chance to suspect us. Fill up that book according to the pass you carry. In case, they search us, there won't be any discrepancy."

The accommodation provided to us was right royal luxury. After an eight-course meal I felt sleepy, but Mohan Singh said—"I shall be off at midnight to fix up various things. First of all, I shall pretend to inspect the Chinese trucks and shall put earth in their tanks to make them useless. Then I shall join the gunners to misdirect the range of fire. I have a life's opportunity to take revenge. You know, as we have arranged, our forces are to attack this post before dawn. Don't sleep that long. As soon as you hear the first shot, leave your bed and take cover climbing up the high mountain to your right."

"Wish you all success!" I said, and got to the soft warm bed looking like one from a fairy-tale.

VII

The loud snores of the Chinese watchman woke me up before the expected first shots of the morning. Jumping down from the bed, I looked for my clothes to put on. So tattered they were that I needed some light to find out the right places to put them on.

Luckily, moonlight infiltrated through the ventilators which enabled me to locate the things in the room. To find whether I could get some material to tie round my feet in place of socks, I opened the cupboard which was placed at one side of the bed. Very neatly a nicely pressed

Red Army officer's uniform hung there. A pair of boots were placed below. In the side drawers were nicely arranged a pair of binoculars, a shiny revolver with a spare magazine and a strap full of more than a hundred bullets. Apparently, the officer to whom the equipment belonged had gone just for a drink to the officers' mess and under the influence of liquor probably had entered some other bedroom instead of his own.

To me all those items were a most cherished gift as if fallen from the Heaven. Without losing a moment I got myself dressed in the uniform and hung the strap of bullets around my shoulders. The boots also fitted well. Trying them on inside the room I reached a corner and found that an overcoat with the insignia of a Red Army colonel was dumped there. Putting that on over the uniform made me feel comfortably warm and happy. Taking the binoculars I came out of the house leaving the watchman still snoring heavily.

This time the sentries before the barrack-house and the patrol posts stood to attention giving me as smart a salute as they could. Acknowledging them casually, I came out of the Chinese enclosures, and proceeded towards the mountain, of which only a rough outline was becoming visible.

I selected a conveniently climbable rock as my observation post. In case some shells were fired in that direction, which was hardly probable, I had a big boulder before me which could give me good cover.

For quite some time everything before my eyes looked calmly asleep. Then it seemed as if some dark waves were coming nearer to the Chinese camp first to encircle and then to engulf it. Perhaps one outpost was able to detect it, because they fired some coloured rockets. The sky, brightly lighted red, looked as if the morning sun rose horizontally in the

sky and immediately began falling down. Moving mules and men caught in the light looked like being pinned down to earth.

Firing began immediately. Obviously, the Khampas had the Chinese camp within their gun-shot. Some heavy calibred fire from the Chinese side thundered in a volley, and they kept on firing at intervals but they were overshots—hardly doing any damage to the approaching Khampas. Gradually, the loud thunder-claps having struck, the mountain resounded and merged into a steady roar.

The Khampa advance which looked like approaching sea waves had by now completely engulfed the Chinese camp. The Khampas kept on firing without a pause thus dumbfounding the enemy.

At this stage, a chain of loud explosions started. Trucks were set on fire, then the barracks, and lastly the ammunition and the petrol dumps. The wavy tongues of fire soon began to compete with the mountain in stature.

All was over before the sun in the shape of a fireball began to climb up into the sky. The victory of the Khampas over the Chinese was complete. A few Chinese and their advisers came to the mountainside and were about to reach the rock where I had taken cover. I could hear their panicky shrieks. Lest they should turn their guns on me I opened fire on them having the boulder still as my cover. By this time some Khampas who were in pursuit finished them off with their gunfire. Mohan Singh was leading them. He too could not recognise me, and was about to open fire when I called him by name.

No doubt, Mohan Singh proved himself to be the real hero of the day. All the high commanders of the Khampa forces embraced him one by one. Dorje wearing an overcoat of a Chinese, with the red insignia of a colonel, broke the news

we all were eager to hear—"Dalai Lama reached the Indian borders a few days ago, and just now the radio has announced that the Land of Buddha has given him asylum."

The entire Khampa army echoed the jubilations. From empty shells to big drums, whatever came handy was used as a musical instrument. Captured food was served for the feast of the whole army and the neighbouring population. Tchiring led a batch of wild singers and dancers: "Sangbo Sangbo! Oh, my God! The Pass is ours!"

We gathered flowers, grass or stones whatever we could lay hands on by peeping into the snow while enjoying the Tchamba or biscuits which they were distributing, and we made a thanks-giving offering to the gods.

The mountain peak of Chumalhari shone full in its majestic grandeur. Its top had the fine features of the smiling compassionate Buddha.

The whole of the Tibetan landscape and all its people sang and danced in the greatest joy of their life.

6. *THROUGH FREE TIBET*

I

Snow melted quickly on mountain-tops. On lower levels it formed rushing torrents and leaped into the gushing streams, which in their turn flooded the river draining itself ultimately in the Hram-Tse Lake. It was spring at its height in this part of Tibet.

The Khampas considered their great victory over the Chinese incomplete until special prayers in the monastery of Tongu-Gompa were held. The situation of Tongu being on the road to Lhasa, at the foot of the sacred Chumalhari, and some passes leading to Bhutan in the vicinity, the Gompa had prospered well. People said that a number of gods and deities enshrined there were made of pure gold and the big marble image of Buddha was specially brought from India.

"Oh what beautiful gods they were!" Tchiring explained to me—"Even the big monasteries of Lhasa envied the riches at Tongu Gompa. When the Chinese soldiers began breaking them, the chief abbot of the monastery did not stay there an hour longer, but went straight to the Hram-Tso and drowned himself."

"Luckily, the pure gold deity Tara did not fall in the hands of the Chinese." Another young man named Tashi who accompanied us, said—"When the Dalai Lama had begun to remove his treasures from Lhasa before the Chinese entered that sacred city, we knew which side the wind was going to blow. I myself saw that about hundred muleloads of Lhasa treasures passed this road on their way to India. The same night I dressed myself like a Jhogpa—a brigand and took away the Golden Tara to safety."

"Where did you take it?"

"Along with other treasures we have kept it hidden in the Khangbu-Chu valley on the Sikkim border. Now we have received reports that the Chinese are building roads there to attack India, so we have to remove our treasures from that hideout."

Only a couple of days ago the Chinese were ousted from Tongu Gompa ; therefore, a lot of clearing was needed before the holding of the services in the main shrine. Soldiers, peasants and the Lamas all joined hands to make the task easy. Rumours circulated that the missing marble image of Buddha was going to reappear. Everyone awaited the miracle.

At first sight the Gompa gave an impression that some iconoclasts of the dark middle ages had visited the place. The large gate at the main entrance was missing. Tashi explained, "It was bitter cold when the Chinese reached this place ; they needed fire. Nothing came in more handy to them than the wood used in the structure of this Gompa. They did not spare even the wooden images of the gods—so barbaric their behaviour with our religious treasures has been."

We entered a spacious courtyard, three sides of which had two storied galleries, supported by columns. Tashi said, "This is what we call Lhaprang in Tibetan—place where the Lamas live. In front of us is the Lha-Kang or the temple."

Here too the large wooden doors were missing. Regardless of that two Lamas squatted by the side of a big drum, each with a praying-wheel and a rosary in his hand, the beads of which they shifted after every prayer. On our appearance, they began to beat the drums in an excited manner.

The whole Gompa was filled with a new commotion and life. Old and young Lamas who had fought against the Chinese for us along with the Khampas, now with suspense

and curiosity on their faces, looked for the marble Buddha—the main God of the shrine. The new Chief Priest at last came forward and removed the temporary curtain so that we could see the many images representing deities or sanctified Buddhist heroes ; all these were grouped along the walls of the temple. Some of the images which were carved out of wood and had by some chance escaped total destruction, showed charred faces—a sign that they had to face the Chinese fire. The new drapery and ornaments of the gods were quite artistic ; some others were fashioned in gilt metal. At the foot of the images was a long shelf where brass vessels were placed with burning wicks in them being fed with melted butter. Offerings were made of ears of barley with imitation leaves made of yak-butter, coloured red and yellow.

The next shrine was that of 'Kunjuk-Sum'—the incarnation of all the saints together united in a trinity. 'Kunjuk-Sum,'—literally translated means—'the three deities', but the head priest told me—"This Trinity refers to the elements—air, water and fire. To our mind, they are symbols of voice, compassion and the force of life. All this philosophy is elaborately dealt in the eight hundred volumes of what we call the 'Kajar'. They were the first prey of the Chinese bon-fire."

A separate entrance led from the 'Kunjuk-Sum' to the 'Kunjuk-chick'—'God alone.' Here we had in front of us an altar covered with woollen carpets and with collection of offerings far more abundant than before the other images. Light through an opening of the ceiling fell directly upon the face of the life-size marble Buddha.

It seemed that the sculpture was an excellent copy of the original at Sarnath—Buddha turning the wheel of the sacred law. Blows of hammer had now chopped off the lower pedestal where two deer and first five disciples were carved

in a pose of meditation and prayer. Buddha's hands and shoulders were damaged, but the head had remained practically undamaged. Except for a part of the roughly cropped up hair which looked like a crown, the image retained its original look and serenity. The rays of the sun falling on the broken parts of the marble looked like glittering diamonds.

"The miracle is there!" Everyone cried prostrating before the lord they were looking for. Chanting of devotional hymns had the accompaniment of gongs, beating of drums, clashing of cymbals, noise of cane-flutes, ringing of hand-bells, and the shrill sound of a number of ten-foot large horns. The noise of those instruments was so great that the head abbot had to wait a long time before he could say the prayers audibly.

"Our 'Deva Tsembo'—the Buddhist heaven is nothing but a free Tibet." So the abbot began his preaching standing on an altar erected specially for him—"Our country must remain free from the havoc created by the Chinese invaders. Our Buddhist religion is a religion of love and joy for all mankind, and therefore, it is indestructible. Chinese brutes may try hard but they will not succeed in killing our religion. Rather, in that effort, they themselves will forfeit their right to call themselves human beings, not to speak of claiming their existence as a cultured people. According to the path shown by Tathagata we must realise that the Chinese domination is misery of the hell. Tibet must get rid of this misery. What is the correct way to end this misery? It is to drive out the Chinese from the Tibetan soil. In this effort every Tibetan should become a 'Chanchub'—disciple of the God of infinite goodness and dedicate his life in saving his people from the Chinese torments."

Crowds went round and round Buddha praying in hymns.

From their movements and gestures it was easy to see that they were sure to attain their heaven, the Deva Tsembo—a free Tibet.

II

Before the sun went behind the tall Chumalhari, the Khampas called their grand council. Word had come from other parts of Tibet that the Chinese had pillaged the famous Sakya Gompa and the Badu Gompa. The chief Lamas had fled to the south with their families, but the Chinese had succeeded in unearthing the treasures of the Gompas, and killed or made prisoners all those who had stayed behind. With all the herds of enslaved people, yak, mule and cattle they had captured, the Chinese bandits had set out straight for Shigatse on their way to China.

One Khampa only, Sonam by name, had escaped on the way from the Chinese hands, and having learned on the way that a great Khampa victory was being celebrated, managed to reach the Tongu Gompa. After one day's and two whole night's march, he had become so exhausted and scorched by the sun and the wind that, as soon as he finished telling the news in brief, he fell fast asleep right in the middle of the grand council.

There was not much time to think or waste ; so some one shouted from a corner of the crowd—"Let our new Chief Abbot tell us in which direction we should attack next!"

The Abbot got up and stood erect as he had done while preaching a little while ago—"Half of our fighting units should march north immediately. They must forestall the Chinese bandits somewhere on the Shigatse-Lhasa route and release our folk from the grip of the devils. The most sacred law of comradeship directs us not to leave our Tibetan brethren to be flayed alive by the Chinese."

Said and done was a rule with the Khampas in such cases. Half of the crowd which happened to be on the northern side of the Abbot immediately fell in line and marched away with the scanty clothes and Tchamba slung on one side—those were all the worldly possessions left to them.

The council continued its deliberations further. Someone stood up in a corner and asked—"The Chinese are pushing ahead along Kangbuchu on the Sikkim border. The head of the Sakya Gompa and many others are on that way to safety in India. Should we not stop the Chinese from blocking the only pass available to us in that region?"

Again the Abbot got up, and said—"Sure, the Chinese will be stopped from reaching that pass. Is that not the 17000 feet high Ghora Pass?"

"Yes, yes" a number of voices confirmed—"It is the Ghora Pass we mean."

"Fifty armed men will march to Ghora Pass to keep it safe for us. It will be their duty to secure the support of the local people and to lead them into battles. These fifty from here will have the extra assignment of protecting the contingents which are due to seek shelter in India. Well, you all agree to this plan?"

"Yes, we do!" shouted the whole assembly.

"Then, with the bleasings of Buddha our meeting is over."

"Yes! the meeting is over," shouted the Khampas—"On to battle! Victory to Buddha!"

The crowd roared at the top of their voices—"Eternal victory to Buddha! Eternal glory to Tathagata!"

And off they went to action.

III

"Listen!" Tashi said holding my hand—"You should join our unit bound for the Sikkim border."

There were many brave and strong Tibetans who marched with us. Among them were known to me some who had behaved courageously in face of death. Dorje was a good Khampa commander, always restless to engage the Chinese in difficult terrains and to defeat them. He had fought several battles with success in the Chumbi valley, and now he was out to defeat them on the northern side of the Kanchenjunga massive. Tchiring had established a guerrilla record by defeating the Chinese on some of their strongholds on the Lhasa Road. Lama Lobsang had ousted the Chinese command from several strategically dominating Gompas. Tashi was expert in removing the national treasures of his country right before the noses of the Chinese communists. Several mule loads of gold and golden-gods he had kept hidden in the mountains on the borders of India, in places where the Chinese would not be able to discover them. Those hidden treasures had become so numerous that he had begun to forget where he had buried them.

Some women too did not lag behind in making sacrifices for the freedom of their country. Their lot was harder. During marches they cared for the children, cooked meals, also fought with rifles in their hands when the enemy came to raid their camps. When misfortune befell, the women suffered most because the Chinese never spared them from any type of barbarous tortures they had invented to inflict upon the helpless population. Quite a number of women had become wrecks, though they succeeded in making their escape possible.

My close contact with these simple Tibetans changed my view about all the peculiar things I had read or heard about them. Whatever faults they may have, one could not classify them as uncultured, judged by any criterion. Some innocent

qualities made them more likeable than many others living far away from modern civilisation.

One characteristic, most common in them, of course, was their belief in miracles. Maybe, it had become so deeprooted in them due to their geographical isolation behind many insurmountable mountains. But Tashi explained this matter to me in a much more simple way—"One can get miracles done in our country by performing some simple miracles."

"For example?"

"You remember the miracle of the marble Buddha? I shall tell you the simple secret. When the Chinese ransacked the monastery, they could not find any image made of gold, as they had expected. We had removed all of them beforehand. So, they accused the Buddha for their frustration and 'sentenced him to death.' A Hun took an axe and at one stroke 'beheaded' the marble Buddha. They pulled down the 'trunk' and placed a heap of rubbish over it. The head they carried off as barbarians of the past had done with their beheaded enemies in the dark days. After a short distance, finding the head to be an unnecessary burden they threw it away into a roadside crater. Accidentally, it was the same crater in which I had hidden the gold-Tara. When I went there to collect the treasure, naturally I picked up the head of Buddha. Later on we recovered the rest of the body from the rubbish. One had simply to place the head on that trunk and the miracle was performed."

"A perfect miracle, indeed."

"The re-appearance of Buddha has given a new inspiration to all the Tibetans who have come to know about it. Now, they are sure to carry on their fight until we achieve complete independence of our country."

"How innocent and simple you people are?"

"No, we are called backward, a crime according to

Chinese law, and that gives them an excuse to behead the population."

The landscape along our route was rugged and barren. It was so still that not a sound was to be heard except the hollow thud of the mule's hoofs.

IV

On the fourth day of our march we had the first glimpse of the Khangbu-chu. The river seemed turbulent and was flooded with the snows of the spring. We made a halt, despatching some patrols to find out a suitable ford.

The same afternoon we had an unexpected meeting with the caravan which had left the Phari region earlier. Their guides told us that before they could reach Kampa Dzong, the local population informed them about the movement of the Chinese troops further west. Accordingly, they changed their direction, and were now going to make for the Ghora Pass like ourselves.

Pema held the saddle of her mule with both hands and tried to cover her cropped head with the gunny bag containing her provisions. Realising that her attempt had failed she gave a sad smile, saying—"How do you find my hair now?"

"Growing fast, indeed!"

"Wonderful! The Chinese too have realised it and have offered two thousand rupees for my head. You see, how valuable it has become."

"Misers they are."

"They are also after you. Rumours are abroad that one Indian robber calling himself a merchant and doctor is commanding the Khampas, and that every Chinese patrol has been ordered to shoot the Indian at sight."

"We sail in the same boat."

Our patrols returning from their reconnoitring duties reported that the first Chinese outpost was only five miles downstream. An old wooden bridge situated a mile upstream was still intact, and most probably, the Chinese had not reached so far yet.

We decided to cross the river early next morning before sun rise.

V

Mules which strayed away at night were getting roped in, and wooden saddles were being harnessed in the dark. Dorje informed me about the next programme—"Since the Chinese outpost is in our vicinity, it will not be advisable for us to cross the Khangbu-chu river in large numbers. On the other side of the river there is hardly any suitable terrain for our manoeuvring and dodging the Chinese pursuing units. With their superior long range weapons they can entrap and mow us down. The correct thing to do will be that a small escort take you up to the pass and if they allow even half a dozen of our wounded to cross into India for treatment, we shall consider ourselves very lucky."

"Have they made it so difficult to cross the passes?"

"India Government have taken a stand which would be very fair to the Chinese. Lest the Chinese get annoyed, they do not allow our nationals to cross the border in large numbers. Even those who are allowed have to get through tremendous bureaucratic obstacles. The first thing, they relieve us immediately we are on the other side is, our weapons and precious possessions. Hardly any other country would have been so hard to its neighbour at a time of its greatest peril."

"Your fight becomes more difficult that way."

"That makes us change our strategy to our great disadvantage. Look, we must have certain areas under our

control which we may call our free Tibet. Technical reasons force us to select such areas close to the Himalayan passes. Once those passes are made another 'front' for us, we get entrapped from both sides and lose our lives."

Lobsang had posted some patrols downstream to watch the movement of the Chinese. Their reports indicated that it was safe to cross the river at a point further upstream. Having made that arrangement, Dorje distributed our caravan to fulfil various assignments in different directions.

We were only seven including myself and ten mules for our use to cross the river. To make us safe from the Chinese pursuers, the logs which had helped us to cross the river were floated downstream and deposited behind some rocks in shallow water for future use. Reaching the other side, Pema said—"Leave me at the water edge for a while alone. From here I am having a good view of all I am forced to leave behind."

She took in a deep breath of her country and all she loved so dearly.

VI

The sun came up over the tops of the eastern mountains. Khangbu-Chu was a river with many backwaters, dense rushes, and deep holes. All its surface now glittered like a mirror.

Pema remained engrossed in deep meditation, her eyes fixed on Tibet. Overhead we heard the noise of a plane flying very high, silvery in colour, but casting deathlike dark shadows.

Our muleteer Lobsang knew how to command—"Take cover." The mules too had got used to the droning sound. They too behaved like seasoned soldiers.

Only Pema did not move. Lobsang called to one of his

aides—"Go, catch her mule and hide it behind that boulder."

The wind did not appear to carry the words to Pema. Gathering all the power of his lungs, Lobsang shouted again, —"To the boulders, Pema! Take cover behind that rock!"

This time his words were heard by her. She tried to move looking up at the plane which had passed over our head. Lobsang said—"They have come to reconnoitre for their outpost. I have marked in the past, before a Chinese unit moves towards a Himalayan pass, one of their planes flies over the area presumably to report on the topography and the weather to their troops.

The plane took a turn from downstream and headed again towards us. This time it flew much lower. Lobsang guessed—"This time it is coming for us—Pema!"

Pema got up in hurry, but in the very heat of her flight cried—"Wait! My comb! That's from Mussooree!"

She halted, and stooped down to search between the stones. It was a cheap comb costing only half-an-anna, I had purchased it for her during our stay at the Mussooree cottage. But, since those days, it had become her constant companion over mule back and the mountains. She considered it to have the power of miracle to grow her hair again longer than she possessed before they were cropped.

Just then, the plane began to shower bullets over us. 'Tak! Tak! Tak!' was the noise in the sky which chipped off stones around us. Pema tried to have herself protecting her head between her hands. Her legs remained exposed. Something sharp pierced her right one. She staggered and fell.

The plane disappeared behind the mountain. Dust too was subsiding when she emerged at the point of rolling down. Lobsang shouted at the top of his voice—"Quick, lads! Stop her from falling into the river."

A tall Khampa nearest to her held her fast, murmuring—"You are lost! lost! And all for a trifle!"

Coming to her senses as if after a heavy sleep and trying to make out the objects about her, she said—"I'm hit. Leave me brothers! Save yourselves!"

She had her eyes still fixed beyond the sparkling Khangbu-Chu.

VII

We all collected around Pema. Her wounded leg was tightly bound with ropes. Deep agony was reflected on her features. The tall, long haired Khampa in heavy boots, who had held her back, knelt by the side of the sufferer, and prayed.

An operation was suggested by a muleteer, a good specialist in the surgery of wounded mules. He had not the faintest knowledge of human anatomy, neither did he possess instruments of sufficient sharpness necessary for extracting the bullet from the leg of the patient. I gathered from him, that he was for severing the limb at the place where the bullet had penetrated. Knowing all that, Pema looked at me, and said—"I entreat you, do not force me to suffer that surgery."

"Bullet will not be extracted without chloroform"—I assured her.

"Where will you get chloroform here?"

"The Ghora Pass is only five miles' climb now, and then you are in India. Once there, your treatment is quite simple, without pain."

"Let us go without any pause for rest," commanded Lobsang.

The muleteers unharnessed two mules and with the aid of some ropes and saddle-wood, a comfortable stretcher was

improvised—all in a few minutes. Four persons carried Pema swinging the ends of the rope over their shoulders.

Considering her nomadic habits and the rough life she was used to, I was confident that she was going to stand the journey and overcome the severe pain. The wholesome climate of the high Himalayas with the aid of the open air and the sun, was sure to make her recovery more rapid.

Opening her eyes at intervals, she enquired—"Have we passed the zone of fire?"

"Not yet quite," Lobsang gave an encouraging reply—"We are nearing the pass now."

"By autumn I shall get cured," she said, looking at the snow ranges which were in full view now—"and shall return here—for a new fight."

7. *A NEW DAY OVER THOSE SNOWLINES*

I

The high Himalayas have always new surprises for those who venture to disturb their sanctity. Like a mendicant the snowy heights prefer to remain in eternal meditation undisturbed. Whoever dares approach nearer to them has to face unforeseen obstacles, and sometimes with good luck gets extraordinary rewards.

For a truly adventurous traveller each track on the snowy ranges is the beginning of fresh life. The mountain air constantly inspires him to attain something which has never been done, or where all others have failed. On rare occasions, a man does succeed in experiencing the bliss of being one with the 'Mountain-God.'

The spring evening was setting in earlier than we had expected. The pass was not in sight yet, but we did see, hovering in the distance against the sky, a white peak breathing under the shower of a pinky sky. Bubbling with joy, we stopped. Pema too could not keep it to herself—"It is too beautiful: it hurts me more than the bullet not to share with you the story of the deity who lives on that peak."

"Do tell me."

"For the first time when I was crossing this pass, mother related to me the famous Saga of Tibet connected with that peak. Long, long ago, the famous Goddess of Miracles—Tara incarnated herself in Tibet as a poor peasant girl. It was during the reign of Srong-bstan-Gampo who had a Chinese princess named Wen-Tchen as his queen. Being of a very proud nature, Chinese royal blood could not tolerate the fact that an ordinary Tibetan girl surpassed her in beauty and every other accomplishment. She got little Tara brought

before her in chains, and ordered her Chinese escort to drop the girl from the peak of this mountain. You see, only the Chinese have the credit of inventing such cruel punishments in history.

"Then, a miracle happened. Instead of coming down, Tara remained suspended in the air. The Mountain-God of the Himalayas, called Shiva in India, placed the girl on his palms and raised her high into the sky to show her unsurpassable beauty to the whole world. Right there, he created for Tara—the 'Sukhavati'—'Happy Land,' in which nowhere does one hear of anything unwholesome, nowhere of the hindrances, nowhere of the states of punishment, the states of woe and evil destinies—nowhere of suffering. Whatever Tara may wish for comes to her, be it musical instruments, cloaks of different colours, ornaments of various kinds, or a superbly handsome husband.

"Contented with her own happiness, Tara showers it also on mortals. But since the Chinese queen punished her, she never looks towards Tibet. That is why the whole country has become barren, and the people so poor. The Chinese are the root cause of this disaster. Once they are turned one and all out of Tibet, Tara will have pity upon us, she will find that we Tibetans were not at fault, and so she will shower all sorts of happiness upon our land too.

"For the present Tara showers all her wealth and goodness on India, because the Indian God had been kind to her. India has always been so kind and friendly to Tibet and Tibetan people. During the present struggle of life and death of our country, all Tibet prays to Goddess Tara who has her abode on that sacred Indian peak."

The view of the peak did Pema more good than any medicine. Pure mountain air and the joy of seeing the throne of the Goddess of happiness and miracle, made her

feel much stronger. She was getting intoxicated by the beauty of the Himalayas.

II

Lobsang loved to talk about the snowmen and the 'Dremos'—the red-bears which were supposed to inhabit those high altitudes. He himself had been a 'Dogpa'—a smuggler belonging to a Tibetan nomadic tribe. As his professional operations invariably took place under the cover of darkness, and most often he had to cross the pass alone, actually he had chances of seeing some rare wild-life on snow-ranges, unseen by any other man.

Lobsang was not afraid of them. Taking pride in having worked as a Dogpa, he related his experiences—"They are far less ferocious or treacherous than the Chinese. Once I was crossing this very pass in autumn. Early snowfall had covered all landmarks. Not knowing whether I had forgotten the way, I approached a black object, taking it to be a 'mani'—pile of stones on which prayers are inscribed in Tibetan. When I reached it so near that I could have touched it if I wished, to my great alarm I found that the object was a living dremo. In face of so certain death I recited some prayers in honour of the Goddess Tara. The dremo mimicked me with a grin and allowed me to continue my walk. A Chinese patrol will never show that gesture of mercy towards a man."

Having been reminded of a Chinese patrol I asked him—"The pass cannot be very far now?"

"No, it is not. Actually, we would have been halfway over it, had we headed for it straight."

"Why are you taking us through a circuitous route?"

"Dogpa tradition demands that first we say our prayers in the 'Eka-caves' and then only cross the pass."

"Where are those Eka-caves?"

"On the other side of this crevasse in front of us."

"I have never heard of those caves."

"They are one of the most amazing things in the Himalayas."

"What are the wonders there?"

"First of all, whatever you see there is a creation only of nature. The cave opens from the top behind a big boulder. If you do not know the place you can never reach it. Thousands of people pass this way every year but there are only a dozen or two who know that there is a place of pilgrimage right under their feet.

"At the entrance you have to squeeze yourself to get inside, but once you are there, you see a hall where hundred elephants can be accommodated quite easily. And what godly decorations there are over the walls! The complete life of Buddha is painted there. The images you see really talk to you."

"What do they say?"

"To follow that you have to know the language of the gods. I am not very literate. Besides I get dazzled at the glitter of the godly complexion."

"What colour they are?"

"Indescribable. In order to appreciate them you have to be there when the morning lights infiltrate the caves. The rays of the sun first fall on the heaps of snow looking like statues of the giantlike bodyguards of the Dalai Lama. The snows reflect the rays over a dep-blue hot-spring inside the cave, making it appear like a rushing fountain before a palace. Then the reflected light of the fountain illuminates the Buddha's life over the walls. That magnificent colourful godly sight must be seen to be believed."

"Does anyone live there?"

"Why? Have you never heard of the Eknath Lama?"

"Never."

"So, you cannot claim to have seen a real god in the body of man . . . And now we are there. You will meet him and see his hermitage. Afterwards you can tell me whether I was right in bringing you first here."

III

Had he not greeted us with a hearty laugh, we would have taken him as a statue of Rabindranath of the wilderness, crossing a stormy pass painted by Nicolas Roerich. In a solitary soft candle light his whole facial expression was chiselled as it were out of rock. The lines making his expression were not different from those of a broken boulder. By contrast, the eyes were the softest that ever looked at us, and full of dreams though wide awake. A one-piece loose woollen long "over-all" allowing the hair at his chest to meet his beards openly, were the only cover over his tall bony trunk. The lower portions of the leg and feet were bare. His right hand carried the begging bowl from which he picked up some corn grain by grain and put it in his mouth. The "hairy-bush' over his lips was thick enough to keep and display as sample whatever variety of grain he munched.

Offering us some parched barley he asked—"Are you the pair for whom the Chinese have set a head-hunting price?"

"La Lesse! Yes, sir!" replied Pema with a Lhasa accent.

"You did well in not going to the pass straight. One yak-man who brings me milk has told me the Chinese are in ambush for you on the Indian side of the pass."

"How did they get over to the Indian side?"

"It has a small history. Such things are possible because the responsible authorities at Delhi do not realise the importance of the Himalayas for the life, culture and the

very existence of their country. Somehow or other, through the stupidity of the Chinese, news leaked out at Delhi sometime ago that the Chinese armed forces have occupied a large tract of Indian territory in Ladakh, and their next move was to capture the passes—the gateways to India. Indian bureaucrats in Delhi gave no importance to these facts thinking that they did not affect them or their families in any way. They had never seen the Himalayas, and so by passes they understood papersheets posted somewhere authorising anyone to cross the place without let or hindrance. The general public of India, being religious minded and having seen or imagined the places of pilgrimage in the Himalayas, understood the danger much better. Many of them were facing harassment from the Chinese side in their own territory. They raised their voice, and the authorities in Delhi told them 'after all those are barren territories, a peak here and there, we are not going to quarrel with our great friend and neighbour for those stone-chips.' Then the Chinese shooting intrusions began, and a few lives on the Indian side were lost, quite a number of Indian patrols got arrested and tortured by the Chinese. Once more a voice was raised that the Chinese should be stopped. This time some bureaucrats getting fat salaries thought of stretching their limbs a little as an exercise for better appetites, and as an act of great patriotism and national service proceeded towards the Himalayas to fix up the limit up to the point the Chinese advance must not be disturbed, because they had fears that total stoppage of the Chinese may lead to a war, and who knows, they themselves could get bombed out.

"One anaemic, peevish and sickly person wielding very high authority came personally to this pass, due to its high strategic importance for the assigned job. As bad luck for

India would have it, that officer had never seen snow in his life, so he took them to be an atomic shower directed from Peking. But he faced it bravely remaining inside the check-post for a day. Next day he had a desire to win the highest decorations India could bestow upon him, and so he personally led a party of men with a stone-placard—'India-Tibet border' to be placed somewhere on this pass. But another misfortune for India befell that morning, because a light storm raged over the summit of the pass. The responsible high civilian had to rush back to Delhi in time for his decorations, so the 'India-Tibet border' inscription was abandoned on the slope of the Indian side. Because insignificant Indo-Chinese border disputes were to be settled amicably, of which New Delhi was cock-sure, everyone on our side forgot about fixing up the border line.

"Dalai Lama was then blamed by Peking and Delhi both for disturbing the 2000-year old peace over the Himalayas. Heavily armed Chinese soldiers pursued Tibetan refugees to kill as far as they did not meet with any resistance. And how could the Indian patrol advance further than the lower slope where the Delhi civilian had put the border line? This is how the Chinese go over and control the Indian side of this pass."

"Now, I understand how the border matters stand in practice."

"Let me bring the border story up-to-date. Last week, the Chinese have placed two machineguns just above the abandoned stone-placard and have under control of their fire the far away Lachung valley deep in the body of India."

"It means we have lost this pass to the Chinese."

"Including those Eka-caves which have been our place of pilgrimage from time immemorial."

"Are we not going to do anything about it?"

"Who bothers about it? Delhi thinks, though they can prove from historic documents that the areas occupied by the Chinese are Indian, any action about it would be hasty not deserving of a mature and enormously big power like India."

"Are they doing nothing about it?"

"Of course, they are drafting notes to Peking on such a scale that very soon it will create a paper shortage in India. Quotations about the Indian claims are given from the Rigveda which the Delhi authorities have heard about for the first time in their life. According to one research-scholar in the Secretariat, the Rigveda has come out after the escape of the Dalai Lama from Lhasa, and so that must be put forward as the latest claim that the Indian officers have actually administered those parts of the Himalayas. The Chinese are going with their guns in hand, hunting Tibetan and Indian nationals and all those areas where they do not run across strong Indian patrols, they declare them to be unadministered by India and administered by China. This is the way they want to settle the so-called 'border question.' Some very high personalities in Delhi think, that it would be a very honourable settlement for India, though difficult to secure from the Chinese, if the 'administered' portions of the Indian continent are saved. So far, this has been the latest and the severest condemnation of the Chinese action from our side."

"But that would not save Pema and myself from Chinese butcher-knives this night."

"How should such a trifle matter anything to Delhi? Correct action in respect of yourself or the Himalayas is to repeat what Lord Buddha has said as his last word—'Be ye lamps unto yourselves. Rely on yourselves, and do not rely on external help.' "

Looking at the walls, we found the Lord commanding us to go into action.

IV

The forceful voice of Eknath Lama had awakened a number of people squatting in the dark corner of the cave. Recognising one by his healthy stature, I got startled, and asked—"Jigme! How do you come here?"

"We all are falling leaves before the spring. Wherever the wind takes us we go to die and to become manure for the new leaves."

"I could not follow you exactly."

"You know, I live for my child—Nima. Her torture by the Chinese made me melancholy, so much so that I began to neglect my duties. My soul pained—so I have come to take the dust from the feet of this great sage of the Himalayas. This will cure me of my maladies."

"Do you know him well?"

"Can't say well, but I have been coming to him since I was a young lad."

"Has he been since a long time here?"

"Yes," he says, all his worldly desires have been fulfilled quite early. What he has not lived and tasted in life is not perhaps worth knowing or experiencing. Very widely read and travelled a man he is. A man who knew him before me, told me that before taking up this garb of a Lama he was a renowned scientist, had lived in palaces and had seen the world beyond the seven seas like the five fingers of his hand. You can talk to him in any language you choose, he will reply you in a vocabulary much richer than you had ever aspired to command. Politics, religion, philosophy, science, medicine or arts, whatever be your liking you can discuss with him to learn a good deal."

"What about military science?"

"You find in him an ideal general, though they say he had been only a staff colonel in some war outside India."

"How does he keep his knowledge at par with the outside world when he is in the Himalayas so long?"

"Some of his admirers have provided him with a transistor-set. Our checkpost men, when they come here, often bring newspapers and books which he asks them to obtain from Calcutta. But it is not those outside equipment which makes him what he is—it is something inherent in him which has made him so great. And, in spite of all greatness, he places himself at your disposal like a child, whenever you need his assistance to solve a difficult problem for you."

"Can he do something about our safe crossing of this pass tonight?"

"Easily. Perhaps he is the only man to help you in this respect. You must be a lucky man to have come this way."

Eknath Lama was in meditation before retiring for the night when we approached him with our problem. Without opening his eyes, he said in a soft voice—"Rely on yourselves and dislodge the Chinese from this pass. You need not be timid in your action—no one's property you are stealing, you are regaining what is yours, and what the Chinese bandits want to appropriate by truncating your Motherland."

"Will it be so easy to dislodge the Chinese?"

"Simplest matter on earth. Delhi is complicating matters due to fear and stupidity, and getting entangled in its own bureaucratic net. This will lead them to lose their nerves for nothing, and they will think of hanging themselves by the chains they themselves have invented in their imagination."

"No, we are not waiting for Delhi's directions tonight."

"In that case, your victory is assured. You have simply to take the 'border-stone' from the place the lazy bureaucrat left it, and to place it beyond this cave, down below the southern slope, where actually the border is by tradition, custom and usage. If it is done, you all automatically are on Indian soil, and then if the Chinese stand in your way further down to Lachung, it will be at the cost of their own lives. Once you have done this simple job, you have achieved an unprecedented great victory for your Motherland. Later on, our army will follow your methods to oust the Chinese from all places wheresoever they have grabbed our territories."

"Will not the Chinese stop us from bringing that border-stone to this side of the slope?"

"They would have stopped you were they here on this pass in large numbers. For your information, I tell you, there are only five Chinese tonight manning the two machineguns and their hastily-built post-hut. They do not expect any action from the Indian side. From this side they await reinforcements. Skilfully, you should grab their necks and throw them down this side of the slope. Now, this is the most opportune hour for your action. Tomorrow after sunrise, it will be too late."

Jigme got seven men with him ready for the operation. Lobsang knew the route. This time when we looked at the walls we saw Buddha bestowing his blessings upon us.

V

The mountains were asleep covering themselves with thick clouds. We marched in a single file without a shout or a whistle. Not a sound was to be heard but the crack-crack of the hardened snow under our high Tibetan boots.

The Chinese hut too was all quiet. Putting his ear to a gap between the planks Jigme said—"All the five swine are snoring."

Lobsang gave a hard kick to the plank. Some ice cracked and the wood gave way. No sooner had Jigme switched on a torch, than the Chinese fell on our feet begging us to spare their lives. We took charge of their stacked automatic guns. Our two men outside had already their fingers under the Chinese machine guns.

"And we were so scared of these rats!" Jigme gave them kicks right and left—"This is for torturing Nima! And this one for killing my grandson!" He was about to put a hammering blow at the jaws of one Chinese, and wanted to unstrap his gun for the purpose, but suddenly he stopped and said grinding his teeth—"Were I not in the service of the India Government, I would have quenched my thirst with your blood."

Swift action was necessary to search the Chinese. They came from the most treacherous stock, we were certain. While posing to fall at our feet, they might have prepared themselves to shoot at us from that angle. Jigme ordered them to keep their hands up in whatever position they were. All orders they obeyed meekly.

Thorough search was made of the bodies of the Chinese and the hut. One briefcase was full of maps and battle sketches right up to Lachung. There they had shown their military road from Yatung to the Khangbu-Chu as ready, and the whole area up to the junction of the Lachung and the Lachan Valleys as—'to be occupied.' This sinister plan showed that the bases and the forward positions of our armed forces in the vital regions of Natula and Jelepla were going to be encircled. On another sheet was drawn a line of their advance from the Towang side. The ultimate

objective of the two arms of their armies was joining hands along the Teesta-Brahmaputra line, and occupying all territories north of those two rivers. Nothing could have put the Chinese designs and aspirations more clearly than those maps and sketches. Jigme said with sarcasm and anger—"Delhi hopes to counteract these plans with her border patrols!"

Then and there he wrote a note to the Indian checkpost and sent the maps to be forwarded to Delhi underlining 'Not through proper channels but straight to the High Command.' Another request he made was to get the right borderpost, where we were going to shift the stone-inscription, manned at the earliest by army personnel.

"We have worked hard," he smiled, and commanded the five Chinese to carry the abandoned borderstone to the place where we wanted to put them. Turning to me he pointed out—"Look, how they behave—just like our trained dogs."

Reaching the right spot on the southern slope he ordered the Chinese to gather some boulders and to place the placard there. In the morning it was to be fixed up with concrete and cement.

Having completed the task Jigme turned to the Chinese and asked—"What are we going to do with you now?"

"Allow us to hide somewhere on the Indian side," said one of the Chinese still keeping his hands high.

"Do you want us to betray our country?"

"If we return to our Chinese units, they will shoot us down as deserters and kill our families in China as well. If we remain untraced for some time, a way may be found for saving our lives."

"I do not keep snakes feeding them on milk—only Delhi does that."

"Then send us to Delhi, we shall give you all the information about the Chinese invasion plans."

"You are a dog of the Peking rulers, we do not trust you. And even without your saying we have all your army plans in our hands. According to the civilised laws of any country you deserve to be shot. We have caught you redhanded with invasion plans on our soil, only death is the right punishment for you."

"Please, please, spare our lives."

"Not because you do not deserve a bullet, but as it may embarrass Delhi, and the Chinese need not make martyrs of you, we let you go."

"But we have nowhere to go!"

"Then go to hell!" said Jigme turning away his face from the Chinese—"Leave us in peace."

We went for consultations a little away from the Chinese, who still awaited our orders. Jigme commanded them to stand in attention, then shouted—"Salute our borderpost and our Great Land!"

The Chinese obeyed saying—"Champhul! Champhul! We salute you."

"Now, before we send you to hell, a message for the Satans whom you served. Tell them, a strong army mans this pass. Any Satan, swine or a dog trying to sneak into our land will break its own bones. About turn! March! Quick March! 'Margyug! Margyug! (Get out! Go away!)

One of Jigme's men went behind the Chinese with a rifle to make sure that they did not take a turn in the direction of the Eka caves, about which they were not suspected of possessing any knowledge.

While they were still within hearing distance, Jigme shouted again—"Tell them, the Indian people, four hundred

million have arisen as one man in defence of the Himalayas. No power on earth can take away from us the Himalayas—the eternal crown of our Motherland."

VI

Jigme's colleagues from the checkpost reached the top of the pass at dawn in full force. They arranged a 'dandi'—a Himalayan transport carried by eight men, for Pema, and sent signal for a jeep to await us at the roadhead. Thanks to this quick arrangement we hoped to reach Kalimpong in one day.

Pema could not believe her good luck. Eknath Lama's Himalayan herbs had relieved her pains, and brought back the natural cheerfulness of her face. Along with her prayers, she repeated—"Unbelievable! Unbelievable! Tomorrow at this time we shall be at Kalimpong. How nice it sounds—Kalimpong! The very capital of the 'Happy Land! Chik-nyi-sum—(one, two, three), and we are there!"

VII

Morning broke below the horizon. Such unique phenomena of nature are experienced only on the dreamy heights of the Himalayas. Deep red glow created a dome in the eastern skies. Gods and deities of the snow peaks raised their heads—awakened.

Our frontier-guards had arranged flag hoisting at the highest point of the region. Eknath Lama unfurled it. The winds caught it. It soared high up.

Everyone standing in attention, the guards' band struck up the National Anthem. Mountains vibrated the refrain—"Jaya-he, Jaya-he, Jaya, Jaya, Jaya." (Hail Thee! Hail Thee! Hail Thee! hail! hail! hail!).

The Tibetans held for presentation—'Jelda,' the scarf of

love and friendship for India. Beyond several ranges was Tibet—awaiting a new day.

Kanchenjunga, Gauri-Shankar, Makalu, Everest and innumerable other peaks stood up, their heads erect as fearless, brave sentinels. Clouds in varieties of colours hovered over them in shapes like living Shiva and Buddha with their consorts—Parvati and Yasodhara.

And India's Tricolour Flag soared higher and higher, far far above the earth, the mountains and the bright skies of a new day.