

Gulab Singh and the Creation of the Dogra State of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh

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CURRENT CHINESE activity along the northern frontier of India, and Peking's claims to much of this area, have focused attention on a remote and sparsely populated region whose arid reaches, blanketed by perpetual snow, have never held a central position on the stage of world history. The history of Ladakh, where controversy currently rages over conflicting claims to Aksaichin, the Chang Chenmo Valley, Kurnak Fort, Spangur, and Demchok, has been characterized by instability and turmoil. Squeezed between Tibet, India, Kashmir, and the autonomous Muslim Rajahs of Baltistan, Ladakh as an independent entity suffered a precarious existence.

This was not always so. During the reign of Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal, the Gyalpo of Leh, from about 1590 to 1640, Western Tibet as far as Maryum Pass, the watershed between the Sulej and Tsangpo river basins, fell under Ladakhi control. In the time of Sen-ge-rnam-rgyal's grandson, Bde-ldan-rnam-rgyal (c. 1640-1675), Leh controlled not only Ladakh proper with its dependencies of Nubra and Dras, but Guge, Purang with the region between Manasorawar Lake and Maryum Pass, Rudok, Spiti, Upper Kunawar, Upper and Lower Lahul, Zanskar, Purig, and the lower Shyok Valley. But an attempt to interpret this apparent Ladakhi hegemony in the lands north of the Himalayas could be misleading; certainly it would be a mistake to think of Ladakh as a nation in the modern sense. The entire Baltistan-Ladakh area was one of several small semi-independent Moslem and Buddhist States ruled by autocratic chiefs. Over these areas, when conditions were propitious and the Gyalpo strong, Leh could exert its influence. But Ladakh with its sparse population and strong neighbors was more often the victim of aggression than an aggressor itself.

During the nineteenth century either the East India Company or the rising Sikh Confederation could have moved into the region. But the Company usually acquired new territories in this period only for strategic reasons, which were dictated largely by dread of foreign, especially Russian, intervention in India. Ladakh was not contiguous to Russia but rather to China and the hard-pressed Ch'ing Empire was not deemed much of a threat even by the ever-nervous British Indian government. The Sikhs were less pacific and by the 1820's the Gyalpo, Tshé-dpal-rnam-rgyal, whose predecessors had lost virtually all of Leh's seventeenth-century conquests, was well aware of his dangerous position. As the Sikh acquisition of Kashmir in 1819 presaged the ex-

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Unless otherwise indicated, all MS notations refer to records kept in the National Archives of India in Delhi.

tention of Ranjit Singh's ambitions to Ladakh, the Gyalpo sought to strengthen himself by negotiating an alliance with the British. William Moorcroft,¹ who was in Leh in 1822, drew up a trade agreement between the Gyalpo and the merchants of Calcutta, but the Company rejected his proposals for the conclusion of a formal treaty which would have brought Ladakh into the British sphere.

The Rise of Gulab Singh

As it turned out Tshe-dpal's apprehensions were justified, but it was Gulab Singh, the Dogra feudatory of the Sikh ruler, Ranjit Singh, who was to be feared rather than the Sikhs themselves. Gulab Singh was a direct descendant of the Hindu Rajah Dhrou Deu who first established the Dogra family as rulers of Jammu in the declining days of the Mughal Empire. With the growth of Sikh power in the early years of the nineteenth century, the aspirations of Ranjit Singh, the architect of the Sikh state, soon included Jammu, and in 1808 General Hukam Singh conquered this hilly tract for his chief in Lahore. Although he had been one of the staunchest opponents of the invaders, Gulab Singh was realistic enough to discern that the Sikhs were, at least for the time being, irresistible. Therefore, along with his two brothers, Dhyan Singh and Suchet Singh, he decided that the way to rebuild the family fortunes was not by further opposition to the overwhelming Sikh preponderance but by becoming the Lahore Government's loyal servant.

In 1809, Gulab Singh joined Ranjit Singh's army as an ordinary trooper. He soon distinguished himself, especially at the siege of Multan in 1819 and in the subjugation of the bandit chief, Mian Dedo, who controlled the hills around Jammu. Gulab Singh's fortunes rose rapidly. In 1820 he was awarded a *Jagir* worth Rs. 40,000 annually near Jammu. Soon he was allowed an army of his own, and, in 1822, as a reward for his services in the conquest of Kishtwar and the subjugation of Rajouri, he was made hereditary Rajah of Jammu with an annual allowance of three lakhs² of rupees.

Meanwhile Gulab Singh's two brothers had not been idle. They, too, were created Rajahs by Ranjit Singh. Suchet acquired Samba and Ramnagar with an annual allowance of a lakh of rupees. Dhyan received Bhimber and Kassouli with a yearly income of one and a half lakhs of rupees. During the later years of Ranjit Singh's reign Dhyan Singh ranked so high in the old man's esteem and affections that he became the virtual regent of the Sikh state. Thus, within twenty years of the Sikh conquest of Jammu, the Dogra Brothers, as they were known, had reached a position of eminence far greater than that which they had enjoyed prior to 1808—albeit they owed their success to Ranjit Singh's patronage.

Claude Wade, the British agent deputed to the Court at Lahore, found the Dogra Brothers a pernicious influence. No doubt his fears were largely motivated by the possibility of a diminution of the British influence on the Sikh government; nevertheless he gave a revealing view of their ascendancy:

They owe their present commanding position in the councils of their master to the personal favor and protection of His Majesty and have lost no opportunity of using it to augment and strengthen their power. Aware that there is no community of interests or good feeling

¹ William Moorcroft, famous British traveler, and Company Agent in Central Asia.

² A lakh equals 100,000.

between themselves and the Sikhs they employ none but Dogras and other tribes of the mountains to manage and defend their country in the hills. They hold immense tracts of territory also in the plains, besides the monopoly of the salt mines, and by means of arming the transit duties, from the Satlej to Peshawar have their offices in all the principal towns and exercise more or less of influence or interference in every department of the government.³

Both the Company and Gulab Singh were well aware that the death of Ranjit Singh would presage the collapse of the Sikh power. While he still lived the British were content to maintain the *status quo*. They were unwilling to risk defeat at the hands of the powerful foreign-led Sikh army, and Ranjit Singh was a loyal if wily ally. His strong state acted as a useful buffer against possible Afghan or Russian incursions. Ranjit Singh's departure from the scene would change all this, but the Company was willing to wait.

Gulab Singh's ambitions encouraged a more active policy on his part. He hoped to create an empire for himself, although ostensibly for Ranjit Singh, which would fall to him as the presumed survivor of the Sikh collapse. Wade thought that Gulab Singh might try to seize the whole of the Punjab upon his master's death,⁴ and that "there is little doubt that they [the Dogras] would attempt to seize Kashmir which they have now almost surrounded."⁵

As the British had cut off possible avenues of advance to the east by the 1809 Treaty of Amritsar,⁶ to the south, by their support of the Amirs of Sind in 1838, and as there was a limit to the extent the Afghans could be pushed in the west; the only fertile area for the acquisition of further territory lay to the north of Jammu and to the east of Kashmir, in Ladakh, where the British had already evinced a lack of interest. In fact, the possible Dogra invasion of this area was viewed with some enthusiasm by the Company, for it was hoped that as a consequence a larger portion of the Tibetan trade would be diverted to its holdings. The Company had been trying to achieve this end at least since 1815 when a factory was established at Kotgarh on the Sutlej to coax directly into British territory the lucrative shawl wool traffic, normally a Kashmir and Ladakh monopoly. The Sikh conquest of Kashmir and the ensuing famine drove many of the Kashmiri weavers into British India, and the Company redoubled its efforts to gain direct access to Tibetan products. It tried to use Sikkim as a route and worked through protected native states along the Tibetan border to influence the Tibetan and Chinese authorities. These officials were reluctant to export to new markets and staunchly resisted the British overtures. However, Gulab Singh's future actions in Ladakh were to have the desired effect, and between 1837 and 1840 shawl wool imports into British territory and that of protected states such as Bashahr

³ *Political Consultations*, Feb. 14, 1838, Nos. 57, 58, Wade to Macnaghten, Jan. 1, 1838.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* In regard to the Dogra conquest of Ladakh Wade wrote: "It was a wanton act of usurpation in order to strengthen his means of seizing Kashmir itself when the expected opportunity may offer." *Ibid.*, Jan. 17, 1838, No. 26, Wade to Macnaghten, Nov. 17, 1838.

⁶ C. U. Aitchison, *Treaties Engagements and Sanads, etc.* (Calcutta, Govt. of India, 1931), I, 34. Actually the British only restricted Ranjit Singh's advance eastward in the plains area. In the mountains his movements were even encouraged as it was hoped that the Sikhs would come into conflict with Nepal, which the Company, in turn, urged to advance westward. A clash occurred almost immediately (the late spring of 1809) in Kangara.

increased 200 per cent, while other products including salt and borax were also diverted from their usual route.⁷

Zorawar Singh's Military Campaigns

In 1834, Gulab Singh sent his ablest general, Zorawar Singh Kahluria, with 4,000 infantrymen to conquer the territory between Jammu and the Tibetan border. Zorawar led his army through Kishtwar into the province of Purig. There was no opposition at first, as the Ladakhis were taken by surprise, but, on August 16, 1834, the Dogras defeated an army of some 5,000 men under the Bhotia leader, Mangal, at Sanku. Kartse, the capital city of Purig, fell into Zorawar's hands, and, after a month's rest and the building and garrisoning of a fort, the invaders marched down the Suru river valley and again defeated the Ladakhis at Pashkyum. The local chief fled to the Fort of Sod, and the next morning Zorawar sent his subordinate, Mehta Basti Ram, in pursuit with 500 men. The chief and the Sod garrison surrendered.

Zorawar now entered into protracted negotiations with the Gyalpo, Tshe-dpal-rnam-rgyal.⁸ But the latter delayed; he hoped the severe winter would discourage the Dogras and make them retrace their steps.⁹ Tshe-dpal meanwhile raised an army and marched to Lang Karchu where the Dogras were encamped for the winter. The Ladakhis were deceived by the seemingly scattered condition of the Dogra forces and by their pretended difficulty with the snow. Lulled into complacency, they rested and prepared tea, only to be immediately attacked and routed by their foes.¹⁰ The Gyalpo sued for peace and it was finally arranged that he would pay an indemnity of Rs. 50,000 and an annual tribute of Rs. 20,000. Of the indemnity, Rs. 37,000 were to be paid immediately, and the balance was promised within six months, to be rendered in two installments.¹¹

Zorawar marched on to Leh to install Tshe-dpal as a puppet ruler holding power from Gulab Singh and the conquest of most of Ladakh appeared to have been successfully concluded. But the situation was not to remain peaceful for long. The Chief of Sod recaptured his fort, killing the Dogra garrison, and Zorawar was forced to reassert his power. He then marched to Zanskar where the local ruler offered his submission, and a tax of three and a half rupees per house was levied. Meanwhile, in Leh the Gyalpo took advantage of Zorawar's absence to rebel and to close all trade routes. Again Zorawar attempted to obtain aid from the British, but Colonel H. T. Tapp, the political agent at Sabathu, would not commit himself; although he pointed out to his superiors that as Ladakh had never been tributary to either the Sikhs or the Chinese (Tibetans)¹² there was nothing to prevent them from aiding the Gyalpo if they

⁷ Alistair Lamb, "Tibet in Anglo-Chinese Relations, 1767-1842," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, New Series V-80 (1958), Part II.

⁸ The Gyalpo's name appears in many different forms throughout the records—among them: Jank Roostum Numkil, Tonduk Namgyle, Chung Num Tal Rustum.

⁹ Baron Hügel reported that the Gyalpo delayed Zorawar's advance for three months by intimating that Dr. Henderson was an agent of the British Government. Quoted in N. K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh* (Calcutta, Mukherjee, 1951), p. 125.

¹⁰ Alexander Cunningham, *Ladak* (London, W. H. Allen, 1854), pp. 335, 336.

¹¹ A. N. Sapru, *The Building of the Jammu and Kashmir State—Being the Achievement of Maharaja Gulab Singh* (Lahore, Punjab Record Office, 1931), pp. 23-28.

¹² The British tended to include Tibetans in their meaning of the word Chinese.

wished.¹³ With the approach of Zorawar to Leh, Tshe-dpal's position became even more desperate. Once more he sought British intervention. This time he wrote to the Commander in Chief, Sir Henry Fane,¹⁴ only to be rebuffed.¹⁵ The Commander in Chief replied that Ladakh "is beyond the limits of the Company's dominions."¹⁶

When the Dogras returned to Leh no resistance was offered. Zorawar collected the unpaid balance of the indemnity (Rs. 13,000) and replaced Tshe-dpal as Gyalpo with a more tractable relative, Moru-pa Tadsī or Lumbu. The ex-ruler fled with his son to the British-protected state of Bashahr. Zorawar constructed a fort at Leh and left Dalel Singh in charge of the garrison. He then returned to Jammu with the son of Moru-pa Tadsī and several other hostages to insure the new Gyalpo's good behavior.¹⁷

At Lahore, Wade expected the Dogras to make strenuous efforts to capture Tshe-dpal, probably regarding his personal liberty and presence on the frontier "as dangerous to the permanence of their authority in that country [Ladakh]."¹⁸ Metcalfe considered the violation of the Bashahr frontier unlikely,¹⁹ nonetheless Wade informed Ranjit Singh that Gulab Singh's crossing of the Bashahr frontier would be considered in a most serious light²⁰ and asked the Maharajah to order Gulab Singh to withdraw his forces from the border.²¹ He feared that the Dogras would, "as they had done in Ladakh first try to introduce their authority and then make it point of honour with their master to maintain his claim."²²

There is no doubt that many Sikh officials were not as favorably disposed towards the Dogra Brothers as Ranjit Singh. It was soon discovered that many of the difficulties encountered by the Dogras in Ladakh had been instigated by Mian Singh, the Sikh Governor of Kashmir, who found the supply of shawl wool to Kashmir being curtailed by the Dogra incursions. Ranjit Singh himself had long coveted Ladakh, but he was quite content to see its conquest by the Dogras, especially as a report from Wade indicated that Rajah Dhyān Singh had presented Ranjit Singh with a tribute of Rs. 30,000 from Ladakh. The Sikh monarch received a deputation sent to Lahore in the name of Moru-pa Tadsī thus recognizing Gulab Singh's conquest.²³

Within a year of Zorawar's return to Jammu, news arrived that Moru-pa Tadsī had rebelled and that the Dogra garrison in Leh was being besieged. Zorawar started for Ladakh at once. After a journey frequently delayed by swollen rivers, he arrived at the capital, having subdued Zanskar and other mutinous regions on the way. Moru-pa

¹³ *Political Consultations*, Jan. 9, 1837, No. 24, Col. H. T. Tapp, Political Agent, Subathoo to T. T. Metcalfe, Agent to the Lt.-Gov., Northwest Province, Nov. 22, 1836.

¹⁴ *Political Consultations*, July 17, 1837, No. 82, Chung Num Tal Rustum, Rajah of Ladakh to General Sir H. Fane, no date.

Political Consultations, Aug. 14, 1837, No. 8, Son of the Rajah of Ladakh to the Commander in Chief, no date.

Political Consultations, Dec. 20, 1837, No. 7, Jank Roostum Namkil, Rajah of Ladakh to the Commander in Chief, no date.

¹⁵ *Political Consultations*, July 17, 1837, No. 83, Macnaghten to Capt. J. Hay, Commander in Chief's personal interpreter, July 17, 1837.

¹⁶ *Political Consultations*, Dec. 20, 1837, No. 8, Captain Hay to the Rajah of Ladakh, Oct. 23, 1837.

¹⁷ Sapru, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-28.

¹⁸ *Political Consultations*, Jan. 17, 1838, No. 26, Wade to MacNaghten, Nov. 17, 1837.

¹⁹ *Political Consultations*, March 21, 1838, No. 90, T. T. Metcalfe to Wade, Nov. 7, 1837.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Wade to Col. H. T. Tapp, Nov. 17, 1837.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Wade to Macnaghten, Nov. 15, 1837.

²² *Political Consultations*, Jan. 17, 1838, No. 26, Wade to Macnaghten, Nov. 17, 1837.

²³ *Political Consultations*, Aug. 8, 1838, Nos. 28, 29, Wade to Macnaghten, March 1, 1838.

fled but was captured on the left bank of the Spiti River near the British frontier. He was deposed and the old Gyalpo, Tshe-dpal rnam-rgyal, was reinstated on condition that he pay the fixed tribute and the Dogra occupation expenses.²⁴

Zorawar once more returned to Jammu, but early in 1839 he was back in Ladakh to seize Moru-pa, who had been plotting against Tshe-dpal and the Dogra authority with Ahmed Shah of Baltistan. Thus, after the pacification of Leh, Zorawar marched to Baltistan with a mixed force of Ladakhis and Dogras. Taking advantage of the ambitions of the Sultan's son, Mohammed Shah, he accomplished his conquest and annexed Skardu to Jammu. He deposed the ruler in favor of his rebel kinsman and levied an annual tribute of Rs. 7,000. Tshe-dpal had accompanied Zorawar on the expedition and, being now considerably advanced in age, died of his exertions. He was replaced by his grandson, Ji-gMet Sin-nge rnam-rgyal, whose father had expired in 1839 during his wanderings.

The Invasion of Tibet

Gulab Singh had consolidated his position in Ladakh; still he was not satisfied. Knowing the advantages of controlling the profitable wool trade, he was not content to allow the major benefits to devolve to the British. He already ruled Ladakh and was confident of inheriting Kashmir at Ranjit Singh's death. All that was needed to possess the entire wool trade was the acquisition of the very territories where the goats were raised—the Chang Thung Plains of Western Tibet. Consequently in May 1841, Zorawar Singh advanced up the Indus Valley into Tibet with a force of about 6,000 men, largely Ladakhis, Baltis, and Kishtwaris.

He was immediately successful. Following the plunder of Hanlea and Tashigong, he subjugated Rudok and Garo. Finally, after defeating a small force of Tibetans, he captured Gartok.²⁵ The benevolent British attitude towards Gulab Singh changed with the invasion of Tibet, for the commercial benefits resulting from the unrest in Ladakh promptly evaporated. The flow of wool into Bashahr and other border areas dwindled, and Thomason, the British Resident, inquired whether the Dogras should be allowed to interfere with the supply of wool to Bashahr now that the state was under British protection.²⁶ The Governor-General replied that the British Government would not tolerate interference with the trade of its provinces.²⁷ "The infallibly injurious effect" of the stoppage of trade between British India and Tibet in violation of the "established rights of Traffic" of British subjects "by this audacious movement of the Sikhs cannot be submitted to without loss of influence and loss of consideration."²⁸ A Company Agent was ordered to convey the Governor-General's displeasure to the Lahore Durbar and to request that Gulab Singh be forced to recall Zorawar from Tibet.²⁹

Meanwhile, the Dogras continued their successful depredations. They cut the

²⁴ Sapru, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–28.

²⁵ *Secret Consultations*, Aug. 16, 1841, Nos. 34–38, John Erskine, Political Agent, Subathoo to T. T. Metcalfe, July 20, 1841.

Ibid., No. 36, Lushington to Secretary of the Govt. of the Northwest Province, July 15, 1841.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 35, Thomason to Lushington, July 31, 1841.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 38, Governor-General to Clerk, Aug. 16, 1841.

²⁸ *Enclosures to Secret Letters from India*, Vol. LXXIX, Thomason to Lushington, Sept. 1, 1841 (India Office Library, London).

²⁹ *Ibid.*



track between Sinkiang and Bashahr and reached Taklakot after garrisoning several stations along the way. Brian Hodgson,³⁰ for one, felt that they could not be stopped short of Lhasa.³¹ As Zorawar advanced the British became more vociferous in their complaints. George Clerk, Wade's replacement in the Punjab, was instructed to inform the Lahore Durbar that the Dogra interference with the Bashahr trade was unwarranted and hardly the action expected of an ally.³² The situation was felt to be particularly unfortunate as the Dogra invasion had occurred just when the Bhotias were

³⁰ The British Resident in Nepal.

³¹ *Secret Consultations*, Aug. 23, 1841, No. 65, Hodgson to J. Erskine, Aug. 4, 1841.

³² *Secret Consultations*, Sept. 6, 1841, Nos. 42-44, Govt. to Clerk, Sept. 6, 1841.

about to cross the Himalayas with wheat, rice, and "English goods" (broadcloth) to exchange for salt, borax, and shawl wool. Now they would have to suffer the privation resulting from the cancellation of their trip or to run the grave risks involved in pursuing the expedition.³³ Furthermore, in September 1841, Stephen Lushington, then the political agent in Bashahr, reported that Zorawar was trying to exact money from Bhotias under British protection in Byans³⁴ and had threatened to invade the area if the exactions were not promptly discharged.³⁵ The British Government in India was incensed at this report and informed Clerk that the Sikhs must order the evacuation of the Byans territory immediately; no more taxes were to be levied; those villagers already assessed would have to be compensated; and a Company officer should be deputed to supervise the area.³⁶

News that the Dogras were moving towards the frontier of Nepal increased the Company's apprehension, for it had always feared a possible alliance between Lahore and Nepal, the only powerful independent native states on the subcontinent. Clerk was expressing the British attitude when he wrote: "It can never be safe for the Government of India to allow the approximation to Nepal of any other powerful and aspiring hill state."³⁷ Lieutenant Governor T. C. Robertson of the Northwest Province reported that Zorawar intended to build a chain of forts from Ladakh to the border of Nepal and that he was attempting to gain the cooperation of the Nepalis. He felt that the Sikhs might enter into an alliance with Nepal as they wished to gain Kumaon from the British. Robertson's conclusion was that Dogra demonstrations near Bashahr and Kulu were all part of a plan to reach the Nepal frontier.³⁸ Certainly there was evidence that Nepal and the *Khalsa*³⁹ were both willing to fish in the troubled waters of Himalayan controversy. In 1837, a Nepali delegation had been well received in Lahore. Wade, immediately alarmed, had written:

The information gained by me in my late visit to Lahore was that among other objects of ambition Raja Gulab Singh had in taking Ladakh, one was to extend his conquests down the course of the Spith until they approached the northeastern confines of the Nepalese possessions in order that he might connect himself with that Government ostensibly with the view to promote the trade between Lhassa and Ladak, which the late commotions in Tibet have tended to interrupt, but in reality to establish a direct intercourse with a power which he thinks will not only tend to augment his present influence but lead to an alliance which may at some future time be of reciprocal importance.⁴⁰

Wade was equally doubtful about the intentions of Ranjit Singh, whom he suspected of being attached to the British purely for self-interest.⁴¹ In 1839, a Nepali delegation headed by Matabir Singh had again been very warmly welcomed by Ranjit Singh, apparently confirming British fears that the antipathies of 1809 had finally been for-

³³ *Secret Consultations*, Sept. 13, 1841, Nos. 19, 20, Lushington to Thomason, Aug. 25, 1841. The value of this trade between 1830 and 1835 had been about one lakh, Rs. 20,000 annually.

³⁴ The documents refer to "Beans" but no doubt the Byans district of Kumaon is the one involved.

³⁵ *Secret Consultations*, Oct. 11, 1841, No. 46, Lushington to Thomason, Sept. 20 and Sept. 23, 1841.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 97, Govt. to Clerk, Oct. 8, 1841.

³⁷ *Enclosures to Secret Letters from India*, Vol. LXXIX, 1841, Thomason to Lushington, Sept. 1, 1841 (India Office Library, London).

³⁸ *Secret Consultations*, Oct. 11, 1841, Nos. 46-51. Minute by Lt. Governor T. C. Robertson, Meerut, Sept. 28, 1841.

³⁹ The Sikh Confederation.

⁴⁰ *Political Proceedings*, June 12, 1837, No. 41, Wade to Chief Sec. Fort William.

⁴¹ *Political Proceedings*, Oct. 20, 1837, No. 6.

gotten. But nothing came of these overtures. Ranjit Singh was much too shrewd to trade the advantages of a British alliance for the dubious guarantees of a connection with Nepal.

The Withdrawal from Tibet

Actually, the British were in a weak position. They were deeply involved in the Afghan War where most of their troops were committed, and the flow of shawl wool had traditionally been kept to the north of the Himalayas. One could argue that the Dogras were quite justified in trying to correct the situation. As Zorawar himself wrote to the Lahore Durbar, the importation of shawl wool by Bashahr merchants had "greatly injured the shawl wool manufacture of Cashmere" and the Bashahr merchants did not have a right to do this.⁴² But Zorawar's threat to march on Lhasa if Ladakh did not continue to receive a monopoly of the shawl wool trade,⁴³ the fear of a Dogra-Nepal *rapprochement*, and a report from Joseph Cunningham, the British observer in Tibet, that "all trade especially in shawl wool to the Company's provinces is at a standstill or has been prohibited,"⁴⁴ spurred the Governor-General to the verge of action. He set a deadline of December 10 for the withdrawal of Zorawar's forces to Ladakh.⁴⁵ Whether Auckland actually intended to implement this threat is doubtful, but Sher Singh, who had succeeded to the throne in Lahore at the death of Nao Nehal Singh, Ranjit Singh's successor, was impressed enough to order Zorawar's retreat from Tibet and the British frontier.⁴⁶ Clerk doubted that the Dogra Brothers would ever allow these orders to reach Zorawar.⁴⁷ But the whole question became academic on the very date of the British deadline (December 10) when a Tibetan army⁴⁸ defeated the motley, out-numbered Dogra forces near Missar. How far Gulab Singh had over-extended himself was now startlingly clear. Besides many of his troops, the battle cost him his redoubtable commander, Zorawar Singh.

Encouraged by their victory over the Dogras, the Tibetans prepared to invade Ladakh. Gulab Singh immediately sent a relief expedition, while a reserve force commanded by Mian Jowahr Singh, the son of Rajah Dhyan Singh, advanced from Jammu. Vezier Lukput, the ranking Dogra officer in Ladakh, found himself in the unenviable position of trying to hold out against the advancing Tibetans on the one hand and of maintaining the Dogra supremacy over the Ladakhis on the other. Nonu Sunnum, the brother of the young Gyalpo, and Gumbo, a favorite of the Gyalpo's grandfather, defected and attempted to reestablish an independent Ladakh by playing off the two sides against each other.⁴⁹ Ahmed Shah, the deposed ruler of Baltistan, also rose in revolt.

The British, for their part, had to determine what policy to adopt in this new situation. At one point the Company was willing to approve Gulab Singh as the

⁴² *Secret Consultations*, Sept. 6, 1841, Zorawar Singh to the Lahore Govt., Aug. 18, 1841.

⁴³ *Secret Consultations*, Nov. 1, 1841, Nos. 35-37, Lushington to Asst. Secretary, Secret and Political Dept., Northwest Province, Oct. 9, 1841.

⁴⁴ *Secret Consultations*, Nov. 22, 1841, No. 23, Cunningham to Clerk, Oct. 21, 1841.

⁴⁵ *Secret Consultations*, Nov. 8, 1841, No. 45, Clerk to Cunningham, Oct. 20, 1841.

⁴⁶ *Secret Consultations*, Nov. 22, 1841, No. 18, Clerk to Maddock, Oct. 31, 1841.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Evidence indicates that there were only very few Chinese with the Tibetan forces.

⁴⁹ *Secret Proceedings*, March 30, 1842, No. 101, Cunningham to Clerk, Feb. 2, 1842.

ruler of Ladakh in return for support in Afghanistan,⁵⁰ but Cunningham suggested that Tibetan control of Ladakh might be more advantageous to the Company than control by the Dogras.⁵¹ Slowly, the British did move to a viewpoint that allowed them to recognize Gulab Singh's position. First, the Dogras, Clerk reported, had given up any plans of conquering the territory west of the Indus and, second, the Tibetan commander, Kalon Surkhang, was no more interested in encouraging the export of shawl wool directly to Bashahr than Zorawar had been. He stated that Bashahr could continue to trade in shawl wool if it could be proved that this had been done previously.⁵² Although Clerk wondered whether the British should sacrifice the rising trade and industry of Bashahr caused by the difficulties in Ladakh,⁵³ rumors of a possible Nepal-Tibet alliance⁵⁴ made Cunningham remind his superiors that the British were at war with China (The Opium War). He recalled the Company's long connection with the Sikhs and the Punjab, which, as he said, "has of late become, except in name, little more than a British dependency and our honor may be involved in the proceedings of the Sikhs."⁵⁵ With the departure of Ranjit Singh and with the predicted disintegration of the *Khalsa* under way, such British statesmen as Hardinge and Hobhouse⁵⁶ envisioned a client Sikh state or even the annexation of the Punjab. Hobhouse's chief concern after the murder of Nao Nehal Singh was that Sher Singh, the new Maharajah, would be too tractable. "With Nao Nehal Singh," he wrote, "we should, doubtless, have had a very pretty quarrel, as it stood, and I shall regret his death, if his successor is less disposed to quarrel with us than Nao Nehal Singh."⁵⁷

Observing important new developments on the horizon, the British reconciled themselves to not gaining a significant share of the shawl wool trade and to letting larger considerations of Indian security and political expediency take precedence. They limited themselves to the role of spectators in the impending battle for Ladakh, although the General-Governor did offer to mediate.⁵⁸ When Gumbo, the advocate of an independent Ladakh, asked for British aid in avoiding hostilities which he felt would ravage the countryside,⁵⁹ the British told him they felt Ladakh should belong to the Sikhs.⁶⁰ As a result the Gyalpo soon wrote to Cunningham that he had given the country to the Chinese Emperor: "We had no other remedy—what could we do?"⁶¹ To Sher Singh, Ji-gMet Sin-ge was forced to write that Ladakh had always held allegiance to China through Lhasa until the Jammu Rajahs had interfered.⁶² The

⁵⁰ *Secret Consultations*, March 21, 1842, No. 85, Governor-General to Clerk, March 21, 1842.

Secret Consultations, March 30, 1842, H. T. Prinsep.

Ibid., Mar. 30, 1842, No. 1, Minute by W. W. Bird.

⁵¹ *Secret Proceedings*, Mar. 30, 1842, No. 101, Cunningham to Clerk, Governor-General's Agent to the Northwest Province, Feb. 2, 1842.

⁵² *Secret Consultations*, Oct. 5, 1842, Nos. 73-76, Zoorkong to Cunningham, July 20, 1842.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Clerk to Maddock, Aug. 14, 1842.

⁵⁴ *Secret Consultations*, Sept. 14, 1842, Nos. 49-51, Cunningham to Clerk, May 20, 1842.

⁵⁵ *Secret Consultations*, Oct. 19, 1842, Nos. 45-56, Cunningham to Clerk, Sept. 18, 1842.

⁵⁶ John Cam Hobhouse, Chairman of the Board of Control for India.

⁵⁷ *Hobhouse Papers*, DCCCXXXVI, 184, Hobhouse to Bagley, Jan. 11, 1841 (India Office Library, London).

⁵⁸ *Secret Consultations*, Oct. 26, 1842, Nos. 94-99, Maddock to Clerk, Sept. 5, 1842.

⁵⁹ *Secret Consultations*, July 6, 1842, Nos. 40-44, Gumbo to Cunningham, April 18, 1842.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Cunningham to Gumbo, May 3, 1842.

⁶¹ *Secret Consultations*, Aug. 3, 1842, No. 22, Rajah of Ladakh to Cunningham, May 27, 1842.

⁶² Ladakh was never a political dependency of either Tibet or China.

Dogras must leave Ladakh in its former condition, as the Tibetans demanded the payment of the usual tribute to Lhasa, the removal of all Dogras from Ladakh and Baltistan, and the recognition of Chinese supremacy⁶⁸ by the rulers of these areas.⁶⁴ If the Jammu Rajahs cooperated, shawl wool and tea would again pass through Ladakh and Kashmir to Lahore.⁶⁵

The Final Settlement

But neither side was willing to settle the issue without a trial of strength, and by late August 1842, the two antagonists were in the field near Leh. On September 27, Cunningham reported that the Dogras had decisively defeated the Tibetans⁶⁶ and captured their commander Surkhang.⁶⁷ A treaty was promptly signed recognizing the existing situation: that the Dogras were the rulers of Ladakh, but that their control did not extend to Tibet. To understand the treaty provisions it is necessary to look at both the Tibetan and Persian editions, for the Dogra treaty lists only the restrictions placed on the Tibetans, and the converse is true of the Tibetan version. The Tibetan treaty stated that perpetual friendship was to prevail between the two parties and that the frontier was henceforth to be permanently fixed. The Gyalpo and his family were to be allowed to remain peacefully in Ladakh but not to indulge in any intrigues. The Ladakhis could, if they wished, continue to send the annual tribute to the Dalai Lama and the Dogras would not interfere. The treaty also stated: "No restrictions shall be laid on the mutual export and import of commodities—e.g., Tea, piece goods, etc. and trading shall be allowed according to the old-established custom." Finally, the Ladakhis were to provide transportation and accommodations for Tibetan traders in Ladakh, and the Tibetans would provide similar amenities for Ladakhi traders in Tibet.⁶⁸

The Tibetans guaranteed in the Persian treaty that Ladakh "will absolutely and essentially not be the subject of our designs and intentions." They bound themselves not to aid or abet the opponents of Gulab Singh and pledged to "carry on the trade in wool, shawl and tea, in accordance with the old customs, via Ladakh year by year."⁶⁹ The treaty between Gulab Singh and the Lhasa Government did not bind the former's Suzerain, and a supplementary treaty with similar provisions was concluded between the Lahore Durbar and Lhasa.⁷⁰

As Gulab Singh and the British had anticipated, the Sikhs were not able to maintain the efficiency of their government after Ranjit Singh's death, and the inevitable conflict between the *Khalsa* and the Company developed in 1845. Gulab Singh ingratiated himself with the British as an intermediary and, in a clause (Article XII) of

⁶⁸ It is hard to determine whether the Chinese or Tibetans are referred to here: Tibetan affairs were largely controlled by the Chinese Resident in Lhasa.

⁶⁴ *Secret Consultations*, Aug. 3, 1842, No. 22, Rajah of Ladakh to Sher Singh, June 13, 1842.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Secret Consultations*, Oct. 26, 1842, Nos. 94-99, Clerk to Maddock, Aug. 31, 1842. Cunningham estimated that the Dogras numbered 9,000 and the Tibetans 5,000.

⁶⁷ *Secret Consultations*, Nov. 9, 1842, No. 61, Cunningham to Clerk, Sept. 27, 1842.

⁶⁸ H. M. Panikkar, *The Founding of the Kashmir State—A Biography of Maharajah Gulab Singh, 1742-1858* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1930), pp. 85-87.

⁶⁹ From the Persian source quoted in Sapru, *op.cit.*, and translated by Sepher Zabih for the Indian Press Digests, Univ. of California, Berkeley.

⁷⁰ Panikkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-89. Meng Pao, the Chinese Resident in Lhasa, also gave his assent and his report was accepted by Peking.

the Treaty of Lahore signed on March 9, 1846, he was recognized as an independent ruler by both the Lahore and British Governments. The achievement of this end was facilitated by the Sikh inability to pay the full one and one half crores⁷¹ of rupees indemnity assessed by the Company. Consequently, the Lahore authorities were forced to cede to the British the territories between the Beas and Indus Rivers including Kashmir and Hazara.⁷² The Company, in turn, transferred these areas to Gulab Singh for a crore of rupees later reduced to seventy-five lakhs with the British assumption of Kulu and Mandi.⁷³ This arrangement was mutually advantageous for the Company and for the Dogras. At last Gulab Singh saw the fulfillment of his ambition for an independent Dogra state, and the British were able to conclude quietly what could have been a most difficult war. It is doubtful that they could have conquered Kashmir at this time; moreover, they made a sizeable pecuniary profit in the bargain.

A week later, the Treaty of Amritsar signed by Gulab Singh and the British Government formalized the agreement in greater detail. The Dogra position *vis à vis* the British *Raj* was more favorable than that of most princely states. The Company did not guarantee the internal security of the state, and thus could not interfere in its affairs as easily. Gulab Singh and his heirs were guaranteed "all the hilly or mountainous country with its dependencies situated to the eastward of the River Indus and the westward of the River Ravi including Chamba and excluding Lahul."⁷⁴ The eastern boundary of the Dogra dominions was to be determined later. Henry Lawrence, who had replaced Clerk in the Punjab, thought the border should be drawn so far eastward as to be out of Gulab Singh's influence and so that the traders of Jammu could not turn the British flank north-eastward.⁷⁵

Despite the conclusion of the two treaties, the Governor-General was unwilling to forego a final attempt to capture some of the Tibetan trade for Bashahr and the northern provinces of British India. Although Hardinge did not intend to pursue an active policy in this regard, he nevertheless informed the Chinese Resident in Lhasa that Article 11 of the Lahore-Tibet Treaty, under which all the Tibetan trade was to pass through Ladakh, had been cancelled. He stated that he wanted Tibetan traders to have free access to British territory and that no duty was to be charged on shawl wool and other Tibetan products entering British territory.⁷⁶

The final act of the drama was to be played in Kashmir itself: Gulab Singh still had to defeat the Sikh Governor who was unwilling to surrender the province. This was done, and the Dogra ascendancy was assured. Thus created, the state continued under the rule of Gulab Singh's descendants until 1947 when the partition of the sub-continent and the ensuing conflict over Kashmir resulted in its division between India and Pakistan. As part of the *de facto* settlement Ladakh was absorbed into the Indian Union.

⁷¹ A crore equals 10,000,000.

⁷² Aitchison, *op. cit.*, I, 50-54; XII, 21, 22.

⁷³ There has been some recent controversy whether Kashmir and Ladakh were sold or transferred to Gulab Singh. It seems clear that it was a case of transfer rather than sale. Article twelve of the Treaty of Lahore provides for the recognition of Gulab Singh as the independent ruler of these territories, and no mention of a pecuniary settlement is made until the negotiation of the Treaty of Amritsar some days later.

⁷⁴ Article 1, Treaty of Amritsar, see Aitchison, *op. cit.*, XII, 21, 22.

⁷⁵ *Secret Consultations*, Dec. 26, 1846, Nos. 1331-1343, Lawrence to Cunningham (officiating assistant to the Governor-General's Agent in the Punjab), *no date*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Hardinge to Vizier of Lhasa, Aug. 4, 1846.