

GENERAL ZORAWAR SINGH

HIS LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN
LADAKH, BALTISTAN AND TIBET



DR. C.L. DATTA

Foreword by

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FOREWORD

General Zorawar Singh will surely rank among the greatest Military Commanders in world history. The astounding Central Asian campaigns waged by the Dogras under Maharaja Gulab Singh, in which General Zorawar Singh played such a prominent role, represent a unique combination of patriotism, endurance and ability. They resulted in thousands of square miles being added to the territory of India, and to the stabilization of our Northern frontiers.

In the last few years a number of valuable books by historians have appeared on various aspects of Dogra history. I am happy that Dr. C.L. Datta of the Panjab University, Chandigarh has produced a useful book on the life and achievements of General Zorawar Singh. A good deal of research has gone into the preparation of this book, and I have pleasure in commending it to all those generally interested in modern Indian history and specifically in the developments that took place in North India during the nineteenth century. Indeed the composite state of Jammu and Kashmir founded by Maharaja Gulab Singh continues to be the subject of intense interest, and this book will therefore, find a wide circle of interested readers.

New Delhi

KARAN SINGH

PREFACE

In this book, an attempt is made to write a biographical sketch and a detailed account of the achievements of Zorawar Singh Kahluria, a brave General and Wazir of Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu—a feudatory of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. It is a sad commentary that so far no systematic and comprehensive account about the life and exploits of this great and illustrious warrior of the nineteenth century India, who was responsible for conquering and annexing the strategically important kingdoms of Ladakh and Baltistan (in area about 40,000 square miles) with the Lahore Durbar has been written. This area along with Kashmir now forms the northern frontiers of the Republic of India.

My interest in the subject developed when I selected Ladakh as a field for my Ph.D. research in 1963. The book which grew from doctoral dissertation (*Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics: 1819-1848*, New Delhi, 1973), although contains a chapter about Zorawar Singh's conquests, I felt that perhaps a writer's befitting memorial to such a great son of modern India, would be to present his achievements in proper perspective and write a comprehensive biographical memoir. This is an apology for bringing out the present book.

The present book, however, is in many ways an improvement on the information given in the afore mentioned book. While collecting material in the National Archives of India, the writer landed on some manuscripts, which give interesting details about the liberation of Dogra prisoners of war who, after the defeat and death of Zorawar Singh in December 1841, were captured in West Tibet. All these details are being published for the first time. Secondly, an invaluable scroll, which at present is available with the Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras

Hindu University, Banaras, gives details about the socio-military aspects of Dogra invasions. Certain photographic reproductions of most important parts of this rare art piece have been given in the end of this book. Finally, to make General Zorawar Singh's exploits easily intelligible, detailed sketch maps about Ladakh, Baltistan and West Tibet, showing the routes followed by the Dogra army and important battle-fields have been given. In addition, in the sketch map given about West Tibet, the route followed by Colonel Mehta Basti Ram and his soldiers who escaped from Takla Kot (West Tibet) to Almora (India) has also been shown. The preparation of these maps and identification of certain places particularly the battle-fields, have not been an easy task.

Here, it would be relevant to point out that these routes followed by the Dogras to conquer Ladakh, Baltistan and West Tibet passed through a very difficult terrain and over the highest mountains in the world. To cross and re-cross deep gorges and turbulent rivers including the Indus and its tributaries was indeed quite an uphill task. It is, therefore, hoped that this narrative about the victories of General Zorawar Singh and his army, when read keeping in mind almost insurmountable difficulties which they had to face, would inspire all Indians especially our valliant *jawans*. The latter, who, at present, are facing the armies of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of China in the Kargil and Chushul sectors respectively, would try to emulate their illustrious Dogra predecessors. It was in these very sectors that Wazir Zorawar Singh, about one hundred and forty years back, had given crushing defeats to his enemies.

Few lines about the sources. Most authentic and the primary source of information, on which the present book is based, are the English manuscript records, now preserved in the National Archives of India, New Delhi and the Panjab State Archives, Patiala. These consist of reports submitted by J.D. Cunningham, Special Commissioner deputed by the British Indian Government in 1840-41 to report details about Zorawar Singh's invasion of West Tibet. Moving from Simla and following the present Hindustan-Tibet

Road, Cunningham stayed for a year in Western Tibet and on Tibet's frontiers with Bashahr, whence he sent quite detailed reports on the subject to his Government. Additional and sometime corroborative information has also been collected from reports and news-letters submitted by British Political Agent, Subathu (in the Simla Hill States), Commissioner of Kumaon, British Resident in Nepal and the Governor-General's Agent to the North-West Frontier and Panjab. But for this source, the present book, although small as it could not have been written. Perhaps, here it would be of some interest to note that my searches of the Jammu and Kashmir State Archive Repositories, Jammu and Srinagar did not yield much information on the subject. This may be due to the fact that before 1846, when Raja Gulab Singh was under the suzerainty of the Sikh Maharaja, no records about the exploits and achievements of his lieutenants were kept either at Jammu or at Lahore.

Second source of information are the histories, travelogues and memoirs relating to West Tibet, Ladakh, Baltistan, Kashmir and Jammu written in English. General Alexander Cunningham visited Ladakh twice between 1846-48 i.e. within eight years after its annexation by the Dogras and wrote a factual account of the Dogra invasions, said to have been mainly supplied by Mehta Basti Ram, a trusted lieutenant of Zorawar Singh and an actor and eye-witness of these events. The narratives of Moorcroft, Hugel, Jacquemont, Vigne, Drew and Francke also supply additional and often, corroborative information.

Yoseb Gergan's *History of Ladakh* written in Tibetan has also been consulted. It gives details written by Lama Kondeog Nima Rangdol about the Dogra invasions over Ladakh. In addition, it also contains account given by Tsewang Nondup, who was Secretary to the last three kings of Ladakh. Both these persons i.e. Nima Rangdol and Tsewang Nondup were contemporaries of Wazir Zorawar Singh and present Ladakhi view-point about the Dogra expeditions.

Contemporary and near-contemporary Persian works such as *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh* and *Gulab Nama*, though do not contain detailed information, have also been drawn upon. In addition, later works in Persian, Urdu and English have also been consulted.

Contemporary vernacular and English newspapers also throw interesting side-light. To the first category belong *Aina-i-Sikandar* (Delhi), *Akhbar-i-Ludhiana* (Ludhiana) and *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* (Delhi). All these newspapers are now available with the National Archives, New Delhi. In the second category are included, *The Bengal Herald* (Calcutta) and the *Friend of India* (Calcutta). The relevant files of these newspapers, although about one hundred and forty years old, are very well preserved in the National Library, Calcutta.

However, despite piecing together bits of information from variegated sources listed above, so scanty is the material that only a small book as the present one could be written. And this, by no means have been an easy task. It may also be observed that some of the sources mentioned above are either quite eulogetic or highly critical about Zorawar Singh, his compatriots and their deeds. Nonetheless, it has been the writer's endeavour to present a balanced account of the achievements of the great General of nineteenth century India. Still, I am conscious of my limitations, and inadequacies from which the present work may suffer. Needless to write that any suggestion for its improvement would be welcome.

A word about General Zorawar Singh's portrait. A few of these are available in the Kashmir Government Museum, Srinagar and the Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu. But they are not similar and it is not known when and by whom these were drawn. Similarly, portraits of Zorawar Singh given by Dewan Narsingh Das¹ and D. Palit² are strikingly dissimilar. Under these circumstances, the present

1. *Zorawar Singh* (in Urdu), Jammu, 1970, facing page 8.

2. *Jammu and Kashmir Arms : History of the J and K Rifles* (Dehra Dun, 1972), facing page 49.

writer is not in a position to give a portrait of the General, which could be said real one.

As already mentioned, the primary objective of this book is to draw an accurate sketch of life and achievements of a very extraordinary personality. How far, I have been able to achieve this aim, is for the readers to judge.

It is a pleasure to make the following acknowledgements :

To Dr. Karan Singh, Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for writing foreword to this book.

To Professor Anand Krishna, Honorary Director and the staff of Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras for showing me the scroll about Zorawar Singh's invasions and providing me with photographs and permission to publish the same. To the Directors and staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi and the Panjab State Archives, Patiala for help in collecting the material.

To the authors, whose works I have consulted and used.

To Sh. G.S. Bhatia for publishing this book.

And finally, to my wife Sudha, who has always remained a source of help and strength to me.

Chandigarh

C.L. DATTA

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| F.D.P.C. | Political Consultations of the Foreign Department. |
| F.D. Pol. Progs. | Political Proceedings of the Foreign Department. |
| F.D.S.C. | Secret Consultations of the Foreign Department. |
| F.D. Sec. Progs. | Secret Proceedings of the Foreign Department. |
| J.A S.B. | Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. |
| N.A.I. | National Archives of India, New Delhi. |
| Pb. S.A. | Panjab State Archives, Patiala. |

PROLOGUE :

BIRTH AND EARLY CAREER OF ZORAWAR SINGH

The closing decade of the 18th century and the opening years of the 19th, were marked by the emergence of forces which worked for integration not only in the history of the Punjab but also states situated in the Western Himalayas. In the Punjab, Ranjit Singh was busy in consolidating the loose Sikh confederacy into a strong kingdom. In 1799, he conquered Lahore — the Imperial City of the Punjab—from the Bhangi Misal. And two years later, Sahib Singh Bedi of Una, a descendant of Guru Nanak Dev, applied saffron *tilak*—mark of sovereignty on Ranjit Singh's forehead and proclaimed him Maharaja of the Punjab.

The Maharaja's fondest wish was to subdue all the independent chiefs, both Sikhs and non-Sikhs in the Punjab and establish a strong state. After the conquest of Lahore, Ranjit Singh invaded the Cis-Sutlej territory with a view to annex it with his dominions. But to his great disappointment, his expansion in this direction was checked by the Hon'ble East India Company, who by 1805 had emerged as the only puissant power in India. In 1809, the Maharaja had to sign the Treaty of Amritsar with the British, undertaking not to invade again the Cis-Sutlej territory and molest the chiefs of this region, who, were declared to be under John Company's protection.

Not long after 1799, Ranjit Singh had paid attention to the Jammu hills also. At that time between the Jhelum and the Ravi, there were twenty-two states¹ whose rulers recognised the nominal supremacy of the Durrani monarchs of Afghanistan. But when the Kabul monarchy became weak, they asserted their independence and for most of the time kept quarrelling among themselves. In 1800-1801, Maharaja Ranjit Singh advanced to Jammu and compelled its ruler,

Raja Jit Singh to acknowledge his suzerainty. Soon after, the Lahore ruler conquered Basohli and in 1809 the Raja of Chamba, also became his feudatory.

But it was after 1809, when the Maharaja's expansion beyond the Sutlej had been checked, that he paid a serious attention to the Jammu hills. His plans to conquer Kashmir were then also taking concrete shape, for the materialisation of which it was necessary to subdue all the hill principalities to the south of the Pir Panjal range. In 1812, the Sikh army after defeating the confederated Muslim chiefs of Akhnur, Rajouri and Bhimbar, turned towards Jammu. Although, as alluded to earlier, the Jammu Raja had tendered his submission to Lahore, it appears that his freedom-loving Rajput subjects did not submit to this alien yoke and in 1809-1810, there were serious uprisings against the Sikhs, engineered by the Dogra dare-devils such as Mian Dedo. Maharaja Ranjit Singh after suppressing the revolts, deposed the Raja and assigned Jammu, in *jagir*, to his eldest son, Prince Kharak Singh.

However, revolts against the Sikh rule continued for some years more and the man who was to restore order and complete the work of Sikh conquest in this region, was Gulab Singh. He was born in 1792 A.D. and was descendant of a collateral branch of the ruling family of Jammu.² About 1810, after trying his luck at many places, he joined the service of Maharaja Ranjit Singh as an ordinary trooper. Being a brave soldier, he soon impressed his master by his faithful and obedient conduct. A little while after, Gulab Singh called to Lahore, his younger brothers, Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh also. These Dogra brothers, being accomplished courtiers, soon won the favour of the Maharaja. In 1819, Dhian Singh was appointed *Deodhiwala* or Minister-in-Waiting. Gulab Singh was given the command of a small force and was chiefly employed for subduing revolts in the hills around Jammu and west of the Chenab.³

However, it was just the beginning; the Jamwal or Dogra brothers, as they came to be known, by rendering meritorious services to the Lahore Durbar, soon earned more honours and promotions. In 1820, Maharaja Ranjit Singh conferred on Gulab

Singh, the *jagir* of Jammu. In 1822, on Maharaja's asking, Gulab Singh, annexed the strategically important state of Kishtwar,⁴ whose boundaries were conterminous with Ladakh. In the same year, in recognition to his services, Ranjit Singh entrusted the administration of the Jammu hills to Gulab Singh and granted him and his successors the principality of Jammu, with the hereditary title of 'Raja'. Similarly, his brothers who had been made *jagirdars*, were also given the title of 'Raja'.

The Dogra brothers made a common cause. While Dhian Singh and Suchet Singh lived at Lahore, Gulab Singh usually resided in Jammu and looked after the *jagirs* of his brothers also. Dhian Singh's first holding the post of *Deodhiwala* and then, in 1828 his elevation as Prime Minister, brought him in close contact with Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Gulab Singh, taking full advantage of his brother's position, who watched his interests in the Lahore Durbar, further extended his possessions around Jammu and dug his feet very deep in the (Jammu) hills. By 1834, in the words of Drs. Hutchison and Vogel, Raja Gulab Singh, after Maharaja Ranjit Singh, came to be considered as "the greatest chief in the Punjab".⁵

For running the administration and to keep under his effective control, such large areas as Raja Gulab Singh now possessed, the Maharaja had authorised him to raise and keep his own army. The Dogra Raja, ambitious as he was, had trained and equipped with great care a large army, mainly consisting of the inhabitants of the hills. Further, he had also gathered around him, a galaxy of talented persons; one of them was Zorawar Singh Kahluria a most able, intrepid and faithful general, the hero of this monograph.

There are conflicting views about Zorawar Singh's origin. Carmichael Smyth says that he was a native of Kussal near Riasi.⁶ But, Drs. Hutchison and Vogel, on the authority of A.H. Francke, write that he was not born in wedlock and was a *sarotra*⁷ or illegitimate son of the Raja of Kahlur.⁸ However, from the writings of Francke,⁹ who was not a friendly critic of Zorawar Singh and the Dogra administration in Ladakh, it is not clear as to what is his source of information. A recent writer, on the basis of information, said to have been supplied to him by a great grandson of

Zorawar Singh, writes that the Dogra general was born in 1786 A.D. at Village Ansara in Hamir Pur district of present Himachal Pradesh.¹⁰ In the *Gulab Nama*, which is an authentic and near contemporary account, the word 'Kahluria' is written after Zorawar Singh's name. This obviously lends support to the view that he was a Rajput and he belonged to the Kahluria Mians, who are said to be descendants from Rajas.¹¹

There is paucity of information about Zorawar Singh's childhood and early career.¹² However, it is said that when sixteen, he killed his cousin over a property feud¹³ and perhaps to save himself from punishment and atone his guilt, he left for Hari Dwar, a shrine of the Hindus on the river Ganges. Here, about 1803, he met Rana Jaswant Singh, then a *jagirdar* of Galihan¹⁴ near Jammu. The Rana brought him to his place and took him in his service. While staying with the Rana, Zorawar Singh got training in military weapons and horse-riding. However, after some years, he left the Rana's service and joined that of Raja Gulab Singh.

Zorawar Singh's new master put him in charge of the defence of Riasi fort about 1815, a job which he did admirably when it was attacked by Mian Dewan Singh, another contender for the possession of Riasi *jagir*. Soon after, Gulab Singh accepted Zorawar's proposal for the better utilisation of supplies to the troops and appointed him Inspector of Commissariat supplies in all the forts north of Jammu under Dogra control. Here he effected a considerable saving; the practical results achieved impressed Gulab Singh with his innate ability and earned Zorawar Singh quick promotions. About 1823, he was elevated to Governorship of Kishtwar and Kussal and after sometime, he was also given the title of Wazir.¹⁵

Wazir Zorawar Singh, organising genius that he was, devoted the next decade in consolidating the territories of Raja Gulab Singh in the interior of Jammu hills. In Kishtwar, he got the land measured and fixed the state share at fifty per cent.¹⁶ It was perhaps due to these judicious measures that soon the land revenue of this state rose to about Rs. 1,50,000 per annum.¹⁷ In addition to the fiscal reforms, the Wazir also introduced many judicial reforms here.¹⁸ He renovated the fort of Kishtwari rulers and put his own troops and

provisions there. His genius made full use of the environments: sky-high mountains were used for imparting physical training to his sturdy Dogra soldiers who later, after crossing the stupendous and very high ranges of the Himalaya, not only conquered Ladakh and Baltistan but over-ran Western Tibet. The fertile valley of Maru Wurdwan provided much-sought for provisions in the hilly area to his army. That is why in the nineteen-thirties, Kishtwar served as a very useful base of operations for the conquest of Ladakh and Baltistan. But before discussing Zorawar Singh's exploits around Leh and Skardu, some details about the routes which were followed by the Dogra army to conquer Ladakh and Baltistan may be given.

KISHTWAR TO LEH *VIA* SURU AND KARGIL

Total distance between Kishtwar and Leh *via* Suru and Kargil is about 336 miles. This route may be divided into two sections: first, from Kishtwar to Kargil, a distance of about 190 miles and second, from Kargil to Leh, a distance of about 146 miles.

Starting from Kishtwar northward, this route passes through Ikhale, Sued, Yurud, Inshan and Sukhniz villages, all situated in the Maru-Wurdwan valley. After Sukhniz, which is the last village in this valley and is distant about seventy-five miles from Kishtwar, one crosses the Maryum La or Bhot Khol Pass (14,700 ft.), which connects the Maru-Wurdwan valley with the Suru valley. It is a very difficult pass and for about six months, it remains covered with snow. Then, for about sixty miles, the route passes through rocky area which at many places is covered with snow. The traveller has to cross many passes and about a dozen deep rivulets, which are glacial-fed. The route then enters lower Ladakh and reaches village Suru, where the barren area, which began at Sukhniz, ends.

From village Suru to Kargil is a distance of forty-five miles and on the way from Suru, about eighteen miles is situated village Sanku, where Zorawar Singh had to fight a well-contested battle. In this very region are situated Kartse, Langkartse and Sod—the possessions of Tri-Sultans. At all these places also, the Dogras, when they invaded Ladakh during 1834-35, met stiff resistance from the Ladakhis. After the defeat of Mohammaden Chief of Kartse,

Zorawar Singh established a strong military base there.

From Kargil, one follows Srinagar-Leh road. Kargil to Leh is a distance of about one hundred and forty-six miles. This part of the route, was comparatively, easy to traverse.

KISHTWAR TO LEH *VIA* ZANSKAR

Distance between Kishtwar and Leh by this route is about 275 miles and it is considered as the shortest route between the two stations. There are about six passes on this route which are crossed with great difficulty.¹⁹ From Kishtwar, the track runs along the Chenab valley and after covering about fifty-five miles, one reaches Gulab Garh²⁰—a place conquered by Zorawar Singh in 1836. Then after entering the Dharlang valley, it reaches Chishot, where Zorawar Singh had built a fort. The route passes through Matsel, which is about twenty-five miles from Gulab Garh. Here it enters the snowy region and after crossing the Umasi La (17,370 ft.), one reaches village Phe, which is situated on the left bank of the Zanskar river. Then taking right turn and moving along this river, the traveller reaches Padam, the capital town of Zanskar.

Again, after crossing the river (Zanskar), one travels along the right bank and reaches village Zangla. Then passing through a small valley and after crossing the Charchal Pass (17,500 ft.), one reaches the Zambeng valley. After going up and down for many miles, one climbs up to Ruberung La (17,500 ft.) and descends into the Markha valley and reaches village Skio, another important halting place on this route. After crossing two more difficult passes, one ultimately arrives at Rumbak village, which is about 25 miles from Leh. Thence the track runs down to Leh.

In the late eighteen-thirties, this route was followed many a time by Zorawar Singh and his army during their expeditions. In addition to being the shortest, it was free from difficulties which the invaders had to face while crossing the mountain streams during the summer months. In 1837, when there was a serious uprising in Leh, Zorawar Singh following this route, covered the distance of 275 miles in about ten days. While moving along this route, the Dogra soldiers carried with them such rations as wheaten flour,

parched grams and barley, which could last for about two weeks.

LEH TO SKARDU

There are two routes from Leh to Skardu; the first starting from Leh along the Indus down stream reaches Khalasi. Then moving to the north-west and after crossing the Chhorbat Pass (16,700 ft.), the traveller descends into the Kartaksho territory. After that the track runs down along the river Shyok and reaches Kiris, where there is confluence of the Shyok and the Indus rivers. At Kiris, the other route which comes from Kargil also joins it and then moving along the Indus, one reaches Skardu. Total distance from Leh to Skardu *via* the Chhorbat Pass is about 210 miles. This route was generally followed during the summer. When the Dogras invaded Baltistan in 1839, one part of their army followed this route.

The second route from Leh to Skardu is *via* Kargil and was usually followed in the winter. In distance, it is little longer than the first route. Starting from Leh, one followed the Leh-Srinagar road up to Kargil. Then moving northward along the Suru river, one reaches Chathathang. After crossing the Indus to its right side and travelling some distance along the river, one reaches Marol, near which the river was again crossed to its left side. When Zorawar Singh invaded Baltistan towards the end of 1839, the Ladakhi rebels and the Baltis had destroyed the bridge near Marol, thereby making it extremely difficult for the assailants to cross the Indus. From Marol, running down along the Indus, on its left side the track passes through the territories of Kartaksho, Tolti and Parkuta, whence it enters the Skardu valley and ultimately reaches Skardu. After 1947, when Pakistan occupied most of the parts of Baltistan, for the traveller from Ladakh's side, these routes became out of use.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. These states were Akhnur, Riasi, Kishtwar, Rajouri, Punjch, Kotli, Bhimbar, Khori-Khori, Jammu, Babu, Dalpatpur, Sambha, Jasrota, Trikot, Lakhanpur, Mankot (Ram Kot), Behandrata, Chaneni, Bhoti, Bhadu, Balor (Basohli) and Bhadarwah. Out of these, the first eight situated between the Jhelum and the Chenab were under Muslim chiefs, whereas the rest were under the control of the Hindu rulers, mostly Rajputs. For details, see, H.R. Gupta, *History of the Sikhs* (Lahore, 1944), III, pp. 20-21.
2. Gulab Singh's father, Mian Kishora Singh was the grandson of a brother of Ranjit Dev, the recognized successor of Dhrub Dev, the famous ruler of Jammu.
3. For a systematic, comprehensive and critical account about Maharaja Gulab Singh, see Satinder Singh Bawa, *The Jammu Fox : A Biography of Maharaja Gulab Singh of Kashmir : 1792-1857* (London, 1974).
4. Raja Tegh Singh, the Mohammaden ruler of Kishtwar, had annoyed Maharaja Ranjit Singh by providing asylum to Shah Shujah, the ex-king of Kabul, who had escaped from the Sikh captivity. For details about the sub-version of Kishtwar by Gulab Singh, see G.T. Vigne, *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak, Iskardo etc.* (London, 1842), I, pp. 181-82.
5. J. Hutchison & J. Ph. Vogel, 'History of Jammu State', *Journals of the Panjab Historical Society*, VIII, No. 2, p. 134.
6. *A History of the Reigning Family of Lahore* (Calcutta, 1847), p. 98.
7. Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Punjab Hill States* (Lahore, 1933), II, pp. 555, 663.
8. It is the present district of Bilas Pur in the Himachal Pradesh.
9. Cf. A.H. Francke, *A History of Western Tibet* (London, 1907), Chapters, XII to XIV.
10. Diwan Narsingh Das Nargis, *Zorawar Singh*, in Urdu, (Jammu, 1970: 2nd Ed.), p. 4.
11. Cf. *Bilas Pur State Gazetteer, Part A : Punjab States Gazetteer, Vol. VIII, Simla Hill States*, 1910, p. 8.
12. In the *Lahore Darbar Records*, Vol. III, Aa 4(i), about Zorawar Singh's career, Prof. Sita Ram Kohli has written that he 'joined the service, as a private soldier in one of Raja Gulab Singh's battalion. In the year Sambat 1876 (about 1819 A.D.), he was taken in the Maharaja's Regular Army as an Adjutant on Rs. 80 a month. Here he was promoted to the rank of a commandant in 1877 S (about 1820 A.D.) and gradually rose to be a colonel on Rs. 360 a month. He extended the boundaries of the Sikh Empire to China by annexing Gilgit in 1897-98 Sambat, (about 1840-41 A.D.) as Deputy to Raja Gulab Singh. This reference, about the early career of Zorawar Singh, however, appears to be incorrect.

13. Nar Singh Dass, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
14. It is the present place of Ram Nagar, about seventy kilometres to the north of Jammu.
15. Smyth, *op. cit.*, p. 199.
16. Pandit Shaivji Dar, *Tarikh-i-Kishtwar*, in Persian (Srinagar, 1962), p. 53.
17. Cf. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs* (New Delhi, 1966), Appendix, XXXVIII, p. 385.
18. Shaivji Dar, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
19. For further details about these passes, see F. Drew, *Jummoo and Kashmir Territories*, Appendix IV pp. 535-37; Le Marquis De Bourbel, *Routes in Jammu and Kashmir* (Calcutta, 1897), pp. 63-67.
20. Before its conquest by Zorawar Singh in 1836, this place was known as Chatargarh and then it was an important place in Paddar, a parganah of Chamba State. Paddar is now well-known for its sapphire mines. For details, about its conquest by the Dogras, see *below*, pp. 38-39.

ANNEXATION OF LADAKH

Ladakh, now the trans-Himalayan frontier district of Jammu and Kashmir state and the biggest in size in the Indian Union, became the centre of Zorawar Singh's activities. In order to make the narrative intelligible and to have a proper understanding of the difficulties involved in conquering such a land as Ladakh, perhaps it would not be irrelevant to discuss, albeit quite briefly, geographical features and political conditions of this Himalayan Kingdom on the eve of Dogra invasions.

The rugged and elevated table-land of Ladakh is situated in the upper Indus. In the north, it is bounded by the Kuen Lun range and the slopes of Karakoram range and in the west by Kashmir and Baltistan. To its south are situated Chamba, Kulu and Kinnaur districts of Himachal Pradesh, and on its east and south-east, beyond the international boundary, lie the Tibetan districts of Rudok and Chumurti. When Zorawar Singh conquered it in 1834, its greatest extent was from north-west to south-east; its mean length and breadth was 200 miles and 150 miles respectively, thus giving it an area of about 30,000 square miles.

In 1834, when the Dogras invaded it for the first time, the Kingdom of Ladakh was divided into nine administrative units or districts, namely, Nubra, Ladakh,¹ Zanskar, Rupshu or Rukshu, Dras, Purig, Suru, Spiti and Lahul.² These sub-divisions are situated along the head-waters of the Indus, the Shyok, the Zanskar and their tributaries, and are also the natural sub-divisions of Ladakh. In a hilly country, despite changes wrought by war and religion, the natural boundaries of its districts generally remain unaltered. Thus, after the annexation of Ladakh by the Dogras in 1842, these districts formed various *parganahs* of the Ladakh Wazarat of Maharaja Gulab

Singh's kingdom. Even today they constitute separate administrative units of Ladakh district.

Ladakh is one of the loftiest regions of the inhabited globe and no part of it is below 9,000 feet in height. Mountains are the most important feature in its topography. The land is not only hemmed between the sea of mountains, but is interspersed by high hills, in which perpendicular cliffs of about one hundred vertical feet are quite common. The high mountain walls which surround and dissect Ladakh, are pierced by a number of openings or passes. For many months in a year these passes are blocked by heavy snow falls, as a result of which Ladakh is completely cut off from the rest of the world. But in summer, these passes serve as Ladakh's nostrils, and allow it to communicate with the world outside. In Ladakh there are about a score of passes; most important of these, which had a commercial and strategic importance in the past, are the Karakoram pass, the Zoji La,³ the Umasi La and the Maryum La or the Bhot Khol pass.

Ladakh's climate is characterised by extremes of heat, cold and dryness. Summers though mild are short and winters long but bitter. Uneven terrain is one of its natural disabilities; soil for the most part consists of a desert of bare crags and granite dust, and thus is not very productive. The small area which is brought under the plough is mainly confined to the narrow valleys and patches on the banks of the rivers.

During the period covered by this monograph, roads in Ladakh were no better than bridle-tracks and were, in general, both rough and narrow path-ways. It was not till August 1960, when a jeepable road linking Srinagar with Leh was constructed, that wheeled-traffic reached Leh. This high-way has now been further improved and many more transverse and link roads connecting Leh with other important places in the districts have been constructed. In the first half of the 19th century, goods were generally carried by riding and pack animals. Horses and mules were the most useful beasts of burden, but these could not be carried to all the places. At greater heights near the snowy passes, the yak was most useful as a weight-carrier.

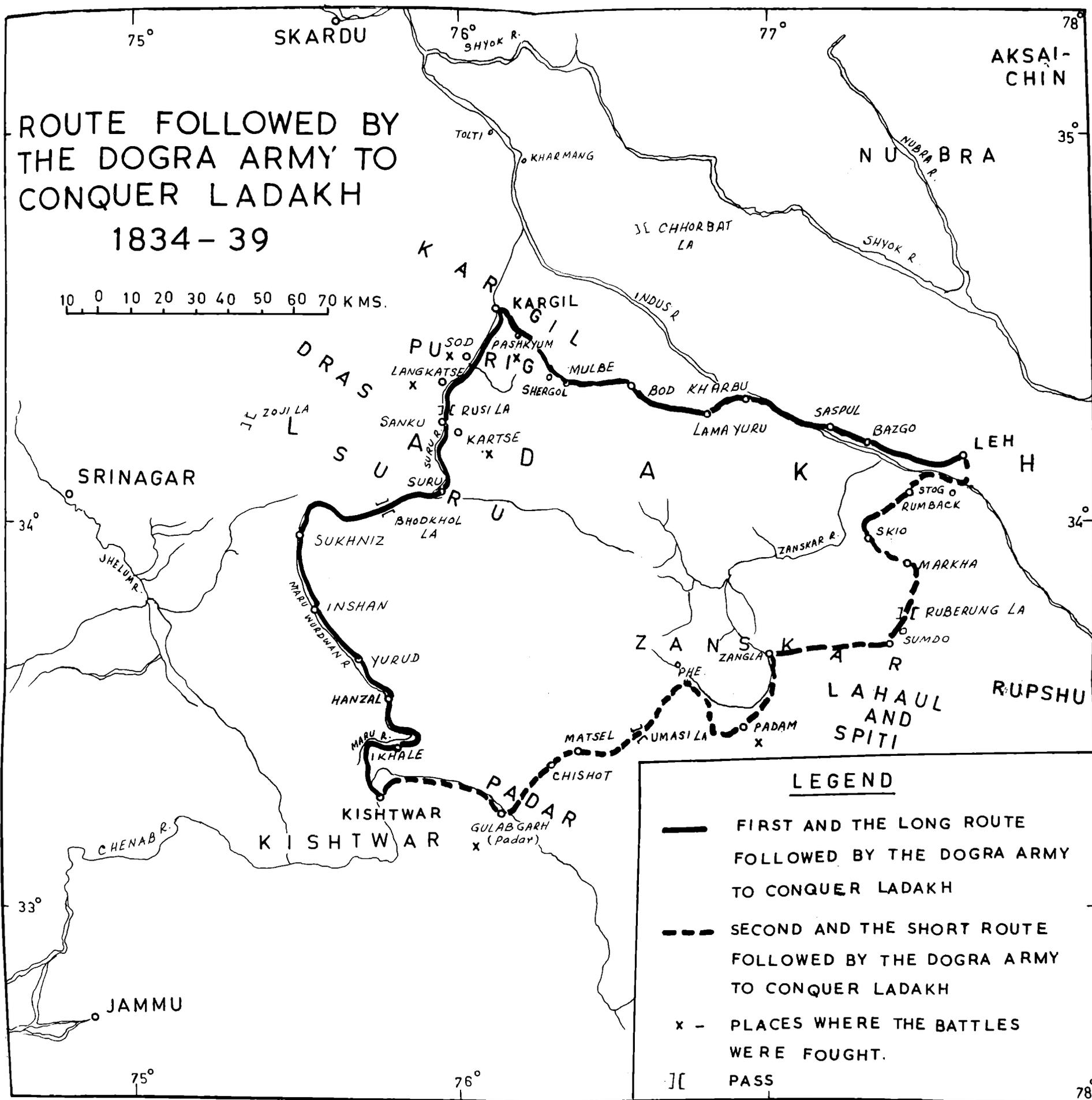
In the early half of the 19th century, the entire Ladakhi population consisted of two groups—the Ladakhis and the Champas. The former inhabited the valleys of the Indus and its tributaries and had permanent villages. The Champas, however, led a nomadic life on the upland valleys which being too elevated are fit only for pastoral uses. Large proportion of the population of Ladakh were the Buddhists. There was, however, a small colony of Mohammadens in Chushod near Leh, and in Dras, there was a group of Dards. But Mohammadens and Dards formed a microscopic part of the entire population.

The nature of government was mild despotism and the last Gyalpo (king) of Ladakh, Tse-pal Nam-gyal (Ca. 1790-1834, 1840-1841 A.D.) was a weak and indolent ruler. Contrary to the Ladakhi traditions in matters of administration, he had seized the privy seal from the Prime Minister and had dismissed many old counsellors and governors. This alienated the Leh officialdom against the ruler. The former, to blackmail the king frequently talked about the good old days of Tse-pal's predecessor and in 1820-1821, warned the king that if he did not mend his ways, the reins of the administration were likely to be given to William Moorcroft and George Trebeck, the English travellers who then happened to be in Leh. Again, about 1820, the Governor of Leh in conjunction with an influential Lama made an attempt to depose the king. Thus we find that internally, the administration of the country was disintegrating and centrifugal forces were gaining momentum.

The state of affairs on the periphery of Ladakh was also no whit better and Tse-pal Nam-gyal had failed to defend the territorial integrity of his country. About 1825, Ratanu, the powerful Chamba Governor of Paddar, invaded Zaskar and made it a tributary to Chamba.⁴ Similarly, about 1820 the people of Kulu, through the Lassar valley, invaded Spiti and took away yaks, horses and other booty. In both these cases, despite, supplication from his subjects to defend them and retaliate, the indolent Leh ruler, did not do anything and contrary to their expectations rebuked them. The same sorry state of affairs prevailed in Ladakh's relations with Baltistan. In 1821, a strong Balti force entered Ladakh, plundered the villages and escaped with loot.⁵ Ahmad Shah, the strong and shrewd

ROUTE FOLLOWED BY THE DOGRA ARMY TO CONQUER LADAKH 1834 - 39

10 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 KMS.



LEGEND

- FIRST AND THE LONG ROUTE FOLLOWED BY THE DOGRA ARMY TO CONQUER LADAKH
- - - SECOND AND THE SHORT ROUTE FOLLOWED BY THE DOGRA ARMY TO CONQUER LADAKH
- x - PLACES WHERE THE BATTLES WERE FOUGHT.
- [] PASS

Balti ruler, seeing Tse-pal's incapacity to defend his country, frequently invaded Ladakh. The latter's relations with Bashahr, one of the important Simla Hill States situated to its south, were also far from friendly. The frontier between the two states was quite frequently the scene of much desultory warfare. Captain C.P. Kennedy, Assistant Deputy Superintendent, Sikh and Hill States with headquarters at Subathu, wrote in 1824 that the aggressions between Ladakh and Bashahr "resembled those that formerly occurred in Scotland in feudal times, consisting of forays and assaults on the borders, the seizure of cattle and firing of villages etc."⁶

Thus, in the first quarter of the 19th century, there was great internal disorder in Ladakh and the ruling authorities there were unable to check foreign in-roads. It appears as if the then Ladakhi Kingdom had earned a name among its neighbours for being an easy prey to conquerors. In due course, this came to be known to Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu and his brave Governor of Kishtwar, Zorawar Singh Kahluria.

In addition to internal weakness of Ladakh, another cause which invited Dogra invasions was the lucrative shawl-wool trade of this Himalayan principality. Raja Gulab Singh wanted that shawl-wool produced in Ladakh, as well as the produce of West Tibet which passed through that country, should be exported to the Indian plains through his possessions around Jammu rather than being exported to and through Kashmir.⁷

Yet another cause of Dogra invasion of Ladakh appears to have been that Raja Gulab Singh wanted to encircle the Kashmir valley from the north-east. He already controlled the passes leading into the valley from the south. Thus his possession over Ladakh would facilitate his conquest of Kashmir over which he had set his heart. Now, we turn to General Zorawar Singh's exploits in Ladakh.

FIRST INVASION

In the summer of 1834, Wazir Zorawar Singh gathered about 5,000 soldiers, who were the residents of Kishtwar, Jammu and the

surrounding areas. They belonged to different castes and quite a few of them were the Mohammedans too. This is clear from the list of the soldiers who, in 1856, were liberated from Tibet, with the help of the Nepalese Durbar and Major Ramsay, British Resident at Kathmandu. Out of fifty-six soldiers who returned to their respective homes in the Jammu and Kashmir state, about seven were the Mohammedans and out of forty-five who refused to come to Jammu and Kashmir and went back to Tibet, about twenty were the Mohammedans.⁸

Infantry appears to be the most outstanding part of Zorawar Singh's army; almost every soldier was a *bandukchi* (matchlockman) and was in possession of a sword and spear. This is clear from the portraits which the present writer has collected from Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras and are given at the end of this book. The soldiers were also provided with some jingals or small artillery guns and mountain guns.⁹ These guns were carried either by men or on mules.¹⁰ Raja Gulab Singh being an important *jagirdar* of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, his army which mostly consisted of the hill men, formed a part of the army of the Sikh state. These Dogra soldiers had participated in many battles and were well-trained.¹¹ At least in weapons, war-tactics and discipline, they were much better than the militiamen of other hill states like that of Ladhakh and Baltistan.

After making full preparations, in July 1834, the Dogras marched from Kishtwar; moving northward and along with the Maru river, they crossed the Wurdwan valley and reached Sukhniz village, about eighty-five miles from Kishtwar. Near this village, after establishing their base in a big camping ground, the invaders moved onwards. They crossed the Maryum La or Bhot Khol Pass (14,700 ft.) which connects the Wurdwan valley with the Suru valley in Lower Ladakh. Then marching through a very difficult terrain and crossing about a score of glacier-fed rivulets, the Dogras reached the environs of Suru, a village situated on the left bank of river of the same name and at a distance of about sixty miles from Sukhniz. Here on August 16, 1834 a Ladakhi force of about 5,000 under the command of Mangal, then probably the minister of Stog, gave a bloody battle to

the assailants. The Ladakhis had entrenched themselves on a hillock and defended it tenaciously for full one day. However, their quaint matchlocks were no match for the fire-power of the Dogras. Soon the Ladakhis were dislodged from their positions and after suffering defeat, over the Russi Pass, they escaped to Shergil. In this battle both the sides suffered losses.¹²

After their victory, the Dogras reached Suru, where they stayed for sometime and constructed a fort. Zorawar Singh, realising the necessity of having adequate provisions during such a hazardous campaign as the one he was conducting in a rugged and barren land, had given strict orders to his soldiers not to destroy the crops, which at that time were ripe. This politic measure not only provided much-needed victuals to the army, but also led to the immediate submission of the peasants of Suru district who placed themselves under Dogra protection. Soon the invaders marched onward and overwhelmed Kartse, the seat of the local powerful chieftains (Tri-Sultans) and the most important fortress of Suru district. They also demolished fortifications of the Tri-Sultans at Langkartse and all this strengthened their hold on Lower Ladakh. Now they took steps to consolidate their conquests: Dogra pickets were stationed at strategic places; a summary settlement of Suru district was made under which every house was to pay Rupees four to the Dogras. New *Kardars* were appointed in important sectors such as Kargil and Dras. After making these arrangements, Zorawar Singh moved towards Pashkym.¹³

By this time, signals sent by the Ladakhi officials from Lower Ladakh had been heard in Leh and the entire country was astir with commotion. Tse-pal Nam-gyal, the Ladakhi king sent his ministers to mobilise all other districts which had not yet sent any warriors. This infused new blood in the retreating Ladakhi army and it returned on the pursuing victors with reinforcements. A pitched battle was fought in the plain near Pashkym. But unfortunately for the Ladakhis, their leader, the minister of Stog, was killed by a musket ball. His death was signal for general flight. The Ladakhis fled helter skelter; most of them over the Pashkym bridge escaped towards Mulbe and Shergil. After crossing the Wakha river, they destroyed the bridges. However, the Dogras crossed the river on inflated skins and stormed

Pashkym fort.¹⁴ This was easily taken possession of, for it was unoccupied and Mohammad Ali Khan, the petty chieftain of Pashkym had fled to Sod, another important place in Lower Ladakh. The assailants then moved towards Sod and started cannonading the fort which was strongly fortified by the Ladakhis. Salam Khan, the *Kiladar* of Sod, fought bravely and nothing was effected in ten days although forty Dogra soldiers were killed and many rendered *hors-de-combat*.¹⁵ Ultimately one day Mehta Basti Ram, an enterprising and brave Colonel in Zorawar's army, in the small hours of the morning accompanied by five hundred soldiers, under the covering fire of his battery vigorously assaulted the fort. By day-break the Dogras gained possession of the fort and made many hundred Ladakhis their prisoners.¹⁶

After these actions, Zorawar Singh would have pushed ahead with his scheme of the conquest of Ladakh, but he received reports to the effect that one Doctor Henderson, said to be an agent of the East India Company, was staying with the King of Ladakh. He suspended his operations and reporting the matter to Raja Gulab Singh sought fresh instructions. Gulab Singh in turn wrote to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who immediately addressed the Political Agent of the Hon'ble East India Company at Ludhiana to ascertain the meaning of such proceedings. The Agent satisfied Ranjit Singh with an assurance that Dr. Henderson had crossed the Sutlej in direct violation of the orders of his Government and that the Company did not entertain the slightest idea of interfering with the Maharaja's conquests northwards.¹⁷

After this explanation, Zorawar Singh was desired to proceed further with his operations. But this took about three months and in the meantime winter had set in. Under these circumstances, after realising war indemnity, the Wazir, perhaps would have liked to retire to Kishtwar for some time and re-invade Ladakh when the winter was over. He made an offer to the Ladakhi authorities that if they paid Rupees 15,000 then the Dogras would return to their own country.¹⁸ Leaders of the Ladakhi army at Shergil and Mulbe appear to have welcomed this proposal and requested the King to make this payment. In the case of King's refusal, they even offered to raise the amount by realising 'six Jau'¹⁹ from every soldier.²⁰

Though the king was prepared to make the payment, the domineering Queen Zi Zi, forbade his doing so. On the contrary, the conduct of the leaders who had forwarded the proposal was condemned and Prime Minister, Ngorub Stanzin and the minister of Nubra were asked to go and bring Zorawar's head.²¹ Tse-Wang Tondup, who was Secretary of King Tse-pal Nam-gyal, tells us that the king ordered all the able-bodied men to fight the enemy.²² At the same time, other necessary measures were also taken to mobilise the war potential of the country and reinforcements rushed to the scene of battle. A little while after, the Gyalpo, the Prime Minister and other important court officials collected an army of nearly 20,000 and marched toward Pashkym.

When the Dogra General, according to a previous understanding, sent some of his agents to collect Rupees 15,000, the Ladakhis not only seized and put them to death but, by a circuitous route attacked the invaders in their rear. Many Dogra soldiers were made prisoners and with their hands and feet bound thrown into the Wakha river. Realising his precarious position Zorawar Singh ordered a retreat to Langkartse, an operation that was beset with some difficulty. Now was the proper time for the Ladakhis to pursue their adversaries whose mobility had been impeded because of intense cold and snow fall. But, the vanquished left the Dogras unmolested for about four months and thus lost a golden opportunity to expel the assailants from Lower Ladakh.

Early in April 1835, the Ladakhi army advanced towards Langkartse. Zorawar, after getting intelligence about their movements, despatched an advance-column of about one hundred soldiers to meet them. After reaching the environs of Langkartse, the Ladakhis entered into long deliberations about their future course of action. Further, after a long and tiring march through the snow, they were exhausted and settled down to prepare their evening meals. Sensing the situation to be quite favourable, the Dogra advance-column delivered a surprise attack and soon their companions also joined them. Although the Dogras ultimately won this battle, from the losses which both the sides suffered, it appears that a well-contested action was fought. Few hundred Ladakhis, in their attempt to escape over the

snow-bridge were drowned in Suru river and many were killed in the battle field. Losses suffered by the Dogras were not inconsequential: Wazir Uttam Padhiar, Hazru Wazir of Una and Surtu Rana along with a score of soldiers were killed and about sixty of them were wounded.²³

The battle was a turning point in the Dogra-Ladakhi hostilities. It greatly demoralised the vanquished who appear to have given up the idea of fighting with the invaders. The latter, on the other hand were greatly encouraged and a large quantity of provisions and clothing also fell into their hands. The weather was becoming warm and now Zorawar Singh, using the prisoners and other natives as the carriers of Dogra baggage, advanced to pursue the fleeing Ladakhis and again reached Pashkym, whence the attackers marched to Mulbe and then, *via* Kharbu, reached Lama Yuru. There was no resistance as morale of the Ladakhis had been shattered and they were fleeing before the Dogras. The peasantry and other inhabitants of the villages on the way were anxious to save themselves from the depredations of the invaders and hastened to offer *nazars*, in the form of horses, money and provisions to General Zorawar Singh. In return, they received Dogra protection.²⁴

At Lama Yuru, the General received a letter from the Ladakhi King in which he sought the cessation of hostilities and offered to discuss terms of peace provided his personal safety was guaranteed. Wazir Zorawar Singh agreed and both parties met at Bazgo, then a small town on the Indus, about thirty kilometres to the west of Leh. Having discussed the preliminaries of a peace settlement, the parties moved towards Leh. Zorawar Singh, however, left the main camp at Bazgo and took a small party of about one hundred soldiers with him. After the latter reached Leh, an untoward incident took place which, but for the King's solicitations, might have led to an open conflagration again. The Dogra Commander held a gathering in which, after the usual custom in the Lahore Durbar, he offered a *sadka* or *sarwarna*²⁵ of Rupees one hundred to the King's son, but the latter mistaking the action either for an insult or for treachery drew his sword. His followers did the same, whereupon the Dogras also drew their swords. But the King fell upon his knees and clasped Zorawar's hand while the prince and his followers retired to another place. The

news of this incident soon reached the main Dogra camp at Bazgo and next morning the whole army reached Leh.²⁶

The invaders stayed in the capital for about four months i.e. till about October 1835. Under the peace settlement, the kingdom was restored to Tse-Pal Nam-gyal, but he now became a vassal of Raja Gulab Singh and through him of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The Ladakhi King, in addition to paying a yearly tribute of Rs. 20,000, was also asked to pay Rs. 50,000 as war indemnity. Out of this indemnity a sum of Rs. 37,000 was at once realised, partly in cash and partly in jewels. The balance, the King undertook to pay in two instalments within four months.²⁷ The Dogras also stationed Munshi Daya Ram, as their representative in Leh.²⁸ After making these arrangements, Zorawar Singh and his army, before the advent of winter returned to Kishtwar in October 1835.

The results of the first Dogra invasion, in which the fighting continued for about a year, were disastrous for the Ladakhis. The invaders after conquering Lower Ladakh, penetrated up to Leh and dictated their terms to the King. Although in Nubra and Rupshu-highland of Ladakh, there was no fighting, it appears that with the fall of capital, these territories also submitted. Further, if Lama Kondeog Nima Rangdol, who was an eye-witness of the Dogra invasion over Ladakh, is to be believed, the invaders broke all images in various monasteries and took away precious articles.²⁹ Thus, Dogra influence extended further eastward and Ladakh came within the effective control of Raja Gulab Singh.

When Zorawar Singh reached Lama Yuru, he heard that the people of Puring and Suru in Lower Ladakh had revolted; the chief of Sod had not only recaptured his fort, but with the help of other rebels had also put to death the entire Dogra garrison including Mian Nidhan Singh, the Dogra Kardar of Dras and Kargil.³⁰ It may be mentioned here, if only in parenthesis, that both Suru and Purig districts had always been a strong bulwark of Ladakhi defence. It was here that about three hundred years ago, when Mirza Haider Dughlat, Commander of Sultan Abu Sayed of Kashgar, invaded Ladakh, he met a stiff resistance. At Suru, Maulana Kudash, one of Haider's lieutenants along with many of his soldiers was put to the sword.³¹

As it is evident from the narrative, the Dogras had also to fight many action in this region, the inhabitants of which resisted the foreign invasion with much determination. Not only that, there were frequent recurrence of revolts too. Thus it is wrong as Arthur Neve³² has remarked that because the people of Suru were Mohammadens, they cared little for the allegiance to the Buddhist King of Ladakh.

Coming back to our main theme. By forced marches Zorawar Singh soon reached Sod and quelled the rebellion. Here, he came to know that Colonel Mihan Singh, the Sikh Governor of Kashmir, not only incited the Ladakhis including the Chiefs of Suru and Sod against the Dogras but had also given them active support by sending one of his officers, namely Fateh Singh Jogi³³ with many soldiers. The opposition of Mihan Singh was due to his apprehension that Dogra proceedings in Ladakh were likely to ruin the shawl industry of Kashmir and he had already complained to the Maharaja about the import of shawl-wool from Ladakh into the Jammu hills.³⁴ After settling the affairs at Sod, the Dogras marched to Suru, where thirteen of the enemy were made prisoners and hanged on the trees. About two hundred more, who were found to have complicity with the rebels were put to the gallows and many more were given exemplary punishments. This had the desired effect: all the Zamindars of the district without much opposition, hastened to tender their submission and promised to behave in future.

SECOND INVASION

The Dogras had hardly returned to Kishtwar when news came in that an insurrection had broken out in Ladakh. King Tse-pal Nam-gyal, on the instigation of some of his chief counsellors and Colonel Mihan Singh, had closed the roads to the merchants carrying trade with territories under Raja Gulab Singh's control, and had confiscated the property of the officials having pro-Dogra leanings. The Ladakhi King refused to pay tribute to Raja Gulab Singh³⁵ and also tortured and imprisoned Munshi Daya Ram, the Dogra representative at Leh. Winter (1835) was now in full swing and snow had closed all the passes; besides, there was a likelihood of strong Ladakhi resistance on the Kishtwar-Suru-Kargil-Leh route. Yet, delay in quelling

the rebellion was likely to offset the Dogra plan of a complete subjugation of Ladakh. Zorawar Singh, therefore, with characteristic energy and celerity of movement, in November 1835, again marched to Leh, this time following a direct though difficult route *via* Zaskar.³⁶ Miphi Sata, a Ladkahi guided the Dogras through this route and was richly rewarded for his services.³⁷ Through forced marches, the Wazir covering a distance of about 275 miles in ten days reached Chimra, a village above Leh on the right bank of the Indus and on the high road leading to Rudok. The Ladakhis were completely surprised to hear about his arrival. King Tse-pal Nam-gyal hastened to wait upon the Wazir at Chushod, a place between Leh and Chimra, and expressed contrition over what had happened. However, the heir-apparent of Ladakh, Prince Chog Sprul, who was also implicated in the uprising, with his mother and some followers ran towards Spiti, whence he escaped into the British-protected territory of Bashahr,³⁸ and sought political asylum. The pursuing Dogras were warned by the British Government not to enter territory under its protection. Although Chog Sprul's request seeking active assistance³⁹ from the British in restraining the Dogras from conquering Ladakh was not acceded, he was given political asylum; a stipend of Rs. 200 per mensem was also sanctioned, and in addition a house at Kotgarh was rented for him at Rs. 800 per annum. But, as ill luck would have it, after a short while, Chog Sprul died at Simla⁴⁰ and not in Spiti as has been mentioned by Francke.⁴¹

Zorawar Singh accompanied by the Ladakhi King, then moved to Leh and realised the balance of war indemnity amounting to Rs. 13,000 besides some additional expenses of the army. To make up this amount, the property⁴² of the royal family and Leh officialdom was taken. The Dogra General now refused to take anything on trust. The old King was deposed and given a small *jagir* in the village of Stog near Leh. The kingship was then offered to Dragchos of Khalatse, who was generally deputed by the Gyalpo on a trade-bearing mission to the Governor of Kashmir. But he had always been a faithful servant of the King; therefore, looking at this offer as an attempt at making him a traitor to the ruling dynasty, he refused to accept it.⁴³ The offer was now made to Ngorub Stazin, who

had married the King's sister and was his Prime Minister for a number of years.⁴⁴ He was reportedly not on good terms with the ruler and during the first Dogra expedition, after the battle of Langkartse when he was made a prisoner, he had helped Wazir Zorawar Singh. He accepted the Dogra offer and became the new ruler of Ladakh.

To strengthen Dogra position in Leh, Zorawar Singh constructed a big fort⁴⁵ there. Tsewang Tondup, Secretary of King Tse-pal Nam-gyal writes that for constructing this fort Zorawar Singh appointed quite a large number of Ladakhis and personally supervised the construction; houses adjoining the Skara area (in Leh) were demolished and the material thus obtained was used for building the fort.⁴⁶ Dalel Singh and Thanedar Magna Ram were put in-charge of the fort under whom about 300 Dogra soldiers were stationed. After making these arrangements Zorawar Singh returned to Jammu in March 1836, taking with him Dragchos, the new ruler's son and some other well-placed Ladakhis, as hostages for the better behaviour of the new King.⁴⁷ Soon after, Raja Dhian Singh presented to Maharaja Ranjit Singh a document containing the agreement⁴⁸ of the new Raja of Ladakh with the Maharaja.⁴⁹ A tribute of Rs. 30,000 and a variety of presents were also offered to the Sikh ruler.⁵⁰ Ranjit Singh, in addition received a deputation in Lahore sent in the name of Ngorub Stanzin and in this way accorded recognition to Gulab Singh's conquest of Ladakh.⁵¹

Before leaving Leh, Zorawar Singh had ordered Colonel Basti Ram and Wazir Lakhpat Rai⁵² to pacify and annex Zanskar, which had still held out. The Dogra dignitaries marched thither with 1,500 soldiers and after restoring peace in Zanskar moved down to Jammu *via* Paddar.⁵³ Yet, to keep communications with their garrison in Zanskar open, the Dogras left about thirty men at Chatargarh in Paddar.⁵⁴

However, the people of Paddar, who were under the control of the Chamba Raja, were not well-disposed towards the Dogras of Jammu. Especially, Ratanu, the *Palsara* or Chief official of the Chamba Raja, was opposed even to a temporary sojourn of the Dogra soldiery in Paddar, lest it should turn into a permanent occupation.

Meantime, there was a rebellion in Zanskar and the entire Dogra garrison there was put to the sword. Ratanu, on hearing this, attacked the Dogras at Chatargarh, made some of them prisoners, and expelled others from his territory. The Raja of Chamba who had already accepted the suzerainty of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, was unhappy over this incident and he did not want to annoy the powerful Dogra brothers. Disavowing the act of his deputy, he expressed regret to Raja Gulab Singh and releasing the prisoners, sent them to Jammu.⁵⁵ However, the mischief had been done and the Jammu Raja was anxious to avenge the insult. In the spring of 1836, he sent Zorawar Singh with a strong force to punish Ratanu and quell uprising in Zanskar. Besides, by annexing Paddar, the Dogras would be removing that bottleneck on the direct and short route from Kishtwar to Leh, where their movements had often been impeded by the jealous deputies of the Chamba Raja. The bridge over the Chandra-bhaga had been dismantled by Ratanu and the river was in spate. As a result, for three months the Dogras could achieve nothing. Ultimately, with the help of some peasants and ropes, they crossed the river a few miles down stream and overwhelmed the fort of Chatargarh, razed it to the ground, constructed a new one there and named it Gulab Garh.⁵⁶ Some of the people of Paddar were put to death and others mutilated; the territory was then annexed to the Jammu dominion.⁵⁷

THIRD INVASION

The Paddar affair cost Zorawar Singh many soldiers and kept him engaged during the precious summer months, which period he would have liked to spend in putting down insurrection in Zanskar. However, by the time (about November 1837) he started on his third expedition into Ladakh. Winter had set in, and the cold was so intense that twenty-five soldiers were lost on the glaciers near the Umasi La and many more lost their hands and feet from frost-bite.⁵⁸ Peace, however, was soon restored in Zanskar, whence the Dogras marched towards Leh. Here Ngorub Stanzin, the new Gyalpo, was accused of having complicity with the rebels of Zanskar besides which, he was suspected of fomenting trouble in other parts of

Ladakh. When Stanzin heard about the approach of Dogras in Zanskar, he fled precipitately towards Spiti. He was, however, chased by the energetic Rajputs of Jammu and after a skirmish with his followers captured at the village of Tabo in Spiti and brought back to Leh, where he was imprisoned. Like the Ladakhi prince, Chog Sprul, it appears, his intention was to escape to the British-protected territory of Bashahr. The Gyalpo, however, was deposed,⁵⁹ and the aged Tse-pal Nam-gyal reinstated in his former position. He agreed to pay a yearly tribute, with the additional stipulation that the expenses of the Dogra troops stationed in Ladakh were to be defrayed by him. In May 1838, Zorawar Singh returned to Kishtwar where he stayed for about a year.

FOURTH EXPEDITION

In May 1839, the Dogra General had to return to Ladakh again, this time to subdue the rebellion which was being incited by a Ladakhi leader named Sukamir of Hembabs in Purig.⁶⁰ The latter had issued a call to arms to the whole country against the Dogras. Several other influential men of Purig such as Rahim Khan of Chigtan and Hussain of Pashkym had also joined with Sukamir and an army was being gathered in the environs of Leh. Before the gathering storm could burst, Zorawar Singh again following the direct route *via* Zanskar, entered Leh at the head of a large army. The rebels were completely surprised. Although some of them, including Rahim Khan and Hussain escaped towards Baltistan; others, trying to deceive the Dogra General rapidly changed colours: "we have all come here to say *salam* to you. We want to make a petition."⁶¹ But Zorawar Singh was a discerning and seasoned leader, he knew what was being cooked. He advised the leaders to stay and the rest to go home. On further enquiries and cross-examination of the leaders with regard to the originators of the revolt, Sukamir was found to be the main-spring behind the plot. He was caught and his limbs were cut off publically.⁶² Some of his prominent associates were also given exemplary punishments, a fact that created great awe in the minds of the Ladakhis.

This was Zorawar Singh's fourth and last campaign into

Ladakh. His frequent incursions had broken the back of Ladakhi resistance, and the people of this small, yet important kingdom in the Western Himalaya, appear to have given up the hopeless task of raising the banner of rebellion against their new energetic masters. Except in 1842, when after the death of Zorawar Singh and defeat of his army in West Tibet, they revolted at the instigation of the Tibetans, and again in 1846, when there was some trouble in Zaskar, the Ladakhis continued to show a peaceful demeanour throughout the period of Dogra rule which lasted till 1947. To consolidate Dogra rule and strengthen their position in Ladakh, Zorawar Singh as mentioned earlier, had constructed strong forts in Leh, and other strategic places such as Chushod and Langkartse etc.

Soon after its conquest, Ladakh did, however, become a convenient base for invading Baltistan and Western Tibet. But before discussing the Dogra invasions of Baltistan, it may be worthwhile pausing for a moment and ponder over the various causes of Ladakhi defeat.

First of all, there was no standing and centralised army in Ladakh. Ladakhi militiamen who fought with the Dogras were undisciplined and ill-armed. There was no cohesion or unity of action among them. On the other hand, the Dogra army was very well organized and much better equipped. The Dogras, who formed a part of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army, had learned more up-to-date techniques of fighting, whereas the Ladakhis because of geographical conditions and their social habits, had been living in isolation and were quite unaware of these tactics. Secondly, religion of the Ladakhis was also a contributory factor for their defeat. Lama Buddhism, due to its pacific teachings, appears to have made the Ladakhis peace-loving and indolent, and it degenerated the fighting spirit of the people. Further, this religion by segregating a large proportion of youngmen into monks, limited the fighting-manpower of the country. Thirdly, as the *chronicles of Ladakh* bear out, Ladakhi militiamen had to carry their provisions, weapons and accoutrements with them.⁶³ All these articles formed a heavy load and impeded the mobility of the soldiers. The Dogras on the other hand, had a separate commissariat arrangement. Furthermore, while

in Ladakh, in accordance with the Napoleonic maxim, they used the natives as carriers of their baggages and providers of their provisions. Fourthly, the Dogras possessed superior weapons. They had a good park of artillery, whereas the Ladakhis had none. The Dogras had jingals and muskets which were far better than the out-dated Ladakhi matchlocks. The Ladakhis, even did not have these matchlocks in sufficient number. Fifthly, just before Zorawar Singh's first invasion over Ladakh in 1834, small-pox had broken into the country; in this epidemic about 14000 persons are said to have died and this was a great loss for a small country.⁶⁴ Finally, the Dogras were fortunate in having an experienced and skilled General as their leader. Zorawar Singh could not be easily overawed by the overwhelming number of the enemy, nor did unfavourable circumstances spur him to quick action. He became beau-ideal of the Dogra soldiers and was a source of constant inspiration to them. On the other hand, unfortunately for the Ladakhis, their daring and promising leader, the minister of Stog, was killed in one of the early actions; after his death all other Ladakhi leaders proved to be good-for-nothing.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ladakh has a local as well as a general sense; regionally, the central district in the valley of the Indus, in the heart of which is situated the capital city of Leh, is known as Ladakh.
2. In 1846, Lahul and Spiti, the southern districts of Ladakh, were detached from it by the British and annexed with their newly-acquired territory of Kangra district. Now both Lahul and Spiti form part of the Himachal Pradesh.
3. La in Tibetan means a pass.
4. H. Goetz "History of the Chamba State in Mughal and Sikh Times", *Journal of Indian History*, XXXI, Pt. II (August, 1953), p. 53.
- 5 *Foreign Department Political Proceedings*, 20 September 1822, No. 63.
6. Memo from C.P. Kennedy to W. Murray, Deputy Superintendent, Sikh and Hill States, 6 July 1824. *Records of the Delhi Residency and Agency (1807-1857)*, Vol. I (Lahore, 1911), p. 280.
7. For a detailed discussion about the produce, flow and importance of Shawl-wool in the Western Himalayas in the first half of the nineteenth century, see C.L. Datta, 'Significance of Shawl-wool Trade in Western Himalayan Politics', *Bengal Past and Present*, Vol. LXXXVIII, Pt. I (1969), pp. 16-28.

8. See letter dated 1 January 1857 from John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of Punjab to Maharaja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir regarding repatriation of the Dogra soldiers by the Tibetan Government etc. Persian Record File No. 130-B (1941) pertaining to the years 1855-56. I am thankful to Mr. S.S. Gergan of Srinagar for drawing my attention to this letter.
9. *Foreign Department Secret Consultations*, 22 November 1841, No. 23.
10. The present writer saw some weapons which are well-preserved in the Dogra Art Gallery, Jammu. On some of the guns it is written that these were used by the Dogras in the "19th century". However in the absence of any authentic proof, it cannot be said with certainty whether these weapons were handled by Zorawar Singh and his army.
11. For details about the constitution and weapons of the Jagirdar's troops, such as that of Raja Gulab Singh, see Fauja Singh Bajwa. *Military System of the Sikhs* (Delhi, 1964), pp. 127, 129 ff.
12. A Cunningham, *Ladak, Physical, Statistical and Historical* (London, 1853), p. 133; see also, A.H. Francke, *A History of Western Tibet* (London, 1907), pp. 139-40.
13. *Foreign Department Political Consultations*, 9 January 1837, No. 24 enclosure No. 2. See also, Francke, *Western Tibet*, p. 140.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 334-35; Francke, *Western Tibet*, p. 141.
17. Cf. B.C. Hugel, *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab* (London, 1845), pp. 101-2; Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 10-11.
18. Francke, *Western Tibet*, p. 142. Maulvi Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu Wa Riasat hai Maftuha Maharaja Gulab Singh*, in Urdu, (Lucknow, 1939), p. 348, says that in addition to Rs. 15,000 the Wazir also demanded an annual tribute of Rs. 9,000. The chronicles of Ladakh, however, say that money demanded by Zorawar at this occasion was 1,000 'Silver rupees'. (Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet* (Calcutta, 1926), II, p. 128.
19. A Ladakhi coin equal to about one-fourth of a rupee.
20. Francke. *Antiquities*, II, p. 128.
21. *Idem.*
22. For details, see Y. Gergan, *History of Ladakh* (New Delhi, 1976), p. 519.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
24. Cf. Francke, *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, II, p. 251.
25. It was a sort of votive offering; money offered was woven over the head of the person concerned.
26. Cf. Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 338-39.
27. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 339. *The Chronicles of Ladakh* however do not mention the war indemnity at all and give the amount of yearly tribute as Rs. 5,000 (Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 129).

28. K.M. Panikkar, *The Founding of Kashmir State* (London, 1953), p. 78; see also, Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, p. 354.
29. Y. Gergan, *History of Ladakh* (in Tibetan), (New Delhi, 1976), pp. 594-95.
30. For details, see Kirpa Ram, *Gulab Nama* (in Persian), (Jammu, 1875), p. 249.
31. Cf. Mirza Mohammad Haider Dughlat, *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* (A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia), tr. E.D. Ross and ed. N. Elias (London, 1895), p. 462.
32. *Thirty Years in Kashmir* (London, 1913), p. 246.
33. *Gulab Nama*, p. 249. Cunningham (*Ladak*, p. 340), wrongly gives the name of Mihan Singh's officer as Jala Singh Gopi.
34. Sohan Lal Suri, *Umdat-ut-Tawarikh*, Daftar III, tr. V.S. Suri (New Delhi, 1961), p. 213.
35. Cf. Karl Marx, "Three Documents relating to the History of Ladakh", *JASB*, Pt. I (1801), p. 22.
36. For details about this route, see *supra*, pp. 7-9.
37. For details about the rewards given to him see, Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 340-41.
38. *Foreign Department Political Consultations*, 9 January 1837, No. 24; see also Karl Marx, *loc. cit.*, p. 22.
39. For details about his seeking British intervention, see his three letters written to the G.G's. Agent, Simla Hill States, Subathu, Appendix A.
40. For a more detailed account about his movements in the British-protected territory and British policy of non-intervention, reference may be made to C.L. Datta, *Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics*, (New Delhi, 1973), pp. 153-54.
41. Francke, *Western Tibet*, p. 149.
42. This included tea, wool, jewels, gold and silver utensils etc.
43. Cf. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 252.
44. Karl Marx, *loc. cit.*, p. 22. Francke, *Western Tibet*, p. 150; Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, p. 358.
45. This fort is a huge three-storeyed building. The second storey has watch-towers, whereas in the first storey, there were barracks for soldiers and officers. The ground floor was used for storing ammunition, military stores and keeping beasts of burden.
46. Y. Gergan, *History of Ladakh*, pp. 534-35.
47. Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 341-42; Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 252.
48. In the agreement it was written: "When Khalsa Gulab Singh would show his determination to proceed towards Ladakh the Raja of the place would go to receive him with respect simply on the news of his arrival. The said Raja (Gulab Singh) took possession of that country and made the Raja of Ladakh sit upon the throne of its chiefship. According to the Will of God the said Raja consigned his life to the Creator and the son of his maid-servant expelled the

son of the Raja out of the country and himself took his seat upon the throne of chiefship. Now the said Raja has turned him out of the country and has made the son of the late Raja take the place of his father." *Umdat-ul-Tawarikh*, Daftar, III, p. 431.

49. *Idem*.

50. *Foreign Department Political Consultations*, 8 August 1838, Nos. 28-29.

51. *Ibid*.

52. He was originally the Prime Minister of Raja Tegh Singh of Kishtwar. At the time of subversion of Kishtwar by the Dogras, Lakhpat had helped Raja Gulab Singh. The latter, soon took him into his service. Thereafter, Lakhpat served his new master most faithfully and was many times despatched on important military expeditions. He was killed in 1846, while he was quelling the resistance of Sheikh Imam-ud-Din, the Sikh Governor of Kashmir. Cf. Panikkar, *Founding of Kashmir State*, pp. 168-69.

53. Cunningham's this part of the narrative is not clear. He mixes up Padam (Spadam) with Paddar. (*Ladak*, pp. 342-43). Padam at that time was the headquarters of Zanskar district of Ladakh, whereas Paddar, situated in the Chandrabhaga (Chenab) valley between Pangri and Kishtwar, was a *Parganah* of Chamba State.

54. Cf. *Punjab States Gazetteer* (1910), Vol. XXIIA, Chamba State, p. 105.

55. F. Drew, *The Jammoo and Kashmir Territories*, p. 132.

56. *Punjab States Gazetteer* (1910), Vol. XXIIA, Chamba State, p. 105; Hutchison and Vogel, *History of the Punjab Hill States*, I, pp. 320-24: *JIH.*, XXXI, Pt. II (August, 1953), pp. 153-54.

57. *Ibid.*, *Gazetteer of Kashmir and Ladakh*, (Calcutta, 1890), p. 641.

58. F. Drew, *The Jammoo and Kashmir Territories*, p. 132.

59. According to Cunningham's narrative (*Ladak*, pp. 343-44), deposal of Stanzin appears to have taken place in 1837. But according to the *Chronicles of Ladakh*, Stanzin remained King for about six years. (Francke, *Antiquities*, II, pp. 131, 252), G.T. Vigne, an English traveller who visited Ladakh in 1838-39 calls the Raja as Marut Tunzin and says that he was a puppet in the hands of the Dogra Raja Gulab Singh (*Travels*, II, pp. 352-53). From all this, version of the Ladakhi chronicles appears to be more correct, and the deposal of Ngorub Stanzin may have taken place in 1839 i.e. one year before the Dogra conquest of Baltistan.

60. Cf. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 252.

61. *Ibid*.

62. Francke, *Western Tibet*. pp. 154-55; M.L.A. Gompertz, *Magic Ladakh* (London, 1928), p. 184.

63. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 251.

64. Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 285-93.

ANNEXATION OF BALTISTAN

Baltistan was an ancient and independent kingdom.¹ Its proper name was Tibet-i-Khurd (Little Tibet), by which prefix it was distinguished from Tibet-i-Kalan, the name applied to Ladakh. The Dards called it palolo—the name by which it was also known in the seventh century A.D. when great Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang visited northern India.² The Tibetans called it Nang-Kod; it was also frequently called Iskardu or Skardu, after the name of its well-known fort and capital.³

Its greatest length is along the course of the Indus from east to west for about one hundred and fifty miles and the breadth about eighty miles from the mountains of Deosi to the Karakoram range, thus giving it a total area of about 12,000 square miles.⁴ It is bounded on the north by the Mustagh range and Nagar; on the east by Ladakh; on the south by Kashmir and two districts of Lower Ladakh—Purig and Suru. On its west is situated Gilgit and Astor.

Baltistan is composed of enormous mountain-chains, or masses of mountain; height of most of the mountains is between 18,000 feet and 20,000 feet. In its north-easterly part is situated, Mount Godwin Austin (K₂); its height 28,265 feet is second only to Mount Everest and it has not been conquered so far. Baltistan is intersected by many valleys, most important of which are the Indus valley and the valleys of Shoyk and Shigar. Being situated in the maze of high mountains, access to the valleys is very difficult.

In 1840, when General Zorawar Singh invaded Baltistan, including the district of Skardu, it had eight sub-divisions or districts i.e. Kharmang or Khartaksho, Khapalu, Tolti, Parkuta, Shigar, Rondu and Astor. Ahmad Shah who controlled the central district of Skardu

was the most powerful ruler; the other sub-divisions, although being administered by different hereditary chiefs, formed his dependencies.⁵ Most of these petty chiefs, who owed allegiance to Ahmad Shah, were his kith and kin: Gulam Shah, Raja of Parkuta was his brother; Ali Khan, ruler of Rondu was his nephew; Kartakhsho or Kharmang ruler, Ali Sher Khan was his son-in-law and nephew.⁶ In the first four decades of the nineteenth century, there was constant unrest in Baltistan, for, these chieftains either kept quarrelling among themselves or remained at war with their neighbouring chiefs like the king of Ladakh⁷ in the east and the ruler of Gilgit in the west.⁸

The nature of Balti Government was mild or benevolent despotism. The title of Skardu ruler was 'Erghmayun', signifying 'the Lord of the mountains'; among his people he was called Gyalpo or King and among his tributaries and petty chiefs he was known as 'Ju'. Last independent ruler of Skardu, Ahmad Shah's dynasty is stated to have been in uninterrupted possession of the country for the last fourteen generations and he was quite a powerful ruler in the region to the north of Kashmir.¹⁰

Like Ladakh, in Baltistan also, there was no standing or regular army. But at the time of national emergency, such as arose in 1840 when Baltistan became a victim of Dogra invasion, the chiefs owing fealty to Ahmad Shah, sent their militia to defend the country. They were exempted from taxation in requital of military service. In addition, on such occasions, the peasantry of the country was asked to render military service. The king provided them with arms, munitions and other weapons of war, but after the emergency was over, they were disarmed and dismissed.¹¹

The revenue of the state was collected in kind: each landholder was expected to give one *Kharwar* (about 35 kilogram in weight) of wheat, one of barley and one of mustard or millet. However, some of the Zamindars paid their revenue in one *Kharwar* of *ghee* (clarified butter), instead of other three articles mentioned above.¹²

The people of Baltistan were Mohammadens of the Shia persuasion. When compared with the Ladakhis—their peaceful neighbours—they were more warlike and aggressive. However, Csoma de Koros,

the energetic Hungarian traveller and scholar who visited Kashmir and Leh in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and stayed for many years in Ladakh, remarks that the Baltis were 'very unhappy on account of their chiefs' having continual quarrels with each other or with the Prince of Ladakh.¹³

The propinquity of the Sikhs had raised apprehensions in the mind of Ahmad Shah and he thought that after the Sikh conquest of Kashmir in 1819, Baltistan would be the next target of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's policy of aggrandizement. In order to save himself from any such eventuality, the Balti ruler, therefore tried to cultivate friendship with the British and sought protection from the Company's Government. When William Moorcroft, an Englishman was in Ladakh (1820-22), Ahmad Shah, by sending presents of gold-dust and some trifles tried to make friends with him.¹⁴ He even further proffered his help to Moorcroft by furnishing porters, provisions and letters of introduction to the Mohammaden chieftains on the road to Badakshan and Kokand.¹⁵ Moorcroft did not very much encourage the offers and friendly gestures of Ahmad Shah, as these might have given umbrage to the Ladakhi authorities, whose hospitality he was then enjoying and who, at that time were at daggers drawn with the Balti chief. Yet, he wrote an ambiguous letter to Ahmad Shah, holding out promises of British support. Therefore, hereafter the Balti ruler continued to expect British help.¹⁶ In 1827, when Lord Amherst, the then Governor-General, deputed C.M. Wade on his first mission to the Punjab, Ahmad Shah wrote to Wade. His letter was, however, intercepted on the way by the Sikhs.¹⁷ In 1829, the ruler of Baltistan again despatched some letters to Wade, now Governor-General's Agent at Ludhiana. In response to the latter's wishes, the Balti ruler procured intelligence about what was then happening in Eastern (Chinese) Turkistan. He promised to provide the English, should they be interested, safe passage through his country to Yarqand. Ahmad Shah further offered to co-operate with the British in the scheme of opening the navigation of the Indus, and showed anxiety to enter into friendship with the Company. He also sought Wade's help about his claims over a *jagir* in Kashmir and Lower Ladakh which had been

seized by the Sikhs, but in the past had been the possessions of Ahmad Shah's ancestors.¹⁸ However, the Governor-General enjoined on Wade 'not to use any expression, which could excite in him [Ahmad Shah] a hope of our interposing on his behalf with any of his neighbours'.¹⁹ This threw cold water on Ahmad Shah's hopes and all his efforts to place himself under the protection of British Government in India ended in smoke.

In 1831, when Victor Jacquemont, a Frenchman, visited Kashmir, Ahmad Shah took him for a British agent and immediately despatched his Wazir, Chiragh Ali Shah, with many presents and a letter for Jacquemont. Chiragh Ali came under the guise of supplying specimens of plants and animals for Jacquemont's collections and told him that Ahmad Shah was the 'most obedient servant' of the British and Baltistan was their (British) country. Chiragh Ali finally disclosed that he was on a secret political errand; but, the Frenchman soon dismissed him.²⁰ In the late eighteen-thirties when G.T. Vigne, an English traveller visited Baltistan, Ahmad Shah took him for an officer of the Company and thought that Vigne was despatched by the British Government to ascertain his (Ahmad Shah's) pretensions of friendship and solicitude for seeking British protection against the Sikhs. The Balti ruler gave an "exceedingly kind, flattering and hospitable reception" to Vigne and sought political alliance with the British. But Vigne told Ahmad Shah that he was not an employee of the Company and that he was visiting Baltistan for the sake of his personal pleasure and the advancement of scientific knowledge.²¹

Ahmad Shah's fears about the Sikh invasion of Baltistan were not unfounded. Kirpa Ram, the Sikh Governor of Kashmir, about 1825 invaded a small territory known as 'Kathai' situated between Kashmir and Baltistan; though the first Sikh attack was repulsed with much loss to the invaders, yet in one of the subsequent expeditions they took possession of this territory.²² Later on, prince Sher Singh during his Governorship of Kashmir (1831-33) invaded Baltistan, but as the Baltis were vigilant, the Sikh invasion failed.²³ In order to defend his country from such an incursion, the Skardu ruler had taken some defensive measures. Vigne, when he visited Baltistan in

1837, found that between Gurais and the Burzil pass, the Balti ruler had destroyed every house so that a Sikh invading force could find no shelter or provisions.²⁴ Further, on the direct road leading from Kashmir to Skardu over the Deosai plateau, at many strategic places he had constructed gates or '*Darwazas*' which were designed as some sort of boobytraps.²⁵ But it is an irony of fate that the Dogra attack which sealed the destinies of Baltistan as an independent state in 1840, came from another direction altogether i.e. from the Indus valley above Skardu.

The Dogra ruler Gulab Singh may have conquered Baltistan earlier, but he was apprehensive of active hostility from Colonel Mihan Singh, the Sikh *Nazim* of Kashmir, who, as noted earlier, was quite jealous of Dogra incursions in Ladakh. But after Ranjit Singh's demise when there was commotion at Lahore, Mihan Singh was "alarmed into concessions by the powerful and ambitious Rajas of Jammu, and he left Iskardu, and the whole valley of the Upper Indus, a free field for the aggression of their lieutenants."²⁶ Occasional intercession offered by C.M. Wade, British Political Agent at Ludhiana, in Ahmad Shah's favour and visits of some Englishmen such as Dr. Henderson, G.T. Vigne and Dr. Falconer to Baltistan in the thirties of the nineteenth century, also to some extent helped Ahmad Shah to postpone the evil day.²⁷

However in 1839, Zorawar Singh turned to conquer Baltistan, for which a *casus belli* was not difficult to find. Ahmad Shah had declared that after his death not Mohammad Shah, his eldest living son, but Mohammad Ali Khan, a son by another wife would succeed him.²⁸ This arrangement naturally offended Mohammad Shah who, with some followers escaped to Kashmir and solicited assistance from the Sikh Governor.²⁹ He reached Srinagar on September 7, 1836 and soon after offered *nazar* to the Governor. The latter, in return sent a *ziafat* of one hundred rupees to the fugitive prince, and granted three rupees per diem for his subsistence besides holding out assurances of, protection and help.³⁰ After staying for sometime in Kashmir, Mohammad Shah met General Zorawar Singh at Suru in Lower Ladakh. The General treated him kindly and promised every help.³¹ Mohammad Shah stayed in Purig for a couple of years and then

shifted to Leh. But sometimes in 1839, when the Ladakhis were trying to throw away the Dogra yoke, with the connivance of the Ladakhi authorities, a party of Skardu troops marched into Leh and whisked away Mohammad Shah.³² Zorawar Singh, hearing of this, at once wrote to Ahmad Shah that by forcibly seizing the refugee, the Baltis had committed aggression on the Dogra territory for which the Balti ruler was responsible. He also demanded immediate release of Mohammad Shah. But to this letter Ahmad Shah vouchsafed no reply.³³ Naturally, Zorawar Singh now decided to invade Baltistan.

In November 1839,³⁴ the Dogras General assembled all the Ladakhi militiamen, including their leader Banka Kahlon and the aged King, Tse-pal Nam-gyal and asked them to march with the Dogra army for the conquest of Baltistan.³⁵ This was a wise step: it would suppress the insurrectionary spirit of the Ladakhis, at the same time making them useful for the invaders. The strength of this army was about 7,000 and it included both combatants and non-combatants. Zorawar Singh divided his army into two parts. The first detachment mainly consisting of the Ladakhis and led by Mohi-ud-Din Shah, a Dogra Officer was asked to enter Baltistan by following the northern route. Marching from Leh and passing through Bazgo and Khalasi, this contingent moved along the river Indus for some distance and then took northerly direction. After marching through Goma Hanu and then crossing the Chhorbat La, the invaders reached Chunga, whence after covering some distance they followed river Shyok downstream and reached Khapalu. Hereafter crossing river Shyok to its right and passing through Doghani and Kuru, they reached Kiris, a place where there is confluence of the rivers Indus and Shyok. From Kiris moving along the Indus and passing through Gol, the invaders reached Skardu.³⁶ The idea behind sending the detachment by this route, appears to be to take the Baltis by surprise and attack them from rear side as well.

Zorawar Singh himself assumed the command of the second and main part of the army; marching from Leh along the Indus, he followed the Leh-Srinagar route; marching through Bazgo, Khalasi, Lamayuru, Fotu La, Bod Kharbu, Mulbe, Shergil and Pashkym, it ultimately reached Kargil. At Kargil—the strategic place which was

the scene of fighting between India and Pakistan in August 1965 and again in November 1971 and where the valient Indian *Jawans* having thrown back the Pakistani army, seized many strategic posts—he halted for sometime and put his army in proper shape. The invaders then moved along the Suru river. After crossing the Indus, they marched toward Garkon, an important place in Purig district where the Ladakhi rebels who had revolted against the Dogras in 1839 were hiding. Some of the insurgents were caught and given exemplary punishments; others escaped into Baltistan. Thus, after restoring normalcy in Purig and Kargil *ilaqas* and taking many residents of that area as carriers of Dogra baggage, the invaders descended into Olthithang and marched towards Marol. In order to follow the then usual road to Skardu, they were to cross the Indus again to its left side. But to their most unpleasant surprise, the Balti and Ladakhi rebels, after crossing the river had destroyed the bridge near Marol.³⁷ Moreover, a strong Balti army under the command of Gulam Hussain, the Minister of Ahmad Shah, had gathered on the left side of the Indus at Marol to give befitting reception to the assailants.³⁸ Under these conditions, the invaders were obliged to march along the right side of the river, but there was no way out and they had to cross stupendous cliffs and deep ravines quite often. Even unfrequented narrow paths in this difficult terrain had been obstructed with branches of trees by the Baltis. These booby-traps very much impeded the mobility of the invaders.

After marching for about twenty-five days over the snow-capped mountains, although the Dogras received the submission of the chief of Kharmang,³⁹ their condition was becoming critical. To cross the Indus river no way was in sight while provisions were running short in the Dogra camp. Wazir Zorawar Singh appointed Mian Nidhan Singh with about 5,000 soldiers to collect supplies. But the hostile Baltis lured this column into an ambush about fifteen miles away from the main Dogra Army and fell upon it in large numbers. Nidhan Singh with his whole column except four hundred men was put to the sword. The survivors numbering about four hundred returned with great difficulty to the main column and told their woeful tale to the Wazir.⁴⁰

The Dogras were now in a very precarious situation: the winter was in full swing and their provisions had exhausted. Their difficulties were further accentuated by the heavy fall of snow which had closed all the passes from behind, thereby snapping their supply lines. It was not easy to construct a bridge over the Indus because the Baltis in their thousands were keeping a round-the-clock vigil on the opposite bank. The pitiable condition of the invaders has been aptly described by Alexander Cunningham in the following words :

With an impassable river in their front, and certain starvation both from cold and hunger, whether they retreated or remained in their present position, the majority of the troops paid no attention to orders, and of the few who still obeyed, none did so with alacrity. The Dogra army had halted in this position for fifteen days, exposed to frost by night and to hunger by day. Many had sought shelter from the snow amongst the overhanging rocks and there they sat listless and vacant, and utterly indifferent whether they should be cut off by the sword of the enemy or be frozen to death by the cold.⁴¹

But the ingenuity, courage and skill of Colonel Basti Ram, the hero of Sod, saved the Dogras. His was a last bid to extricate his companions from this difficult situation. Accompanied by about forty daring soldiers, at the dead of night, Basti Ram moved along the river to reconnoitre if it could be easily bridged at some place, while another party kept up a smart fire upon the Baltis on the opposite side to distract their attention. At last, at one place near the Wanko pass they discovered that except about thirty feet in the middle, the river was so thickly frozen that a man could easily pass over it. Soon, with the help of Ali Sher Khan, the chieftain of Kharmang and some Dards, the local tribesmen, who probably acted as their guides, the assailants, before the day-break made an ice-bridge⁴² over the river.⁴³ Indeed, the frost which had so nearly destroyed the Dogras, now proved their secret ally. The main Dogra army thereupon marched to the place after receiving Basti Ram's message. At first a small party led by Basti Ram crossed the river and fell upon the Baltis.

In the plain, near the Wanko pass, which was known among the local people as 'bloody battle field' a pitched battle started. The Baltis, although taken by surprise, cut the Dogra advance-guard to pieces. However, arrival of the main Dogra army turned the tables on the Baltis and in a hand to hand fight the invaders were victorious. Wazir Gulam Hussain, the leader of the Balti force was killed.⁴⁴ His death completely demoralised the vanquished and they fled precipitately toward Hamzigund and Skardu. In this battle which was fought in February 1840, about three hundred Baltis were killed; losses on the Dogra side were comparatively less, although about five hundred of them had been rendered unfit to fight by the intense cold and frost-bite during the last few days.⁴⁵

This victory proved a turning point in the Dogra-Balti war: thereafter the Baltis put a feeble resistance. The victors pursued their fleeing adversaries as far as Marwan, where, so as to replenish their resources, the Dogras halted for a few days. Here, General Zorawar Singh handsomely rewarded Colonel Basti Ram and about thirty of his companions for the valour exhibited by them in the last action and for making an ice-bridge over the Indus. They were given golden *karahs* (bracelets) and cash awards.⁴⁶ Then the assailants marched towards Hamzigund, where they stayed for three days and were given every assistance by Raja Ali Sher of Kharmang. The latter also paid *Nazarana* to Zorawar Singh and perhaps to do the same, he produced Raja Ahmad Khan of Tolti and Raja Gulam Shah of Parkuta before the General. After that the invaders marching through Tolti, Parkuta and Gol reached Skardu.

Here a word about the second column, which had been sent under the command of Mohi-ud-Din Shah, may also be said. In order to check its advance, a Balti force which had been raised from Khapalu—dependency of Skardu situated in the southern valley of Shyok—met the invaders near Kiris, but was defeated. Thereafter the assailants, along with the rulers of Khapalu and Kiris who had acknowledged Dogra suzerainty, joined the main column under Zorawar Singh near Gol and thereafter the entire army marched towards Skardu.⁴⁷

Ahmad Shah had prepared for such an eventuality. The fort of

Skardo was situated on the edge of a high plateau. From three sides it was surrounded by the deep waters of the Indus and on the fourth, the passage leading to the main citadel was steep and extremely difficult. The Balti ruler had fortified this stronghold and was also stated to have laid in a stock of provisions which could last for three years.⁴⁹ Thus, because of difficulty of access and sufficient provisions, it was believed by the Baltis that the fort was impregnable. The invaders soon beleaguered the fort and probably cut off its water supply.⁴⁹ After a few days' siege, the Dogras, hardy mountaineers as they were, one dark night stole round from their position in front of the chief fort, and taking the guards by surprise, climbed the hill. After a hand to hand fight with the guards, they took possession of the small fort near the summit and in the morning started firing at the main citadel. Another action was fought in which many Baltis were killed and others, including Ahmad Shah, made prisoners.⁵⁰ This took place in the first week of March, 1840.⁵¹ The fort was razed to the ground and Ahmad Shah's palace within it dismantled. Frederick Drew remarks that seizure of the Skardu fort, resembled somewhat, on a small scale, the capture of Quebec by the English.⁵² From this fort, rich treasures and a large quantity of provisions fell into the hands of the invaders. If Raja Ali Sher Khan of Kharmang is to be believed, the Dogras also got three thousand matchlocks and two thousand swords from this fort.⁵³ Some of these weapons formerly belonged to Ladakh which had been seized by the Baltis; these were recognized by Tse-pal Nam-gyal, the Ladakhi king.⁵⁴ Ahmad Shah was deposed and in his place, Zorawar Singh installed Mohammad Shah as the new King of Baltistan.⁵⁵

Mohammad Shah became a vassal of the Sikh Maharaja, through Raja Gulab Singh and was asked to pay an annual tribute of Rs. 7,000. In order to overawe the Baltis, Zorawar Singh, on the pain of death asked Ahmad Shah to arrange for the arrest of Rahim Khan of Chigtan and Hussain of Pashkym, who, after fomenting rebellion in Ladakh had escaped into Baltistan. Soon the two rebels were produced. Their limbs were hacked in a lucerene field before a large crowd which had been assembled to witness the scene.⁵⁶

CONQUEST OF SHIGAR AND RONDU

After giving these exemplary punishments Zorawar Singh now took steps to subdue those feudatories of Ahmad Shah who had actively assisted their suzerain against the Dogras and still held out. First came the turn of Shigar, situated to the north of Skardu. Taking few hundred soldiers with him, Zorawar Singh marched toward Shigar and conquered it without any difficulty. After stationing his own men there, he returned to Skardu. Then came the turn of Rondu, another principality situated on the Indus to the north-west of Skardu and an important station on the Skardu-Gilgit route. Zorawar Singh appointed Rasul Beg at the head of 1000 Dogra soldiers to conquer it. Some Balti soldiers under the leadership of Raja Ali Sher Khan of Kharmang were also ordered to guide and assist this column. Marching from Skardu and moving along the Indus, the invaders reached Katzaral, near which the people of Rondu had thrown up a defence work.⁵⁷ As a result of it the movement of the invaders was impeded for sometime. But by taking a higher path, they soon reached Rondu and conquered it without much difficulty, as its Raja Ali Khan had fled on the approach of the Dogras. The latter took possession over the Rondu fort and annexed this principality. However, a little while after, when Ali Khan paid Rupees 15,000 as war indemnity in cash and kind, he was restored to his previous position,⁵⁸ although now he became a vassal of the Sikh Maharaja through Raja Gulab Singh.

ABORTIVE ATTEMPT TO CONQUER ASTOR

The Dogras then turned their attention towards Astor or Hasora which lies to the south-west of Rondu and was an important halting place on the Srinagar-Gilgit route. In addition, Srinagar-Gilgit road also passed through it and for any power aspiring to conquer Gilgit, it could serve as a useful base for operations. Madin Shah, a Dogra officer, at the head of about 500 soldiers moved to conquer the principality of Astor and besieged its Raja, Jabbar Khan who had shut himself in the Astor fort. The siege continued for about twenty days and the garrison was forced to surrender after the water supply had been cut off by the invaders. Raja Jabbar Khan was made a prisoner

and brought to Skardu. But this Dogra conquest was discountenanced by Colonel Mihan Singh, the Sikh Nazim of Kashmir, who asserted that Astor was within his sphere of influence and the invaders should not advance thither. This opposition of Mihan Singh was probably due to the fact that during his impending conquest of Gilgit, he wanted to use Astor as a spring-board.⁵⁹ On Mihan Singh's intercession, Raja Jabbar Khan was released after sometime and sent back to Astor. This opposition of the Sikh Governor of Kashmir, checked Dogra expansion westward and shattered Zorawar Singh's dream of conquering Gilgit. Thus it is wrong as has been suggested by some writers that Zorawar Singh conquered Gilgit also.⁶⁰ From Astor, the Dogras retraced their steps towards Skardu.

Zorawar Singh stayed in Skardu for about nine months and took many steps to consolidate the newly-conquered territories. As mentioned before, Mohammad Shah, the eldest son of Ahmad Shah, on the condition of paying an annual tribute of Rs. 7,000 became the new ruler of Baltistan. Similar tributes were fixed on the other petty rulers of Khartaksho, Khapalu, Tolti, Parkuta, Shigar and Rondu, who acknowledged the suzerainty of the Lahore Durbar. Zorawar Singh also constructed a fort at Skardu, perhaps at the same place where King Ahmad Shah of Baltistan had shut himself, and stationed a strong Dogra contingent under the command of Bhagwan Singh Kishtwaria. Owing to his short stay at Skardu, it appears that the Dogra General did not introduce new fiscal reforms and the old revenue arrangement continued in Baltistan. However, to meet the requirements of Dogra soldiers stationed in the newly conquered country, the *Zamindars* were asked to deposit with the local Rajas sufficient quantities of grain, butter, wood and salt.⁶¹

After making these arrangements, Zorawar Singh ordered Ahmad Shah and his prominent chieftains and feudatories to assemble their armies and march with the invaders back to Ladakh. The return journey to Leh *via* Khapalu and the Chorbat La commenced in the middle of 1840. But near Khapalu, smallpox broke into the army camp and took a heavy toll.⁶² Tse-pal Nam-gyal, the aged Ladakhi King, who was worn-out with the exertions of the Balti campaign and who had out-lived the downfall of his country, also fell a victim

to the epidemic and died. Banka Kahlon, the leader of Ladakhi forces, also soon followed the King to his grave. Their bodies were brought to Ladakh and buried at Stog near Leh, with all customary rites. Wazir Zorawar Singh, on reaching Leh installed Jig-smed Nam-gyal, the grandson of Tse-pal Nam-gyal, then a boy of about eight years as the new nominal ruler of Ladakh.⁶³

Why was Baltistan whose sky-high mountains, deep rivers and unfrequented narrow foot-paths, made it almost militarily invulnerable, conquered somewhat easily by the Dogras? First and perhaps the most important cause of the defeat of Ahmad Shah was his quarrel with his son, Mohammad Shah and his strained relations with his feudatories. Mohammad Shah and his sympathisers, especially his maternal-uncle, Raja Ali Sher Khan of Kharmang, not only guided the invaders through Baltistan but rendered them every kind of assistance at a very critical moment. But for that help, the inclemencies of weather might have made a short work of the Dogras. If Raja Ali Sher Khan is to be believed, he spent about Rupees sixty thousand as payment of *Nazarana* and on entertaining the invaders.⁶⁴ Similarly, Raja Ali Khan of Khapalu, who had been deposed by Ahmad Shah and who for sometime stayed in Nubra enjoying Dogra hospitality and protection, also helped the invaders. Thus, the Balti chiefs' not putting a united front against the common foe, greatly facilitated Zorawar Singh's task of conquering Baltistan. Secondly, like the Ladakhis, the Baltis had no regular army and were poorly and inadequately equipped. In hand to hand fights, which were fought many a time during this invasion, they were no match with the daughty Dogras of the Jammu hills. Finally, the Baltis also did not have capable general of the eminence of Zorawar Singh. Ahmad Shah, no doubt a courageous man, unwisely stayed at Skardu, waiting for the enemy there, rather than meeting them with all his might on the border of his dominions.

Since 1834, the Dogras had been invading Ladakh and gravitating towards Baltistan. By 1840, both the Kingdoms lost independence and came under the effective control of Raja Gulab Singh. What were the advantages of Dogra rule to Leh and Skardu? First, the centuries-old plundering expeditions which the Baltis and the Ladakhis

had led on each other, stopped. This greatly eased the tension on the borders between the two kingdoms. Thus it brought relief to the people of both the states, especially those of Purig, Khapalu and Kharmang who were unhappy on account of their chiefs having continual quarrels either among each other or with the rulers of Leh and Skardo. Secondly, as pointed out by Alexander Cunningham, who visited Ladakh during 1846-48 i.e. about five years after the death of Zorawar Singh, the energetic new rulers had taken great pains to construct bridges, roads and bridletracks connecting important places in the region. This greatly benefited the inhabitants of the area, especially the Ladakhis since their principal means of livelihood were derived from the transport of merchandise. Better means of communication facilitated the work of the labourers. Thirdly, the introduction of forceful Dogra rule brought security to the people; there was complete extinction of theft and other crimes. Finally, it opened Ladakh and Baltistan to the outside world. Here-to-fore, these kingdoms, which were situated in the maze of mountains, had not felt the impact of modern civilization. After the Dogra conquest, a constant stream of travellers and explorers especially the British, started flowing into these territories.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. F. Drew, *The Northern Barrier of India* (London, 1877), p. 200; see also Vigne, *Travels*, II, p. 249.
2. A. Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India* (Varanasi, 1963), p. 70.
3. Drew, *Northern Barrier*, p. 210; see also *Gazetteer Kashmir and Ladakh*, 1890, p. 191.
4. A. Cunningham, *The Ancient Geography of India*, p. 70; Vigne, *Travels*, II, p. 249.
5. Notes taken by Captain C.M. Wade, Governor-General's Political Agent at Ludhiana in 1829 relative to the territory and Government of Iskardu from information given by Charagh Ali, Agent, who was deputed to him in that year by Ahmad Shah, the Gyalpo (King) of that country. *F.D.P.C.*, 5 October 1835, No. 53-A.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Csoma de Koros, 'Geographical Notice of Tibet' *JASB.*, Vol. I (1832), p. 125; *F.D. Pol. Progs.*, 20 September 1822, No. 63.

8. *F.D.P.P.*, 20 October 1837, No. 62.
9. *F.D.P.C.*, 5 October 1835, No. 53-A.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *J.A.S.B.*, Vol. I (1832), p. 125.
14. Moorcroft to Swinton, 6 February 1822: *F.D.P.C.*, 20 September 1822, No. 68; *F.D. Pol. Progs.*, 20 September 1822. No. 74.
15. Moorcroft to Metcalfe, 4 May 1821: *F.D.P.C.*, 20 September 1822, No. 60.
16. See N.K. Sinha, *Ranjit Singh* (Calcutta, 1951), pp. 125-26.
17. *F.D.P.C.*, 5 October 1835, No. 53-A.
18. Wade to Government, 20 April 1836, *F.D.P.C.*, 23 May 1836, No. 109.
19. G-G to Wade, 23 May 1836, *F.D.P.C.*, 23 May 1836, No. 112.
20. Cf. V. Jacquemont, *Letters from India etc.* (London, 1834), II, pp. 147-53.
21. Vigne, *Travels*, II, pp. 236 ff.
22. *F.D.P.C.*, 5 October 1835, No. 53-A.
23. Cf. Vigne, *Travels*, II, pp. 208, 216.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 243-44.
26. Cf. J.D. Cunningham, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 217.
27. Mackeson (Assistant Pol. Agent, Peshawar) to Clerk (Pol. Agent, Ludhiana), 18 July 1840: *F.D.S.C.*, 1 March 1841, No. 126. See also, Vigne, *Travels*, II, p. 375.
28. G.T. Vigne (*Travels*, II, pp. 255-56), says that the cause of estrangement between Ahmad Shah and his son was that the prince when entrusted with the government of Husora by way of trial, had abused his authority and thus proved incompetent as a ruler. Thereupon Ahmad Shah determined to give the throne to his other son. Hashmat Allah, (*Tarikh-i-Jammu*, pp. 576-77), however says that the root cause of this trouble was the new Gyalmo (Queen), step-mother of Mohammad Shah. Mohammad's mother had died, and the new queen wanted to make her own son as the 'next King of Baltistan. To achieve this object she prevailed upon Ahmad Shah to declare her son as the heir-apparent.
29. *Akhbar-i-Ludhiana* (Ludhiana), 7 January 1837 (N.A.I.); see also, Ganda Singh (Ed.), *The Punjab in 1939-40* (selection from the Punjab Akhbars, Punjab Intelligence etc.), (Patiala, 1952), pp. 24 ff.
30. Wade to Government, 30 December 1836; *F.D.P.C.*, 31 January 1837, No. 28.
31. *Foreign Department Secret Consultations*, 1 March 1841, No. 127.
32. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 346; see also, Hashmat Allah, *Tarikhi-Jammu*, p. 362.
33. *Idem.*
34. *Ambala Division Records*: Pol. Agent Subathu to T.T Metcalfe (Agent to Lt. Gr. N.W.P., Delhi), 25 May 1840, No. 713 (Pb. S.A.). Alexander Cunningham

(*Ladak*, pp. 346-47), wrongly says that Zorawar started on this expedition in the end of 1840.

35. Cf. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, pp. 131, 253.
36. Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, p. 363.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 364.
38. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 347.
39. It is said that Raja Ali Sher Khan of Khar Mang or Khartaksho, was having political differences with Ahmad Shah. In 1834, when Zorawar had invaded Ladakh for the first time, Ali Sher Khan had entered into a secret alliance with the Wazir and had requested him to invade Baltistan. (Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, pp. 352-53, 591-92 ff; A. Neve, *Thirty Years in Kashmir*, p. 275).
40. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 347; Francke, *Western Tibet*, p. 156.
41. Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 347-48.
42. Francke (*Western Tibet*, p. 157) writes that the Dards of Deh, a local tribe often made bridges across the river in winter. Their method is that they fasten several beams to the banks in such a way that these project into the river. After sometime, floes accumulate and beams are frozen in the encrustation of ice, over which it is possible to walk. Then more beams are fastened to the first and process repeated until the other bank is reached.
43. *Ibid.*, Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, pp. 366 ff.
44. Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, p. 367.
45. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 349.
46. *Ibid.*
47. For details, See Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, p. 367 ff.
48. J.E. Duncan, *A Summer Ride through Western Tibet* (London, 1906), p. 286.
49. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 349; *Gazetteer Kashmir and Ladakh*, 1890, p. 196.
50. Drew, *Northern Barrier*, pp. 208-09, see also *JIH.*, XLVII, Pt. II (Aug. 1969), pp. 335-36.
51. *F.D.S.C.*, 18 May 1840, No. 53.
52. *Northern Barrier*, p. 207.
53. Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, pp. 593-94.
54. Y. Gergan, *History of Ladakh*, p. 548.
55. *Akhbar-i-Ludhiana* (Ludhiana), 2 May 1840; *Delhi Urdu Akhbar* (Delhi) 17 May 1840; *Aina-i-Sikandar* (Delhi), 25 May 1840 (N.A.I.).
56. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 253.
57. Drew, *Northern Barrier*, pp. 203-08.
58. Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, p. 373.
59. It is interesting to note that when the Governor of Kashmir sent Colonel Nathu Shah to conquer Gilgit in 1842, he first annexed Astor and established a military post here. For details, see Drew: *Northern Barrier of India*, p. 182; *Gazetteer Kashmir and Ladakh*, 1890, pp. 177-78.

60. See for example, Sita Ram Kohli, (Ed). *Lahore Darbar Records*, Vol. III, Aa4 (i), (Pb. S.A.).
61. Hashmat Allah, *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, pp. 594, 657, et. al.
62. *Ibid.*, pp. 375-81.
63. Francke, *Antiquities*, pp. 131, 254; Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 350.
64. Raja Ali Sher Khan had written a detailed account of all these important happenings in Persian. Moulvi Hashmat Allah of Lucknow, who had joined the services of Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir and who for some years was *Wazir-i-Wazarat* of Ladakh in the eighteen-nineties, got this Persian MS from Raja Aman Ali Shah of Kharmang, probably a descendant of Raja Ali Sher Khan. Hashmat Allah has given these details in his book. Cf. *Tarikh-i-Jammu*, pp. 589-598.

INVASION OF WESTERN TIBET : DEFEAT AND DEATH OF ZORAWAR SINGH

By 1840, the Dogras had conquered Ladakh and Baltistan and had established their authority in these lands. - They were ready for fresh conquests. General Zorawar Singh now thought of establishing an empire in (Chinese) Turkestan. As mentioned in the previous chapter, his expansion towards Gilgit having been discountenanced by the Sikh Nazim of Kashmir, his only path for expansion in the circumstances lay north and north-east of Ladakh—towards Yarqand and Western Tibet. He threw gauntlet to the Chinese Governor of Yarqand :

remit an annual tribute according to an engagement, without giving rise to any disturbance and bloodshed in your country. The neglect of this advice will at last entail shame and ruin on your country and your comforts, and you will then repent.¹

The Dogra General further desired the Chinese Governor of Yarqand to depute an agent to attend on the Lahore Durbar and acknowledge the suzerainty of the Sikh Government.² There was ostensible reason behind this move: the British were fighting the First Opium War (1839-1842); the Ch'ing Emperor, when apprised of the friendship subsisting between the English and the Sikhs, is said to have ordered his Governor in Yarqand to confiscate and destroy the entire stock of opium of the Punjab traders valued at about eight lakhs of rupees.³ George Russel Clerk, British Agent for the affairs of Punjab and North-West Frontier, wrote to the Supreme Government :⁴

Raja Gulab Singh is now intent on a new scheme of ambition... he now hopes to find in the seizure and destruction at Yarkand of opium belonging to traders and subjects of the Sikh Government, the means of inciting the Durbar to authorise his attempting the conquest of Yarkand, an enterprise, which his Vazeer there, Zorawar Singh has long considered to be easy of accomplishment.⁵

Clerk, further believed that the Dogra troops in Ladakh were inured to mountain warfare and cold, and if not opposed by the independent Mohammaden chieftains to the north of the Tarim basin, were quite capable⁶ of wresting Yarkand or "any tributary in that position" from China.⁷

The Anglo-Chinese negotiations over the First Opium War were taking an amicable turn and thus any Dogra invasion of Yarkand at that time was likely to be productive of embarrassment and inconvenience to the British Government. The British Agent at the Lahore Durbar recommended to the Sikh Maharaja "to require Raja Gulab Singh to desist from his designs on Yarkand".⁸ Did the Dogras abandon the invasion of Yarkand of their own accord or were they dissuaded from so doing by the Lahore Durbar on a recommendation from Clerk? From the scanty sources available, we do not get a clear answer to this query. But it appears, that Zorawar Singh, great military general that he was, realising the manifold difficulties involved in such a risky and somewhat useless adventure of leading an army over the Karakoram Pass, abandoned it, and turned his attention towards Western Tibet, which was comparatively easy of access.

Before discussing details about Zorawar Singh's invasion of West Tibet, few lines about this region may not be out of place here. Tibet has been divided into several large vaguely-defined areas. The Western most part is known as West Tibet or Na-ris.⁹ It consists of the area between the Mayum Pass on the east and the Ladakh border on the West; in the north it is bounded by the Chang Tang and in the south it also touches Himachal Pradesh and the north-west part of Uttar Pradesh.

When Zorawar Singh invaded West Tibet, it was under the control of central Tibet. Gartok or Garo, situated at a distance of about 200 miles from Leh was the main centre of Government. For the administration of West Tibet, Garpon or Governor of Gartok was responsible to the authorities in Lhasa. Charles A. Sherring, who visited West Tibet in the summer of 1905, thus says about its administration :

The province of Nari or Western Tibet, is sub-divided into districts which are governed by officials who bear the title of Jongpen. Of these there are four and a fifth who, although he does not bear the designation, still exercises the authority and enjoys the respect commanded with that title. These are the Jongpens of Rudok, Chaprang, Daba, Takla Kot and the Trajun of Barkha.¹⁰

West Tibet was thinly populated and the people led nomadic lives. Shawl-wool, soda, salt and salt-petre were its main products. Cultivation was confined to a very small area such as the low valleys of Taklakot and Daba where irrigation was done by means of channels drawn from mountain streams. In such lands which could be brought under the plough, were grown barley, rice and mustard etc. However, most of the table-land of West Tibet is bleak and inhospitable where "herds of wild yaks, wild asses and antelopes roam, finding but slender assistance; where too there is great scarcity of good water, for although the slope of the land is such that rivers can find no outlet and lakes are innumerable, yet the water is generally too salt, to drink."¹¹ In West Tibet are also located the holy Mount Kailash and Lakes Manasarowar and Rakas Tal. The former, a high peak in the range of the same name, is considered by the Hindus, as the site of Lord Shiva's paradise. No wonder, since time immemorial, the Hindus, the Buddhists and even the followers of other religions have converged to these places in large numbers. The Lakes Manasarowar and Rakas Tal and their surrounding area is considered the source of three great rivers of the Indian sub-continent, namely, the Indus, the Sutlej and the Brahmaputra.

Soon after his conquest of Kashmir in 1819, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had asserted that Ladakh was within his political orbit.¹² Naturally, thereafter, he had become interested in knowing details about the countries which were situated on the periphery of Ladakh. On March 12, 1831, there was a conversation between the Maharaja and the French traveller, Victor Jacquemont, who had visited West Tibet in 1830. On being told that the country was "miserably poor",¹³ the Maharaja did not evince much interest and is said to have remarked that it was not of much use to conquer such a region.¹⁴ However, it was Zorawar Singh who attempted to conquer West Tibet in 1841.

The scheme to conquer Tibet appears to have been in Zorawar's mind as far back as 1836. Lala Sohan Lal Suri, the chronicler of Lahore Durbar tells us that after the conquest of Ladakh, while presenting his *nazar* to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Zorawar Singh had sought the Maharaja's blessings for the conquest of Tibet, a country, which "extended over a distance of five hundred Koss" and was conterminous with China.¹⁵ He further told Ranjit Singh that he was ready to kindle the fires of fighting and "by the grace of ever triumphant glory of the Maharaja, he would take possession of it."¹⁶ But the prudent Maharaja, foreseeing hostile reactions to such an adventure from bigger powers such as Tibet, China and the British, had counselled caution and forbidden the impatient Dogra general from going much beyond Ladakh.

By 1840, however, circumstances had changed: Maharaja Ranjit Singh had died in 1839 and after his death Kanwar Nau Nihal Singh, *de facto* ruler of the Punjab, with the help of the Dogra brothers had organised a strong party and was in foreign affairs, a protagonist of the 'forward' policy. He was anxious too to offset the British policy of encirclement by entering into an anti-British alliance with Nepal—the only independent Hindu state on the Indian sub-continent. There had earlier been a brisk exchange of delegations between the Sikhs and the Gurkhas, but as British territory lay between the Punjab and Nepal, all attempts in this connection had been foiled by the ever-vigilant British Agents. When Gulab Singh had first annexed Ladakh, it had been rumoured that his one object

was, to establish a direct territorial link between the Punjab and Nepal.¹⁷ Now it was believed that by annexing Western Tibet, Zorawar Singh wanted to build a chain of forts from Ladakh to the borders of Nepal on the other side of the Himalayas, and thereby effect the much-desired alliance with Nepal.¹⁸ Secondly, Western Tibet was reputed to possess some gold-mines. It was also reported that various monasteries situated in this part of Tibet were quite rich.¹⁹ So Zorawar's other objective was to acquire the monastic riches and gold-producing lands.²⁰ The third and the most important object of the Dogra invasion was to ensure the normal flow of shawl-wool from Western Tibet to Kashmir *via* Ladakh. Mr. Thomason, then Secretary to the Government of North-West Province, wrote to the Supreme Government :

The more immediate object of this extension of Sikh operations to the eastward is to monopolise the Pusham trade and by preventing a particle of the shawl-wool entering Bashahar from Chinese Tartary to force the article to the Cashmere market alone.²¹

Raja Gulab Singh's anxiety about the welfare of Kashmir was now due to his fond expectation of soon possessing it for himself.²² With that aim in view, by conquering Ladakh and Baltistan, he had already surrounded the valley from the north-eastern side and commanded all the roads leading from Kashmir either to Skardu or Ladakh, or towards the plains.²³ After 1834, because of political unrest in Ladakh and Baltistan, shawl-wool from West Tibet had started to flow into Bashahr and other territories under British protection.²⁴ The Dogras, by conquering the West Tibet wool-producing areas wanted to monopolise the lucrative shawl-wool trade. That is why, early in 1841 Zorawar Singh revived old claims of Ladakh over Tibetan territory to the west of Mayum pass, which in the past had remained under the control of Ladakhi Kings.²⁵ The Wazir wrote to the Garpon²⁶ of Gartok not to supply 'Pashmeena' (Shawl-wool) to any other area except Ladakh and also demanded a tribute from the latter.²⁷ But the Garpon sent only

five horses and five mules;²⁸ the Wazir felt insulted at this and soon invaded Western Tibet.

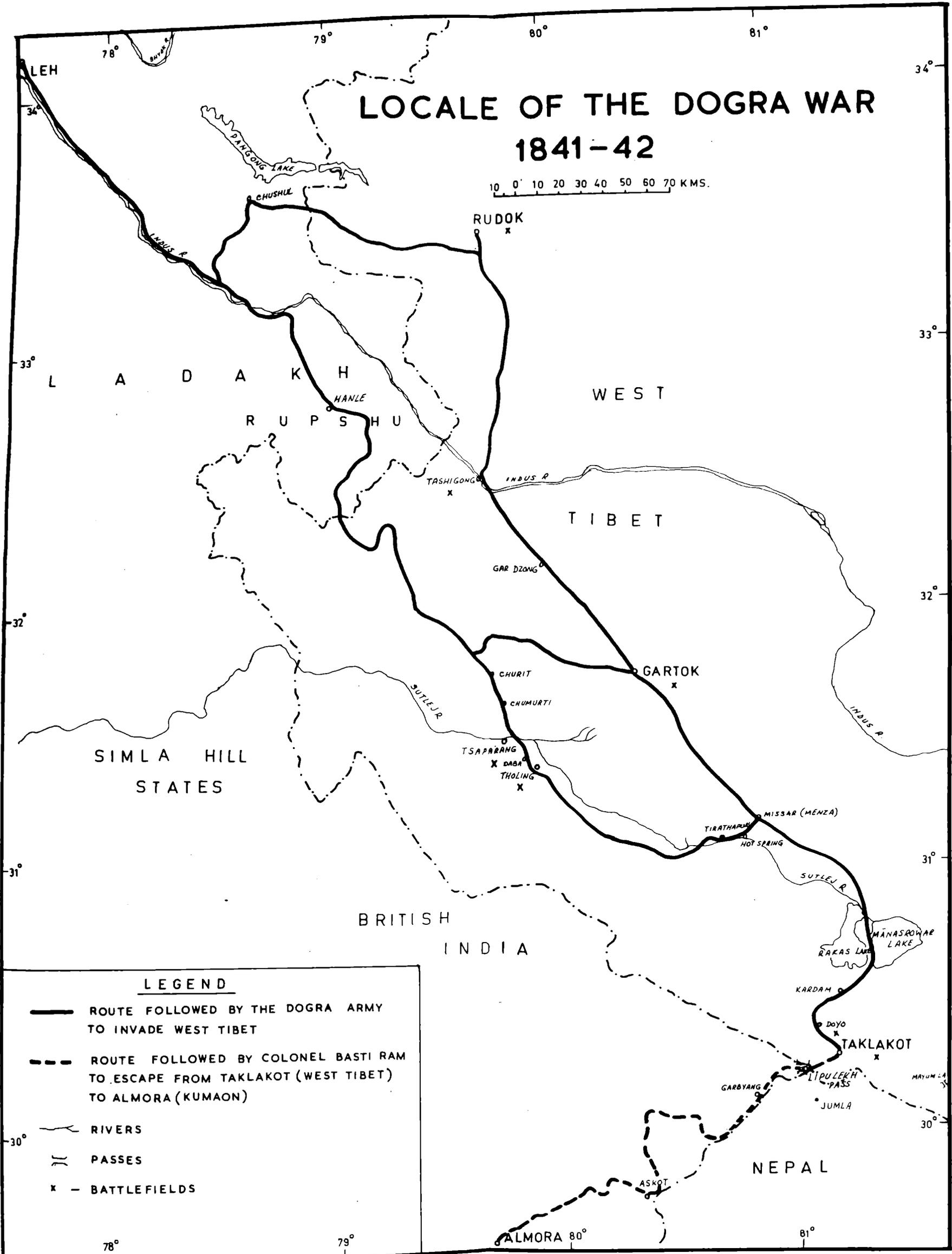
The strength of Zorawar's army was about 6,000;²⁹ out of this number nearly 3,000 were the Dogra soldiers of Kishtwar and Jammu area and the rest were the Ladakhis and the Baltis.³⁰ The former, mostly armed with matchlocks and muskets formed the nucleus of the army and was the fighting force, whereas the Baltis and the Ladakhis constituted auxiliary troops or camp-followers of Zorawar's army. In addition, the local population was also conscripted for carrying provisions, tents and accoutrements. Each villager was made responsible for carrying about 150 pounds,³¹ which load he had to convey on horses, yaks, donkeys, or on his own back. The Dogras also had about six small guns, probably jingals, which could be carried by men or mules.³² The Wazir also took with him some important dignitaries both from Baltistan and Ladakh; these were Ahmad Shah, the dispossessed Balti ruler, Chang Nabdan, the Kahlon of Bazgo, Nano Sunnum, the brother of Chang Nabdan, Gulam Khan, the son-in-law of Rahim Khan, the *Kiladar* in-charge of Spiti district and Gonpo, steward of the powerful Hemis monastery.³³ All this was in accord with Zorawar's scheme of employing the newly conquered against fresh adversaries. It was a most politic measure, otherwise these chieftains might have revolted during his absence.

Zorawar Singh's attack on Western Tibet was three-pronged and well planned.³⁴ Mobilising his army in the spring³⁵ of 1841, he placed the first contingent of about 500 soldiers under the command of Gulam Khan. Early in April 1841, this column entered Rupshu; passing through Hanle, then head-quarters of Rupshu district in Ladakh, it over-ran the Tibetan posts of Churit, Chumurty, Tsaparang, Daba and Tholing. Gulam Khan met some resistance at Tsaparang and Tholing, but the Tibetans were easily defeated and their leaders slain. In the Tsaparang fort, he found a large quantity of grain, two jingals, some ammunition and other property.³⁶ Gulam Khan plundered the Buddhist monasteries at all these places and is said to have broken all the idols with iconoclastic zeal.³⁷

The second column was placed under the control of Nono

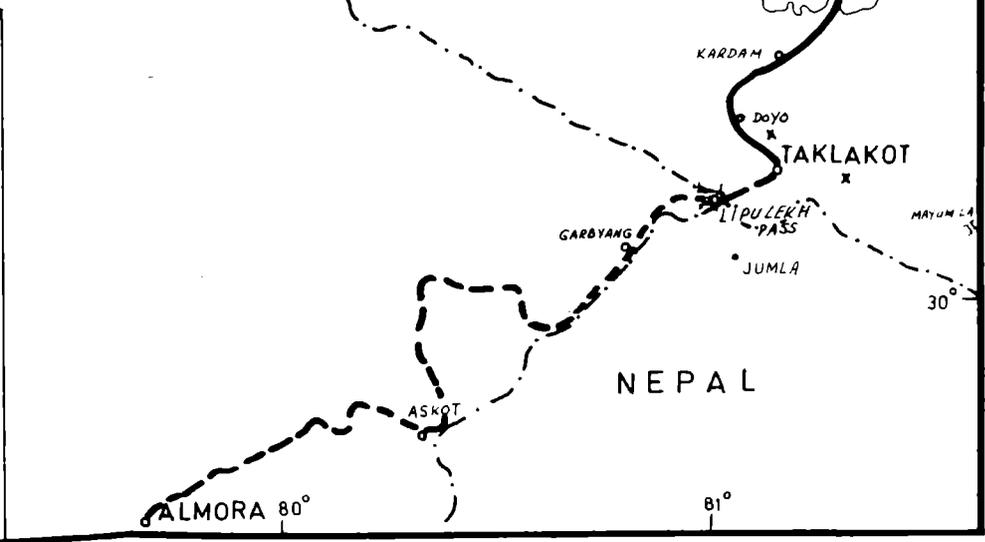
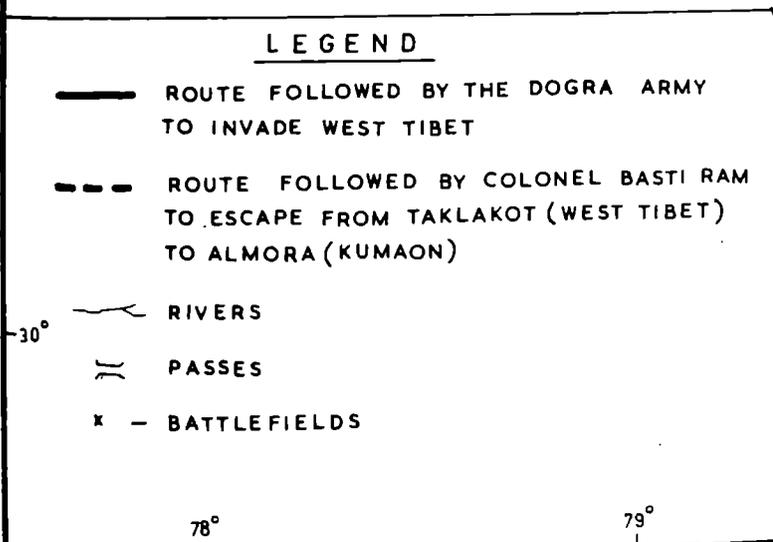
LOCALE OF THE DOGRA WAR 1841-42

10 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 KMS.



LEGEND

- ROUTE FOLLOWED BY THE DOGRA ARMY TO INVADE WEST TIBET
- - -** ROUTE FOLLOWED BY COLONEL BASTI RAM TO ESCAPE FROM TAKLAKOT (WEST TIBET) TO ALMORA (KUMAON)
- RIVERS
- PASSES
- x** - BATTLEFIELDS



Sunnum. This contingent moved upstream along the Indus; taking the middle route, it conquered and plundered Tashigong and then proceeded in an easterly direction to join with the main army.

Zorawar Singh himself led the third column. With nearly 3,000 soldiers, following the route to the south of the Pangong lake, he invaded Rudok and conquered it on June 5, 1841. There was little resistance, the fort was completely sacked and the Tibetan local governor of Rudok made a prisoner. Here, in addition to other articles of booty some ammunition also fell into the hands of the invaders.³⁸ From Rudok, the Dogra force advanced by detachments towards Gartok, the district headquarters of West Tibet. Since the place had been evacuated by the Tibetans, it was conquered without any difficulty.³⁹ Soon after, the first two columns also joined with Zorawar Singh, and the entire army moved in a south-easterly direction along the old caravan route between Ladakh and Lhasa. At Dogpacha, a place near Missar,⁴⁰ the governors of Gartok had collected about 1,200 men, mainly inhabitants of the country.⁴¹ They had also requisitioned the services of about 250 Jukpas tribesmen⁴² with a view, it appears either to attack the invaders or to receive their attack unitedly. On August 7, an action was fought, in which some persons belonging to both sides were killed. But the Tibetans could not bear the Dogra onslaught and fled towards Taklakot, a place about fifteen miles from the border of Nepal. The Wazir, in order to conquer the entire territory to the west of Mayum pass, then marched towards Taklakot.

The first alarm sent by the Tibetan governor of Rudok had been heard in Lhasa and Tibetan authorities had hastily despatched general Pishi (Pi-hsi), with a small force to check the sudden and quick thrust of the invaders. Pishi had hurried to Taklakot, but when the Dogras reached that place, the former, 'seeing the hopeless task of facing a strong army pulled behind the Mayum pass and sent for immediate and heavy reinforcements from Lhasa.⁴³ After some feeble resistance, on September 6, 1841, the Dogras took possession of Taklakot and soon constructed a fort there which was supplied with provisions. A garrison of nearly 300 soldiers was then stationed here and placed

under the control of Colonel Basti Ram. Zorawar Singh's conquest of Western Tibet was now complete.

Before his invasion of western Tibet, Zorawar Singh is reported to have announced his desire to visit the holy places of Kailash Parbat and Lake Manasarowar.⁴⁴ The description of these places given by C.G. Rawling, who visited them during 1904-05, albeit at the cost of some digression, may be quoted in extenso :

Kailash Parbat is by far the largest and highest of many pinnacles that tower up in the sky from the range of mountains which lies to the north of the Manasarowar Lake; its summit rises over 22,000 feet above sea level or some 7,000 feet above the surrounding plain. Figures, as a rule convey but vague idea to the general mind, and it is indeed difficult to place before the mental vision a true picture of the most beautiful mountain.... No wonder, then, that this spot is believed by Hindus and Mohamedans alike to be the home of all the gods, that of the waters of its lake they drink, that in its unexplored caverns they dwell; to them it is the Holy Mountain, and the most sacred spot on earth, a pilgrimage to which ensures both sanctity and renown.⁴⁵

To perform customary offers and usual *Pradaksina* at the holy places, Wazir Zorawar Singh and other high Dogra dignitaries also appear to have brought their wives with them. After the conquest of Western Tibet, the Wazir proceeded to take a holy bath in the Lake Manasarowar and offer a golden idol with other splendid gifts at the Kailash temple.⁴⁶

However, religious observances did not make him forget the political aspects of his task. Simultaneously with his movement into the western part of Tibet, he had taken steps to consolidate the newly acquired territories. He had stationed his own soldiers at every post and constructed fortresses at such strategic places as Rudok, Gartok, Tsaparang, Daba, Churit, Chumurty, Kardam, Tirtha Puri and Taklakot. All these forts were also garrisoned with the Dogra soldiers. Roads were repaired,⁴⁷ and arrangements made to collect revenue according to the old practices. Tibetan local functionaries were taken

into service and asked to contact and pacify the populace.⁴⁸ The Wazir also adopted measures to ensure the supply of shawl-wool from Western Tibet to Ladakh. Orders were issued to sell shawl-wool, as per old practice, to the Ladakhis only. Those who defied this edict were hauled up and the traders of Bashahr and other British-protected hill territories, who tried to smuggle this commodity were severely dealt with. He also appears to have prohibited the killing of kine, as then was the practice in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's and his successor's dominions. Some Kashmiri Muslims who violated this order in West Tibet were severely punished and their tongues were cut.⁴⁹

As *de facto* ruler of West Tibet, the Dogra Commander issued a general *hukam namah*, directing all the people to pay him taxes which heretofore they had been paying to Tibetan authorities.⁵⁰ The Bhotias, the residents of Kumaon and Garhwal who traded with West Tibet were also cessed, as in the past.⁵¹ Necessary facilities were provided to them for carrying commercial transactions with the Hunias,⁵² their counterparts on the other side of the Himalayan crest.⁵³ A Ladakhi was appointed to look after the revenue arrangements of West Tibet.⁵⁴ The Dogra conquest of Western Tibet had alarmed the Bhotias, but to allay such fears, the Wazir despatched Colonel Basti Ram to meet Mr. Lushington, then Commissioner of Kumaon. Basti Ram and Lushington met at Kala Pani⁵⁵ on October 8, 1841; there the Dogra dignitary told his British counterpart that Zorawar Singh was anxious to do everything to secure and place the commercial traffic of the Bhotias on its former footing.⁵⁶ From all this it would seem that the Wazir had no idea of vacating his new conquests, and like Ladakh and Baltistan, he wanted to make West Tibet a part of the Dogra dominions.

However, the Dogras were not allowed to digest their new conquests in West Tibet. General Pishi's requests for reinforcements were promptly attended by the authorities at Lhasa. The latter, collected a Tibetan Army of about 10,000 and immediately despatched it to expel the 'Shenpas'.⁵⁷ The leader of this army was Kalon Surkhang and it had a strong park of artillery. With the help of merchants and the Tashilhunpo monastery, provisions which could

last for about nine months were requisitioned from 'military post warehouses' and were transported to the front.⁵⁸

When Zorawar Singh heard about the arrival of this Tibetan force, he made immediate arrangements for escorting his wife and other Dogra ladies from West Tibet. J.D. Cunningham, British Commissioner who had been appointed by the British Indian Government to go to Western Tibet and report the details about the movement of the Dogras, tells us that Mian Magna Ram, Zorawar Singh's brother-in-law, with a strong contingent first took the ladies to Ladakh⁵⁹ where they appear to have stayed in the fort of Leh for some months. A little while after, when the Dogras expelled the Tibetans from Ladakh and re-established their control over Leh, the ladies were sent to Kishtwar. The Ladakhi tradition confirming this news records that Zorawar's wife had to return without her husband across the Zoji Pass.⁶⁰

Approach of a strong Tibetan force induced Zorawar Singh to open negotiations for the cessation of hostilities of course, but not without demanding his price. He desired the Tibetans to recognise him as the ruler of Western Tibet,⁶¹ and to indemnify the cost of various actions fought by him.⁶² His other condition was that the Tibetans, as heretofore had been the practice, must send all the shawl-wool to Ladakh otherwise he would invade Lhasa.⁶³ These terms, however, were not acceptable to the Tibetans and they saw in it a hidden threat.

Meanwhile, winter had set in and the heavy fall of snow had closed the Mayum pass which connects Central Tibet with that part of Western Tibet which had been occupied by the Dogras. The invaders, therefore, had hoped that till the opening of passes, at least, there would not be fighting at a large scale and perhaps the negotiations would linger on till next spring. But the Tibetans discovered a by-pass, which enabled them to go on the other side of the Mayum La. They invested Taklakot early in November and sent detachments to surround the other Dogra military posts also. The small Dogra garrison of about 100 soldiers at Kardam under the command of Mian Awtara Kishtwaria was put to the sword,⁶⁴ and Basti Ram who was beleaguered in Taklakot was cut off from the main

Dogra army. When this disaster took place, Zorawar Singh was wintering at Tirtha Puri near Lake Manasarowar. About November 7, 1841 he despatched 300 soldiers under Nono Sunnum to check the advance of the enemy, but this detachment was surrounded at Kardam, to the south of Lake Manasarowar and annihilated.⁶⁵ Nono Sunnum escaped and returned to the main Dogra camp. On November 19, the Dogra General despatched another column of 600 soldiers under the joint command of Gulam Khan and Nono Sunnum. But like the first advance-column, it was also cut to pieces and the two leaders were made prisoners.⁶⁶

The Dogra army was now in a critical position. Zorawar Singh's success had reached its high water-mark and the capture of Western Tibet was the pinnacle of his glory. What followed was somewhat in the nature of an anti-climax. There was no hope of his receiving any succour either from Jammu or from Lahore. Nau Nihal Singh, a protagonist of the 'forward' policy had died on November 5, 1840. After his death the Lahore Durbar became a cockpit of conflicting ambitions and discordant interests. Sher Singh, the new Maharaja, unlike Nau Nihal Singh was weak and experiencing great difficulty in keeping his throne safe from the Sindhanwalias. Raja Dhian Singh, being anxious to retain his position as Prime Minister was keeping all his hill-troops in readiness for any eventuality;⁶⁷ Raja Gulab Singh was busily engaged at Hazara and Peshawar, quelling rebellion and helping the British in their war with the Afghans.⁶⁸ Zorawar Singh had sent for reinforcement from Leh and other Dogra military posts⁶⁹ in West Tibet. Joseph Davey Cunningham, commissioner appointed by the British Indian Government to report details about this Dogra invasion, while staying at Churit in Western Tibet, tells us that Mian Dullu Singh, Dogra functionary, in-charge of Spiti district had been ordered by Zorawar Singh to prevail upon the people of Spiti to send their quota of militia; and having done that the Mian was ordered to advance immediately with all the reinforcements towards Lake Manasarowar.⁷⁰ Although Mian Magna, Commandant of the Dogra garrison at Leh, Mian Dullu Singh and other Dogra functionaries in-charge of fortified posts in West Tibet moved towards Lake

Manasarowar, where the fighting was going on, yet due to the closure of all the passes by snow, they were unable to reach to battlefield and returned to their respective posts.⁷¹

General Zorawar Singh, hero of present monograph, now realised the gravity of the situation: he was surrounded in the depth of winter and that too in the Land of Snows; retreat was impossible and he was facing the enemy, nearly three times the strength of his own troops. The Tibetans, who were inured to the cold climate had closely beset the 'black devils'.⁷² Zorawar broke up his camp at Tirthapuri and advanced towards Taklakot, perhaps with the intention of effecting a junction with Colonel Basti Ram, but all the by-paths had also been blocked by the Tibetans. The Wazir, a man of indomitable courage as he was, endeavoured by reckless bravery to instil some ardour in his men; acting on the Napoleonic maxim that attack was the best form of defence, he fell upon the enemy. The first action was fought on December 10, 1841, and fighting continued for three days. On December 12, near Do-Yo, Zorawar was struck by a ball in the right shoulder and fell from his horse. But he was not a man who would give in easily: seizing the sword in his left hand, he continued to fight and put to death many of his enemies. According to a tradition, although badly wounded, he was still dreaded by the Tibetans, who did not dare to approach him. However, ultimately he was lassoed and killed by a Tibetan warrior.⁷³ Thus perished the gallant General who had served his master—Raja Gulab Singh—faithfully and made his name to be feared throughout Ladakh, Baltistan and other areas conquered by him.

After Zorawar Singh's death, the Dogra army having fought one of the most gruesome battles in the history of warfare,⁷⁴ lost heart and gave way.⁷⁵ Many of the Ladakhis, Baltis and residents of West Tibet deserted the invaders and joined with the Tibetans. Rai Singh, Zorawar's second-in-command, Ahmad Shah, the dispossessed ruler of Baltistan and other erstwhile Ladakhi functionaries such as Non-Sunnum, Bazgo Kahlon, Gulam Khan and about 600 soldiers including Balti Mohammadens and Ladakhi Buddhists were made prisoners.⁷⁶ Gulam Khan, the desecrator of the monasteries and breaker of images was hacked to death. Ahmad Shah was treated

honourably by the Tibetans and did not die a few months after the defeat of Zorawar Singh as has been written by Alexander Cunningham.⁷⁷ After the debacle in which the Dogras were completely worsted, the ex-ruler of Skardu identified himself with the Tibetans; he participated in many actions against the Dogras and helped the Tibetans in expelling the assailants from Western Tibet. However, after signing the Tibeto-Dogra Peace Treaty in September, 1842, he was handed over to the Dogras. The latter, seeing in him a potential mischief-monger, brought him to Kishtwar where he was imprisoned. Now all hopes of Ahmad Shah to reign his kingdom were dashed to the ground. After languishing in jail for a couple of years, he died about 1845.⁷⁸

Treatment meted out to other Prisoners-of-war may be mentioned here, if only in parenthesis. In the midnineteenth century, in Lhasa, there were no separate jails or concentration camps for the Prisoners-of-War as we have now-a-days. Perhaps to take them about a thousand miles away from their homes across the stupendous and highest mountains of the world, whence they could not return, was enough punishment. Once in Tibet, there was no discrimination between the Prisoners-of-War and the sons-of-the-soil: soon, some of the Dogras were taken into Tibetan services and most of them married Tibetan wives. After 1846, when Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, he hoped to get these prisoners liberated through the instrumentality of the British Government.⁷⁹ Ultimately, at the intercession of the latter and with the help of Jodh Bikram Singh Thapa, the Nepalese representative at Lhasa, in 1856 fifty-six of these prisoners returned to Jammu *via* Nepal,⁸⁰ but most of them settled down permanently in Tibet and refused to leave that place.⁸¹

A few words about the fate of the Dogras garrison at Taklakot. Colonel Basti Ram had also tried to join Zorawar Singh, but finding the way blocked by the enemy, he had to return to the Taklakot fort. From there, he made a couple of sorties which enabled him to set things right in the fort.⁸² This citadel was well supplied with water and provisions and all this, combined with its natural strength,⁸³ enabled Mehta Basti Ram to hold out for about a month. However, he was quite anxious to know the fate of main Dogra column under

Wazir Zorawar Singh. To procure intelligence about his comrades, he sent two men who told him details about the catastrophe which befell Zorawar Singh. He had already expended his ammunition in a couple of sorties and now there was no hope of getting support from any side. Thus being reduced to a very difficult situation, Basti Ram sent fifteen soldiers with an *urzee* to G.T. Lushington, Commissoner of Kumaon and begged help in the name of Zorawar Singh and his army.⁸⁴ But British attitude *vis-a-vis* Tibeto-Dogra war being neutral,⁸⁵ he could not get succour from them. Now, thinking that discretion was the better form of valour, leaving the camp fires burning and some horses tied,⁸⁶ Colonel Basti Ram along with about 250 followers made a valient attempt to cross the Lipu Lekh Pass (16,750 ft.), and sought refuge in Brstish territory. In this task his previous knowledge of the locale and terrain when he had met Lushington at Kala Pani, a village in the Byans Parganah of Kumaon district, about ten miles from Tibetan frontier, appears to have stood him in good stead. The Lipu Lekh pass and its surrounding hills were then under five to six feet snow. After four painful days of toil and suffering, straggling through snow by day and sleeping on it at night, at long last they reached Gorbea—the first village under British control.

When Mehta Basti Ram and his comrades reached Almorah, they were treated nicely by the British; medical facilities and other necessaries of life were provided to the refugees. Yet, while crossing the snow-capped mountains they suffered much and for a handful of grain, many of them sold their swords, helmets ond armour.⁸⁸ The deadly cold reduced their number and the survivors were much worn-out and emaciated. Some of them suffered from grievous wounds, and were maimed for life.⁸⁹ This reminds one about the story of Napoleon's retreat and the sufferings of his army during the Moscow campaign. However, successful crossing of the Lipu-Lekh Pass at a time when it had the maximum snow, bears witness to the hardihood, perseverance and stamina of Colonel Basti Ram and his followers. After a few days rest at Almorah, the Colonel and those of his comrades, who were in a position to walk were safely conducted to the Punjab by the British authorities; they reached Feroze

Pur on February 16, 1842,⁹⁰ whence they went to their homes in the Jamu Hills. A little while after, in recognition to his services, Raja Gulab Singh appointed Colonel Basti Ram as a Governor of Ladakh, which post he held till 1852.

Coming back to the main theme of Tibeto-Dogra war in West Tibet, it may be noted that the victorious Lhasa army after making a short work of Zorawar Singh and his army moved ahead and sent strong detachments to capture Gartok, Rudok, Tholing, Dapa, Tsaparang, Choorat and other Dogra strongholds. By the end of March 1842, it had expelled the invaders and reconquered all their posts.⁹¹ Zorawar Singh's invasion of Western Tibet, for all practical purposes came to nought and the high hopes of the Dogras to annex the western part of Tibet with their dominions were shattered to smithereens.

Zorawar Singh's was a bold bid to cross the traditional geographical frontier of India, but due to a variety of reasons, he failed to annex Western Tibet. First, he had advanced far too far in an inhospitable, bleak and barren country which was least favourable to military movement.⁹² There were no roads and even the lack of knowledge about the bridle-tracks retarded mobility of the Dogras. At a crucial time, the invaders could not get any succor either from Ladakh or Kishtwar which were situated many hundred miles behind the highest mountains of the world. Secondly, Zorawar Singh's army was a motley assemblage of the Baltis, Ladakhis and others, and had no common force either of interest or of discipline. With the exception of a small number of Dogras, the rest were not soldiers in the real sense of the term and had been forced to accompany the invaders. The Baltis and the Ladakhis, inherently sympathised with the Tibetans and at the first appearance of the latter, deserted the Dogras. Thirdly, as Czar Alexander once remarked in another context, General Winter proved the greatest enemy of the Dogras. Unlike the Tibetans, they were not inured to frost and snow and were altogether ill-fitted to bear the fatigues of snowy and rugged trans-Himalayan regions. In this context Alexander Cunningham who was the first to write a detailed account of these Dogra wars and visited Ladak twice during 1846-48, observed :

The Indian soldiers of Zorawar Singh fought under very great disadvantages. The battle field was upwards of 15,000 feet above the sea and the time mid-winter, when even the day temperature never rises above the freezing point, and the intense cold of night can only be borne by people well covered with sheep skins and surrounded by fires. For several nights the Indian troops had been exposed to all the bitterness of the climate. Many had lost the use of their fingers and toes, and all were more or less frost-bitten...the more reckless soldiers had actually burned the stocks of their muskets to obtain a little temporary warmth. On the last fatal day not one-half of the men could handle arms.⁹³

Finally, Zorawar's commissariat arrangements failed in Western Tibet. The country, rugged and barren as it is, could not afford to support even a small army such as that of the Dogras. When all the passes were closed by frost and heavy snow, the invaders could not get provisions either from Ladakh or from any other side. While facing starvation in the chilly climate of the Land of Snows, it was hardly possible to fight with a large Tibetan army which was well-supplied with provisions. Unlike the Ladakhis or the Baltis with whom the Dogras had hitherto fought, the Tibetans were better-equipped and better-organised.

Zorawar Singh has left a permanent mark in history; his greatest contribution was the conquest and consolidation of Ladakh, Baltistan and the surrounding area which now constitute the northern frontier of India. To him the best tribute may be paid in the following words of K.M. Panikkar :

Besides being an intrepid commander, as the Ladak and Baltistan campaigns had shown him to be, he was also gifted with considerable political ability. His settlement of the newly conquered provinces bears witness to this. To have marched an army not once or twice, but six times over the snow-clad ranges of Ladak and Baltistan, 15,000 feet above sea-level, where the air is so rarefied that people from the plains can hardly live with comfort, is a wonderful achievement. To have

conquered that country after successive campaigns and reduce it to a peaceful province is an exploit for which there is no parallel in Indian history. His greatness will shine through the pages of Indian history as that of a great noble warrior.⁹⁴

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. From Wazir Zorawar Singh to the Ruler of Yaqand, no date, *F.D.S.C.*, 1 March 1841, No. 126.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *F.D.Sec. Progs.*, 25 January 1841, No. 91.
4. Clerk to Government, 2 January 1841 : *F.D.S.C.*, 25 January 1841, No. 90.
5. Mackeson, British Agent at Peshawar, however, was of the opinion that the Dogra troops, though capable of conquering Gilgit and adjacent areas down the Indus, were incapable of conquering Yarkand. Mackeson to Macnaughten (Envoy and Minister at the Court of Shah Shujah, Jallabhad), 14 January 1841 : *F.D.S.C.*, 22 February 1841, No. 56.
6. *F.D.S.C.*, 25 January 1841, No. 90.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. According to A. H. Francke (*Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, II, p. 93), this term in early times meant all Western Tibet including Ladakh etc., but later the term was restricted to the districts of Rutog or Rudok, Guge and Purang.
10. C.A. Sherring, *Western Tibet and The Indian Borderland*, p. 154.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
12. For details, see C.L. Datta, *Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics*, pp. 101-04
13. B.R. Chatterji (tr.) 'Victor Jacquemont's Interview with Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Lahore', *The Modern Review* (November 1931), pp.503-04.
14. *Idem.*
15. *Umdat-ut Tawarikh*, Daftar III, p. 282.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *F.D. Pol. Progs.*, 12 June 1837, No. 41.
18. Lushington (Commissioner of Kumason) to Thomason (Secretary, North-West Province), 25 August 1841 : *F.D.S.C.*, 13 September 1841, No. 20.
19. H. Lansdell, *Chinese Central Asia : A ride to Little Tibet* (London, 1893), II, p. 296.
20. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 351.
21. Thomason to Maddock, 31 July 1841 : *F.D.S.C.*, 16 August 1841, No. 36.

22. Clerk to Maddock, 4 September 1841 : F.D.S.C., 20 September 1842, No. 65; F.D.S.C., 25 October 1841, No. 26.
23. *Private and Confidential Letters from the Governor-General of India to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors of the East India Company.* (Printed solely for the use of the cabinet, no date and place) : G-G, to Secret Committee, 29 September 1839, pp. 10-11.
24. For a detailed account about the produce and flow of Shawl-Wool from West Tibet into Ladakh, Kashmir and British possessions, reference may be made to C.L. Datta, "Significance of Shawl-Wool trade in Western Himalayan Politics", *Bengal : Past and Present*, Vol. LXXXIX, Pt. I (Jan.—June, 1970), pp. 16-28.
25. This territory known in Tibetan as Na-ris-skor-gSum with districts of Rudok, Gartok, and Taklakot was conquered by Sen-ge Nam-gyal (Ca. 1600-1645 A.D.), the powerful Ladakhi ruler. But during the period of his grandson, De-age Nam-gyal (Ca. 1675-1700 A.D.), it was taken back by the Tibetans.
26. The Tibetan local Governor.
27. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 21 June 1841, No. 15.
28. *Ibid.*
29. The strength of this army i.e. 12,000, given by the chronicles of Ladakh (Francke, *Antiquities*, II, 254), appears to be incorrect.
30. *F.D.S.C.*, 1 November 1841, Nos. 36-38.
31. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 254.
32. Cunningham to Clerk, 21 October 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 22 November 1841, No. 23. See also, *Foreign Misc.*, No. 334, p. 648.
33. *F.D.S.C.*, 22 November 1841, No. 23. See also, Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 133.
34. See the Sketch map facing page 63.
35. Francke (*Western Tibet*, pp. 161-62), wrongly says that Zorawar started this expedition at the approach of winter: see C.L. Datta, "Zorawar Singh's Invasion of Western Tibet", *JIH.*, XLIV, Pt. II (August 1966), p. 531.
36. Cunningham to Clerk, 8 November 1841 : *F.D.S.C.*, 20 December 1841, No. 40; J.H. Batten (Senior Assistant Commissioner, Kumaon) to G.T. Lushington (Commissioner of Kumaon), 18 August 1841 : *F.D.S.C.*, 13 September 1841, No. 17.
37. Cunningham, *Ladak*, pp. 351-52 ; Francke, *Western Tibet*, pp. 162-63.
38. Lushington (Commissioner of Kumaon) to Thomason (Secretary to Govt. N-W Province, Agra), 9 August 1841 : *F.D.S.C.* 30 August 1841, No. 27; *F.D.S.C.*, 20 December 1841, No. 40.
39. Lushington to Thomason, 6 September 1841 : *F.D.S.C.* 27 September 1841, No. 46; see also, *JIH.*, XLIV, Pt. II, (August 1966), p. 532.
40. Missar at that time was a regular dak post on the Gartok-Lhasa route. It is about one day's march from the famous Lakes Manasarowar and Rakastal. (*F.D.S.C.*, 13 September 1841, No. 18).

41. Batten to Lushington, 2: August 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 13 September 1841, No. 18; see also, *Foreign Misc.*, No. 334, p. 286.
42. Jukpas or Chukpas was a tribe of robbers, which infested Western Tibet at that time. Their mobile bands usually plundered the caravan traders and soon disappeared on horses which kept ready for the purpose. As this tribe was partially organised and well-armed, it was taken into service by the local Tibetan authorities and pressed against the Dogras. *F.D.S.C.*, 13 September 1841, No. 18; see also *JASB*, XIII Pt. I (1844), pp. 182-83.
43. M.W. Fisher, L.E. Rose and R.A. Huttenback, *Himalayan Battleground: Sino-Indian Rivalry in Ladakh* (New York: London, 1963), Appen. pp. 157-58.
44. From Political Agent, Subathu to Agent (Lt. G. N.W.P.) Delhi, 22 May 1840, *F.D.S.C.*, 25 May 1840, No. 713 (Ambala Agency Record, Bundle No. 243: Pb. S.A. Patiala).
45. C.G. Rawling, *The Great Plateau: Being an account of exploration in Central Tibet, 1903, and of the Gartok Expedition, 1904-1905* (London, 1905), pp. 262-63.
46. Batten to Lushington, 21 August 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 13 September 1841, No. 18; see also *Foreign Misc.*, No. 334, pp. 336.
47. Cunningham to Clerk, 8 November 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 20 December 1841, No. 40.
48. Lushington to Secretary (N.W. Province), 10 November 1841, *F.D.S.C.*, 6 December 1841, No. 57.
49. See deposition of two Zorawar Singh's soldiers, namely, Gulzar Khan and Aukhoo Khan, who deserted him after his conquest of West Tibet and took shelter in Kumaon under British protection. The deposition was recorded by Mr. Lushington, then Commissioner of Kumaon on October 27, 1841, *F.D.S.C.*, 6 December 1841, No. 57.
50. *F.D.S. Progs.*, 11 October 1841, No. 50.
51. Lushington to Thomason, 20 September 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 11 October 1841, No. 46.
52. The 'Hunias' or 'Hoonias' were the residents of 'Hundes' the portion of Tibet opposite the Almora and Garhwal districts of the then North-West Province. Cf. C.A. Sherring, "Notes on the Bhotias of Almora and British Garhwal" *Memoir of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. I, N. 8 (Calcutta, 1906), p. 118.
53. Lushington to Thomason, 11 November, 1841 enclosing the translation of a report received from Chinta Muni Joshi, Patwari of Byans Bhot: *F.D.S.C.*, 29 November 1841, No. 28.
54. See *Foreign Misc.*, Volume No. 335, p. 72.
55. A small village in the Byans district of Kumaon; it is situated about ten miles from the Tibetan frontier.
56. Lushington to Edwards (Offg. Secretary, N.W. Province), 9 October 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 1 November 1841, No. 36.

57. 'Shen-pa' or 'sen-pa' literally meaning 'the Singh People' was a term used by the Ladakhis, Tibetans and Chinese to refer to both Sikhs and Dogras (Fisher et al., *Himalayan Battleground*, Appen. p. 155).
58. *Ibid*, pp. 158-60.
59. Cunningham to Clerk, 5 January 1842: *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 21 March 1842, No. 84; *F.D.S.C.*, 6 July 1842; No. 42: *F.D.S.C.*, 7 February 1842, No. 75. See also, C.A. Sherring, *Western Tibet and the British Borderland* (London, 1906), p. 196.
60. For details about this song which was still sung by the Ladakhis in the opening years of the 20th century, about 60 years after Zorawar's demise, see Francke, *West Tibet*, p. 169.
61. Lushington to Edwards, 9 October 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 1 November 1841, No. 36.
62. Cunningham to Clerk, 3 May 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 6 July 1842, No. 42.
63. *F.D.S.C.*, 1 November 1841, No. 36.
64. Lushington to Hamilton, 13 January 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 7 February 1842, No. 106; *F.D.S.C.*, 27 December 1841, Nos. 16-17.
65. Cunningham to Clerk, 12 February 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 30 March 1842, No. 102.
66. Same to same, 27 December 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 7 February 1842, No. 75.
67. Clerk to Maddock, 11 January 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 24 January 1842, No. 61.
68. It was the first Anglo-Afghan War; Raja Gulab Singh was commanding the Sikh contingent which had been sent there to keep the Khaibar pass open for the English army.
69. Cunningham to Clerk, 20 December 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 7 February 1842, No. 75; *F.D.S.C.*, 27 December 1841, No. 17; H.T. Prinsep, *Tibet, Tartary and Mongolia* (London, 1852), p. 23.
70. Cunningham to Clerk, 18 November, 1841: *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 20 December 1841, No. 40. See also, Cunningham to Clerk, 5 January 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 21 March 1842, No. 84.
71. Cunningham, to Clerk, 6 January 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 21 March 1842, No. 84.
72. The Tibetans called the Dogras with the sobriquet of 'Black devils'. Cf. *The Bengal Herald* (Calcutta), 8 January 1842.
73. Lushington to Hamilton, 13 January 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 7 February 1842, No. 106; Cunningham to Clerk, 12 February 1842; *F.D.S.C.*, 30 March 1842, No 102; Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 134; *The Friend of India* (English Newspaper), Calcutta, 16 December 1841; C.G. Rawling, *The Great Plateau* (London, 1905), pp. 252-53.
74. H.H. Dowel (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of India* (Delhi, 1955), V, p. 546.
75. It may be noticed that at about this time and under similar conditions, the British force at Kabul was overpowered by the Afghans. This first Afghan war cost the British 5,000 men 60,000 camels and twelve million sterling. Sir Alexander Burnes, British Political Agent and Sir William Macnaughten, British Envoy to the Court of the ruler of Afghanistan were also murdered at Kabul.

76. Tsepon, W.D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (London, 1967), p. 178; J.D. Cunningham to Clerk, 1 May 1842; *F.D.S.C.*, 22 June 1842, No. 24; A Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 354.
77. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 354.
78. Francke, *Antiquities*, II, p. 138; *Punjab Government Records*, Vol. VI: Lahore Political Diaries, 1847-49 (Lahore, 1915), p. 38; E.V. Schonberg, *Travels in India at Kashmir* (London, 1853), II, pp. 122-23.
79. Diary of Lt. R.G. Taylor, Asstt. Resident Lahore, Cf. *Punjab Government Records*, Vol. VI, p. 52 and Diary of Pt. Kunhya Lal, pp. 254-55.
80. Governor-General to Secret Committee, 22 January 1857, No. 6.
81. For details about the liberation of these Prisoners, see Appendix after the end of present chapter.
82. Batten to Hamilton, 9 December 1841: *F.D.S.C.*, 20, December 1841, No. 35; *F.D.S.C.*, 27 December 1841, No. 17; *F.D.S.C.*, 3 January 1842, No. 130.
83. Taklakot or Takla Khar meaning "Tiger's fortress" was situated at an elevated place and was like a huge mound; the dwellings were excavated in the centre and the sides were loopholed for defensive purposes. C.E.D. Black, *A Memoir on the Indian Surveys 1875-1890* (London, 1891), p. 50.
84. Cf. Intelligence about the Sikhs and Chinese Tartars dated 31 December, 1841, *F.D. Misc.*, Vol. No. 335, p. 128.
85. For a detailed account about the British Policy and the Nepalese reactions *vis-a-vis* the Tibeto-Dogra war, reference may be made to C.L. Datta, *Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics* (New Delhi, 1973), pp. 152-83.
86. C.A. Sherring, *Western Tibet and British Broderland* (London, 1906), p. 197.
87. For details, see Appendix B.
88. Some of these implements of war which had been collected by the Rajbar of Askot, were seen by Charles A. Sherring, when he visited this part of Western Tibet in the summer of 1905. The *Rajbar of Askot*, who is said to have given generous assistance to the fugitives, was given the following commendatory certificate by the British Commissioner of Kumaon on October 18, 1842: "I give you this certificate as an acknowledgement of thanks for the good work you did in liberally assisting the Singhs who entered our territory from Tibet." For details, see Sherring. *op. cit.*, p. 197.
89. Lushington to Hamilton, 13 January 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 7 February 1842, No. 106; see also, *Foreign Misc.* No. 335, pp. 214, 216, 276-77.
90. Punjab Intelligence from Feb. 10, 1842 to Feb. 21, 1842: *F.D.S.C.*, 21 March 1842, No. 89.
91. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 30 March 1842, No. 89.
92. It may perhaps be relevant to recall here that in this region and under similar circumstances, Tibetan expedition of Mirza Haider, Dughlat, the great warrior and minister of the Khan of the Kashgar had also failed in 1533 A.D.
93. Cunningham, *Ladak*, p. 353.
94. Panikkar, *Founding of Kashmir State*, p. 82.

THE DOGRA PRISONERS IN TIBET : THEIR LIBERATION AFTER FIFTEEN YEARS

As mentioned earlier, when the Dogra army was defeated and General Zorawar Singh was killed at Do-Yo, near the Kailash Parbat on 12 December 1841, Rai Singh, Zorawar's second-in-command along with about six hundred of his followers were made prisoners and taken to the interior of Tibet.¹ It would, however, be interesting to note how Maharaja Gulab Singh took up the case of liberating his captured soldiers who were still alive in Tibet and how ultimately, after fifteen years, about sixty of them were got released through the instrumentality of the British Indian Government and the Kathmandu Durbar.

Raja Gulab Singh could never forget the capture of his soldiers but unlike the present times, then, international conventions about the restoration and better treatment of the Prisoners-of-War were not there and therefore he could not prevail upon the Tibetans, either through any world body, like the United Nations or the Red Cross or on his own account, to free the captives. Nevertheless, after 1846, when independent of the Lahore Durbar, he became the Maharaja of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, he hoped to get these prisoners liberated with the help of the British Indian Government.

In November 1846, Lt. R.G. Taylor, British Assistant Resident at Lahore, visited Kashmir to whom the Maharaja expressed a wish to get back his captured soldiers.² In 1850, when John (Sir) Lawrence, then a Member of the Board of Administration in the Punjab, visited Jammu, the Maharaja expressed great anxiety, on the subject.³ Again in December 1854, when John Lawrence, now the Chief Commissioner of the Punjab paid a visit to Jammu, Gulab Singh talked to him about

the Tibeto-Gurkha war then going on and wished to avail himself of the opportunity to procure the release of the survivors of General Zorawar Singh's disastrous expedition.⁴ In May 1855, he sent his Prime Minister, Diwan Jawala Sahai to the Chief Commissioner requesting him to be favoured with a letter addressed to General Jung Bahadur, the Prime Minister of Nepal, for liberating the captives. The Diwan, also sought permission from the British Indian Government to allow the Maharaja to send in this context a communication direct to Rana Jung Bahadur through one of his confidential agents.

The Maharaja's agent, further told John Lawrence that while the Gurkhas were fighting with the Tibetans, the Dogra ruler, in order to protect his territory in Ladakh, intended to send a body of troops towards Ladakh's frontier with Tibet.⁵

The Chief Commissioner, however, saw through that the Maharaja wanted to fish out of the troubled waters of Tibeto-Gurkha conflict. John Lawrence feared that under the excuse of liberating his erstwhile soldiers, Gulab Singh, in collaboration with the Kathmandu Durbar, may not invade West Tibet on a large scale. He, therefore, suggested to the Supreme Government that Maharaja Gulab Singh should not be allowed to send a confidential agent or secret mission to the Kathmandu Durbar independent of the British Government and that the British Resident in Nepal may be instructed to endeavour to procure the release, of course, with the help of the Nepal Government of such captives who may be still alive in Tibet.⁶ At the same time he also wrote to the Governor-General that the Maharaja should not be authorised to send his troops on the Ladakh-Tibet border because such a measure would affect adversely the recently-developed West Tibet's trade with the Simla Hill States through the Hindostan-Tibet Road.⁷

The Supreme Government concurred with the Chief Commissioner: the Governor-General instructed Major George Ramsay, British Resident in Nepal to take up this matter with Prime Minister Jung Bahadur and to acquaint him with Maharaja Gulab Singh's anxiety to do something in effecting the release of his men from Tibetan captivity.⁸ On coming to know the details about this affair, Jung Bahadur many a time expressed indignation respecting the

treatment of the Dogra captives and their long detention. Soon, he demanded from the Tibetan Government to release them immediately.⁹ The Nepalese Prime Minister felt much honoured to be associated with this work and even offered to exchange some 'Bhotia' (Tibetan) soldiers which he had captured in a recent expedition into Tibet, with the Dogra captives.¹⁰

However, before discussing the subsequent efforts made by the Gurkhas in this matter, it may be interesting to note, that although the British were opposed to sending of a direct mission by the Maharaja to the Kathmandu Durbar, Gulab Singh did try to contact Prime Minister, Jung Bahadur through a special emissary. Of course this was done secretly and without any intimation to the British Indian Government. Major Ramsay, British Resident in Nepal, informed the Supreme Government in February 1856 that a person, namely, Jawahir Singh Gill, the brother-in-law of the late Maharaja Kharak Singh, who was now in the service of Maharaja Gulab Singh, met Jung Bahadur in the Tarai area where the latter had gone to catch wild elephants and offered to fight in the Gurkha army in the Tibeto-Nepal war then going on.¹¹ Although his offer was not accepted, nonetheless, at the time of his departure, Jawahir Singh was presented with a horse, a Khukhri and some arms.¹² The British Resident pointed out that these were the "marks of distinction that were not usually bestowed on strangers or on persons of inferior rank". Jawahir Singh had met Jung Bahadur in a clandestine manner and the latter kept this affair secret. When pressed by Major Ramsay to tell the details about Jawahir Singh's meeting and mission, the Nepalese Prime Minister, side-tracking the issue replied that Maharaja Gulab Singh's emissary had been given 'Rookhsat' (leave) to return to Jammu.¹³

The Tibeto-Nepalese war which had started in March 1854, continued for about two years.¹⁴ In this war the Gurkhas were generally victorious and one of the divisions of their army even occupied Taklakot¹⁵ - the strategically important place which had been conquered by General Zorawar Singh about thirteen years back and was placed under the control of Colonel Mehta Basti Ram. Having suffered reverses, the Tibetans sued for peace which was signed on the

24th March, 1856. Article four of this Peace Treaty read :

“The Government of Tibet agrees to give to the Gurkha Government all the Sikh prisoners now in captivity within the territories and all the Gurkha *sipahees* and officers who were captured in the war, also all the guns that were taken. . . . On the final completion of this treaty the Gurkhas will withdraw all their troops.”¹⁶

Soon, in compliance with the provisions of this treaty, ‘Sethia Kajee’, the Tibetan Commander-in-Chief, gave orders for the collection and transmission to Nepal of the whole of the surviving Sikh-Dogra prisoners then living in Tibet.¹⁷ After their defeat and capture in 1842, most of these prisoners had been settled in the warmer regions of southern Tibet, where soon after they married Tibetan girls and are said to have introduced there the cultivation of apricots, apples, grapes and peaches. The Tibetan authorities, made a thorough search and soon started sending these men to Jodh Bikram Singh Thapa, the Nepalese representative at Lhasa. As a result of these measures, from early in 1856, small parties of the captives started reaching Kathmandu and by the end of November 1856, one hundred and six erstwhile soldiers of Zorawar Singh’s army reached Nepal.¹⁸ Out of this number, fifty-six persons consented to return to their homes in the Jammu Hills, five died at Kathmandu and forty-five refused to go to their previous homes and rather showed keenness to get back to Tibet and join their Tibetan wives and families there.¹⁹ In this context, the British Resident was informed that still there were thirty-four more captives alive in Tibet, ‘three of whom were Sardars in Tibetan service’. One of the latter, had fought against the Gurkhas along with the Tibetans in the resent battle of Kutia where the Gurkhas met with a disaster.²⁰ The British Resident was further informed by the liberated persons that most of them were forcibly sent from Tibet and those still residing there were trying to evade returning to Nepal or the Jammu Hills and would never do so unless they are seized and sent down by the Tibetan authorities.²¹

The arrival of these captives in Nepal posed a problem about



Obverse

Reverse

The medals of which the above is a facsimile were struck at Kathmandu by the King of Nepal in 1856, commemorating the release of the Dogra captives by the Tibetans. On the obverse is head of the Nepalese King (Sri Maharaja Dhiraj Virendra Bikram), indicating that the medals were struck by his order. On the reverse, *inter alia*, is written that the arrangement for the release of the captives was made by Rana Jang Bahadur, the then Prime Minister of Nepal.

their subsistence and disposal. Who should provide them the necessaries of life during their stay in Nepal? And where should they be sent and at whose expense? Immediately after their entry in Nepal, the Gurkha Government had advanced them a few hundred rupees and was even willing to pay other expenses attendant upon their release and retention in that country.²² However, when Jung Bahadur's request to write personally to Maharaja Gulab Singh and to send such a letter direct to the Jammu and Kashmir ruler by a small deputation under a Nepalese Subedar was turned down by the British Indian Government,²³ the Kathmandu Durbar refused to pay any expenses incurred in connection with the release or stay of the captives in Nepal.²⁴ The British Government, thereupon not only reimbursed the few hundred rupees to the Nepal Government which had been disbursed for the erstwhile Dogra soldiers but further advanced to each man, a sum of Rupees twelve for their subsistence on a long journey from Nepal to the Jammu Hills to those who wanted to go to that side and Rupees six each to those, who went back to Tibet.²⁵ All this involved an expenditure of Rs. 1717/14/11 (Rupees One thousand seven hundred and seventeen, Annas fourteen and Pies eleven) which, later on Maharaja Gulab Singh paid to the British Government.²⁶

During their stay in Nepal, these captives were not treated well and were not fully free to exercise their own option, whether to return or not to their previous homes in the Jammu Hills. From the correspondence relating to this affair, it appears that Jung Bahadur was keen to send them all back to the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir but most of them were anxious to rejoin their children born out of their wed-lock with Tibetan wives.²⁷ However there was an interesting exception: a Tibetan woman who had married one of the captives, accompanied her husband all the way from Tibet to Kathmandu, along with their son, aged about seven years. She refused to be separated from her husband and all the three returned to the Jammu and Kashmir state.²⁸ After persuasion had failed to induce these men to return to their previous homes, threats were used and some of them were severely beaten by the Gurkha authorities.²⁹ Even Maharani Jind Kaur, the widow of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the mother of

Maharaja Dalip Singh, who then was living in exile in Nepal,³⁰ and her 'Mukhtiar' interfered a good deal with all the prisoners while they were in Kathmandu and on many occasions attempted to intimidate and force them to go to their original homes. Nay, both the Maharani and her 'Mukhtiar' went so far indeed to tell these unfortunate men that 'they would be murdered by order of Jung Bahadur', if they attempted to return to Tibet.³¹ On coming to know about this ill-treatment to the captives, Major Ramsay remonstrated with Jung Bahadur to deal with them as human beings and issue passports to those who wanted to return to Tibet where they had left their wives and children. The British Resident repeatedly pointed out to the Nepal Government the injustice of using any compulsion in their case and not to allow them to pursue their own inclinations. He further observed to the Nepalese Prime Minister that :

if obstacles were thrown in the way of these men and they were prevented from rejoining their families, the cruelty of the act would entirely detract from the credit that would otherwise be attached to the successful negotiations for their release.³²

As a result of Major Ramsay's persuasions, as has been mentioned before, forty-five of the captives were allowed to go back to Tibet.

The arrival of these captives of Zorawar Singh's army in Nepal was indeed an important and happy occasion for the Kathmandu Durbar. To commemorate their release after fifteen years of exile in Tibet, it struck special medal,³³ on the obverse of which there was the head of the Maharaja of Nepal, 'Soorendra Bikram Sah' with a Persian inscription meaning that it was by the order of His Highness that the arrangement took place. On the reverse side of the medal, the name of Jung Bahadur was also written.³⁴ This medal was presented to each of the fifty-six men who returned to the Jammu and Kashmir State.³⁵

Thus, it was in this manner that after fifteen years, Maharaja Gulab Singh successfully got liberated some of his erstwhile soldiers who, under the command of General Zorawar Singh had conquered Ladakh and Baltistan but made unsuccessful yet bold bid to subjugate West Tibet, and had brought laurels to the Dogra ruler.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *supra*, pp. 73-74.
2. Cf. *Punjab Government Records*, Diary of Lt. R.G. Tylor, Asstt. Resident Lahore, p. 52. See also Diary of Pandit Kunhya Lal, Vol. VI (Lahore, 1915), pp. 254-55.
3. From R. Temple (Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Punjab) to C. Beadon (Secretary to the Govt. of India). 31 May 1855: *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 31 August 1855, No. 39.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 31 August 1855, No. 39.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Cf. G.G. to Resident, 10 July 1855: *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 31 August 1855, No. 42.
9. Resident to G.G., 21 August 1855: *F.D. S.C.*, 30 November 1855, No. 77.
10. Jung Bahadur to Maj. Ramsay, 16 August 1855: *F.D.S.C.* 30 Nov. 1855, No. 78.
11. Resident to Governor-General, 16 February 1856: *F.D. Pol. Progs.*, 14 March 1856, No. 218.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*
14. Cf. B.D. Sanwal, *Nepal and East India Company* (Bombay, 1965), p. 285.
15. See B.J. Hasrat, *History of Nepal* (Hoshiarpur, 1970), p. 330.
16. For details see, Resident to Government, 15 July 1856, enclosing a copy of the Treaty of Peace, consisting of ten Articles concluded between Nepal and Tibet: *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 29 August 1856, Nos. 45-46.
17. Resident to Govt., 31 January 1856: *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 31 October 1856, No. 31.
18. G.G. to Secret Committee, 8 September 1856, No. 35; see also G.G. to Secret Committee, 22 January 1857, No. 6.
19. *Ibid.*
20. The Gurkha column here suffered a severe reverse and was driven out with 117 killed and 75 wounded; the Tibetans also captured all the Gorkhali guns, ammunition and stores and two months' provisions. Cf. B.J. Hasrat, *op. cit.*, p. 330.
21. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 30 January 1857, No. 16.
22. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 28 November 1856, No. 16.
23. On this policy matter, the British Indian Government insisted that such a letter should be written by the Maharaja of Nepal and not by the Prime Minister—General Jung Bahadur—and it should be communicated through the medium of British Government. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 31 October 1856, Nos. 31-32.

24. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 28 November 1856, No. 16.
15. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 31 October 1856, No. 31-32. See also *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 30 January 1857, No. 16.
26. Chief Commissioner, Punjab to G.G., 1 July 1857: *F.D.P.C.*, 2 August 1857, No. 185.
27. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 30 January 1857, No. 16.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. For details about the Maharani's escape from Chunar Fort, where she had been incarcerated, into Nepal and other activities, see M.L. Ahluwalia and Kirpal Singh: *The Punjab's Pioneer Freedom Fighters* (Calcutta, 1963), pp. 79-105.
31. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 30 January 1857, No. 16.
32. *Ibid.*
33. For a photographic representation, see p. 88.
34. For a photographic reproduction of obverse and reverse of this medal, see p. 88.
35. *F.D. Sec. Progs.*, 30 January 1857, No. 16.

EPILOGUE

General Zorawar Singh's conquest of Ladakh and Baltistan between the years 1834-1840 is a great landmark in Indian history. By annexing these kingdoms with the Lahore Durbar, he extended the boundaries of the Sikh State to its natural frontiers in the north. It was, perhaps, the culmination point in the process of integrating and annexing the diverse principalities and kingdoms in the Western Himalayas, started by Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1846, when Gulab Singh became independent of the Lahore Durbar and was given the title of Maharaja, these territories formed a part of his dominions, and a century later i.e. in 1947, when the Indians got freedom, both Ladakh and Baltistan became part of the Republic of India. Thus, credit for putting both Ladakh and Baltistan on the map of India goes to Wazir Zorawar Singh.

The brave Dogra general's venture to plant flag of the Sikh State into the heart of West Tibet was indeed quite laudable and he succeeded in it. But he failed to consolidate his position. While wintering in the western part of Tibet, it appears that Zorawar Singh did not realise the difficulties and immensity of the job he wanted to achieve; unlike Ladakh and Baltistan, West Tibet was not conterminous with Kishtwar and other Jammu territories which had proved very useful base for military operations. With their scanty sources and supply lines many hundred miles away behind the highest mountains in the world, the Dogras, perhaps, could do no better. Here, it would be of some interest to recall that in 1533-34 A.D., under similar circumstances, the powerful and enthusiastic army of Mirza Haider Dughlat, the Commander of Sultan Abu Sayed of Kashgar, which had set

upon a holy war against the 'infidels of Tibet', had failed and ultimately forced to retire into Ladakh.¹ Further, in the Tibetan plateau which was covered with snow and blinding blizzards, the invaders had to face General Winter. Again, unlike Ladakh and Baltistan, here the Dogras were opposed by a strong and well-equipped Tibetan army.

General Zorawar Singh was a great military strategist and a valient fighter. Even his enemies—the Tibetans, recognised his valour. Charles A. Sherring, who visited West Tibet in 1905 (sixty-four years after the death and defeat of Zorawar Singh and his army), when for the first time after the Younghusband Expedition to Lhasa (1903-04), the doors of this region were sung open to the British visitors, records an interesting tradition. He says that when the Dogra general was killed, his flesh was cut into small portions and every family in the neighbouring area took a piece and suspended it from the roof in the house, "the idea being that the mere presence of the flesh of so great a man must of necessity confer brave heart on the possessor. There is a very big chorten² erected at Do-Yo over his bones and the place is regarded with veneration."³ Swami Parnavananda, that indefatigable, eminent Himalayan explorer who visited West Tibet including the famous Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarowar more than thirty times⁴ in the first half of the present century, also records a similar tradition. The Swami writes :⁵

The extraordinary courage and presence of mind exhibited by him [Zorawar Singh], elicited the profound admiration of even the Tibetans, who, in order to perpetuate the memory of so great a general's association with Tibet, constructed a memorial in the village Toyo in the shape of a Chhorten or *Samadhi* (a closed up structure, corresponding to the Indian stupa), wherein are kept the remains of the dead general. This is a unique case in the history of the world where a memorial was erected by the conqueror for the gallant enemy. The memorial is painted with red ochre (*geruva*) annually by the Tibetans and homages paid with incense etc.

We may conclude our account by observing that although Zorawar Singh and his army perished near the Lake Manasarowar, the war which they waged in West Tibet, was not without any political result. The Tibetans, after making a short work of the main invading army, fell upon the Dogra piquets and soon expelled the invaders from Western Tibet. Yet, when the Tibetans came to the rescue of the Ladakhis and Baltis, and attempted to dislodge the Dogras from Ladakh, they failed. A relief force sent under the command of Dewan Hari Chand and Wazir Ratanu not only defeated the Tibetans in many actions and pushed them out of Ladakh, but also foiled attempts of the Ladakhi Raja and Leh officialdom to regain independence. The Tibeto-Dogra war of 1841-42, however, soon came to an end and in September 1842, a peace treaty was signed between the Tibetans and the Chinese on one side, and the Dogras and the Sikhs on the other.⁶ The border between Tibet and Ladakh as settled in the peace which closed this war is now the border which separates the Indian Republic and the People's Republic of China. One may now hope that those very regions which General Zorawar Singh and his army conquered after leading many arduous and hazardous expeditions, and those very frontiers which had been sanctified by the blood of Dogra martyrs, would be protected by our brave *jawans*.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For a detailed information about Mirza Haider's this invasion and his retirement into Ladakh, see Mirza Mahammad Haider Dughlat, *Tarikhi-i-Rashidi* (A History of the Mughuls of Central Asia), trans., E.D. Rose, ed., N. Elias, pp. 417-21, 454-55 ff.
2. It is given in Sherring's *West Tibet*, p. 198.
3. Sherring, *Western Tibet and British Borderland*, pp. 197-98, 259.
4. *The Sunday Tribune* (Chandigarh), September 12, 1976.
5. Swami Parnavananda, *Exploration in Tibet* (Calcutta, 1950), pp. 135-36.
6. A detailed discussion about what happened in Ladakh immediately after the death of Zorawar Singh i.e. sending of a relief force, signing of the Peace Treaty etc., will be found in the present writer's *Ladakh and Western Himalayan Politics*, pp. 144-51.

**LETTERS FROM THE RULER OF LADAKH TO H.T. TAPP,
POLITICAL AGENT, SUBATHU (THE SIMLA HILL STATES)***

Letter No. I

From

H.T. Tapp,
Political Agent,
The Simla Hill States,
Subathu.
28 December 1836.

To

T.T. Metcalfe,
Agent to Lieutenant Governor
North-West Province,
Delhi.

I am sending herewith translation of three letters received from the ruler of Ladakh.

Translation of a letter from Chang-Raftan (Tsi-pal) Namgual (Nam-gyal), Rajah of Ladakh.

The British Government is the cherisher of the whole world, and as the moon throws its radiance over the world at night, so does, the British Government.

Last year I sent a vakeel to Ludhiana with a letter for Claude M. Wade now I send one with a vakeel to you. It is my anxious desire that you should send four or five British officers here. The Sikhs have plundered all my property and my country. I am in a very distressed state and entreat you will send me a vakeel. On account of the devastated state of my country I cannot send you my *Nazarana*. I desire to be under the protection of the British Government and wish to be considered their vassal, but I cannot agree to be under that

* *Ambala Division Records, Series No. VII/4(i), Bundle No. 11 (Januaroy 1836 December 1836)*, pp. 229-30 (Punjab State Archives, Patiala).

of Sikhs. I send a bag of musk, a Ghoont, a Soorya Gao, a cow tail and a dog, as a kind of Nazarana.

Dated the 6th of Asouj,
Sambat 1893 (in Oct., 1836).

The seal of the Raja

Letter No. II

(Statement of Aug Chook, Vakeel of the Raja of Ladak
on the 11th November, 1835 at Rampoor.)

In the month of Chyt 1892 corresponding to March/April 1835, Mian Zorawar Singh, Sardar of Maharaja Ranjit Singh commenced hostilities against Ladakh by entering the *Pargunnah* of Karcha. Banka, my Master's wazir quitted his place and with 3,000 men went and encamped in *Pargunnah* Sarhol.

2. Mohammad Ali Khan, wazir of *Pargunnah* Pashkyim being afraid of the Sikh Army fled and Mian Zorawar Singh took possession of the fort of Pashkyim and afterwards took possession of the fort of *Pargunnah* Sod (Sout) having defeated Salaam Khan the *killadar* who killed 30 of Zorawar Singh's men but finding himself unable to oppose so large a force, he fled.

3. On the following day, the Sikhs captured Salaam Khan, after which Zorawar Singh sent his vakeel to my master offering to quit his territory, if he would give him a Nazarana of 30,000 rupees and threatening him with destruction and war if he refused. On this my master sent Chang Toobdan, wazir of *Pargunnah* Bazgo to fight with the army of the Sikhs. Toobdan accordingly united with Banka wazir and marched their forces beyond *Pargunnah* Sangree and the Sikhs having got the worst of it in the battle fled at night and both the Wazirs returned to *Pargunnah* Sarhole.

4. When Mian Zorawar Singh heard that the Ladakhee army had arrived, he vacated the fort of Pashkyim and Sod and retreated three marches. Banka and Chang Toobdan Wazirs remained for some days in *Pargunnah* Sarhole and then went to Mulbhe.

5. Tumpoo Kotwal informed my master that the wazirs had not done their duty and that if he were ordered he would cut off and bring the head of Zorawar Singh into his presence. The Raja ordered

Gampa Chee and Sunum to go and fight with Mian Zorawar Singh and to march for that purpose into Semkar at the same time recalled Banka Wazir. The above mentioned two persons accordingly went to the said Pargunnah and killed about 30 of the Sikh army after which they (Gampa Chee and Sunum) went into Pargunnah Daras. When the two Wazirs a (person) came out in front of each other a (person?) suddenly intervened and concealed the Sikh army from the men of Ladakh. The Sikhs taking advantage of this got into the rear of our troops and seized Girmat, son of Tumpa Kotwal and Doorjun Namgal told the Sikhs that he would rather sacrifice his life than Salam to Mian Zorawar Singh. Therefore Mian Zorawar Singh wounded him in the hand with an arrow and three men seized him by the throat Doorjun Namgyal immediately drew his sword and killed all three and was then killed by the Sikhs.

6. After this both armies came back to Mulbhe and the Sikhs plundered all the property that was in the fort of Mulbhe and Zorawar Singh then sent a *cassid* to the Raja of Ladakh offering to retreat if the Raja would agree to give the Nazarana of 30,000 rupees. The Raja gave Rs. 15,000 as Nazarana but Zorawar Singh notwithstanding the receipt of it made a descent on the village Timas (?) and plundered the forts and temples of that place. When he again sent a messenger to demand the 30,000 Rupees Nazarana promising to retreat as soon as the money should be paid. He also ordered the Raja to come to him at Bazgo where he would receive the Nazarana and then depart to his own country.

7. When the Raja arrived at Bazgo, Mian Zorawar Singh saluted him and said that he was anxious to visit Ladakh, which he had not yet seen. After having visited Ladakh and settled the annual tribute of 30,000 Rupees Nazarana he returned to Pargunnah Serule.

8. Ali Sher Khan, wazir of the Raja collected an army for the purpose of fighting and Tampa told Zorawar Singh that he was to be seized. On hearing this Zorawar Singh again arrived at Ladakh and Sonam Gal Rafstun Chog Sprul, son of the Raja finding that Mian Zorawar Singh wished to seize him fled into the kingdom of Basahr. The Sikhs then placed Lumpa Kotwal on the Guddi and turned the Raja out of the country.

9. The Kotwal then followed the Raja with his army to Hanle when the Raja fled with fear of his life to Piti and the Kotwal plundered him of 25 pieces of Kim Khab, 3 horses and 3 guns.

10. Sir, Mian Zorawar Singh notwithstanding the receipt of 15,000 Rupees Nazarana and the settlement of an annual tribute of Rs. 30,000 has forcibly driven my master from his own country, and as neither my master nor I have ever seen any person equal in goodness to the servant of the Hon'ble Company, I have come before you to request that my master may be taken under the protection of the Hon'ble Company and treated as the other Rajas of protected states—the proper amount of tribute being paid for the same.

SIMLA

15th December, 1835.

True Translation
Sd/- Political Agent

Letter No. III

(Translation of a letter from the Rajah of Ladakh)

Zorawar Singh Sikh writes to me desiring me not to remain at Pittee but to come to Ladak. I have replied, "I will not go to Ladak, as I cannot place confidence in what you say, I have sent my vakeel to Sabathu and to Ludhiana to solicit assistance from the British Government and I remain at Pittee by its favour, I have nothing to do with you."

Now I am in great hopes of receiving 3 or 4 hundred sepoy with 2 or 3 British officers that my life may be spared otherwise those of Ladakh, who are in the service of Ranjit Singh will seize and murder me.

Last year I sent to Captain Wade, Political Agent at Ludhiana an inventory of the things that were plundered from me; by and by two of my people will wait on you with a Nazarana.

My country is small, it is not like Bassahir, but such as it is I will pay proportionate tribute and be a servant to the British Government, like other tributary Hill Chiefs, I will not be wanting in this.

I am in much anxiety on the subject for unless my solicitations are complied with, my life will not be saved.

Zorawar Singh and the Kotwal in the hope of my never being reinstated are plundering and devastating the whole country; and the Kotwal says, "you have left our country for a year and a half and given out that you would receive assistance from the British Government, now where is your British Government and show it to me."

I have related all the circumstances of my case, and now you are the arbiter of my fate. I remain in anxious expectation of receiving an answer to my letter in ten or twelve days, that my mind may be at ease.

Dated Pittee

19th November, 1836.

ESCAPE OF COLONEL BASTI RAM AND HIS COMPANIONS FROM WEST TIBET TO ALMORA*

From

G.T. Lushington,
Commissioner, Kumaon
Camp Bageser,
13th January, 1842.

To

Secretary to the Government
N.W. Province,
Agra.

I have the honour to report the arrival at this place of Bustee Ram, late Commandant on the part of Wazir Zorawar Singh at Tuklakote.

Bustee Ram has brought with him about 150 followers and about 100 more are soon on their way from our Pargunnahs of Beans, Chandaus and Askote. The whole of the persons effected their escape from Tuklakote about 25 days ago, and made their way through the snows of the Beans Pass into this territory.

2. Some of Bustee Ram's followers have suffered severely in their hands and feet from cold and snow, and the whole of them appear to be much worn and emaciated. This was, of course, to be expected, and it may I think be considered an instance of singular good fortune that they should have been able to effect a passage through the snow at this season, as they actually have done, without one of the party dying from cold and fatigue during the transit. I think it likely that several of those who have been severely effected by the snow may not recover from their wounds, but as they have continued to move on and on, no death has occurred.

3. Bustee Ram's account of the circumstances which drove him

**Foreign Department Secret Consultations*, No. 106, 7 February 1842 (National Archives of India, New Delhi).

to seek refuge in our territory correspond in all essential points, with the information, I have on former occasions submitted to Government. But one, and that a most important fact, I have now learned from him, viz. that Zorawar Singh was slain in an assault made by him on the Lhasa troops, at a place about a day's march from Tuklakote, by whom he was at the time surrounded, and that Sardar Raee Singh, to whom the command devolved on the death of Zorawar Singh was induced by the Lhasa commander to deliver up his arms, stores and baggage to them, on condition of food and free passage to Ladakh being allowed to himself and soldiers, the which conditions, Bustee Ram states, were violated by the Lhasa Chiefs, and the Sikh followers left to die of cold and famine on the spot.

4. The news of the above catastrophe reached Bustee Ram through two of his own men whom he had sent out to procure intelligence, and he then called on his followers to adopt one of the courses either to die, sword in hand at Tuklakote, his ammunition having been expended in one or two fights with the Tibetans or secondly to attempt the Beans Pass notwithstanding the heavy falls of snow, and seek protection in our territory.

5. The latter was the course preferred and the successful issue (?) of it speaks I think highly in favour of the hardihood, perseverance and stamina of himself and followers. The snow was at that time about 5 to 6 feet deep. They left Taklakote at midnight, taking the horses with them, but before they had proceeded far, the poor animals sank and were obliged to be abandoned, as likewise the greater part of their arms. Thirty men of the party turned back in despair, but the rest moved on, and after four painful days of toil and suffering, straggling through the snow by day, and sleeping on it at night, they at length reached the first British village of Beans by name Gorbea, from which place they found less snow and by degrees got into a less savage country. (From Gorbea to Tuklakote is usually one day's march before snow had fallen).

6. Bustee Ram stated that the whole of the Sikh army, save that small portion which he has brought along with him has been completely destroyed by the Lhasa troops, by the cold and famine. Some of the details learnt from him are as follows :

Previous to the engagement in which Zorawar Singh fell, the Sikhs had lost from 150 to 200 men in one night by cold and exposure. The Kardum Kote Commander Mian Awtara, a relation of Zorawar Singh had been surprised by the Lhasa people, and destroyed with the whole of his party. When Zorawar Singh attacked the Lhasa force at the head of his remaining troops, about 1000 to 1200 strong, it was found that his men could not use their arms effectively owing to cold and fatigue. They were, therefore, soon repulsed by the Tibetans. Zorawar Singh having been first wounded by a matchlock ball, and shortly after killed by one of the Lhasa spear-men. His head, hands, and ears were cut off and sent to Lhasa for the satisfaction of the authorities there.

7. Thus, for the present at least, has ended the course of Sikh conquest and ambition in Hyoondes and I think it may be acknowledged, that if their first successes were astonishing, their subsequent misfortunes have been not less remarkable.

8. Under instructions lately received from Lieutenant-Governor, I have afforded Bustee Ram and party every necessary attention, and propose after they have rested a few days from their fatigue, to forward on such of them, as can march to the Governor-General's Agent, North West Frontier (Ludhiana), to be disposed of by him as he may think proper. As they appear to be in great distress having parted with all but the clothes on their backs during their march from Goorbea to this place, and have not at this moment wherewith to purchase food I shall be under the necessity of advancing funds to enable them to reach their homes, I shall endeavour to affect this with a little cost to Government as possible and I trust that the outlay so incurred will receive the sanction and approval of the Lieutenant-Governor. I do not intend it to exceed Rs. 500.

Sd/- G.T. Lushington.

**LIBERATION OF DOGRA-SIKH CAPTIVES (ZORAWAR
SINGH'S SOLDIERS) FROM WEST TIBET***

From

Major G. Ramsay
British Resident in
Nepal, Kathmandu,

8 December 1856.

To

L. Edmonstone,
Secretary to
Government of India
Foreign Department.

Sir,

In continuation of my letters to your address No. 21 of the 31st July, 1856 and 33 of the 20 October 1856, on the subject of the liberated Sikh captives. I have now the honour to report for the information of the Right Hon'ble the Governor-General-in-Council the arrangements I have made in communication with this Durbar to enable them to proceed to Cashmeer or to return to their families in Tibet.

2. Altogether, 106 men have reached this place—56 of whom have left Cathmandoo enroute for Cashmeer *via* Benares, Delhi, the Punjab, etc. I have paid to each of them the sum of Rs. 12 as on more carefully estimating the expenses they are likely to incur upon so long a journey, it appeared to me that Rs. 8 would not have sufficed for their subsistence and I gave to a Bootnee woman who came down with her husband, and refused to be separated from him, Rs. 8, which with Rs. 12 her husband received, ought to be enough for them both, and for their child of 6 or 7 years of age, whom they have taken with them.

**Foreign Department Secret Proceedings*, No. 16, 30 January 1857.

3. Five of the party died shortly after their arrival at Cathmandoo and the remaining 45 persons have decided upon return to Tibet. I have therefore begged of the minister Jung Bahadur to give them passports and to send them back to that country where they have all left wives and families.

4. I believe that after persuasion had failed to induce these men to return to Cashmere, threats were used towards them, and that some of them who complained to me of the treatment they received were severely beaten. They however repeatedly declared to me in presence of the Nepalese orderly officer at the Residency that nothing but force shall induce them to desert their families in Tibet and that they are willing to encounter the hardships of crossing the passes that are already begun to be covered with snow, rather than go to Cashmere but they said if first compelled to undertake the long journey through our provinces to that country, they would then even endeavour to reach their wives and children through Western Tibet.

5. Under these circumstances, I repeatedly and stringently pointed out to the Durbar the injustice of using any compulsion in their case and I told General Bum Bahadoor at a public Durbar, a few evenings back that if obstacles were thrown in the way of these men and they are prevented rejoining their families the cruelty of the act would entirely detract from the credit that would otherwise be attached to the successful negotiation for their release.

6. The ex-Maharani [Rani Jindan] of Lahore or rather her *Mookhtiar* interfered a good deal with the whole of the prisoners whilst they were here, and on many occasions attempted to intimidate them and force them to go to Cashmere, and went so far indeed, they say, as to tell them they would be murdered by order of Jung Bahadoor, were they attempt to return to Tibet. Upon my remonstrating with the Minister at his being allowed to meddle with them in any way he replied that Jung Bahadoor had been obliged to communicate with the prisoners through the medium of the Rani Jindan's Sikh Mookhtiar, from his ignorance of their language, and that the man had merely threatened them with punishment in consequence of their having drawn their Kookeries (Nepalese quivers) upon some of them, I disbelieve both these assertions as many of the captives speak

Hindustani fluently, and I have never had the least difficulty in conversing with them without any interpreter and a more quiet and more in-offensive, and respectful body of men, I have never seen.

7. As the Durbar stopped the subsistence allowance of these men from the date of declaring their determination not to proceed to Cashmere, I paid them six Rupees each to enable them to return to Tibet, of which I trust His Lordship will approve as had I not done so, they could not have undertaken the trip and would have been sent as vagrants into our provinces.

8. I have ascertained from these captives the names of 34 more persons whom they known to be now alive in Tibet, three of whom are Sardars in the Tibetan service. They say that those three men will not on any account return to Nepal, nor will the Tibetans give them up; one of them fought against the Goorkhas in the last war, when the latter met with the disaster at Koofi.

9. From what the liberated prisoners generally said I do not think that any of them willingly returned from that country but having been removed from their homes and lost their occupation, they do not now care to return there. I suspect that the whole of the captives now there have, contrived to evade returning here, and will not do so unless they are seized and sent down by the Tibetan authorities.

10. Under these circumstances, I shall not press upon this Durbar again to call for their surrender unless the Governor-General-in-Council is of the opinion that I ought to do so. I have now verbally suggested to the Minister, General Bum-Bahadoor and shall repeat my suggestion in a *yaddasht* (reminder) that whenever any of the captives now in Tibet may be sent to the Nepalese representative, at Lhassa, Jodh Bikram Singh Thappa, he shall enquire of them if they wish to return to Cashmere or not and in the event of their answering in the negative shall take steps to prevent their being sent down to Cathmandu.

11. Minister Jung Bahadoor has had a medal struck to commemorate the release of these captives after their fifteen years of exile and although he has introduced his own name in the Persian inscription which it bears, he has put upon it the head of the Maharaja

Soorendra Bikram Sah and has set forth that it was by His Highness' order that the arrangement took place. This medal has been presented to each of the 56 men now on their return to their own country.

12. I shall forward a copy of this letter for the information of Sir John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of the Panjab with lists in Persian and in English of the 56 liberated captives who are now on their return to Cashmere. Of the 45 men who are about to return to Tibet and of the 34 who are now alive there, and of the five who have died at this place.

13. Accompanying contingent bill of all expenses incurred by me on account of these prisoners which I beg may be submitted for the approval and sanction of His Lordship the Governor-General-in-Council; it amounts in the aggregate to Rs. 1717/14/11 and includes the sums disbursed by the Nepal Durbar in getting them down from the frontier to Cathmandoo.

PAINTED SCROLL*

There is a long painted scroll which throws flood of light on the socio-military aspects of Wazir Zorawar Singh's invading army. During the years 1834-1841 A.D., when the Dogras invaded Ladakh, Baltistan and Western Tibet, there were no press correspondents who accompanied the army and gave details about the movements of troops and various actions fought by the invaders. There is no other source which gives details about the war preparations made by Zorawar Singh's army and description of weapons and accoutrements used by the Dogra soldiers. In the absence of any such document, this scroll is unique and gives details by one, who appears to be eye-witness. As the scroll is now in many pieces and its end is gone, it is not possible to say with certainty about its author. It is, however, conjectured that the artist who drew these portraits was Ganga Ram Nakashi! Perhaps he was in the employment of Zorawar Singh and took part in various Dogra expeditions, which were sent to conquer Ladakh, Baltistan and West Tibet.

This scroll unfolds panoramic vision of the terrain and various aspects of the battles fought by the Dogras. Here a selective list of eleven portraits is being given. The meaning of these scenes cannot be grasped fully unless we visualize them in their own environments. The portraits give details about the weapons, accoutrements, dress and religious observances of the Dogras. Almost every soldier was having a match-lock¹ and a sword. Other weapons of offence were

*Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University, Banaras, Acc. No. 6831.

¹This is also corroborated by two deserters of Zorawar Singh's army. For details, see their deposition given before Mr. Lushington, Commissioner of Kumaon on 27 October 1841. *F.D.S.C.*, 6 December 1841, No. 57.

sabres and spears. The weapon of defence was shield. Infantry and cavalry formed most important parts of Zorawar Singh's army. The usual means of conveyance were horses and ponies.

The Dogra soldiers did not wear uniforms. Although they were to fight in the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions where snow-fall and blinding blizzards are a common phenomenon, from these portraits, at least, it appears that no special pains were taken to fit them with suitable accoutrements such as woollen or leather jackets, trousers, caps, etc. A close study of these portraits reveals that in order to save themselves from the rigours of elements, soldiers got warmth by sitting around the burning logs of wood. They wore thick clothes and perhaps at a time, had many dresses on their person. Most of the soldiers covered their heads, ears and chins with a piece of cloth and it may be remarked here that even now a days, the residents of Kishtwar and the Jammu Hills are seen covering their heads and chins in this fashion. The soldiers also carried blankets and few kilograms of parched grams and flour over their backs.

Wazir Zorawar Singh was a religious person; he appears to be a worshipper of goddess Durga. In plate No. 9, he is seen standing with folded hands in front of a Trishul. A goat has been killed to propitiate the goddess, while another is being kept ready for sacrifice (Puja bali). Here, it may not be out of place to mention that the present writer during his recent visit found the image of goddess Durga on a high boulder near the residence-cum-fort of General Zorawar Singh. The fort, although in shambles, still stands on the bank of river Chenab at a place about six kilometres from Reasi—a town situated about seventy-five kilometres from Jammu city. It is said that during his stay at this place, the general used to worship the goddess and the image stands there since his times.

It appears that there were no elaborate medical arrangements to treat the wounded and sick soldiers. From the portrait (Plate No. 6), one gathers the impression that when Wazir Uttam Padhiar was wounded, he was not given adequate medical treatment. From another source, Alexander Cunningham, we know that after fighting a bloody and well-contested battle with the Ladakhis at Langkartse,

the Dogras lost Wazir Uttam Padhiar along with many soldiers and two leaders, namely, Hazru Wazir of Una and Surtu Rana.

Brief description of various portraits is given below:

Plate No. 1

The Dogra Army crossing a very deep ravine and marching over snow-clad mountains.

Plate No. 2

Soldiers taking rest and getting warmth after a long and tiresome march.

Plate No. 3

Taking meals after a tedious march.

Plate No. 4

Fighting and taking policy decisions (General Zorawar Singh consulting his lieutenants including Wazir Uttam Padhiar); standard-bearers, buglers and drummers are also seen standing nearby.

Plate No. 5

A battle-scene.

Plate No. 6

Wazir Uttam Padhiar wounded seriously; retreat of the Dogras.

Plate No. 7

Pashkym fort being set on fire after Dogra victory.

Plate No. 8

A battle-scene; defeat and retreat by the Ladakhis and producing a Ladakhi leader before Zorawar Singh.

Plate No. 9

Zorawar Singh (standing with folded hands in front of Trishul of Goddess Shakti) and his companions offering goats as sacrifice (*Puja bali*). Also seen in this portrait are vanguard of the Dogra army with drummers, buglers and standard-bearers.

Plate No. 10

Zorawar Singh and his victorious army entering Leh.

Plate No. 11

After the fall of Skardu fort, king Ahmad Shah of Baltistan being produced before Zorawar Singh.

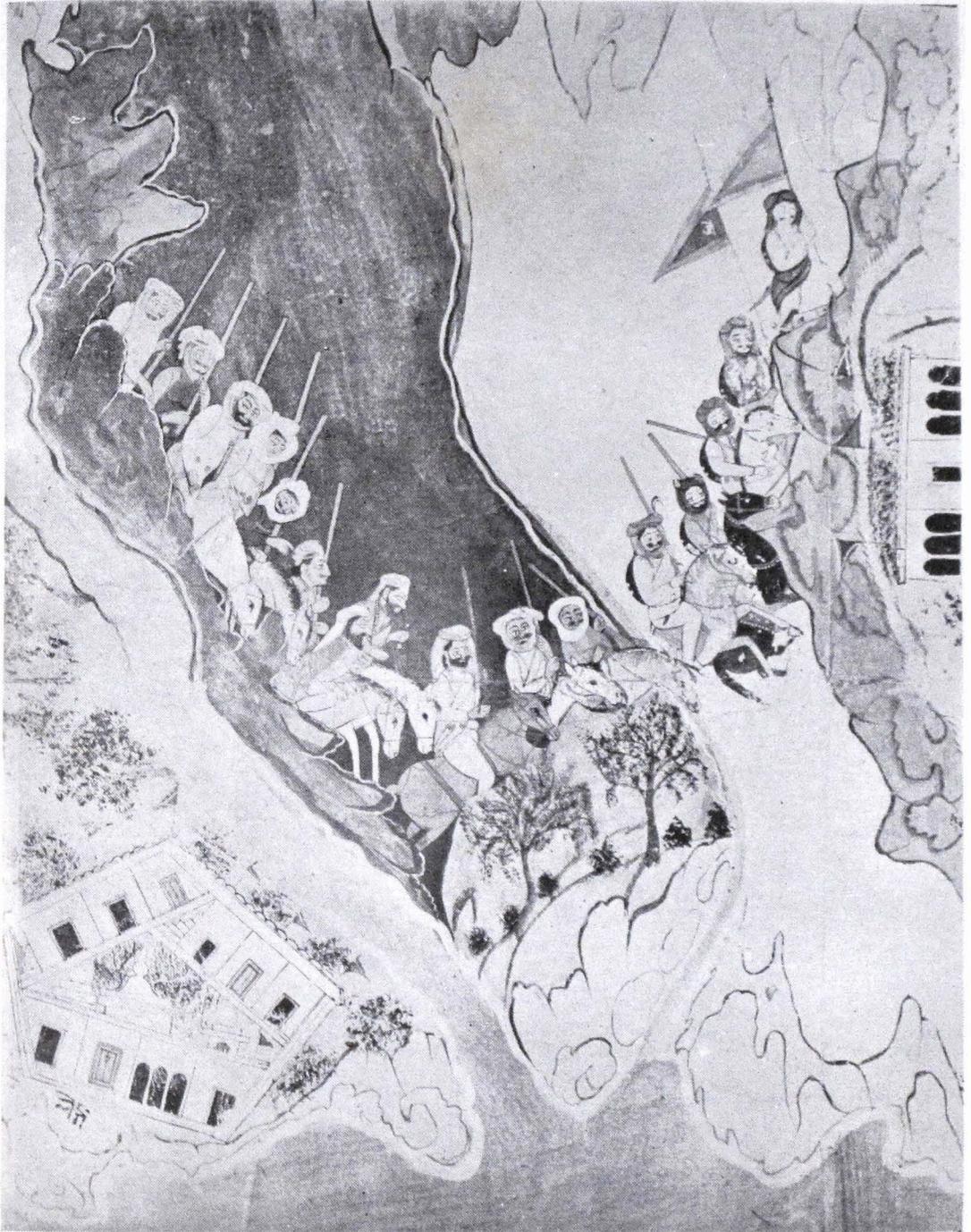


Plate No. 1. The Dogra Army crossing a deep ravine

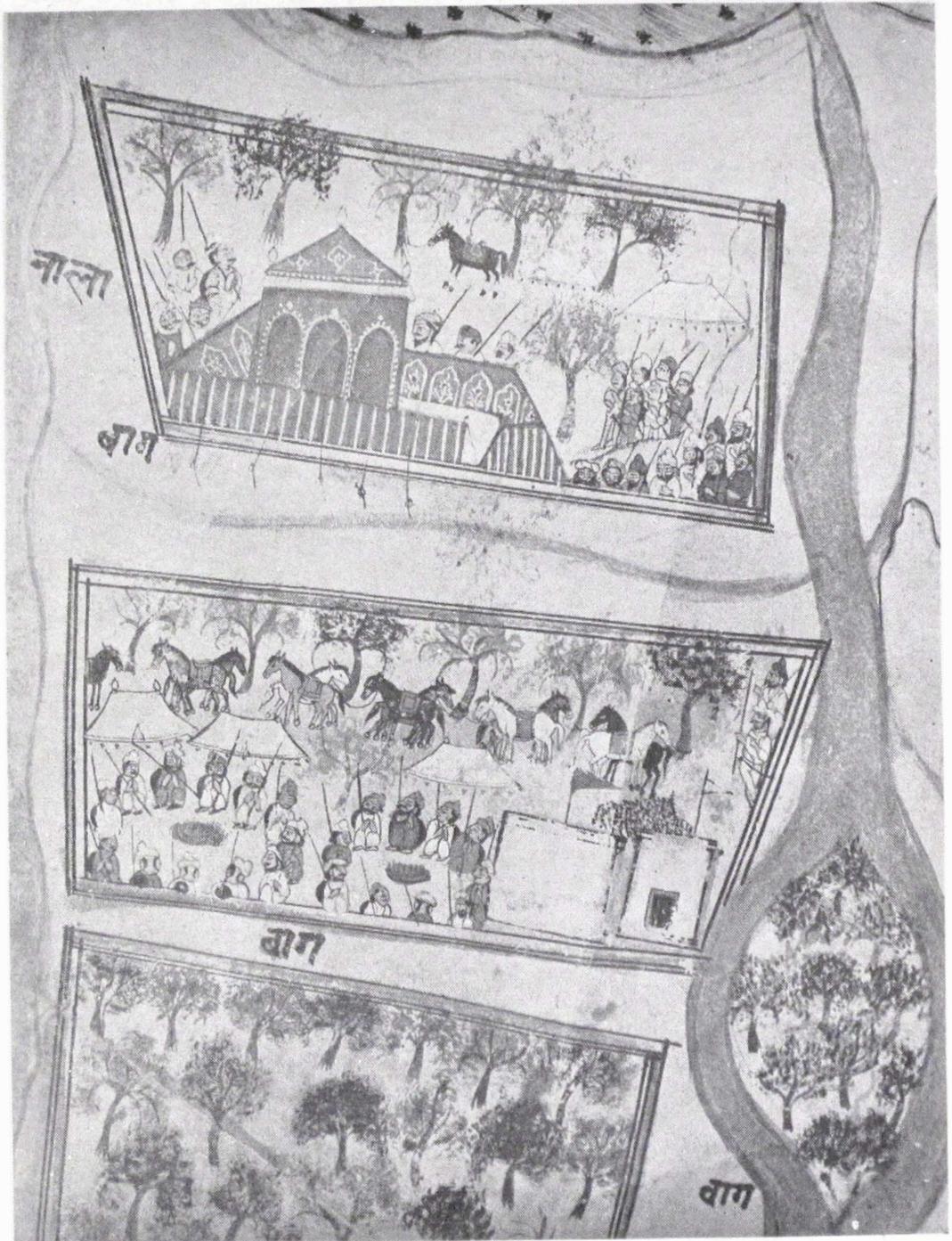


Plate No. 2. The soldiers taking rest



Plate No. 3. Taking meals after a tedious march



Plate No. 4. Fighting and taking policy decisions



Plate No. 5. A battle scene

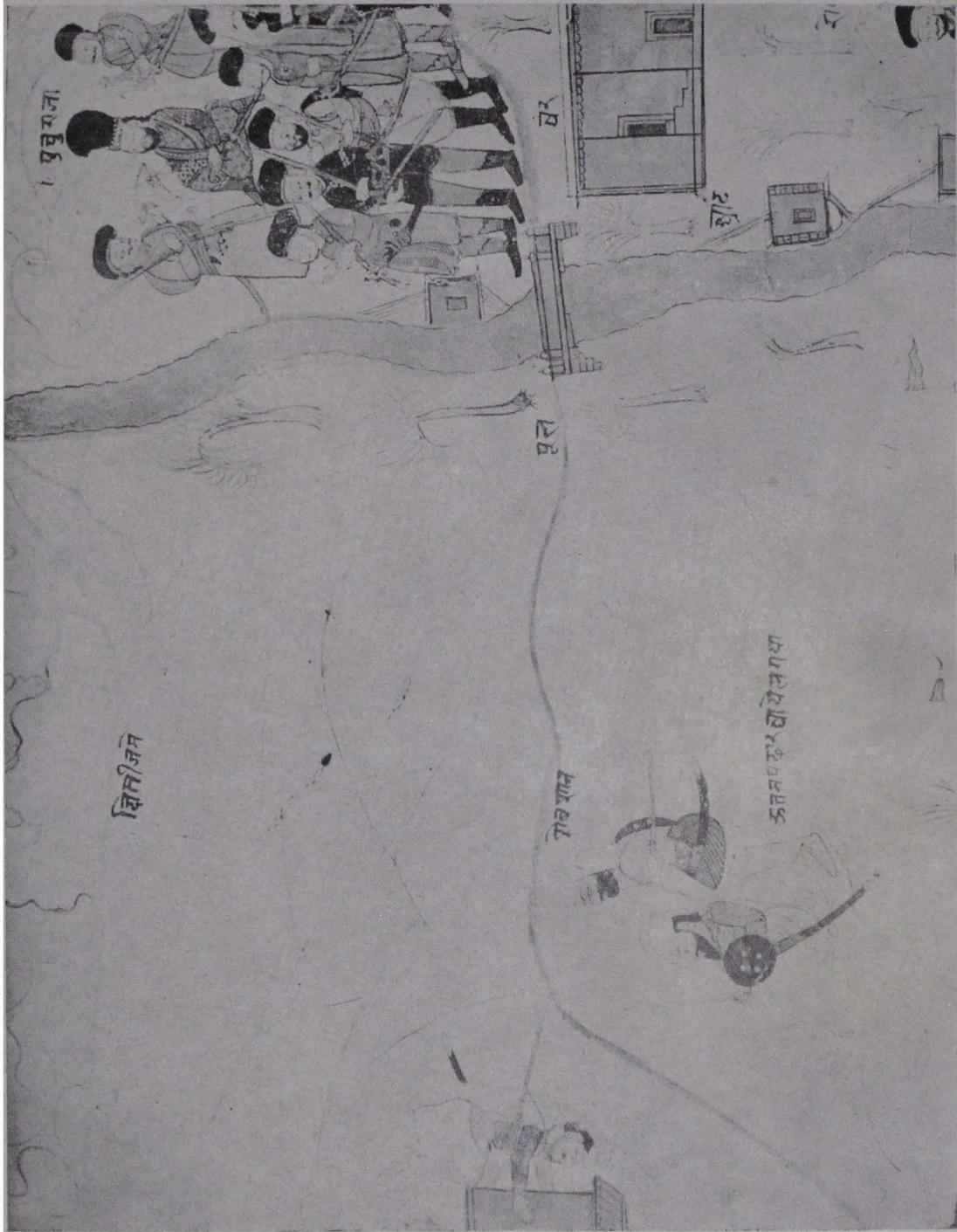


Plate No. 6. Retreat of the Dogras



Plate No. 7. Setting on fire of Pashkym fort



Plate No. 8. A battle scene

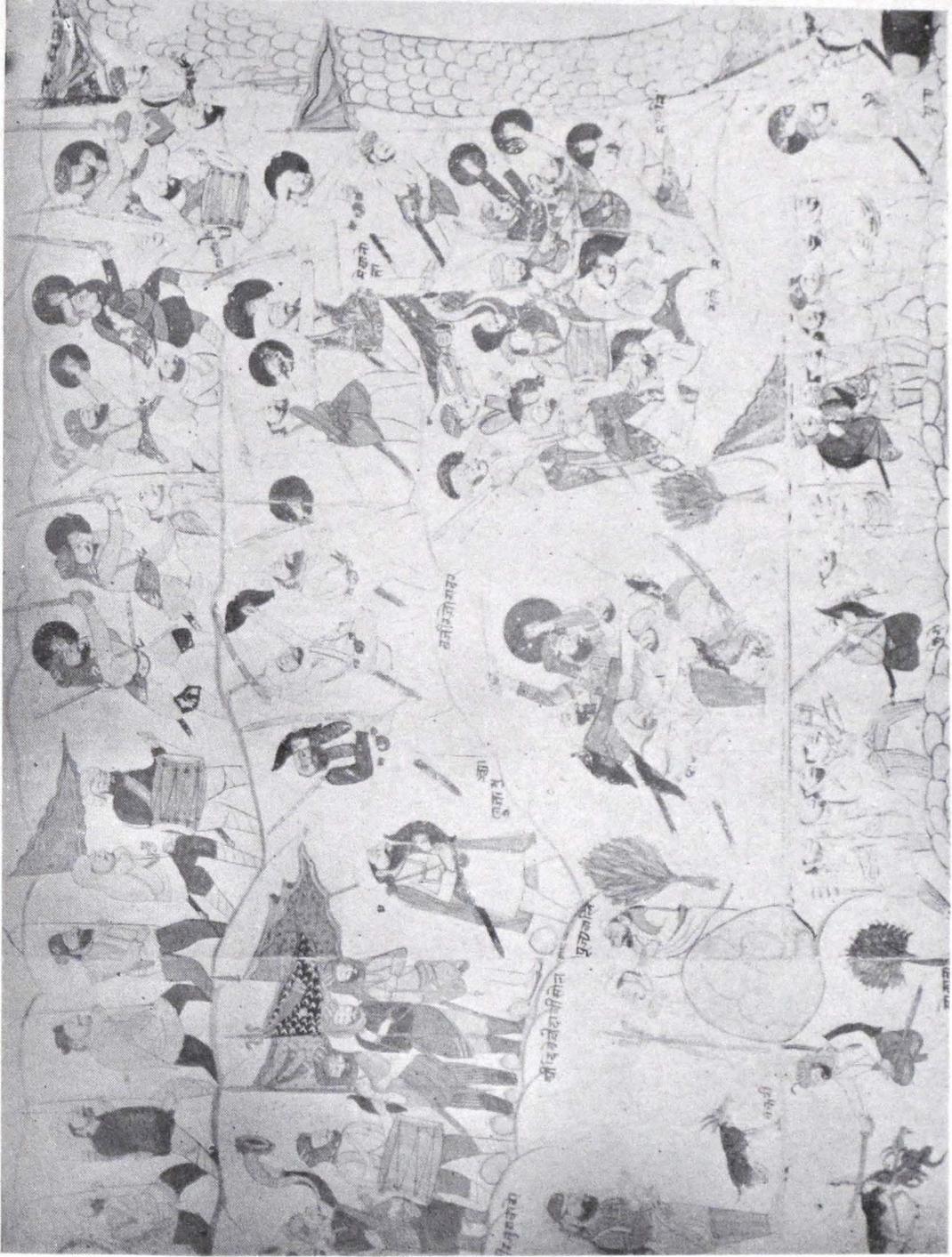


Plate No. 9. Zorawar Singh Kahluria offering Puja bali

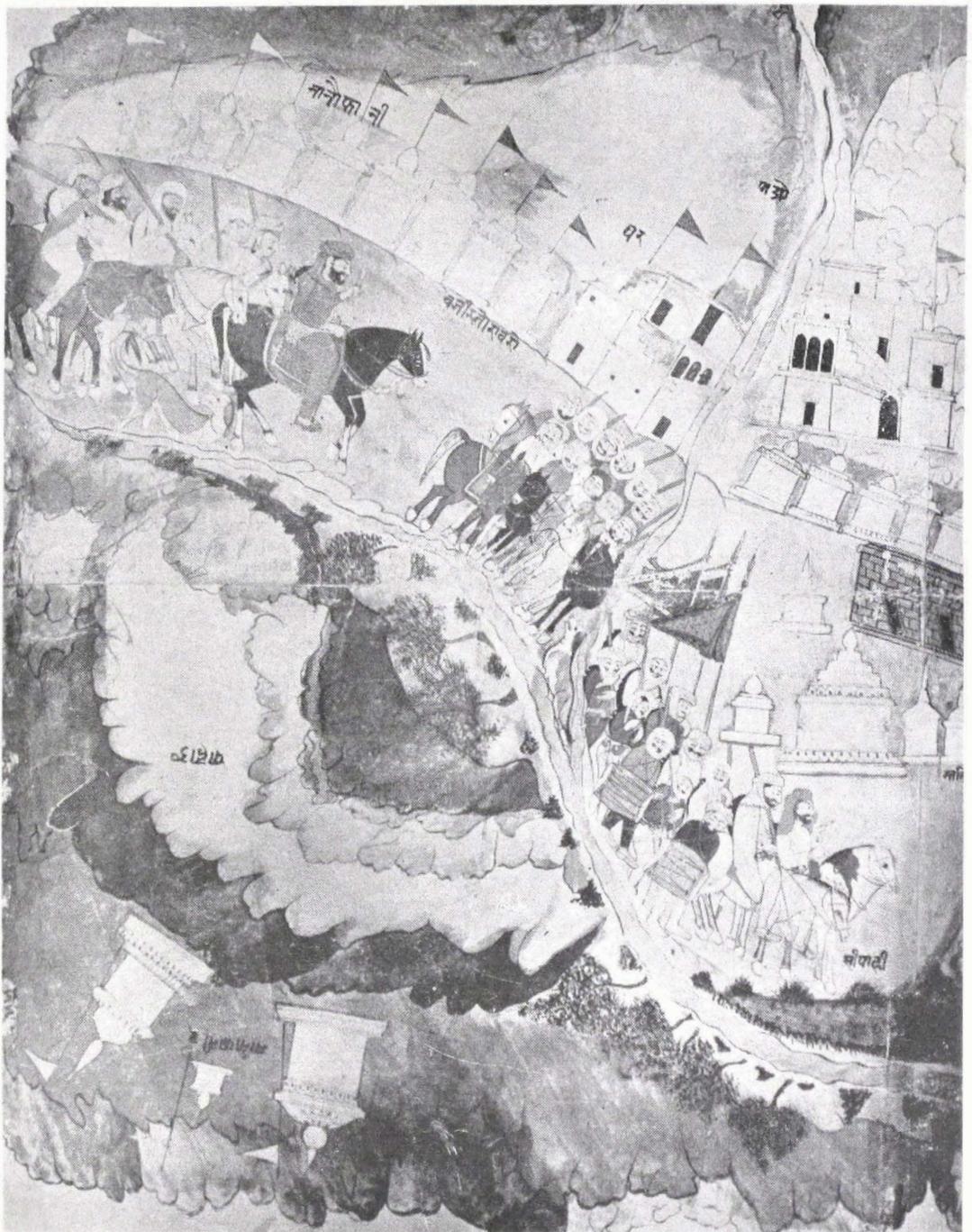


Plate No. 10. The Dogras entering Leh



Plate No. 11. King Ahmad Shah of Baltistan being produced before Wazir Zorawar Singh

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- (b) Panjab State Archives, Patiala. Ambala Division Records (English MSS). Khalsa Darbar Records (Persian MSS).
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