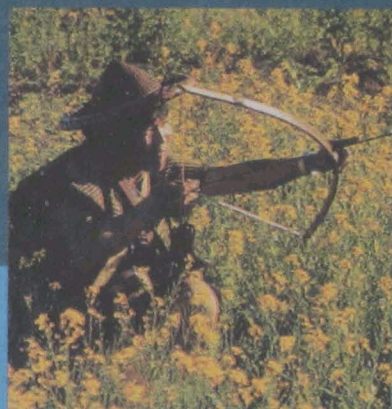


BORDER TAGINS OF
ARUNACHAL
PRADESH



S M KRISHNATRY

India—The Land and the People

Border Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh

Unarmed Expedition 1956

S M KRISHNATRY



NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA

The book was originally published by Directorate of Research,
Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar in 1997.

ISBN 978-81-237-4460-5

First Edition, 2005

First Reprint 2007 (*Saka* 1929)

© S M Krishnatry, 2004

Rs 80.00

Published by the Director, National Book Trust, India
A-5 Green Park, New Delhi - 110016

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	xv
1. Introduction	1
2. Narratives of Geeta Krishnatry	10
3. Spiritual and Cultural World of Marabai Tagins	213
4. Folktales of Apatanis, Maras, Na Tagins	220
5. Epilogue	226
<i>Glossary</i>	228

Foreword

Prior to Independence, India's eastern marches were scarcely known, unlike the North West Frontier Province bordering on Afghanistan and adjacent lands where the Great Game was played out. The Northeast, a huge swathe of densely forested cis-Himalayan territory was a land of mystery - wild, unexplored and constitutionally "excluded". These Frontier Tracts lay secluded behind a so-called Inner Line along the foothills edging the Assam Valley, rising in serried ranges to the Himalayan rampart and the Forbidden Land of Tibet beyond.

Little was known of the vast mosaic of tribal communities inhabiting this region. In October 1953 an Assam Rifles Major and his unsuspecting column of 42 men and supporting staff were massacred at Achingmori in Tagin country on account of what later transpired was an inter-tribal dispute over a woman. The country was shocked. The Tagins were known to be a warlike and otherwise relatively unknown people, with the Bangni and Adis, whose homelands stretched from the mid-hills up to the McMahan Line in the Subansiri Division of what had come to be known as the North East Frontier Agency or NEFA, today's Arunachal.

Under the Raj, the answer would have been a punitive expedition. However, the new Indian Government stopped short with apprehending the ringleaders of the incident. The further task of establishing friendly contact with the people and bringing the region under settled administration awaited volunteers. An important element in the lives of

the Marabai Tagins had been cross-border pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist peaks of Takpashiri (Tsari) and Dorji Phagmo between Gelling and Migythun, with a major pilgrimage every twelve years, next due in 1956. This seemed an ideal occasion to mount a friendship expedition. Major Surendra Mohan Krishnatray, a recent addition to the newly formed Indian Frontier Administrative Service happily volunteered to lead it. The choice was apt. Krishnatry and his wife, Geeta, had just completed six years in Gyantse as part of the Indian establishment in Tibet and, filled with a sense of adventure and mission, volunteered to traverse this unsurveyed region.

His terms of reference were to ensure a peaceful pilgrimage, prevent trespass into Indian territory and establish an administrative centre as near the international boundary as possible. In order to demonstrate his friendly intentions, Krishnatry took two bold and imaginative decisions. He invited his wife, Geeta, to accompany him and determined that the column would carry no weapons. Thus, armed with a Gandhian commitment to *ahimsa*, the party set forth to Doporijo, to which point stores had been airlifted, and commenced their forward march on January 24 whereas this writer happened to be present to wish them Godspeed and a safe return.

The journey was full of wonder and adventure for both visitors and hosts. Rhinos on the runway at Jorhat, cobras, leeches and mites, dense jungle and precipitous gorges, some traversed perilously on rope ladders clinging to the face of the mountain. The Tagins were childlike in their curiosity and full of fun. The baubles they valued were safety pins, needles and thread, and payment in eight anna coins - not the smaller four anna variety - as these were good for making trinkets and garlands. The hand mirror Geeta carried was an object of amazement and amusement, as viewers doubled up with laughter on seeing their own grimacing faces! There were uglier facets of life too, like slavery (which quickly ended).

The radio-telephone, packed in a box that crackled and “spoke”, was another source of wonder. As Geeta was the operator and cipher decoder and constantly talking into the box, a group of porters finally discovered the “secret”. It held the Krishnatry children with whom Geeta would daily converse. Having seen through the game the porters decided that they would not carry that particular load any further as it was too dangerous. What would happen if the box fell and the children were hurt? There were other occasions too when the porters mutinied as they were on half rations on account of delayed or abortive air supply drops. The aircraft that appeared were obviously a special kind of bird. Here were people whose first experience of the wheel was that of an aeroplane.

Krishnatray distributed hoes, axes and spades to help improve the simple tillage practised locally. Approved elders and headmen or “gams” were given red coats as symbols of new administrative authority. At other times he tried to mark the rivers and seek confirmation or correction of the maps they were carrying. Geeta taught knitting. The expedition doctor healed the sick.

And so beyond Longju to Migythun, a predominantly Tagin settlement of about 40 houses, and the Ring-Khor or “long circle” pilgrim trail that attracted numbers of devout Buddhists from Arunachal, Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim in the Tibetan Year of the Monkey. The Tagins and the Nime (Tibetans) would hold a Dapo or peace and friendship rite with prayers, a yak sacrifice and oaths to ensure peaceful passage of the Dalo (holy circumambulation). Krishnatry distributed gifts from the Government of India and conducted meetings, telling the people of Gandhi and Nehru. Only Tibetan officials were encountered. Thereafter, the return trek to Jorhat.

The peaceful opening up and integration of Arunachal is a little told story and sadly even less appreciated. It ranks among the greatest achievement of Indian nation-building. The further development and political growth of this

sequestered corner of India have been unique and merit tribute to the sagacity and foresight of those that made it happen. Geeta and S.M. Krishnatry are among that band of unsung heroes.

January 28, 2005

B.G. Verghese
Visiting Professor, Centre for Policy Research,
New Delhi - 110001

Preface

The bulk of this narrative is based on diary of my wife, Geeta, which forms Chapter II of this work. Completion of this work was delayed on account of the preconceptions of Geeta as also of the associate leader of the expedition, that is, myself. She held top positions in respective State Social Welfare Advisory Boards till she retired in 1979. Thereafter too she remained victim to intermittent problems of failing health. Haunted by incessant agitations in Shillong, we found ourselves catapulted to settle down like immigrants in Delhi.

Most exploratory expeditions in the tribal frontiers have been armed or armoured with heavy escorts much to the cost and suppression of human rights, occupation of their lands, burning of villages, molestation of women, looting of livestock, crops and banning of trade. This was the trend in Abor, Mishmi and Miri expeditions led by the British armed forces during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh thus fought back with stockades and their native resources. Peace was elusive due to revengeful bloodshed. Non-violence was not for the British.

Marabai-Tsari expedition led by me was conducted with a difference. It was wholly unarmed and unescorted. The Diaspora of the Tagin tribesman sprawled right along India's north-eastern frontier with Tibet—along its extremities extending through the hidden valleys of their Bangni kinsmen of Kameng frontier and their habitats of the Khru, the Kamla and the Subansiri river basins and

over to the Mara and Na Tagins on the border lines, finally merging their identities astride Siang frontier with the Monpa mix of Mechukha. The Tagin heartland, however, must be identified with the higher approaches of the upper Subansiri river confluencing with Tsari chu and other feeder valleys right up to Migyithun in Tibet — their El Dorado where every twelfth year they were hosted by the Tibetan authorities for contracting a peaceful management of the Tsari-Rong-Khor (circumambulation) pilgrimage. Marabai and the Na people had border trade with Tibetan Ihopas and, therefore, rarely seen on Assam side. The pocket of territory remained the last to be explored for want of takers earlier for fear of warlike Tagins. It was for this that my wife and I volunteered and planned an unarmed friendship expedition. She became the soul of this expedition and her diary forms the piece de resistance of this volume.

Having descended from Tibetan height in 1954, I sought positioning ourselves at Ziro for a feel of the area, fully convinced along with Geeta that the bloody culture of armed legacy of British expeditions against our own people must end forever—punitive or retributive. And a human rights approach of love, humour and patience must be tried out to set a tradition for future administrative operators. I felt that a woman was a more secure safeguard against tribal onslaught, while Geeta was firm she would rather trust peace with tribals than with armed escort in our company. This unarmed and unescorted expedition has served to be a watershed in the administrative history of Arunachal Pradesh and has, if it is to be believed by the cynic, set the pace for lasting peace between the tribals and the administration unlike the other tribal communities of the north-east region of India. Tagins have been at peace with themselves and their own government led by committed leaders and devoted bureaucracy have thus established an abiding rapport. Besides, it prevented any possible clashes with the expected Tibetan and Chinese

soldiery which were expected to be in the offing. It poured cold water and disarmed the wrathful sullenness of the entire Tagin tribe and their frayed tempers which had left their heat after the Achingmori massacre they had perpetrated about two years earlier by killing 47 Assam Riflesmen halfway in our projected itinerary.

We took the plunge not unaware of the prohibitive passage through deep river gorges and towering missile like peaks. Bailey, Morshead, Sherrif and the Kingdomwards had to turn away dreading the Marabai and their formidable deep gorges. Three years later Lt Gen. B. K. Kaul tracking the same route swore he would do it 'never again' as he recorded in his *Untold Story* thus: *We had to do crawling at times on all fours with a thumping heart — our inside seemed coming out and I panted for breath — I swore I shall never again undertake such an ordeal — I had to put cotton wool in ears to sleep with the noise of rivers and waterfalls — the track was studded with ladders climbing over sheer rocks loosely hanging on their last legs — we had to hug the mountain face holding on to creepers — one slip and goodbye to life.*

This fairy tale is all about the multi-dimensional expedition reaching out to the last line of our administrative control with benefits to the last villages Limeking, Ging and Na enclaves in order to evaluate their living conditions on the borderline, cooling off of the Tagin trauma caused by arrest of the ring leader of Achingmori massacre by two large columns of the Assam Rifles force led by Hipshon Roy and K. T. Khuma, my colleagues, keeping peace with the Chinese or Tibetan escort for the pilgrims who had to circumambulate through our territory and the Governor Jairamdas' dictate to consolidate the border — all in one, apart from the necessity of keeping ourselves on our feet. Besides, the main agenda was to lay down a pragmatic charter of behaviour for future generations following in the footsteps of time.

When I took this expedition, Tibet was on my mind. I

took over at Gyantse from Hugh Richardson and spent six years there. Having studied its structural and spiritual lifeline, I had thought it had its own spirituality code. Giving alms to beggars was an egalitarian practice. In the fourth month of the Buddha's Nirvana charity was poured on them — barley, salt, butter, chhang, etc — when the monks, nuns and mendicants flocked and sat pretty in disciplined rows while passers-by bestowed alms. Yet they had a role to be critical with *ketcha* (freedom of speech). The common people and the monk cadres enjoyed freedom to keep fingers on the pulse and in a unique way they signified vocal public opinion, press or poll.

Lamaseries and monasteries were state controlled instruments of enforcing clerical or public order. The private sector was either feudal or non-existent. The social justice code was well enforceable. Lamas and the laity were integrated in the administrative and judicial system with good effect. In their book *Tibet and Tibetans* Tsung lien Shen and Shen Chi Lieu said that they could hardly imagine what would be left if modern Tibet and Tibetans were deprived of its lamas, lamaseries and lamaism. Monks were crucial part of society — some for education or worship, some for social or vocational training and some even unspecified vagrants and yet entitled to a share of allowance in cash or kind. They paid nothing to lamaseries.

The diary summons nostalgia of friendship of those years. The Chinese and Tibetan contribution to my success was implicit in their non-interference, thanks to transparency of my intentions. My greatest concern was that my onerous tasks should not leave behind burning ambers.

S. M. Krishnatry

Acknowledgement

I owe my gratitude to Mahatma Gandhi's technology of love and non-violence which bore close synonymity with the female gender's characteristics and quality of personality. That it was best suited for the occasion was further convincing by the self-confidence Geeta displayed as a philanthropist social worker. Women's enthusiasm was seen as the instrument for winning over the Tagin sisters' hearts and penetrate the men's hostility through them. The efficacy of the role they could play made Geeta tell Governor Jairamdas Daulatram that she felt more secure amongst the armed tribal people rather than the military forces.

This volume of a historic expedition (1956) containing brick by brick account of the construction of its edifice in respect of planning and execution would not have seen light of the day without the push given by the then Governor of Assam Shri Jairamdas Daulatram, who personally asked Geeta to write out this diary and also fill for him a questionnaire along with the researched answers on the spiritual world of the upper Mara and Na Tagins. Alas he did not survive long.

Shri Gegong Apang with record longevity as Chief Minister of any State in India evinced keen interest when I showed him the typed manuscript with the album of photographs unseen by him earlier. My gratitude to him and to the Arunachal Government which volunteered to publish it.

The entire Tagin, Bangni and Adi population of the

Subansiri area as a whole, both men and even more so the women, who ideally and willingly joined us with their varied support groups were the genuine heroes and heroines who acted together to make this unarmed expedition a grand success. Their spontaneous response converted a probable disaster into a triumph.

I am grateful to Srirang Jha, who has edited this volume. Indeed, the present revised edition with a new title is the outcome of sincere interest taken by the National Book Trust, India.

146, Mandakini Enclave
New Delhi - 110 019

S. M. Krishnatry

INTRODUCTION

PEAKS, PLACES, PATHS AND PEOPLE

Adventure should be of the human spirit, so that we win over the hearts and minds of the people.

— Jawaharlal Nehru

Reference to Marabai Tagin identity was conspicuous by its absence in the 19th century records. They seldom descended far down to come to Assam nor frequented far in Tibet. What 'Abor' was to Assam, 'Ihopa' was for centuries to Tibet and it covered Mishmis, Adis Bokars, Shimongs, Tagins, Bangnis and Monpas in a generic sense. One residing nearer the southern international frontier of Tibet was Ihopa. Mara and Na Tagins along with the group known as Marabai did not claim to be in the line of Abotani as ancestor as has been imagined. Old reference to Nidu-Mora itself alludes to Nyido-Mara. J. N. Choudhary has described Tagins to be migratory from Penzi village. Mara Tabe said that the place they migrated from was known as Helungjiang far in the north. This, he said, was apart from Tsari area, their habitat for centuries. It was not correct that Tagin houses were as large as those of Daflas (Nisis) whose largest house seen by me was an elongated housing structure containing as many as 15 hearths (family units or dormitories). Tagins were individualistic and the largest Tagin house seen by us was one containing four hearths. Centuries of tradition and mythology of our tribes residing in Arunachal Pradesh had rendered their own accounts and descriptions of places, names and all else in

their thought and culture to mix up the haze of mystery. Nevertheless all that remained and rendered into new forms is relevant and interesting.

Tagins then were believed to suffer from endemic dissidence to authority. Tours and expeditions were a prohibitive thought. But for us, the technology of love and tolerance applied to primitive and hostile perceptions of their mind-set was, in a sense, ultra-modern. Anthropologically it turned into a path finder for future for dealing with the primitive mind. A chain of commonly linked markets with bargaining no less organised, freely imposed tariffs and monopolies in the process of trading in relays — where prices were not measured in weights and coins and currency notes had no value, where bartering levels and pricing were dependent on age-old free equilibrium unfazed by our economic trends and where coins had the only value for weaving them into trinkets and necklaces—such was the unique world of brave Tagins. That a yak would equal to 5 swords and rock-salt in a sack, a quantity of *ambin* (rice) was dependent on their own values and leverage.

These were the Marabai Tagins whose lives were interwoven with cross border pilgrimages in the worship of two magnificent snow peaks named in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon as Takpashiri (Tsari) and Dorji Phagmo. The former is the abode of Heruka (Sanskrit) or Demchok (Tibetan), one of the holiest; Dorji Phagmo or Vajravarahi, the guardian of the entrance, overlooks the holy Chikcha, *gompa* and the Migyithun village before the tracks plungs into the gorges of densely forested Tsari Chu (Gelling in the vocabulary of Tagins). Those were the days when Dorji Phagmo and Herunka sanctified the guarded entrance into the untreaded route to India, deemed to have been impenetrable and also perhaps guarding both the countries of Lord Buddha for their prosperity and religiosity. The larger of the two pilgrimages exploded curiously once every 12 years like a Supernova on this international

border Shangrila without notice of and concealed from all the glaring eyes on media's camera flashes. It was the similar periodical regularity with which Kumb and Kailash beckoned the devotees from far and wide and when an extravaganza sprang up into existence on the blurred borders of India and Tibet. India was shut out to its own pocket of territory for generations of hoary history. It posed no border problem or anxiety on both sides in mutual respect, understanding and sympathy. The remote threshold to be reached for the rendezvous was Migyithun Chikchar villages, Mara and Na Tagin traditional homelands pitched on international border. This was never one of those trade routes between Tibet and India over which the traders travelled like Sadiya Rima and Tawang Nymjang Chu-Tsona, and in the opera—*The rebel rousing*, Tagins both Mara and Na played the major role.

T. S. Murthy in his *Paths of Peace*, while discussing boundary in this region mentioned that "Krishnatry's would probably be the best account". I would put it differently and say this was the only account of approach from south of the international frontier and, though I am not discussing international frontier here, I had studied it and would deem it to be the least likely to be controversial with well-defined parameters. Those of us who had not studied Bailey and others' reports did not even know in 1955 in the NEFA outfit that these pilgrimages had in fact been regularly performed since the creation of Sun and the Moon and pilgrims were trespassing through this segment of Indian territory. Of this we came to know from Lhasa. The Dalai Lama had in fact performed the circumambulation ritual in 1900 over the Kinkhor or Chinkhor or Chunkhor circuit of the short pilgrimage around Takpashiri, with 11 staging huts for the stay of pilgrims which was an annual feature. I am avoiding repetition of what has already been recorded by travellers from the Tibetan side. Nevertheless this had been the region of Mara and Na Tagins' periodical hunting

expeditions— hunting of Takins, even snow leopard, whenever the area was free from snow.

Not to confuse, there is another Takpashiri snow peak south of Chayul Dzong, quite outside the Tsari tract. Tsari tract and the Tsari Chhu valley, paradoxically and unlike the neighbouring valleys, got abundantly heavy rainfall and were regarded to be very holy. The monsoon apparently surged through the atmospheres, unobstructed by high ranges, into the deep gorges funneling along the Tsari Chhu valley. The average height of the Tsari area was about 9,500 ft. and its beauty would be comparable with the Chumbi valley of Tibet. Sanctified by religious sanctions the Tsari region did not permit taking of life, specially wild animals, or even tilling the soil. No women were allowed to go beyond Droma La en route Kinkhor and even the Dalai Lama had to dismount and walked a particular stretch on foot. Kintup, the well-known Sikkimese explorer, who performed the short circuit wrote that “the soil yielded no kind of produce. It was this Tsari tract which the Mara Tagins claimed as their traditional abode to which they had migrated from Helungjiang and from which they were driven out. It was they who had regularly frequented Tsari and Takpo region of Tibet, but it was one-way traffic in which Tibetans seldom came down to Ihopa villages for trade — only Tagins and Ihopas went up on trading or galavanting missions. They took madder vine, cane musk, skins, rice, etc, to Tsari, the land of rhododendrons, birch and fir trees which they have viewed nostalgically. This account is based on Nguri Tem’s verbal report when he went to Migyithun as our envoy.

According to Bailey’s account, Pemako which constituted the valley of the Tsangpo (Bramaputra), below the gorge, used to be inhabited by Abors but about 100 years before (more than 200 years before now) they were driven away by people migrating from Tawang-Bhutan area. They had come in search of land of Pemako, the land where ‘rivers of milk’ flowed, which in a prophecy they

had come to know about. Murthy, in his *Paths of Peace*, described a generic people called Mon which for centuries inhabited the Himalayan border regions. These migrants came to be known as Monpas and some of them also, perhaps along with some Tibetan Khampas, found their way into the Dibang valley down south. They also spoke a dialect of Monpa spoken in Tawant. A portion of this immigration made their way into Pachakshiri (modern Mechhukha of Siang Frontier district). Interestingly Bailey described that even in 1912 some of the Abors or Ihopas were living in I'emako wearing Tibetan clothes but otherwise speaking their own language. The Monpas and Ihopas of Pemako were indistinguishable to the untrained eyes. Before the Monpa immigration the whole Pemako belonged to Ihopas (Mishmis, mostly Karkos). This of course has a historical base and so has the historical backing as to how the Mara Tagins and the Na Tagins were dislodged from their ancestral homes in Tsari-Chayul area. The exiled Prince Rupati, described as father of Mon people perhaps due to his royal connection, went from plains of India with 1,000 soldiers and travelled across into Tibet. He had been identified with King Drupad of the Mahabharata. Gyalpo Rupati, the five Pandavas and the 12 Kauravas were also there in Tibetan legends, quite often credited with founding of Tibet as per Shankarapati's description of the prince fleeing and migrating into Tibet. Murthy, however, seems to downgrade Rupati legends as a later modification of Naraka. He had made a good use of this stint in Tawang for his studies. Lahaul people had been looked upon by Tibetan neighbours as belonging to Mon group and they considered, the Kulu Hindus as Mon. Sarat Chandra Das, however, described the people and tribes living in the cishimalayan region as Kiratas, the generic name found in Maharashtra in which there is a reference to Kirata-Arjuna battle. In his book *History of Western Tibet* (1907) Francke thought the western Tibet and the Zanskar Tahsil of Laddakh to be Mon. He also

identified Mustang of Nepal to be settlement of Indian or Mon origin, possibly pre-Aryan population.

There had been various legends from tribals themselves but curiously there were as many seeking migrations from south as those from unidentifiable north, such as Helungjiang of Mara tribe. It would seem likely for the people from the plains migrating to settle in the Himalayas for cooler climate, religious motivation, adventure and search for probable land or due to wars and chase rather than to imagine Tibetan people from cold and freezing heights descending to the heat of the plains or even milder climates of the submontane regions. It is wholly probable that wave after wave of simple people moved in enfilades for spread of Hinduism or Buddhism or for quietude up the enchanting and beckoning Himalayan heights from east to west of the great Himalayan spread. This explains for differing sects and denominations from Assam to Kashmir (Laddakh) having different dialects. They inevitably must have socialised and traded with Tibetans merging into a cultural admixture and forming a belt of southerners engaged in trans-border missions. Thus a mixed Aryan or pre-Aryan Mongoloid identity of their own grew up. There was nothing to stop the adventurer from travelling east-west seeking new pastures under such a generic identity as Mon. Not all the Himlayan people or tribes were Mongoloid; not all Tibetans were Mongoloid for that matter. No wonder that with thousands of years or more behind them they have lived parcelled out in different tribes and communities. It also stood to reason that the Tibetans described them as Mon-pa or Mon-yul (one living in the land of Mon) or simply Ihopa (one living in the south or coming from the south-Iho = south).

It was clearly identifiable that what Christopher Haimendorf referred to as Agla Mara was the same as Upper Mara but the village group was around Limeking. Also his Hru-Mara was Helu-Mara and Nime-Na the same as settlements of Na Tagins. Both he and Bailey had

gathered clues and information from two different and distant sources. Bailey divided them into five Ihopa tribes and Haimendorf into five routes leading to Tibet. Morangwa Tingba of Bailey corresponded to Mara Tagin, (also Marang Tage), Lungtu Ihopa to Na Tagin, also to Nime-Na of Haimendorf, Tingba to Sonu-Sekke, and Soreng Lingpu-Langongwa to Nising or Bangni from 'Khru side or those crossing over from Chyangtajo region. The last group Lawa is from Kamla valley areas.

Sir Henry Mac Mahon's India-Tibet borderline remained undefined when drawn in an arc presumptively pending determination of the status of the Ihopa hamlet called Migyithun for which the Tibetan Prime Minister had especially asked to be placed on the Tibetan side during the 1914 convention parleys. For ages it had been the launching base for the pilgrims circumambulating down the Indian gorges alongside the Tsari Chu. Lonchen Shartra's request was tacitly understandable pending formality. The route lay through the unsurveyed and uncharted Tagin territory bordered and studded by a chain of holy snow peaks like Gorichhen, Takposhiri (Takpo-Tsari) and Dorji Phagmo, the protective guardian deity overlooking the passage.

The holiest of them all were, of course, the last two around which the pilgrims drawn from neighbouring Buddhist countries went around reciting prayers and covering the distance prostrate on their bodies. If Mount Kailash is the holiest in the western sector, these two combine to make the holiest pilgrimage in the east. Even one of the Dalai Lamas who performed the pilgrimage reverently walked the portion directly under the eye of Dorji Phagmo. She is no other than Varja-varahi in her snow peak abode, whereas the other is the holy abode of the deity Demchock (Heruka in Sanskrit).

This was the Tsari pilgrimage held every twelfth year (monkey year) on a large circuit, but also yearly on a short circuit. This 1956 pilgrimage was first ever to be seen by

outsiders in this expedition and perhaps the last one to be performed, since thereafter the Dalai Lama's Government fell and the Chinese communists took over Tibet under the Chinese rule. It is like a mythological pageant on Shangrila revealing its grandeur in a glimpse and then being shut out once again to the world. The towering snow peaks and the piercing rocks still shoot into the skies, but wait for the day of redemption.

Though the immediate concern of the Tibetan authorities was the peaceful conduct vis-a-vis the fear of the demanding Tagins, the real focus shifted to the expected advance of the Chinese P.L.A. to ostensibly escort the pilgrims to protect them against the warlike Tagins and exploit the occasion to claim territorial access. The trespass over the Indian territory was implicit and the Indian Government could not sleep over the possibility of a military or political gain while exploiting the opportunity. The Tagins loved their opportunity and were prone to spark incidents. They loved their heritage and were not beholden to anyone, including the Indian Government. This enclave had not been explored before, though they knew that they were there. In the march towards reaching out to our borders with Tibet this enclave of our territory remained the last to be explored as there were no takers to mount an expedition which could survive the ordeal and enable them to return without death in the deep precipitous gorges or by the Tagin swords. Forty seven Assam Rifles led party had been killed a couple of years earlier in what is known as the Achingmori massacre—with no survival. Fresh on my return from Tibet, I had decided to face the sword of Damocles just when came the SOS to proceed in this multi-dimensional mission which had a far-reaching and permanent impact on peace keeping all around.

My mandate was indeed as simple as it sounded supercilious:

Plan your own strategy and take as much force as you would need to thwart any designs to trespass Indian

territory, enforce law and order among the recalcitrant Tagins in the Mara area and ensure peaceful passage of the pilgrimage; establish an administrative centre as near to the international border as possible.

It was a tall order in the face of no worthwhile intelligence available from any quarter. I had to deal with the people and I loved it with freedom to act as deemed necessary.

NARRATIVES OF GEETA KRISHNATRY

18 January 1956

Flying out 'blues' — Sorry no human bodies — Non-categorised pilots — Air Force dinner

Ziro to Jorhat

As usual delay occurred in the shape of late arrival of VIPs in the scheduled Air Force sorties bringing Financial Adviser and Advisor to the Governor and their party. They were supposed to be spending their night at Ziro, and the returning Dakotas were to lift us, the expedition personnel and the heap of kits out to Jorhat. But the eerie cold of Ziro changed their mind and they decided to get back to more salubrious Jorhat after a four-hour tour. So my husband quickly ordered loading of the first aircraft and ran to have radio-telephonic talk with the Director of Supply and Transport, Rowria (Jorhat) to cajole him into arranging another sortie for ourselves. I saw to my exasperation that our personal trunks had been sent in the first. Whatever little hope I had of taking them along with us dashed to the ground; for one look at our visitors' luggage I knew that we could never get them in with us. Anyhow we waited anxiously for the plane to arrive. No plane for two hours. We waited first on the landing ground, then went around. We dared not lift our eyes from above; the sky was a mass of thundering clouds. But our spirits got restored by a waning sun trying to peep its way through, and lo and

* Geeta Krishnatry was an eminent social activist and philanthropist.

behold, we heard the welcome drone of a plane. Bursting with excitement, hands aching with the burden of 'best wishes', we raced towards the plane only to be told that the pilots were non-categorised and could only take luggage, not 'human bodies'. Another sortie was coming for passengers. Somewhat reassured we went back to our usual parking place to stand, eyes fixed on the 'approach'. I do not know how long we stood there repeating to well-wishers our 'thank you' till the Base Superintendent In-charge came running to the Political Officer to inform that the next sortie was not coming but the pilots had been asked to lift as many passengers as they could without undue risk. Out came the baggage which had been put inside and out came our trunks also to make room for our VIP guests. I was assured by the Political Officer that by tomorrow our luggage would be with us again. So with a longing look at my trunk, my husband and I boarded the plane and reached Jorhat Airfield at last.

19 to 22 January 1956

Hesitant Air Force for virgin areas — Air-drops the Waterloo — The kindly rhino

Halt at Jorhat

Frantic shopping for me all these days, and for Krish, my husband, session after session with Wing Commander Dhattigara, who I was told was most disinclined to hazard his fleet of aircraft anywhere into the areas of darkening shadows on the map denoting a jumble of high-rise snow peaks with deep narrow gorges for air-drops. Peacetime rules did not permit Air Force taking undue risks in such virgin areas unless authorised by Air H.Q. Krish said he despaired and failed to get any commitment beyond Dhatti's disarming advice, "Why the bloody hell are you walking into these rocky traps endangering everyone's sound sleep? Yes, *why?*" My husband confided, "Air-drops may prove to be our Waterloo."

A press party, representatives of all major newspapers, happened to be around the same time. They were having rollicking time with usual hospitality, preparatory to be taken around the NEFA Shangrila country—perhaps for the first peep into treasures of the hidden land. Our exploration into the blue was a secret hush-hush affair. Going as we were to hang our washings on the Mac Mahon Line, it was not open to press! But during an ebriated reception for the large party one evening, someone felt pressed by wind and blurted out the information how my husband and I were to embark on a unique mission. There was a beeline towards us which embarrassed us uncomfortably. Krish strode over to the Adviser to the Governor Kan Mehta reporting that someone had spilled the beans and asked him to deal with anxious journalists.

For a NEFA it Jorhat was always a spot of back-in-civilisation and high expectations, where I could have the luxury of a Circuit House to stay with lights and running water at my beck and call, where I would shop, shop and shop! But Jorhat turned out to be a nightmare! First of all, the moment we had landed from Ziro it started drizzling which later turned into a downpour, and in this downpour we started the hunt for our lodging, for both the Circuit House and the Dark Bungalow had been booked for the visiting press party. We tossed over from place to place at Jorhat but found shelter back at Rowriah airfield only in one of the half-completed class III and IV *basha* type staff quarters, miles away from other staff colonies! Our two tiny rooms had neither electricity nor water, neither doors nor windows. Well, we distributed our heavy luggage as best we could in both the rooms—one we used, the other our servants. Obviously our camp life was to start from Jorhat itself!

By the time we had settled down to some extent it had turned dark; so hurriedly candles were lit and a petromax (which was to be opened only at Daporijo) unearthed from the wooden crate and life was bright again. The only

redeeming feature out of all this chaos was that we did not have to cook our dinner; we were invited by the Air Force for dinner in the mess. Then it struck me what about the servants' food. Lama, our cook, solved the problem by saying he was not hungry and that Norbu could go to the mess with us. He himself would guard the baggage, there being no other way to lock up the bamboo quarter. I saw sense in this proposal. My husband decided to leave his double barrel gun with him for further protection. Our cook was an ex-serviceman and had seen action in Burma. He was discharged later due to shell shock. His right leg and right hand trembled constantly but this affliction did not affect his efficiency as a first class B.T. cook.

We had a wonderful dinner with Air Force officers and I must say they were very hospitable. They not only fed Norbu but also sent packed dinner for the cook. When they came to know of our plight, a standing invitation was extended to us to have all our meals in the mess. We thanked them warmly but said we did not want to take undue advantage of their hospitality and would agree to come and have breakfast tomorrow and by that time we would be able to sort ourselves out. But our friends would not take 'No' for an answer, so we perforce agreed to come to the mess once again before leaving Jorhat. We said good night to them and started for our basha. We had gone hardly halfway down the runway when the jeep driver whispered *genda* and sure enough there was the lone rhino strolling away unconcernedly. Thrilled, I told the driver to slow down so as to have a good look but the man shivering with fright pressed hard on accelerator so the jeep went past him. Having reached home the euphoria of having seen rhino from close quarters vanished when I witnessed gaping doors and windows. It was one thing to be sitting in the jeep and admiring wildlife but it was something quite different to sleep in an unprotected house in company with at least one rhino at large. Deciding to ram our heavy baggage in a more strategic position against the unlatched

bamboo, I called out to the cook. No answer. Called again, no answer. Funny there was no light either! So my husband told the driver to switch on the headlights into the house and what did we see—Lama lying on the ground and the gun lying on the bed! We all rushed inside suspecting foul play. Calling him out again, my husband shook him taking him to be alive. Except for a mild grunt no response whatsoever! We looked at each other helplessly. My husband suddenly sniffed at something, bending down swiftly over the prostrate body he smelled his breath and straightened up, disgust writ large on his face, and growled, "The blighter is dead drunk" and marched away into our room in dark with great difficulty. Norbhu and the driver lifted the now groaning Lama onto the bed. Thank heavens! Anybody could have come in and walked away with the gun. So much for our cook and his lack of hunger! And so much for his guarding the house! In all this confusion I had completely forgotten about the rhino menace, but now it all came charging back, so I spent best part of the night barricading the doors with *jhapas* (bamboo/cane woven carrying baskets — a porter load), the only things I could move about under my own steam (Krish having gone to sleep). He thought the whole thing stupid! As if the rhino could be stopped if he had a mind to enter and sleep with us! At last I went to bed quite sure I would not be able to sleep one wink.

It was bright sunlight of a wintry sun when I woke up. And right away my husband asked, "You were whimpering, did you have a nightmare last night?" Then I remembered I did have a dream of a rhino chasing me and I could not for my life run! No wonder I had whimpered, anybody would, I thought to myself crossly. My husband chuckled, "You have not got over your rhino phobia yet! This reminded me of a very amusing incident which had occurred at Daporijo and Gusar.

Only last November, we had gone to Daporijo on tour and were staying with Prafulla Phukan, Assistant Political

Officer, Daporijo, a very ardent angler and a keen *shikari*. Subansiri at the Daporijo bend is full of *mahseer* and hill trouts while the jungles are full of barking deer, jungle fowl and wild boar. Phukan used to close the shop at 12 noon, pick up his fishing rod, shoulder his rifle and away he would go into the heart of the jungle to bring home some booty, like the prehistoric caveman, the only difference being that for caveman it was his daily bread, for Prafulla his dearly loved hobby and love for meat. Anyway, the showman also asked us to accompany him on such expeditions and my husband would enthusiastically agree (no mean shot himself). But I extracted a solemn promise from both that if they wanted me to come it would have to be fishing yes, jungle fowl yes, maybe a barking deer or two yes, but certainly not, repeat not, the wild boar! All agreed, we set out amidst the bamboo groves and it turned out to be a lovely excursion, admiring the beauty of nature with oohs and aahs and Prafulla's eyes darting from here and there, to pointing out the favourite wild boar haunts and, for my benefit mainly I suppose, demonstrating how to act if one is chased by a wild boar, and how the wild boar attacks only in a straight line. So one should run in zigzag course. On and on he went at length little realising the effect the talk was having on me. To me a moment before the bamboo groves were heavenly, and now they were sinister shadowy affairs where hundreds of wild boars were ready to attack! I became personification of silence and furtive looks.

We enjoyed ourselves hugely. My husband and Prafulla shot wild fowl a piece and then we resorted to fishing. Phukan being a seasoned angler, waded down far into the river where he caught two big-sized *mahseers* and a couple of hill trouts, whereas we lesser guys were content to remain on the bank itself watching the fun and indulging in amateurish attempts. I confess I gave up in one single attempt, but my husband stuck to it with same grim determination as he would to any tricky problematic

file. He kept throwing the line in the river just to find it had landed only a few feet behind him on the sand. Undaunted he decided to do a complete turnabout so as to face the sand instead of the river and threw the line over his right shoulder—a novel way but he did land the line in the river and caught a fish too!

Then on the way to Gusar, across the Subansri river, through a very thick darkish forest and going along a narrow jungle path, Habung, the Apatani vaccinator who always acted as the path-finder (even though) I always led any party to regulate the speed with my steps) suddenly balked and ran backwards into the clearing speechless! The thought of wild boar still planted in my mind, I also bolted backwards running zigzag as I never had run in my life! It was only a cobra that Habung had spotted; but to my husband's amusement, who was going to wait to check out what caused the hundred metre sprint!

23 January 1956

To Daporijo by air — Repacking porter loads

So we arrived at Daporijo, the lovely place with mild climate. Unlike the deserted Rowriah airfield, I felt at home with congenial NEFA-like friendliness in all round ambience as soon as the sortie had landed. Got busy repacking the loads, as from here it was all trekking on foot till return of the expedition. Krish was leaving ahead on the morrow so as to reach Taliha, the last administrative centre before the Tibetan border, before 26 January, the Republic Day, when he was to meet and address the village headmen of the entire Tagin region. I had to wait for one baggage sortie on the 24th to similarly prepare porter loads by splitting the entire baggage. George Verghese, the journalist, arrived accompanied by the Political Officer to finally bid farewell to the expedition. I remained very busy repacking load for portorage helped by Nguri Tem, the Dafla interpreter and his wife, Yogum,

who both had to share my room in the *basha*, as the other had to be vacated by them somewhat unceremoniously by the sudden arrival of the Political Officer.

25 January 1956

Daporijo-Sippi Camp, 16 miles — Gloomy birthday

Started marching for Taliha with ideas surging on in my mind not only for what lay ahead on this fortuitous mission but also of my own birthday today with no one to wish me! As usual, the porters were not sufficient to carry all loads. Assam Rifles' Wireless Detachment boys took their own time and some porters had to be given to them. Track was quite good, almost flat, and yet N. K. Sri Chand, the unseasoned Wireless Mechanic was slipping over and almost fell in the gorge from over the bamboo bridge in canvas shoes. Went ahead of the line of porters till only three were left over. For Sri Chand it was his first trip walking in this region which he regarded as inhospitable for him.

I felt almost choked by the gloomy dark overhanging bamboo groves all along over us. Sun was out but not a single ray penetrating through. Beautiful blue river though. Saw some wild ducks and green pigeons. Nguri Tem and his wife came up and joined me at the Sille camp where we were to stop. It was a nice spot under the shelter of a mountain as it were. Porters were far behind. Had lunch. Did not know what to do. Got a puppy to play with. People started arriving in twos-threes. Tem's wife looked tired. Women passing flocked around her and me and she proudly put on her ornaments to show off. Had bath, sat down with the porters, carried on conversation. Saw a Galong girl who looked the youngest and prettiest among them, but married at a price of two mithuns. Had a session of sing-song with them. Wander Rynjah, Assistant Political Officer, also going to Taliha to relieve Khuma arrived meanwhile.

I spent the evening near the fire chitchatting. Had early dinner and then off to bed after scribbling this diary. Tomorrow I would see my husband. I heard vague rumours earlier that Mara Tagins were preparing to fight with us.

26 January 1956

Sanju Baby's birthday — Sipi to Taliha — Confusion

Sanjeev, our son's first birthday and of course, the Republic Day. I missed the baby who had been left behind under the care of my mother at Meerut. Could not sleep last night due to Nguri Tem and his wife intermittently smoking *biris*. I also felt cold. Got ready to move on by 7.30. As I came out of the hut I saw utter confusion concerning loads and porters who in their high-toned voices kept protesting excitedly. And so the porter parade and counting of loads — somehow they did not really tally. Loads rechecked, porters recounting also did not help. Assam Rifles' Wireless boys who had left earlier with their loads were blamed for pinching two extra porters who always looked forward to going light. Habung ran to catch them up. In between all this discussion a flight of wild ducks landed gracefully in the placid river waters. I got impatient and told them to somehow patch up and then left along with Norbhu, Yogum (Tem's wife) and one (Auxiliary Service Corps) porter. After crossing the rickety bamboo suspension bridge which swayed with every motion, we embarked upon a horrid slippery non-descript path for over one hour up the hill. There was, in fact, no path except for dents cut two inches deep on the face of an almost vertical hill — so slippery we could not keep balance. Saw some porters even taking river route and shouted to find out whether we were on the right track. We were taking an old abandoned route till I came down to the river level and went in comfort happy to escape the horridness. But happiness was only short-lived. The track became treacherous beyond words and I had never before seen a

path so wet and slippery in winter. I had a good slip, fell clutching at the air. Yogum hastening to help slipped over me. The ASC porter coming behind held on to a jutting rock to help her who in turn helped me. We had not got over it when Tem, who got us up there enjoying the fun, also slipped over and fell on a rock and cut himself badly holding the gun. We might have gone down hundred yards more when down came Norbu holding the tiffin carrier, all too soon skating down to know what had happened. That was the longest distance covered in the one second. It was painful to watch the way we were coming down the slope, no bashful bride would have walked better!

We were keeping eyes open not only for nature's beauties but also for runaway porters. I met the Assam Rifles' porters on a lovely gentle slope digging away for their lives, for sweet potatoes. Checked for load/porter ratio and found two extras engaged by them. Told them to wait for the rest of the porters to level up the loads. We marched on and on. No camp in sight, awful road again. Somehow we did reach but took more time to do these nine miles. Those nine miles became nineteen miles for us all. It was not very cheering to know on top of that that our tent had been left behind in Daporijo. Poor ASC porter started making a small plantain-leaf tent for me. He was soon joined by other ASC men also. And we sat down with Yogum for our Dalfa lunch. It had been warmed and I took it inside to have it by myself. I heard somebody laughing to see Sri Chand walking limpingly with perspiration flooding his face and cursing the road to high heaven. He swore the road was not nine miles but 25 miles. But they were cheerful after some time. The rest of the party arrived with Assistant Political Officer Rynjah. There was unanimous opinion that the track was much longer than nine miles. How we judged the distance with our own fatigue! They had hardly sat down when Norbu came with face as big as lamp-post saying somebody had been

meddling with our loads. Yesterday he had three *Dalda* tins, this morning two and only one left now. Rice was also less. Too little indeed was left in the bag and only one *Dalda* tin when went over to count and check. He added another complaint by saying some other people's load had been found in our kitchen load. This time Lalzuala, the Upper Division Assistant, came to the rescue of the porters and said he took out an article from some and added it to another. So we searched for the rice bag which contained at least our one month, ration. We could not locate it. Porter parade plus load counting proved useless till we got so confused that we left it for the next morning. Poor Zuala kept at it, in spite of my telling him not to bother. Meanwhile Norbu saw one unassuming stray load lying by itself. He opened it to have a look and the way his face broke into smiles I knew we had got it.

After a little while we all settled down and started discussing our forward march, when one Tagin boy brought a letter from my husband wishing me and the the baby (at Meerut) a happy birthday. He had sent wireless telegraphic message to Taliha.

Though somewhat frail in health, he was brisk and agile, talkative and good company. My husband himself a man of inquiry, had only to place the needle on, and Tamik, whom my husband addressed as Gomik (rules of naming had it that the last letter of the father's name as invariably the first of the son's name) would start off reminiscing about his escapades. Being the first Galong to pass Matric in an Assam school, among his tribe, Tamik had his own style of rhetoric. "The Air Force flyers are not to be trusted, sir. We shall achieve on foot what they cannot by flying; they are unnecessary bluffers," he pronounced his judgement when my husband told him that the Air Force briefing told him there was no dropping zone beyond Taliha according to Wing Commander Purshottam's recce.

Krish confirmed my impression that the Tagins of

lower Sippi valley area and the upper Galongs were the most sickly and ill-clothed people, emaciated and ill-fed during the winters, sore bodies patched all over with ghastly ringworms. Our porters had been halting from time to time digging in for sweet potatoes and collecting jungle green vegetable wild leaves called *yegu* and *dzoko*.

Krish revealed his entire plan and strategy to Tamik while marching as otherwise there was no time available earlier. After discussing several aspects of it, he warned Tamik either not to beat anyone with his stick or else to surrender the same to him. Tamik promised that association with Gandhiji had made him non-violent. "Sir, in tribal areas, violence has a meaning which means death." "In that case you please do not use your non-violent symbol also," was Krish's quick rejoinder. Tamik then vehemently denied any necessity of taking Assam Rifles escort with us. There was no need to extend the armed hand of friendship." Sir, I and you alone can go to the Tagin country, explored or unexplored, and make them realise they are Indians — even if they kill us and if we die, it will happen in the cause of our Indian empire extending to the Mac Mahon Line. "Man was born naked and will die naked!" was the last message delivered by the spirited Galong. And so my husband gave hm the title of Frontier Gandhi (East). Came out Tamik, "Sir, you had easier time with the British than I, Mahatama Gandhi and Panditji had!"

Republic Day at Taliha had a late start. Tribal people up early with the dawn took time reaching Taliha but the gathering swelled up about the time of the community *barakhana*. Exhibition gave the necessary cultural insight—their dresses, articles, equipment, etc, and Krish made good the opportunity to meet and joke with the Gams hailing from around Taliha and some neighboring areas, his way of gaining familiarity with their wit and charm. No Tagins came from beyond Nalo though invitation had been sent to all. Krish, therefore, decided that in addition

to the advance party he had planned, he would also send a party of emissaries to go right up to Upper Mara to spread the message of peace and the friendly nature of our exploration.

He spoke to about 2,000 Tagins at the community lunch time — not too bad a gathering. He told them Tagins were the people with the blessings of Ab Tani and Nyido (the ancestors). They all should forget the foul episode of Achingmori massacre and talk only about their future prosperity. He and his wife had come to them together not to fight but to convince we trusted them and had no evil intentions. We were going right up to Limeking and Taksing and would also go to Migyithun if they desired us to and would make friends with the lost brothers and sisters of this country who had lost contact with the others. He told them that Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi wanted all hill people also to progress and prosper and have plenty to eat and buy and that peace should prevail without any fear of each other. He appealed to provide porters to help the programme with the blessings of our common ancestor, Ab Tani.

Importantly he asked them also to tell and assure everybody that he was not going with his wife to catch them, punish them to burn their houses or loot their property, not even to settle cases among themselves and that his, on behalf of the Government, was a different mission to find out what they needed or to hear what they had to say. It just so happened that there happened to be a *Dolo* (pilgrimage) and, if possible, we would attend that also.

They spoke nothing, made no false promises, on behalf of Maras but merely listened and agreed to help according to their capacity. "Why should we not help you if you have to help to help us?" was the rhetorical question they posed and answered when Krish asked them what they had to tell him.

The next day — and resuming my diary for 27th — Krish had asked all Gams to stay back for the night as he

wanted to more intimately talk to them to chalk out the details of the tour, thus briefing as frankly and openly as possible. Early morning we lit a fire engulfed in the thick fog and started the meeting. It was now that Krish disclosed to the community of headmen (*Gams*) the thrust of our expedition. The Chinese professed friendship with India so far, but we shall have to be ready to thwart any evil design on their part. Krish was cautious not to inject an overdose of it to avoid panic.

It was decided that interpreter Angu Tashi and Gam Riga Nyade would constitute the emissary party with *parwanas* to show they had Government authority to speak whatever they had to say. They were fully briefed to emphasise the following special features of this exploration:

- a. Object was exploratory to study their problems, to help them out unless they did not want to and not to burden them with administrative demands. And, therefore, no Assam Rifles force was accompanying.
- b. No cases were to be settled and none should come for cases.
- c. Political presents to both poor and rich will be given as a token of friendship and goodwill.
- d. Peace must be maintained by all villagers and as we were not to harm them, they should also not try to harm or hinder the party.
- e. People must not run away but come to meet us. Payment will be made even for a blade of grass if taken from anyone. We were coming only to give them, not to ask anything from them except porters.
- f. Camps should be prepared and tracks improved — all on immediate payment.
- g. Mem Saheb was coming to meet and talk to the women and know their problems.
- h. We are all sons of the common ancestor Ab Tani. We are, therefore, not Americans, nor Kundens (Chinese communists) but same as Tagins.

- i. We want to fight none and are friendly both with Nime (Tibetans) and Kundens (Chinese communists) but if anyone harmed Tagins in future, we will take up the cause of our brother Tagins. Yet we shall not interfere with customs, traditions, dress, religion but would rather promote these.
- j. We will not interfere with trade with Tibet or contacts with them.

They were to go fast and come back fast to report to Krish halfway. Issued with blankets, we bade them god-speed.

Another advance party was then to leave on 29th January with the same message. They were to muster up people for portering of loads, construction of camps and selecting of sites and improvement of tracks which the Gams had warned were in very bad condition.

We chalked out the tour programme and stages for a fourteen-day journey to Limeking which was Mara Tabe's village. Allowing a few days, rest we hoped to reach Limeking between 20th and 25th February.

Mali Rapu and Iso Pekho, the two east bank Gams of Mali and Balo villages, were chosen to accompany us. Rapu is a stalwart, strong and quiet personality on whom my husband thought of placing his trust. Tarik of Konyak village and Chingdir Chade of Dupek were to accompany us as Sardars. Pekho was asked to go to Eba village on the east bank to ask Eba Topu, the giant chief among the powerful clans, to come and meet us en route.

Assistant Political Officer, K. T. Khuma, an old hand in Tribal Administration, left on 28th relieved by another stalwart — Wander Rynjah, Assistant Political Officer. The emissary party also left the same morning. Later in the evening Krish gathered together all officers and personnel accompanying us. Wander Rynjah, Jamadar Saheb Gobardhan Rai and other staff of Taliha attended. A special code of conduct and discipline was given out for strict compliance by all concerned. He made it clear that

one of the most important things was that nobody was allowed to use force or misbehave in dealing with Tagins and none in any circumstances, other than to defend oneself, must hit and strike anyone. Even a pet dog could bark back if hit and a tribal is a self-respecting person. All unfortunate incidents in the past were due to such lapses and that this was the reason not to take the Assam Rifles in this trip. Political Jamadar Tato Riba, Vaccinator-cum-Medical Orderly Habung Habung and Political Interpreter Nguri Tem belonged to the category who were already well versed with the rules of the game laid down by Krish. Nguri Tem had translated to the tribal people Krish's speeches so often on long tours that he used to be dubbed as 'His Master's Voice'. Tem would only have to grasp the frequency of topic and he would, on his own heat, then rattle off the entire speech without Krish having to go sentence by sentence. He is a Nisi (Dafla), Habung an intelligent Apatani and Tato a Galong. The last one had also accompanied Capt. Thukral of the Survey of India party.

The next day brought an important visitor, Baki Tadi, whose dignified bearing and charming smile won over Krish. It was love at first sight. He gave him lots of first-hand information about our tour. He was rather a good intelligent speaker. He said Tabe, Gam of Limeking, was scared of coming to Taliha because of the Chinese and Tibetans. People en route were not unfriendly but they did not know how to treat a *migom* (officer) as they had not met any. Capt. Thukral had reached only up to Chekhe in 1952, only about 5 days' march away. Giving his own eye-witness version of the Thukral episode, he said he was shot at by a poisoned arrow which, in fact, was not shot at him but at Bini Dachak, the Political Interpreter accompanying him. The accident occurred as a reprisal to kill Bini Dachak (Miri tribe) who stabbed a villager just because the latter, while lighting his pipe, inadvertently scattered hot embers on the coat of the interpreter. The villager swore to take his

life as he was never even slapped by his parents. The villagers were later genuinely regretful for Thukral's injury, he said.

Baki Tadi also gave information about the coming *Helu* (Migyithun pilgrimage) and Na villagers. He said the Tibetan Government paid heavy price to the Mara and other Tagins so that they did not obstruct passage along the route of pilgrims and harass them. These Mara Tagins did a lot of trading with them on barter system. Dyes, skins, cane and rice were exchanged for swords, salt, beads and woollen blankets. Mara Tagins purchased rice from Mayu (lower) Tagins to sell it off. On their side, Tibetans alone reserved the right to sell to Tibetan Government or others in Tibetan *dzongs*. Tabe was called to Helu for preparation of tracks and also to negotiate for gifts. He may have returned by the time we reached up. Nime Deba had sent word to Tabe that this year our party should not go to Migyithun or Mara as the Chinese were also not coming. They think we were Americans and will fight with Kundens (Chinese communists). Tabe was anxious to remain neutral.

My husband told Tadi, whom he chose as an emissary, all about our being one with them. As all of us were sons of Ab Tani, B. S. Saheb (Base Superintendent) also being Galong, how we all could be Americans?

Krish asked Tadi to explain to Tabe how Habung, an Apatani, Tem, a Dalfa, and Tamik, a Galong, and we who spoke the same Hindi could be Americans. And if Tagins were not Americans, could we be? They should not be scared of Tibetan conflicts with the Chinese and even if we fought we would again be friends. Indian Government did not like to fight with anyone. And then just to tease and test Tadi, Krish asked as to whom he would prefer. Out came the reply "Nipaks (Indians)" and out came also the explanation forthwith "because Nipaks have aeroplanes that can drop rice and blankets for us." And at that he was awarded with farewell presents of rice, blanket and a

mug. Dui Tashi, another interpreter, got similar briefing and wished god-speed.

It always intrigued us to hear all distorted (as these sounded to us) meanings attached to these words. Even when in 1951, Bob Khating, the then A.P.O., established administration in Tawang, and Krish was Indian Trade Agent in Gyantse, Tibet, he was told by Tibetans that Americans had come to Tawang! And now the Tagins had picked up the same story of Americans coming to Mara and Migythun.

We busied ourselves with inspecting our snow clothings. My sleeping bag I found was just enough for me to get in. In addition to bags we had one pair of gloves, one pair of goggles, one warm baniyan, a pair of pyjamas and also one windproof jacket. I had to part with mine as it was too big for me. We were now all set as though to conquer the highest peak left over by others! In the evening we had a welcome-cum-farewell party for the incoming Wander Rynjah and the outgoing Khuma. In this Krish decorated ASC Jeet Bahadur who received Governor's commendation Certificate for doing outstanding load carrying and camp making duties during their tours of western Subansiri area including Nyapin and Mengyo in company with Krish, earlier in 1954.

29 January 1956

I became Cypher Assistant — Halt at Taliha

The day started with rain pouring down in sheets. Tarpaulins had to be hurriedly put on loads. We had hardly begun our breakfast when Gams of our party started coming in. First came Iso Pekho, a smart looking man with a shabby felt hat which he has also used in place of his hankie to wipe face. His wife and two sisters followed him at a distance. These girls had a chic way of cutting their hair with *daos* and wore red caps perched jauntily on their heads unlike other tribes. They wore long

strings of blue and white beads in their neck. Ear lobes were distended in the usual form but they wore different earrings than Daflas and Apatanis. They supported it with a string which went over their head. Pekho gave me an impression of a man in perpetual hurry. He walked in hurry, talked in hurry and even smoked in short hurried jerky puffs. His wife had lodged a complaint against him for being unfaithful. She was rather a tired looking woman compared to his bright-eyed sisters. Pekho had come back from Eba with the return message from Eba Topu that although he would not be able to come due to *puya* being performed in his house, he would meet us on the way. A very powerful Gam of the east bank, it was good augury that he had promised all assistance to us. Naik Sri Chand made a bid to go back telling Krish he and his forefathers had never negotiated a terrain like this. But Krish, realising we could land up in real plight without a wireless mechanic at hand, pulled him up and ordered that he would have to march with the column. He had been borrowed from the Army.

We were busy talking to them when an A/R Messenger brought a W/T to Krish whose face clouded up. It was from ADGA (Adviser to the Governor) and another from the Political Officer saying that all his cypher messages were found corrupt. Lalzuala who had only learnt the code the other day had obviously used the wrong key. All messages had to be redone. So in desperation Krish asked me to help as he was too much tied up to spare time. And now I had become his cypher assistant. We divided the work: I encyphering and decyphering and Zuala typing. Still raining in the night. We were using our sleeping bags for trial.

30 January 1956

Bereavement of Wander Rynjah

Krish, I and Rynjah went out in the morning to inspect the new site for Taliha Administrative Centre which Krish was

to approve if found suitable. On return we found porters starting to pour in for the impending expedition. I had had a bad sleep in the sleeping bag which I decided to dispense with. When I got up from my afternoon rest, my husband called me aside and said, "There is bad news for Rynjah, his mother died of heart failure." He had not broken the news to him and so he went into his *basha* to inform and comfort him. I felt very bad as Rynjah had been in Taliha only a couple of days. We continued to be busy, I with supervision of load tying and Krish with the Gams.

He was anxious to make the best of his Taliha halt to get to know the feel of Tagin tribe and to familiarise with them.

Mali Rapu arrived back. A tall impressive man of quiet dignity who took a passive part in the never-to-be-forgotten Achingmori massacre. He was also accompanying us with Eso Pekho. Today the advance party had left.

B. S. Tamik Dabi who had gone to Dinekoli Administrative Centre to bring one more Political Interpreter returned with Dui Gobu who came to see Krish with his sister who was married to Agi Radeb, a striking personality, and was another cause of Achingmori massacre episode. I decided to call this woman again the next morning in order to probe into the Achingmori episode from the human angle as she happened to be the wife of Agi Radeb, the main ring leader of Tagins who perpetrated the massacre.

31 January 1956

Woman's love unearthed as cause of Achingmori massacre.

The story I unearthed from Dui Gobu's sister was somewhat at variance with the blown up uncharitable version that it was a revolt against the Government. The real cause was an inter-tribal rivalry over a woman.

Achingmori massacre (October 1953) was overblown in rhetoric as a tribal rebellion against the Assam Rifles and

the Government of India at large, primarily because Major R. D. Singh and about 27 Assam Rifles men got somehow unwittingly involved in an inter-tribal adversary relationship, the Galong of the east bank (Siang District) and the Tagins of the west bank (Subansiri Dist) over a young woman (Galong) fallen into a love relationship with Agi Radeb, a handsome Tagin chief who staked all his riches to keep her as his wife. If A/Rs had not been the victims along with another about 20 members of staff headed by Base Superintendent Barua, the love story would perhaps have become a legend in democratic and secular love episodes. It is extremely doubtful whether Agi Radeb and other five men who were arrested, tried and sentenced, ever even in dream, could have imagined the magnitude of the crime and the far-reaching implications of what he had seen as traditional tribal revenge justified in their own law of jurisprudence. Since none survived, it was impossible to say how much the touring party was aware that, perhaps inadvertently, they had carried with them elements who took advantage of their umbrella to set off the Tagin resentment.

It is here that we had chosen to study and screen each and every tribal leader who was to accompany us on this **expedition** and to avoid controversial and dubious **characters**. To go without Assam Rifles was one such **cautionary** decision in an inflammatory ruling ethos and suspicion.

It did not seem to have been motivated by defiance of the Government, though the end result may have been a mixture of repentance and resentment. The young woman had initially been married to a very young boy. So she left him and went to stay with Agi Radeb who kept her as a wife. A year later she gave birth to a daughter. Now her former husband's people wanted her to come back. Agi Radeb was prepared to pay her price in mithuns. But they would not agree. He doubled the price and later even trebled the price in mithuns but in vain. One day the

woman with her ten-day-old child was carried away by force to her former husband's house. A Government Political interpreter, Taluk Rane, was the main force behind her kidnapping, apparently using his official position and Agi Radeb swore to kill him in retaliation and revenge.

When the party of Maj. R. D. Singh approached Achingmori, this interpreter, Taluk Rane, who was in the party, was attacked together with his supporters and friends and captured. In the night he somehow loosened his bonds and fled but his friends were chopped to pieces in the morning. This interpreter was still alive and the poor girl was living with her brother, Dui Gobu (on the date of the diary), as she cannot go to Agi Radeb (in jail) and did not want to go to her former husband. Radeb was still prepared to pay treble the price. The case was still undecided.

Dui Gobu helped the Government in catching the ring leaders. He said he had warned the late Maj. R. D. Singh of the intentions of the Tagins, but nobody believed him. He told them not to proceed to the prepared camp. Even if they went there they should go with all the caution and not to allow any Tagin within the perimeter as they would certainly be attacked. He swore to kill a mithun to prove his bona fides and genuineness (killing a mithun to swear or to enter into an agreement or to enter into a treaty with another tribe is a ritual and indicated the solemnity of bond of alliance or friendship) but it went unheeded and ignored by all including Political Jamadar Gidam (who apparently perhaps showed overconfidence in A/R cover). Gidam, a Galong, was perhaps the marked out target, possibly considered the source of Government strength protecting the kidnappers. Result — complete massacre of innocent people. It so happened that the camp was pitched in a place called Achingmori, a riverside clearing, which was a good place for ambush with hardly an escape outlet, having a steep mountain behind. In spite of repeated warning given to Maj. R. D. Singh (one cannot blame him

also, for in these areas officers generally placed themselves completely at the mercy of Political Interpreters) he decided to camp there. Not only so, he put himself in a tight spot for ambush by Tagins. On reaching the camp, as usual, the boys put themselves on working duty — having deposited rifles in a pile-arms position, cutting wood for cooking and building purposes, collecting leaves for cushioning, constructing latrine, getting water from the water point, etc. Only two sentries kept guard over the arms pile.

During all this time the Tagins silently surrounded the party well concealed in jungle growth. First they lost their nerves at the sight of armed sentries and the arms pile till one young man who apparently had no grievance against anybody, came forward and said, "I will do it". He entered the perimeter and asked the sentry for *aloo* (salt). The sentry asked him to scam but Maj. R. D. Singh from a distance called out to him not to scold but to let him have some salt. The moment the sentry turned around to listen, out came the young man's *dao* to slash the sentry's head. After that the other sentry was overpowered and killed. All others were similarly dealt with, though a few of them (tribal porters) fled into the jungle to hide. But all the sepoy, Base Superintendent Barua, ASC and civilian staff (total 46 including 27 A/R men) were brutally murdered and so was Gidam, the person allegedly responsible. Maj. Singh first managed to escape but was chased and caught near the river and hacked to pieces. Since none escaped, none remained to give authentic evidence as to the story behind this massacre. What, if anything, was behind their assault on A/R men will remain a mystery over which one could conjecture according to one's own light. The most important and correct story and its background would have come out from Barua who was an officer of the civil administration but was also killed. Revenge is a time honoured practice in Tagin land but whether the offence of crime was that serious or whether the situation so precipitated that all got scrambled in a hand-to-hand fight would be anybody's guess.

In spite of all this, somehow we could not blame the then unadministered Tagins entirely. In their code of jurisprudence there was only one way of dealing with the wrong done and that in most cases was the law of the sword. What shocked me was the cruelty of the young man who came out of the blue with courage and murdered the sentry whom he had not seen before.

Anyhow after the event the Indian Government treated this area almost as a war zone and sent troops to catch the ringleaders. But the only thing they could find were abandoned houses, chickens and pigs, which of course were slaughtered, and houses burnt. Nobody could arrest the ringleaders immediately till with the help of promises and threats a few of them were caught. And once the link broke, one by one they were arrested except Agi Radeb himself who was elusive like 'spirits', till Maj. P. N. Kaul, Political Officer, sent him a message to come and see him with assurance for safety, in peace. He did come and put his grievance against certain people.

Dui Gobu was the person who helped B. S. Tamik Dabi the most. He did not understand Hindi or Assamese. All the same he too was admitted into the trusted circle by Krish with a token gift of a blanket. And so our party was now complete.

That evening we called on Wander Rynjah to come for a drink so as to share his grief, neutralise it and help him to come out of it. He was to be our Base Commander, as it were, who would send us all the succour in logistics as well as be our nearest, reliable partner even without being in the assault group.

1 February 1956

*Taliha to Kodam — I fell 20 ft. down on the very first day
— A providential escape.*

Got up early morning listening to almost like a bazaar being held outside. Peeped out and saw a sea of heads in

the small flat courtyard of Taliha. Porters everywhere and the way they pounced upon the loads was similar to a hawk pouncing upon its prey. With great difficulty they were joined by Iso Pekho, Mali Rapu and Tarik who armed with sticks chased them out into forming a line. It is no laughing matter to control more than about three hundred of them who had only one object in their mind, that is to grab somehow the lightest of the loads. Added to this bedlam was the constant bleat of a goat. It proved too much for me, so I went out to chase it. But to my surprise and right in front of my eyes it gave birth to a kid. Within a second all the porters — loads or no loads — ran helter-skelter to watch the newborn kid. Every effort to keep on their feet in that melee was accompanied by shouts and exclamations of *Ole* from the crowd. Soon they were again chased back to their respective places with the help of tongues and sticks. So now we had another shrill *Me-Me* added on as a token of appreciation of the world in general from the baby kid.

One by one they were now allowed to pick up loads and leave. One hefty man elbowed out two lesser individuals and charted at what he thought was the lightest — a tent — but the look of supreme disgust on his face as he tried to lift it proved that all that glitters is not gold. It was the rain-soaked tent. Actually in the end we had to hire two porters to carry it by turns. Thank God all of them left in an hour's time with Mali Rapu and Iso Pekho and we ready to march. Our party consisted of my husband as the leader, myself Dr. Shashanka Bannerji, Base Superintendent Tamik Dabi, U.D.A. Lalzuala, Bimpak, the Interpreter, our two personal servants, Lama and Norbu Sherpa, doctor's peon, Tamik's peon Kojub and four ASCs. A very late start about 10.30 a.m. but our next camp was only 6 miles away. So with all the good wishes from everybody we at last launched forth on our long expedition. Familiarisation in Taliha had made us wiser that it was not exactly a plunge in the dark. But within a

few minutes of the start Norbu came closer to whisper that the crowd which saw us off was saying that we shall never return again as Tagins were only waiting for us for revenge, and that this time they planned to take asylum with Chinese.

Thoughts flashed through my mind like a kaleidoscope as I looked at the horizon and saw nothing but the haze of blue mountains wrapped in fold after fold, rising taller and taller like an amphitheatre — the sight of which had made Wing Commander Dhattaigara (who had flown over) explode before Krish, “It is a real hell of a terrain. Why are you risking lives?”

So this was the country never visited by or known to anyone living outside that pocket — be it the Chinese or the British, and which had intrigued writers and explorers who were obliged to turn back with fears of hostility and inaccessibility — pocket of India known little in India. The only exceptions were the Sikh gurus and pilgrims who still have their presence in forward areas. I was not complacent but not too sure with so many imponderables ahead. One grave handicap was far too many tasks loaded on us with rather limited time we had at our disposal. Krish loved it all with his Army background, and the challenges of all sorts beckoned and dared at him. But I . . . And just then as if he could read my thoughts he said, “You believe in omens — that goat delivery can only be classed among the good ones.” He said that the thick growth of *tali* jungle through which we were passing was responsible for the name Taliha (place of *tali*). *Tali* is a medium-sized banana-like tree of which leaves are of no significance but the porous shoots and soft stems are eaten raw as well as cooked by those suffering from hunger or thirst enjoy it.

Rain had made the slope very slippery. On the opposite bank of the Subansiri there were the villages of Duchok, Dupek and Riga. At one particular place we had to pause as the going was very tricky for the accompanying porters to pass one by one. Kojub in front of me had hardly

descended down the slippery log with notches cut in it for the foothold when I knelt down to negotiate a rock too big for my stride and threw my weight by holding a root sticking out near the ladder — to my utter dismay the root came out in my hand and there was nothing else to hold me back from falling. I must have somersaulted four-five times bumping my head and body against the stones and bushes ultimately landing 20 ft. below, luckily not falling in the gushing river another about 30 ft. below. I don't know how my husband rushed down that confounded ladder and how Kojub, whom by the way I had passed by on my way, covered the rest of the distance screaming like a wounded hen. He was naturally the first one to reach and in his agitated state of mind mistook my leg to be my hand and tried to lift me by that while I was trying to disengage myself from my hat strap. My husband reached in time to convince Kojub of his mistaken identity and help me on my feet. The look of horror on everyone's face and the way they kept on feeling for my 'crushed' bones and the way they kept on asking if I was hurt made me laugh. The fall had stunned me to a certain extent and for some time I could not hear from the roar of the waterfall. But I kept repeating I was all right, only a little shaken. Then all of a sudden I heard the sound of rapids in the Korenim river below, which I mistook for rain at that time and asked Krish, "Raining"? He looked so perturbed at that question that I knew what he was thinking — injury to the brain but was consoled when I assured him of my momentary loss of hearing. Since the riverside was to be our place for halt for lunch only 30 feet down, I managed to walk and sit down there. Dr. Bannerji gave me a thorough examination asking me question after question. Krish had obviously asked him whether I was fit to continue or should we get back to Taliha. I heard him say she herself never would admit she should go back to Taliha. I know he suspected concussion and possibly a bone crack. While lunching on the bank of the Nimu Kore, I rested for a while when

porters were sharpening their daos on the stones. Meantime I myself decided not to back out and to continue marching.

We passed Taliha-Dinakoli newly constructed bridge over the Subansiri river. This time nobody trusted me and the way Kojub watched every footstep made me think of a doting mother watching the first walk of her child. On the way we could see on the opposite bank the small slopy clearing called Achingmori (mori means a flat space), the scene of the massacre of R. D. Singh's party just over three years ago. It had now overgrown with bushes and looked sinister on the riverside down below. On reaching the village outskirts we were met by *Gaonbura* Kodak Buish of Kodak village who was standing with a jar of *oppo* (*oppo* or *apong* is the rice beer) to welcome us. He begged to be excused for not meeting us halfway as he himself was conducting of betrothal ceremony for his son. In this *singpa oiyu* (spirit) was to be propitiated by puja in their own tribal religious ceremony. He was fully dressed up in his priest's attire which consisted of a peculiar looking head ornament tied with a needle and a brass chain called *nalio dumpky*. After refreshing ourselves with *oppo* we scrambled down the slopes into a clearing—our camp. The first thing that struck us were our porters squatting in two beautiful rows with loads in front waiting for instructions. Such good behaviour was unexpected. Tamik told them to make a dump. They were now free to line up with open palms in a gesture to expect something from us.

After tea we went to see the village where Capt. Thukral had had the mishap of being shot by the arrow. Sat around the hearth in G. B.'s house, each hearth to wife who prepared her own *oppo* and meal separately for her children.

Oppo is beer made from rice or millet in every tribal house in the entire North-East, nay the entire tribal world of India and any other country. In Arunachal it may go by the name *oppo*, *apong*, in Tibet is called *chang*, in Nagaland *Zuu*, *Roi* or *Madhu* and so on. It has also its own varieties — the most refined called *Rohi* is perhaps the one made in

Manipur by Kabui or Zeliang Nagas. I learnt the art of brewing refined Rohi at Imphal from a Kabui household *mazdoor* who was an expert. With practice I improved upon it so much that we served it once to J. M. Raina (Chief Commissioner) and his wife Vimla Raina and some Delhi guests in champagne glasses. No one ever doubted it to be anything other than champagne. It became quite popular and was ordered for special occasions when guests from Delhi turned up.

A tribal hearth in the house (bamboo made) was his sitting room-cum-cook house where the family and their guests thronged around, squatted and spat into the fire (in tribal fashion) and of course sipped hot *oppo*. The longer it was kept for brewing the stronger it became. It is always and will remain the *sine qua non* of tribal hospitality. It is commonly used in pujas for marriage rituals, for concluding treaties or agreements and could be taken as accepting friendship or denoting pleasure in a particular situation, depending whether one accepted it or declined it. Hence the official advice to frontier officers to always accept it when offered howsoever little one imbibed.

All the daughters of this *Gaonbura* were married to Government interpreters and Krish pulled a joke about the various Government benefits to them, one of them being the availability of eligible husbands from Government workers. The G. B. agreed about this and other benefits and asked that the Migum (officer) Saheb should explain all these to people ahead as they did not know anything. We then came back to the camp.

Gams of Doyum village (next stage) arrived to escort us. Gifts and presents were given to all concerned including those women with children who wanted to stay the night. Resting after dinner, Krish, the doctor and all well-wishers came over to ask me about my possible injuries. Dr. Banerji diagnosed sprained elbow and bruised shin, back, arms and one knee. My nerves were still shaky. In a moment of weakness I told them that I had not yet got over it and felt

the mental shock I had been carrying. The doctor gave me now the necessary sedatives and said we could stay on for another day and night if I felt so.

2 February 1956

Kodak to Doyum — Popular reception encouraging — I loved meeting women

Porters were ready before day break. Noise they made was deafening. *Sardars* and *Gams* armed with sticks and lashing tongues had to stand guard before the loads could be torn apart by the tug of war in their snatching and sorting. We started marching on fairly level though slippery track. Kodak people had told us that Doyum people had not improved their track but now Doyum men said Kodak and Nalo (village ahead) village portions were badly repaired.

From today we embarked upon a country on the west bank hitherto not visited by any officers of the administration or the Asam Rifles. The east bank had, however, been travelled by Kukri column during OPMOP (operations carried out in the wake of Achingmori massacre) which marched up the Hika route via Mechuka. Before we descended to the New river, we again had a view of the clearing called Achingmori just above the Subansiri bed. We were met by a few Tagins en route, among whom one old lady especially seemed to show concern for me. Inquisitively she stopped my husband and asked, "Why is Saheb taking Mem Saheb? The track is too bad and worse is yet to come." My husband who had a knack of wickedly joking with old women shot forth, "Because no other young girl wanted to keep company. So I brought Memsahab." Tamik explained that Memsahab wanted to meet her Tagin sisters to make friends. I followed embracing her and said someone had to go with this Saheb, so why not me? I had not come for my bread and butter but I loved adventure of meeting sisters living on distant frontiers and so here I was. I took out pins from my hair and put in hers.

We crossed the Bumlo Koro river when my husband stopped and pointed towards a tree stump on which was written in English, "Boundary between Kodak and Doyum." We knew that Habung, the Apatani youth, could be trusted to do research en route with advance party for our advance information. As we went along crossing the river Jaw we saw the magnificent Jaw Sidding, the largest and highest waterfall of the area which could someday be harnessed to provide electricity. We passed Atang, Gengba and Dieu villages of Mayang Doyum and Dieu clans respectively. All this while our route lay through thick jungle, but except for hearing the crowing occasionally of a jungle fowl there was no sign of jungle life. We reached an abandoned *Jhum* field and could see on the east bank a cluster of villages called Kamsar (7 houses) of Papuk clan, Balyu (11 houses) of Iso clan and now we halted for lunch with the picturesque scenery around. Resuming the march we could see Porbiang village of Ipu clan, which was Iso's sister clan, with 4 houses, Dibi of Dhuku clan 7 houses with two more adjacent hamelets. Kojub pointed towards the Doyum massif on which porters were going up and down looking like ants and we were to soon start going up the Doyum. And some climb it was though it looked beautiful from a distance. We had to walk on our torso to hold the ground. All around us we had porters lying flat on ground to recharge their batteries. We had to frequently halt to regain our breath. At one point we saw porters picking *ooik*, the geen eatable. Krish with his appetites for green vegetable wanted to try it and so we all including Lama and Norbu started picking the leaves. As we were uncertain about the taste and flavour we took enough for trial. Up and up we went along till we saw to our relief the 'summit'. Zuala almost sang with joy, but as we came abreast of what we had thought to be summit we saw porters sitting down there, their faces streaming with sweat. It was only a false summit. I had heard of false bottom but this one took the cake. We climbed higher and

higher passing through more *oik* and *tali* trees. Suddenly we were cheered with the shrill shouts of 'Jai Hind' and saw little children scrambling down the slopes and behind them came our friend Tani, the G. B. with *opo* jar in his hand. We all sat down and the *opo* never tasted so good and refreshing. It was really well prepared and an enquiry came to know that 'Jai Hind' had for the first time been taught to children by none else than Tem and Habung. Talking about it Krish remarked it was all right complaining about sun beating on us climbing but think what would happen if the next day it rained going down the hill! The very thought was odious to us all. My suggestion was for everyone to sit on large banana leaves and slide down! When all *opo* was distributed as the rank and status demanded, we trudged up again and reached the top at last. We had done a climb of about 300 ft. at an average 60° angle. We explained the meaning of 'Jai Hind'. The camp was made in a cleared spot which gave a peripheral view of the entire valley and beyond. Fuel was difficult to get as trees were far out. Balu village was directly perched on the opposite bank and my husband gave binoculars to Iso Pekho to locate his house and see what his wife was doing. Poor man flattered himself with the idea but was disappointed.

After tea we went to see the village — a large one of 15 houses perched on the highest spur. We were exhilarated by the roaring reception we received. Almost the entire village had waited for our welcome — a phenomenon we attributed to our advent in the area without the armed might of soldiers. As we saw a fenced vegetables plot near a house, curiosity took us there but we were halted and warned by a shrill voice of a middle-aged woman speaking rapidly to Tamik who reacted by jumping like a kangaroo and shouted, "Watch Memsahab." I thought there might be a snake so I too followed suit. Then he told us that the fence was surrounded by *panjees* (a trap laid on for bamboo arrows to pierce on trespassers if poached upon).

We went into Tagum Tani's house and settled round the hearth with fresh *opo* served in freshly cut bamboo jars. Most village people appeared to congregate there, so Krish asked them about the general health, diseases and crop this year. They said this year the crop came up good but was destroyed by a herd of wild boars. Krish ragged them by asking what kind of braves they were if they could not lay traps to drive and kill the wild boar. They excused by saying the herd was too big, 70-80 strong, and they had no guns to shoot.

Tagum then went into counter-offensive and said now that the Nipak Government had come (Nipaks are plains people — there might be famines and that was how our beliefs went. On further elucidation he continued that due to Nipaks' coming, people had to porter their loads and had to do all sorts of errands and thus got no time to do their *jhuming*. The result was starvation.

Krish said no doubt our coming sometimes becomes untimely and there may be compulsive disruption but they should see the Apatanis and the Nisis (Daflas) who also complained earlier, were prosperous now. There were enormous benefits in medical care, cooperative stores, kerosene, rice, salt and what not — even their agriculture had improved. And when the *Sarkar* came guns could not remain far behind! Fortunately a boy with a gnashing cut bandaged by Dr. Bannerji was also there when all eyes turned on him. The doctor had become quite popular and the first word these Tagins were learning was 'Doctor Saheb'. We had brought hoes and axes to distribute to these people. So Krish again resumed the friendly dialogue and said, "Do you people think we get something for ourselves by giving you all these hoes, axes, etc? We brought these spades to help you cultivate your fields; do we ask anything in return? As for portering loads, you carry loads only for a day or two but get payment handsomely. Do you mean to say that the time for *jhuming* gets lapsed within two-three days? Why do

you not admit that you were lazy (laughter)?" He had hardly finished when Tagum's wife who looked at in agreement to what he had said told her husband off: "Yes, Migom Saheb is quite right. We women work in the fields and also at home; these men do nothing." Having said this she gave a playful push to her spouse. She was rather a dear old soul who had had eight children out of whom only four were alive. She was very inquisitive about me and asked question after question. How many children you have, whether boy or girl? Why are you not putting on Tashang (beads)? Why have you cut your hair? Why have you left your place to come to such an awful place? How many mithuns were paid for you in marriage? And the like. I had to reply to all her questions. But the age of little Sanjeev (our infant son) became the stumbling block — how to tell her his age in terms of months or days? Tamik was busy interpreting for Krish and we were carrying on conversation: on her side in Tagin and gestures and on my side in Hindi, Assamese and broken Tagin plus gestures — and how gloriously we made ourselves understood! All of a sudden she beamed, brought all her children aged 9 to 12 years. She first pointed towards the eldest and said *Ma* (no), then younger one and on and on to the youngest. Finished with all her children, she pointed out to the other wife of Tagum who had a baby a few months older than mine but as there were no other babies in stock to show I thought I better call it off by saying yes by approximation. Then Chindrik Tade of our party who had been to Shillong on Bharat Darshan came in, sat near us to help us out. She also told me that four mithuns were paid as her bride price. She brought lots of dowry in shape of Tibetan beads, waist belts, *deo-ghantis*, etc, and said that women did the housework and field work except for felling trees for fresh jhums. Men did not help much and spent their time hunting and going for trade with Mara tribes near the border. Each wife had to collect her own firewood. The

eldest wife dominated over the other wives. They had enough rice to eat. They also ate millet ground and roasted dry but usually they preferred to make *opo* from it. We saw the way it was being ground by a slave woman on a stone very similar to our *silbatta*. As we were to get up to leave, Tagum's wife got up to disappear after motioning us to wait and coming back with a cock protesting to high hevaen for being shoved into my trembling hands and saying it was a small gift for Migom-Memsaheb who had come so far from her house. *Migom* is the word for officer. I was really touched by her genuine affection. And as we climbed down the steps of the log-ladder she stood at the top all the time wishing us well.

It was quite dark outside by now and we were hesitating whether to go to other G. B. Tani's house or not when Tani himself solved the problem saying it was too dark and Saheb would face difficulty in climbing down to the camp. "My *opo* also has been exhausted in Tagum's house and in reception," he apologised. We also excused ourselves as we had to assemble at the camp for giving out political presents. He begged us to stay a moment and called his wife who appeared with another large outcrying hen which was put in my infirm hands saying I must keep that for myself. Even in dark I could see Krish's eyes brightening up with relish after the meatless days at Taliha. After reaching the camp I sent one of these to the common mess of Dr. Bannerji, Tamik and Zuala. Gams arrived on time and Krish gave out to each some cloth, rtugs, plates, beads, pocket knife, *biri* bundles and match-boxes. They were very happy. The villagers got rice for two days and an axe and a hoe collectively for the entire village. They went back with beaming faces. *Gams* of Nalo (next halt) arrived to escort us. That night we had a grand dinner of chicken roast and roasted potatoes with cauliflower; we had brought some vegetables. With a happy tummy and relaxed body (after my fall) we went off to sleep. It rained the whole night.

3 February, 1956

Doyum to Nalo—'Uiyus' cure dysentery — 'Jaoi Hind' catches up — Uproarious receptions proof of our sound strategy — Women bombard questions — Examine.

Ready to march, Tamik with a stick in his hand and boiling mad with rage came to report that a number of porters were not willing to lift loads as they demanded payment in advance right there and some others had not been fed by the villagers who had promised them. The situation was really bad with all of them sitting with sullen faces on their hats, glum and inarticulate. Krish first dealt with the hungry group and told them it was rather late in the day to tell him that as his kitchen had been packed up together with stores. He could not feed them when it was time to start. He asked them why they failed to report to him last night if they really went without meal. After hearing that they will be given rice first thing at Nalo they agreed to carry loads. The next people to tackle were the stubborn lot. They refused to lift anything unless they were paid on the spot. This was a bit too much to pay 150 porters as it would have taken half a day.

We also knew that once they got money they would leave the loads and run away. So Krish and Tamik used all the charm and persuasion as well as reasoning after which they gave in to the extent that their womenfolk should be paid as they had to go back soon, over which Krish also agreed. At this most of them left with loads barring six or seven who kept sitting saying they must first see payment being made. No amount of ethical reasoning would help. Krish's tone became strident now and he asked them whether they had not trust in the word spoken by his tongue; if not, the next thing would be to blacklist their village from all future benefits. This language they understood and got up meekly except one who just would not budge. Tamik by now lost control over himself and slashed at him with his cane-stick. The porter almost saw

murder in the eyes and before anybody had time to think Krish severely reprimanded Tamik and snatched away the stick from his hand.

A few of our loads were left behind and Bimpak and Tarik were asked to bring them along later. Krish hugged Tamik when he was told that those few porters had hidden their own rice packets behind the bushes and were being dishonest — so he had felt outraged.

We crossed Kyakum Koro with a beautiful waterfall called Kyakum-Dingdoh-Sidding (three long combined falls). The track crossed another rivulet, Paking Koro, half a mile further and then another, Sho river. Upper Subansiri is a regime of rivers, rivulets and waterfalls — so beautiful in its serenity. Here we saw a massive stone overhanging the track forming a cave with a cool underbelly called Damsho (*dam* means stone). A legend attached of how the neighbouring village sought shelter under it when struck with the epidemic of *Echi-Lipik* (dysentery) and drank water of Sho river, which cured them. They did not worship the stone but attributed the cure to the *Uiyu*. Bimpak and Tarik caught up with us with loads which were left behind in their care. The track now went rising up to a *jhum* field and then rowed itself into a jungle till we emerged into a clearing and saw a few people sitting round the fire. They were villagers from Lingme cutting *jhums*. Krish asked them to come to Nalo for portering loads. Here again we saw a wonderfully massive stone called *Junga Lingne* flat on the ground. It must be at least 40 ft. by 20 ft. — one could almost build a small house on it. Very pretty place with a lovely scenery of snow covered mountains. From here we could look back at Doyum village and Taliha at a distance and that gave us an idea of how much we had been marching.

Now we went down the steep track when a porter slipped and fell badly down below. The doctor soon put him right with medicines, bandage, etc. We passed another stream watered by another well. We were met here by

eager groups of children and Tapak, a boyish *gam* of Garam village shouting Jai Hind. Had *opo* and we started on a stiff climb of 2,000 ft. holding roots to keep balance and reached the top literally bathing in sweat. Little children climbed ahead like monkeys. They would climb for some time, stop, look at us toiling away and then climb, all the time wishing us "go well" (*aipe gilenka*). The top was an open place spacious enough to make a good air dropping zone, nay, even for an Auster to land and take off. The vicinity of the mountain range, however, had to be watched. Our camp had been prepared a little out of the way from our tracks but centrally located and surrounded by the scattered Nalo hamlets.

As we reached the camp we saw hundreds of people waiting. And the noise they made on their first sight of us was enough to drown the noise of the waterfall. The noise was uproarious because over the bend we saw another thousand or more people waiting and spotting us from the top. It was a thrilling experience that made our fatigue overcome in a minute. We had excellent receptions at Doyum and Nalo both and we attributed it to our friendly and innocuous mission as well as to the excitement of seeing the first *Nipak* woman coming to meet them, no less to the homework done by the emissary party and the advance party who had propagated the message faithfully. Seeing so many people Krish addressed them with the help of Tamik Dabi. While I could see only their cheery faces, the taller ones could see the beads decked up in their necks. Tamik's voice could hardly be audible, so he took the sonorous voice of Mali Rapu for proper conveyance. Jai Hind was gustily repeated thrice by the mob with hands thrown up in the air each time. Indeed they seemed to have made a song of it! I was never so much touched in my life. And though only a few men dared, the ladies satisfied themselves fully by touching different parts of my anatomy to see if I was also made the same way! I did not object to them touching — but it was very hard for me not to wince

when some toothless dame would first rub her watery, sore eyes and then pat my nose and eyes in a gush of affection, or scratch her lice covered hair and then run her finger in my hair.

Krish stood watching at a distance enjoying my discomfiture. As usual, questions were asked about the child, his sex, age etc. One question that every woman asked me was why I was not putting on my *tashangs* (beads) and where my earrings were as they could see my ears pierced. Where was my *abu napum* (father's house).

Most of these questions I could follow and give answers in words and gestures. But sometimes I could not follow and took refuge in my Hindi which left them with a blank look. So I ended up the dialogue by saying, "*Nokke agam go tachinma*" (I did not understand your language). Still they kept on talking. Mercifully I was saved by Mali Rapu who asked the porters to stand in line for payment. Most of them left me but some started asking for safety pins. Somehow this commodity was very popular here. I gave to some, refusing the boys. I had hardly finished when women in the line also started clamouring for them. Interpreter Bimpak who was counting the porters stood fretting and fuming for them to come back. In the evening we were busy paying 312 porters we had. We had decided to halt here the next day and so took life a little easy. So far we had been engaging porters for as many days as we could, two-three days village-wise and then re-engaging fresh ones from the next cluster of villages. The halt became necessary to re-check, reduce, repack and consolidate the porter loads as well as manpower demand.

4 February, 1956

*Salt Satyagraha — Faces in the mirror — Children spat out sweets
— Sports and indigenous games*

It was the day of 'Salt Satyagraha', a sort of civil defiance but mercifully non-violent in character!

After a leisurely breakfast I put on for the first time in this Tagin country my sari and also fished out a pair of earrings from the bottom of my trunk. Oh, how they were surprised to see silk. Even our *gams* round about Taliha area admired the dress having seen it for the first time. One of them said excitedly how they were wondering if the Nipak women did not have a different dress from men nor any ornaments — now they knew!

This was the day for airing, washing the clothes and retying of loads and organising children's sports. Krish was meanwhile busy talking and digging out information from the neighbouring *gams* who were pouring in. For a moment I looked away from the loads to see what was happening.

A buxom wife of Tarik, our Sardar, was admiring herself in our small mirror, the like of which they had not seen before. The way she was enjoying sometimes grimacing, puckering her mouth and sometimes smiling quite oblivious of anyone around her made me laugh. She lowered the mirror and joined me in the laughter. She had come to say goodbye to me as she was leaving for her village. She told me she had been crying having to leave me and my husband. I gave her pins, needles and thread and showed how to use them. Meanwhile her husband also came and the first thing he did was to march up to the mirror and admire himself. He brought it over to his wife as both of them lovingly wanted to see their faces together.

Despite trying out different angles when they could see faces together, she uttered *alma* (bad) and put the mirror in its place.

While I was thus amusing myself, Krish and Tamik came inside the tent to consult about the quantity of salt to be dished out 8 villages of Nalo with just 12 loads left over in the balance before an air-drop. Salt issue was settled at 2 mugs for each including those who had helped in the footpath repair. Ten neat rows were formed with 20 in each row. According to their expectation each person had

a huge plantain leaf spread out in front! Krish started ladling out salt and it reminded me of a *barat* (marriage party) sitting expectantly waiting for the delicacies. Sun was very strong and by the time he finished his face was red. After that we gave sweets to children who sat sweetly with even bigger banana leaves, even bigger than themselves! Two lemon drops on that huge thing looked so ridiculous but they did not know sweets were not to be eaten like a plate of rice. We had a limited supply. A few of them spat out immediately on tasting. On the whole, sweets were altogether foreign to what taste their palate could relish. Even sugar they were not quite used to so far. Luxury of sugar came with advance of administration.

Meanwhile there was some sort of agitation brewing up amongst people who had been receiving salt and to our surprise they all came and left their packets of salt in front of our tent saying it was too little. Tamik was asked by Krish to reason with them and explain the momentary shortage and promise of larger quantity on return trip. But they were adamant and warned they might not porter the loads from here the next day. When Tamik gave up hopes, Krish asked him to translate loudly word by word what he was going to tell them. He told them that for a track of merely 6 miles 200 people, mostly children of 4 to 2 years, could not have worked. The next thing he wanted them to understand was that even if he would like to give children he could not do so as he had only 12 loads and he did not want to give away half of these to Nalo alone as others equally deserved it. People should not behave childishly in returning back what was given to them. After all they had called him as their guest and he did not expect to be treated shabbily. There was some murmur again but some people incitingly muttered something which made Dui Gobu lose his shirt and shout in a rasping voice pointing at the east bank. Tamik interpreted him as saying they should not forget that there was the east bank manpower resource also. He lashed out to warn that he himself could get more

than adequate number of porters from there (he belonged to the east bank of Subansiri villages). He told them they would behave certainly much better with the Saheb. "Is it not shameful for Nalo group to ill-treat the Migom (officer) who had taken the trouble to plan out their future well-being?" he roared. Some people shuffled towards the salt packets, yet others held their ground. This made Krish and Tamik lose their patience and I was myself getting sick of their stubborn civil disobedience.

Tamik would have used his stick but for the vigilant eye of Krish who showed real anger for the first time, saying if they thought they would not porter loads it would not only be degrading their own Government but they would also be an insult to Nalo clan who would forfeit his confidence for future. The Tagin clans ahead will surely blame the Nalo if we failed to reach them. He warned them that his party would sit for days at Nalo and enact a counter-passive resistance to Nalo's attitude and call all the Tagin clans to come and condemn the behaviour of the Nalo. Inter-clan rivalries for what they were, this seemed to shake them. And that is what happened. Gams Garam Tako of Bame and Garam Tapak lashed out at their villainous behaviour and threatened to turn out the entire Garam clan to porter loads. He even called them "you ungrateful dogs!"

Not to precipitate a hot controversy and confrontation, Krish conferred with Tamik, Mali Rapu, Dui Gobu, et al, and decided to add one more bag of salt to Nalo quota, making three wholesome for them. Meanwhile three ring-leaders came to say they did not want Sabebe to be annoyed, but if he could give them some more salt they would be contented. And he should also promise he would not pay more than two rupees per day anywhere else. Krish responded and explained it was not in his hands to increase or decrease the rate fixed by the Government.

Thank God they reconciled with the logic and having taken their share left the camp. Krish also had to give some

political presents to the *gaonburas* of Nalo group, but before doing so he did not forget to tell them curtly of their display of utter uselessness in controlling their people. Later they were given identical gifts to Doyum G.Bs. They were also given axes and hoes. By the time we finished it was 10.30 A.M.

With everything cleared we decided to organise children's sports to restore the ambience of amity and to cool the nerves. It was great fun-fair for Tagin children and adults too got inspired. Shotputting, arrow shooting and high jump were the highlights apart from their own indigenous games. In shot put and high jump Chingrik Tade scored the highest. A mighty stone piece which I found impossible to even lift was used for putting the shot! We were helpless with laughter when ASC Dambar Bahadur tried to throw beginning with great poise like a veteran but landed the stone behind him instead of ahead of him — how the Tagins enjoyed it with laughter, poor Dambar! We had rather a crowded lunch with people all around exclaiming with excitement. But later in the afternoon it was comparatively quiet. In the evening Tamik gave us the news of many porters going away. It was too late to do anything and decided to wait for the morning. It rained in the night.

5 February, 1956

ASC Tapum hit by dao, sent back — Doctor salvages medicine load

To top it all Dupek Tapum, an ASC of Taliha, was hit by *dao* (a sword-like weapon) by a Tagin to whom he was a bit rough near ASC shed. He was bandaged and packed up to Taliha. We did not want the seed of any trouble to grow in chain reaction with our mission.

Nalo to Ate was 9 miles. We were late in starting as what had apprehended been happened. Nalo porters went back on their words. Krish suspected further

altercations and intra-Tagin tensions from what had been a settled affair after all. Again and again people were sent out to coax them. They came in trickles but we decided not to wait but leave. Bimpak was left in charge of the remaining about 20 loads to be lifted by the east bank people, if necessary. Tamik left a parting shot for the G.Bs of Nalo to bring the loads on their own backs if they did not get porters.

As we went along we saw to our relief porters coming in twos and threes. Saw a few women standing on their *jhum* fields. Tamik asked them to go and porter loads. They said they had small children, otherwise they would have gone. They wished us happy journey. We climbed steeply to Jing, a village of Garam clan with five houses. Women and children were standing and waiting for us. Their chorus of 'go well' got louder as the dogs joined in with their yelping and barking thinking no doubt we were trespassers. We halted there for some time after the arduous climb. We congratulated Dr. Bannerji on his providential escape as we learnt how he had slipped from the precipice, and had it not been for Lalzuala holding him back, he would have reached the deep gorge down below. We skirted around Garam village and met the dynamic Garam Tapak G.B. We could see that on the opposite bank of the Sirin river village Sirin nestled below with six houses and also villages Iring and Nengpa of Chiyum with four houses. The road went over the saddle fairly level. We crossed two little rivulets popular for sweet water supply. This flat space was called Dillingmori. Any level and flat space in the Subansiri valley we were treading onwards was such a delight — not only with possibilities of a dropping zone but also just for the joy of it in a terrain made up of up and down gradients. So we parted with lingering looks hating to approach the steep ascent above us. I really marvelled at the courage and endurance of the Tagins, who incidentally compared themselves with monkeys, carrying loads of 25 lbs up and down these

treacherous tracks. Somehow we reached the Ngaw river and crossed over a single log of 15 ft. length on to a small rock with half an inch foothold. Higher up we reached village Bame Garam. This village had no recognised. G.B. but Niyete, an aged Tagin, was waiting with an *opo* jar. We halted with the excuse of sitting down for *opo*. Tako, a rather rough-looking man, liked us so much that he begged us stay in his village. He gave us lots of information regarding the careless way some people were given red coats in Dinakoli (east bank) without proper investigation of their authority over the village and their suitability. He also said that we should be more careful in the dealings with Tagins further up as they had been rather unruly and treacherous earlier.

Meanwhile, I carried on conversation with the women, One little girl came forward with a small puppy and wanted to barter it for *kabshi* (Tibetan word for pin or needle). Once I gave her one I had to give each and every one. A very old toothless woman who could hardly see came walking slowly towards me and tried to pat my nose, the most prominent feature she could see on my face and brought out an egg. Her gift touched me very much and I tried to give her money in exchange but I should not have done it. "I had heard of *Nipak kime* (Tibetan word for woman) coming here so far away from home. Now I have seen the little *Nipak kime* and I am happy." It was awfully sweet of her to say this, I must say. Here I saw a very pretty girl, Yame, with long dark eyelashes. She had come as a bride to this village. She showed me her newly constructed house — only two people to live there. I wish she were a bit cleaner. Surprisingly here too I was asked by women about my not wearing *tashangs* (beads). We were busy talking till we heard shouting and the noise of 'crash crash', 'boom boom'. One medicine load had gone down the slope. The poor doctor rushed down to salvage it together with the porter. He told us to go ahead. Young Garam Tako wanted to know whether he should come

with us to Ate or stay back to arrange for porters. Krish told him to come not to disappoint him and also to give him some presents. He received presents and went back to arrange for porters for the next day. Krish thought he was conscientious and deserved a red coat (Government symbol).

We continued our march and were caught up by the rear party bringing leftover loads. G.Bs of Nalo had to carry loads themselves after all! Halted for lunch when the doctor also joined in time happy at his rescue mission. An excellent specimen of a quiet cheerful doctor worthy of this mission. Punya Ano of Isoriang village met us with *opo* and later accompanied us. The countryside was unfolding a spectrum of waterfalls, each vying with the other in grace and beauty. We arrived at the camp at 2 P.M. It was situated on a sloppy spur. Just behind it on the higher spur were perched four houses of Isoriang village of Bami clan (Ponyang). They grow rice, seed potato, millet and *Lai sag*. The yield is not much. Ate used to be a large village of Baki clan with our friend Baki Tadi as the enlightened leader. The camp overlooked Shebar valley on the east bank wherefrom the route led to Hika and Mechukha in Siang Frontier Division. Village Eba on the east bank with the redoubtable Eba Topu, a terror in his own right, was also majestically located. The *gam* of Hika sent out by the Assistant Political Officer (II), Mechukha, had met us at Nalo and had gone by the Shebar route to muster up porters from the east bank. The population had now begun to decline.

6 February, 1956

Ate to Liyu — Tagins are like monkeys, yet fall to death — Trade barriers — Angu Tashi's report — A sexy evening

At 6.45 A.M. Niba Tukje, very keen on gun licence, brought 40 porters from the east bank. Accompanied by Cheke Talo, our path went across single bamboo poles (with no

support for hand) over deep chasms. Poles all places had been put aslant at different angles and without any foothold. Rather it was very rocky with hardly few inches for a foothold. By this time all of us were fairly nervy. After a little while we had to go up the spur with steep ascent. Sometimes we had nothing to hold and heave oneself up. Here I was very grateful to one Tape who despite the heavy load on him helped me up. He would wait in front at a dangerous patch and extend his hand for support. In this way I got away lighter than others. We were still at the climb when we reached a clearing. From here we could see the following villages on east bank: Siyum village of Siyum clan (6 houses), Raba (6 houses), Dago in Shebar valley (4 houses) Ike (12 houses, Rae (3 houses), Taring (6 houses), Gangba (8 houses) and on the west bank 5 villages of 2 to 3 houses each, three villages of Yame clan (total 7 houses).

My helper found the track a bit better and sat down to rest. We trudged along at last reaching the ridge top panting. It was very stuffy with closed atmosphere of overhanging bamboo trees, a botanist's paradise no doubt with all sorts of plants. I wish I had remembered my botany. We sat down flap on ground, leeches or no leeches. Even Tamik looked slightly shaken. I asked Talo *gam* how on earth they travelled up and down those horrid tracks. He laughed and said Tagins were monkeys but even so many of them died down the precipice or were crippled for their lives. I really marvelled at them.

Krish started asking Tao questions and he was cooperative. He volunteered information about Mara Tabe and Hellu.

Mara Tabe's ancestors were not the same as theirs. Maras claimed ancestry from Nyidu (rain) not Abatani and were said to have migrated from Helyu (Chayul Migyithun area).

They had monopolised trade with Tibetans with Na Tagins as partners and did not permit Mayu Tagins (lower) to go up. Due to such trade embargo lower Tagins could

proceed only up to Mara area. Tabe's one daughter got married at Na and the other was to be married at Yolu Nalo (actually she got married to Roliana Hmar, the Base Superintendent, who later had come to relieve my husband). Tabe had two wives from Na. Tabe was afraid to come down for fear of being captured by lower Tagins who would get no doubt a fat ransom in exchange. Mara did not have enough rice to eat themselves, yet sold it to Helu people. They have only one crop of millet and paddy against two of lower Tagins. But Tabe had plenty. It was now clear that we could expect clean cooperation from Mayu Tagins who were being left segregated and debarred from political and trade contacts with Tibetans due to trading embargo placed by Mara and Na groups of Tagins (Marabi group). There was no doubt also that Tabe had no finger in the pie insofar as Sino-Tibetan problems were concerned. It was natural that all NEFA tribes of the border region had well dug-in sympathy with Tibetans, but the fear of the Chinese was also well stamped in the minds of Mara and Na Tagins.

While we were engrossed in his report, a letter was brought by one of the Tagins from Habung who warned that the track ahead was awful and the population too dwindling. He asked us not to take the Chupcha village route but come by the riverside route which was less hazardous — a very faithful advice, though nonetheless hazardous as we found later. Also came back Angu Tashi who had been sent as an emissary. We were excited to get the feedback from him. He had thought of meeting us at Ate and wanted to go back to Taliha to perform some pujas. He was also a *Neibu* (priest). As there was hardly any spot to sit down and hear him we bundled him along with us to Liyu camp. The fellow had started from Gangba and had intentions of reaching Nalo after briefing us! Cooling our nerves on the riverside and after a cup of tea we at last reached the jungle camp as there was no village on this route. It was a small clearing with thick forest along

with roaring rivers and large size leeches attacking from the ground, from branches and creepers, not to mention the hundreds of porters huddled together around us. As we did not have lunch on our way we had it in our kitchen shed as our tent was still being pitched. I had some difficulty in swallowing food not only due to bad throat but also due to 250 pairs of eyes staring at us.

That evening was the most crowded evening of my life—I was beseiged by men, women and children demanding pins. I almost recited the Charge of Light Brigade: Cannon to the right of them, volleyed and thundered. And did not think I was ever more conscious of being a woman. I usually used to take refuge from men by saying that I would give pins, etc, to women and they should go to Migom Saheb. But this time nothing would help so much that one audacious young man tried to show that he was a girl by pointing towards his conical bamboo sheath which covered the male organ. When I pretended not to hear or notice women burst out laughing. That showed they had no inhibitions about sex. Men freely talked about women's breasts and do not hesitate to admire also.

But surprisingly women of this part were very under-developed. I had seen till now only two women with full figures. A few of them tried to hold my hand longer than necessary. Some of them tried to measure my height by standing beside me and said: "Ale, you are too small." Though I dare say these women were just the same height! Some of the men and most of the women wanted to know if I had fed my baby. In the beginning when I failed to understand one of the women touched me on my bosom and said something. In the end one man took his face near another woman's and imitated a child suckling. There was no objection from that woman. I must say sometimes it was very difficult for me not to feel bad when they tried to touch me, yet and most of the time I succeeded with them. But today one after the other they kept pestering me and

asking silly questions. In the end I had to ask Krish to come and help me out. But I made the wrong choice, for when he came all others with him also came to join the fun! And now the questions were directed towards him. One man showed typical gestures of sexual act and pointed towards both of us. My cheeks became red hot, yet the women including teenage girls giggled and poked at my husband. I buried my nose into my diary on the pretence of reading. But Krish no less a tribal got away with it and soon turned the tables on them by his advances to them !

Tamik came and chased them off. He brought Angu Tashi with him for interrogation. We gave tea to all present. Tashi had reached Mara on 8th with Baki Tadi and Tage *Gam* of Riga village.

He said Tabe was worried that we might be coming to catch and arrest him — in which case he would run away and hide in jungles. On Tashi's assurance of our good intentions he said he would do all to help us but his village was thinly populated to be of much service. He told Tashi that Chue Deba (Tibetan officer) had sent a message to him asking us not to come to Helu this year as *Khungten* (Chinese) had been told also not to come. He and Tabe feared clash between we and the Chinese. Because the Chinese had informed Tabe through the Na Tagins that Na, Bida and Helu and the land up to the confluence of Gelling and Subansiri was within their boundary and if any time an Indian officer claimed it they would fight. They have also left instructions in Na to be informed of the arrival of any Indian officer on pain of death. There were 5,000 Chinese soldiers in village Sangling (Sang Cho Ling), two days', march from Na. Tabe himself never met a Chinese, though he had just been to Na. He was given lots of Chinese pictures which were not much intelligible to him. Tabe had heard that there were 10,000 Chinese troops in Lhasa. They had also advised Tabe to be neutral and not to take anybody's side. His relations with Tibetans were good. People in Na, Bida, Helu and Mara seemed to

be inclined towards Tibet, though they did not like the Chinese. Tabe also wanted to know whether we would open a permanent outpost or we would go back "like a dream". This question had been asked by Nalo and Nacho also but Krish had evaded a direct reply saying it was for Tagins to decide. Besides, he did not want to say things that might be promptly carried over to the other side of the border or specifically asked by them. He was also not sure of jeopardising the chances of our mission's success in any manner and in any case favoured posturing the task to be investigative and befriending. Tabe advised us to open the outpost at Naba just short of Limeking (Mara). Tabe was believed to be on very good terms with Tibetans (and possibly Chinese) and what he might say could not be ruled out as feelers of disinformation. Tagins had not in recent past liked intrusions in their domain and they were not one in their attitudes towards the Indian Government. Angu Tashi used his briefing perfectly and loyally and when Tabe again asked the same question whether the Government would stay put, he made a positive statement, "As long as the sky, Subansiri and these mountains remained, the Government would also remain and the country (Arunachal Pradesh) will improve, food will be more for us. Saheb was bringing a gun to present you and will make you the leader among the Mayus also (lower)." Shillong had the intelligence turned over to us regarding a place called Deluriang in upper Mara area being suitable for administrative centre. When asked about it, Tashi showed plainly his disgust over the 'much mentioned' Deluriang. He said it was hardly as big a place as his palm with only two houses there and on the east bank. According to him Limeking itself was much better. He said Limeking (Tabes's village) was not exactly that large — there was another single house stage called Ging (Mara Tayee's) which was the last before Helu (Migyithun) and Na on two fronts. Angu Tashi's report was no doubt confirmatory of the earlier reports of Talo. It was more definitive and

Krish thought that the lines were getting drawn in respect of the situation more credibly. He did expect that the news of our expedition would reach the pilgrimage authorities in Tibet and that Tibet would definitely use it as a handle to dissuade PLA from having to do anything by way of interfering with the pilgrimage with propaganda or their *Thangshi* (Drama troupe). But he was still not prepared to rule out attempt at disinformation.

We finished late talking to him. Had dinner and went to bed. Rained later in the night.

7 February, 1956

Country of 'snakes and ladders' — 1,500 ft. dangling Ringjing Ragye the hanging track — Eba Topu's hat-trick repairing for us such ladders in the ladder country — Hitherto a terror-striking Tagin leader with scores of murders to his credit — A man much sought after befriended

Not porter troubles, thank heavens, as they were all there, overnight. Angu Tashi said goodbye. This time the track from the very beginning was nothing but precipice and ladder-ridden, part by cutting steps and the rest going up or down the ladders. The rain had made it worse confounded.

We crossed finger. The Subansiri enters here a deep gorge when both banks close in steeply, leaving room for Liyu and Shekar rivers only, with the Subansiri roaring along dreadfully below. If we were all safe today, unhurt and alive it must be due to God's own hand to prop us to retain our foothold. Ups and downs in this broken terrain were normal features but even this river bank route was like the snakes and ladders game where none could be sure of a downfall any moment, A hundred yards level path with fragrance of some flowering tree proved to be like the last breath of life when the real ladder came before us known as Ringging Tarak. It was a hanging track as it were — an about 400 ft. of bamboo and cane ladder

hanging down the face of a precipice which we would have to climb down rung by rung till we reached the Subansiri river below. As we reached it I stopped abruptly asking where the track was and was told that that was the ladder we would have to negotiate, There was dead stop of heart beat and a sudden nosedive in my morale. I had always been allowed to lead touring parties like an engine regulating speed. But now this pause was seen by my husband as the end of the road for me when I saw him scanning my face. In a moment, as if to change the engine, he stepped ahead of me to step down the ladder at the same time taking the camera out from round his neck ready to click. He then asked Angu Tashi to hold one of my hands and asked me to hold the ladder with the other. "I am sure you will be able to do it. Go step by step deliberately, concentrate only on the step of the next rung without ever, even by mistake, looking down the Subansiri below. It is a dizzy sight, cut it out! Won't you darling?"

With this initiative which he took for the first time in my case, otherwise always leaving me to my own capability, I stepped down rung by rung on my haunch, while my husband, leading the party, at the same time merrily clicking the camera, descended surely but steadily reading me out from moment to moment. I did not know how Angu Tashi could have stopped my weight going down into the river if he had tried to prevent me in the air! Perhaps he might have followed me in a downright crash! Sitting down extending my leg from rung to rung of the shaking ladder which to me looked rather loosely and precariously tied up with cane, I gained confidence except when my pressure went up whenever the next rung proved too far away for my legs to reach. In such cases I had to balance myself on my hands and come down. I kept thinking of the short-legged porters going down with the load. I felt like taking off my hat (I was actually putting on a straw hat), which I did remove as it was proving cumbersome. There was no doubt that one false step

would have meant a mangled pulp of my body. Hundreds of porters down the ladder looked like ants from the top. Two-three loads fell down in the river when porters could not hold the balances. One of them was found to be a trunk with everything inside shattered to bits. Somehow I managed to reach the end of this nightmare of a ladder looking up of which was as scaring as down. It was after all not that weak a structure! "Darling, be careful" and "Memsahab, watch" were the two voices still ringing in my ears. The final struggle was to jump about 4 ft. on the ground from the last rung, when despite my protest Angu Tashi picked me up like a sack of potato to help. Without my husband's lead, and I knew him to be the most sure-footed, quite a few would have lost heart and preferred to stay away as even the rungs were rather slippery with the impact of rain and mud.

After cooling our heels over a sip of hot coffee on the river bank, we moved on knowing a few more *taraks* (rock-force ladders) awaited us, as we were taking a riverside unused track rigged up for our passage, the regular track via the village having been totally demolished by landslides. We had to go down all the time over the edge of wet moss covered rocks. At one place I slipped but regained my balance. After this one ASC Jit Bahadur and also Sardar Tarik insisted on helping me. Sometimes they both helped in different directions asking the other to leave. I had to tell them that if I wanted help I would ask either of them. We were laughing out at this when somebody pointed in front rows of porters standing in queue to negotiate another rock-face ladder of about 200 ft. Below that again the swift waters of the Subansiri churned. We saw L/N Thapa standing on the bank and shouting to us. The voice came floating up and we heard something like "box fallen down". Somebody said it must be the doctor's medicine box — it keeps on falling everywhere! Again Krish took the lead followed by me more confidently this time. Tamik sitting on top kept warning me not to look down at the

racing river. I could not convince him my not having any compunction about looking at the cascades of water below us. After getting down this something like swinging circus ladder, we followed the river bank, our box (which turned out to be ours that kept falling) mercifully did not go right into the river but just fell short of it.

Having found our feet, we followed the river bank and believe me, the same dashing river that had my heart in my mouth sounded so sweet and musical! The bank had widened with stones and boulders embedded all along the sand. I was not too happy with 'boulder hopping' as my football boots, good for slippery mud, were disastrous for the boulders besides my natural aversion to it. But all around me people were happy and cheerful for the good break. A good break for me was the sandy beach about a furlong long good for picnicking. The river also had turned placid from its tearing rapids. A little ahead we crossed the Gyamte Sikyo, a small beautiful tributary.

Further up we were greeted by naked children shouting Jai Hind on the opposite bank. They sang and danced splashing in water calling out to us with their characteristic. *Aipe Gillenka* (go well). We shouted back *Aipe Dulanka* (stay well) along with Jai Hind. Jai Hind had been taught by emissaries. They belonged to the prestigious Eba village perched high on the east bank. We crossed the Coyo Koro, a small tributary. We were met there by Hika Bydik, G.B. of Hika and Eba Tayur, G.B. of one of the Eba clan villages. To cross it one had to slide along manipulating the force of the body with the hands and feet locked up around strong cane rope tied up from one bank to the other thus propelling along with face turned towards the sky and back towards the river below. During my first tour in the then NEFA in Mishmi Hill District (Lohit Division) Krish had crossed the river in this Mishi fashion, but quite common with other tribes also. This was the second bridge Dinakoli—so new, because, according to them, there still was some murky politics in existence between the two banks that insulated

frequent crossing. But one could easily construct a steel rope bridge here for future planning. We went along sometimes hopping, sometimes sliding on sand and sometimes even slipping over mossy boulders where even my hands could not be trusted. Once jumping from a particularly slippery boulder I stood undecided, when I saw a little hand extended towards me. I looked up to see a boy of 10 years with a load standing on the side who must have been monitoring my progress. I took his hand with an acknowledgement smile and jumped down. For them any semblance of a foothold was enough.

We had marched on for some time when we came across some Tagins sitting down on boulders curiously and they did not seem to be porters.

One commanding personality among them sprang sprightly on his feet with 'Jai Hind' in deep tone and all the rest followed his example. We were surprised as none expected so many popping up, all adults from behind the boulders. Krish fixed his gaze at this old majestic personality, when there was a pause, each trying as if to read the other, and then asked who he was. "He is Eba Gam?" whispered Mali Rapu from behind. Tamik took the initiative, "So you are Eba Topu?" The steel frame oldish man nodded with striking dignity which would charm anyone. As Krish greeted him saying 'the great Eba Topu' and extended his hand to shake his, Eba Topu's smile lit up his lined face and he grasped the hand with his both, shook him unexpectedly and exclaimed, "No Migom accepted my *opo* in the past, will you take it with me today?" taking the jar out from his cane haversack. Krish nodded assent and quipped, "Because you were always running away from them; you are not running away from me?"

There was a touch of cordiality when he put his arm around this grand man who, Krish disclosed, made it possible to renovate and at places even reconstruct Ringjing Rague Tarak fit for our large party overnight. Indeed the whole mission to Migythun would have been abandoned

but for this one man's leadership. As we settled down on a shady spot for *opo* and lunch, we heard a dog chasing a barking deer in the jungle. It turned out to be a beautiful day with not a jot of cloud. Eba Topu sat uninhibitedly exposing his bamboo sheathed private parts to Krish's wandering camera. And with *opo* reaching his heart broke into an emotional conversation, "Saheb should not mind my not going to Taliha as summoned. He called me and I should have gone, but then I thought I could help Sab better by staying back improving tracks and cutting out new ones at some places. Then I knew he would need porters to be mobilised from the east bank." Pointing towards the chain of ladders he said, "Nobody was prepared to repair and renovate due to fear of divine retribution if anyone in the party fell down. I stayed one whole day and spent last night to help my 20 men to make it negotiable. Men were also reluctant but I told them that I alone will take the blame if any mishap occurred." My husband thanked him for his quick, execution of the requisition he had sent for this job. He had been ordered only two days before. He then asked about his people, their cultivation and other requirements and in a lighter vein said, "Now Eba Topu, tell us frankly and truthfully how many men you had so far killed in your *shikar* and how many women kidnapped? Since I have not come to catch you and you don't have to use your bows and arrows from behind those boulders, for once you can tell the truth to the Government safely as you would tell your exploits exultantly along with stories of romance to a friend."

Topu's bright beady eyes twinkled and he replied sanctimoniously, "In my young age I fought many and killed many but now I am old and since *Sarkar* has come why should I kill more?" His bright eyes closed for a moment and he continued, "Saheb, I must tell you frankly my reason for not going to Taliha. Some people have been reporting against me that I had been raiding and there were cases against me. Taliha people wanted me to go

there and settle the old cases. But is it right for them to take me to task for my past? Earlier there was no *Sarkar* in Taliha and none is here even now, and we had our own code of justice and jurisprudence and our own ways of revenge. But since the *Sarkar* has now come in Taliha you can find out whether I have done any harm to anyone since. On the contrary, I have helped Government recently on every occasion, you can see this *patta* (paper)." He took out lovingly from his skin side bag an old crackling paper and handed it to Krish. It was a letter of commendation from Base Superintendent Mechukha, countersigned by APO (I), U Hipson Roy, who had been to Eba village. He wanted a certificate from Krish also.

He was unhappy that yet no one had dropped the past cases against him. Krish agreed that the only way to restore law and order and end litigation in the Taginland would be to condone and drop all cases of crime committed before the advent of Government in the area and he had already declared that he would convert all leading committers like him to Government's friends and not Government's victims on the specific condition that no crime would be committed by them, being thus reformed. This could apply to others too all over to restore balance and sanity. He explained that chits and certificates for service did not implicitly say that old cases were dropped, hence the game of hide and seek continued. He said he had in the very beginning made it plain that he was not taking up cases or treating anyone as a criminal. The way this jaunty figure of an old man reacted won the hearts of all and the way he looked at you with small shining eyes made you think of Hanuman.

After lunch and *opo* we felt sleepy and warmed with bright sun caressing us.

We took Eba Topu along with us to Ayengmori following the river bank all along till we climbed into the jungle. There was hardly any track but we had no difficulty walking over bamboo bridges as they were freshly cut and

not at all slippery. Here we took a sudden turn towards right and saw the river Subansiri close to us. This made me call out Krish to ask whether the camp had been built on the east bank. He laughed outright and said, "Geet, you had too much of *opo* it seems." No amount of arguing would help me, so I kept quiet and marched on. We could now see the camp in a beautiful sand-bedded clearing. Our arrival was auspiciously heralded by shooting of a wild boar with shot gun by some porters chopping the wood. How we ran to see it! At the camp we were met by Baki Tadi. The camp looked good and roomy compared to the cramped one at Liyu jungle.

The first thing I did was to say 'Hello' to the wild boar bravely dead and next thing which I did was to find out the reason for my misjudgement about the direction of the camp. I went to the edge of the little spur where our camp was seen as if located on the east bank. I realised soon that we had crossed a U-shaped turn on a hill and at one point the river turned sharply in view giving the impression of the camp being there on the east bank. Unfortunately before asking my husband about it I had mentioned casually to him that I was feeling drowsy due to warm sun and *opo*. I called him to show the reason for my optical illusion and demanded to take his words back. "Taken back," said he effortlessly and promptly as if without any feeling. But he agreed such deceptive phenomena were common. Since we had planned to halt at Ayengmori an extra day we took life easy besides making payments to the clamouring porters. Had early dinner and went to bed. No rain at night and the sky was starry for a change.

8 February 1956

Halt at Ayengmori — Search for D.Z. — Problems of provisioning — Mali Rapu sheds his shyness — Big daos only can fell big trees Mimics and gimmicks. No Sortie — Farewell to Eba Topu

We woke up with lovely sunshine. Krish wanted to go and

rece for a possible D.Z. (dropping zone) in the area. Ayengmori itself would have been ideal but for the lack of a straight line approach for the aircraft. Provisions were draining out and logistics were still in doldrums. We were half expecting an air-drop but were being asked where.

Eba Topu turned up wanting to go back as one of the children was said to have drowned in the Subansiri while trying to cross it. Felt very sad as their shrill voices and shouts of *Jai Hind* were still ringing in my ears. Did not know how Tagins would take it and hoped our advent would not be regarded as a bad omen for them. But felt consoled seeing the ever-smiling face of Eba Topu. Krish called him inside and showed him our photos in Dafla and Apatani dresses and asked him whether there was any lack of credibility that we too were sons of Abtani. He could not recognise but asked more about the young pretty *Kime* (damsel) standing in the photo — indeed a compliment that I would value for the rest of my life coming as it was from an innocent genuine mind of an unsuspecting remote person. The gallant old man felt tickled finding out the identity later on.

He repeated his paradox about reconciling his past with his present. Krish told him that to come out clean was a better way to settle up old cases, even at some costs, but on his part, he had condoned him and that is why he had decided to award him with the Government red coat with merit certificate. As a reformed man he would himself have to promote peace and amity rather than allow himself or others the old game of mutual raiding. Moreover, he should not fear Government, for the Government was made of people like him. There was no distinction between a *Nipak* and a Tagin. If they were cut with a *dao* they will have the same amount of pain and the same amount of blood will flow and in the same colour. This impressed the once notorious raider Eba Topu so much that he asked Tamik could the Saheb not stay more here. "I would like to

kill a mithun to make a *dapo* (peace with friendship) with him for ever”.

There was a touch of pathos in the genuinity and he decided to perform the ceremony on our return. While awarding the red coat and showering him with presents for his party of workers and for the parents of the drowned child, Krish told him that a friend in need was he and he regarded him as a sapper-engineer more than the professional ones for rebuilding and strengthening those ladder-tracks which alone could make our visit worthwhile. A photograph of Gandhiji given to him which carried conviction about the oneness of *Nipaks* and Tagins as offshoots of the same culture was proudly shown by him to his men. Even as he left he again assured my husband that he would not raid, kill, snatch somebody else's wife.

We were sorry to part with this grand old man.

All this while Baki Tadi waited for Krish to go for recce but just then Bishan Thapa (Wireless Operator) came running to inform that Jorhat was on the air. Krish spoke to Ambrose, Superintendent, Air Drops, in the absence of the Director of Supply and Transport, Col. Dewan. He knew nothing of the arranged sortie for today but promised to confirm by 11 A.M. Baki Tadi asked to listen to Dui Tashi and him about Mara people and so the interrogation once again. The information was more of Helu (Migythun area) belonging to Mara Tagins. The Tibetans of the area paid taxes to them and also a special subsidy endowment on the special occasion of *Dolo* (pilgrimage). Fifty years ago (*from the date of the writing of this diary — Editor*) in a war the Tagins were defeated and pushed into the gorges of the Gelling river (Tsari-Chu) further south. Krish calculated and wondered whether the occasion could have been Chou-Erfeng (1910). They also told about the murder of Mara Pusing beheaded by the Tibetans of Migythun when the victim had visited them. Mara people wanted to revenge his murder but the Helu people ransomed the death of Pusing. It was also said that the track between

Mara (Limeking) to Helu had been burnt by someone leaving no roots to hold onto precarious precipices. None knew who did it, but Krish suspected this was perhaps to discourage us going there in the year of pilgrimage when Tagins nor Tibetans wanted disturbance by our trip.

One thing which struck us was the conditonal friendship being offered by Tabe who even wanted us to go further up on promise of having no clash with the Chinese. Also he wanted an outpost way back at Naba and not Limeking, his own village. The wily old man! Another call for a radio telephony talk came but nothing could be heard due to faulty reception. Baki Tadi was getting impatient to go to his village for his meal and chances of a sortie here appeared dim, so Krish gave up the recce of the D.Z. where Captain Thukral's advance survey party had an air-drop. Before Baki Tadi left to go to his family to prepare for the next day's march, I gave him one *husif* (needle and thread) for his wife and safety pins for his daughters and he forgot his waiting fatigue.

At last Col. Dewan came on R/T and Krish told him that the day had been lost; they must lay on a sortie or two five days ahead at Naba, which also boasts of a resonable D.Z. Air Force being most dependable and so far non-committal, the problem of provisioning for money payments as well as in kind as also rations for survival were posing threats of a "Waterloo"! Even an ignoble retreat would need provisioning he explained to Dewan and asked them to pull their socks up. The best thing would have been to air-drop at Limeking itself to avoid portering all along and to save on manpower, but then who would vouch for the Air Force choice? Col. Dewan, always most helpful, promised to prevail upon the 'air boys'.

With the burden off our head, we returned to our bunks to write notes and this diary. Shortly after came in two important *gams* to meet us — Kyamke Nome and Lingu Tali brought in by Mali Rapu. Their villages, Gengba of the former and Dengshar of the latter, were biggish by

upper Tagin standards and so they were briefly given the reasons for our visit and gratitude for all assistance in addition to the present of rice, cloth, beads, knife and *biris* and a mug and plate for themselves. We settled down round a blazing fire when Mali Rapu, usually a quiet withdrawn personality, was inspired to get into his talking shoes and talked highly of these *gams* "Saheb, we should rightly befriend big *gams* like these and not bother much about small ones. They are happy to have been given good presents." When Krish saw him in good form he quipped it was for interpreters and Mali Rapu to say who was big or small. Encouraged, Rapu was poetic when he said, "Saheb, you know yourself that a big *dao* can fell a big tree and a small one only a small tree!" That evening was won by Rapu who made us helpless with laugh and mirth. He picked up the mirror from the tent to see what it could be, having never seen one before, stopped talking abruptly when he saw his own image and looked askance at the gathering from the corners of his eyes. We tried to show no sign of noticing his expressions howsoever comical they were. Whenever he was satisfied we were not watching him, he picked the mirror and moved to a less conspicuous place. There he squatted comfortably, opened the mirror and started admiring himself. First he put the mirror in front of his face and admired what he saw which obviously pleased him. Then he admired his neck, his hands, his fingers, his legs, his toes, and he mimicked and made queer sounds once again admiring his whole figure from top to bottom by placing the mirror at different heights. He now looked askance not to be observed that we all quickly looked away. Satisfied we were not aware of his self-discovery, he turned once more to the mirror and saw his face critically with grimaces, gimmicks and mimics, he looked expressionlessly, then frowningly and then nodded his head as if to say yes or no. He looked in questioningly, then as if to answer his own query with his tongue out and burst out with loud laughter when we all joined him

unable to restrain ourselves any more. He got up hurriedly, put back the mirror at its place and ran for his life. No amount of calling out would bring him back, Oh, how we laughed with tears trickling down our faces.

And so ended the day with a happy note with the picture of Mali Rapu admiring himself in the mirror.

9 February, 1956

Ayengmori to Kojin Camp — Map to ground study getting blurred — Identity of rivers at stake— The snow administrative centre stopped at the dismal-looking Kojin Camp

We were told that the Menyi river was as big as the Subansiri but for the depth. The Mara people came down the Menyi from Migyithun (Helu). Looked as though the Menyi was the Tsari Chu. That also fits in with the accounts of others regarding Migyithun, Na, etc. In that case, Yume Chu may be the Gelling. Our map seemed to prove it further or else is wrong and inaccurate. One of Krish's assignments was to check out the accuracy of the map, but what was appearing to happen was that he himself was becoming a victim to the inaccuracy without any solid means for verification.

Today we had more porters than we could cope with thanks to Eba, Baki and Riga clans being well populated. We went along the Subansiri bank over an almost flat ground. As we emerged out of a brief jungle we embarked into a clearing hardly a furlong from our last camp. Here we had a beautiful view of snow-clad peaks, pure and white in the early morning sun. Tamik, who had not seen a snow peak so close, expressed his delight by saying, "Oh horribly good!" The local names of these peaks were Nylo Dumpo and Riga Dumpo. We were wondering if these were the same in the vicinity of Migyithun. Here we left the main party and climbed up the gentler slopes of Gengba much to the annoyance of Baki Tadi who wanted us to traverse the beaten track. Somehow we persuaded

him to come up with us. Krish saw the possibility of having a lower D.Z. than Gengba higher flat and decided to explore. As we climbed higher and higher through the *jhum kheti* (where Tadi uprooted a large bunch of fresh *lai sag*) the snow view became lovelier and clear. Looking from the top of the spur we saw the open valley with clear approaches from either side for dropping sortie. We could also see clearly the clustered villages of Shebar valley and another snow peak near it.

Here Krish asked a few questions from Baki Tadi who having had obviously exhausted his patience replied first yes and no and later on burst out saying, "Why are you asking the same questions again and again? You are going there yourself, have that much patience. Why must you climb these silly hills when our path goes that way. It will get dark before we reach camp." We meekly got up to go with him. He could not help laughing when Krish quipped, "Tadi you would not have got that bunch of *lai sag* stolen from the field if we had not come this way here!" He left us there when he went down saying he would come another way as he had left his jungle fibrous rain cape and cane bag and that he would meet us where the two paths converged. Krish said why he was doing the same thing when he did not want him to go another route. Krish started taking photos of snow, etc, and you can imagine what Baki Tadi felt when he did not see us at the junction of the paths. He climbed all the way up and confronted us with the quizzical look pointing towards the sun. We climbed down and reached at the confluence of the Gyo and the Subansiri (Gyo Pallen). The flat space up to here must be at least three furlongs. The site was pretty good with good water, good fishing at the meeting of the rivers, good building material and good climate just about halfway between Taliha and upper Mara. Reminded me of our fishing in Daporijo in company with Phookan. What was more, there was good DZ and good vicinity of villages. Here we saw another cane bridge with 34 bridge to

connect the east and the west banks. As we went along the valley opened out with gentler slopes and *jhums* convertible into terraces for cultivation.



Eba Topu, a powerful person of Eba village, with his relatives

But soon we manoeuvred our way through the thick growth of jungle and came back to boulder hopping and walking over, at one point, a felled tree trunk 100 ft. long and slippery like ale. The Subansiri hissed and foamed dashing against the boulders. Thank God, today I had changed over to jungle boots and had more confidence than yesterday. We reached the Kojin Koro where we halted for lunch. From the Kojin's confluence with the Subansiri we could clearly see the mountainous snow source from where it originated. Opposite the Kojin Koro on the east bank were two sister rivers, Kobu and Kodu,

which unitedly fed the Subansiri. We could also see three villages perched high up called Dri (19 houses), Ragmi (11 houses) and Rebang (6 houses). But further up the population was again thinning out till we reached the Kojin jungle camp whence the villages disappeared totally. The camp had been made right on the path with dark overhanging trees obstructing noonday sun. The camp was so dismal that we had to light our petromax at 3 P.M. That day we could not have done more than 6 miles. Interpreter Gobu said there was no other place as we had to enter a deep gorge thereafter. A wireless message received in the evening proclaimed Governor Jairamdas Daulatram's fly-over column at 10:30 on the morrow. He had eagerly told Krish over from the aircraft! The political Officer was to talk with Krish at 5 A.M. Tamik who claimed to be up and doing every morning at 3 A.M. was appointed the 'Alarm Clock.' We doubted success as the reception was greatly hampered by the tall thick forest. Later in the evening Mari Tape and Dajam Tape, headmen of Ragmi clan, came. But Dajam Tape, a tall thin youngish don Quixote type with red rimmed bulbous eyes and a voice like cracked bamboo, impressed me more than the oldish Mari Tape. They left with a promise of fetching porters. While Krish had been talking to them I busied myself with enciphering a message and then went to bed early.

10 February 1956

Kojin to Nacho, 10 miles — Talking boxed-in babies — Crisis over lifting wireless sets — Hasn't Pattagari got eyes to see—Pilots would not risk the gorge — Extra precautions for the VIP Nacho's pretty wives.

Krish woke up at 4.30 A.M., waited for R/T talk with Political Officer, got disgusted waiting in the wireless shed and came away as he was still asleep. Porters were restive to start off but had to wait till R/T sets were free to move.

The talk began at 7.30 A.M. and I gave him breakfast while busy talking. No accuracy of map reference was guaranteed, so it was suggested by Krish that we would try to climb up to a vantage elevation point for visibility and put smoke signal and white cloth signals for the pilot to spot us. He made clear that the chances were meagre in view of deep gorges in terrain. We were requested to halt at any open place by 10.30 and wait till 1200 hrs. Krish suggested the time of 1200 hrs. by which we would make it to Nacho itself where there was open terrain, but it was not agreed as he was keen to take the Governor to Ziro itself by 1200 hrs.

All this while porters for the radio-telephone set were listening, watching and gesticulating with horror written on their faces. Whispering was going on as if in a conspiracy. They gushed forth to Tamik and exploded with anguish gesticulating and pointing towards the R/T set. We were dumbfounded as to what had made them so excited and almost violent. Then we saw Tamik doubling up with laughter. When the talk finished, Tamik with tears of laughter trickling down his cheeks ran towards us, pushing aside the porters in front of him, and exclaimed, "Oh, horribly good joke, sir. These people tell me: *Budha* (old man) you cheat us. Those two boxes contain Migom Saheb's children with whom he speak every day. We will not carry them anymore. They are not *dumppo* (luggage). If one dies or falls to ground injured we shall be punished! How dreadful of you to shut them in a box so that we would not know— or you tell us how the box replied. amount of cajoling would help persuade them. They looked at me with accusing eyes, probably forming the opinion of a cruel stepmother." But when we burst into laughter they stood hesitantly whether to laugh or keep a stern face. Then came Mali Rapu who alone had stayed behind, all others having already gone, to rescue and resolve the crisis. He showed off his better knowledge, asked us to open the boxes exposing the insides for

inspection and explained in his own God knows what way as to how the others' voices were hard. He assured them they were not children but a Migom talking and being heard from Ziro! Then the porters joined in the laughter themselves. They no doubt had a great gift for laughter at their own cost.

We waited for the signallers to move with us in case we received the call while on the move marched along the bank playing the favourite game of hide and seek with the river, the ridges and the jungle. Passed the village of Tachi with 5 houses, Dingshar with only two houses and a large village, Charu with ten houses. Here we saw another cane bridge (Kyak Shika) crossing over to the east bank. We passed three more villages on the east bank the Miabang (2 houses), Tapkiaring (2 houses) and Thoreng (5 houses).

We reached the Kojub river at 10.30 A.M. and the rendezvous to meet the Governor's aircraft through air space. Porters were already waiting there. Wasting no time, Krish with Dui Pekho, Mali Rapu and others went up the spur overgrown with shrubs and stunted trees. This was the only open spur along the bank and he decided to prepare the fire signal here. I followed them shielding my face against hanging branches and trying my best to keep up pace with them. We reached, in fact, an old *jhum kheti* about 600 ft. above the river bank and 400 yds. away from it. Not to lose time Krish took out his own *dao* to chop trees obstructing the air view. In a moment about twenty *daos* came out vigorously striking the vegetation along with him. I who had neither *dao* nor an axe to chop trees tried to pick wood and dried grass for making fire. In the meantime Lalzuala arrived with most of the porters and two ASCs. More *daos* came out to lend a helping hand. All round one could hear nothing but *daos* cutting and small trees falling. My work was taken over by Dr. Bannerji who with an injured finger could not wield *dao*, and stood near Krish who shooed me away. I went to Tamik Dabi who plainly desired my absence by saying 'watch' and crash

came a tree just near me. I sneaked back to my smoke, dodging trees, people and *daos*. But by this time the smoke was so huge that it became impossible to sit near it. One man gallantly made a nice seat for me out of the fallen trees and bushes higher up on the spur and out of the way of *daos*. Due to lack of proper tie-up the radio-telephony set had already gone ahead oblivious of the rendezvous site and so we were to rely only on the site signals. We were all set to 'receive' the VIP by ten past eleven, 'press' and 'photographers' included! My husband had just finished taking shots of the column when we saw a speck of a plane coming towards us. It was flying not less than 8000/9000 ft. It flew over our heads perhaps locating the smoke and the white cloth strip which itself must have looked no more than a dot on the ground. Krish was absolutely right that the pilots would never risk the gorges, what with VIP security and restrictions and even without a VIP on board. And so it was. No amount of *Jai Hind* from about 300 people, waving of hankies, etc, would bring it back. It came back still at the same height, not inclined to descend a bit and there was not a chance of us seeing His Excellency's and Chowkhoman Gohain's waving hands which were asked to look for! People had run crazy shouting hoarse and trying to attract attention, while in desperation Doc took out his white shirt and started waving forgetting in excitement that they could perhaps neither see his white shirt nor hear our mighty *Jai Hinds*. It passed us unconcerned all the way to Taliha where it circled twice, and then pointing its nose towards Ziro disappeared out of sight.

How empty and useless we felt. I could see Tagins looking at us compassionately and pointed at Krish's scratched and bruised hands. They muttered "all that labour for the *pattagari*" (*patta* is bird) which they rarely had seen and were eager to look at craning their necks out. "Has *pattagari* got eyes to see?" asked an old woman. How much of sarcasm was there in that question I did not know. Perhaps she regarded *pattagari* to be animate with

life element in it. That is how perhaps Ladakhis brought hay and *bhoosa* to feed the aircraft on its first landing in 1948! Despite a clear sky and an open spur the pilots were playing far too much for safety. Regulations after all. It looked sheer impossibility for them to spot us flying at 8,000 ft or so.

Disappointed as we were, we bravely clutched at the thin line of cold comfort of not a least been forgotten by the Governor who showed considerable interest in this exploration mission. Came down stumbling along the spur over chopped trees and had lunch at the soothing Kojub-Subansiri confluence. We crossed the Kojub and went up a stiff climb for a mile from here and then climbed an easy gradient overgrown with *Tali* trees. At certain places it flattened out completely, reminding of a possible austere landing strip someday there. We climbed higher and reached a *jhum kheti* where our porters were taking rest. Krish took compass readings and did some map to ground study. From here one could see on the east bank some wide gaping valleys but quite in depth below. These were of two sister rivers, Kodak and Korit, with a confluence of their own before joining the Subansiri. There was another Kyo river valley little way down south. The only human habitation overlooking the Kori consisted of village Ring-Doring with 5 houses with a few vegetable plots neatly fenced in. In Kodak valley too there is only one village, Chokhar, with its two dilapidated houses.

As we turned to go up to the camp adjacent to the wide rolling spur we saw a few persons sitting down looking at us. Tamik asked them who they were. Without answering one of them, a stocky middle-aged man, sprang up with a shout of *Jai Hindi* and extended his hand towards me. I was completely taken aback with this unusual gesture and did not know what he meant me to do with it. But as the hand remained extended I put mine in his and got a good handshake. Only then did he say who he was. We had the honour of meeting Nacho Bimbe,

the brother of *Nyete* (Headman). He was sitting all this time quietly waiting for us to notice him. Tamik who could not get over a Tagin shaking hands asked him whether he had been taught. Bimbe just laughed and said *Ma* (no). In fact, it was instinctive for a man holding hand rather than shaking it, I thought. We soon reached our camp and were received by *Nyete Nacho Gyalo* (curiously both *Nyete* and *Gyalo* are also Tibetan words meaning headman and *raja* respectively), a very old man full of skin disease, clutching a locally made mud pitcher (mud pitcher also appeared a novelty — difficult to say whether the requisite technology came from Assam or Tibet) full of *opo*. He was accompanied by a majestic looking middle-aged lady wearing a long brass coin necklace round her neck and also another brother, *Nacho Tering*, with his wife, a shy young girl. We took a little *opo* only and distributed the rest. We left the local *gams* entertaining guest *gams* and interpreters and retired to our tent. On the east bank we could see the villages of *Rabang* and *Babang* deriving their names from the respective mountain ranges on which they were perched like bird nests.

We were neck deep in making payments to porters till late in the evening and we had to abandon the idea of visiting the village but instead invited the bigger *gams* (*Ropu's* advice!) to come and see us. They settled down round the fire. Soon they opened out and told us that the villages were of the *Nacho* clan, larger than others around and had 13 houses. The old man *Nacho Gyalo* used to be an influential man in his younger days but now *Bimbe* was the *de facto* *Nyete*. I also saw the widowed daughter who, on my asking, told that she did not visit her in-laws as none survived in that family and she would stay with the parents till somebody married her. They were pretty women and with more Tibetan type dresses and decoratives and *Krish* photographed them all.

A new page seemed to start today as the terrain changed with frowning and awe-inspiring high mountain

peaks all round. From Nacho onwards people's economy, dress and character underwent a visible change, the Tibetan influence becoming more evident with chains round the necks and with Chinese coins in the beads. These must have been very recent acquisitions and Tagins would make out their own fashion patterns including jewellery of their own make. We were to pay out in coins and we found eight-anna coins were preferred because they were a novelty to making beads of coins. They wore another type of iron ring chains in front of their waist. These and the *tashangs* made up the popular jewellery for women. Nacho people married spouses further up to Mara area and even Na in exceptions. They preferred not to keep fraternity with Mayu Tagins who were generally regarded as interfering types. People were poorer than Mayu Tagins, however, though all Tagin customs were the same. Only crops worthy of growth were paddy and millet (one crop each). They lived mostly on sweet potatoes and dried bananas. Surprisingly they did not have much poultry or pigs with them. They also traded with Tibet, particularly those having relations with Mara and Na Tagins. Every year after the snow melted, these people and those few others on the east bank went on to Tibet via Kodak valley route—over Kodak Yaten to a place named Shia (Shika). The Tibetans according to them called it Shia-Onge. More people followed this route than the Menyi valley route which was longer (also perhaps more hazardous and free from Mara and Na Tagin trade embargo and interference). It took nine days to reach via the Kodak valley route with heavy loads. They carried to Tibet cane, vegetable dyes, skins and musk and got in return woollen cloth, swords, beads, etc. As there was no village in the Kodak valley they had to halt in the jungle. We saw some Tagins wearing hair-knots with large spike needles passing through them. In fact, Mara and Bai people and what are known as Bangnis did their hair-knots, whereas most other Tagins did not and kept their hair in the fashion of hippies. I was

sure interpreter Nguri Ten and Habung Habung, going in the advance party must have felt tickled with excitement to see similarity with their hairstyles among people lining up the Tibet boundary.

11 February 1956

Nacho to Dogi Nalo 12 miles — What makes a good trinket? Civil strike once again — More about Tibet connection — Riddle of the rivers begins to weigh on Krish's mind — Prettier wives of Nalo gam

Every morning routine invariably demanded tremendous din and bustle of porters trying to prey on loads like vultures on a carcass with loud shouts and high-tone protestations. As it was quieter this morning I and Krish debated in bed how people could change so soon. The mystery was unravelled soon. As the cocks in the camp or village would crow, Krish used to call out *keh keh* to summon the chickens for feeding as the village women did. This he would say was his only relaxation in a day of high activity and responsibility! As he called out, there came Tamik to report the sensational news that all porters were on strike and some had deserted to protest against payment in four-anna coins. We had brought coins of all denominations and now it was the turn of four-anna bits. Some of them even went to the extent of throwing them away. There was no money economy in any case, the usual business in villages being conducted in kind only. We had not brought paper money for that every reason, having no value for them, and the coin money was being used which was also of no value in a localised sense. They demanded payment in eight-anna coins only despite all explaining that two of four-anna bits equalled one eight-anna piece. All that was Greek to them. They said they were being cheated by the Government. Our puzzle was solved. Baki Tadi said people could make use of coins only for making trinkets and garlands and a four-anna piece was unacceptable and unsuitable for that. Again Bimpak and

Sardar Tarik were left behind to ferry the loads left behind and we moved.

Krish had left it to be sorted out by me and Tarik, while he had busied himself in map reading with the only assistance of a compass and the ground features. The latter were all the same in contradiction and his mind suffered from a spin in an attempt to sort out the accuracy or otherwise of the existing map. Valley after valley unfolded themselves now and there was little he could do to identify the rivers which themselves might have been named erroneously. In any case river and feature names on maps bore no relationship to names being given out by Tagins! While interrogating Nacho Tagins, he disclosed that Shia village in Tibet had only about ten houses. There were two junior Tibetan officials, Shia Peda and Changba Deba. They might be only the headmen as Shia was not much of a trade mart at all. People carried out only trade in the barter system. From here the line of trade was via Mechukha on the other side in Siang Frontier Division and most of the dealings in barter were with the Khampas and Monpas (all Indians) living there. They, of course, travelled deep into Tibet, being more acceptable and having relations across in Tibet. There was that cultural hiatus between the Tagins and them but both had borrowed from each other in the bargain, the common factor being the Indian Administration with the Base Superintendent, later Assistant Political Officer, Mechukha. From Mechukha they travelled crossing Lho (La pass) and over to the Menyi river route. Tagins had never met or seen a Chinese over there in Tibet

On the way we saw lots of cane strands hanging ready to be taken to Helu for the festival. We climbed higher with sun beating down on us from a crystal clear sky. Below Kyomori a fairly large stretch of flat land could have made a good short landing ground but for the fact that it was completely fenced by high towering mountains. We visualised someday green velvet paddy plants growing

there instead of weeds and trees. Further up we met two men fully dressed up to kill in brand new Tibetan woollen clothes in addition to baskets of cane. They were returning from Limeking where they had gone for trade. They had exchanged for each cloth a pair of small pigs. They said Mara People would start improving their side of track from tomorrow. Mara Tabe was very ill and worried about our coming at this unwelcome juncture. He may not come down to Naba to receive us. We could now see only one village on the east bank, of one house only and Diba village on the west with just two houses.

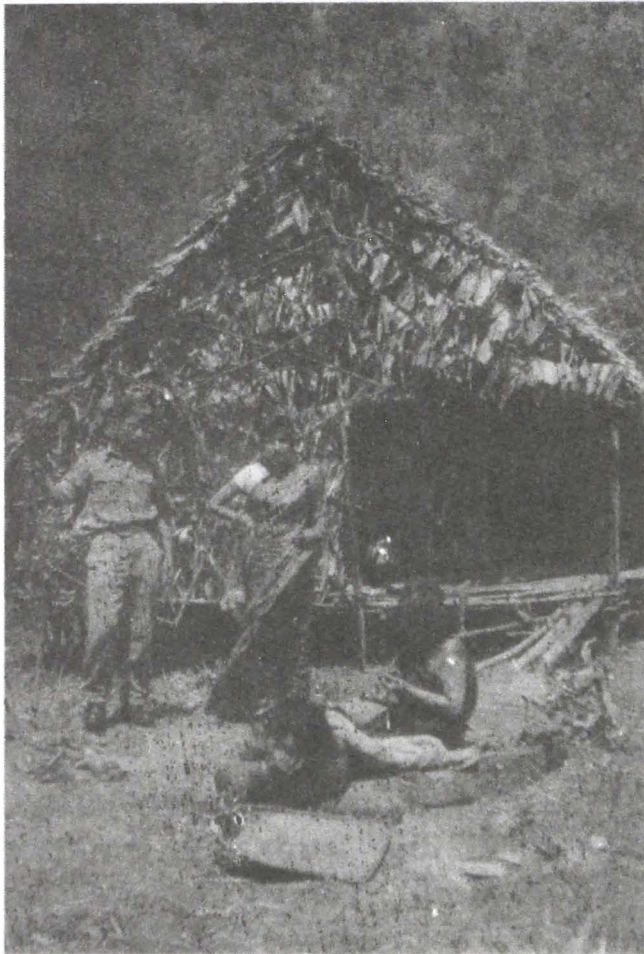
We halted for lunch at the Lodo Kori river with another Gonyo Koro the next door. On nearing Yolu Nalo we saw a majestic fall, Yolu Sho (*Sho-fall*) which could be exploited for hydroelectric power generation. Yolu Nalo itself is a pleasant camping site with a possible DZ too. This place was full of fragrance of some flower that we could not locate. When I asked Mali Rapu or any Tagin they said they could not smell anything. I could not believe they had no sense of smell besides natural local smells. As we approached Dogi Nalo I got a pleasant surprise to see a woman with parted hair in the very first house we passed while her husband with a *pudum* (hair knot) greeted us with a gesture towards his tummy showing it was empty. Nothing to eat except bananas. Tagin women in those days in general never parted their hair and this woman must have learnt it from Mechukha Khampas.

We passed through the few scattered houses of Nalo and reached our camp. Here we saw the eye-catching personality of Nalo Nyobin, the headman. He was smartly dressed with a brown skin hat. He had a leopard skin sheath for his large Tibetan sword. He had Mongoloid prominent features quite different from the lower Tagins. While he was talking to Krish about the food scarcity, his three pretty wives scampeed up to me. I must say they would have been looking prettier if only they kept their faces clear of dirt and grime. It was a pleasure to talk to the

middle wife, Yabin, who came from one of the villages of Shibar valley nearer to Mechukha. She came with her little girl and sat down near me. I asked her who taught her to part hair and make two thin plaits on either side of her forehead. She replied her people made it always. I gave her needle and thread and she also demanded pins. She was very happy and presented me with four eggs. I distributed sweets to the children and was offered in return pieces of dried banana by a gentleman who himself was eating it! She told me that Nalo village was always poverty stricken and more so this year. I tried to find out the cause for it but could not get a satisfactory answer. All that she said was that beyond Nalo the rocky nature of terrain prevented them from getting a good yield from their crops. Later on I was given to understand that upper Tagins were by nature a bit lazy and depended largely on their trade due to agricultural instability. Small population was another handicap. They bartered Tibetan or Mechukha made woollen cloth with own rice or rice obtained from Mayu Tagins or pigs or chickens. They began *jhuming* in March when men cleared the *jhum* forests and burnt it and women planted seedlings in small slots dug by sticks. In May they did weeding by another sharp bamboo stick and in September/October they harvested.

Nyobin's third wife belonged to a lower Tagin village. She had a cute face and looked Dafla (Nisi) in features. My husband complimented Nyobin for having an eye for beauty. But he intended marrying some more for his harem. He had relations with Mara people. There was a rumour that Tabe's daughter had been betrothed to Nyobin's son. Later it was Roliana Hmar, succeeding my husband, who married her. Nyobin said that the Menyi river which now almost unfolded itself was the largest river joining the Subansiri on the east bank and had a regular trade tract to Shia. It takes 10 days with heavy loads. But it was a dangerous track. Now in the map there was only one large river joining the Subansiri with a

regular trade route to Tibet and that was Tsari Chu! The riddle of the rivers could not be sorted out for onerous reasons.



A make-shift hut at Nguju village

12 February 1956

Nalo to Nguju, 9 miles — Coin crisis continued — Purchasing power of rupee in Tibet not the likely cause Map to ground features remained unreconciled - "Why have you come here? How come Government is concerned about us? The 'Americans' only demanded and ordered" — Definition of Memsahab was 'the woman who left her child behind.' The Governor speaks — The riddle gets involved.

We got up the next morning with wonderful news of 13 more porters running away in the night saying they did not want four-anna coins. They must have payments in *daos* or eight-anna coins or one-rupee ones. They refused to be further 'cheated'. We had to manage without renegades, collecting able-bodied porters from Nalo. It was again a day for boulder hopping. We crossed Kitchi Koro (stream) and Ko Koro on opposite banks and then encountered a freak of a big boulder with a shallow water tank inside its hollow belly, making it a swimming pool with a window cut out in the bargain. While Lalzuala and Tamik scrambled over it to the top to get themselves photographed, I was content to stay below not being inclined to climb the slippery slope. We crossed two more small tributaries and then left the Subansiri bank to climb up the spur to avoid sheer rock terrain and then saw Diba and Sesere villages of Rae clan, each with about 3 houses. We then reached the much discussed Sangam of the Subansiri and the Menyi. The latter was described as the largest tributary of the former and that is why Krish wondered it to be the same as the Tsari Chu described on the map.

Out came his map, compass and camera. As there was no other trace of any other large river confluence except the Tsari Chu and the Subansiri on the map corresponding to the Subansiri and the Menyi on the ground, one could either identify the Menyi to be the Tsari Chu or presume that there was no such river as the Tasri Chu which led to Migyithun. And yet it was the Gelling by local description which the Tagins took to go to Helu (Migyithun), whereas the Menyi route led to Shia! And if the Gelling was the same the Yume Chu to reach Migyithun by local information it was clear that the entire map of this unsurveyed part of India was at best imaginary. We had no other means of finding out the correct situation and the Survey of India could perhaps do nothing to enlighten us even if we referred to them. They themselves had asked for verification.

But could the map be so atrociously upside down? On being asked again Nyobin and Tadi reaffirmed that there was no other large river than the Menyi. We said then the Gelling must be the Yume Chu in Tibetan. Nyobin replied he had heard of the Gelling being called the Yume Chu by the Helu people. The puzzle kept getting worse confounded throughout and several question marks remained imprinted on Krish's mind. The Tagins were, however, puzzled on another account. They wondered by Migom madly kept asking about rivers and whether he had gone river crazy!

Having made the above analysis Krish thought he was at least getting somewhere, or so he consoled himself with the thought, and now a couple of forlongs further we crossed a large Mede river, larger than the Menyi which was turning to be the north bank as the Subansiri started wheeling westward! We had a quizzical lunch there, gazing at river valley and feeling as if they jeered at us. Krish, Tamik, Zuala and the doctor went out to climb the spur to have a better view to read the contours. I did not go as I had no faith they would come back any wiser. And so it was. We climbed stiffly for about an hour and so reached Ngoju village. Our tent had not been pitched and I sat with Nalo Nyobin's wife. When I sat on the ground they protested and fetched a 'chair' for me, although they felt flattered visibly that I chose to sit like them on the ground. The usual talk about my not wearing a *tashang* ensued which was overheard by Krish. He asked me to wear not only *tashang* (beads) from today but also whatever minor item of jewellery I could. They perhaps regard *tashang* to be an item of women's *suhag* so why not wear it to let them feel one with us, he felt. One girl started begging for my ring and was very embarrassed when I in return begged her for her *tashang*. Others burst out laughing. Nyobin's wife advised me to let only the men go to Limekig, the track being too bad for me. I could either stay with her father, *gam* of Nguju, or camp at Naba. We paid them in rice as they preferred it. Yame said she was coming

along with us further for portering—this was the second wife.

Nguju village overlooked a lovely snow view. The village with just 3 to 4 houses had the same impoverished look. The old Nguju Nyete, Nguju Tarik, was called by Krish to collect rice for the villagers. The very first question he asked was, "Why have you come here?" Krish patiently explained the Government of India's intentions of improving the living conditions of the Tagins and said, for instance, they would not only be never without rice but would be able to grow more in their own fields. But the old man pursued shrewdly to know how come the Government of India felt concerned with them especially then. Krish replied Nguju Tarik was a very intelligent man and perhaps wanted to know whether we would be going to the Helu pilgrimage — as a reason for our coming this year. His answer was in the affirmative, provided of course if Mara Tabe and others would agree to take us also. He made it clear this was not an order. He countered that if they were eager to go for the worship of Takpashiri and Dorji Phagmo (snow god and goddess) why could he not also go for the *darshan*? He avoided reference to the Chinese and reverted to the earlier theme.

Krish said they must have heard about the British Government, the white officers, who ruled and now the real *Nipaks* of the country and their own Government who were the same as Tagins, Nisis, Apatanis and so the concern about their own people. The old man muttered, "Oh Amarigans! They never came here, but they came to Nisis and Apatanis, fought and punished but were not like you who gave rice and all that. Arunachal Tribes always confused with Americans any people coming up towards Tibet. At this Nalo Nyobin opened out, "We are grateful Saheb for the hardships and trouble you have undergone, especially memsaheb who left her child behind to be able to see our wives. We would like *Sarkar* to be here always".

Nguju Tarik also gave information about some Tibetans

having come to Limeking to invite people to come for Helu for presents as they never went without invitations. They came every twelfth year. Their names were Lingdo Dorji and Jaya Sarsang. They stayed with Tabe. Tato Riba, Nguri Tem and Habung Habung were advised by them to go to Limeking immediately. When asked what they would prefer in payment they said they had enough salt (rock salt) from Tibet but would like rice in payment. We gave them two bags and they left before it got too dark. Later we got a letter from Habung saying: Political Jamadar Tato Riba had asked him to inform us about the arrival of 5 Tibetans who wanted to go back, but they had detained them giving rice, etc, in present in case we wanted to see them. But Krish sent word Tibetans could wait if they wanted to meet him. We were also told that a Tibetan officer called Chue had sent a message to Tabe to inform us not to visit Migyithun this year in the interests of a peaceful pilgrimage but to come the next year when they would get the tracks, etc, improved. Moreover, it was too late in the season to come as the monsoon would start and our retreat would be cut off. Nguju G.B. had said that it took them three days to reach Helu with light loads. He also said that Mara clan people had migrated from Helu region of Tibet, and coming down Shia and Menyi had settled down in Limeking area. He too said that the Gelling river was sometimes called Yume Chu in Tibetan lingo. Later in the evening Bishan Thapa, the Wireless Operator, came with the message that Governor Jairamdas Daulatram would speak to Krish on radio-telephony set from Ziro — such a darling old man — he was taking keen interest in the progress of the expedition and had been received repeat of all wireless messages from us.

13 February 1956

Ngugu to Naba, 7 Miles — 'Consolidate the frontiers — Do not proceed beyond last village without clearance' -- Taliha sends us coins and other loads

The morning broke crystal clear but with a touch of chill. We packed up fast to move the porters away to reduce noise before talking to the Governor. I felt the Governor was being gracious to spare time to speak personally to Krish who agreed: "I don't think many people remember our mission every morning other than he. We are only a few nuts and bolts in this big administrative machine after all! We wanted him to come on the air. Meanwhile we sent away Lalzuala and the doctor to reach Naba post-haste to get on with the clearing of the dropping zone there. There had been air-drops there for Thukral's advance party in 1952-53 while he and the main group had not advanced beyond Gengba.

The Governor complimented Krish for leading the column which he said had gone very well beyond his expectations and that was due to good planning. He asked Krish to stay a month or two more on reaching Limeking, the last village, to consolidate the frontiers (a tall order) and to "stabilise your successes". He asked him to halt there and not to move on the pilgrimage area of Migyithun to meet the Chinese. He should move further only after getting clearance from Shillong where they were in touch with Delhi. "You have already met a large measure of your objectives faster than I thought and we do not want to precipitate matters with the Chinese."

He also asked me to speak — perhaps to be sure I was alert and alive! And when I told him we were worried about his health in the cold of Ziro, he said, "It should be we who should be worrying for you, and at the same time, being an asset to the administration, you must look after yourself fully."

We then left at 10.30, everyone praising his interest in his men in the field. Now we had climbed leaving the Subansiri entering the gorge again. The road appeared to have been freshly cut and the sun was pleasantly out. We crossed the Harak Koro boundary between Nguju and Naba (the boundary jurisdictions were traditional and

settled by Tagins for generations). The river was fed by a waterfall which, by its own force, had hollowed a rock into the shape of a well. We climbed up to see how deep it was. We found the spot rather pleasant to have lunch there. We watched Mali Rapu, who after having a sort of bath, was now wiping the water off his face and legs with his small *dao*! Having climbed a spur and crossed two rivers, the Lingba and the Giving Koro, we saw two houses of Bohum village with *jhum kheti* spread out. Nalo Tago, a small young man, who had been carrying our loads, had migrated here from lower Nalo when an acute food shortage had befallen him. A few women draped in Tibetan style were lined outside the houses to meet the "kime Migom Saheb" (lady officer)! But their real interest, apart from a thorough friendly scrutiny, was to beg for the *kapshi* (needles and pins). As I had nothing left in my pocket I asked them to follow us to Naba. They agreed. They also said the Mara (Limeking) track was very bad and we rather stay in Naba. We reached Naba where air-drops had once taken place. The place was a fair size flat spur protruding from the hill range and then looking over the Sunabsiri river deep below. The approaches for the aircraft appeared reasonable from the ground. A small waterpoint gushed out in a small stream from the belly of the mountain range. The snow view appeared once again in all its naked majesty. Surely one of those peaks must be the celebrated Takpashiri peak and the other its female consort. We went straight to check up the progress of clearance by Zuala and Dr. Bannerji who had left the smaller bushes and shrubs intact thinking they would help break the speed to the falling loads of the aircraft but sufficient to make an excuse for the pilot not to risk his aircraft making a swoop over them. The 'speed breakers' could be mistaken for hazards. The camp had been pitched right over the projected DZ. There was nothing else to do other than to shift it to one side away from the line of flight.

I was again mobbed by women begging for pins. Naba

Tatum, and genial *nyete* of Naba, met us with his old wife. There were only two houses in Naba, the other one belonging to his cousin. More sure that the pilot was likely to declare it fit for drops and not knowing what Limeking had in store for us, we decided to build up our base camp here. Dui Gobu was sent out to fetch our loads sent from Taliha from lower Nalo together with Rs. 500 in eight-anna pieces which had reached there so that they could buffer up a reserve stock in case of hold-ups in dropping. There was nothing more to do except to keep expecting the airdrops. We slept with a feeling of anticipation as to what waited us next after reaching the last big village of the no-man's land frontier.

14 to 18 February 1959

Halt at Naba — Further clearing the DZ — Lao (Ihopa) messengers arrive from Migythun just beyond Longju—Invite our visit to their area after Helu Typical frontier types with apprehension and fear of Chinese intervention—Two airdrops at last on 15th February—We were reported far ahead of our map references Can we drop anywhere in Subansiri valley? They did empty out the aircraft belly but dropped magazines and periodicals—Lhopa's comprehensive report—'Here rice falls from the sky like rain.

So far we had been marching to catch up with Mara Tagin's departure for the pilgrimage. Having got into the vicinity it was necessary to take a stock of the situation and cry a halt for a few days to replenish and recharge our batteries. Consequently, in a relaxed mood I wrote first thing in the morning to my mummy to inform we had reached safe and sound. We struck the night camp and shifted it to a safer high ground where we would expect to be out of range of the dropped loads. It was a lovely clear day and we did not want to waste time. While I looked after shifting the camp, Krish went down to further clear the DZ with a few ASCs. They were at it for two hours and cleared it well indeed. Some porters helped him and yet

others undertook to cut bigger trees 90 yards in the line of flight. With 'T' and fullstop, all white and gleaming in bright sun and smoke signal kept ready to be lit with fire we waited for the plane to come. 'Clear' signal had already been sent early in the morning at the appointed hour. By 12.30 our camp was also ready, fully established and operative on the higher ground overlooking the DZ. By 1.30 P.M. we were told one sortie was on the way. Bishan Thapa, the signal man who contacted on the R/T, gave the direction as the plane reached Taliha. Smoke was now going up billowing in volume. Yet neither the plane saw us nor could we locate it. Squadron Leader Anderson asked of Krish to talk over the R/T and was very complimentary and congratulatory in tone but asked to recheck the map reference. When Krish repeated the map reference, he acknowledged it to be correctly received by him and confirmed he was actually circling around the same reference but could not locate any trace of DZ markings. Although it was a cloudy affair by this time, he said he could distinctly scan the right bank of the Subansiri. Krish said he could not see any sortie. Anderson at last again took the mike and called out? Hello, Mike Charlie something drastically wrong which I could not make out. Would it do if I dropped the loads around anywhere in the Subansiri valley?" Krish protested and said we would never find any load in this valley of forested gorges. We did not know whether Andy went back or emptied the aircraft 'somewhere' in the valley.

As we stood outside our camp in the afternoon looking at landscape, we noticed a little commotion and people pointing at something. We then saw Political Jamadar Tato Riba who shouted *Jai Hind* He was accompanied by two Tibetan looking men with *Baku* on their persons and wearing plaited hairs. They also said *Jai Hind* to us and shook hands with Krish. We were a bit perplexed about their objective; and if their presence in our territory had not been misunderstood, it was because Krish was well

versed in situations like this where Tibetans were concerned. Tato said Baki Tadi had informed him that Krish and allowed them to come and see him. This was actually not true. But then perhaps Tadi wanted them to be presented before him as they were eager to meet him before going back to migyithun. Krish decided to make the best of the initiative Tibetans or the Chinese might have taken to see if the horse himself would open his mouth with the correct version of what undoubtedly must be reaching them as jumble of rumours about our intentions. With his background of Tibetan affairs he soon manoeuvred the visitors to speak out. He asked their names and the young hefty pink complexioned man gave it out as Lingdo Onge and the other shorter and older man as Puri Tarin, who surprisingly was known to be a Tagin brought up in Helu. For myself it was pleasure to see the handsome Tibetan after Krish and I had left Tibet in January 1954. Since the visitors had no food, Krish asked them to be looked after with comfort and got rice, tea, salt, milk, sugar etc. issued, telling them they were our guests. He was fully aware of the traditional Tibetan hospitality. He asked them to take rest and food first before coming for what they had to say. On asking, Baki Tadi said they were so keen to see our *Nipak* (Indian) officer that both Tabe and he felt pity on them and decided to allow them a meeting. Krish turned to me and said if one was a Chinese come in Tibetan disguise he would know how to find it out.

We called both for tea-cum-talk late in the afternoon. I think they were slightly scared of us, but they were soon put at unsuspecting ease, especially Puri Tarin who talked freely after that. They said Chue (Tibetan officer) bade them to request that Mara people be allowed to go to Migyithun to receive the customary presents and that we should not stop them. Krish said both Chue and we were friends even if we had not met because our Governments had lived and maintained border relations in the traditional and customary ways of the pilgrims passing through this

segment of Indian territory. "Tagin people have been helping you and have become a factor indispensable to pilgrimage." He said they should inform Chue that he was as anxious for the peaceful and successful pilgrimage as Chue was. And, therefore, there was no reason for him to stop Tagins going for an age-long tradition. He came here not to stop, as erroneously thought, but to tour his jurisdiction and meet the Tagins to know their problems. It was just too bad that it coincided with the pilgrimage, but Chue should not think we could not visit our Tagins.

Lingdo Onge who obviously had a higher status said Chue was worried that our trip to Migythun might clash not only with pilgrimage but with Tagins, departure for Helu as there would be none left for portorage and improving tracks without which it would be risky. He had promised that the next year Tagins could improve the track and would be free of the pilgrimage to receive us. Krish again assured that if we had to go there we would definitely inform the Tibetan Government and expect an invitation without which we would not go beyond our territory. While Onge spoke in Tibetan, Puri Tarin translated into Tagin dialect. Onge described himself as assistant to the Migyythun headman and also his son. He answered some intricate in-depth questions from Krish regarding ecclesiastical forms of Buddhism which a Chinese incomer would not have answered correctly and also his Tibetan accent was that of a Tibetan and not a Chinese as Krish had heard and Chinese speak in Tibetan in Tibet. Moreover, he had the Tibetan style of long plaited hair which a Chinese would not wear.

They told us that Helu or Holu as they sometimes pronounced, was the same as Migythun. Mighithun people had their dwellings situated on both sides of the river Gelling which was known as the Tsari Chu in Tibetan. I could not believe my ears. Then the Yume Chu was not the Gelling! Locations and rivers were getting worse confluence of Subansiri and Tsari Chu took them four days to

Migythun, people of which were called Loas by Tibetans which connoted 'slave' class (literal meaning people of south or *Ihopas*). The people were either Tagins or Tibetans mixed with Tagins. They had to pay annual heavy tax to the Tibetan Government consisting of the following articles: 100 baskets of one man load each of dyes 25 seers each) one load of split cane which was very heavy; two loads of yak hair rope each load having ten strings; 10 loads of rice, each 30 seers; one load of yak butter; and one load of aconite (poison plant). Most of these things were not available at Migythun but they procured these by bartering with Tagins. They said these taxes were sent to Kunden Chue in Lhasa whose name was supposed to be Sung Su Kandun Phodang (most likely Dalai Lama's palace. He sent his *Pagbos* (*Nyerpas*) to collect these taxes every year in *chukchiba* (corresponding to October-November before the heavy snowfall would commence. *Nyerpas* were estate junior officials in chare of commissariat. This time the tax collection had been delayed due to advent of the pilgrimage. They also paid taxes to Mara people annually: a goat per house, salt (rock), beads, etc. Migythun had about 40 houses with a population of about a thousand which they claimed were mostly Tibetans barring a few Tagins like Puri Taging. Tarin married the sister of Onge Gombo (head-man), a very exceptional case as they did not intermarry Tagins. People of Helu were not considered pure Tibetans by the Tibetans who looked down upon them as slaves (a clear contradiction). And so they were not allowed to marry to upper Tibetans. They also spoke of different dialect and wore no boots but carried swords. They put on cane hats similar to Tagins. They smoked pipes also different from those of Tibetans and similar to that of Tagins.

Note : The above description is clearly indicative of the fact that the population of Migythun largely consisted of people of Tagins' origin and it was primarily a Tagin settlement of *Ihopas*. The slave trade flourished as many

slaves were taken from such settlements along the frontier, by purchase or by other means, to Lhasa or other Tibetan towns by Tibetan officials and noble families. They were used as menials as well as for all sorts errands. We had seen many such in the mansions of senior officials. The slaves, like those of the Arunachal tribes, could not be married by the Tibetans. These tribes sold them off across the border at a premium.

According to them there were two resident petty officials: one of them a *lama* called Chundri Deba and the other one who came to Helu recently along with his family was known as Chujor Chempo. (Their pronunciation of Tibetan name is not guaranteed nor can be expected to be dependable.) By the later description Krish thought this could be the Tibetan officials of fourth rank who paid annual visits for collection of revenues from these areas. In our time Rimshi Dhote of Dhote estate, near Gyantse, had this assignment apart from Takpashiri (Tsari), there was another sacred mountain called Dorji Phamo Phamo. Lha means in Tibetan a god and Mo a female, and so the divine goddess was supposed to be the divine consort. While Takpashiri was snow covered the year round, Dorji Phamo peak got covered with snow only in winter. Buddhists performed only two pilgrimages in the areas: Tasari-Rong-Khor or Ring-Khor and Chung Khor (the long and short one) which is performed every year during summer months. The route encompassed the Takpashiri only and Tagins were not admitted. (In fact Tagins were not needed as the route for the short pilgrimage was within the Tibetan territory. There were rest houses called Tau Khang (Tsuklakhang) where the man in charge looked after the comfort of the pilgrims and procured coolies for pilgrims. Some people performed this short pilgrimage also in winter starting in April often over deep snow terrain.

As for Ring-Khor (long circle) it was a very important and holy pilgrimage of the Tibetans and Buddhists. Thousands of people from all over Tibet and the surrounding

areas and devotees from Arunachal, Bhutan and Sikkim surged up to earn the merit of the holy performance. It took place once in every twelve years in the monkey year of the *losar* (Tibetan New Year). This year they would start on 26th of February. The route went round circumambulating the two holy mountains crossing the frontier, down the Tsari Chu (Gelling) to its confluence with the Sinik (Subansiri). It did not actually reach the confluence but whirled over the higher spur, a day's march away. From here it followed for 10 days up current of the Subansiri passing Na settlement of Chiddar sub-clan till the *sangam* with Yume Chu was reached. Here some people went up the route of the short pilgrimage but others followed the track right up to the confluence of the Char Chu river and the Chayul Chu alias the Loro river passing another village of Na of Sonu-sekke clan. Here again some cut across to the Loro river over to Sanga Choling (Sangling) and beyond, while others still went further up to the Loro river's confluence with the Nye river and completed the pilgrimage there, all this depending upon which direction lay their subsequent destination. But there were no rest houses en route this long pilgrimage path and the devotees were obliged to sleep in the open. High Tibetan officials, of course, brought tents with them. Five hundred soldiers of Tibetan Army accompanied them helping in track making as well as providing security cover against Tagins, some of whom no doubt lived for that day. Tibetan officials went out of their way to bribe them or the Loas to prevent molesting the pilgrims. Krish thought later that the strong word used (bribe) was perhaps the Tibetan perception, otherwise it may be no more than the passage money or some levy or tax which Tagins may have been demanding for trespassing our territory. Giving bribe would appear to be a very difficult thing to an unorganised lot, whereas it was Tibetan Government itself which invited Tagins, whose lands had been usurped in the past, to settle for the compensation, etc, in a *dapo* (treaty) after determining the

amount to be paid collectively. Such invitation to Mara Tagins had already been extended by Tibetan Chue. They also said that so no food was available on the way, many a pilgrim died of hunger and cold and even more so by falling down the chasms below.

All this information came in bits and pieces. Puri Tarin and Lingdo Onge left late in the evening to cook their food. Earlier in the evening we had invited our touring group for refreshment and both the persons from Helu also joined them. Our little test was hardly enough for 15 persons but when they squeezed in they had tea or rum as they desired. One could see the difference in Tarin, the main speaker of the two as he sipped a couple of times from his cup and without waiting for anybody to question him he gave out the following further expose: I am a Tagin by birth. My ancestors came from Nyido (rain) in common with Mara Tagins who had migrated from Helu. My own ancestral home was a Naba Nyilo area. Saheb should know that hundreds of years back Helu belonged to Mara Tagins. The Tibetans came later on. That is why they gave annual subsidy and twelve yearly compensation to Maras. We Mara people were very good and kept friendly relations with *Nime* (Tibrtan) people, but these Mayu Tagins (lower) were notorious for raiding and capturing us and asking for fat ransoms from our relatives. They should be properly cotnrolled by *Jaggar* (Indian) Government. He had hardly finished these words when Mali Rapu (belonging to lower Tagin area) taking umbrage said quietly, "How can you say so? We have never seen you, let alone raid and kidnap!" Krish hastened to pacify them putting his arm round Mali Rapu, and told Puri Tarin, "How could I come and reach here with my wife if Mayu Tagins were bad? Not only that, I brought them with me as friends. I am thankful to them for their help and cooperation even though I had not come with 500 soldiers. Moreover, they are more prosperous than you people."

Good humour came floating back in the tent and Rapu

and Pekho flashed a look of gratitude towards Krish. To show no ill feeling, Rapu gallantly took out *biris* and passed on to all including Puri Tarin to enjoy a smoke.

We all then came back to the subject of *Dolo* (pilgrimage) and Tagin subsidy. It seemed that a few days before the actual pilgrimage started the Tagins who were descendants of the Nyido ancestry, stretching from Nacho upwards, were invited by Tibetan Chue Depa to come to Helu to receive presents. Their names were written in a book. Other Tagins just to see the fun and fanfare and also to trade went over there for the *mela*. On arrival of all the recipients they gathered together in an open flat ground, Tagins on the one side and Nime on the other. A *Dapo* (peace and friendship rite) was performed. Tibetans consecrated the rite with prayers and killed yaks to seal (ratify) the *Dapo* and the Tagins took the oath for not harming pilgrims, killing of yaks or capture of the Tibetans. After the *Dapo* ceremony they were called out by names and given presents which varied from person to person. Tabe got the largest share.

Once the *Dapo* was over and presents given out, the Tibetans and other holy pilgrims started on the pilgrimage of circumambulating. But the Tagins kept hanging on there soliciting favours from morning till evening, squeezing when they could not get voluntarily in a few cases. (another version was that, the coercion was resorted to whenever the Tibetan officials failed to pay the subsidy according to *Dapo* expectations. After that they sometimes resold at the even as much as doubled premium. Onge told us that the Migyithun people remained half fed throughout the year. Though they grew wheat, sweet potato and barley, they had to be dependent largely on the 'trade' of rice (while rice was generally in short supply in Lhasa). They ate powdered millet also. No officer visited them, nor had they been to Lhasa. They complained that the Tibetan Government remembered them only at the time of tax collection, but the rest of the year they were left to fend for

themselves and tide over their difficulties. They had not seen the Chinese but they had heard of *Khungstens* staying two days' march away.

They were very impressed to know that their Sangye (Lord Buddha) was born and lived in India (born on Nepal border with India). They were also told about Mahatma Gandhi, whom Krish described as Gyagar Sangye (Indian Buddha) who also preached what Buddha preached but in different context. Common theme being *ahimsa*. They were very keen to see him in photograph. They dispersed late at night very happy at the heart to heart talks with so much commonality. The next morning when they came to say goodbye, they received presents from the Indian Government consisting of *endi chadars*, two yard pieces of long cloth, mugs, plates, knives, tea leaves and rice. They were overwhelmed with the gesture. They mumbled something about *Jagar Ato* (master) being large hearted.

Thapa came to say that a sortie was in flight. The DZ was cleared. Just then the plane appeared and started dropping. Tarin and Onge stood gazing wide-eyed looking like marbles with admiration, both praising India where "rice rained from ground"! They left. But they came back soon after asking for 'Jaggar Sangye's (Gandhiji's) photograph. Krish took the chance to ask them to convey to the Chue that Maras not be stopped from pilgrimage. But since he was in no mood to welcome him and me to the pilgrimage he should see that he did not also let the Chiense and Tibetan troops accompany pilgrims since it was all a religious festival. Thereafter, they departed out of sight.

We then focussed attention on the DZ and saw hundreds of pairs of legs running at top speed towards the dropped loads and within a short spell all the loads were neatly stacked in front of our tent for tally with the manifest. It was a good air-drop but all rice and salt with no trace of *daos* and eight-anna coins to the utter disappointment of the porters. And now they wanted *bakhsheesh* for the next sortie. The same plan came and

dropped beautifully, flying low. At every drop we cheered the pilot and were full of gratitude when he finished his task. Porters again were at loads like vultures on a carcass. This time they pinched and pounded to make sure what it contained and the way they dragged their feet bringing the loads for the dump gave out the repeat of the story of no *daos* and no coins. It was again *ambin* and *alu* (rice and salt). It was not easy to convince them that the absence of their two beloved articles was not due to lack of pressure from our side. Greatly hurt some of them wanted to go away without payment in anger! All except twelve accepted rice and a little salt in payment. They too preferred to wait or to come back later.

16 to 18 February, 1956

Porters desert on instigation — Dui Gobu seeks porters from east bank — To leave Naba on 19th — Halt continues — Tamik Dabi taken ill with malaria

We planned to leave Naba on 19th when we found Tamik suddenly taken ill with malaria and toothache. We were concerned, him being an important member of the expedition. Doctor had known Tamik before and thought Tamik was prone to fall ill. We decided to leave after a gap of two full days to let him recoup. We sent words accordingly to Nyilo village and Limeking itself for porters and to improve the track. Nyilo Tasser Nyete of Nyilo village came. Doctor treated him as he was ill. His tummy had gone haywire after killing and eating a mountain goat (*burrhel*). The *uiyi* from the dead goat had entered his stomach, so he believed. The real trouble was due to the spirit of that half-cooked goat finding a bad reception in his stomach. Nyilo village was a few miles away on the opposite bank, a cluster of eight houses but with scanty population and permanent scarcity of food. While talking to Tasser, a visitor with his face streaming with sweat arrived telling excitedly something about Gobu and Nalo.

For a moment I stopped breathing thinking some catastrophe might have befallen poor Gobu. Tamik obtained the story that Gobu had reached Nalo and arranged porters, etc, and the lower Nalo people carried loads up to and Garam Tatuk of Najring village who had returned from Naba. They incited the porters that the *Sarkar* was paying in inferior coins and neither *daos* nor *eight-anna* coins remained in stock. They should, therefore not be cheated by the Saheb. Hearing this piece of good advice the whole lot of them left their loads and bolted leaving Dui Gobu to deal with the loads. Gobu's persuasion was unheeded. Gobu had taken only a limited amount of rations and was now totally without food. Hence the arrival of this messenger for sending him rice and rations. Nevertheless Gobu had contacted the east bank Tagins who would bring the loads in the next three days. Gobu also sent word that he had not seen Tamar, the ASC, supposedly bringing Rs 500. It was only on such occasions of mishaps when Krish missed the Assam Riflemen who generally came handy to maintain decorum and discipline on tours. But then he knew they could also smoulder resentment with their high-handedness, as was their wont in some cases, and render it counter-productive.

On the 18th, porters from Limeking arrived. Each one had a hair-knot (*pudum*) on their hairdo style an the influence of Bangnis on the one hand and the Tibetans on the other was apparently there. Tabe's son, a boy of 10, also came with them. Their spokesman was Tape (17). None of them would even smile! They wanted their loads straightaway so that they could leave early in the morning. Despite all emissaries and advance party mechanism they were stridently Mara tribesmen, pensively cautious and even indifferent, but not yet hostile.

For the first time too, we saw two specimens of Dafla-Bangni tribes from Khrung (Khru) and Kamla valley which we had bypassed miles behind us on the south-west of our division. Krish had planned ambitiously to take a

detour and return via those valleys befriending and incorporating them also into the administrative fold, if all went smooth. They had settled down in Mara and Na. Mara Tanga was decked with tons of beads and had a piece of bear-skin fur draped round his *pudum*. He was related to Mara Tabe and was slightly different from Tagin of lower Subansiri, as far as the lower torso was concerned. He had a loincloth and not the Tagin bamboo sheath much to the amusement of Tagins.

We called them up in the evening and gave them tea. Mara Tape told us that they were all ready yesterday to move for Helu when they received the orders to come and porter loads. Mara Tabe was very annoyed in saying Saheb had told them they could go to Helu, now he sent word to porter his loads — why did he tell us lies? It sounded like starting on the wrong foot both for the Mara tribe and us. It seemed Tabe had arranged for four people to carry him, being a sick man, but had to divert them over to us. Krish told Mara Tape and Tanga that he did not tell lies and that if Tabe was so desperate to go he could leave tomorrow without waiting for us. Tape hastened to say how he could leave without seeing the Saheb and that he now planned to leave the next day after arrival of our party. He said they were not very sure we could go to Limeking as the road was in a deplorable state. "We were too few people to repair and improve it and so if anybody fell and broke a leg please don't blame us." Krish laughed to say that at the most we would also break somebody's leg but no more!

Last minute instructions were given. Lalzuala and L/N Shri Chand were to remain in charge of Naba base camp in our absence and Tamik was to follow as soon as he had gained strength. Dr. Bannerji was to accompany us.

19 February, 1956

Naba to Bate Camp, 9 miles — The misery of this jungle camp, fatigue fear and falling rain — I had to decipher corruptly received messages till late into night with a failing hurricane lantern.

By the time we had woken up, the Mara porters had already been on the move, other porters were trickling in one by one. We had estimated 60 porters and were taking bare essentials for ourselves. A few days of comfortable rest at Naba had done us no good as far as marching was concerned; we felt softened and our muscles non-adjusted to ferocious terrain. The unkempt path came as a rude shock. I took time to regain my stride and negotiate edges of precipice and sheer rocks. We were going higher in altitude and around us snow mountains stood straight up unrelenting and awe-inspiring. As we went along holding our breath to feel as light as possible over a slender single bamboo bridging a chasm, we could see a number of waterfalls all over the country. Thapa actually slipped and was saved only by timely grappling by the doctor. We were shuttling along a meagre four-inch path cut on the extreme edge of a rocky landslide with a stream to its credit making it still worse and slippery — on the east bank (it was really the north bank now). We could see a large and long river, the Mazing Koro, which had its source in the snow mountains above and had a 60° fall into the Synyit (Subansiri) below. From here our path went steeply up for a thousand feet to the saddle of the spur where we halted for some time while the doctor bandaged the foot of a porter from Nyilo who had injured it yesterday while improving the track. Krish as usual took such rests for studying the ground and the landmarks to match them with the map, sometime optimistically but mostly in despair. All the stipulations seemed to be on demolition course. Even a compass reading did not reconcile.

From here we went down a steep slope holding roots for our dear lives. The track was becoming more and more tricky and abominable. No wonder the population was so small as surely there were more deaths due to falls and diseases than births. We were told only last year Mara Tabé's three brothers and two others fell down from the rocky path on the way to Helu and died due to holding of

some loose or false roots. This made me remember my predicament between Taliha and Kodak! I felt a shiver passing my body. It appeared clinging to such roots sticking out of the rocks, despite a degree of firmity, was the main cause of losing the body balance if the hold gave in. The demonstrably fearsome way this was told by Tato Riba added to our discomfiture. Their dead bodies had been found floating near Balu village about two days march from Taliha.

We reached the base of that steep descent, crossed the river and halted for lunch. From here we climbed up an almost perpendicular rock and reached the saddle of the spur after an exhausting two-hour climb. We stopped to regain our breath and looked around us. We could see a little of Limeking village, the rest of it being invisible due to the protruding range obstructing the view. It looked absurdly near as the crew flew and yet so abominably far beyond the gaping crevasses. On the opposite bank we could see two houses with a paltry *jhum* patch on the slope. No wonder Dui Tashi showed such contempt for it. The path came down expectedly to go up again. At last we reached our halting, a camp right in the middle of the road and as miserable and bleak as Kojin camp. Even this semblance of a camp was made by our faithful team — Rapu, Tadi, etc, and not Nyilo villagers. Obviously the loyalties and the commitment were thinning away in spite of payment in advance. Due to obstruction by tall trees and mountains. Thapa had difficulty about the interference in wireless reception. No one came to meet us, there being no village between Nyilo and the last village, Limeking — a walking distance of about 12 miles.

We thought of turning in early when two long cipher messages were brought by Thapa to me for deciphering. He apologised for overwriting as the transmission was very bad. I could have murdered him. After that arduous climbing my body was crying out to be in bed early. Anyhow I crawled out of the camp bed and started

deciphering. The more I wanted to complete early the more mistakes I made. Even then I struggled up to 10 P.M. and got at least one correct. Krish asked me to leave the other for the next morning. But I struggled on for the second out of sheer tenacity though the letters before my eyes were literally dancing — till the lantern was put out by Krish and I slumped down to slumber. It rained throughout the night and we got dismally wet.

20 February, 1956

Bate camp to Limeking, 7 miles — A dreamy weemy night — Krish's nightmare — My Waterloo with pigs — Nguri Tem meets halfway to Limeking — The Kotir Koro route to Kamala valley towards south and also to Soreng Lipu, 'honey-hunters' route—at last Mera Tabe, our frontline man, curious mix of emotions favouring independence from Nipaks, at the same time realisation of new tide, in their lives.

Last night was the worst that we spent. While in dream I must have dealt with dozens of cipher messages. Krish, unusually, also dreamt of horrible tracks. He gave such a jerk to the camp bed as to let the torch fall down on the floor. The sound woke him out of dream and startled me out of my dream. Krish said he dreamt of barely saving himself from falling by holding on to stumpy root.

I completed my deciphering work and we confronted again the rotten path. Since yesterday we had been passing over a deep gorge over precipices and steep rocks with an angry Subansiri ready to receive us into her bosom below. Our difficulties were increased ten-fold by last night's rain which had made an already mossy track further slippery. We climbed up steeply to a saddle of the jutting outspur and took up a path frequented by mithuns (*ovis frontalis*) over gentle slopes. We met Political Interpreter Nguri Tem, who had come to receive us halfway. He had been to the one-house Ging village 5 miles beyond Limeking.

Mara Tayi, sole occupier of that house, together with his old mother had just returned from Helu and had brought a letter from Cha-jor Chue (most likely Chayul

Dzong-pon) to be delivered to Krish. Tem handed over the letter to Krish which was written in Tibetan. Krish's comment was that our expedition had created a panic all round and everyone was apprehensive about our motives. The only bright side was the God's mercy we did not bring armed force with us.

Nguri Tem who had been loyally Krish's alter ego for over two years was a lucky choice of us. He was rather liked in Tabe's house as Mara Tagins had cultural links not only with lower Tagins but also with Bangnis and Nisings of Kamla and Khrung valley Nisis (Daflas). Indeed Limeking was the junction of the routes from south-east and south-west, as well as from north (Tibet). He briefed us usefully about Mara Tabe and his family members and other village highlights. We came down passing a small koro; the last bit of our path was rocky and bad. We halted for lunch crossing the Kotir Koro which was coming from a low saddle almost looking like a pass. To our delight Tem pointed towards that and said that that was the route to Kamla river valley, which we had bypassed on our flank and was now to our south. We confirmed this position from other Tagins and found that the track followed the bank of the river and crossed the path over a high Kemissi river which formed a water parting between Kotir and Selu rivers, the tributaries of the Kemissi or the Kamla river. It then followed the Selu and reached the first, inhabited village of Sore or Soreng. On the opposite bank in front was another village called Lippu, a sister clan of Sore. People inhabiting the Solu river valley were said to be all Tagins. From their village the Keme river valley was supposed to be a few days' march away. People trading with Mara and nearby villages take this route. They have also marriage relations with Mara people. One of Tabe's wives was from this Soreng Lippu. Krish was interested in returning back exploring this Kamla river valley area if only time and exigencies of Mara area permitted us. Kamla and Khrung (Khru) valleys also were unvisited, unexplored

and unpenetrated like the border region of Tibet. Extension of administration was held as the primary task for the benefit of national integration. Kamla and Khru valleys also were not sending friendly signals to this post-Independence phenomenon, a matter of Prime Minister Nehru's policy towards the tribal regions and their development. We would have performed a hat-trick indeed if we were able to kill three birds with one stone. And that would have brought the entire Subansiri Division within the fold of administration, large chunks of which had been left out neglected for many years of the British rule.

We left the track and crossed an extremely narrow rocky hairpin bend with sheer drop of thousands of feet and crossed over the ledge of a landslide. And just above that we saw a hanging cane ladder fixed on a monstrously precipitous rock for scrambling up. I turned to my husband and said that the entire Subansiri valley had appeared to turn in to an obstacle course. And circumstantially Mara Tagins, being in no mood to receive us or rather welcome us at this juncture, would have been only laughing in their sleeves if we were unable to successfully negotiate to reach our destination. But then he rightly said they had been after all admiring my guts to defy all obstacles besides the fact that they too had had too short a time to improve and ease the obstacle course. Having reconciled myself to the Tagins' best intentions, I found that the hanging ladder I was not liking was being used and meant to be used by the 'honey hunters'. From a distance it looked very fragile and the very thought of people climbing to collect honey on such a contraption brought cramps in my feet. For a moment I thought it would be inviting one's death to go up especially if the bees also made a frontal attack. When told this was the last hazard before the destination I took life in my own hands and stealthily climbed up. Even the bees did not notice!

We climbed down to stream again, and again shot up to high spur round the corner in the usual 'snakes and

ladders' style and now found that we had reached the *jhums* of Limeking village — an exhorting feeling — and a little further ahead saw abruptly the village itself with more *jhum* land to itself. Our first thoughts had always been on dropping zones and we thought it was an appropriate site of marking out a zone for dropping our supplies. As we came nearer we spotted some people standing and waiting for us. Our eyes got fixed on a man wearing a wild cat fur cap tailored crudely — a pale drooping personality and we rightly surmised him to be Mara Tabe, the man we came in search of. As we neared he together with his two wives either side folded his hands along with them — wearing quaint caps. There was a pathetic touch in his wan smile enforced on his washed out anaemic face when Krish pressed his folded hands raised in greeting.

There was no doubt about the old man being physically as well as emotionally sick. His two wives, looking very much Ladakhis in appearance came near and beamingly asked about my welfare. In no time we were instant friends talking about each other's family and children. Yet all this time Tabe who was helped into a camp chair of our own by Krish himself sat motionless with his gaze fixed in the ground without uttering a single word beyond saying *Abu* (master or father) faintly. The gloom and unhappiness so visibly written on his pale fallen countenance seemed to betray his concern for the future. I wondered if he had consulted the village soothsayer (priest) and seen forebodings of a rough future for all concerned. For a moment I felt sorry for him.

We tried to cheer him up by giving him a cup of tea and promising speedy recovery by our doctor. All this while Tabe's eldest wife with a thin sharp face kept busy talking. She and the second wife belonged to Na and she appeared to possess an air compared to Mara Tagins. When I told her it was typical of all women, all over the world, to speak always highly of their parents' house and think small of



Mila Rapu swings his sword to show war dance, Limeking



Hornbill dance, Limeking



A feast, Limeking



Sword dance by Mara Tabe



Taliha Republic Day sports event



Swinging Sport



The priest reads omens in a chicken liver



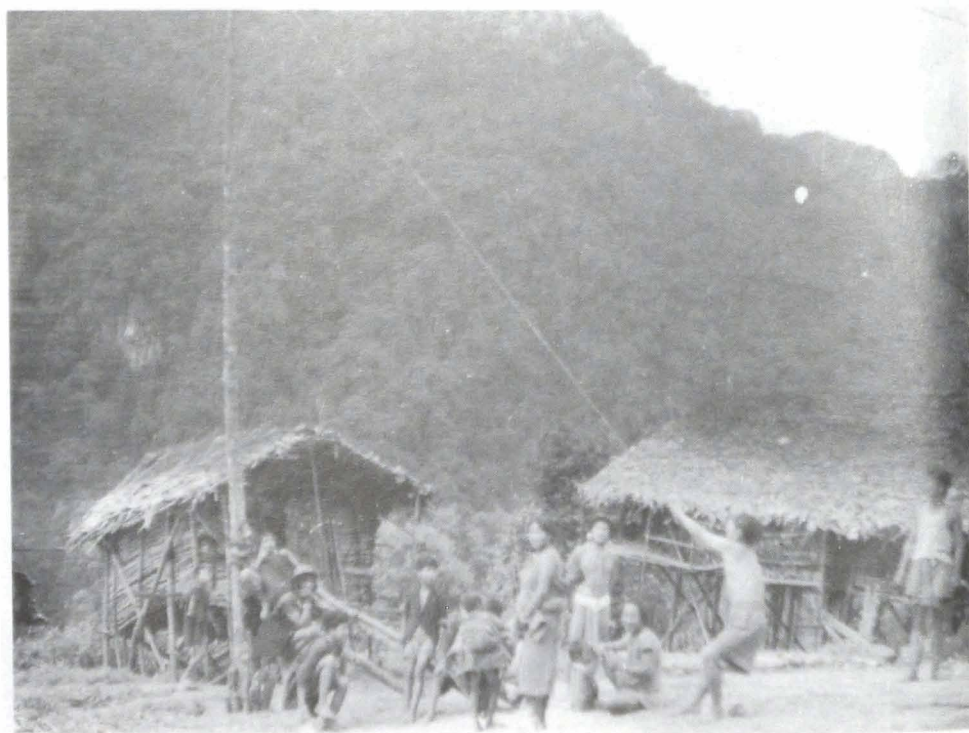
Tarpauline hungalows



A scene of Nguri Ten's Panchayat



Girls Preparing Jhoom Fo Paddy



Bamboo Rope Swing Festival

the husband's house, she and the other women laughed and agreed. This was our first link — testing similarity of temperament. When she said she had been hearing about the small *Nipak* woman and wondering what she would be like, I replied I too had been told about Tabe's three wives and their beauty, and had been wanting to be friends. Tabe still sat morose till Krish took pity by saying that if he found it necessary he would send the doctor with medicines to accompany him to Helu and bear the expenses of hired Government porters to carry him. If he desired he would also allow him to speak on behalf of the Government with authority and dignity to Chue. He should remove all fears and doubts and would be allowed to go for the pilgrimage. He gently asked him to go and rest as he must be tired sitting down. What an emotional regeneration he must have gone through as Tabe's lit up smile spoke more eloquently than the words, and he left us for the day supported by his wives on either side.

Mara Tayee, the second in the hierarchy, owner of the single house in Ging, turned up to see Krish. Tayee, a middle-aged youngish man, handsome and stout had an independent air about him which gauged Krish with a twinkle in his eye and a studied look. Krish also fixed his gaze trying to size him up. He had covered the distance from Migyithun in two days. While Krish murmured to himself whether he would, if Tabe refused to play the game, Tayee broke the ice to say he was sorry he was not present to do track repairs as he was not sure of our coming. In subsequent conversation he seemed to give answer to Krish's thought when he said, "I shall do whatever Tabe told me." For the present he had come to say goodbye as he was leaving for his village to depart for Helu the next morning. When Krish offered him two bags of rice for absence from his village to cover the pilgrimage, he first refused and left. But when Tabe's wife told us that he needed rice but was shy, we called him back and handed the bags over to him. He left for Ging, a further 5

miles away. "The rice of course would be sold in Migyithun but it would enhance their status," muttered Krish.

Tabé's wife sweetly brought a large chicken and put in my lap saying, "I would be very happy if you would accept it." She was followed by the middle wife who dished out eight eggs from her vast folded pocket or *baku* (*chuba*) and gave me. They would not accept anything in return but were genuinely pleased when I pulled out safety pins, needles and thread. The six safety pins were instantly transferred to their caps in a row and they asked for more to complete the circle around. I gave a few more and a comb each from my stock which I had brought on my own initiative. The authorised political presents did not include these. The combs went into action certainly to help in flushing out bunches of lice.

People started begging for more and more safety pins and when they came to know that only women were given these they brought in their womenfolk. One charming woman from Deluriang came to get her share. She said there were only two houses but five women. So I trustingly gave for them too. Her brother who was staying in Mara told me he was a priest (*Nyibu*) and wanted Krish to excuse him to go to Deluriang for puja. On inquiry whether anyone was ill there, he replied in the negative but said he had to go to Deluriang to avert the bad omens and angry spirits related to our journey further to Helu. These people must have seen inauspicious omens — or did our arrival foretold foul forebodings.

I was wondering who would be Mara Tabé's third wife who I knew was from Sore Lippu in Kamla valley. On asking, someone pointed to a shy poorly dressed girl whom I had, in fact, taken to be a slave when she had come to porter our loads at Naba. She was so quiet and so much in awe of the eldest wife that she did not come anywhere near me when I was distributing pins (I had given her one at Naba). I called her and gave her also needle and combs.

Later in the evening Krish sent word through Tem to find out when Mara Tabe was leaving for Helu. He replied that as Saheb had come he would stay a day and leave the day after. So that was that. We seemed to have reached the end of our road unless the Ministry of External Affairs would give a clearance signal. We did go to bed that night with a sense of fulfilment, having overcome all the pain and sweat.

21 February 1956

Halt at Limeking — An air-drop all too soon — The Indian sari enlivens interest — Tabe dithers with mental struggle to retain the power centres he controlled — Nime have been like patron to us — “I don't want to be a GB or a Government man. Mayu Tagins have trapped us Tibetans and Chinese both. Whatever happened Tabe will remain the frontline authority while Tabe felt he will be non-entity with a distant authority in Shillong once we left the scene

The morning broke fresh and clear with a beautiful view of the snow mountains — perhaps more assuredly Takpashiri and Palden Lhamo, the consort. We leisurely breakfasted waiting for Tabe who had first come at 7.30 A.M. and found us asleep. He came again later slowly with his wife and sat down a few yards away from our table. His wife watched each and every action of ours. On asking, all others disclosed that they had never seen the plains men (*Nipaks*) before and thought that whom they saw earlier were 'Amergans'. They were irked but impressed by the use of knife and fork combination and commented boldly about it. As we finished breakfast Bishan Thapa came running to announce a sortie was coming. This caught us pants down as we had told them we would clear the DZ by 12 noon. But meteorological report of 'all clear' did not come by too often and when they came they would come to off-load their quantified commitments for season. We left Tabe and villagers bewildered as we jumped out to lay on DZ signals on the ground and to light smoke fire. Dr. Bannerji did a wonderful job in 'getting up' both

in record time. Krish took the mike to welcome the pilot and to warn not to drop at Naba due to portorage non-availability. This was okayed with 'Roger' acknowledgement while the flight was right over us. Krish returned to the DZ to cross-check the preparation of the DZ. Thapa now took over the set nervously and foolishly asked the pilot to wait for 5 minutes for clear report. The zone was ready which facet was not visible to Thapa from his position. The pilot said 'okay', turned and dipped over us and made a beeline for Naba. We returned vainly hoping it would come back and knew the pilot would empty out the aircraft belly at Naba rather than wait. Naba was unprepared and unexpected and so some loads spilled over to the Subansiri gorge. There was nothing one could do.

This episode could not have been seen as edifying for the 'unwelcomely' welcomed *Nipaks* and Tabe looked dependent and downcast gazing into the ground. The only time his face brightened up was when he saw me coming out of my tent putting on a silk sari. They of course had never seen fine silk, much less a sari in their remote lives. *Nime* (Tibet) also put on silks but not so fine and were very impressed when I told them it was handwoven.

Tabé and his wives came in and touched it and shook head at its fitness unbelievably. I told Tabé that in India cloth even finer than that was handwoven.

We sat down ceremoniously in a circle with Tabé and his people on one side and we visitors headed by Krish on the other somewhat in the fashion of a ceremonial seating *dapo* without the mithun feast. In the middle lay an array of sumptuous presents of blankets, rice, etc, covered with cloth.

Tabé sat quietly trying not to look at the presents, deep in his thoughts. Nguri Tem had told us previously that Tabé was very influential equally with the Tibetans and the people of the Khru valley and the Kamla valley. In fact, Tabé knew of this fact and had confided in Nguri Tem with whom he had established an excellent equation of father and son relationship. He had told that all the routes

converged at Limeking which was a centre of power and all the tribes including the Tibetans looked at him as a key man to be cultivated and followed. He blamed Mayu Tagins for bringing in *Nipak* Government in his domain. He was very unhappy at this as he would no longer remain influential and enjoy the monopolistic power in his sphere. Nguri Tem's diplomacy had worked to collect all intelligence and gauge his mind. Mara Tabe also did not want to accept the shot gun Krish had brought to present him as our frontline man. He pretended to be too old to use it and to help the Government. "Moreover, your Saheb will not be able to give me as much as Chue did. What benefit will I have with *Nipaks*?" (How very true was his appreciation of the situation.) Tabe wanted Tem to advise me to keep Mara people out of administrative fold so as to leave his options open, but Tem had said he could not possibly say such things to a big officer like Krish. With all this in mind, Krish began by apologising for coming to visit him at an inconvenient time and to cause him worry about his Tibet connection. On the other side, the foreigners whom they had referred to as 'Amergan' had neglected the welfare and development of frontier hill people and left them to their fate. Those hills and mountains had remained cut off and a feeling of alienation had grown between brothers and brothers. But once the foreign rule had ended, it was like a meeting between two brothers after centuries of parting. Tabe's fame and popularity was known to him and that presents to be given to him were in full recognition of his big status in his land.

He introduced him to 10 bags of rice, 8 blankets, 3 pieces of *lattha*, 3 *kudalis*, 3 axes, mugs, 10 plates, 20 beads, 10 *endi chaddars*, one brand new single barrel shot gun (which he pointed out would not be available for less than Rs. 2,000), 50 cartridges, 10 knives, safety pins and matches. Tabe was asked to accept and lift the present sent to him by the Government, his eyes darting to ten bags of rice, to pick-axes and to each item in turn. In all he had received more than he had imagined.

Yet, Tabe said, “*Abu*, I must tell you frankly: we Mara people had heard of *Nipaks* but never seen them. On the other hand, we had known *Nime* people for many generations. And we have learnt to look upon them like we do to our own parents. Now that *Sarkar* has come or rather has been brought here by the Mayu Tagins whose black deeds are well known. I am happy to hear what you have just now told me. But I would like to be left out as I am now too ill and may die soon. What will happen to my children now?

“I will be useless for Government work. Please do not appoint me a *Gaon Bura*, nor give me these presents. Instead give them to Mara Tayee of Ging who is younger and a much more capable man.”

One could almost read the mental struggle the old man was passing through to retain his freedom to opt out. His refusal to become a G.B. (no one actually asked him to become so far) or to accept present betrayed his desire to keep clear of Government obligations which would tie down his hands and impair his authority to just what other G. Bs enjoyed. His eldest wife, Yame, who no doubt was very influential with him supported her husband. All the villagers and others who were lounging around in the lovely warmth of the sunshine — some lying prostrate and listening, others picking up lice from each other’s hair — now waited to see how Krish was going to react. Krish would not let this challenge go in vain.

Determined to win over Mara Tabe and his Mara tribe he deliberately but similingly told that the problem was even simpler than what Tabe’s wife, Yame, confronted when he married her and made her leave her old parents, home to find her own with him. She must have missed her parents, home and possibly cried on separation from them. They had been told that Tibet was their home and Tibetans their parents by the officials on the other side of the border — the same people whose ancestors drove away the Maras from their ancestral land in Helu area. Today, Tabe was

feeling sorry to leave his parents as it were, because the time had come for him to come to his brothers where he really belonged. Why did the 'parents' on the other side not allow their 'sons' to go back to their ancestral land in Tibet to live or to go even as far as Chayul Dzong or Tsona Dzong or Lhasa even to travel or for sightseeing? Why did they call Maras as *Ihopa* which denoted inferior status fit for supply as slaves to the parents — not the sons and daughters? They were 'parents' because they needed peace and help and services for *Dolo* (pilgrimage) and so gave presents like payment for work or tribute to do Maras honour because they deprived them of their land. He said we had not come to Maras as parents but brothers and had common parents in Abtani or Nyido who along with the Nature's bounties were worshipped in *Nipak* villages as much as Tagin villages.

He said he had no intention of making Tabe a G.B. but if he wanted he would. Nothing would be done against his wishes. As for his recommendation for Mara Tayee, he would comply with his wishes to make him a Government G.B. but not if he did not want it. He said he had intentions of treating Tabe as a friend, something bigger than a mere G.B. as he was the leader of this area, the wise old man whose advice and instructions we would all carry out — a father-figure. Whether he wanted a red coat or not was immaterial for his advice and guidance would still be sought and valued. It may be another thing that other G.Bs with red coat recognition mustered more weight around them if he renounced his position voluntarily. In principle all including Mara Tayee will obey his orders.

As for his fear of death, our doctor was there to treat him as long as he returned from Helu safe and sound. He would be completely cured of his illness and restored to health within a month of his return. Krish said he had learnt about all that was there in Tabe's mind including his attachment for *Nime* people and fear of *Khungten* (Chinese communists).

Tabé must have known the fate of *Nime* people after *Khungten* had conquered their country by force and it was time when he thought of safeguarding their present habitat from occupation by them and their being driven further to Mayu Tagin area. Had Cha Dzong Chue, etc, not told Tabé that *Gyagars* (Indians or *Nipaks*) were their friends, and now he wanted to tell him that *Khungtens* also were *Gyagars'* friends and have never fought each other. *Nime's* Sangye was born in *Nipak's* country where Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru were also born.

He showed photographs of the Buddha, Gandhiji and Nehru and said we followed them and never fought with *Nime*. Tabé should, therefore, not fear us, but also not depend on *Nime* alone for succour in times of need. He could ask the Chue, if required. Tabé who had kept smiling all the time replied to this by saying that Saheb seemed to read his mind correctly.

"My doubts and misgivings are cleared," he began in a happier frame of mind. "I too have heard that in places like Nyapin the Government had helped people who say they had now plenty to eat. We Mara people do not fight anyone and like to live in peace. Kindly tell Mayu Tagins not to indulge in raiding and killing. As for myself I shall come back from *Dolo* as soon as possible and place myself at your disposal for cure of my illness. I would not have gone leaving you behind but this pilgrimage has come after 12 years and there were commitments to fulfil. On return I shall help the Government as much as possible though I have only a handful of people. Now that we know that you are not stopping us from going to Helu, we would have liked to take you also but the track is very bad and would need thorough repair. Moreover, the Chue has sent word to me to request you not to proceed further in the interests of the pilgrimage as, in that case, *Khungtens'* attitude cannot be anticipated. But he has said that if you like you could send one man with me — someone who would not require top class hospitality for

which they are not prepared this time. You should come again next year."

Krish told him jokingly to tell the Chue that while he was inviting his man he was bent on not inviting him!

This provoked laughter.

And Tabe hastened to say that next year he would take Krish, invitation. Krish also assured there was no likelihood of fighting between *Nipaks* and *Khungtens* and even if it came, it would be peace again between big countries. Krish responded by detailing Nguri Tem, his alter ego, to go with Tabe and asked Tabe to look after him like his own son. Tem would correctly explain to the Chue the reason for my coming, and would represent *Nipak* Government as plenipotentiary. He will dress up like a Tagin-Nisi. Tabe was happy and said he was very happy now. He was shown pictures of Mahatma Gandhi and our Prime Minister Nehru for whom he took an instant liking and wanted to keep one for himself. He was given one photo each of Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru. He showed them to all present.

Krish had not shown to anyone the brand new single barrel shot gun brought for Tabe. So now he took the lid off the wooden crate and took out the gun — loud exclamation ensued!

I could see the flicker of excitement in Tabe's eyes as Krish put the gun in his hands, saying, "Tabé, it was decided to give you a gun. Here it is with 150 cartridges — all free." If Krish was to praise the gun he might not believe it as it was after all a gift. But he promised that the Chue would jump up to see and pay not less than Rs. 2,000 for it, if he sold it. He said the two muzzle loaders he possessed were no match to that gun. Tabe took the gun, happiness flooding his face, and fondled it while spectators thronged around him envious of his good fortune. He was explained how he could get 50 cartridges each year with the licence.

Krish thought it would be a good idea to demonstrate the working of the gun and its accuracy and asked Nguri Tem to take a pot-shot. A paper target was put and Tem

fired at it but missed the shot on the wind-swayed target. It was a bad show for the gun. Then Political Jamadar Tato Riba with great confidence tried his luck and failed. We knew it was partly due to the fluttering target, but then the gun was getting discredited. While we tried to rearrange the target, Tabe, the old sick man, coyly offered to take a chance. We were all surprised to see his courage to compete. He lay down in a regular trained fashion, rested his gun on a small tree-stump, aimed and hit the bull's eye. He was pleased as a punch and so were we to see the gun justify itself.

We congratulated him on his markmanship. Krish now told him to go and rest a while and to come again later on. This time he could collect his precious presents and walked home by himself. After the lunch we called him back over to our tent and gave him a chair to sit. His whole demeanour was changed. Instead of a sad mopping man, we talked to a sweet and smiling gentleman, for Tabe was every inch a gentleman. We found out from him that normally it took seven days with heavy loads to reach Migyithun though we could easily do in five days. The stages were as follows: Darjang — halt in the jungle on the Subansiri river 10 miles, then Rio after a dangerous precipice, then after a murderous path along a precarious edge, Maja and so on and so forth. The night we heard that Mara Tabe's two wives, having the typical border mentality, had told Tabe that the *Nipak Saheb* had given so much without anything in return. Even the Tibetan Chue would not give so much without something in exchange. God knows whether all that given was for giving life or death.

22 February 1956

Mara tribals depart for the pilgrimage leaving an empty village and us forlorn and stuck — Period of stagnation and no air-drops — Pilgrimage a greater occasion for Tagins even more than the Tibetans — Prolonged halt and boredom: "Tiger Tiger"

We were woken up at the break of dawn with the birds when someone called out "*Sabu ngo holu..!*" Krish jumped out to undo the flaps of the tent and found Tabe sitting with his youngest wife, Yasi from upper Kamla valley. She held a protesting hen in her hands which she wanted to give me. I knew she felt very neglected yesterday as she did not come near me possibly having no resource to give me a present being the youngest and the poorest (each wife had to raise her own poultry, crops and other resources). Moreover, the eldest and the elder wives dominated and discriminated against her, being from a different region. Tabe might have helped her to procure a chicken to perform the necessary protocol, hence the present.

Krish accompanied them to Tem'sshed where he was tying up his load for Helu. He was given some last minute instructions such as not to take undue risks and not to stick his neck out if he did not feel sure of himself. He was also told that he should keep his ears and eyes open and if felt suspicious of the Chinese obstructing him or Tagins deserting him, he should run back to the Indian territory which will not be difficult to distinguish. But the most important confidential message which Nguri Ten was asked to deliver politely to the seniormost Tibetan official was that under no circumstance was the Chue to permit the Chinese troops to enter the Indian territory which began at Migyithun downwards and ended beyond Na settlements on the pilgrimage route and that the Indo-Chinese Tibetan friendship since time immemorial should not be allowed to be despoiled by such unwarranted trespass when we were taking full responsibility for Tagins who had been fully ordered to keep peace with the pilgrims. Tem was told to inform the Tibetan official that we were there on a mission to ensure this without creating a big issue at Beijing and New Delhi level. He was also to be told that since the PLA in Tibet were still restricted in their jurisdiction by the Tibetan Government authority, we were sure that responsibility for restraining them would

squarely be held by the Tibetan Government. Tem was also told to brief Mara Tabe also en route to be firm with the Chue if he wanted Tagins to be on their best behaviour. Krish had thought that the departure of the Mara crowd could have a semblance of some ceremoniality and for the matter had laced himself up with his camera and stood some time waiting for the party to start. Tabe who waited for Tem to be ready left stealthily without wishing or looking back or saying a word — even before Krish realised that he was on the move. A little later Tabe's wife left with her child. Then he saw a couple of others leaving without following the same route but in the same direction — till they all left in bits and pieces. Nobody was concerned about anyone else carrying either their own infants or their luggage. When I came out to see him, Krish was standing alone, lonely and forlorn. He wished if only Shillong had given the green signal for this expedition a month earlier, we could also have perhaps gone along in a more organised manner, taking the Tibetan officials and the Chinese Commander into confidence, if necessary.

With all gone, we were forced to halt for 20 days, compelled by circumstances and pressure from all sides. No porters to even shift our stores from the base camp (Naba) to Limeking in one go. The entire valley from Nacho to Ging was deserted and for a moment it became scary to think that if anybody wanted revenge it was easy to wipe us out of existence. For the upper Tagins, Maras and Na Tagins the pilgrimage was obviously the greater occasion than even for the Buddhists, though for different reasons. It was a carnival or the *Kumbha mela* at Prayag which came once in 12 years in their dull and dreary lives. We could now neither go forward nor backward nor sideways as all able bodied people had deserted these valleys except for distant lower Tagins and lower Kamla people.

We hardly sat down for breakfast feeling sorry for ourselves when our friend, the old lady, wife of Tabe's

elder brother, who had met his unfortunate end by fall, came. While she having been left lonely like us sat giggling with her toothless mouth, we coaxed her into telling stories and anecdotes. I told her she looked like my grandmother. She settled down comfortably and began by saying that there were many anecdotes relating to Mara people's origin. There was one which would be related by her. They claimed ancestry from the rain God called Nyido. The first one was:

"Long long ago after the creation of the sun and the moon and the earth, two brothers fell down from the sky along with the rain. They were known as Kangra and Mara. They fell in the area of Migyithun or Helu. Unfortunately, Mara fell on a stone while his brother fell on the back of a yak. Kangra, by the grace of Sechi-Nyido, inherited automatically lots of heads of yak and other useful things which he could get in exchange for yak. But poor Mara inherited only stones and rocks where he could not even cultivate. He could not bear the taunts of his richer brother. One day in a fit of jealousy he stole a few yaks from Kangra. Kangra gave him serious warning, but even then Mara again went and tried to steal. Kanga collected his household goods, fought and defeated Mara, who then left Helu, migrated and came over to Menyi side (of the border). That is how Mara people descended from Nyido (rain) and looked down upon lower Tagins (descendants of Abtani) as people of lower order. (Perhaps coincidentally this anecdote appears to have its source in the historical fact of their having been defeated 50 years earlier, i.e., 1906 and forced down to the southern gorges.)

I asked her who her own ancestors were. She replied, perhaps evading a direct reply, that up to Naba (variation from up to Nacho) all Tagins were descendants of Abtani. Her own father's village was Dogi Nalo and she was a relation of Nalo Nyobin, the *nyete*. All of a sudden, like a juggler, she produced two eggs from her vest (chuba) pocket and wanted to barter them for *ambin* (rice). Jokingly,

I laughed and offered her half a seer only to tease, and when she smirked and countered to offer half the egg so sweetly, I gave five seers and told her to keep her eggs also. It was worth watching her bantering and gesticulating.

Mara Tabe's village was a mere five-house cluster with its perch on the higher ground on the edge of a gorge overlooking the Subansiri down in the depth. There ended the jutting spur emerging from the lofty mountain range called Musing, to the south. It sloped steeply, then gradually levelled itself to form a shallow bowl which was to be the dropping zone — partly wooded, partly barren. This rolling slope stretched out to the village overlooking the deep-gorged Subansiri or Shynyit, formed a fairly pleasurable habitat, somewhat deceptive though, as this chunk had approaches of steep runaway tracks making defence easier. The village *jhums* rolled over the slopes. The beautiful snow peaks to Takpashiri and Dorji Phamo towered over the turn of the valley Sangam with (presumably) Tsari Chu over which the pilgrimage route traversed at the higher reaches. The village had a small stream to itself, but higher up on the precipice a more liberal stream could be tapped to provide us water with no constraint. The valley opened out fairly wide but appearances, as it turned out later, were false as the view from the encircling aircraft, was awesome with rather narrow abrupt turns. The open slope was hemmed in by high mountains forming deep ravines. Limeking was wrapped in another legend:

"The name was bestowed by *Uiyus* (spirits). Hundreds of years back when Mara people were pushed southwards from Helu towards Menyi, two brothers came and settled down in the Musing area. The younger brother became greedy and aspired to become the master of the household. He secretly tried to kill the elder brother who left Limeking and settled on the opposite bank at a place called Deluriang. Even here the younger brother chased him and wiped out all his family and thus occupied both the lands. One day

as he was crossing the landslide near Limeking he saw a boy with bow and arrow and a *Chunga* (a bamboo jar) of *oppo* (rice bear). He recognised him as the only survivor of his brother's family. He wanted to kill him but the boy begged for mercy. He spared his life and brought him to his house, treating him like a younger brother. His sole descendant now is Gilo Tachak of Gilo clan which is otherwise extinct. Gilo Tachak still lives with Tabe whose ancestor was the younger brother! Till three years back the entire village of Mara Tabe used to be in a location called Chogoyi or Pebungang. But as the population increased. They found the space short of requirement and ultimately settled down at Limeking and Deluriang. Chogoyi was too rocky to cultivate in any case."

As the days passed, our lack of movement and forced compulsive halt at Limeking began telling on people's nerves. We were also fidgety, being new to strangers criss-crossing the routes, becoming objects for prolonged staring, especially when I happened to be alone. The entire valley was practically deserted by people having gone in search of a windfall to their El Dorado — The Shangrila if you please. One day we strayed around to Tabe's house and saw to our surprise and delight an old woman sitting on the raised platform/balcony of the house on a simple and crude tiny loom made of a few sticks. We made ourselves at home near her and cautiously started a dialogue, admiring her ability to weave. (Though Nisis and Miris did some weaving, the Tagins higher up did no weaving and it was obviously the contact with Mechukha and Tibet further north that had induced them to try their hand at crude loin looms. She showed the yarn which she was in the process of making from the Tibetan wool. She was weaving in 6" wide strips and the width tended to get narrower and shrunken. I had learnt weaving from Apatani expert women and knew the cause. But when I told her it could be avoided by fixing a small stick sharpened at both ends on both edges of the cloth as was done on Lushai

(Mizo) loom, she pooh-poohed the idea and went along with her work. Tato Riba who was around was asked to sharpen a stick and I fixed it myself, while the old woman waited patiently with an indulgent smile on her face. Meanwhile we got out from her that she was a slave woman from the Khrung (Khru) valley who was sold off to a raiding party but she and her sister had escaped to Na where she was captured and sold off to Tabe.

Note : Eradication of slavery from the erstwhile NEFA was gathering heat and the campaigning was being carried out with much vigour and fervour. While it not doubt set many a slave free from bondage on payment of compensation to the masters, it left some of them forlorn and jobless, even unattached and unaccepted due to the stigma they carried. A large number of them were recruited to the Agency Service Corps, a portorage outfit; the female slaves came handy by marrying them to the males. The programme was by and large useful even though it created resentment, upsetting the socio-economic patterns built around the slave system. As already described earlier, some slaves reached out as far as Lhasa with their new masters who fetched them lucratively from the *Ihopas*.

When I again removed and fixed the stick about an inch further and the edges came out beautiful and straight, she pretended not to notice the difference. But we knew she was pleased with it all right. And in course of conversation she herself began fixing the stick more and more. Thus her unacknowledged compliance might have been in the hope that Tabe's wives would accept the merit of the improved technology. A slave woman would certainly not commit without the mistress's approval. Yater — that is her name — then took a good look at me and asked about the woollen jersey I was wearing. I told her I had woven it and I would be happy to teach her. For that she gave me a sad but grateful smile, again conscious of her slave status.

She told us that the route to Soreng-Lipu was too bad beyond the Kotir river saddle and one could make it in four days. But the route along the Kotir river bank was hazardous. Moreover the pass would be closed then with heavy winter snowfall which would melt only past mid-April. That information, apart from getting time-barred, dashed whatever hope had remained kindled in my mind of moving down in that direction. And then the rains would overtake us. When we enquired about the route to Na, she said once we were clear of the virtual two-day death trap march, the rest of it was not bad as one followed all the time the river bank. She liked Na far more than Limeking. But she changed her attitude towards us, the moment Tabe's eldest wife came and sat near us and started replying to our questions in yes or no or 'I don't know'. Thinking it wiser not to embarrass her in the presence of the mistress, we left and headed for a reconnaissance over the high spur spread over with *jhums* to see if any fold of nature provided a more level building space at a higher altitude. It was good but no trace of a water source near about.

As day after day rolled past, we were getting intrigued why no air-drop sorties were appearing despite clear weather. A tiny speck of a plane appeared one day which obviously had come to recce the DZ but at what altitude! From that height the pilot would naturally see the Limeking areas as a deep-set gorge. We tried to call it but without response. No, it could not have been Chinese. Porters came in sixes and sevens from Naba to ferry our loads from the base camp. Our political presents stock had now improved but the stock of rice, tea and sugar was dwindling steadily but surely. And one fine morning, to my dismay, I discovered that I had left my spare toothpaste tube in Naba. I sent a message to lift my box of personal stores labelled No. 2 while for the whole week we were forced to be very sparing with daily use. But in response all that was received from Naba was anything but Box No. 2. In

desperation I asked Dr. Shashank Bannerji and Tamik Dabi if they could spare one toothpaste tube on replacement basis. Tamik who suffered from toothache intermittently said he did not use any toothpaste and used simply tooth brush, while the doctor said he would send me one tube. A little later came an apologetic chit of paper to say that he had left his spares at Naba “but you are welcome to share mine” — and which he duly sent. While Krish brushed and got a sparkling Kolynos smile, I had to contend myself with good old Indian salt of which there was plenty. Alas, I could not use Kolynos as I was allergic to it.

After the grand feast of clear sunny spell for days, rainy weather followed — it literally rained in sheets. Alas, we were now confined to our small tent with boredom taking over. At last there was break in the clouds one day while a watery sun struggled for supremacy over the clouds. We strolled out to say ‘hello’ to our neighbours. That afternoon not only our Box No. 2 arrived but with it came our precious radio set all the way from Ziro. I straightaway put it on, thank heavens it was working despite all the jolting it had suffered. Some panacea for boredom.

Just in case some trees were inhibiting the aircraft, Krish ordered Baki Tadi to chop off some 15 selected ones to tempt sorties. But when we asked them to chop off two with large trunks, they asked could the aircraft not avoid them for there lived penetrating spirits (*uiyus*) on them. To avoid offence, Krish said solemnly that if *uiyus* wanted to eat rice, sugar and atta, it would be prudent to pray them to vacate the DZ. But their fear got the better of them and they backed out. The next day the ASCs with a few other Tagin porters with Iso Pekho and Tato Riba were again sent to clear the DZ further. We could see a number of trees coming down with a crash, but no sorties. In the afternoon that day porters trickled with a few rice loads. When they had left, Jeet Bahadur came with a complaint that two loads were much lighter, someone had pricked the sack

with dao and taken out about ten seers of rice. It was no use crying over the theft as the culprits had already left. While we were all busy trying to gauge the total damage, we heard a shriek and someone shouting "Help, help tiger — help". Then Tato Riba shouted and asked for the shot gun. There was a wild animal there. He loaded both the barrels. And as Habung Habung sprinted towards the scene holding gun in one hand and the box of cartridges in the other, we waited with bated breath. We saw Iso Pekho with his *dao* raised, edging cautiously towards a thicket, with his servant bringing up the rear with his axe, and Tato Riba struggling nervously to load the guns. Sudden anticlimax came when we saw Iso Pekho turning back in disgust saying *Eki* (dog) who had delivered five brand new pups. We tried to look for the fellow who put up so much bedlam shouting 'tiger-tiger' but there was no sign of him. Only then somebody pointed towards a tall straight tree and someone 20 ft. up clinging to it. His explanation was that he heard a growl from the bush, thought it to be a tiger and shouted for help. It broke the monotony and provided mirth and laughter for days together and whenever they saw the ASC they went into fits of laughter.

Baki Tadi and his ilk had another problem. When their stock of *oppo* was consumed, they would relapse into a state of 'thirst' and wanted to go to the village to get their wives to prepare more for the next few days.

And so on the days passed, good days with lovely sunshine cloaking the landscape and dazzling the snows with an outcrop of dimdams and ticks accompanying the warmth at their best. When the sky remained overcast with heavy dark brooding clouds shedding tears continuously and an occasional flash of anger, we waited hoping against hope for the 'drops'. Our rations had started dwindling and Tamik Dabi's toothache increased tenfold in recurrence making him desperate to return.

Note: The bites of dimdams and ticks, with no escape, were one of the commonest occurrences in the Arunachal environmental forests. The sting of these tiny flies would form a pin-point size bulb when blood would coagulate with swelling and itching. While fascinated and afraid of wild animals, never failing to describe or read of them, had a fatalistic attitude to these inescapable bites and the bites of leeches and other jungle bees. I would just abandon any interest in them, letting them suck my blood without caring; like I had a passion for preferring injections to capsules or tablets. Of course, trekkers would know how they give up all interest in such mundane things including rain, snow or storm and doggedly suffer their onslaught, when they know it was futile trying to escape them.

The full moon night came on 25th February and the pilgrimage began the next morning, a cloudless auspicious day. We had a clear view of the pole star. Sure enough the Subansiri was now flowing east-west. We had been now continuously told 'no sortie'. We wondered what could be cooking up as we had not been taken into confidence. Dr. Bannerji was feeling bored with no patient to treat and so when a call came from Naba and Dui Gobu's boycott was seriously ill at Naba, he promptly wrapped up his stuff and moved off to do the journey in a single day, and we asked Habung to accompany him. Krish asked Tamik Dabi to make friends with a few old women left behind and try to unearth the information from them. For which I indicated to him how he expected Tamik and his toothache to be mollified when he was in reality pining for his 13-year-old wife in Daporijo. In fact, the lethargy of no work, no rations and no forward-looking programme of even air-drops had begun to condition our tribal stalwarts to look back over their shoulders towards their villages. Even there was no apparent hostility for us and the Mayu Tagins in our party. The lack of welcoming posture leading to inhospitality had begun to corrode

their morale all too soon. Even we felt rather stale, infected by them, with a do-nothing forced halt. Questions were being asked by them and even by the remaining Mara Tagins as to when we were going to beat a retreat. It became worse when Krish was informed by the Director of Supplies at Jorhat during a radio telephony encounter that the dropping agency had rejected the Limeking Dropping Zone, being too deep in the ravine.

While the Governor was keen we should end up with a prolonged stay to consolidate and establish an administrative centre to exploit our unexpectedly great success, the locals and the staff were feeling atrophied by indecisions and uncertainties. Tamik perhaps rightly blurted out how euphoria of our success had put Shillong to sleep without reading the after-effects over here. Resentment of rejection of DZ even at Naba was being read as breakdown of planning at Ziro-Shillong-Jorhat axis level and the rude shock administered was telling the most at Limeking.

1 to 5 March, 1956

Surprise at seeing me without broken bones — Distress at the emaciated look — I gave haircut to Krish — Nguri Tem's mission a grand success — Offered 'biris' to Lhasa official — Tibetan official spoke good — Upper Tagins put in right frame of mind — 'Better be on own Government's side' — Tem told Chinese he was deaf — Menstruation syndrome same.

First of March came — with 22 loads from Naba escorted by Baki Tadi returning from leave. These porters came all the way from lower Nalo in the hope of earning some food material in payment. Being the lean season they were on the verge of starvation. They said they had been without food, but why was I looking starved and emaciated compared to them when they saw me last? But they were happy to see me whole as they were worried I might break a leg or both. It rained the whole day and the whole night. It made the whole life stand still.

The next day Krish decided to cut his hair, abandoning the earlier idea of donning a Tagin hairstyle, hippie-like. As there was no barber for miles together, I decided to try my hand with scissors rather than let a Tagin cut with two cross-cutting *daos*, provided he did not mind the consequences. And so armed with a pair of scissors and a comb I set about my task, with hordes of small children and an old lady friend breathing over my neck. I executed my mission not too badly. While I was struggling to keep both the sides equal, Nguri Tem arrived back like a hero from Migyithun. We were so overjoyed to see him safe and sound. After brief greetings he was told to rest and come after food fully refreshed.

Twenty three more porters arrived from Naba. *Gam* Nalo Teni of a village opposite Dogi Nalo, a strong hefty man, and his demure dreamy eyed wife came to see us. The two had portered our loads. Krish gave them a chit to authorise payment in rice from Naba stock. They had not been given presents so far and left for their village soon after hoping to see us on our return.

Later in the afternoon, Nguri Tem came to render his oral report and Krish had a long interrogatory session with him. It seemed they had reached Migyithun on fifth day. The first two days' track — or rather absence of a track — had brought tears in Tem's eyes and he had thought that his end had come.

"Saheb, I am Dafla, a hillman adept at negotiating all types of tracks, yet this sort of track I had never seen. I had to curb an overwhelming weakness that suddenly came over me to retrace my steps and own defeat and cowardice. It was only by sheer pull of will-power that I crossed the unnegotiable portions on all fours. On the other hand, Tagin youngsters scrambled like monkeys and negotiated the worst without any fear."

As soon as they reached Helu (Migyithun) he became the centre of attraction and thousands of people trooped up to see a Gyagar from the land of the Buddha. He stayed

for a few nights there. They were all put up in a small house with the Na people, while Mara Tayee stayed in a separate house. Tem met the highest official of Tibet, as instructed by Krish, and was treated very well. This was Che-jong Chue, the official who came from Lhasa. He was received in his tent and offered a raised seat while Tabe, etc, sat on the ground. He alone was offered tea and sweets and Goldflake cigarette. Tem reciprocated, as expected of him, Chue's gesture by offering his own *biri* which the Chue enjoyed smoking with relish. He then made a small present of four bundles of *biris*, apologising that he could not bring presents for the Chue over those impossible tracks. (Krish's briefing to him was quite comprehensive on etiquette as well as substance of what he should tell. He told Tem that he was very pleased to see him. "If we could not meet each other, please tell your *Ato* at least I have met you, his personal envoy." He then turned to all the Tagins who had accompanied Tem and addressed them thus, "I am very happy to know that a *Gyagar* officer has come to administer Tagins and look after them. Now you Tagins cannot cheat us and raid us, as you are sandwiched between the two friendly Governments. If you do any wrong to us and run away back to your village, our *Gyagar* friend will hand you over to us and vice-versa. All these things I want you to hear in front of a *Gyagar Shung* (Government) man." He then requested Tem to remember word by word and repeat to Krish what he had told him. He also told Tem to feel assured about his protection if anything untoward happened. While they were all talking, two Chinese soldiers tried to eavesdrop and were at once ordered out by the Chue.

Tem then took the opportunity to convey Krish's message, "My *Migom* (boss) asked me to convey his greetings to the highest Tibet officer here and to say that I have been sent according to the invitation conveyed through the *Tagin* messengers by you. He will not come to *Migyithun* as he acknowledges that your territory begins

from Migyithun for which he had no invitation to visit. He knew all about the pilgrimage and the route passing through the Indian territory. He came to ensure that the pilgrims were properly managed within the Indian territory and also that no soldiers were sent along in their guise and trespass the sacred land of India. We have had no request from Tibet or Chinese Governments and so please cooperate as our Tagins would cooperate in traditional manner."

Having said that he begged for leave and thanked for listening to him. The Chue asked him to wait and presented him with two loads of *tsampa* (parched and ground barley and two pieces of woollen cloth which no doubt was in reciprocation of our presents to Onge and Puri Tarin. He said, "Please tell your *Ato* on my behalf, we have this pilgrimage since creation of the sun and the moon and we cannot give it up. We pay subsidy to Mara people for that in the spirit of our traditional friendship. But these Mayu Tagins are very troublesome to us. He should teach these people a lesson so as to chasten them and curb their tendency to raid pilgrims. I am very anxious to meet the *Ato* and would certainly have come down to see them both but the road is impossible for me to travel. But the next year we both should exert effort to meet each other. I have once seen a *Gyagar* officer and I am very keen to see him. Krish recalled that till 1953 end Rimshi Dhote, a lay officer, used to be paying annual visits to collect taxes in these areas. The Tibetan official then told Nguri Tem confidentially that Krish's message had given him good reason to request the Chinese Commander to give up any idea of accompanying the pilgrims and that he would enforce this desire.

With these parting shots Nguri Tem bade farewell to him and came back to his real house. On the way a few Chinese soldiers accosted him and asked in Hindi his name and work, which in any case he could not understand. Then one of them told through another interpreter not to be afraid as they were all friends.

The Chue's excellent treatment of Tem was almost a shock and engima to Tagins. They had all the time thought that both the Governments would fight and the Chinese would fight the Indians! On top of it the Chue's open declaration of his happiness and satisfaction at *Gyagar's* coming in the area made them ring their minds continuously to reconsider their position between such good friends. The Tibetan official's rhetoric set the records right, as our explaining the same to them would have taken months to sink. Tem overheard Mara Tabe discussing this new development with Na Chamding saying, "Are we going to lose our payments in future? Better to us to be on one side and help our own Government." Battle for loyalties had been won over such as never before in this extraordinary manner and all that remained now was to see what our Government had in store for them. They would still remain the border folks with one leg this side and the other on the other side and the temptations would still continue, so would the efforts from the other side where the Chinese would before long start calling the shots."

Na Chamding, Na Ekha and Na Musing, all three *Nyetes* of Na, trooped up to Tem in the night and asked him about us. Among other inquiries they asked, "Is it true that the *Nipaks* (Indians) have large bulging eyes, ears and noses as long as our arms (it almost made me self-conscious), that they have large mouths for eating human flesh (hundred years ago plains men might have imagined Tagin and Arunachal tribes being cannibals! Such is the human ignorance in absentia). We have heard they carry young children closed in the boxes (our w/t set). Is it also true that they have given so much to Tabe just to buy his land and make him a slave?" Tem replied to all and each and every question. First he assured them that *Nipaks* were not *uyus*, followed by his master's voice lecture for half an hour praising the Government's help in his own Nisi (Dafla) area in establishing hospital, school, agriculture

stores and carrying out improvement of the tracks and roads, all on payment at Government expense. He ended by saying, "Not only the Government helped us out by various presents of rice and agricultural implements, it taught us to know ourselves and do self-help in a wider sphere. I am a hillman like you all and you can come and see for yourself our *mulk* (country). You will then come to know for yourselves." Na Tagins dwelt bang in the borderline villages and were far more Tibetanised and circumstantially Tibet-oriented than Mara Tagins, just as Maras were a shade more Tibet-prone and lesser Tagins than Mayu Tagins for whom generally the routes to Tibet were trade-barred by the other two to retain monopoly. Of course, of all these the Maras alone had a history of having possessed land and habitat on Migyithun side of the border and so Tabe's right of leadership and representation was recognised by Tibetan officials even more than Na. Nevertheless the Na people kept best of relations with the Maras who valued Na Tagins for having more regular contacts in socio-economic field. It is only to be expected that their el dorado was Tibet and they had never been allowed by Mayu Tagins, reciprocally, to step down south beyond Naba, much less to the Assam plains. Thus Tagins happened to be the only major tribe so little known or written about in the world of literature.

Against this background, the night of full moon in Migyithun with the Tibetan official's plain speaking as to where they belonged and Nguri Tem's discourse, had galvanised the minds of Mara and Na Tagins to turn to India, their own country. It was the night when the pilgrims took the down hill path on the sacred pilgrimage route and these Tagins a downward look and appreciation of their true identity. Say what the readers may like, the fault was India's who had kept their children shut out in neglect for centuries. Our mission and the effort we put in as an investment had already paid dividends. The battle of loyalties had been won, but not without a feeling of

nostalgia to envelop their lives for the future and yet without any assurance of how their lives would be treated by the advancing administration vis-a-vis the Mayu Tagins and others. Who will care for them at such a distance?

After dinner, and before Tem pretended to sleep, he had told them that his *Migom* had conveyed a message that whenever they were ready after the rains, he would arrange a *Bharat-Darshan* trip to familiarise and reassure them of their place. Tem had to leave early next morning, but after they had a discussion till midnight (which Tem was listening to in case they suddenly turned against him) they woke him up to assure that they would escort him back to the first stage within Indian (Tagin) territory and would fight the Chinese in case Tem was threatened with any harm or harassment. Then the Na leaders confided to Tem that they wanted to come and see *Deba* (Krish) but unfortunately this pilgrimage had come in the way and they had already accepted the Chue's contract for improving the track. The Chue had, in fact, issued them guns to ensure the safety of the pilgrims. This contract was given alternately to Migyithun and Na *Ihopas*. They also asked whether our party would stay some time at Limeking or would return.

Tem told us that most other Tagins had come to receive either gift or do trading, specially in rice they had received from us to barter with woollen cloth and beads. Even Tabe had sold his share for beads and swords. The Chue had entrusted Tem to inform the Tagins down the valley that those who had not yet reached Helu to receive the gifts should better hurry up or else he would not wait beyond a day or two. Helu, as we were told earlier by Puri Tarin, was a village of about forty houses now crowded to full capacity to thousands of pilgrims. Both the villages of Migyithun (either side of the river) were very dirty and the filth was multiplying by daily increase of people arriving from all walks of life. Daily skirmishes took place. One Khampa hit a woman with his *dao* for picking up a few

twigs from his hearth, while the woman's husband, a local resident of Migyithun, revenged by chopping the Khampa's arm and so on. The day Tem left Helu, preparations for *Dapo* (agreement of peace ceremony) were already on their way. As Na people had to leave early to improve tracks, Mara people were to receive the gifts first.

He gave interesting information about the yearly taxes paid by the Helu people to Mara Tagins. Every year, prior to Mara Pusing's murder, they paid one sheep per household. But after the fighting 50 years ago, they stopped it altogether. But now again since Mara Tabe's time they paid about half a seer of salt each house. Tem felt outraged when he saw in Migyithun *dev-ghantis* and *dev-kahains* considered so sacred and expensive in Arunachal Pradesh (for having been manufactured by gods) being actually manufactured in metal and black smithy shop furnaces! He declared with anguish how he had lost faith in their sanctity. This mission having been completed so successfully had, in fact, contributed to the successful culmination of our main mission. He returned happily in four days, not now so much burdened by the cruel thought of death on the track. He, the Medical officer Dr. Bannerji and Lalzuala were recommended by Krish for the Governor's Commendation Certificate Award for the year. He was given leave to go to Taliha to fetch his wife. She had gone back to halt there as he had gone with the forerunner advance party all the time. She had been threatening to go back to Ziro from Taliha.

Krish thought that this was the psychological moment to talk to Mara people about their view on opening an administrative centre at Limeking. He got the Political Officer at Ziro on radio telephony and asked clearance for it from the Government without losing time, as later the monsoon would take over the situation totally excluding any possibility. In that case next October-November could be earmarked for opening the administrative centre when he could return, if someone else did not volunteer. Krish

also complained why the air-drops had suddenly discontinued. The reply was as hostile as it used to be sugar-sweet earlier which shocked Krish with its tone and tenor. Jaspal was rude and said, "I certainly can do without you in Ziro and do not want a cat's paw who displaced Bob Menzies!" We who heard him were greatly pained and disturbed and wondered what could be happening between him and the Government to make him feel so insecure.

This, however, made Krish and all of us most disheartened and he asked the staff to take it easy, even if they felt trapped. They should remember, he said, that they had all done an excellent job in unparalleled circumstances, and that could make anyone jealous. There indeed could be no other explanation. But it cast a gloom. Tamik almost became hysteric in his desire to go back as his toothache got presistent. He implored Krish to allow him to return and signal the authorities concerned accordingly. The rest of the party also became worried showing signs of discontent. The refrain was: they came prepared for three months and overstay there would be counterproductive during the monsoons. Baki Tadi also had been looking rather unhappy since his return from his village.

In the evening we spread our map on the ground and estimated the distance covered by us. The map showed a measurement of just over six inches for the distance, reducing our poor march to 24 miles! This was very disheartening as I had no doubt we marched at least one and a half miles an hour if not two or more. We called all the *gamis* and decided to hear their version and had good fun. Mali Rapu was not there, but Iso Pekho, Chade and Baki Tadi came. Pekho, who estiamted after a quick calculation (true to his self), said with conviction it was not less than 2,000 miles. We called Chade who said demurely it must be 20 to 30 miles. Tadi, when asked, calculated at length and then said deliberately it could not be less than 100 miles, which certainly appeared nearer the mark. Our

own estimation ranged from Krish's 95 to mine 110 miles. We congratulated Tadi's correct estimation and called him Tadi the Survey Engineer. I asked Tadi whether he had his fill of *oppo* in his village as he had returned earlier than expected. He made a face and told he could not even eat food, much less drink *oppo*, as his wife was running her monthly course. According to their custom women in that condition were treated as untouchables and were not allowed to cook. Voluble sympathies poured forth from the gentry present. (How true that the same custom should be prevalent in the good old days in villages in the rest of India, at least in the North, when I remember our female cook used to lay off every month and, as a child I used to be told why she could not work as a lizard had dropped over her.)

5 March 1956

We go to Ging, Mara Tayee's one-house settlement — Krish's thirst to at least see the confluence of the Tsari and the Subansiri from a distance or catch a glimpse of the passing pilgrims — Chogoyi visited by him — The tragedy of Mara Pusing, the tyrant, as told by his surviving daughter-in-law, Mara Tayee's mother.

The morning broke crisp and crystal clear. Krish calculated that the pilgrims would have by now reached the crossing over the confluence and so desired to visit a vantage point whence to be able to see through binoculars the passing of the great Tsari Rong Khor pilgrimage. Even though circumscribed by the orders not to proceed further than Limeking — according to the wishes of the Tibetan Government so as to enable them to withstand the Chinese pressure (so it came to be known later), he braced up and we all started for Ging and Chogoyi, which is where Mara Tabe with his clan lived earlier, before shifting to Limeking which had more *jhumable* land than Chogoyi. It was a leisurely start and we had commissioned two Tagins to improve the track reasonably. While we sat sipping our tea

in the lovely sunshine, a very impatient Tadi hovered around us only to be off again. He brought Tamik to air his impatience. He declared we would never reach anywhere if we delayed. We left the camp at about 9 A.M. and the track plummeted downwards steeply. I recalled Tem's initial two days' track and naturally felt inhibitive, specially after letting out all energy and letting in ennui during our atrophied stay. It was irritating to see no tangible improvement of the track, but I also wondered what improvement could there be with a mere *dao*. Within the very first mile we saw some of the most frightening track — in fact, sheer rocks and no track worth the name. The blood seemed to freeze and a feeling of chill came over, cursing at the same time as to who had taken full day's wages without doing even precious little. Moreover, this area needed *kudalis*, jumpers and pickaxes, none of which was available due to absence of air-drop. It would have wiped out many a tear if they had air-dropped them as these had been manifested from the beginning. Faithful Kojem, Tamik's loyal attendant, who always found his position on the march next to me, almost mechanically took upon himself to give me a hand. What is more, he had learnt when exactly I would need it. Somehow we reached the Gyijay Koro at the bottom. My husband, akin to a horse, was most sure footed when climbing up but most vulnerable going steeply down without support. He always quoted the Tibetan proverb: If you cannot climb, you are not a horse; if you cannot climb down you are not a man. But he would not admit he was not a man!

We halted to cool our heels and the river water proved soothing to the nerves. From the bank of the river like the snakes and ladders game we began climbing up the raw steep face of a landslide followed by the gruelling ascent of nearly two and a half hours which brought us to the top of the spur. The track at this end mercifully had roots and shrubs to hold on to and was reasonably safer except in the last one mile approach when we had to cross over huge

trunks of trees felled for *jhuming* which I, with my shorter legs, found exasperating. Crossing loose landslides was another slippery affair.

At last we reached Ging, Mara Tayee's one-house village. This too, like Mara Tabe's Limeking, was situated on the edge of a rolling slope from the Musing mountain range. There was also an outhouse next door. A three-house village called Baduk made a symmetrical setting on the opposite bank both stood like forward sentinels overlooking India's deserted Shangrila of snow peaks and deep gorges. The confluence was still not visible among the cascading fold after fold on ranges. The triangle formed by Ging-Baduk combine, Na and Migyithun was the no-man's land wherein lay the circumambulation route for the devout and unfailing Buddhists who dared this most merited pilgrimage. The region in any case would have looked like an abode of Gods inspiring reverence. In such a grim awe-inspiring setting, with all humans having gone to the *Dolo*, our reception was left to the loud barking of a ferocious Tibetan mastiff, the first one of the species since we had left Tibet — this side of the border. He was not even chained and we did not know whether there was even a soul inside. We stood frozen in speech and action hoping it would relent till we spotted an old woman rising from her siesta. She got up as we neared, blinking against the glare with her red-rimmed almost blind eyes. She got up and I got the moral courage, when to her pleasant surprise I pressed a few precious *Kabshis* (needles) into her hands. She gave out a charming smile, a singal for the mastiff to wag his tail and whimper out of the terrifying barking. Then she introduced herself as the *Nyete Ane* (mother) and apologised for not recognising us earlier, being shortsighted. Dr. Bannerji pulled out a tube of Oriomycine ointment and gave directions how to use it. This was no place for a bigger population due to water problem. A minute trickle of water was there which took half an hour to fill a bamboo *chunga*. There was no room on the opposite

bank which precipiced into sheer rocks and cliffs towering over the Subansiri with hardly a weed on it.

Tagins must be better than mountain goats to be able to negotiate this 'valley of death' as it was described — when many a Tagin perished including Mara Tabe's three brothers who met their tragic ends when the fragile weed rope snapped on their way to Helu. The very thought brought cramps to my feet. We had our haversack lunch busy in these thoughts when Krish began indentifying the snow peaks glittering and shimmering in sunny atmospherics. The flaky jots of a cloud or two played with the holy peaks which had brought us to their *darshan* with unerring charm leaving us breathless in thoughts of divine. But was it all worth playing with death?

After brief resting, Krish with two *gams* to accompany, got up to make it at least up to Chogoyi, the abandoned site of Tabe's habitation which he hoped would further afford an improved forward view. He promised to be back before dark to camp the night at Ging. This trip he said would be unauthorised and off the record.

I dozed off in the beautiful warm sun. While having tea later, the delightful old lady came and offered me six eggs, and I gave her sweet tea (unheard of here) in return. I gave her more pins and needles at her request. We started talking about her family and her country. She said there were with her only two very old slave women and an orphaned boy. She was, of course, the mother of Mara Tayee and daughter-in-law of Mara Pusing. She kept me engaged till late in the afternoon when darkness had begun to envelop. She was very proud of being the daughter-in-law of Mara Pusing who she said was a hero minus his tyrannical instinct. We pressed her to tell the story, Tamik Dabi interpreting. She said: Tibetans were not too cordial due to Mara Pusing's constant raiding and acrimony. He became notorious for his extra smartness to harass the Migyithun people and Tibetans. They tolerated his aggressiveness for quite some time, offering to settle

disputes by peaceful means. They agreed to pay subsidy to Mara people in the shape of 144 goats and sheep a year. But Mara Pusing was sore over the manner Tibetans drove down Maras from their Tibet-side habitat in fighting earlier. Being not heeded, he demanded higher price for that deprivation than was possible for the *Ihopas* to pay. When nothing came out of negotiations, Mara Pusing indulged in vengeful violence, raiding and killing men and the livestock of Tibetans. When these depredation became unbearable, Migyithun people decided unanimously to get rid of this menace once and for all. They invited Mara Pusing to come and settle the disputes. Pusing with two other Tagins went and was immediately captured treacherously and soon after beheaded. This happened on the banks of the Tsari river and his body along with the bodies of the other two were thrown in the river.

When Maras learnt about the death of Mara Pusing, they were secretly happy as he was on the whole a cruel man and was held responsible for creating bad blood with Helu people, thus damaging the trade relations between the two. But chivalry and self-respect demanded that his treacherous killing had to be avenged to give peace to the dead and appease the spirits. They would not raid the now alert Helu people directly and decided to make use of the same strategem as used by the Tibetan *Ihopas*. They pleaded that the strained relations should be put right in mutual commercial interest and offered to consider recompensation for Pusing's doings. They thus invited the other party to visit Mara area hospitably and prepared for the *Dapo*. When the party came, they were ambushed and pounced upon. The exact number of people killed and put in stocks remained controversial. But anyhow the majority believed that four out of twelve Tibetans (*Ihopas*) who came from Helu in all good faith were killed on the spot and the rest put in stocks. Since then the border trade stood at a dead stop for about eight years. Both parties suffered the consequences of the economic crunch that beset them. All

this had happened in Ging.

In the meantime Mara Tabe's father, Mara Tache, came into power in Mara hierarchy. He took upon himself to patch up the torn relations and resume trade. He called Mara Tayee's father and told him to get prepared to recompense the Tibetans. Taking risk of life on his own palms, he went to Migyithun assuring people of his peaceful intentions as demonstrated by his coming without arms to talk to them. He said that their quarrel was with the other clan (Pusing's) only. He told Helu people to make a *Dapo* and resume trade. He promised that the death of the Tibetans would be properly compensated. He then collected cane and dyes as the price of four deaths and also freed the people kept in stocks. Thus once again the trade was reopened. Tabe's father who had negotiated this peace became a trusted friend of the Helu people and thus got the largest share of the subsidy in *Dolo*. But their tax of 144 goats and sheep per year was reduced to only half, a seer of salt per house per year. It is difficult to say what it meant in terms of monetary value determined in barter economy.

After telling this historical piece that once again set the border trade alive between two non-Government simple folks, the daughter-in-law of Mara Pusing chuckled to herself and said, "Yes, my father-in-law was a tyrant with harsh tendencies, but his grandson is a straightforward peace-loving soul." She was referring to Mara Tayee, the handsome and flamboyant middle-aged man with good deal of self-confidence. Going by Tayee's physique and personality, Mara Pusing must have been a striking personality. The trading Maras may have regretted his high-handedness; but who could say that history might have judged him as a great champion of Mara Tagins' ancestral rights of predominance and a hard bargainer who bravely extracted a price of 144 sheep in payment of loss of their ancestral habitat. A daughter-in-law's judgement could be objective, yet missing other good traits in his character.

Tamik Dabi who so fluently translated his story to me cross-questioning her at times, earned her appreciation for knowing Tagin language so well. This pleased toothaching Tamik. But much more, that gave him a flush of happiness when she asked, "I have heard that one Tamik Gallong has come with the party whom everybody praises — have you met him?" "Yes, I am Tamik Dabi," said a beaming Tamik followed by mutual laughter and mirth. "So you are Tamik Migom about whom we have heard so much." Pleased as a punch, Tamik offered her a cupful of sugar — so precious and scarce — much to the consternation of Dr. Bannerji whose common mess with him was running on last remnants of sugar.

Krish returned rather disappointed with his trip to Chogoyi from where the view of the confluence was hardly rewarding. The trouble he said was that the rivers flowed in deep gorges among giant peaks. So, the next day we returned to Limeking hoping to get air-drop as the day had promised to come spotlessly calm. The clouds started gathering later and the sky turned into a thundering mass of clouds and from evening onwards it poured and continued to pour non-stop.

UDA Lalzuala arrived from Naba which had now reduced to a mere dump, leaving Habung and Purnnand Magar, the ASC in charge of it.

7 to 10 March, 1956

We give DZ a 'tree-cut' — Thukral's map references come from Survey of India, create commotion all over — Iso Pekho sent to Helu to watch and report goings-on — Only emergency sorties will come— Tadi's musings on adultery law — No Chinese down the Gelling route with pilgrims — Tabe loses temper at Dolo — Tells "Our Migom would not have Chinese along with pilgrims." We have reached far ahead of map reference

Rains continued throughout night and the whole day following. We could imagine how early rains (this was the

chhota monsoon sure enough) would ruin prospects of exploring Kamla valley and possibly Khrung valley on downward return. We still did not know what mysterious turns were taking place regarding air-drops for this expedition — on which we here had no control whatsoever and the trendy missing out of such lovely weather was giving ominous signals to our minds. What exactly was in store for us was the question worrying all.

To get people doing, Krish ordered that a close 'tree-cut' programme should start to make the DZ faultless in any case. Seven men took the entire day to make a *machang* to cut down the largest tree which fell down like a mountain falling, the echo of which reverberated round the valley. Nearly twenty more trees were chopped down making a tally of approximately 80 trees of all sizes. The DZ was now looking faultlessly presentable. All the labour will go waste if Air Force still would pack up on some pretext or other.

Krish at last received map references given by Capt. Thukral of the Survey of India when his men traversed this region in 1951. Kodak and Nalo have been shown at fantastic distances from Taliha. All that we concluded was that the Subansiri valley was mind-boggling so far as map was concerned. Krish was more interested in getting IAF map references of our location as they could read better from the air.

Krish was also thinking hard why no news was forthcoming regarding the passing of the pilgrimage and how our Tagins were fairing. He sent Chindik Chade to Ging and Baduk to see if anyone had returned and, if so, what news. He also decided to despatch Iso Pekho towards Helu to watch the pilgrimage route. Mali Taning, his cook, was to accompany him. He briefed him to know what people were talking about us and the Indian Government. Also, to gather news if the Chinese accompanied the pilgrims. (Krish had asked Mara Tabe to tell the Chue that no Army personnel or the Chinese should accompany

pilgrims as it was purely a religious affair.) He was to inquire if Tagins were satisfied with *Dolo* gifts; if not, what they intended to do or if they were being instigated against us. Pekho seemed to show courage. All he asked for was tea, sugar, *biris*, matches and one blanket. His only request to me was, "Please look after my wife if I die." As if for a parting advice he told us to return to Taliha after *Dolo* as the tracks became very treacherous with the imminent rains which would overtake us within a month. He added that Mara Miro, Tabe's brother, fell down and died the year after Achingmori massacre and another five people died five years ago similarly during rains.

Our suspicion that the authorities might have hesitation in approving DZs at Naba and Limeking were well founded. The Limeking DZ has been rejected and so the Naba DZ. Though Krish had as early as Naba stay recommended that an Administrative Centre should be opened and an Assam Rifles outpost opened to cope with the pressures and problems that would arise with the change in the nature of our functions, nothing had been cleared obviously due to indecision about the approving of a permanent DZ at one place, the best available being Limeking itself. This made for gloomy prospects and delays. The only redeeming feature was the efforts Kan Mehta, the Adviser to the Governor, was making in personal touch with the Air Force authorities. He also informed us that the IAF thought our location was much farther ahead than the references we were giving. We had the same information from Thukral's map reference. Everything now appeared in the doldrums. But at least on the ground we seemed to know where we stood.

The authorities had agreed to give no more than the emergency sorties (to keep us alive?). The Tagins said monsoon in these regions started early and ended late and if they had not agreed to drop for the next one month, by say, 15th April, air-drop might be written off up to October end. We did not know how an Assam Rifles outpost with

an Administrative centre could be opened. We thought the prospects were bleak, especially if we failed to make use of the rising euphoria among Tagins to present a worthwhile alternative and not become subject for ridicule by the reactionaries among them. It was for that that Krish had given the green signal to arrange the wherewithal for the proposed Administrative Centre as early as 17th February when the goings were good. Soon the Maras would want to give notice that in a small population they were unable to spare a single person and would remain preoccupied with preparing and sowing the *jhums*. Mail came from Taliha bringing a couple of magazines for Dr. Bannerji and three newspapers for us dated 3rd, 5th and 8th February.

We visited Mara Tabe's house where Baki Tadi stayed. It was interesting to see a woman slave doctoring a sick middle-aged man lying down. Krish had seen during his childhood days indigenous healers in rural and semi-rural areas of Uttar Pradesh known as *Singhi Lagane Wale* who peddled indigenous medicine and *singhis* (small-sized horns) for fixing them on incised points on legs to suck blood and relieve pains and pressures. That was what the woman was doing with great expertise apparently with some results or otherwise she would not have been asked. Since I too had read about this process and I did not want to disturb, we started talking to Tadi who was relaxed despite his loneliness. During a light conversation he suggested that the Government should fix up lenient punishment among Tagins and NEFA tribals for adultery as Government employees would in future have to remain away from wives! Krish with his characteristic humour asked whether the licence would not then be claimed also by the wives and their paramours on the same grounds, and Tadi broke into his charming smile.

He also revealed that Nyilo clan, almost extinct, also claimed ancestry from Nyido (rain) and along with Maras did not count themselves among the ordinary Tagins. According to him, a serious cause of high mortality among

them was, among others, their fights with Tibetans frequently during the recent past, falling down from the tracks in accidents and infantile mortality. He thought Government arrival on the scene was timely as the Maras could have gone extinct in another five generations or so.

Iso Pekho returned accompanied by Soreng Tayee, Tabe's man, who portered Nguri Tem's load to Helu and back. At Ging he met four men coming back from *Dolo* and brought them to us. We were told Tabe was expected back on 11th March. Soreng Tayee created sensation by reporting that the Chinese soldiers fired two rounds at him which whistled past a place called Toepick. But on further investigation and interrogation it transpired that no Chinese came down the Gelling route and the rounds were fired by the Tibetan Security men who fired at Soreng Tayee only to scare him away, considering him to be a thief. Charu Chao said he could say on authority that the Chue had ordered to scare or shoot anyone not carrying load, on suspicion. Na Takap who was around soon recognised Tayee and asked the gunman to stop shooting.

Interestingly Charu Chao and Charu Chengba said that Tabe and other gams were not happy at the quantum of presents (or payment) to these custodians and Tabe lost his temper and took liberty to snatch away two yaks for himself forcibly. (Krish thought Tabe took this high-handed step as he felt sure of our backing. And this view was supported by the informers. As it was the Chue's denunciation of Tagins' behaviour to Nguri Tem had sored his conscience; and he knew his Migom at Limeking would justify his demanding of the conventional share due to them. The fact that Tabe did not hold our presence as responsible for this scaling down was obvious when he reportedly cut the earth with his sword (to make a solemn declaration) before the Chue and swore he would never again come even if invited. "I shall go back to our Migom who gave us costlier gifts in our first meeting, without the background of *Dolo* tradition, consult him and if he could

arrange our requirements in future, would not look back to Chues at all. Later Na people and also the Chue pacified him and agreed his anger was justified. In the ceremony summoning the commencement of the passage down, the religious prayer flags and others symbols were hoisted in some gorges, in praise of the Buddha and made in propitiation of the two holy peaks. All Tagins assembled were then given a *chunga* of Tibetan tea with *mape* (Tibetan barley flour). A yak had also been killed to solemnise the Dapo with Tagins' cooperation. All this preceded giving away of subsidy payment. Accordingly the three Chinese remained behind, the Tibetan Chue having sent away the remaining back. They did not seem to have tried to socialise or hold talks with Tagins. "They knew we are on the Indian side and would not do anything so long you stayed here." We were told.

L/NK Bishan Thapa came to my husband to report that the rations for the signal detachment would exhaust and that they would go without rations from 15th.

11 to 12 March, 1956

Mara people return from pilgrimage — Wife Yame's unhappiness at preference for Mara Tayee — Mara Tate presents us yak meat — Tibetan officer asked the Chinese to quit — 'No, sortie for you — Few females left to talk about with — I had started helping Lalzuala in stocktaking of the stores, etc, and helping the doctor at the dispensary. But as Krish remarked the best occupation was to watch the rain falling and try to maintain the ebbing health. The doctor described my ailments to non-meat vegetableless diet day in and day out. Even the uikh (jungle vegetable) was disappearing from the scene so widely in demand

Tabe and his people returned from Helu today after an absence of 18 days. They were drenched in rain and rather shagged out. They went direct to their houses as they were laden with their once-in-twelve-year windfall. We would rather they rested especially Mara Tabe, the sick man. We sent Tamik Dabi, however, to greet him in his house. Mara

Tate, the strong man of the village with stout physique who was also the village priest and who was considered the unfriendly type, surprised us when he came to present a piece of high yak meat. We could hardly stand the obnoxious smell but accepted it with gratitude. (They loved it in that way.) We returned our call on him in the evening. I gave his quiet wife a comb and some pins and needles. She confessed these were not available in Helu. He talked loud about the Tibetan presents to him and said they had given him very well that year. Wee knew he would try to show off to us but would praise us to high heavens while dealing with Tibetans. Being frontier people they would, of course, try to get advantage from both.

The sky cleared up the next morning and we gave 'all clear' weather report. "No sortie for you" was the prompt reply. The Director of Supply and Transport Officer at Rowriah was reported to have been blown off in storm (bamboo *basha* structure). Reconciled, we asked Mara Tabe to come out and show his valuables to us and also to relate his story. Krish took photos. Tabe showed his gifts with planned exuberance and relaxed mind. "I have nothing to hide from *Ato*. He said he asked the Chue whether India and Tibet were good friends and whether he had asked Krish's representative to be sent to Helu and whether he wrote a letter to *Migom*. The Chue confirmed all that and added he wrote because Tagins told him he was fully satisfied and at ease in his mind about our friendly relations with Tibet. He smiled and nodded vehemently with satisfaction. Yame, the eldest wife who had gone to Helu after 12 years, held me in an embarrassing embrace and said she missed me as she could not find any Tibetan or Chinese woman as good as me. It was complimentary all right. She blurted out that Tabe was very disappointed with his quota which had arbitrarily been reduced by the Chue. Tabe followed and said he received gifts far short of expectation. He was annoyed but did not quarrel with the Chue in accordance with our advice! The Chue had nicely

made the excuse that as he was a new officer for *Dolo*, he did not know the authorised quota for each and had appealed to all to accept payment in good faith. That the Chue's ignorance was a mere excuse for discrimination and a pretence could not have missed its mark on Tabe. He said most Tagins were reconciled as they had hoped to get advantages from their own Government. Leave aside the boasting they indulged earlier about the lavish gifts they received, they were shy to admit their disappointment. Tabe denied having struck his sword to cut earth but said his quarrel was only with Mara Tayee. Tayee had obviously been cleverer and stolen the march over Tabe in the game of leadership vis-a-vis Tibetans. He had taken advantage of Tabe's illness and age.

Tabé said a unit of 10 Chinese soldiers returned from Migyithun when the Chue told them they were not wanted and should go back and treat the sick and the diseased elsewhere, not in Migyithun. They were a first aid unit. The Chinese had come up despite his protestations and cared little for him. Others said the Chinese returned, having changed their mind, in view of our vigilant approach here. Tabe said if we were not at Limeking the Chinese would definitely traverse this area along with the Buddhist pilgrims and thus the Chue was apparently happy we had come but did not want us to come up to Helu for fear of clash or disturbance in the pilgrimage schedule. Thus though the rendezvous for destination Takpashiri was the common motivation and fulfilment of differing objectives, it was so far an all-win match for us. Characteristically they would have liked to claim this pocket of territory not only on the ground of pilgrimage but also of their oft-repeated argument:

All where Indians were not there, was not India's but theirs! Nevertheless 100 Chinese had suddenly arrived belatedly at Podzo Sumo, 7 miles from Migyithun and none including the Chue knew the reason for their coming. It might have been the same old Tibetan *kecha* (rumour of

'Amerigans' reaching Migyithun from the south.

Tabé said he had approached the Chinese doctor just to see and gather some information. He gave medicine that gave a couple of days' relief. They had a dig at him: "You work for the Indians, make roads, lift loads for them. Why don't put on Indian clothes? "We are accustomed to these clothes which suit the climate and terrain for generations. However, we get a lot of Indian clothes, and other articles also," Tabé had replied.

Yame said, on my inquiry, that they did not say goodbye to the Chue and came away without goodbye presents. Tayee was still with the Chue escorting him down the pilgrimage route. She was more strident in telling how Tabé was gradually yielding ground to Mara Tayee in influence and endearing himself to Tibetans. The Chue had also told Tabé that the Dalai Lama kept getting headaches and stomach troubles and that he had been deputed to do the pilgrimage for the sake of and in the hope of curing all his ailments. The Chue was, therefore, doing the pilgrimage along with his wife who was carrying. Tibetans depended on Tagins so much for their safety. Saying that, he told his utility was at stake and so Tayee had better chance for wresting an increased quota. What was less than last time were 4 yaks, 5 *Dev Kahains* (Tibetan brass plates), 9 swords, 5 brass *majiras* used for women's belts and 8 Tibetan bells or *dev-ghanti*. When all four brothers were alive, he used to receive 50 swords. For the remaining two now he received only 10 this time. Instead of 13 yaks he received only 9 this time. Tabé said the Na people and the Helu (Migyithun) people also received gifts from the Tibetan Government. He said the Na people got 3-4 times more than Maras. They received when they went to Helu to meet the Chue: 30 loads of barley flour, 40 loads of *pakchi* (beaten rice), more than 100 swords, 3 loads of butter, 3 carcass of meat, 3 loads of *pakchi* for track-makers and 3 yaks to entertain them. They received the second time the same amount when they completed track

construction. The third time they received was when the Chue reached Na during the course of pilgrimage and finally, the fourth time, when they said goodbye to the Chue from Na. Presents to all people were given individually and not collectively.

When Tabe finished his story of *Dolo*, the discussion degenerated into finding more information about Na settlements. To gather correct information from Tagins was like trying to get blood out of stone. Tanga, brother of Tabe who had stayed at Na for a couple of years, however gave fairly reliable information. There were 6 Na villages east of Yume Chu confluence and another 3 further up on the Char Chu Dzayul Chu angle. They all paid taxes to the Tibetan Government according to him.

13 to 15 March, 1956

Trial flight of the Otter aircraft — A consolation air-drop to test fly Otter — Adviser Kan Mehta announces decision to open Administrative Centre with A/R outpost at Limeking — Mara Tayee goes to town — Indo-Tibetan mutual goodwill is born — Terse reaction to opening of Centre — Natural misgivings and forebodings — 'No red coats to us please.'

At last there appeared a ray of delight with the announcement that the Government of India had cleared the opening of an Administrative Centre with the Assam Rifles outpost for the benefit of the upper Tagins. Though initially Krish had envisaged and planned it to be a familiarisation, befriending and exploratory unarmed expedition, he had remembered his mandate to try and bring them into the administrative fold with various accruing factors, if people by and large favoured it. With the early monsoon regime more or less overtaking us and the delays in waiting for Tagins to return from *Dolo* unblemished, his plans of traversing the Kamla and the Khru valleyes, cutting across to Soreng Lepu were receding and he was being advised to postpone that for early next winter as a natural follow-up programme in a separate

exploratory unarmed venture. With this excellent decision of the Government he felt very happy and the entire perspective was now set. Availability of staff, the Assam Rifles, the firming up of an accepted DZ and air-drops during monsoon were still the underminables that were worrying us. The workload would pile up, and the risks of dissent among Tagins with the first flush of euphoria yielding place to hard realities of 'interference' in their hitherto unhampered lives would increase, and the unarmed security concept could dissipate with the oncoming of the heavy hand of administration. It would result in the change of regimen.

As if to herald the event, the news of an approaching Otter aircraft with a payload for the air-drop was doubly cheery. I was hoping some of my medicines prescribed by the doctor and the tonics to recoup would come. But why the Otter just a nine-seater? What was happening kept worrying us. Krish switched on to talk to the Political Officer, Zero, but the response was meagre and he was asked to convey over the Morse key if it was important. During this Mara Tabe stealthily walked in and said that Mara Tayee, who had now also come back from the pilgrimage 'duty', had something to talk to Krish. He was shown in. When he spotted me he swore how happy he was with me that I had charmed and kept his mother so happy at Ging. He said Mem Saheb must again visit his house and his mother had invited me. Frank and forthright of character, I realised, he was full of reverence for his mother. Mara Pusing whose story had already been related was a stern leader and Tayee was now number two in the hierarchy. In fact, the Tibetan official had showered greater patronage to him than on the ailing Tabe. I pulled at him by saying I did not find his two wives at Ging as he had taken them also for escorting the Tibetan Chue, nor had they come here. He smiled and turned to Krish and said.

"The Chue told me to give this parting message to you that no Chinese troops accompanied the pilgrimage

through the Indian territory and that he had great desire to meet you, but it had not been possible. He will want to meet you next year and he wanted you also to try and meet him. He has requested you to continue to allow border trade and customary border traffic. He told me that *Nime* (Tibetans) and *Gyagars* are one people. He had heard that Mayu Tagins killed Indian officers and men two years ago. But he said Mara people were better people and would serve you as well as they had served me." Tayee also related how he had cleared his doubts with the Chue. "Will *Nipaks* take our land and make us slaves? Will they fight against Tibet or be friendly?" were his queries. The Chue had replied that *Nikaps* would not take away land nor enslave Mara people but would look after them. He had assured Tayee of most cordial relations between India and Tibet and had said that if he did not believe him and *Migom*, he would put me on a horse, take me to Lhasa and I could ask the same thing to the Big Chue and satisfy myself."

The Chue had then bade goodbye and told him to help us carrying load, etc.

Saying this Tayee asked our programme and whether we required porters to go back so that he could arrange.

Krish must have thought it was perhaps the best occasion to announce at this point that the Government had come to stay for ever and would establish an outpost and Administrative Centre in this area. He would carry out this task and only then we would return. This decision was of course subject to Maras and upper Tagins endorsing it and wanting a centre there. There was tense silence with vacant looks and no comments. Krish did not expect clapping or cheering but did not anticipate dissent also. But he knew it would be a great if not greater change of life for them as, unlike others, they were neither used to dealing with the *Nipaks* nor had they seen or known any. Moreover, their contacts and trade had been with Tibet alone. There would be that big question mark in their

minds despite all that the Chue had told them. Krish, to defuse the awkward moment, followed it up by explaining the advantages and disadvantages that would accrue to the people at length. To drive home the decision, deriving their consent at the same time, Krish asked them if they were all happy about it. Feeble nods and stone deaf silence were what they reacted with. No unanimity with clapping but no outright rejection either. There was no time for them to have their *kebang* (meeting) to consider what to them was a *fait accompli*, yet Krish wanted it to come from them and he was not altogether sanguine for they did not want their Tibet connection severed — if there were contradictions and loss of their freedom to go along and trade with Tibet. After all their ancestral home, about which they were so nostalgic lay in the lower Takpo belt of Tibet. I could easily read their minds having heard them express their apprehensions regarding Sino-Indian-Tibetan relations and interactions. *Dolo* had passed off despite the new element of our presence but they had forebodings of clashes of wills between China and India, which perhaps Chinese soldiery had given vent to during their probings. Krish fired yet another rhetorical salvo: did anyone had any doubt or questions to ask?

Mara Tayee, disconnecting his bamboo pipe which he had been vigorously puffing at, came forth, "Mem Saheb and you came here at considerable personal risks to meet us on behalf of the Government wanting to go to Takpashiri pilgrimage. None had done it before and we had never seen a *Nipak* or the country beyond Nacho. You gave sumptuous presents on the first meeting everywhere and want to give more now that we are back from *Dolo*. But news infiltrate to us also how the *Sarkar* works in the lower regions. The first officer always gives but officers who come later give a lot of troubles and take away all gifts! If that is so, please do not give us gifts, free as we are. Even Tibetans do not give us free gifts — the gifts given at Helu to us are in deference to and in return of the land which

they had occupied. We are a jungle people — wild, monkey-like and free. You are good but your successors may be different and demanding. Please do not create for us what may become shikar traps.”

Krish first admired his frank question. He said he had never heard it and it was not the Government behaviour at all that anyone would ask back the gifts. He would go back before the monsoon set in but had a programme to return and explore the Khrung and the Kamla valleys, if *Nyido* would spare his life, to look them up again and again. As for free gifts from the Government they were like free *oppo*, eggs or chicken they had given us which we had accepted. Once we lived like disciplined countrymen under the established administration our behaviour would be on business terms and they would pay for what they needed and we would not accept their gifts free of payment. He asked Tayee and others to further remove their doubts and mark us well. “You had also heard that we *Nipaks* ate human flesh — the way *Nipaks* also talked that you were cannibals — and that we had large bulging eyes and ears. Anything else?”

Tabe, Tayee and all burst into spontaneous laughter and Tayee replied, “Quite right — what Saheb says is absolutely true, and we have also heard that *Nipak* officers lock up human children in boxes and hold talk while moving.” There was more bewildered laughter. (This was their version of our radio-telephony talks.) Tayee then demanded that red coats should not be given to them (red coats symbolised Government insignia) as they had known that people awarded red coats had to run about on long distance errands, whereas for Maras it was impossible to travel down as Mayu Tagins always quarrelled with them. In any case by putting on red coats they might not be able to put on their traditional clothes from Tibet.

Krish removed his doubt and assured there was no restriction on putting on any clothes. In any case, he said, they would no doubt put on better clothes like Tabe and

discard their coarse woollen Tibetan apparel in favour of superior broad cloth attire from India which we had given. He told Tayee that much that he thought came from Tibet was actually brought by Tibetan traders from the *Nipak* country and sold to Tagins at enormous premium — like beads, silks, cottons, pins, needles and even rice. This staggered and stumped them.

Krish decided to call a *kebang* of all east and west bank (or north and south banks) G.Bs right up to Nacho on 20th March to obtain approval of all collectively and then make a declaration about opening the Government centre in the area at Limeking or whatever air-drops were agreed to be acceptable to *pattagaris* (bird-vehicles, as they called them). As if to deliver a parting kick, Mara Tayee flushed out a high smelling piece of *kyang* meat and offered it to Krish, who tried to dissuade him and wanted to return it to Tayee for their own consumption. All effort having failed, he grumblingly accepted, muttering in English he would not be obliged to accept it once the Administrative Centre was opened.

Weather showed promise the next morning and the white wooly clouds from down the valley appeared to lift up into evaporation. We gave the 'clear' signal at 10 A.M. and were told that the Otter was already halfway through. It did a successful air-drop at 11.30 — a heartening sight, even though a trial sortie. But we were terribly disappointed that there was nothing but rice and salt. The party complained how they could indefinitely live on salt and rice alone. Dr. Bannerji had diagnosed malnutrition problems with everyone and specially myself, a small eater. Besides, I was beginning to have liver problems. All that cheered me was a bundle of magazines and chocolates, each from the Air Force mess. Our emergency demand for sugar, potato, tea, onions, condensed milk and tinned vegetables had gone unheeded. And the Assam Rifles' signal boys had exhausted their rations today. Our team felt dejected at the scant attention our requirements were

receiving. It was gloom and excitement died out all too soon.

The entire Mara clan had assembled for political presents which however, mercifully, consisted of salt and rice. They were all about one hundred people. Krish explained the Government's regret that Mara and upper Tagins suffered neglect and these gifts were, by atonement, meant to prove the Government's goodwill and good intentions as from one set of brothers and sisters to another group of brothers and sisters sent by the father (Government). "We shall not part now," he said. Krish then showed them the flag of India which was theirs as it was of the country to which they all belonged, the picture of Mahatma Gandhi and Prime Minister Nehru. He explained how unlike the British, these leaders had decided to reach out to the remotest hills and plains' tribal people who suffered privation due to having been left to themselves by the foreigners. He also briefly said India's relations with the Chinese were good, but in any case if there was aggression from them, only India and *Nipakas* could come out to save them.

Tayee was most disinclined to accept the photos of the leaders partly due to *uyus* getting offended and partly his scepticism. "But I don't know about such a thing — Saheb should not get angry if rats damaged or fire disfigured them." Krish explained these were meant only for those who genuinely wanted them. Tabe had them gladly and both of them were given gifts of broad cloth pieces and *pattu* cloth.

Before Tayee left for Ging, he left word to Tamik Dabi that he would remain at the beck and call of *Migom* whenever he was summoned for any work.

In the evening we called on Tabe and his family in their crowded house. This visibly pleased them. They said Na people, considered themselves under the Tibetan allegiance with whom they mixed socially and commercially the year round. They had never seen any *Nipaks* or Government people although they also held they were part of India.

And they had frankly told the Tibetans they would accept patronage and dealings with *Nipaks* if it so happened. And also that they would receive and host them if they paid visits to Na villages. This was also the advice of the senior Chue (Guru Namgye Dzonpon). One of their functions had been to bear the protection of pilgrims both during *Ringkhor* (long pilgrimage) and *Kinkhor* (short circuit) held yearly. For this they were given arms and cartridges belts by Deba Shung (Tibetan Government). The Tibetans receive from them a token present of one skin of barking deer or a pod of musk deer or skin of mountain goat (*burhel*) per house yearly as courtesy.

Much of the information was forthcoming to me from Yameng, Tabe's eldest wife, who along with other women were showing deep concern and friendship for me. In fact, it was the first time after the first day of arrival when all women had gathered together, received presents, and assembled in euphoric mood and they were a step ahead of men in making conversation.

Most of them quietly conveyed to me how they, the women, were very happy about decision of the *Sarkar*, but the menfolk were undependable and quarrelsome and should not be taken for granted. This was the first hint at possible non-cooperation if the Tibetan enigma and the lurking distrust against us continued to play up their minds.

I announced that I would start a class of stitching and needle work and also knitting garment for all if they had wool produced in Tibet. They were indeed mighty happy and agreed to assemble for the class regularly. They also asked that children's hygiene and medicine should be arranged by me and the doctor in the medical shed. Yameng declared on the other hand that she would personally take me to Na the next year. Comparing me with Chue's wife whom she had encountered in Migyithun, she said, "Our Membsaheb is so friendly and considerate whereas she was proud and non-communicative." She

volunteered the information, supported by Tabe's gang that the Chinese had approached Na villages and wanted to establish an outpost of PLA as it was rich in butter milk etc. Na people told them they belonged to the side of India but would cooperate with Chinese without accepting their proposal for opening an outpost. The Chinese then gave them warning not to help Indians. Na people spun, weaved and tailored clothes and possessed yaks, *dzos* and reared sheep, fowls and milch cows. Though some Tagins, they had been slightly influenced by Buddhism, were indistinguishable from Tibetans, especially women, they did not (being Ihopas) intermarry with them. There were about 40 houses, each house having as many as 10 hearths. The altitude was higher than Limeking with easier terrain but lesser vegetations and rainfall. They were short of rice which Mara and Bangnis of upper Kamla and Khru river valleys traded with them. It was thus quite a junction of several routes, some coming as far as from Chayangtajo in eastern Kameng Division. That is how a cultural admixture developed and some Na people of Tagin origin wear *pudums* (hair knots with needle passing through in the front). Lower Na was a *jhuming* area but upper Na did ploughing with yaks. However, a few Tibetans had come and settled down in Na. Tabe said Na people performed a role also for the annual short pilgrimage and paid with money and *mape* (barley). "They go to beg and get it by working but we Maras demand by right by virtue of our lost land in the Tsari Chu valley. The Na people, we were told, also were driven out from their Tibetan habitats in the lower Takpo area about 50 years ago. We were not able to clearly assess how they were pushed down and made to lose their ancestral land." Tagins spoke of conflicting reasons and not with one voice. They were so vague, and extracting information was an elusive affair.

16 to 31 March, 1956

A fortnight of despair — The ration supply crunch — The flight

prevarications and adverse stand on DZ — No air-drops — Iron tablets for Tabe arrived on 31st March — Krish orders half ration scale to conserve more — Women under me organise games of sorts to keep the tails up — Tabe convinced Nipaks would not be able to stay long — He plans to shift to Chogoyi if we open Administrative Centre at Limeking.

The expedition was losing steam — Tamik Dabi left for home, got injuries in leg and spine. Cash arrived before A/R, so Krish had to stand guard! We also faced divided loyalties and simmering opposition.

Tabe had donned his dark brown broad cloth apparel given by us. He said he liked it 'soft and nice'. He also wanted tinned fish to taste and to wear modern shirts with pockets. The Chinese dig about wearing Indian clothes seemed to have been working seriously on him. An aircraft came to recce Naba, then Limeking on 19th March and appeared to have okayed the DZs, if 'okay' had no other meaning attached to it. The pilot said he would report to Jorhat. The next day Ambrose, Superintendent Air-drops, spoke to Krish on R/T to say the Wing Commander would come for final recce — none came. The following day broke with thunderous rainfall for the day and the night.

Frantic angry signals from Nk. Sri Chand at Naba protesting he could not live longer merely on salt and rice. Dismal days for us. And now the Assam Rifles' wireless team revolted on having to survive on meagre (half) rice and rationed salt. The ASC boys in Naba too had foolishly consumed three months' ration and ghee, tea and sugar in one and a half months — thanks to lack of proper supervision there. Human bodies were surviving on rice, *atta* and dal when they had to porter loads in difficult terrain. We too had no sugar left. The common mess with the doctor, etc, was already without milk, onion, potato and sugar. There appeared to be a total fiasco somewhere on Jorhat airfield.

Mara Tayee was another fellow getting on nerves.

Perhaps to induce us to go back, he brought three chickens and a few eggs and asked us condescendingly when we intended to leave to enable him arrange porters. It would be too late with coming rains. He also raised reservations that if we opened an outpost the A/Rs might come in clash with them as they did not know each other's customs. There might be troubles about women whom they might molest or rape. Krish explained that the Tagin women must stay away from A/Rs who were strictly prohibited from molesting women. They were not undisciplined like the Tibetan troops who raped, looted and extorted. Then they must be like the Chinese troops who never even as much as look at women, he concluded.

It was this aspect that Krish often worried about — that in future the upper Tagins would compare us with the Chinese or Tibetans, as it suited them, and he wondered if the NEFA Administration in their humdrum ways would ever keep a special lookout to see these front line people were not unduly made to feel small under the Indian administration.

Tayee again hedged over giving of red coats as they were not certain which side — Tibet or India — they belonged to: "The Chue had said we must give all help and work for you, but had also added that, as they gave us tribute, we are also their men." Krish made it clear that Marabais were wholly Indian subjects. He said, "Tribute is paid by the Chue to you, and not by Marabais to the Chue. You should, therefore, consider the Chue to be your subject and not vice-versa." Divided loyalties by border folks were not uncommon. To make it more explicit, Krish added that if Tayee felt apprehensive about our coming here, and went across, the Na people also were telling that they would run away down the Subansiri and the Yume Chinese came to stay there.

The pilgrimage was by now concluded. One Tibetan warrant officer and one middle class Tibetan died falling down the precipices. Mysteriously we are not being kept

informed as to what had brought about the collapse of our supply line, and this was eating into our morale. Even worse, the Tagins too were turning sceptical about our intentions, promises and their future.

To break the demoralisation I decided to organise games with the help of Tagin women who were attending knitting classes regularly under me. This was a good diversion, something to cheer up. Villagers also got into the spirit and joined in the games and dances and the fun. It did help to enliven our boys. It was a clear day and in the evening we went over to Tanya's house. There Tanang, the Nibu (priest) was conducting Yapu and Michu Uyu pujas. One pig had been sacrificed for Yapu and three chickens for the other. The object was to propitiate them to yield good and plenty of *shikar* and crops. After the Mara Tabe and Baki Tadi went to the jungle to look for their *konia* (trap) and bought back a burhel (mountain goat). Later we visited Tabe's house where Yameng was struck with fever. The doctor was called but he gave only an Aspro, there being nothing else in stock. Alas, what a loss of face would it be if air-drops did not resume after raising high expectations. Day after day there had been the dull and rude refrain "no sortie for you". Yet our eyes were glued to the sky for a stray sortie. Tamik could not bear it and asked for porter to be arranged for him to go back.

I was also keeping ill health and the doctor ordered me rest for stomach and gastric problems. It appeared the new jungle green edible leaves were not agreeable. Mara Tabe made the characteristic remark that he did not think we would be able to stay for long. I had a brief session with Yameng when one Nacho Tayu came from Na Tungra village. He said that pilgrimage had finished and no Chinese came along to Na. Na people had told the Chinese that they should not open the outpost at Na. There appeared to be some symmetry in Maras discouraging us to open an outpost this side too. It was clear they preferred the status quo ante and favoured no change either from our side or

the Chinese even though they were aware they were subject of India.

Tracks from Na led to the Kamla valley and the Khrung valley. The track to Kamla upper waters reached Ruba village crossing over Ruba *pudi* (pass). The other crossed over the Khrung and reached Chate which appeared to be the last village. From there another four days' trudging up took them to perhaps across the watershed to reach Puchu, Kupa (Kap?) and Nure in Tibet where they traded. It was not possible to identify these names with those in Tibetan for lack of verification (the names were quite different and distinct in Tagin and Tibetan languages.) The Khrung valley people did not have a track to go along as the mountains were too high and insurmountable. The other Takpashiri peak seemed to confront the passage. In Tagin parlance the Bangnis came up to Kamla side, crossed over Jumo Durmo Pudi and reached Sarkar Gomolung, Jane Nandung and Sirra Komhala near Chayul Dzong. The last village in ten Khrung valley was said to be Meli from where it took about 10 days to Tibet by moderate marches. No Tibetans went down to the Kamla or the Khrung valleys and the traffic was one way only. Except for Na people, no others of our people were allowed to go as far as Chayul Dzong where Chamjen Chue was headquartered. Same was the case of Sangling (Sangacholing) Dzong to which Na people alone could go. Marabais also were not permitted. While Marabais acted as buffer between Tibetans and Mayu Tagins, Na Tagins were buffer between Bangnis on one side and Tibetans on the other. Na people every year went to the Chamjen Chue and took rice, etc, for him while he gave them salt, cloth, etc. The traffic was regular, The Chamjen Chue somehow imposed a tax of one skin perhaps arbitrarily or may be as customary present to him. On the other hand they were said to approach him whenever they needed money to celebrate a marriage or any other need. On such occasions they received free gifts of yak or cloth

We guessed that the Kane or Gane Chue in Tagin vocabulary was none other than the Dalai Lama. The Kolo Chue was Guru Namgye Dzongpon. The Kangra Chue stayed two and half days' march from Migyithun and might be identified with Kymdong Dzongpon. The Chejor Chue, according to Tabe, stayed near the source of the Gelling (Tsari Chu). The Lhasa official who came was known as the Chi-Ger Chue. And none of us could get the head or tail of the Tagin word Chue or its possible origin. Nor could we connect Helu or Dolo to anything known earlier. Na clan of Tagins included Cheddar, Hahi, Nate, Yanghoo and Chate. And there appeared to be surfeit of *takins* just above the Tsari Chu confluence above the pilgrimage route and the Tibetans were forbidden to kill these or any other wild animal. Takin skins were prized in Tibet.

Tamik Dabi whom my husband had detained for a few days to watch the situation had been complaining vehemently of toothache. The doctor each time gave him sugar tablets and Tamik mysteriously felt better not knowing what it was. Tamik and his toothache became a joke to laugh at. Krish now knew he had been too demoralised and so he let him have his departure ceremoniously with a locally contrived garland.

Having announced the decision to open an Administrative Centre with an outpost, Shillong had literally gone to sleep over it. We were also getting reports from Ziro that we were not really wanted back and as everything on this expedition had gone on too smoothly, were being taken for granted. Here Tagins also were keen to keep themselves out of reach from the *Nipak* intruders into their privy. Everyone was guessing what was cooking up at Ziro, Jorhat and Shillong where something about which we were not being taken into confidence must have cropped up. Negative reaction to all this black-out was setting it among Tagins too and they talked endlessly about their future having been marred with the *Nipak* fly in their

ointment threatening their health. He wondered whether Government could be trusted by them to deliver alternative and more advantageous prospects for them than what they enjoyed from their age-long contacts with Tibetans. With an indifferent *Sarkr* and Mayu Tagins as their traditional adversaries, their trade will be bottled up. Who would care about them so far away from Jorhat or Shillong? He was most unhappy that clearance for construction of buildings had not materialised nor even the question of air-drops settled. Construction work could not be taken up by them when very soon they had to work on their *jhums* he warned. Alas, from an upbeat mood, Tagins had plummeted into a mood of scepticism and we were beginning to be seen as meddlesome nuisance. Krish consoled himself by remembering how similar desperations had cropped up in a number of expeditions to remote areas including Younghusband's in 1904.

A bright moment seemed to flicker when on the morning of 29th I sat sipping my sugarless tea admiring the first ray of sun embracing the snow peaks, when Bishan Thapa, the Wireless Operator, was heard declaring: "Weather quite clear, fit for drop." In a moment he shrieked with joy, "Thank you very much, very good, good morning — out." Krish jumped out of bed to enquire and was told there was one sortie. And the news spread like wildfire, people scanning the skies. But alas, it proved to be a false alarm. It was only a reconnaissance sortie and that too returned much before reaching us, seeing a woolly cloud rising from the valley. Lalzuala reported that calculating at half the ration scale, the residual stock would last only 15 days more. Maybe map reference was still being miscalculated.

Last but not least, came a delegation of Mara Tagins, the mass nature of which had not been seen earlier — about 30 people. They declared they would no longer be able to take any work of construction of buildings. They really must then start their already overdue cultivation preparations in the field. They reminded they had warned

us a month ago but we had not taken any decision. If they did not start cultivation then, the *Uyus* would starve and kill them. They reminded their belief that *Nipaks* always brought famine in the lives of hill people. They were apprehensive seeing *Sarkari* men also starving, but if we wanted to go back they would porter the loads even though rains were coming (to get rid of us). Krish was now a really worried man. His own men of the party as well as the unpredictable and disgruntled *Maras* were both raising the banner of revolt. He had no sleep that night.

The next morning threw a ray of light and hope. We at last got a wireless message from Shillong repeated to us and addressed to the Officer Commanding IAF telling him to make up his mind by 31st March positively. It was now clear that our expedition had produced a crisis in the flying schedule and possibly with the Administration. IAF had also revolted! You too Brutus!

1 to 15 April, 1956

The Air Marshall's recce — Tabé's iron tablets arrive by land route — A daughter's betrothal. Sports to celebrate it — Takin hunt by Tayee — Tamar, the thief boy — Na Mangfa came to meet with his own story — My social work and knitting, etc, classes — Puri Taring suddenly reappears with a message — The mood in Migyithun favoured us — The pilgrimage area claimed by Na people — Semi-starved days — Loss of patience by Mali Rapu and Baki Tadi — More about trading sorties across border

And so the flight was air borne into Limeking to decide our fate, the aircraft flying at a distance and altitude wholly uninspiring. From Naba it turned around in the home-bound direction. After about 10 minutes, as if for the last look or perhaps to lose height, it came above us hovering around about 3,000 ft. above the DZ. Then it tended to return home, never to be seen again. Someone there wanted to speak to Krish but changed mind. It recalled to us the first recce made on 26th February which rejected the Limeking DZ, then the second on 19th March which

looked thorough and convincing to us laymen. And now we waited for the verdict. We did however get some rations by the ground-logistic channel from Taliha. With that came Mara Tabe's iron tablets. We were asked to indicate our monsoon requirements. Without the staff sanction and strength, about which we had no idea of what was being worked out, we had to express helplessness and reminded about the basic decisions and homework pending at Ziro.

Mara Tabe brought us a carcass of a domestic pig which he had received this morning from Nalo *Nyobin* in connection with his son's betrothal with Tabe's daughter. *Nyobin's* wife, the prospective bridegroom and his brother came to perform the betrothal ceremony. We decided to utilise it for refreshment to a community feed not only with our staff and party but Tabe's close relatives to celebrate the betrothal, a gesture that tickled them a lot. Sports started with A/R boys (signallers), ASCs and all others in the Limeking community. Children's games produced paroxysms of laughter. Krish used this occasion to present red coats to Mali Rapu, Baki Tadi and Mara Tabe. So at last the gang leader had accepted it! Songs and dances dominated the scenario around a camp fire later in the evening. Yameng sang some songs imitative of Tibetan harvest songs. Mara Tabe and Hika Tayum tried some *lama* like dances and gyrations. Culture seemed to flow from Na. Here Bagbe Bimpak, the G.B. who reached that day, performed the Miri dance and we all joined in a semblance of Punung dance (Gallong and Minyong). In the end I gave a Hindi song.

Tamar, the thief boy, had arrived. A thief in this region is a marked out personality and behaved as if thieving was a recognised profession. Limeking village and our people were put on alert. Nguri Tem came to ask for permission if he could be tied for the night as the entire village desired. It became a cat and mouse affair. That could be called 'protective custody' in legal parlance.

These were the days of anticipation and unfulfilled expectations, with a prize on whoever could detect an approaching aircraft. And the tensions were relieved by some diversionary event, such as when Mara Tayee came with *takin* meat. He had been on *takin* hunt for 2-3 days chasing a *takin* all over the heights and slopes each hoping the other would give up. It was a trial of physical endurance till the animal stopped dead tired. Tayee then shot an arrow almost at point-blank range. Asked whether he was not tired himself, he said he could have collapsed with fatigue also but the animal would not have benefited the way he had. The main carcass was being carried by five men to Nguju village for presentation to Nguju Tarik's daughter who was to be betrothed to Tayee's son (both under teens).

Then Na Mangfa, Yameng's brother and son of Gyambo (liaison headman), and Na Taluk of Langbang were in village. They were brought to meet us by Tabe. Mangfa brought the information that the Chamjen Chue had informed Na people about a letter received from the Tibetan Government to say that Indian officials coming to Na or anywhere in Tibetan territory should be treated and escorted well and accorded all facilities as they were good friends. They could be allowed as far as the landing ground (perhaps Cha-Yul Dzong). Obviously times had changed for the better for the Tibetan Government to acquire confidence vis-a-vis the Chinese. For Krish had tried for permission to travel from Gyantse, where he was posted, to trek along and see the country and meet the *Ihopas* all along the Indo-Tibetan border with NEFA but had not been given *lamyik* for fear of the Chinese taking offence in those days. He was now determined to come back to this region again in November and not only explore the Kamla and the Khrung valleys but reach out to the Tibet borders and across to study in depth the most amicable relationship which had for centuries developed between Indian people and the Tibetans almost entirely of

their own volition.

Two hundred Chinese troops camping at one day's march from Sangacholing asked the Chijer Chue (from Lhasa) whether they should come down if there were need for them to camp at Na. The Chue who was on a pilgrimage at Na replied there was no need, there being no fighting, etc. Five hundred Chinese permanently stationed at Nyeme in Lhontse Dzong had a landing grund under construction at Chayul Dzong and they had sent only a small group to enquire about the track leading to Mara where an Indian outpost had made it incumbent on them to take notice. They actually wanted to go down the Subansiri and up the Gelling to collect information (recce). There was no hostile propaganda against India but they seemed to regard their jurisdiction over Tibetans and Indian jurisdiction over Tagins. They collected all information about the Khrung and the Kamla areas and had conceded there might be disputes, that being frontier area. They had asked Na people to regard themselves to be on the Chinese side. The Chinese outnumbered Indians and Na should report to them any Indian moves on pain of death.

Na Tagins' answer was that they only knew Tibetans for trade and allied contacts and knew little of others and if there was a fight they would flee. The Chamjen Chue had once claimed the pilgrimage route to be their land, but held Tagins to be under India.

Na, sitting on borders had suffered defeat at the hands of Tibetans, driven away from Takpo area in the past. Na Tagins did sometimes intermarry Tibetans of whom some artisans — tailors, blacksmiths, etc.—had settled down with them. They had travelled far and wide during peregrinations and offered to take message, if any, to the Chinese. Na Mangfa sat cross-legged and not in the Tagin fashion of a bird-like perch (on two feet). He spoke with guttural sound and intonation. When in Tagin area he dressed Tagin way but Tem had seen him in Migyithun dressed in Tibetan style and did not wear *pudum* (hair knot)

but had two plaits in Takpo fashion. Tagins believed that the landing ground construction near Chayul area was meant for us as the Chinese had only motor vehicles and Tibetans had no aeroplanes. But the way the planes had failed to utilise five days of clear weather and had earned for themselves a poor reputation was worth listening to together with their gleeful stance at our discomfiture.

It has now been raining for 48 hours and the weather had turned tail. Not a word regarding approval for the DZ or an air-drop. Shillong's withholding of this mystery was damning and disturbing and Ziro, of course, has no time for us.

Puri Taring, who had settled down at Helu for the last 35 years and who had met us at Naba, suddenly reached here. He had secret talks with Tabe in the jungle and then came to Krish. He had either been sent with feelers by people of Helu or by the inquisitive Chinese and had mixed up his own clan's problems about the pregnant future. He said confidently that the Migyithun people expected us to visit them the next winter as *Kashag* had also cleared it. Would we go there or not? The Chinese had wanted to settle there and had said they had permission from Lhasa and would like to reach before Indians did, as the land belonged to China. The people had not responded and said that the land belonged to Mara and Helu people and they should verify that from the Lhasa Government. But since they insisted, the people were very apprehensive and wanted us, the Indians, to reach there first for their protection. The Chinese also wanted him to report what talks he had with Krish at Naba but he had run away. He said acceptability was clearly established in our favour but the people felt they were under pressure from *Khungtens* (Communists). Krish asked what was clearly the desire of Migyithun people and how we could ascertain what they wanted. He said they had heard highly of our conduct from Maras and even the Tibetans saw that rather than go in to the Chinese net it was prudent to invite the *Gyagars*.

He asked to issue him a letter and fix boundary for the Chinese benefit!

Krish said he felt flattered but the Indian frontiers did not cover Migyithun on the Indian side, and they should remain with Tibet. He seemed rather disappointed and was perhaps quite genuine about the 'message' he had come with. He wanted to know whether he and his clan could then shift to Gilomo, a good place, better than Limeking, and a couple of days' march from the confluence. But he would not do so without protection and so would like us to have an outpost there. But the Maras would oppose it as it was their hunting ground, apart from opposition from Mara Tabe who feared they would be asked to make roads and buildings, he told confidentially. Gilomo was the place of Gibu-Gilo tribe of Tagin clan, with the only survivor, Gilo Tachak, living at Limeking. Krish told Puri Taring he could say nothing about an outpost unless he had seen the place, but if India did go to Gilomo for an outpost he and his family would be very welcome.

The Puri clan used to live in Nacho-Nalo and was getting extinct under threat from other clans. His father fled and died in Baduk and the rest of the family fled to Helu. And so Taring was the leader of that clan in Migyithun. Security of his clan under the Chinese regime was what worried him. He disclosed that the Chi-jir Chue was a very good man and had provided a lot of presents for Tabe, Tayee and others on the understanding that they must prevent all the Mayu Tagins from the pilgrimage. But the Helu people had treacherously concealed and misappropriated for themselves a lot of presents. Hence some Tagins were happy, others not so happy.

Na Mangfa returned with his wife from Nguju and called again. His wife from Shaitam village of the Kamla valley who had been kidnapped by him was kept for a year in Nguju pending settlement of the dispute through negotiations. And now she was his legally wedded wife. With so many versions of the so-called tax paid by Na

people it might still be worth listening to what he told. A tax of 50 *sangs* (about Rs. 10 per sub-clan had been paid, approximately 5 *sangs* per head of the family. There were 5 sub-clans. In addition, each sub-clan had to give 5 skins of takin or stag. In lieu of 5 *sangs* one could pay 2 skins extra. At the fixed rate of exchange 3 rupees were equivalent one Chinese silver dollar (we took it worth two and a half rupees) and 15 *sangs* made one silver dollar. Tax was paid yearly. Though exchange rate could fluctuate, at an average it remained 5 *sangs* to a rupee.

The entire Tsari area, including Yume-Yuto and Chikchar villages belonged to Na clan in the same manner as Helu belonged to Mara People. The tax was presumably demanded after defeat as war gratuity after they had suffered defeat. Earlier the Tagins had ransacked Yume village. According to Bailey, at the time of his visit in 1912 from Takpo side, they were not receiving the annual payment from Yume Tibetans which they paid for occupying Na land. Perhaps at a later date and with improvement of relations or pressures brought on Tibetans the payment was resumed at a much reduced rate with the result that each of the Na clans, by turn, now got once in five years the following: *Dev-ghanti* 1, felling axe 1, dao 1, yak skin 1, *mape* 1 load, butter one sack, salt 5 seers and meat with tsampa one leg.

According to Mangfa, Bida clan village was Dah on south bank, known as Punch on the north bank where it was also known as Khapa (Kap) or Renang. Cha-Chugang was an upper Na settlement at the confluence of the Yume and the Subansiri. Na had 24 houses: Yaja 3, Langbang 4 and one on the east bank.

Mangfa said the Chamchen Chue had asked him to find out all about us. The Chinese Officer at Sangacholing also asked them all about our features, complexion — whether we would go to Na etc. We told him, in addition, to first make it clear that we were *Gyagars* (Indians only), not Americans or Pilangs (British). The frontier people

acted real go-betweens, wishing to make the best of all sides. This was something less known about intelligence gatherers. The truth lay in shifting, sorting and locating the pure truth which needed tremendous knowledge of sorts. Krish's policy was, therefore, to reveal the least and give only that which suited our ends.

More than a week had eapsed after the VIP recce and we sensed a deeper crisis, not solution. G.Bs Mali Rapu and Baki Tadi had now lost patience. It was now not possible to get any buildings constructed and it was best to return and be back in October. Tadi was adamant. He could stay no more away from family for no purpose. Rapu complained his son, wife and daughter were sick and helpless without him. As we were ourselves semi-starved, we had already sent away most of the G.Bs and political interpreters. We would now be left alone among dubious, unpredictable and untried friends — fingers crossed. Persuasions might not work and pressure would spill them over to Tibet, with tremendous loss of face.

Administration had perhaps not understood the difference between unarmed penetration in a hostile area and an armed administrative establishment, though Krish had warned of the need for peace if administration was decided to be established. He was not pressing too much either with the growing uncertainty to feed more mouths. It was a vicious circle.

My stitching and knitting classes were the only going activity and Krish seemed to bank on the goodwill of womenfolk at least. I had taught them stitching of blouse, baby shirt and men's short shirt and had also knitted socks and full-sleeved jersey for infants. I made blouses for Yameng and others too. Gradually women were turning over to the idea of our staying over. Tayee, etc, used to come, sit around in Tagin perch with peeping bamboo sheaths and keep watching the *tamasha* of the class. Tabe even turned up one day with a piece of white cloth requesting me to tailor a shirt for him with two front

pockets, so that he could put his cartridges and go for hunting.

My classes had diversions of gossip and anecdoting. One such story was about the Chu-khampas' contingent who came in the 1944 Takpashiri pilgrimage and spoiled for a pitched battle with Tagins. The Khampas always came late, as the last batch to go through, as they were not amenable to obedience and discipline which was to be enforced by the visiting Tibetan official from Lhasa to administer the pilgrimage affairs. Even as they had been talking, the party of about 100 Khampas this year also had started their pilgrimage after the Lhasa Tibetans had wound up their camping. And so they described the 1944 episode. Khampas professed loyalty to Dalai Lama but none at all to the Chi-jir Chue, whose instructions they ignored and commenced their circumambulating in the middle of the sequence which had officially been laid down. The crowd became too thick for the narrow track and was full of Khampas as well as Tagins who had sympathies with the Chue. Some argument ensued when a Tagin drew out the sword of a Chu-Khampa. The latter challenged the Tagin to do the same for all, and they did spark a fight. Tagins being past masters in ambushing and jungle-craft, though smaller in number, killed 20 Chu-Khampas and suffered only 5 killed among themselves. They said Tagins were considered notorious for nothing, and it was only Khampas who were always responsible for the fights during pilgrimages. Tibetan troops often clashed with them also and gave them handsome thrashing.

Just short of mid-April nearly 100 people of Soreng Lingpu Bangrus and Tagins halted at Limeking on their way to trading expeditions. The snow had apparently melted to allow them passage. More than 60 passed on to Ging and Baduk villages and the remainder billeted at Limeking and Deluring houses. They brought to Maras rice, millet, Tache, Docu or Niki fibre cloth, ginger, chillies,

meat of domestic and wild animals, etc, and would buy from Marabais salt, woollen cloth, *daos*, swords and beads and all such things that Marabais bought from Tibet.

We visited Tabe's house where several of them were staying. Soreng Tachak was maternal uncle of Tabe and Lingpu Tasser, who was described to us as a big man, was his brother-in-law. Tachak had a natural grown goaty beard and was talkative. We were told that one of the reasons for this unusually large expedition was that they all wished to see the *Nipak* Chue and his *Dene* (wife) and to know what they were like—good or bad people. They had also heard from distant sources that we gave salt once free of charge and they would also like to request for it. Tabe had now confirmed that we were good people. Tabe looked proud and patronising as his natural inclination appeared to be that we should also rope in the Soreng-Lingpu people in the fold of administration. He wanted us to stage a double coup, a hat trick. He laughed at their ignorance and even told them, what Krish should have, about Nehru. *Apong* from Soreng Lingpu was served in the new enamel cups we had given.

Tabé's wife, Yameng, played a clean hostess. Her remarks could be condensed into the following: "We had only heard of *Nipaks* and knew *Nimes* and acknowledged allegiance to them. But now we have seen the like of *Nipaks* who are good, keeping peace and order, when fear disappeared, killing stopped and food comes. They taught knitting, tailoring, treated people charmingly and lovingly like mother did. If nose had broken, they would join; if arms or limbs or ears were cut they healed the wound, if eyesight was lost they restored it." She said all this and much more in an instant sing-song.

This was indeed an excellent testimonial for the Kamla and Khrung river valley people who listened and invited us to come after the rains. This was an oasis in our word of doom and dry life. Little did they know how miserable we were feeling, eating half rations and leading milkless

and sugarless existence. And still less did they and even our word knew at what tremendous sacrifice and personal risks we had brought them into the lap of India whose praise Yameng was singing. But for me and Krish it mattered little what they at Ziro or Shillong were plotting.

The pride in our hearts for restoring to our country a pocket of India cut adrift and practically forgotten, lost or abandoned to the wolves for God knows how many centuries, could never be extinguished or robbed by anyone. At least to me it gave the sense of victory of having won the battle of Tagin land, which could never have been peaceful except in the way we did, wresting them from the clutches before others could grab.

Krish was busy gathering all kinds of information from Soreng-Lingpu people. It was as if he had found some new toys to play with. These were the Bangrus and Bangnis he had been hearing about who tied Nising-like hair-knots on the forehead unlike Tagins who were not fussy and could even shave off head to escape the lice. The Bangnis and Nising treated their *pudums* as a matter of honour and insult. These trading sorties obviously had the post-*Dolo* linkage.

On 14th, Ambrose came up on air to say the fluid situation had ended and 15 parachute sorties were ready, sanctioned for Limeking or Naba wherever it suited paratroop. A large crowd listened to Krish speak into the 'talking box'. Krish said we seemed to have turned the corner. He could smell the fragrance of the windfall.

That night Tabe's brother's son of 10 years was caught by Nguri Tem stealing a bag of rice. Krish merely sent him off to Tabe to be dealt with. This morning the boy was exiled to Sorenging Lpu as a punishment. Or else the punishment would be to cut one hand or throw away the body into the river.

And one villager approached Dr. Bannerji and asked him to perform puja to divine and fined out the person who stole some of his things. The doctor had truly acquired the reputation of being *Nipak-Nibu* (priest). And at last the

missing aircraft appeared unhesitatingly and para-dropped, the sight of which brought everyone to dancing including the Tagins. For them it meant *ambin* (rice).

Tabé had improved in health with iron tablets doing the magic. He peeped in and described how Soreng-Lingpu Bangrus mistook us for *Uyus* and cannibals who ate humans if any one appeared before us with spears! And so when a new contingent came this morning with spears hidden under their *chaddars*, he literally rebuked them for their ignorance.

They said Cheke village boys had told them all that—reporting that Mali Rapu, Iso Pekho and Baki Tadi had already been enslaved by us. Well, their teaming up is entirely voluntary and patriotic. They asked no payment at all.

16 to 30 April, 1956

Para-drops during the fortnight — Sugar a novelty — Even women kidnap — Camp construction and hazards — The lack of force encouraged Tagins to defy us — No news of A/R or ASCs coming — We are at the mercy of Tagins who struck work and threatened — Water-point made — Log houses, Tagin style with tarpaulin roofs — Shillong compliments — Maras under unwilling pressure — Rabble rouser Tanang — Tents crash in storm — Better to get rid of him tonight

This fortnight was marked by resumption of air-drop by 15 scheduled para sorties calculated to provide for monsoon stocking, a heart-warming event after a putrid suspense of two months' breakdown of logistics. The first drop having been successful at Limeking it was hoped that there was reasonable certainty of Limeking retaining its DZ. Despite this mood elevation event Rapu, Tadi and Pekho left for their homes. I happily parted company as I realised being a woman, how their families must be pining for them. Krish gave presents for their families and hoped they would return before we left. They recommended each other for the posts of interpreter. The flow of rations had

set the Mara people begging for ghee and sugar of which they had acquired taste in Na and Tibet (yak butter, etc). The aircraft indeed had swung into action one by one daring the weather and despite adverse weather reports by us. Could they be the same droppers? Came also Tayee Reku, a Bangni resident of Na, and Yajum, mother of Na Effa. She had a personality—80% Tibetan and dressed handsomely. She was soft-spoken but no doubt must be dominating much younger Tenyi, her second husband, who had earlier chosen to run away from her. She chose to make the last bid to take away her husband (kidnap?) and would report to us if she failed for settlement. She said her son, born three *Dolos* earlier was lying wounded by a *takin*. She aimed to ask for compensation if her husband failed to come around. Reku said we were very well regarded in Na and asked whether we would go there. Krish countered whether we would be invited. They said the Chinese displeasure would prevent them to invite us but Mangfa had praised us and the villagers expected us to stay for good. They had refused to accept Chinese nationality when they offered to issue them the nationality certificate.

With receipt of sanctions for making buildings, there was no reasonable hope of enduring air-drops. Krish decided to go ahead with buildings. The first one must be a godown. Krish asked Tabe to take on the work forthwith to save rice from rain. Tabe was not counting on this and flatly refused, saying his men could not be spared from cultivation work. There was argument after argument with a distinctly distorted countenance. Yameng who had been asking me to get my baby boy also air-dropped and to stay on at Limeking was now in a different mood and advised me to return. Meanwhile air-drops continued and Tabe and his men were again asked to take on work, otherwise all stores and rations would remain to lie in open rain. They moved towards forests to cut logs but refused to lift air-dropped loads by saying they were too

tired. Yameng, often the spokeswoman for Limeking, came blaming me for breaking up the classes and diverting all women to force construction work on them. Tabe came to say he had lost his face with his men and it was most unworthy of *Nipaks* to force unseasonal work load on poor people who had no other livelihood. He had to rebuke them and they said they were being enslaved.

Picking up and fetching loads from jungles along with parachutes became a serious problem and we lamented the non-arrival of A/Rs and ASCs. There were night meetings and secret confabulations in the village area apparently against us. Krish now recalled Habung Habung and his associates after winding up Naba camp. To show our goodwill Lalzuala, the doctor and he also started working for collecting building material. Tarpaulins were dropped for roofing temporarily and Tabe and the striking eight men also joined work with increasing truculence. I was in the grip of a terrible health trap with severe throat sore and the doctor kept warning me of malnutrition and what not.

Nevertheless, I realised that I had no option but to contend with all hazards which were part of the game. And when on 20th April Krish received a complimentary message from Shillong, my ill health looked a small setback compared to our enormous success.

Adviser Kan Mehta signalled they were glad that Krish's tenacity and initiative had enabled us to hold on under trying conditions and they could now take definite decisions to set up an outpost here at Limeking. He thought it was essential to consolidate the excellent work already done by his party and they considered he was obviously the most qualified officer to do so. But an unkind outcome thereafter was when he suggested that if I wished to return at any time, the Political Officer would provide all necessary help. It conveyed appreciation to all members of our party. It hurt me on two counts: one that only I should have been singled out to deserve mercy to the

extent I should leave behind my husband, and, secondly why others should be asked to take care of me when my husband was there. Krish consoled me it was not meant to be taken in that light, but wondered what 'consolidation' could be done during the severe monsoon when he deserved a break to recharge his batteries. And the same was true of the party we belonged to and which was getting demoralised but dared not say it. He smelt a rat. Krish was sore and regretted consolidation could not be done in haste and that I, his wife, would need no help other than his own to return now as soon as buildings were constructed. He knew this would give alibi for Kan Mehta not to select him for Grade I of I.F.A.S. And so it happened. Mehta's vindictiveness was common talk.

Maras' non-cooperation and lack of enthusiasm was worrying Krish and he decided to summon Tabe and his men. He had a long talk with them, mostly acrimonious but frank and fair. They conceded that they would have to work but under compulsion and, therefore, could not give us full satisfaction. New terms were offered with high premium but the spokesman, Nacho Tanang, the stout village priest, was stubborn, unyielding and most threatening about the future. Krish felt the very presence of A/R force would have been necessary at the juncture but Ziro had not preplanned this contingency to standbye as was requested by Krish.

"We cannot work anymore. Here are your tools and implements." They stacked them there. Krish used his last card. He would in that case have to summon the Mayu Tagins from the lower area to work here as we could not survive the monsoon without the protective buildings. He hoped they would not fight with them as after all they would be working for the benefit of upper Tagins. He wanted them to go and let him have their consent by late in the evening. There were loud shouts in protest in high toned agitated manner.

Meanwhile both our tents crashed and blew away by

the tearing storms. Krish also sent for Mara Tayee to see if his leadership would deliver the goods. Tayee came complaining about pain in the body and talking about snake bites, hunger and calamities if they engaged themselves in house construction. Later he made exorbitant demands and openly accused *Nipaks* of giving unnecessary trouble to the hungry people. "What would happen if men got snake bites and died due to fall?" Krish said that he too was free to go back if he thought we had come here only to give trouble to the hungry people and not rice and food.

The resentment of Marabais was so intense that they had stopped coming into the camp to see us or to listen to our radio with children. What was worse, tempers were getting frayed between them and our staff members with whom they were picking petty quarrels or passing derogatory remarks. Tempers, however, rose and fell abruptly among the hot-blooded ones and hands jumped in a natural reflex to the hilt of their swords. Before Krish could summon them to ask for their answer regarding calling up Mayu Tagins or Soreng-Lingpu people, they were seen in bulk going towards the area they were cutting logs and hueing planks. They had resumed work but grudgingly and under protest.

The godown was now steadily coming up on the stilts (to avoid moisture). Meanwhile Mara Tayee had come round to ask for tea, sugar, *atta* and ghee for workers. He said he had a claim on this since Krish had made him the Government *Gyenbo* (Headman). When Krish said he did not have enough for everyone in his party, he promised no one else would come and ask if Tayee was given. At Krish's request I gave these items out from my kitchen. Krish also offered him a tarpaulin for a separate shed for his men if it was inconvenient for Limeking housewives to billet them. This was because they were said to be cribbing. But he replied, "But we are all Maras, why should they object?" Not only a sort of rivalry, but there was obviously

a mutually customary arrangement between Tapok and Techu sub-clans of Maras which made billeting obligatory. In the evening he and his men came to listen to the radio. Talking about development and education he would say pretentiously, "But we are *Pachas* (idiots), we cannot learn anything." I butted in to remind him of a blunt *dao* getting sharpened if continuously rubbed and honed against a stone. He said even Gane Chue had informed them of a curse that if *Ihopas* went beyond a lake near Helu, the *Uyus* who lived en route would kill them. This no doubt was to prevent them from trespassing beyond a point. What surprised me was that not only the name of the Dalai Lama, was so much revered, but also it was much quoted with respect by these upper Tagins.

We had constructed a tarpaulin awning in front of our improvised tent to be useful for sitting down of Tagins, etc, like a *chowpal* or *panchayat*. Although Tabe's men had been disassociating from us, Tayee and his men came regularly. To keep them amused, we did everything and made them do it. I showed them hand tricks asking them to repeat including twisting of the thumb to touch the wrist and Krish also showing how to perform *sheershasan* (standing on head). Everyone would try to stand on his head and would roll over with great fun. We were hoping these antics and monkey tricks would induce Limeking people also to shed their sullenness. Quite often individuals would bring the killed *burta* snakes (vipers) to show how they were risking their lives for our sake. Vipers were the leading cause of death, next only to the fall from precipices.

Tanang, the aggressive Mara doctor-priest came and demanded that we should approach him in future. He said the godown construction had been completed and demanded payment then and there to be made to him for all the workers. This was late in the evening. Krish sent Tem and Lalzuala to inspect the completion. They returned to report that the side walls had not been constructed or even touched and the front wall not yet completed. But

Tanang insisted that so far as they were concerned the building was complete. They had enough trouble at the hands of *Nipak's* and had worked for more than a month. Tagin houses were built that way and they would do nothing more! He was defiant and violent in delivery and Krish could not further contain himself. He turned around, faced Tanang and said in deliberate tone, "Even if you Maras count two days equal to one of *Nipaks*, you have not worked for more than 20 days. Moreover, the payment is given by the Government when work is completed. Thirdly, I did not recognise you at any time as the spokesman for Mara clan." He then summoned Mara Tabe immediately from the nearby house and asked him sternly as to who was the GB of Limeking and why Tanang was demanding payment on behalf of them all when work had not even been completed.

Tabe complained Tanang was spreading poison between the Government and Maras and was not listening to his advice. He blamed Krish and asked to deal with Tanang severely rather than so leniently.

Krish now turned on Tanang and his gang who had by now joined him and asked them to remember that the Government would stay for ever in this area and could not be got rid of it even if they planned to kill his party as was being whispered around. He asked them to remember also what the Chue had told them. Whichever side they ran away after committing any crime the Tagins in future would be brought back for very severe punishment as was the case with the Achingmori massacre. He ordered them to complete the work as soon as they could and then demand payment which would not be delayed. He then told Tabe not to play double game with him and control his men in future.

Never had I felt so insecure when that night reports came of some plot being hatched against us. Tem brought news that Mara Tayee and his men were also disgruntled that night as continuous pouring rain with swarming

leeches and surging dimdams had rendered their bodies sore. Krish summoned Tayee who came looking a bit apprehensive. Krish asked for his support, acknowledging that the work was untimely but had to be done. He agreed but bewailed, "We were independent people and had never become slaves of anyone, but we would abide by the Chue and your orders. But what of our future?"

It was like taming the wild tigers — the tigers who felt the jungle did not belong to them anymore. That night I had pain in my jaw and there was to be no sleep in any case. Krish slept with his concealed pistol loaded and others had organised a 'keeping watch' system to ward off any assault, despite Tabe's warning to them. Surprisingly all of them turned out full force next morning for work. Tabe had come down upon them severely. The iron tablets had revived his vigour and strength. He threatened Tanga, his younger brother, who had confronted him to defy, as a result of which Tanga had fled away to the jungle. They took two more days to finish the building and were paid full amount as settled and a lot more *bakshish* for extra hardship.

The same day the arrival of another barter expedition from Soreng-Lingpu cooled off the Limeking nerves and gave them diversion from a state of abject tension. People from and other local villages trickled in for making more smaller buildings.

1 to 15 May, 1956

Technology of timber/logs and tarpaulin — Vegetable seeds a novelty — Tagyo the ASC 'slave' — Strawberries, a windfall of months' delicacy — Slave emancipation and loss of face — Naba people strike work — Rains and rains — A children's carnival — Incredible we are alive — Our move order comes.

Frantic construction activity continued as the main feature of this fortnight combined with resumption of stitching and knitting classes. The weather permitted no

more than one dropping sortie, taking the total so far to five but the machinery had acquired automation. Tabe had brought in Soreng Takum who was keen on meeting us, particularly his wife eager to meet me. Takum volunteered to ask his men who could be sent to Limeking to construct buildings from his area. But Krish half-seriously told him in the presence of Tabe that Tabe and his people alone had the privilege to do work in Limeking and we would not like to offend them. I asked why his expedition people did not even come near the camp this time. He replied they were probably afraid we might ask them to construct buildings.

Ging and Baduk people completed A/R barrack, a good job done with plank walling and floor planking. It was as good as Tayee's men could have done with mere *daos*. A W/T from Taliha informed us that O/C Assam Rifles there was asking for porters so as to start marching on 5th May.

Tayee's men were paid off with handsome *bakshish* in appreciation of their good work. Krish gave them vegetable seeds, received from Taliha, and sent Habung Habung, the Apatani, to go and teach them prepare the beds for sowing. Seeds were later given to Limeking men also at the request of women attending my classes. Bonhomie now appeared to be gradually restored with the crisis more or less blowing off.

One Tagyo, a Tagin from lower area, came today as ASC bringing a load. He had a striking poise about him. Krish questioned him and found that he had been sold years earlier to a Mechukha trader with whom he had visited Lhasa for trade, a few years ago. Recently he had regained his freedom from slavery along with others. He knew Assamese, Monpa and Lhasa dialects, and Krish decided to retain him as suitable for Limeking, especially to show the Maras and Na clans how slavery was now an outdated and outmoded trade to indulge in.

Thank God, my cook, Lama, had been taking excursions

into the shrubby area to collect strawberries and other green jungle eatables suddenly cropping up with change in weather. I confessed this was something I could not have found in Jorhat or Calcutta. They were so juicy and fresh to eat.

Rains had now truly taken possession of the Limeking valley with warming of the weather. And there was an outcrop of millions of moths from nowhere. They filled the air and the earth alike, swarming up like locusts. Children of Limeking left their normal pastime of catching and catapulting bees and roasting them and other insects on our petromaxes for 'eats'. They rushed out with receptacle cans to collect thousands of these moths for consumption. The radio had reported that the Brahmaputra had been rising. Below us the swirl of the Subansiri had turned into an unabating roar. Waterfalls which were mere streaks earlier were now turning into real *akash-gangas* literally pouring down from the skies as it were. Limeking rainfall would easily beat Cherapunji in effect and picturesqueness.

Naba villagers had been engaged for constructing office log-house and had been working in spurts coming in between, to extract more and more rations for their sustenance, striking work and resuming but never refusing to work. The hospital building was also completed. Dr. Bannerji himself had supervised it with partly ASCs and mostly on self-help basis — the only building with earth flooring involving considerable earth work. We had passed the test in Tagin eyes and they certified that *Nipaks* knew how to make houses.

Krish was getting ticklish problems about slave emancipation. Slaves had begun to desert their masters and run away to us for emancipation and employment in Government. It was becoming the Government of the 'slavemen'! The masters were coming to him to claim them back and there was no force to prevent taking them away forcibly. One slave, Cheke Tanya, ran away from his master in Eba village, the people of which had done so much for

the success of this expedition by solving our logistic impossibility over that ladder — and if Eba men come to drag him away from in front of our eyes, it would be a big shame. Tanya, sold by his two brothers, claimed they could not have sold him away at a paltry price of one *dao* and a belt of cymbals. He asked for release into freedom. For such duties a force of police or A/Rs was an essential requirement to establish law and order. And yet we were now duty bound to secure release of a slave if one approached us for help. We were bound to give protective shelter.

We reached a milestone when we at last shifted our supply dump to the newly completed godown in the new camp site. To be responsible for it, the handful of ASCs were also billeted in one corner of the same log building. Krish was now waiting for final word from higher authorities whether A/R would be sent or not. If not, he would rather than risk them in the large A/R barrack. Without being nursed by A/R is the crucial stage we had reached, the new outpost will have to live cohesively in a security-oriented dispersal in the new camp. Already a young Tagin woman had started flirting with signal boys stripped herself naked and went on making obscene gestures. There was no responsible NCO to control the boys. When weather cleared up the first time after 19th April, it was raining heavily at Jorhat. It enabled me to call up the 'class' of women to take up child bathing and hygiene. The children joining up the classes gave a new impetus and regenerated interest to all, including menfolk. Krish with his army background joined by teaching the children marching in steps, saluting and standing to attention. This renewed spurt in fraternisation led me to organise children's games and carnival almost every third day in common effort. The large awning in front of four tent had become a scene for many a mirthful evening when apart from gossip they came to listen to our radio. Sometimes they did not wait for my initiative. One day Takak, the young son of Mara Tayee, spontaneously

organised the carnival with children 8 to 14 years of age. He and those who came from Ging had obviously been practising many of our exercises, *asans*, etc, in their village and they were most keen to demonstrate to me how they also could perform them with credit. They even sang the Nepali song *Reli-Mai* and danced it, which they had learnt from signal boys.

Tarik Madu who had earlier taken leave from us came back with his wife who came all the way to meet me according to him. He stated that lower Tagins regarded it short of miracle that we should still be alive! Many of them had forecast we would either be cut into pieces by the hostiles or would fall from precipices to our end. Many lower Tagins had now been coming in search of job, though they admitted they would not have been allowed access to this forbidden region of Maras who monopolised trade and dealings with Tibet. Six months earlier they would have been captured, killed or kept hostages. But Krish invited the Maras to go with him to Ziro or anywhere as no one could harm them under the Government rule.

On 13th came Krish's move order after the arrival of Roliana Hmar, the Base Superintendent, some time next month. With him were also expected some A/R men, Political Interpreter Tada Koyu to relieve Tem, one overseer and one compounder for the Medical Unit. A remarkably good job was done by our staff in the party when under the leadership of Lalzuala a bamboo channel brought in fresh and good water from a permanent waterfall some two furlongs higher up which was negotiated through the most difficult access up the ravine. Limeking people never had it so good as their existing source was small. Or else they used to go down to the Subansiri to fetch water. They, in fact, came to express their appreciation for what *Nipaks* were capable of without their assistance.

My 'class' was by now becoming not merely a teaching centre but also a manufacturing unit on free sale basis. That killed time for me and kept me going. I knitted for

Nguri Tem's wife, Tarik Madu's wife and Mara Tanang's wife. Krish distributed vegetable seeds to Limeking and other village people who came. I tiny jersey I made was for Mara Tabe's newborn son.

'Operation Upper Mara' — for completion with fine finishing touches of buildings, tarpaulin roofings, completion of water points and above all shifting into the new camp was accomplished as the fortnight ended. Limeking outpost and the Administrative Centre was now a 'living' thing we had struggled to accomplish. Very nearly all the objectives had now been fulfilled. India had now symbolically regained the 'Shangrila' she had not even seen in her life of previous centuries.

16 to 31 May, 1956

Monsoon setting in earnest — Gorge winds and tarpaulin roofs — The Bobo pole — The monsoon delicacies and children's games — The first real Sunday — Arrogance again — Dr. Bannerji gets the next laurel — Tabe's law of killing for justice, asks sanction for murder — No milk for 3 months — Na and Apatanis — Tibetan brocade robes and silk saris display — Rota will not die — Tabe's cases.

The new camp buildings are based on tribal design architecture. They were like long houses with airy perforated floors and walls. No thatch, none available either in the vicinity. They had tarpaulin roofs for emergent use. They had to be of temporary nature in the circumstances we faced but they were airy, moisture-proof and less subject to vipers, dogs, scorpions and various insects. Soreng Tamar, informed no volunteer labour was available in that season — all were busy with cultivation and food gathering. Krish gave him some vegetable seeds salt, etc, for his return.

The life now in our new log-house was at least 'romantic'. Walking on the log-floor needed practice and if you were not careful, the gaps could take your ankle through. In the warm season it was very airy and pleasant. But there were rains pouring down in sheets and the main pastime was to see how the rain fell at Limeking with

thunder storms and strong gorge winds funnelled from the Tibetan plateau into valleys with deep gorges. Inside the log-houses I used to sometime sit holding tight the fastened bed, hoping I would not take off like an aircraft if the shaking stilts got uprooted with force of these blasts. And the whistling sounds were so demoralising and frightening. My husband advised me half seriously to start singing along the tunes of the swinging winds. Later when we got a posting at Pasighat in 1961-62, these gorge winds followed us and we found that they were a special feature of Pasighat-Dibang valley debunking into the plains.

One day I watched surprisingly that the same Bobo pole acrobatics so popular in the Apatani valley was erected in the village with the same exercises. Both the boys and the girls were swinging in the pouring rain which was not unpleasant in the bearable temperature. The tracks between Ringjing-Ragye and Nacho had been washed away along with several culverts and log-bridges. The ladder built by Eba village was now unsafe. But the village boys and girls were perhaps the luckiest to be able to enjoy the falling rains. They were acting like busy bees catching insects from the mud paste and slush, collecting them into small bamboo receptacles for the dish. It was a hideous sight for me watching them sit in batches patiently manoeuvring the wet and pasty mud with fingers to catch the precious delicacies. "It is their strawberries — don't grudge," my husband would shout when I expressed disgust loudly. And yet other children took bamboos with strings soaked in a sticking substance like gums. Standing on the raised logs they would hurl the bamboo with string down over the bushes where they knew the birds would be taking shelter from pouring rain. The feathers of little sparrows once caught in the sticking gum-like substance, their necks were twisted and body roasted, preferably on our petromax top. Yet another party of children draped in their impressive fibre rain capes and hats went out with bows and arrows shooting birds where possible. I had

already described their catapult-like guns for killing bees and flies. Yet another pastime for them was to catch insects in the air by sweep of the hand, hold them by wings and expose them to the heat and kill them for the sport. So this was village children's life on semi-hungry stomach in pouring rains when nothing else was to be done. Even with rice now, 'delicacies' remained their sport.

Krish asked Limeking villagers to collect suitable bamboos for the water pipeline, for extension from the Administrative Centre to reach village for themselves. They fetched the pipes dumped in front of Krish and asked for payment. He asked them to lay it on self-help idea as they would do for their own village use. Nacho Tanang again took up the agitation and when Krish refused to oblige, left in protest. Krish was not going to create a precedent to appease their arrogance.

20th May was the first Sunday when my team of women and Krish's party were not going to work and earned a holiday. Lucky we had moved from our tent to the log-house residence, for it had been raining in sheets. I had never seen such heavy rains in my life. While the thunderstorms shook the foundation of the stilts, they often beat on the tarpaulin roof which pounded heavily and struggled as it were, to loosen the knots they were fastened with. If the tarpaulin too took off, where and how far, God knows, would it land. And thoughts like these would keep me engaged. And yet even the tarpaulin coverings, single or double, were not leak-proof as water would collect in the folds formed by the winds. And so life was kept quite exciting, with keeping ourselves water proof, rain-proof and 'flight'-proof. As a consolation, the staff members and the accompanying GBs, in their own effort to judge who deserved the laurels, informed me that I was on the top of the list and Dr. Bannerji the next. When I asked about Krish, they said they had kept him out of the 'opinion poll' as he was the leader of them all.

Yameng was very annoyed and complained that even

she was not being allowed after dusk to come to the camp. Krish had issued the order to check on illicit meeting between our men and their girls. Krish had his characteristic retort : "Because you are still pretty and attractive." It was a treat when Mara Tapur killed a burhel and brought the meat for sale. We bought our share happily and Lama made an excellent roast dish.

Nacho Tape and Nacho Tanang, the priest, still harboured hostility. They had been telling they would kill anyone drawing water from the Government water source. Mara Tabe this time was said to have come down heavily on them and ordered them to respect the Government in every way.

Tabé had by now fully recovered to normalcy in health. He visited us fairly regularly and one day sat for a long time. He said he had met the *pilangs* (British) twice in Migyithun. Krish thought he must have met Sheriffs and Kingdom Ward there and at upper Na (Lung). In a rare mood of confidence he asked Krish for permission to kill a man of Chete village of Kamla valley. He related the story thus: Yami, one of Tabe's wives, was earlier married to a man from Chete. She gave birth to a boy who was allegedly not her husband's son. Others said the husband ill-treated her too often. She ran back to her father, Na Tayee, who refused to refund the bride price back to her husband. So they killed the father. Tabe in the meantime appeared on the scene and kidnapped her to Limeking and also in revenge killed a man from Chete. The Chete people who would not succeed in killing Tabe killed a man of Soreng-Lingpu in proxy. The Soreng-Lingpu people were now demanding that either he should now kill a man from Chete or should pay them the price for the kill. Tabe said he could not pay the price and so should be allowed to kill a man from Chete at Na. "As the Government has not yet reached Chete, please allow me to kill and don't stop me." He had antagonised almost all people up to Nacho and had never been even to Naba in his life. He would settle all

old disputes with everyone after he had killed a man of Chete at Na. Krish said he should wait for about two years so that the Government reached Chete also by that time (laughter). Moreover, if he did give permission for the love of his dear friend Tabe, he would be obliged to go to jail along with him. But if he liked, he would order Soreng-Lingpu not to insist on your killing a Chete man, otherwise the whole village would be liable to be punished for abetting the murder. And so like in the case of Apatanis, it was a law "You kill my dog, I will kill his cat" for justice — a good way to dispense with judiciary.

Strong winds and gales, too many beetles and bees in latest arrivals, too many snakes, too many birds and too much sickness were being attributed to the arrival of *Nipaks*. Krish added to that, all in good humour, too much rice, ghee, sugar, etc, and too many medicines. And if too many Tagins have been coming for these commodities which did not exist in the good old starving days, he was equally obliged to feed and look after the other admiring visitors, who were equally his subjects like birds, snakes, beetles, bees, animals and thieves! Tabe volunteered to admit that his Tagins always talked nonsense.

I enquired about the common factor of Bobo pole — was there any affinity or relationship between Apatanis and Tagins? According to him people of Na and Apatanis were descendants of Nabu and Nyingbu respectively. They were two cousins like Tapok and Tachi of Mara. In the pyramid of ancestry they were all sons of Nyido. Migrating via the same river route, which Mara people also did, both the Tanangs (Apatani) and Na went down south. The Tanangs stayed there in Ziro valley but the Na returned back. Krish butted in to say that advantages of having the same Government would, therefore, enable the lost brothers meet. Like we had come to meet our lost brothers.

A sortie came on 23rd to bring *biris*, canteen stores and usual ration commodities. Still no milk which none of us had taken for the last three months in any form.

One day when I had assembled all women for the 'class' which now was being held in my new log-house apartment I decided to display all my silk sarees, my set of Tibetan *chupas* caps, shoes and aprons in brocades and silks (the box left out at Taliha containing these had now reached us) not only to impress the Mara Tagins who had no idea of the richness of Indian wardrobe, but also to show them how well we knew of the Tibetans they used to brag about. The moment the women reached there were 'oohis' 'aahs' from all of them, wide-eyed astonishment and every possible hand falling over to caress and feel the materials. They indeed sent messages to their homes to summon the menfolk who literally came at the double. Nacho Tanang also came. They were dumbfounded as if struck with lightning. Krish and I then dressed up in our Tibetan clothes to show them. And when Krish said those brocades and silks were sent to Tibet from Benaras where they were manufactured by *Nipaks*, they further looked aghast. And when he told them Tibetan traders purchased the beads in Calcutta market at two annas per hundred and sold them in Migyithun to the Mara and Na Tagins at 10 rupees for a pair they felt so small and ashamed and resentful of the cheats that they started getting up and spitting in disgust and condemnation. Then he produced the same beads from his just received stock from Calcutta and asked if they found any difference. They denied and exclaimed they were in fact better. He disclosed the price and said they need not in future buy these from Tibetan traders. Did they know now their country better? There was a chorus of "ehs" with simultaneous nodding of their heads in agreement. My husband then turned to Nacho Tannag, the priest villain, and asked him to say something since he was very fond of talking like a leader. He said he was forced to become a leader by other people. He blamed Tape, his young cousin, for all the evils and said it was Tape who swore he would never help the Government. He showed repentance and agreed he would in future abide

by the orders of *Nipak* Government. "We were *pachas* (idiots)," he said, with moist eyes. My husband had forethought and advised me to take some silk sarees and Tibetan clothes not only to display but also to wear if and when we had reached Migyithun. How else would they, the most isolated of all Indians, carry the television-like imprint on their minds, of the *Nipak* country they had never seen but belonged to?

A child was born to Phungba. I decided to present a small knitted jacket for the infant. The mother was kept for three days lying outside the house under the granary. Also Raota who had been seriously ill for many days and was told by the priests that there was no chance of his survival, at last agreed to take the medicine when Dr. Bannerji told him, to the embarrassment of Tagins, that he would not die. He was the same patient who had been seen by me once getting his blood siphoned off through a *singhi* by a woman priest.

Another case of abandonment of patients was discovered when Mara Tayee's brother-in-law coming from Soreng-Lingpu was bitten by *Burta* (viper) en route. He was left in the forest to die as there was no chance of survival from snake bite. All they did was to light a fire near him and place water and food. The doctor volunteered to go, but they said he must have died by then.

Mara Tabe's rejuvenated health and vigour had also revived his valour for 'conquest' and revenge in the game of inter-village or personal disputes. This time he wanted to plead for allowing him to catch one man from Soreng Lingpu in revenge for kidnapping his wife sometime ago. "I have 4-5 cases to settle in that area, but you have made me a Government G.B. and tied me up into knots. But you should not stop me from going to kill or catch this man and settle these cases according to our free independent law. Also the Mara people had been called to join Soreng-Lingpu Tagins to raid and exterminate five villages of Sangyoi, Dena and Lokar clans. We had been postponing

these raids for the last three years, we must do it this year." Krish somehow suppressed his anger at his audacity but said that if the Assam Rifles were here, Tabe would not have dared to talk this way. So far as he was concerned he could not allow these raids to take place. His request could be settled amicably under Government auspices and there was no need to rush into a carnage of killing all around just because the Government had come to stop them for future. In the long run all such cases would look insignificant and childish adventures when his children would grow. Their children would grow into educated youths and learn to settle even their parents' sins. He asked Tabe to understand that he must himself advise restraint to Soreng-Lingpu as the real leader of this area — as administrator of justice to all rather than act as a criminal carrying out a chain of criminal activities. He told Tabe the Government would take lenient view if he turned a law-abiding leader but would come most severely if any village perpetrated raiding and killing. Krish asked him to send warning to Soreng-Lingpu area against disobeying these orders. Tabe relented helplessly as if an attempt was being made to extract the teeth of the tiger.

I visited the house of Mara Tata (Rota) who was under the doctor's treatment and found that the doctor had given him new life. "Is she Dane Saheb?" He asked me in the darkness of his room and tears rolled down his cheeks. He said only the *Nipak* doctor could have saved him. Helped by Habung Habung he cut a small stick to count and trace his descent to show that if he had died his children would have been left without any guardian. He said he would now live and serve the Government.

1 to 17 June, 1956

The snake bite syndrome — Limeking DZ rejected — Selection for staff — Milk famine ends — Kano (hungry) lean period — The Mayu Mara 'dapo' kebang news of departure broken — The TRC experiment — The leeches regime — We and A.S. Hmar at Nacho — Tadi's 'Pakki'

with goat — Tacha and his wife had gone to see the dead body of the snake bite victim for a sentiment. They returned and reported he was still alive till the day before. Tgins would not touch the victim of snake bites or falls from precipice for fear of offending the Uyus. And also if the snake had been killed or had bitten they would not work that day lest the Uyus should victimise them. The victim, thus had no option but to die. If the parents were informed of the snake bite or accident, the informer was expected to be rewarded with a carved Tibetan sword (Ryokse).

The startling news to be flashed was that the airlift agency had made up their mind to declare the Limeking DZ unsuitable for dropping. Their rules had to be too rigid. It was rather late in the day and put the NEFA Administration in a very embarrassing position. Krish thought our expedition was the cause and curse for the crisis (later the Kalinga Airlines resumed Limeking air-drops). Curiously while everybody down the line jumped at Government jobs, the Marabais were most reluctant. Krish suggested that Tabe should call up Tayee to choose personnel for Class IV Limeking staff. Mara Tayee was offered the post of Political Interpreter in their wider interests. Tayee, too independent to be tied down to any routine or discipline, flatly refused and reacted to Tabe violently. "Tabe, if you tell such nonsense to me, I shall kill you and then kill myself." They said no one from Maras would accept, not aware of the rules. Krish told them it was for him to think about it and he was again giving chance first to Maras as the centre was located in the Mara area — before he was compelled to recruit Mayu Tagins, whose orders in that eventuality they would have to obey, with no scope for complaints later on. They received this with stoic silence. Later I was told Tabe advised Tayee that he should have accepted to be the Political Interpreter. He then asked Tatum, GB of Naba who was with them, to take on or select a man from the Marabai group. Aversion was so deep that Tatum took offence and asked Tabe as to who he was to order him about. On that they quarrelled and

made ready to kill each other. Swords were to be drawn and had it not been for Nguri Tem nearby to intervene, Tabe would have definitely killed Tatum who was a sickly man. I wonder what Krish would have done with Tabe having no quarter guard or A/R to arrest him. And so the tempers of Mara Tagins soared and dropped with a change of breath.

The seventh sortie, may be the last one, arrived and lo and behold the milk famine had at last ended and we had tea with milk after more than 3 months. What luxury!

As I sat drinking tea, a man kept making gestures with hand and smiles. I called him nearer and recognised him to be Nacho Bimbo who in his half-starved state of health had gone beyond recognition. So I gave him a richly milky tea with high sugar and he looked so revived. Putting his hand on his stomach, he said *kano* (hungry). Indeed *kano* was the password for every Mayu Tagin whom we met after five months for the next few weeks. Some inferior *atta* had been dropped which was to be written off and Krish decided to dispose it of free to such hungry individuals we came across. With *kano* playing havoc, there was quite an influx of Mayu Tagins coming to work and earn some food or get free help to tide over the starvation crisis. Quite often they would sing praises of *Nipak Sarkar* if only to show off how much they were patronised by us. It was the first time they could have access to thus far and this in itself was irritating to the Mara and upper Tagins. So Krish thought to hold a *Dapo* type *kebang* (congregation of parties) of the upper and lower Tagins to ask them to live in peace in future. Our move orders had come for departure and he decided to announce that also simultaneously. So 200 men and women had gathered for this 'Mayu-Mara' *Kebang* people anxiously waiting to know what Krish was upto. Krish told them time had come when the people of both the groups should free their minds of the differences they conveyed. Mayus must understand that Maras were part of the same Indian nationality they themselves belonged

to. They had to follow the rules of the same Indian Government from whom they would get the same privileges and treatment. They were also Tagins, the only differences being that Maras had contacts across the border with Tibetans where Mayus were not allowed to go by Tibetans. But that was something beyond the jurisdiction of the *Nipak* officers. Nor could Maras help them, apart from the fact they would not like to, while enjoying the trade monopoly. Trade channels were specified. Just as Mayus could not go to Tibet, Mayus did not allow Maras to come down. He said he did not know about what Tibetans or the Chinese would do in future, but to some extent the monopoly would have to be diluted. But as far as Maras or Na people were concerned about coming or going anywhere into India, they would indeed be free to do so and Mayu Tagins should welcome them, fraternise with them and enter into partnership and other friendships including marriage relationships. In any case the rivalry or the hostility between them must end forthwith and the Government would take serious view if one people were prevented from having access to any part of India. Maras must remember that Tibetans did not allow them to go beyond Helu or beyond Na. So they were Indians first and foremost. There must be no quarrels in future between the two. This was our view of consolidating the frontiers as far as it could go.

Krish asked them whether anyone from either side differed with what he had said. None differed and all confirmed they had understood. Krish then had rice and dal served to the people to 'seal the *dapo* with the meal as he could not produce mithuns or goats. They sang and danced and women helped to serve food in the *barakhana*. The GBs from both sides told later on that the *Migom* had said very good things for the future. Krish's announcement of our departure plans were received with dismay and there were spontaneous offers for going and improving tract bridges 'even' if they did it without payment. Tabe briefly commented:

“You were not only a good couple, but you have also united us amongst ourselves and with India at large. This has given us happiness and prosperity for the future. Marabais shall never forget you both for centuries.” Womenfolk swarmed towards me with tearful eyes and did not know what to say. They compelled me to bring tears to my eyes.

By now Habung, the quiet and efficient Apatani whom we had brought for one reason, among others, that he would teach wet rice cultivation to the Mara people and who had prepared the beds and sown the seeds on arrival, had now been well rewarded. In the nursery sown with local paddy seeds, the seedlings had come out very well and luckily better than in the *jhums* of the Marabais. His effort became a standing exhibition for all the passers-by to whom he explained the method and the advantages vis-à-vis the *jhuming* method. Krish was very proud of the success of this experiment. He regarded this as the most spectacular achievement and solid proof of the application of the Nehruvian approach in the non-violent experiment — a brilliant item of planning.

Mara and Na Tagins had seen nothing of this cultivation in Tibet as they never went in deep enough into the Brahmaputra valley. Besides, in the technique, none could really beat the Apatani tribe of the Ziro valley where they practised such WRC from ancient times — an oasis in the midst of a vast desert land of *jhums* surrounding them. Their irrigation system evolved in the most complex system of landholdings in the valley where not one inch of space was wasted. It had shamed the best of exponents who found there was nothing further to teach but a lot to learn from them. It was the best proof of what an excellent team could achieve with meticulous planning and executing all at one go within the time frame and general guidelines of the Government. The atmosphere had changed overnight after the announcement that we were returning and all the Marabai villages stirred out, without even receiving

formal *parwanas* to improve the tracks for their *Debe* and *Dene* free of charge.

The Governor, Jairamdas Daulatram, had desired we should achieve what he described as 'consolidation of the frontiers' — a tall order if by that he meant delineation of the frontier tribes and their habitats within the Indian horizon, which easily was a task requiring at least two seasons, if not three. Krish himself was planning to return to the region in November to traverse the Kamla and the Khrung valley frontiers. But so far as consolidating the emotional and national integration was concerned, all that was to be left behind was the follow-up and keep-up to uphold the path of peace he had laid down.

17 June to 6 July, 1956

From Limeking to Jorhat airfield — Departure and a touching teary farewell — Roliana Hmar and party met us at Nacho — The regime of leeches, sandflies and dimdams — The 'Pakki' farewell at Baki — Krish's birthday airborne sally for last glimpse of Limeking

We rejected the proposal for a formal, feasty departure with a 'beat-up'. That was not necessary as I did not require any boestered-up feelings after the pride I now developed in the achievement in the mission I had volunteered for. Krish and I were eager to get back to our baby son from whom we had been away for nearly six months and my foremost thoughts were how I shall be able to take on the journey on a weaker pair of legs and run-down health. Moreover, Mara Tabe had been on 10 days' mourning due to his infant child's death, which under their custom, had confined him indoors. Thirdly, we wanted the left-behind team to keep feeling brave. So it was a simple ordinary departure which bore the impact of mutual pride, satisfaction and a sense of achievement which no one could rob me of for the rest of my life. It was one of those things in life which became never to be forgotten — a service one rendered to the country. With

such jumbled-up thoughts we went over to take leave of Tabe whom we had met about five months ago in a feeble, pale, sickly condition and who was now a picture of health. Tabe desired we should return to see them during the coming winter.

“The Marabai Tagins will never forget you both for centuries as long as the tribe was not extinct, for nobody in their history had changed their quality of life in this manner and had succeeded in reaching them. My wives and all women feel a sense of greater security than ever before,” he said trying to hold my husband aloft but with tears.

To revive him Krish asked whether he would like something to be sent up. Wiping his face he said he would like cartridges to be sent every six months. And he wanted one jerican for keeping drinking water, one steel box for keeping clothes and red coat and one hurricane lamp. ‘Thank God, he was not asking for an aircraft’ is what I heard Krish saying to himself. I took leave of his mourning wives who were speechless except for what the tears could speak.

Outside, Krish hugged each member of the team he was leaving behind, congratulated them and thanked them. “We have survived it so far,” he said in fulfilment. I then turned to the waiting women, many of them wanting to come with me for some distance. Everyone brought at least one parting egg for present and did not know what to say. Perhaps they now realised that their *Dene* friend and them had a century’s gap between them and knew they might never perhaps find me again the same. U.D. Assistant Lalzuala, Dr. Bannerji and P. I. Nguri Tem and his wife came up to a couple of furlongs. With them came also Tabe’s grown-up daughter Yadik (who later got married to Roliana Hmar) who had become one of my ardent admirers.

Undernourishment and confinement for months at Limeking had made me apprehensive and after the first

five miles I felt fatigued. Tagins, I must record, had done a fairly good job in improving the track but the continuous pouring rain was unrelentingly merciless.

I am not recording my experiences in a running, daily style as I have been doing during our upcoming trek. For then it was wave after wave of inquisitive women and children coming out to see the rare *Nipaks*. They all were now mostly indoors only peeping out as the rains fell in sheets. My only companions to keep me engaged were deadly green large leeches known for their poisonous bite and often hanging from drooping trees or ordinary brown leeches and of course dimdams and sandflies. While leeches reached practically every part of my anatomy, dimdams inflicted bites that turned sore. Mali Rapu had taught Krish and me the best way to shed leeches from the body rather than the usual salt padded stick. He taught us to slap the climbing leech which instantaneously made it loosen its hold due to shock, pick it up and keep rolling between the two fingers till it got stupefied and then throw it out into the bushes. We found this extremely efficacious and effective. But even this required vigilance twenty four hours with eyes constantly glued to the feet and legs rather than to the path. And so the progress was haltingly slow. Almost every morning we saw our cook Lama pouring down half a hurricane lamp container full of kerosene to light the totally soaked twigs and wood. If the weather was kinder, near a village the people indeed swarmed like moths towards us showing their stomachs with cries of *kano*. At Naba, Kyali Tatum, the GB charmingly confessed that when we had come up in the beginning they were all suspicious, afraid and alert. Although the advance parties had repeatedly assured them of our bona fides, they were nevertheless sceptical of our real intentions. They were even ready to fight if needed. He told Krish they found in him a real *Abu* (father) who never used a stick. Krish in his characteristic humour said, "Don't worry I shall tell the new officer to do what I could not do — use the stick!" He

laughed and held both the hands of Krish in high regard.

We reached Nacho and were received by the Area Superintendent, Roliana Hmar, and his party with some Assam Rifles men. They were as fatigued and tired as we, and complained that the jungle belonged to leeches.

Baki Tadi had slipped ahead that morning and met us at his village receiving us ceremonially with others with *Jai Hind*. He declared he was going to perform a *Pakki* which was a ceremony for something like cementing of friendship. He had sent men to find a mithun from the forest, otherwise he would kill a goat for the celebration. He said finally he had now befriended the Government for ever. He narrated his association with Capt. Thukral and his team who had established a camp in his village. He assured us he was the happiest Tagin leader with the culmination the mission we had come on.

His contribution, Krish told him, was outstanding and we told him we were proud of him.

On 6 July we reached Rowriah (Jorhat) Airfield and were received by the DST and a few other officers. When Krish saw a sortie being detailed just where our aircraft had taxied to, he asked where it was going to drop. 'Limeking' came the answer. He was then introduced to the crew of the aircraft which belonged to the Kalinga Airlines who had lately been doing daring sorties. "Krishnatry? So he was the man who was in Limeking whose wireless men always showed displeasure and anger. Why not come with us now to see your Limeking from the air and say to the tribals there a symbolic 'Hello'?" It acted like a shot in the arm for Krish's downing morale. "Will you fly me over beyond Limeking up to Tsari the Chu up to Migyithun on one side and up the Subansiri up to Na settlement on the other? If you promise to do that, I come," he asked the Captain of the aircraft. "Accepted, we would love to have you in our company if to experience what we have to ensure, but you will have to show the direction beyond Limeking and tell us to turn around before hitting

the frontiers." The deal was through. Krish turned around to the DST and requested to make it a special sortie for dropping live goats (meat on hoof), poultry, *maida*, *sooji* and all the niceties his staff had been missing out. Also to send a wireless message he would be on board as one of the ejection crew." "Fair enough," replied the jovial DST, Rasheed Yusuf Ali, IFAS. The load manifesto was altered pending take-off. I said goodbye and good luck and pushed off to the Circuit House.

Krish rejoined me at about 6.30 P.M. looking tired and worn out. Briefly he narrated the story of the successful air-drop he had gone on but of not-so-successful a test of endurance he had been put to by the pilots. They were most impressed by the way he hopped from one end of the *pattagari* to the other pointing out to them various landmarks and stages as they flew in excellent weather over the densely forested valleys and gorges. After flying about an hour and a half and listening to him, the Captain said they were exhausted, whisked out a bottle and shouted around whether Krish would care to share the contents which he, however, thought wholly inappropriate for the flight but certainly well suited to a drawing room company. Within minutes he could see the Limeking Centre and people thronging around the flag pitched on the DZ. The first *chakkar* (circuit) was for practice trial, and for the next rounds he and others shoved down the parachuted loads which opened up fine and landed on the DZ. He hardly had time to fully see and appreciate how the Limeking crowds were frantically waving hands, shirts and dancing around to greet him. When the Captain had not yet completed and given him the thumb sign, he had by now his head circling too. Even so he gave the direction and the craft was now flying on an even keel, but not exactly his head. He turned around from Mighyithun all right but in his state of mounting sickness he was unable to discern which exactly was the Subansiri valley out of a series of rivers one after the other. And so reeling round like a dying

hero he shouted to the Captain to return to the base. He could after that only hear the Captain shouting to the copilot. "This guy has conked off." He had the impression they were enjoying the joke! "I certainly met my Waterloo but understand better the hazards of flying and dropping over Limeking. Do you think I could have done better by sharing the contents of that bottle?" he asked.

All said and done it was a grand finale to the unarmed expedition to rendezvous at Takpashiri.

SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL WORLD OF MARABAI TAGINS

Idea of God: In a lengthy discussion, their mythology dated back apparently to as far back as the origin of man, when their fears and tribulations were reflected in propitiating the malevolent and the benevolent spirits or the *uyus* as they described them widely. Before the advent of organised religions anywhere and specially in the Asian theatre, such instances had been common in the practices followed to worship rivers, mountains, snakes, trees, rocks, rain and the sun or the moon. In Tibet this would perhaps be identifiable in the practices of Bonism. Though there was no personification of identity of God as such they believed that there was a supreme power, unknown and undefined which created the earth, the moon and all the things around them. But to them the countless *uyus* residing and affecting their daily lives were more relevant for worship than such a power. The Creator was taken for granted as benevolent, but it was only the Regulators of their day-to-day lives which came in for worship.

Name of the Highest God: Sechung Nyido (sechung being male) is identified with the earth, while Nyido regarded as female is identified with rain. They are not *uyus*, as they can be seen. Nyido is considered as only next to the Creator and Marabais claim they descended from Nyido and fell from the sky.

His Power and Function: Sechung Nyido is all-pervading,

can save and destroy and even kill but almost never exercises these powers. From Sechung were born all earthly things such as trees, mountains, animals, rivers and rocks. He has no particular function but seasons, sun, moon, air, thunder, etc function and move under his authority and presence. Sechung Nyido also makes people rich, poor, bad or good. Sechung Nyido is stationary and passive on the whole.

His Link with Man's Happiness and Sorrow: As the guardian Sechung Nyido takes all-pervading interest in people's happiness and sorrow. For instance, he asks *Donyi* (sun) and receives all the news of happiness and sorrow and of peace and war. *Donyi's* function is to go round the universe to the world of *uyus* at night and to the world of human beings in the day and see what is happening. For example, when men fight Sechung Nyido asks *Donyi* why they are fighting.

When do They Remember Him: Sechung Nyido is not much remembered but is recongised as the supreme. *Donyi* is remembered in day to day life usually. But they sometimes remember him in sorrow or happiness and his name is mentioned in marriage ceremonies. His name is mentioned in puja or death also. In happiness Sechung Nyido is remembered in gratitude and thanksgiving. In sorrow he may also be remembered in disgust, anger and for help.

In What Terms do They Pray and Address Him? They do not worship Sechung Nyido as he hardly gives them any trouble directly. It is the *uyus* that give troubles and have to be appeased and worshipped. But *Donyi* is commonly remembered as Ayu-*Donyi*-Ayu being the revered female deity or mother.

Is He Good and Beneficial? Yes, Sechung Nyido is beneficial and benevolent.

Do Children Know about His Name? Such children who are able to work, collect wood and fuel, draw water and stand on their own in day-to-day life know his name. Small children do not know.

Are There Any Smaller Gods? Yes, there are other *uyus* who are worshipped.

Names and Functions of Important *Uyus*:

1. **Nelitai-Fulo *Uyu*:** Gives all-round prosperity and happiness in life, especially in marriage. A mithun or a pig is sacrificed.
2. **Changter Langri *Uyu*:** Helps in *shikar* and safeguards against death by falling into a river or from a mountain. A pig is sacrificed.
3. **Jetterette *Uyu*:** Protects crops against rats, wild pigs and birds and gives good crops. A pig/chicken is sacrificed.
4. **Yasang Sangru *Uyu*:** Saves women's lives in child-births. A pig/chicken is sacrificed.
5. **Jingte *Uyu*:** Controls all birds and animals and animal kingdom. Is worshipped to ask for animals in *shikar*. A pig/chicken is sacrificed.
6. **Cho Ong *Uyu*:** Bestows fecundity and profundity of pigs and chicken. A chicken is sacrificed
7. **Niki *Uyu*:** Teaches and ensures efficiency of Nibu (priest). A chicken/pig is sacrificed.
8. **Kyarang *Uyu*:** Bestows victory against enemy in raid and destruction of the foe. A dog/chicken is sacrificed.
9. **Jingru *Uyu*:** Protects against the ghosts of dead who might come with fire to destroy. A pig/chicken is sacrificed.
10. **Singru *Uyu*:** Controls and commands certain *uyus* of the forests and mountains. Sends *uyus* to go and kill human beings who might have infuriated them for destroying their jungles, rocks and other dwelling places. A chicken (or a dog) is tied to a tree in the

- jungle, sacrificed and then the tree felled. The chicken is not eaten by the priest or others as in the case of the *uyus*.
11. **Mitung Uyu:** Precaution against the throat going hoarse or dry due to excessive speaking and to give power of good and convincing speech. If omens are not good before going to Helu (Mighyithun) for trade with Tibetans, this *uyu* is worshipped. A chicken/pig is sacrificed.
 12. **Tap U Uyu:** Safeguards against headache and vomiting. A chicken is sacrificed.
 13. **Korong Uyu:** Safeguards against natural calamities such as thunder, lightning, landslide, falling of trees and destruction of properties therefrom. A pig/chicken or sometimes a goat is sacrificed.
 14. **Dojung Uyu:** Looks after welfare of mankind, villagers, etc, on which houses are built. A mithun is sacrificed.
 15. **Diging Uyu:** Lives under the earth and keeps watching anyone who may destroy trees, etc, on that land with the result that one might harm oneself, hurt one's hand and foot. Also where this *uyu* lives Tach and Tash do not grow for rain cannot fall on that particular place. A pig/chicken is sacrificed.
 16. **Pamru Uyu:** Gets annoyed if anyone inadvertently visits this *uyu's* place in jungle while on *shikar* with the result that one may lose one's way. Four white chickens, signifying a clean heart are sacrificed.
 17. **Sali Jungtung Uyu:** Lives in water and gets offended while one goes for fishing and drags the unfortunate person for death in the water. A white chicken is sacrificed.
 18. **Lama Uyu:** Lives on high mountain passes (snow). Has no hair but has wings on body with head like that of a man and feet those of a bird. Kills men. *Nibus* can see it but laymen cannot with the result that they are killed.
 19. **Gunchi Uyu:** Gives good fortune in trade. Worshipped when Mara people go to trade with Tibetans. This *uyu*

is requested to evaluate their articles high and devaluate Tibetan article low in barter. A pig/mithun is sacrificed.

20. **Yatchi Uyu:** Seduces and compels people to commit adultery, murder and other evil deeds.

In What Form do Other Gods Exist? Lay people consider stones, trees, etc, to be *Uyus*. But only a *Nibu* might know the real form. Some have only two teeth, one on top and the other below. Some have long hair, others have none. Some have no fingers others no toes, etc. But on the whole they have no human form basically. Good and benevolent *Uyus* are better looking and would let human beings pass on yielding track to them. Bad *Uyus* are ferocious looking.

The Prayers Which Priest Utters and Their Meaning: When a *Nibu* is consulted his foremost task is to determine which *uyu* is doing the damage. This is done by the process of killing chicken after chicken and judiciously examining their livers, thus experimenting the name of each *uyu* — whether symptoms confirm the presence of a particular *uyu*. The *Nibu* then prescribes the sacrifice to be made to appease the *uyu*. He takes as much as 4-5 days sometimes to invoke and summon the *uyu* from all over. This takes major part of the prayer. He mentions all the nooks and corners of the world (as are known to him) in search explaining at the same time the reasons and the urgency. He asks the assistance of all other similar *uyus*. The chanting might continue night and day with the help of one more boy or assistant. When he announces the arrival of the *uyu* the priest would start saying the prayer in which specific demands and prayers are made.

Where does the Supreme God Live? There is no clear cut mention. But *Sechung* being identified with the earth and *Nyido* with rain they are considered to reside accordingly. All other *uyus* live under the earth in *Uyu Myo*.

Was He Born? Did He Die? No, never.

Their Conception of right conduct: To cultivate well, to care for parents, to speak truth, to obey *Nyute* (Headman) and authority, to be kind and merciful.

Instances of Good and Sinful Life: All those who devote their time in good pursuits like cultivation, speak truth to all, obey the authority and are not oppressive and lead good life. And those who indulge in indiscriminate killing of fellow human beings, commit adultery (especially with slave women and sisters), torture and trouble the poor and lies and commit thefts lead sinful life. Some lower Tagins believe that Abutani commit adultery but do not allow murder. No specific instances were given.

What is the Greatest Sin? No clear cut mention but murder of the innocent and sexual liaison are the worst sins.

Ideas of being Gentle, Kind and Cruel: Kindness and gentleness in behaviour and treatment always pay in life and lead a person to happy living in life and death. Cruelty is regarded very bad. People who are cruel and oppressive must be dealt with severely or might be even killed or exterminated. The idea of cruelty to animals is not so highly developed.

What Happens After Death? When *uyus* eat up or kill human beings the latter turn ghosts.

Does the Soul Die? They have no idea of soul as such. After death one turns *Urumble* (ghost). But *Urumble* does not die or take birth.

Where does It Go: After three days of burial *Urumble* leaves the grave. In accidental death *Urumble* goes to *Taling* for 10 years, then to *Uyummyo*. In *Taling* *Urumble* is very active, makes a lot of noise, leads a life of pleasure with good food, etc. In case of natural death *Urumble* goes straight to *Uyummyo*.

Idea of Heaven or Hell: All go to *Uyummyo*. But good people go by good road and bad people via bad road *Gingrimo-Lamda*.

People lead the same life and wear the same clothes as they had done in life. The rich are also rich there and the poor, poor.

Knowledge of Buddhism: Only heard and seen monks in action. Do not follow Buddhist practices except a few Na Tagins.

Are the Priests Hereditary? No, anyone inspired becomes *Nibu* (non-Buddhist).

IMPORTANT SACRIFICES

1. **On death: Urumbe or Pala or Bungding Urumbe:** A pig mithun is killed in the name of the dead. *Urumbe* of the killed animal goes with the dead. Each animal is sacrificed according to the element of the deceased.
2. **On Bad Dream: Yuma Maning or Manying Uyu:** The priest determines the sacrifice after consulting omen in an egg (not chicken). Sacrifice of a child pig (piggy) or pup is made according to the requirement.
3. **On Sickness — Lema Uyu Mosu:** The priest on finding out omen makes the call for the *uyu* to release the sick. When this is done, sacrifice of a chicken/pig is performed. The sick person remains under a spell when he is not allowed out of the house.
4. **On Birth: Nolung Donum or Other Donam:** This is the feast held 3 or 4 days after the birth and meat is served. The feast is held in the name of Sechung Nyido. A mithun/pig is sacrificed.

FOLK TALES OF APATANI, MARA, NA TAGINS

Bune-Buni Sisters

Bune and Buni, two sisters, were living together. Buni was clever and Bune a fool. Buni married Tachak Dalang, son of Uyu, a discerning husband. They lived happily, but Bune also lived with them as drawer of water and hewer of wood.

Once Bune and Buni both went to carry water. Bune asked Buni to look at her shadow in the water. She was also asked to remove her dresses before looking at her reflection in the water. After pulling off her dresses Buni looked at her image. Bune pushed her into the river. Then wearing the garment of Buni, Bune came to Tachak Dalang's house at dusk. Not quite recognising her Tachak Dalang asked her about her identity. Bune said, "I am your wife." Dalang thought Bune to be his wife.

One evening, Buni taking the form of a bird sat on the railing of the *chang* (verandah) of Dalang's house when he was there and asked him, "Perhaps my husband is pulling on very well. Tachak Dalang asked, "What bird are you to talk? Why have you asked me?" The bird replied, "I am your real wife." The bird convinced him that she was really his wife and told many past associations.

Tachak Dalang asked the bird to enter into a hen's nest for the night. The bird refused. Then the bird was asked to enter into a box of meat. When the bird entered into the box of meat Tachak Dalang said, "If you are my wife you will ask me to open the door of the box early in the

morning." Staying over the night the bird asked him to open the door stick at the early crowing of cocks. While they came out in the daylight he recognised her as his real wife and converted her back to human form. That very day Tachak Dalang and Buni killed the liar Bune and burnt her.

Bune Chura

Long long ago there lived two sisters named Bune and Buni. Bune was very dull and Buni was clever. They had a poultry run. One night a hen was carried away by a jungle cat. Bune and Buni searched the feather of the hen. Their parents had the magical power. With the help of the feather of the hen, they flew away. They wanted to meet the parents. In searching hither and thither they met an old woman doing gardening. They asked her for the news about their parents.

The old woman said, "I shall not tell you anything if you don't give me reward." The two girls agreed to pay her an old dish as her reward. Then the old woman showed their parents. Bune and Buni were very glad to see them. But their blessing was turned into a curse. The fool Bune died out of joy. Her dead body could not be revived by the magic. It was then carried away by the ghosts. They asked some boys to bring water to cook the dead body. But the boys who were to bring water did not return. Therefore, the ghosts boiled her flesh in urine and ate.

Buniba and Taba Tacha

One day Bune and Buni went out to steal some palm. The palm garden belonged to a snake. Seeing Buniba steal palms the snake caught hold of her. Buniba entered into a solemn agreement of marrying the snake. Buniba and the snake lived one or two years as husband and wife. The snake while going out would go as a snake and while returning changed its skin frame and became a man. While at home the snake kept off its frame and while going

out it put on the frame. One day, while sweeping the house, Buniba got the snake's frame and threw it into the fire. The frame was burnt in the fire. From that day, having lost his skin frame, he remained a man. His descendants were known as Taba Tacha sun clan.

Chiki-Tani Origin

Long long ago while there were no man-woman at all; there lived only Chikiba Taniba. The former was the stronger of the two. Chiki and Tani were both eye-sore to each other and passed their time by quarrelling. Taniba was always defeated by Chikiba. Tani turning into ghosts always defeated the family of Chiki.

One day under a clever plan, Taniba asked Chikita to climb the hill with him. They started climbing. Chikiba carried Taniba binding him on the shoulder with a cloth like a baby and crossed the hill. Then Tani binding Chiki on his back with the long leaf of a tree began climbing. Tearing up the leaf Chikiba fell down in the middle of the cave. Taniba was afraid. Talking from the mouth of the cave Taniba asked, "What do you want?" Chiki demanded a mithun. Bringing a mithun, some feathers of a bird pierced through its nostrils producing a sneezing sensation. The mithun could not stand and ran away. Chiki then said, "I want a cow." Taking the cow Taniba did the same thing. The cow also could not stand and ran away. Then at last he said that he wanted a pig. While one pig was being sacrificed Chikiba became very glad and said, "Your clan will live long and they will be very rich." Again he added, "If you do not sacrifice a pig yearly I shall kill all your tribe. Thenceforth is Chiki God worshipped in the Malakha festival (of Apatanis). At that time only Tani and Burba were dwelling. Due to the blessing of Chiki the dynasty of Tani was increasing. They became rich and powerful.

Up to this date Tanis and Nisis are known as descendants of Taniba and worship Chiki God.

Taniba and Burba (Legendary Heroes/Rivals)

Both were brothers and rivals with Taniba proving the better in intelligence. One day they went to the jungle. Taniba's trap caught more rats and birds and Burba had none. Burba asked, "How do you catch so many?" Taniba replied, "I kill one pig and cutting it into pieces place these near every trap."

Believing that, Burba killed one pig and placed all the meat in the same way. Knowing that, Taniba picked these up and ate and then changing himself into a bird got himself into a trap. Burba while searching the traps found the bird and took it away in his cane bag (*chiba*). Reaching home he took out the bird from the cane bag. As soon as he opened the bag the bird flew away and fell on the nose of Burba's wife. While going to cut the bird with a *dao*, he cut her nose with his *dao*. Then the bird flying again fell on the head of his son who was sitting near him. Burba cut his son's head into two pieces with the *dao*. Then the bird fell on the ladder, climbing to the ceiling. Burba cut it also into two pieces. The bird fell on the post. He cut it too into two pieces.

Burba thought of all these doings of Taniba very sadly and then one day took revenge on Taniba. Burba made a wooden pig feeder trough. Seeing Taniba, Burba asked him to lie down on the trough and he added, "If the trough holds fully your body it would hold sufficient food for the pig too. After finishing making the trough, Taniba tested it by lying down and it did not hold. The second time it held the body. Before Taniba got out of it Burba tied down Taniba with the trough and rolled it down deep in the hell. Taniba's both eyes were pasted with one another. One crow was asked to open the eyelids. The crow replying he would not do it passed stool on his body. Seeing one owl flying Taniba asked him to open his eyelids. The owl opened his one eye and told that the sun could open his eyes. Taniba went up to the sun and his eyes were opened. The sun asked, "You stay for some days here." One day

while the sun was ready to go to the field he asked Taniba, "Stay at home, do not look below the *machang*, do not look upon the ceiling and do not look at the containers. After the departure of the sun when Taniba looked below the *machang* he saw bears, pigs, etc. Looking upon the ceiling he saw tigers and birds and peeping into containers saw wasps and snakes.

When the sun returned Taniba told him, "I cannot stay here, send me back." The sun hanged down a rope upon the roof of Taniba's house. Taniba coming down the same saw his wife and children badly emaciated. When asked, Taniba's wife described all the tyranny of Burba. That day Burba went to collect the firewood. In order to teach a good lesson to Burba Taniba hid himself just at the door leading up to the ceiling. Hearing the footsteps of Burba, Taniba threw his *dao* at him. Burba jumped on the ground and Taniba cried, "Earth, burst, burst!" The earth burst into two pieces and Burba entered it.

Pangang-Pali

Long long ago there lived two tribes called Pangang and Pali. These men of ancient times were stronger than our Tani men. The Pangangs were 500 and Pali were 1,000, Pangang and Pali were actually brothers who troubled the people of Hari village (Apatani valley).

Not forgetting these troubles Taniba thought that if they even fought with them they could not be defeated. How to kill these people was their problem. At last they hit upon the plan that they could be killed only by false pretension of friendship. So the Tanis prepared *apong-pani* (rice beer) and they decided to kill them that way. Thus the Tanis prepared *apong-pani* with poison and made Pangang and Pali drink it liberally. Drinking that poisoned *apong* some died at the village. Some Tanis hid themselves at Tsari Lanchu (a place of ambush) to kill the survivors. Those Pangangs and Palis who were coming out of the path were

killed there. After killing them their heads, bodies and haunches were kept separately.

The place where the limbs were kept had separate names. Dingkhru-miding was the place where heads were placed. Hapung-widing was the place where haunches were kept and Buye Tare was the name where bodies were placed. From that day the tribe of Pangang and Pali became extinct. Their living place, the hillock, is still there. Even today we could find their water point and a few broken utensils.

EPILOGUE

The last forty-two rainy seasons have since swelled and witnessed the torrential waters of the ageless Subansiri meandering down its evergreen ravines. The deafeningly noisy chain of its waterfalls had awe-inspired Lt. Gen. B. M. Kaul and forced him to plug his ears with cotton wool to steal a wink. The missile-like rocks piercing into the sky, the snow peaks and the brave Tagins stand firm as border sentinels as before. What may be missing is the Tsari pilgrimage around the holy peaks. The traditional man to man border trade goes on. The new well-aligned tracks and *kutch*a roads are freely and fearlessly used by all alike including the Marabai and Mayu Tagins without trampling on each other's human rights. The then 10-year-old Mara Tasser Mara Tabe's son, is the Political Interpreter in the highest grade. Tagins have had a Cabinet Minister in the Arunachal Pradesh Council of Ministers, and it made me proud to meet Mr. T. T. Gamdik of Ike village (Siyum circle) on the east bank which is beyond Eba village of the late Eba Topu, the overnightly architect of the treacherous Ringging Tarak, the killer ladder dangling down to the roaring Subansiri below. Without his engineering feat my 1956 expedition could have been damned and dumped dead. Mr. T. T. Gamdik was Additional Deputy Commissioner at Deporijo, a sure proof of all-round reward of peace. There has not been any significant breach of harmony in the aftermath of the establishment of the Limeking Administrative Centre covering Na-Taksing enclaves. What is more, with a *kutch*a road circumventing

it there is no more the dreaded Ring-ging Tarak to threaten with Oiyu.

Streams of Tibetan refugees trickled down from Sangacholing and around through Limeking in 1959 disturbances in Tibet. Tagin options in living and trading rights have bloomed to hopefully more rights without constraints on trade movements, or hunting. Trade down south flows unhampered and the civil supply and canteen shops cater for requirement without uncertainty. Consolidation of territory and tribal homogeneity has silenced speculation and apprehension, irrespective of the need for border reconciliation, if any.

Our remotest tribe now enjoys expanded human rights, thanks to this 1956 soul-searching and epoch-making expedition.

Democracy in Arunachal Pradesh has taken firm roots, thanks to a band of dedicated youthful leaders.

The phenomenal transformation of Arunachal must be attributed to its people's love of peace.

Anyone reading this diary will be convinced of the need to take good care of the bordering people to keep them on further progressive track.

GLOSSARY OF TAGIN WORDS/NAMES

A.P.O.	:	Asstt. Political Officer
Abutani	:	Ancestor of Apatanis and Niis
Achingmori	:	Where 47 Assam Rifles and Civil staff were murdered
AGI Radep	:	Allegedly the Tagin behind the Achingmori massacre
Amrigan	:	Tagin pronunciation of Americans
Angu Tashi	:	A political Interpreter of that area
Apatani	:	A distinctive tribe of Apatani Valley; Ziro, Tanag or Tani
ASCs	:	Men of the Auxilliary Porter Corps
ATO	:	Master, Father
Baki Tadi	:	Gam of Chete and versatile leader of Baki clan area
Basha	:	A small dwelling place made of bamboo
Bimpak Bagbe	:	A political Interpreter
Bini Dachak	:	Political Interpreter with Capt. Thukral (1951)
Chagoyi (Or Pembung)	:	Village site beyond Ging, one house village
Charu Chow & Charu	:	
Chengba	:	Two Bangnis of border area
Chigr Ghue	:	Chief Officer from Lhasa
Chindgir	:	
Chade	:	Gam of Dupak Village
Che Dzung	:	
Chue	:	Dzungpon of Chayul, Dzung Chue being the word for Tibetan officer
Cheke Tato	:	Gam of Cheke village
Dui Gobu	:	Political Interpreter and brother of Agi Radep's wife

Dafla : **Nisi or Nising or Bangri tribe**
Dolo : **Tagin name for pilgrimate**
Dap : **A ceremony to seal friendship**
Deba Shung : **Tibetan Government**

The book provides an incisive account of the first unarmed expedition of north-eastern frontiers of India along Tibet undertaken in 1956. The tribes such as *Tagins*, *Apatanis* and *Maras* living in frontier areas of Arunachal Pradesh which formed the itinerary of the expedition, were believed to be quite hostile and all attempts by the British Indian troops to enter their villages were foiled. Hence their lifestyle, folklore and socio-economic conditions remained unexplored until this unarmed expedition led by the author and his wife Geeta Krishnatry whose diary forms the mainstay of the narration.

S.M. Krishnatry (b. 1921) joined the British Indian Army in 1942. He fought the enemies during and after World War II. He remained posted in the north-eastern frontiers for almost 35 years. He held important position in military and civil administration in post-independent India. His other books include *Portrait of New Social Order* and *Call of the Individual*. He lives in Delhi.



Rs 80.00

ISBN 978-81-237-4460-5

NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA