

A Man of the Frontier

S.W. Laden La
(1876-1936)

His Life & Times in Darjeeling and Tibet



Nicholas and Deki Rhodes

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by

Nicholas and Deki Rhodes

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Studio portrait of His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, taken in Calcutta c.1910 and presented to Laden La at the time.

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Laden La in Tibetan dress



Map of Lhasa city viewed from the South West, commissioned by Laden La from a local artist in 1930.

Preface

When my brother, my sisters and I and our cousins were young, we were told that our grandfather was a remarkable man. Our father, our uncle and our aunt, who clearly worshipped him, often told us stories about our grandfather, but as we did not know him, he remained a remote and revered figure. I always wanted to find out more about him and his achievements, and am very pleased that my husband shared this wish, and with his long-standing interest in the history of the Himalayan region, he has tackled the necessary research with persistence and enthusiasm.

Over the past years my husband and I have searched widely for information about our grandfather, and have talked to a number of people who remembered him directly. For many years we have planned to write a biography, but other priorities always intervened. Our aunt Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) Tenduf La, who was very close to her father, enthralled us with many stories, and it was her forthcoming one hundredth birthday celebrations that provided the incentive to get this project off the ground. It is sad that she never saw the book in print, but we were able to talk to her about the contents when we last met in Darjeeling, in September 2004.

We were fortunate to have had access to many papers that have been preserved by the family. We are particularly grateful to our late beloved parents, Wangchuk Dorji (SWL's second son) and Nima Lhaki Laden La. Our late Uncle Palsang Wangdu (Pat), who acted as his father's secretary for many years, maintained his files meticulously during his lifetime. Our mother and uncle generously entrusted us with many files, and hunted down old family photographs, which we were able to copy. We would also like to thank Mr. Richard Gould for permission to use two photographs from the estate of his father, the late Sir Basil Gould, and to the Hon. Mr. David Cobbold for permission to use a Lytton family photograph. Although other photographs have been copied from prints in our possession, we are not always aware who the photographer was, so we express our regrets if we have not acknowledged any photographs appropriately. Without that material, this little book could not have been written. Our cousin Sherab Tenduf, has been a source of constant encouragement and inspiration as this book has developed and we are very grateful to him.

We have also read many books about Tibet and the Darjeeling district, both travellers' tales and histories, many of which mention our grandfather. In addition, we have read through the official records preserved in the India Office Library, now part of the British Library in London, and we would like to thank the librarians for their

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unstinting help. Several historians have pointed out references that have been of use in building up this brief biography in particular Julie Marshall and Alex McKay. Much research remains to be done, but we feel that we now have sufficient information for this provisional biography. Once this book is published, we are sure that friends, relatives and other individuals will come forward with memories and references, and we invite such contributions and comments. Sonam Wangfel Laden La's biography deserves to be written. However, we hope that this preliminary account of the life and work of our grandfather will be of interest, not only to family members, but also to historians of the Darjeeling District and of Tibet.

Deki Rhodes (née Laden La)

January 2006



The Chowrasta, Darjeeling – c1900

Introduction

Sonam Wangfel Laden La was a remarkable man by any standards, who occupied a unique position in Darjeeling and in Tibet during the first thirty-six years of the twentieth century. If one consults any book about the history of the region, his name features prominently. Many travellers who wrote about their visits to Darjeeling, mention him warmly and comment on the help and hospitality he offered to them. On his retirement in 1931, the Indian press described him as “one of the most romantic figures in the Indian Police Service... whose work will rank in history with the greatest of British frontier officers”¹. He was clearly a multifaceted man of talent and influence, but the references are somewhat disjointed, and nowhere does one get a complete picture of his achievements. Nowhere can one get a clear idea of the man himself.

Laden La was born in 1876 into a Sikkim Bhotia Lama family, who were small landowners in the region. He was the first local boy to be given a “European” education in Darjeeling, as well as a comprehensive education in his own Sikkimese Tibetan culture. This was probably a conscious decision on the part of the British administrators to groom him to be a leader of his community, true to his roots, while also being an Anglophile. After successfully completing his education, he was the first local hill boy to be appointed to the Imperial Police Force in Darjeeling at officer rank. He spoke several local languages, and he was respected by all communities in the District, who found him to be a person with whom they could identify.

At this time, at the end of the nineteenth century, the British were a global power, and were seeking to establish a working relationship with Tibet, so as to create a buffer between India and the “great” powers of Russia and China. An intelligent local man, well educated in both European and Tibetan cultures, could be of immense use in establishing good relations with Tibet. It is interesting to consider to what extent Laden La was being used by the British, or was he, in the end, his own man?

As regards the relationship with Tibet, after the Younghusband military expedition of 1904, Laden La did indeed play an important role in establishing a good rapport between British India and the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama, and the more progressive Tibetan Ministers. When the Dalai Lama sought refuge in India in 1910,

1 *INDIA*, Vol.7 No.37, July 1931, pp.9-10.

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Laden La was assigned to his party on a full time basis, and from then until 1914 he was continually involved with Tibetan affairs. After two years with the Dalai Lama, he helped to negotiate the withdrawal of Chinese troops from Lhasa; he accompanied the first four Tibetan boys to study in the UK; and on his return to India, he attended the Simla Conference, at which the border between India and Tibet was agreed bilaterally². He then spent a year in Lhasa in 1921 with Sir Charles Bell, and in 1923 he was invited to establish a police force in Lhasa. Finally, in 1930, he succeeded in resolving a dispute between Nepal and Tibet, which was on the verge of developing into a war between the two countries.

In the intervening years, when he was not in Tibet, he was very much involved in community affairs in Darjeeling, and in the days before democracy, he became the undisputed leader of all the communities of hill people. He strongly advocated separating Darjeeling from the plains of Bengal, developing, as early as 1917, an agenda remarkably similar to that of the more recent campaigns for hill autonomy. In this context, his name, and quotes from some of his speeches, are still featured in political statements today. It is unusual for a serving police officer to involve himself in politics, but it is a measure of the man that he could do so. He was also a very devout Buddhist, and spent much time, and his patrimony, supporting local religious institutions, as well as a number of local social causes. This aspect of his life has previously received little attention.

The objective of this book is to record the events of his life, both his achievements and his frustrations, placing them in the wider historical context. We have tried to trace his origins, and to record how it was that he developed in the way that he did. Others have used the word "intermediary", to describe the role that he played in developing the relationship between the British Indian government and the Tibetan government. He did more than that, however, as he was a leader, not only of his Sikkim Bhutia community in Darjeeling, but also of all the local hill people. In giving voice to local aspirations, he did much to make each different and distinct local community feel proud of its heritage, while encouraging all the hill people to work unitedly for their common welfare.

2 Although the border was agreed bilaterally, between British India and Tibet, China refused to ratify the agreement, and the border issue remains unresolved to this day.

Chapter 1

Background

The early history of the Bhutias in Sikkim is shrouded in myth and legend, but a common belief is that they came from eastern Tibet. Some theories suggest that they may have been exiles from the great Tangut (Tibetan) Buddhist Kingdom of Minyak, which flourished at the eastern end of the Central Asian Silk Road between the tenth and thirteenth centuries³. The legendary ancestor of the Sikkim Bhutias, Guru Tashi, was apparently a younger prince from the royal house of Minyak, who lived in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Since he had no prospect of inheriting the throne of Minyak, he travelled with his family to seek his fortune, and arrived at the great monastery of Sakya in Tibet. There, his eldest son, performed, what was then considered the miraculous feat, of erecting the pillars of the new monastery that was being built, and he became known as Khye-bum-sar. In gratitude, the King of Sakya gave him his daughter in marriage.

Thereafter the family settled in the Chumbi Valley, from where they made contact with a Lepcha chieftain living near Gangtok. Khye-bum-sar initially had no children, but the Lepcha chieftain prayed for him, and prophesied that his issue would rule over Sikkim. Khye-bum-sar and his wife then had three sons, and his descendants gradually moved into Sikkim during the fourteenth century. The Kingdom of Minyak was annihilated by Jengis Khan around 1227 A.D., and numerous waves of refugees fled southwards and westwards into Tibet. It would not be surprising if, after a century or more of wandering across the "roof of the world", via Kham, in Eastern Tibet⁴, some more fugitives from this Kingdom, reached the hidden rice bowl, full of treasures, that is *Den-jong*. This hidden land of Sikkim, mild and fertile, inhabited by the peaceful Lepchas since time immemorial, must have seemed a veritable heaven on earth.

The descendants of Khye-bum-sar's three sons, who settled in Sikkim and in the Chumbi Valley, formed twelve clans, one of which was called the Nam-tsang-kho-

3 The Minyak kings reputedly came from the Kingdom of Uryen, where the Lotus-born Buddha, often known as Guru Rimpoche or Padma Sambhava, was born in the eighth century. All Sikkimese Buddhists, including Laden La, hold Guru Rimpoche in great veneration. The location of Uryen is not known for certain.

4 There was a Kingdom of Minyak there until the 1950's, and the Minyak Tulku then came to Bhutan, where he now heads the National Library.

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pa⁵, and it was from this clan that Laden La was descended⁶. Although little is known of their early years, these Bhutia clans brought Buddhism with them, and established Nyimapa temples and monasteries throughout the region, which included both present day Sikkim and, what is now the Darjeeling district.

It was in the Seventeenth Century, that a proper government was established in Sikkim for the first time. Following certain predictions of Guru Rimpoche (Padma Sambhava), the choice of religious King, or Chogyal, fell on Phuntsog Namgyal, who was crowned at Yoksom in the seventeenth century⁷. The royal family of Sikkim, the Namgyals, claiming descent from the early Kings of Tibet, as well as from Khye-bum-sar, then established their rule over the whole country of Denjong. The right of the Namgyal family to royal authority was unquestioned, and the earlier Bhutia settlers accepted the new situation, along with their Lepcha compatriots.

Laden La's great-grand uncle, Lama Rinzing Dorji Laden La, also known as the Kacheng Tulku, built the monastery on Observatory Hill in Darjeeling. This monastery was established, probably around the 1760's, as an offshoot of the Pemayangtse Monastery in Western Sikkim⁸. At this time, of course, Darjeeling was part of Sikkim.

- 5 This was one of the "eight respectable names", according to Risley (Gazetteer of Sikkim, 1894, p.28). Although Risley says that they were not directly descended from Khye-bum-sar, the legendary ancestor of the Namgyal family, Yapo Yongda has told us that Risley is not correct, and that these eight families were also descended from Khye-bum-sar.
- 6 In an early notebook, Laden La signed his name as Sonam Wangphel Laden La Nam-Tsang-Kho-Pa. This ancestry is also remembered by Yapo Yongda who, as a young novice monk in the 1940's, was told stories about Laden La by elderly monks, who had known him before he left Pemayangtse Monastery and went to Darjeeling.
- 7 There is some dispute over the date of this event, which may have taken place as early as 1604, or as late as 1642. Yapo Yongda has told us that, according to the Pemayangtse Monastery records, the earlier date is more likely. This was a time of great rivalry between the different religious sects in Tibet, culminating in the supremacy of the Gelugpa sect in Tibet, and the establishment of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama as the secular, as well as religious ruler of the country. At this time, the Drugpa Kagyu sect, under the Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal, established an independent Kingdom in Bhutan. It was, therefore, very appropriate for the Bhutia Nyingmapa settlers to establish their own independent kingdom in Sikkim, in order to demonstrate their independence from Tibet and from the Dalai Lama in Lhasa.
- 8 The History of Sikkim, compiled by Maharaja Thutob Namgyal and Maharani Yeshey Dolma of Sikkim, 1908 (India Office Library Records MSS Eur E 78) records the founding of the Darjeeling Monastery by the Kacheng Tulku. Other theories regarding the founding of Darjeeling are discussed by authors such as Biswas & Roy (2004), pp.30ff and Wangyal (2002). Contrary to what some records say the name "Darjeeling" probably did not derive from Laden La's ancestor Rinzing Dorji. It is more likely that it originates from the famous Terton, Dorji-lingpa, who was born in the Tang Valley in Bhutan, and who travelled to Sikkim in the fourteenth century. At that time, in the fourteenth century, he may have established Nyingmapa temples at Do-ling in Sikkim, and perhaps also on Observatory Hill in Darjeeling.

The Observatory Hill Monastery was destroyed by Nepalese troops loyal to the Shah dynasty of Kathmandu in about 1788⁹, and few inhabitants remained in the Darjeeling district during the period of Nepalese occupation, which lasted until 1817. In that year, under the terms of the treaty of Titaliya, signed between the Nepalese and the British after a war between the two countries, the territory of Darjeeling was returned to Sikkim, and first came to the attention of the outside world.

Around 1829, James Grant, the Collector of Malda, identified Darjeeling as a pleasant place for a hill station for Bengal, and over the next decade, Colonel Lloyd deceived the Chogyal of Sikkim into parting with the Darjeeling ridge to the British.¹⁰ The Chogyal had expected that his gift of Darjeeling would be reciprocated by gift of a certain portion of land in the Terai, at the foot of the hills, which had traditionally been part of Sikkim. That did not happen, and the British only offered a modest annual payment in return. Darjeeling, as a town, was a creation of the British, and particularly of Dr. Archibald Campbell, the first Superintendent of Darjeeling, who administered the area from 1840 to 1862.

Laden La's grandfather, Tsiwang Rinzing Laden La, had been a local headman, and had collected taxes from the lands in Darjeeling and in the Terai on behalf of the Sikkim government¹¹. This arrangement ceased when the British wrested control of Darjeeling from Sikkim, and Laden La's grandfather then became an assistant to Dr. Campbell. One of Campbell's major contributions to Darjeeling was the discovery that tea could be grown there. He experimented with many different types of camellia bush, before determining which variety of bush produced tea. In 1856, the first commercial tea gardens were established, and it is recorded that Laden La's grandfather sold land at Pandam, Glenburn, and other places, for some of these early gardens¹². From then on tea cultivation was to become the commercial backbone of the Darjeeling district.

The Chogyal of Sikkim looked at the growing commercial success of Darjeeling with some frustration. He justifiably resented the way the British had wrested the territory from his control¹³. This created tension between the British and the Sikkimese, and even resulted in a very one-sided military action in 1861, when the

9 Francis Hamilton was the first European author to mention Darjeeling, when he recorded this fact in his book on *The Kingdom of Nepal*, published in 1819, but the information was probably obtained around 1804.

10 Fred Pinn (1990), gives an interesting and well-documented account of the establishment of the British hill station, from its first "discovery" by James Grant before 1829, through to the first settlement in 1839.

11 cf W.D.Gourlay (1918), p.17.

12 *The Darjeeling Advertiser*, 8 January 1918, p.5.

13 cf Fred Pinn (1990).

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Chogyal realised the futility of confronting the British and the need to develop a more constructive relationship. As a result, in March 1873, the Chogyal of Sikkim, Sidkeong Namgyal, visited Darjeeling on a goodwill mission at the invitation of Sir George Campbell, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. One achievement of this visit was an agreement to set up a Bhutia Boarding School in Darjeeling. In this school Bhutia boys could receive a broad education. The syllabus covered both traditional Tibetan language and religion, and subjects such as mathematics, and the English language, which would prepare the students for a life in British India. The British hoped that some of the students, would learn sufficient surveying skills for them to be able to complete a map of Tibet, and to help improve the relationship with their northern neighbour. Sir Alfred Croft, Director of Public Instruction in India, wrote that the objective was “to train up interpreters, geographers and explorers, who may be useful if at any future time Tibet is opened to the British”¹⁴. These were matters close to heart of the British in their foreign policy ambitions.

Sarat Chandra Das, from Calcutta, was chosen as the headmaster of this new school. The Chogyal was asked to recommend a Tibetan teacher, and he chose Lama Ugyen Gyatso, one of the most intelligent young monks from Pemayangtse Monastery. Ugyen Gyatso had been with the Chogyal on his visit to Darjeeling in 1873. Later that same year Lama Ugyen had accompanied the Deputy Commissioner, Mr J.W.Edgar, on a tour of Sikkim. The school was formally founded in April 1874, from which date Lama Ugyen Gyatso resided mainly in Darjeeling.

Lama Ugyen Gyatso was a very respected Nyingmapa monk, who came from a land-owning family of Yangang, a village located on a south-facing slope, a few miles east of Ravangla. His ancestor, Lon Norbu Khyungzin, had been an officer of state serving King Phuntsog Namgyal in the mid seventeenth century. A few years later, another ancestor, Chag-jot Pema Khang, had been Prime Minister, and the lands of Yangang and Lingdam had remained in the family since that date. In 1884, Coleman Macaulay described him as “the great man” of Yangang; “he owned the living, in fact, of the monastery”¹⁵. He built a fine house at Yangang, close to the gompa¹⁶, where part of his family still resided. Nyingmapa monks were allowed to marry, and Ugyen Gyatso lived mainly with his wife, Choki, in Yangang Villa in Bhutia Busty, Darjeeling. Choki was the younger sister of Sonam Wangfel Laden La’s father, Kyungdung Rinzin Laden La, so Lama Ugyen Gyatso became an uncle by marriage to Laden La.

Ugyen Gyatso soon gained a reputation in official circles in Darjeeling, as a man of

14 Quoted in Waller (1988), p.193.

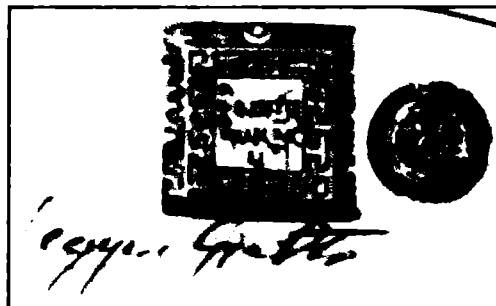
15 Coleman Macaulay (1885), p.3.

16 The Gompa was founded by Ugyen Gyatso’s great uncle, Sring Lama. In the late 1990’s we visited this beautiful house, still owned by the descendants of Ugyen Gyatso’s brother.

integrity and ability who could be trusted, and who firmly believed that the establishment of good relations between the British and the Tibetans was in the interests of both parties. He had visited Gyantse alone in 1878, and again in the company of Sarat Chandra Das in 1879. In 1881-82 he again accompanied Sarat Chandra Das, this time to Lhasa, bringing back useful information on every occasion. He successfully mapped the Yamdrok Tso in 1883, travelling with his wife, Choki. A British colleague in the Survey of India noted that when he travelled with Sarat Chandra Das, “the Lama was the harassed and hard-working surveyor; the Babu the light-hearted observer”¹⁷.

Laden La himself was born in July 1876 in Darjeeling, possibly in Bhutia Busty or in Ging. His father, Khyundung Rinzing was the landlord and Chief Lama of the Ging Monastery¹⁸, and his mother came from Western Sikkim. His parents died when he was very young, and he was sent to Pemayangtse Monastery as a novice monk. Apart from the family connection with Darjeeling, his parents had connections with Lingmo, a few miles north of Yangang, up the Teesta Valley, and with Barfung Lingdam, near Doling monastery, a few miles to the west of Ravangla¹⁹. Sometime during the 1880’s, his aunt, Ani Choki, his father’s sister, who had no children of her own, adopted young Laden La and he was brought back to Darjeeling.

The scene was now set for the commencement of Laden La’s life in Darjeeling, where he was placed in the care of Lama Ugyen Gyatso and his wife Choki. He could not have found better adoptive parents.



Seal and Signature of Lama Ugyen Gyatso

17 Holdich (1906), p.250.

18 cf. “A Hero of the Old School” by Pasang Tshering, World Tibet News, 23rd May 2005.

19 Ashang Lhatu, the son of S.W.Laden La’s mother’s brother, was the head lama of Doling Monastery, and used to visit the family house in Darjeeling until the 1950’s.

Chapter 2

Education in Darjeeling

When he arrived in Darjeeling, Laden La pursued his education in earnest. Instruction in the Tibetan language and religion was received from Lama Sherab Gyatso at Ghoom Monastery, and other subjects were taught by the Jesuits at Sunny Bank in Darjeeling, and for a time he was also at Doveton College and St Xavier's College, both in Calcutta.

Sunny Bank was where the Jesuits first set up their school in Darjeeling in the 1880's, while they sought a more permanent home. In 1888, they started levelling the ground for the fine buildings of St Joseph's, North Point, where they opened their new school in 1891. This is still one of the finest educational establishments in India. No other local hill boy received this type of education at the time, alongside European and Anglo-Indian boys. It can only be guessed exactly how he received this opportunity, but it is possible that Sir Alfred Croft heard from Ugyen Gyatso about his wife's bright young nephew, and thought that it would be an interesting project to educate him alongside British boys. It must have occurred to Croft, and to other senior British administrators, that an intelligent local person, like Laden La, who had received a British education, could one day play a very important role, both in local administration and in fostering good relations with Tibet.

His education in the Tibetan language and the Buddhist religion was not neglected. Lama Sherab Gyatso²⁰ was a very learned Gelugpa monk. He was a Buriyat, who had come to Darjeeling from Siberia via Mongolia and Tibet, and he had assisted Sarat Chandra Das and Ugyen Gyatso in Tibet in 1882. Apart from being the lama in charge of Ghoom Monastery, he taught at the Bhutia Boarding School. His "Yellow Hat" teachings must have contrasted with the Nyimapa teachings that Laden La had received at Pemayangtse, as a young novice monk, but no doubt, gave him an excellent understanding of the wider aspects of his traditional culture, and in particular of the teachings of the Dalai Lama. With Lama Sherab Gyatso he became proficient in reading and writing classical Tibetan.

However, life was not all dreary study and bookwork. He must have established a relationship with some of the local and European photographers, and he appears in several commercial photographs illustrating the local people and culture. He projects the image of a very confident young man, wearing his hat at a "rakish" angle, and seems to be the leader of the groups of local young men. No doubt his command of the English language helped in establishing these relationships, and he clearly bridged the two cultures with confidence. His aunt, Ani Choki, also appears in a few

20 Also known as Shabdrung Lama. C.f. McKay (1997), p.123-24.

commercial photographs, as do Lama Ugyen Gyatso and Lama Sherab Gyatso, perhaps encouraged by young Laden La.

Darjeeling, perched on its lofty ridge, housed an extremely cosmopolitan, vibrant and commercially successful society at the time. The railway had reached Darjeeling in 1881, and the population of the town was increasing rapidly. Apart from the British and other European Christian settlers, and the largely Nyingmapa Buddhist Sikkim Bhutias, the population included Lepchas, both traditional Animist and converted Christians; Drukpa Kagyu Buddhists from Bhutan; Nepalis of several different tribes, such as Limbus, Rais, Magars, Tamangs, and Newars – who could be Buddhist, Hindu or converted Christians; Buddhist Tibetan traders from Gyantse, Lhasa, Kham and Amdo; Marwari traders from Rajasthan and elsewhere; Hindu Bengalis and Biharis from the neighbouring plains areas of India and Muslims from Bengal, Kashmir and Afghanistan. There were also Parsis from Bombay and Sikhs from the Punjab. The Christians were mainly Roman Catholic, Scottish Presbyterian or Church of England.

Although the society was extremely diverse, the class and caste systems that were prevalent at the time operated strictly, so that most of these numerous different groups of people lived their separate lives. The British had at least three castes of their own - the “heaven born” I.C.S. administrators lived separately from the army officers, and both considered themselves superior to the tea planters and other European traders or “box-wallahs”. In turn, the European “box-wallahs” tended to consider themselves superior to the “native” businessmen who mainly came from Tibet or elsewhere in India. The local Sikkimese Lepchas and Bhutias, and the growing number of Nepalese inhabitants, rarely mixed with the other communities. This was the unfortunate reality of the British Empire at the time, and the Europeans moulded society largely to facilitate the exploitation of the local people. Although it was the Europeans who benefitted most, some of the wealth did filter down to the local people, who became much more affluent than their compatriots who remained in their villages.

Laden La was unique in Darjeeling, in that his education allowed him to feel “at home” in both European and local cultures, and his ability to empathise, made him someone that all communities could relate to. He spoke ten different local languages and dialects, and he read and wrote English, classical Tibetan and Nepali fluently, often switching from one to the other in his personal papers and diaries.

As regards family life, Ani Choki was based in Darjeeling, where she ran a local brewery. How this could be squared with the strict Buddhist principles of her husband is not recorded, but it certainly helped to set the family fortunes on a firm financial basis. Ugyen Gyatso remained the main Tibetan teacher at the Bhutia Boarding School, but he had many other responsibilities associated with border affairs. During

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the short war between British India and Tibet in 1888-9, he was the interpreter on the expedition, and was awarded the silver campaign medal. He did much work for the survey of India and debriefed the famous Sikkimese explorer Kintup on his return to India after five years of travelling across the length and breadth of Tibet. On retirement from his teaching post in 1893, he received glowing testimonials, and was awarded a large Viceroy's silver medal in recognition of services rendered, together with the title Rai Bahadur.

However, this was not the end of his career, as in June 1895 he was given the position of managing the Government Estates in Kalimpong, a role he held for about fifteen years until his retirement in 1910. Kalimpong had been annexed from Bhutan after the Anglo-Bhutanese war of 1864-5, and in the 1890's Europeans gradually settled there. Chincona plantations flourished in the congenial climate, warmer than Darjeeling, but pleasantly cool compared with the plains of Bengal. Chincona had been discovered in South America in the 1860's, and was used to produce quinine, the most effective treatment for the dreaded malaria. An important event for Kalimpong was the arrival, in 1889 of Dr Graham, the Presbyterian Minister from Scotland. Not only did he convert many of the locals to Christianity, but in 1900, he established a fine school called Dr Graham's Homes, initially for the children of European tea-planters and their local "wives". This school developed an excellent reputation, which still stands, and it occupies a central position in the life of Kalimpong. Kalimpong was also developing as the main centre for the growing trade with Tibet. Wool was crossing the Jelep La (pass) in increasing quantities, as a result of the trade agreement concluded with Tibet in 1889, and Kalimpong was the frontier market to which the Tibetan traders came to sell to the Marwari and other Indian businessmen. The Teesta Valley Branch of the Darjeeling Hill Railway was built around 1915 to handle the transport of this wool to the plains of India.

Home for Lama Ugyen Gyatso and his wife Choki was at Yangang Villa, Bhutia Busty in Darjeeling, but Ugyen Gyatso would have spent much time in Kalimpong discharging his responsibilities, quite apart from visits to his ancestral property and family at Yangang in Sikkim. Young Laden La lived partly in Bhutia Busty, and partly at Ghoom Monastery, and he certainly learned to live an independent life.

Apart from Ugyen Gyatso, another older male family member was Ani Choki's elder brother, Kunlay Gyatso (Laden La's father's younger brother), who must have cut a dashing figure. He had received education in surveying techniques, possibly at the Bhutia Boarding School, and from the late 1870's, he was sent on several expeditions by his Survey of India masters, under the code name RN (Rinzing Namgyal). His best known expedition was a circuit of Mt. Kanchenjunga, but in 1884 and 1886 he also surveyed part of Bhutan²¹. In 1899 he accompanied the famous mountaineer,

21 c.f. Rawat (2002), pp.226-239.

Douglas Freshfield, on an expedition to Sikkim which included the first circuit of Kanchenjunga by Europeans²². Family tradition says that he performed the rare and exciting feat of swimming across the Teesta River. However, perhaps the most memorable event in Kunlay Gyatso's life was his visit to England, at the invitation of the retired Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell, where he had an audience with Queen Victoria at St James's Palace. The record of this historic visit, probably the first by a Sikkimese Bhutia to Britain, is a gold watch with the inscription "presented to Kunlay Laden La by Sir George Campbell on the occasion of his audience with Queen Victoria at St James's Palace". Unfortunately the date is not mentioned, but it was probably during the 1890's. The visit must have made a strong impression on the young Laden La, who was in his twenties when Kunlay Gyatso died around 1900.

It was now time for Laden La to embark on his career, endowed with an intelligent and enquiring mind, equipped with a unique education in both Tibetan and Western culture, and spurred by the examples and experiences of his uncle and his adoptive father.



Gold Watch given to Kunlay Gyatso Laden La By Sir George Campbell on his Visit to Queen Victoria at St James' Palace (1890's)

22 An account of this expedition, with a photograph of Rinzing Namgyal, is given in D.Freshfield (1903).

Chapter 3

Early Career in Darjeeling

After completing his education, Laden La now embarked on his career. In August 1894, when he was just eighteen years old, he was appointed as an Apprentice Compositor, working at the Government Press in Darjeeling on the great Tibetan English Dictionary project masterminded by Sarat Chandra Das, as well as on other Tibetan language books. His sound command of both the Tibetan and English languages was a rare skill, and his contribution to the work of the Press must have been significant. After receiving several promotions, he achieved the rank of Chief Compositor in 1896, at the age of twenty, and Sarat Chandra Das wrote glowing testimonials in his service book. If the British truly had plans for Laden La (SWL) with his unique education, it may seem surprising that he was initially placed in such a “back-room” position, but it may have been a test to see how he faced up to the discipline of routine work. If so, he passed the test with flying colours.

In 1897 the British administrators decided that he was ready for greater responsibilities, and he was transferred from the Bengal Secretariat Press²³ to the Deputy Commissioner’s office as Interpreter. After only six months he was again transferred, this time to the Imperial Police Service. In October 1899, after passing an initial course at the Bhagalpur Police Training School, he was posted at Darjeeling, the first local boy to be granted officer rank. These were the days before organised crime and terrorism, and the role of the police was truly to serve and protect the community, rather than to fight crime. Laden La’s Buddhist upbringing made him a sincerely compassionate person, and he was ideally suited to his new role. His knowledge of local customs and languages, coupled with his intelligence, education and integrity, earned the respect of both the Europeans and of the local people. He was able to ensure that the police, in exercising their duties, understood and respected local sensitivities. His first months in the Police service were spent, assisting with the organisation of the census in Darjeeling District, and in learning the basic principles of the law and other matters relating to his new duties. He attended several courses at Bhagalpur, and apparently after failing to pass one paper, he fled to Darjeeling without permission! He received a severe reprimand, and was sent back to Bhagalpur, where he completed his training in 1901. He was then assigned as personal assistant

23 The Dictionary could progress without him, and was finally published in 1902, becoming arguably the most useful dictionary for words appearing in the esoteric and complex classical Buddhist texts.

to Col.E.H.C.Walsh²⁴, the Deputy Commissioner, Darjeeling District, and was very much involved with frontier intelligence work.

At this time, the British were paranoid about the role of Russia in Tibet, and were determined to do all they could to establish a dialogue with the Tibetans. Those were the days of "The Great Game", when Russia was expanding its influence over Central Asia, China remained the traditional power in the Orient, and the European colonialists were busy dividing up the rest of the known world between themselves. The British feared, above all, that Tibet would fall under the influence of Russia, as a result of the activities of Agvan Dorjiev and other Buriyat Buddhist monks, several of whom were known to be studying in monasteries in and around Lhasa. SWL was asked to identify all suspicious visitors to Darjeeling district and had clearly built up a network of reliable assistants, who could undertake such duties in a discreet but effective way. His findings were reported, rapidly and concisely, to his superiors, and occasionally he was able to identify and detain individuals who were clearly engaged in intelligence activities for the Russians. An example was a Mongolian called Ovisha (sometimes spelled Obishak) Norzunoff, who turned out to be the Secretary and interpreter for Agvan Dorjiev himself.

An interesting entry occurs on 10th September 1901:-

"Arrived at Jorebungalow: met with Geshela Lama who is a well known Lama ... resident of Jorebungalow & went to Lhasa on pilgrimage with Kunzang Gurmed of Jorebungalow & Kazi Ugyen, Govt. Agent of Kalimpong – though great efforts have been made to record many important matters, but he seems to be quite innocent. From our conversation I ascertained that Kazi Ugyen, Govt. Agent of Bhutan safely reached Lhasa with his servants and representations(?). Kazi Ugyen had with him 2 elephants, some English ponies, tigers & leopards with him, but one of the elephants died near Tashilhumpo."

This visit was one of the most contentious in Anglo-Tibetan relationships. Kazi Ugyen had taken a confidential letter from Lord Curzon, the Viceroy, and had been asked to hand it secretly to the Dalai Lama. His Holiness, however, refused to accept the letter, which was returned to the Viceroy with its seals intact. Curzon, mistakenly accused Kazi Ugyen of being "a liar and, in all probability, a paid Tibetan spy"²⁵, but Laden La certainly expressed his view at the time that Kazi Ugyen was absolutely honourable. One further diary entry records on 1st November – "In the evening met with Kazi Ugyen, the Bhutan Agent, who went to Lhasa". Kazi Ugyen was later

24 By coincidence, Walsh was a coin collector, and wrote substantive articles on the Coinages of Nepal and Tibet, with which one of us (Nicholas Rhodes) has been familiar from school days, well before hearing about the Laden La family.

25 Cf Alastair Lamb (1960), p.251

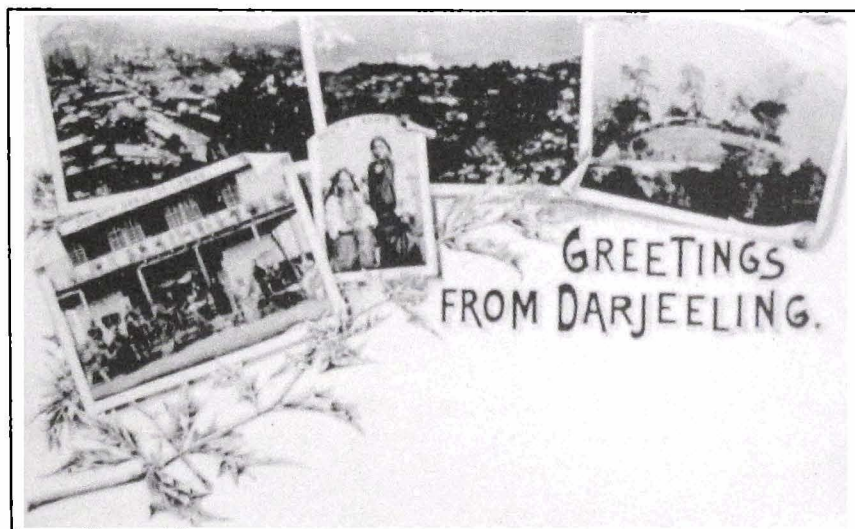
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officially vindicated, but not until after Britain had invaded Tibet in 1904.

It should be remembered that the British had no reliable information from Tibet, and they relied on information from locals, such as Laden La, Sarat Chandra Das and Lamas Ugyen Gyatso, and Sherab Gyatso, based in Darjeeling. It is certainly interesting reading this information in "raw" form in Laden La's diary. He was methodical and professional in his work, which was conducted without inconveniencing or embarrassing legitimate visitors, and without casting false and misleading aspersions. Anybody reading through his official diary will be amazed at how, at only twenty-five years of age, and after only three years as a police officer, he could discharge such sensitive duties in such a thorough, sensitive and systematic way.

By this time Laden La had married Choden Zangmo from a Sikkimese Bhutia Lang-dang or She-nga (Lama) family of Ging, near Darjeeling. It was a love marriage, and there is a family tradition that Laden La used to ride his horse down the ridge to Ging, in order to conduct his courtship. Their first son arrived in August 1898, but died aged two in 1900. There followed, in quick succession, three sons, Sonam Tobgay, also known as Rinzing (Tom) in 1900, Wangchuk Dorji (Willie) in 1902 and Norbu (Norman) in 1903, followed by Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) in 1905 and later two other sons, Palsang Wangdu (Pat) and Douglas. The family lived at Yangang Villa, and other members of Laden La's wife's family also occupied houses on the same property.

Laden La was on the way to wider responsibilities, and his first opportunity came with the British military expedition to Tibet in 1903/4, led by Colonel Francis Younghusband.



Chapter 4

The Younghusband Expedition to Tibet

In 1903, the relationship between the British and the Tibetans came to a head. From 1899, Kazi Ugyen Dorji, the Bhutanese Agent in Kalimpong, had been to Lhasa and delivered letters from the Indian Government to the Dalai Lama, but no replies had been received. In 1902 the letter was returned unopened, and the British realised that they could not conduct any meaningful dialogue with the Tibetans, which made them very nervous about relations between Tibet and Russia. In 1903 Col. Younghusband was sent to Khamba Dzong, just north of Sikkim, and waited for several months to talk to a Tibetan representative, but he waited in vain. Finally, in late 1903, it was decided to force the issue and an army was assembled to “escort” Younghusband to Lhasa.

Laden La officially joined the Tibet Mission in December 1903, as assistant to E.H.C. Walsh who was appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Chumbi Valley. He was to spend most of this period in the Chumbi Valley, returning to Darjeeling in December 1904. We have not found any official war records mentioning his name, but he certainly met all the key players on the British side of the “Great Game”. O’Connor, Bailey and Bell all spent time in Chumbi during this period, and Laden La must have been useful to them with his linguistic abilities and his local knowledge. He received from Bell a copy of the “tentative” first edition of his *Tibetan Glossary* (only 50 copies were printed), on which he scribbled notes which Bell used in subsequent editions. He also assisted Walsh in his first academic publication – a glossary of the Tromowa Language, detailing words and phrases in the four languages, English, Tibetan, Sikkimese and Tromowa. Much of the work, particularly on the Sikkimese content, was undertaken by Laden La, who received appropriate acknowledgement on the title page. In addition he apparently wrote a Confidential Report about the Chumbi Valley, for submission to the Government of India, but we have not yet managed to locate a copy of this document.

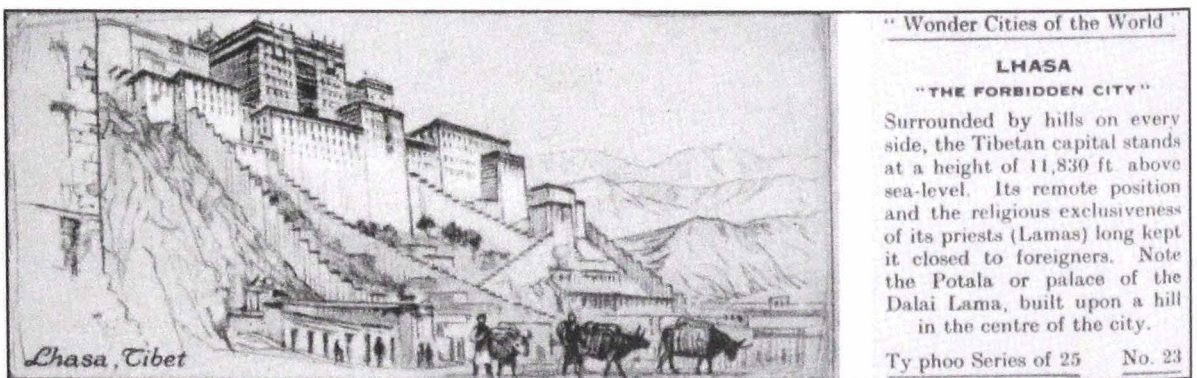
Otherwise, SWL’s activities would have involved general administrative tasks, ensuring the smooth flow of people and equipment over the Nathu La and the Jelep La passes from Sikkim, up through the Chumbi Valley and onwards to the Tibetan plateau. This was no small feat of logistics. His local knowledge enabled him to locate the best people to receive contracts for the supply of items such as mules and provisions for the military forces.

SWL may have left the peaceful environment of the Chumbi Valley for short periods and, according to some hearsay, the Tibetan Government offered Rs.10,000 for his head and hands²⁶. At the end of the campaign he was awarded the silver campaign medal. He was twenty-nine years old then. In his service book, Walsh wrote:-

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I cannot speak in too high terms of this officer's works. During the eleven months he has been with me as my clerk in Tibet, he has had to deal with many confidential matters of importance and has always been reliable. He is an unusually clever and intelligent officer, active and prompt and not disheartened by difficulties. I hope he will obtain promotion.

The Younghusband Expedition was a shameful episode in relations between Tibet and British India. A superior military force overwhelmed and massacred many helpless Tibetans. Younghusband blamed this unfortunate invasion on "the policy of non-cooperation by the Tibetans". Strangely, Tibet was the turning point in Younghusband's spiritual life. In his brilliant biography on Younghusband, Patrick French relates how a small bronze statue of the Buddha was given to Younghusband by the Ganden Tripa with the words "when we Buddhists look on this figure we think only of peace, and I want you, when you look at it, to think kindly of Tibet". Younghusband was deeply touched. Quoting Patrick French, "the next morning he rose early, tucked the little statue into his saddlebag and rode off towards the mountains. The unclouded sky was of the clearest Tibetan blue, the distant peaks bathed in a purple haze. He was filled with an intensity of joy... and with this indescribable joy came the revelation of the essential goodness of the world. 'I was convinced past all refutation that men were good at heart, that the evil in them was superficial In short, that men at heart are divine'..... soon Younghusband would be the mystic, not the soldier, the guru, not the imperialist".



26 Evans-Wentz (1954), p.87. Also the article in *The Statesman*, 14th June 1931, suggested that Laden La was present at the fighting around Gyantse.

Chapter 5

The Visit of the Panchen Lama to India

After the British Indian forces left Tibet in late 1904, Laden La returned to Darjeeling, and became involved in police work at Kurseong. The effect of the military expedition had been, paradoxically, to improve the relationship between British India and Tibet, and the British were no longer so paranoid about identifying spies.

Proof that political relations with Tibet were improving came when the Panchen Lama accepted the invitation from Frederick O'Connor, the British Trade Agent in Gyantse, to visit the Buddhist holy places in India. Laden La was the obvious man to accompany the party as interpreter and liaison officer. The Tibetan party was eighty strong, and Laden La, now twenty-nine years old, joined them at Gangtok on 25th November 1905, from where they proceeded to Darjeeling, staying at the Drum Druid Hotel. From there they proceeded by train to Rawalpindi in order to visit Taxila, then returned via Agra and Benares to Bodh Gaya, where the Panchen Lama was able to worship at the famous Bodhi tree, under which the Lord Buddha had attained enlightenment. This momentous visit took place on 21st December, which was apparently a very auspicious day in the Tibetan calendar. A few days later they arrived in Calcutta, and the whole party of about eighty Tibetans, were lodged at Hastings House. The Viceroy, Lord Minto, was in Calcutta at the time, and received the Panchen Lama at the Government House. Presents were exchanged, and a long line of Tibetans entered bearing gifts²⁷. On 2nd January, the Prince of Wales (later George V) arrived in Calcutta, and the Panchen Lama attended several functions at which His Royal Highness was the guest of honour. His Holiness also entertained the Prince of Wales at Hastings House. Visits were made to various tourist attractions, including the Zoo, which he found particularly interesting, before the party headed back to Tibet on 11th January 1906. The presence of the Tibetans created quite a stir in Calcutta, and many column inches were filled in the local newspapers, and postcards were printed, so that people around the world would remember the occasion. The visit of the Panchen Lama was a great success, and was truly a turning point in Anglo-Tibetan relations. Laden La's crucial role was to ensure that everything went smoothly. Tibetan diplomatic protocol was strictly followed, and no misunderstandings occurred. While the Panchen Lama was in India, the Dalai Lama (The Great Thirteenth) was on his way to Peking, where the reception was not as cordial and warm.

27 Interestingly, in the 1990's the authors were able to purchase, in an auction in Kent, four of the gifts that had featured in this parade – a yak-horn wine flask, a Tibetan tongba (for millet wine) and two copper tea pots. These had been purchased from the Government by the Viceroy's then secretary, James Dunlop-Smith, whose daughter (now an elderly lady) had put them up for sale.

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Another opportunity for SWL to exercise his developing diplomatic skills soon followed, when the Tibetan Minister, Sechung Shape, arrived in India in January 1906, in order to pay some of the indemnity, demanded as part of the treaty negotiated with Younghusband. Laden La was deputed to look after the Minister and his party. This must have been a difficult assignment, as there were some disagreements between the Viceroy Lord Minto, and the India Office in London, as to whether the indemnity could be handed over in Calcutta, rather than at Gyantse, and whether it should be discharged in three instalments rather than in twenty five. These very petty details delayed the Tibetan Minister in Calcutta, and although he had an audience with the Viceroy, matters were not satisfactorily resolved. Sechung Shape must have found the heat of Calcutta intolerable when the hot weather arrived. Accompanied by SWL, he surprised the British by leaving for Darjeeling, and had to be summoned back to Calcutta in late May, when the decision had finally been taken to accept the sum of Rs.8.33 Lakhs that he had offered in the first place.

Laden La's skills and local knowledge were again made use of in August 1907, when the Tibetan Minister, Tsarong Shape²⁸, visited Kalimpong, and reported that a large sum of money, namely Rs.3,000 in silver, had been stolen from him on his first night there. He was furious, and very influential, and the police had a big problem on their hands. Communal trouble was a strong possibility. SWL arrived in Kalimpong within hours, and rapidly assessed the situation. He guessed that the thief was probably a local Buddhist, and he persuaded the lamas to conduct a puja that threatened dire retribution on the miscreants, both in this life and in future lives, and the fact of the upcoming puja was widely publicised. The day before the puja was to take place, the amount of Rs.2,882 was quietly returned, and everyone was happy. Laden La's reputation soared, not only among his superiors, but also among the Tibetan traders in Kalimpong, as well as among the local people. Such a stratagem could never work nowadays, but being a man of his time, he understood that the people of the hills (a hundred years ago) were simple and god fearing, but easily offended when handled without sensitivity.

Apart from his Police and confidential political work, Laden La involved himself increasingly in community activities, which were to develop into a very important part of his life. To begin with, in 1907 he founded the General Buddhist Association, Darjeeling, and then in 1909 he founded the Himalayan Children's Advancement Association. Also he joined the Darjeeling Volunteer Fire Brigade, becoming the Senior Lieutenant in charge of the staff in 1910. Much more involvement in local community work was to follow in later years.

28 This was the earlier Tsarong Shape.

Chapter 6

The Dalai Lama Seeks Refuge in India

After the return of the Panchen Lama and his party to Tibet in February 1906, life for Laden La returned to normal, except that he was increasingly involved in confidential political matters, producing regular briefings for his superiors. His family was expanding, and by 1909 he had five children, four sons and a daughter, and a sixth had died in infancy. However, his official responsibilities meant that he had to spend much time away from home. The children were at a good primary school run by Miss Twentyman, located at Westpoint on Auckland Road, on the way to Ghoom. When at school they were given European pet names, to make it easier for the teachers and the other children, who were not familiar with their Tibetan names.

Meanwhile in Tibet, the Dalai Lama returned to Lhasa in late 1909, after an absence of over five years in Mongolia and China and was welcomed by the population with great warmth and devotion. He visited the main monasteries, and distributed gifts to the lamas. He had witnessed developments in the outside world, and commenced a number of modernising ventures, such as the striking of fine silver and copper coins using machinery. SWL acquired a set of the new Tibetan coins, and thoughtfully sent them to his old friend Walsh, who was a numismatist²⁹. The relationship between China and Tibet was very strained at this time, and while the Manchu court wanted to impose firm Chinese control over Tibet, the Dalai Lama wanted a more independent country. He had always believed that the interests of Tibet would be best served by keeping both neighbours at arm's length, but at heart he now trusted the British more than the Chinese. This view was reinforced in early 1910, when General Chao Erh-feng advanced on Lhasa at the head of an Imperial army.

It is strange to think that when the British had invaded Tibet in 1904, the Dalai Lama had left Lhasa, to go first to Mongolia and then to China. Now, he again left Lhasa and travelled towards British India, in advance of an invading Chinese army. In fact His Holiness only just managed to leave Lhasa in time, and his aide, the future Tsarong Shape, bravely held back the Chinese forces at the bridge over the Kyi Chu river, which allowed His Holiness and his party to reach the safety of the Chumbi Valley. On arrival at Gnatong in March 1910, the first post in Sikkim, just over the Nathu La, he was greeted by a Scottish sentry – with the words “who are you” – and when told that it was the Dalai Lama his only reply was “Blimey”! The British were only half expecting this turn of events, but they were certainly pleased and flattered that His Holiness should seek refuge in British India which, less than

²⁹ Some of these coins were given to the British Museum by Walsh's daughter after his death. Others were bought from her by the London coin dealer, A.H.Baldwin & Sons, from where the authors purchased them in the 1970's.

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six years previously, had so ruthlessly forced its way to Lhasa. Arrangements were quickly made to welcome this very important refugee, and Laden La was immediately recalled from his normal duties to act as liaison officer, reporting to Frederick O'Connor and Charles Bell. His Holiness's party consisted of three senior ministers, three other ministers and about a hundred officials and retainers.

A house was soon prepared in Darjeeling for the Dalai Lama's party, and the whole group moved to Hillside, near The Hermitage, later in 1910. In the winter of 1911, it was decided that His Holiness would go on pilgrimage to the Buddhist holy places. Arrangements were duly made by SWL and after a few days in Calcutta, the party left for Bodh Gaya. The pilgrimage lasted several weeks, and again was a great success. The Dalai Lama had become genuinely convinced that there was much goodwill towards Tibet from his southern neighbour, and he was also reassured that there was no wish to add Tibet to the British Empire.

Sadly for Laden La, while he was on pilgrimage with His Holiness, his wife died in Darjeeling, leaving his six children motherless. As usual, service took precedence over family matters, and Laden La left his children in the care, mainly of Mr Madan, his friend and the owner of the Central Hotel, and some members of his late wife's family visited them intermittently including his late wife's younger sister, Wangmo. Later SWL married Wangmo, and she was to bear him four more children.

By now Laden La had a wide network of contacts in both India and Tibet, and was accepted by both sides as an intermediary. One of the Tibetans who SWL got to know well at this time was the future Tsarong Shape, the trusted aide of His Holiness, who was to become one of the most advanced and progressive of the Tibetan Ministers in the Cabinet, and became a lifelong friend of the Laden La family.



Two of Laden La's sons leaving for School from Central Hotel -- c1914

Chapter 7

The Dalai Lama Returns to Tibet

In 1911, the Imperial Empire was crumbling in China, and in 1912 a Republic was declared under President Sun Yat Sen. Tibet was certainly not high on the agenda of the new government. The Imperial army in Lhasa was a liability and an embarrassment, and talks commenced to see how a face-saving formula could be devised, whereby the Chinese soldiers could be evacuated via India, and returned to China by the sea route. The Dalai Lama did not wish to return to Lhasa until the situation had stabilised.

The British in Delhi recommended that Laden La would be the ideal person to conduct negotiations with the Chinese, since there was a reluctance to send any British officer to Lhasa because of commitments earlier made to China and Russia. SWL was thought to be the best equivalent to Dorjiev that they could find – a man of Tibetan ancestry, a devout Buddhist, who was known and trusted by many of the Tibetan officials, including the Dalai Lama himself.

By this time the Dalai Lama and his party was preparing to return to Tibet, and had moved to Kalimpong, where they stayed as guests of Raja Ugyen Dorji in Bhutan House. The remarkable French Buddhist lady traveller and adventurer, Alexandra David-Neel happened to be in Kalimpong at this time, and was very grateful to Laden La for arranging for her to have an audience with His Holiness³⁰. This was not the last occasion when the paths of Madame David-Neel and SWL were to cross.

After a rapid briefing in Kalimpong, regarding his intended role in negotiating the withdrawal of the Chinese troops from Lhasa, Laden La was instructed in May 1912 to proceed post haste to Gyantse, and thence to Lhasa. In Gyantse, he was greeted by Basil Gould, the British Trade Agent, and headed straight towards Lhasa, unaware of the cables flying between Delhi and London regarding his mission. Finally, at the ferry over the Tsang-po river at Chaksam, where he arrived on 9th June, he was instructed to abort the mission to Lhasa, and to carry on the negotiations from Gyantse. SWL remained at Chushul for several days, corresponding with the Tibetan Ministers, who had been very much looking forward to his arrival in Lhasa³¹. He

30 We visited Madame David-Neel's home in Digne-les-Bains, completely unannounced, in the 1990's. Madame Peyronnet, her secretary in later life, and trustee of her estate, welcomed Deki and her sister Lhazang extremely warmly as the grand-daughters of the man who had introduced Madame David-Neel to the Dalai Lama. The press was summoned, interviews arranged for the local newspaper, and we were surprised celebrities for a day!

31 Laden La's file containing these letters is in our possession.

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tried to get this decision reversed, but it was in vain, and he was very disappointed when he had to return to Gyantse. The reason for this move was that a commitment had been made to the Russian Government by the British Government that they would not send any representative to Lhasa³², and Laden La was merely instructed to inform the Tibetans that “in view of the news that the Dalai Lama intends to return to Tibet at an early date, it has been decided that Mr Laden La shall not be sent to Lhasa to help arranging a settlement there”³³. Interestingly Agvan Dorjiev, who was widely believed to be a Russian agent, was actually in Tibet at the time, and later greeted the Dalai Lama at Yatung when he returned to Tibet in late June³⁴.

This “volte face” must have been a great disappointment to Laden La as, not only was he unable to visit the holy city of Lhasa on this occasion, but he also felt that he had let down his friends in the Tibetan Government. However, as a professional police officer he had to obey the order. Back in Gyantse he settled down with the members of the British Trade Agency to the job of fostering good relations with the Tibetan authorities and trying to get the Chinese soldiers evacuated without causing any ill-feeling. Basil Gould, later Sir Basil Gould, became a close friend. While in Gyantse, assisted by a Mr Martin³⁵, he took his first photographs, although few prints or negatives have survived.

In the last week of June 1912 the Dalai Lama returned to Tibetan soil, in the Chumbi Valley, and slowly started to proceed to Lhasa. During the Chinese occupation of Tibet, the Panchen Lama had visited Lhasa (from Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse) with his officials for discussions with the Chinese, and he now heard rumours that any Tibetan officials who had collaborated with the Chinese would be severely punished. Feeling rather insecure, he secretly went to Gyantse and called on Laden La to seek his advice and help. Leaving the Panchen Lama in his house³⁶, Laden La sought help and advice from Gould. After a few days the Panchen Lama, accompanied by Laden La, proceeded to Ralung, where they met the Dalai Lama on 9th July 1912. Gould was specifically instructed that he was not to get involved in these internal Tibetan political matters, but chose not to apply this order to SWL³⁷. While in Ralung, SWL informally assisted in the negotiation of an agreement between

32 Premen Addy (1984), pp.249-50, discusses the background to the decision in detail, and confirms that it was taken at the highest level within Cabinet in London.

33 Letter from Gould to Laden La dated 18th June, received on 21st June 1912.

34 Cf John Snelling (1993), p.147.

35 Sergeant Henry Martin was Head Clerk at British Trade Agency at Gyantse from 1904 until he retired in 1931, having lived in Tibet longer than any other European.

36 We have not read any official report of this meeting in Laden La's Gyantse residence in British records, but Laden La records it in his personal papers.

37 This is clear from the official papers in the India Office Library.

the two Pontiffs, and both were very grateful for the mediation³⁸. At this time His Holiness the Dalai Lama presented Laden La with a gold medal and two citations thanking him for his good service in India, and granting him the official rank of Depon³⁹ or General. The Panchen Lama also presented Laden La with a gold medal⁴⁰ and gave him the rank of Lord Chamberlain at the court of Tashilhunpo.



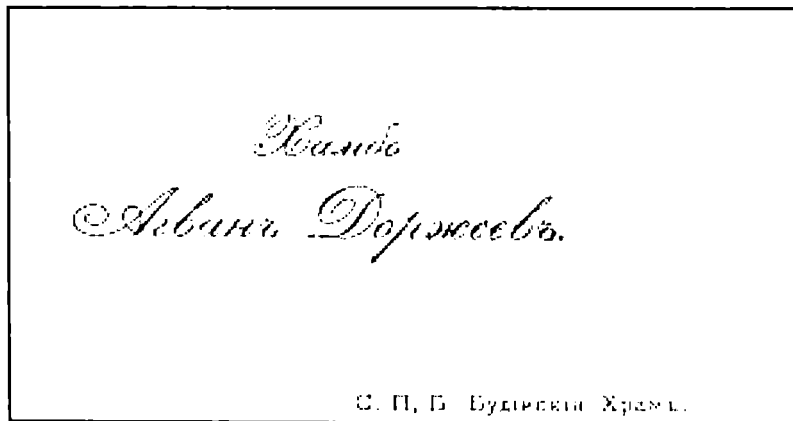
The gold medal presented by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to Laden La in Ralung on 9th July 1912.

- 38 The Viceroy told London about the proposed mediation only on 10th July, and hence the instructions that the British should have nothing to do with any such internal Tibetan matters did not arrive in time! The Viceroy again telegraphed London on 22nd July to say that "Tashi Lama returned to Gyantse yesterday evening, 18th July, and proceeds to Shigatse 21st July. He states that visit to Ralung was completely successful, all old differences being settled. His ministers were however warned as to their future conduct." (India Office Library Records L/P&S/11/25)P2865/1912). Having said that, there remained a tension between the two Pontiffs, or at least between their officials, which was to result in the Panchen Lama leaving Tibet for China in 1923.
- 39 The medal and citations were subsequently illustrated by Sarat Chandra Das, as examples of Tibetan official documents, in his book, *An Introduction to the Grammar of the Tibetan Language*, 1915, Appendix.XI, pp.37-39. The original medal and citation are still in our possession, as is some correspondence with the Government of India confirming that Laden La could keep this valuable gift, and could wear it on his uniform in Tibet, but that when wearing his police uniform in British territory, he was not permitted to wear it, because it was not a decoration recognised by Government.
- 40 Although mention of such a gold medal is made in the original citation from the Panchen Lama, which is in our possession, no trace of it has been found in the family house.

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Also, while at Ralung, Laden La met Dorjiev, who was accompanying His Holiness from Yatung. SWL reported that Dorjiev stressed his devotion to the Dalai Lama, and his determination to see him restored to his former position. Dorjiev also said that he was very pleased to see how friendly the British Government was towards His Holiness, and expressed the view that the withdrawal of the Chinese from Lhasa could only be achieved with the help of British mediation. He also suggested that the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 should be amended so as to allow this, and he said that he would write to the Russian Government proposing this. SWL also reported that 'it was not the case, he added, that he was a Russian agent, though he knew he was suspected of being one'.⁴¹

While in Gyantse, apart from his official duties, SWL maintained contact with his British friends, sending Charles Bell samples of the new Tibetan stamps, and corresponding with Walsh regarding Tibetan seals⁴². After many difficulties, that are well documented elsewhere, the Chinese problem was resolved to the satisfaction of all, and the Imperial army marched away from Gyantse in good spirit, under a ceremonial arch. Once in India, some of the Chinese soldiers settled in Darjeeling and Calcutta, but some returned home to their families by sea, as planned. It was in early November 1912 that Laden La accompanied the Chinese Amban Lien-Yu to



The visiting card of Agvan Dorjiev, pasted into Laden La's autograph book

41 Snelling (1993), p.147, quoting PRO: FO 371 1327 30220: *India Office to Foreign Office: Enclosure No.1: Govt. of India to Marquis of Crewe, 15 July 1912. Laden La pasted a photograph of Dorjiev, and his visiting card, into his autograph book as a memento of the meeting.

42 Walsh later wrote some articles on Tibetan seals in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London.

the Sikkim frontier. On that occasion he nearly lost his life in a great avalanche at Dote, in the Chumbi Valley, and his muleteer, Tsiten Norbu, was sadly killed⁴³. Our Uncle Palsang (Pat) and Aunt Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) used to describe vividly how their father had been completely buried under the snow, and it was a miracle that he had a walking stick, which he was able to poke up out of the snow and wave energetically, and hence he was spotted and helped out by other colleagues. General Chung Yin, who had been the officer commanding the Chinese troops in Tibet, proved more difficult to dislodge from Lhasa. It was not until early in 1913, that the remaining Chinese troops arrived in the Chumbi Valley and General Chung finally left Tibet.

Laden La returned to Gyantse to await further instructions, and it was not until March 1913 that these arrived.



Snow at Yatung - Winter 1912-13

⁴³ For his brave action on this occasion, Laden La was recommended by Gould for the award of an Albert Medal, but this was declined as the actions took place on foreign soil.

Chapter 8

Visit To England

Negotiations had been taking place between His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mr Basil Gould, the British Trade Agent in Gyantse and officials at the India Office in London, regarding the possibility, of sending four Tibetan boys to England to receive the best education possible. The boys were finally selected, and it was decided that they would be accompanied by Tsipon Lungshar, representing the Tibetan Government and by Laden La, representing the British Indian government. The boys were Gongkar, Mondo, Kyibuk and Ringang, and their ages ranged from the eldest, who was seventeen years old, to the youngest, who was aged eleven. SWL decided that he would also take his eldest son Sonam Tobgye (Tom) to England for education, and the party set out. In Darjeeling he hardly had time to collect his son, and for a quick marriage ceremony with his new wife, Wangmo, before setting off for Calcutta and Delhi. They then sailed to England, leaving Bombay on 5th April 1913 on the P&O SS "Arabia", arriving at Plymouth on 24th April. Mr Basil Gould also accompanied the party, as did Lungshar's wife. Before leaving Calcutta, Lungshar had clandestine contact with both Chinese and Japanese agents.

On arrival in the UK at Portsmouth, on a cold, damp April day, representatives of the India Office and of the Press met the party. The whole front page of *The Daily Mirror* was filled with photographs under the headline "First Party of Tibetans to Visit England". Learning the English language was clearly a priority before being admitted to school, and they went initially to the Army College, Heath End, in Aldershot, for a "crash" language course.

Arrangements were made for audiences with the King at Buckingham Palace. First, Laden La himself was received at a levée on 12th June, and received the King's Police Medal from the hands of King George V himself. Then on 28th June 1913, the King and Queen received the whole delegation. In the words of The Court Circular, published in *The Times* on 30th June:

"Their Majesties received a Tibetan Deputation to deliver presents and letters from the Illustrious Dalai Lama. The Deputation consisted of the following:- Kusho Lungshar, Kusho Mondo, Kusho Kyipup, Kusho Grongkar, Kusho Ringang, and Sonam Tobgye Laden La. The Deputation was accompanied by Mr B.J.Gould, I.C.S., Political Officer (in Charge) and Mr S.W.Laden La, Assistant Political Officer. Col Sir J.R. Dunlop-Smith (Political Aide-de-Camp to the Secretary of State for India), was present⁴⁴. The Ladies and Gentlemen in Waiting were in attendance."

44 By coincidence, James Dunlop-Smith had been Secretary to the Viceroy in 1905/6, and had met Laden La in Calcutta during the visit of the Panchen Lama, so he was aware of Tibetan protocol.

The gifts that were presented to the King from the Tibetan Government were quickly placed on loan to the British Museum, and *The Times* later reported as follows:-

“A number of gifts which the King has received from the Dalai Lama of Tibet have been placed on loan by his Majesty at the British Museum. These presents, with letters from the illustrious Dalai Lama, were delivered to the King and Queen by the Tibetan deputation which their Majesties received at Buckingham Palace on June 28.

One of the gifts is a Tibetan saddle with trappings. It is the saddle of “Rimpung Gyalpo”, a King who reigned at Rimpung 500 years ago. On this saddle the first Dalai Lama is said to have ridden into Lhasa. His immediate successors did so also, and for the last 200 years the saddle has been kept in the Potala at Lhasa as a national relic.

Another gift is a coat of Tibetan armour, with a steel helmet. It belongs to a type which runs through Asia to North China, and is found again in Japan, Saghalin, and the North-West Coast of America. A Tibetan sword, which is also included in the collection, is of a type still used by the Khambas, who are the most warlike of the Tibetans and live in South-East Tibet. This sword was probably made in Derge, of which place the interlaced ironwork is most characteristic. The iron-work of Derge is the most finished product of the smith’s handicraft in Tibet.

Seven gilt images, representing the seven gems, afford examples of the symbolism of the Tibetans. They are described by Dr. L. Austine Waddell, in his “Buddhism of Tibet” as the attributes of the Universal Monarch.....

Among the smaller objects is a model of a shrine or chor-ten. This chor-ten, which is gilt, has a square pediment with a circular superstructure bearing a numbus, and is surmounted by a typical Tibetan finial. Sealed up in the base are charms, magic formulae, amulets, and so forth.

Two small bags of gold dust are among the gifts, and there are also two or three charm-boxes bearing all the Buddhist symbols.....

In addition to the foregoing is a modern costume of a Tibetan lady. It is typical of Lhasa and the district, and is made partly of imported Chinese silk and cloth and partly of native material. The gown has bright colours on a dark purple brown ground. The boots are of green and red cloth embroidered in green and red.”

These were truly gifts fit for a King, and there is no doubt that His Holiness the Dalai Lama intended to impress and to demonstrate that Tibet was independent of China. However, there was some unhappiness in the India Office, as the official position of the British Government remained that Tibet was part of China. Approval for the boys to come to England had been given on the understanding that the party was not an official delegation representing the Tibetan Government. However, Laden La, and his superiors in India, strongly supported Tibetan independence.

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Basil Gould returned to India in September, and in October, Edwin Gould, Basil Gould's brother, was put in charge of the boys' education. As regards the choice of a school, the initial preference was for Cheltenham College, but this was abandoned when it was realised that the sons of the president of the Chinese Republic were there. By February, it was decided that their knowledge of English was sufficient and they were all admitted to Rugby School, where they studied with varying degrees of success⁴⁵. Laden La's son, Sonam, could already speak fluent English, and it was decided that he should attend Giggleswick School in Yorkshire.

Meanwhile, in London, Lungshar was, from time to time, trying to give SWL the slip, and made clandestine contact with the Chinese Embassy. Laden La observed that, although these meetings were ill-intentioned, they were not dangerous. Lungshar also expressed the wish to go to Germany, and he was accompanied on a tour of Europe by SWL in July 1913, visiting France, Holland and Belgium as well as Berlin and Munich in Germany.

Laden La's time in England was very eventful, and clearly made a great impression on him. He was able to meet many old contacts from India, some retired and some now senior officials at the India Office. He travelled the length and breadth of England and Scotland with the boys. On one occasion he had tea with Sir Francis Younghusband, and discussed Tibetan matters. Younghusband asked SWL to tell him "something about the Dalai and Tashi Lamas of Tibet and of their present friendly attitude towards us".

Clearly the Tibetan boys created quite a stir, and the group was invited to many stately homes in different parts of the country. On one occasion, near Shaftesbury, Dorset, they even went fox hunting, but on that day no fox was sighted, much to Laden La's relief, as he made clear in his diary. Laden La's Buddhist religion meant that he was very much averse to killing animals, which was such a favourite sport of the British at that time. Uncle Palsang (Pat) used to describe how his father had (only) once shot a deer; he never forgot the sad look in the animal's eyes. On subsequent occasions he accompanied hunting parties, carrying a gun, but he ensured that it was loaded only with blanks, so that he would not offend his hosts, while ensuring that he did not personally harm any wild life.

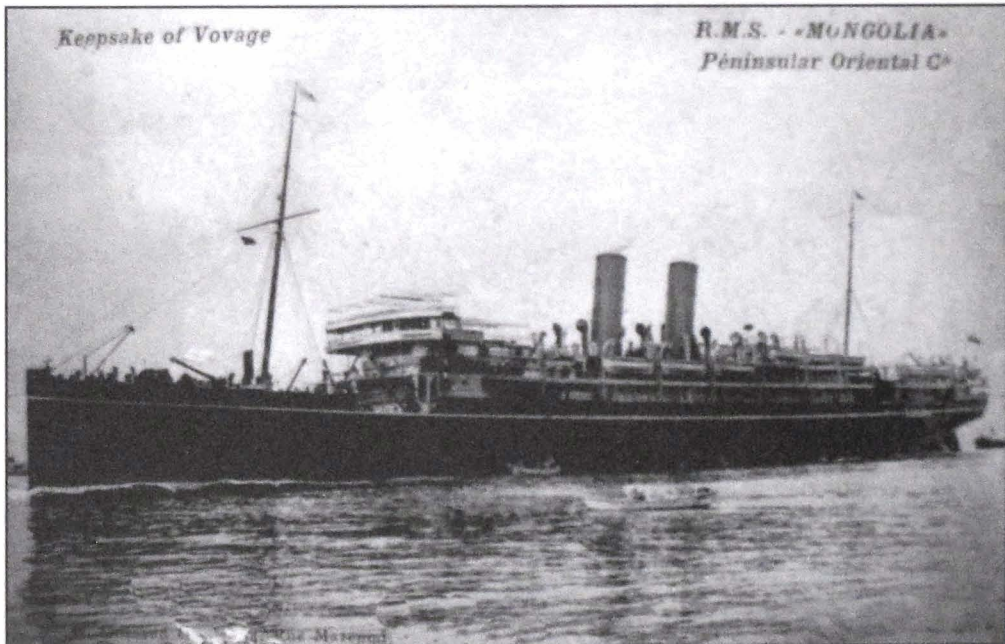
After having been in the UK for over a year, Laden La was summoned back to India to attend the McMahon Line conference in Simla. He left London on 2nd June 1914, by train for Paris and Marseilles, where he boarded the P&O SS "Mongolia". After an uneventful journey, he arrived in Simla on 21st June, where he stayed until 21st July. His primary role at the conference was to act as interpreter for the Tibetan

⁴⁵ For an account of this educational experiment, see Dhondup, K. (1984).

Representatives, but it also placed him at the heart of diplomatic activity between India, China and Tibet.

As history records, the Conference was not a complete success. The Tibetans and the British agreed to a line (the McMahon Line) demarcating their mutual border, but the Chinese representative refused to ratify any such agreement. At this time, his government had other priorities, and so, for the time being, the Chinese were unwilling to take any action that might jeopardise their continuing claim that Tibet was an integral part of China. This was a claim that the British in Delhi were happy to refute, but in London, China was still seen as a great power, not to be antagonised.

Laden La returned to Darjeeling, to his family, and a welcoming committee, on 24th July 1914. At this point, on 4th August, war was declared between Britain and Germany, and Tibet slipped down the list of priorities facing the world powers. After only three weeks at home in Darjeeling, most of which was spent in bed with fever, Laden La set off for Gangtok to report to Basil Gould on the Tibetan boys and other matters. He was still on loan from the Police Department to the Political Department, and it was not until October 1914, that he received notice of his new posting, after setting up home for the first time, with his new wife, Wangmo, the younger sister of his late wife, Choden Zangmo.



R.M.S. Mongolia
The ship in which Laden La returned from the UK in 1914

Chapter 9

War Years and Later

Laden La's new posting was as Head of Police in the Jalpaiguri District, which included the tea garden areas of the Dooars, at the foot of the hills. This was far away from the seat of war, and far from his comfort zone in the cool air of Darjeeling. However, he settled down quickly, joining the North Bengal Mounted Rifles as a volunteer officer. Most of the volunteers in this regiment were tea garden managers and staff⁴⁶. He also involved himself heavily in fund-raising and recruiting for the war effort, for which he was awarded the title of Sardar Bahadur in 1917, and his Aunt, Ani Choki, also received a commendation for her efforts in this regard. He was close enough to Darjeeling to be able to spend time with his family, whom he had hardly seen for four years, and to involve himself in many aspects of local affairs, including local politics. As his children were attending schools in Darjeeling, they only came down to the plains in the winter holidays. On 22nd May 1915, Ugyen Gyatso died, the only father figure that he had known. Laden La had assisted Ugyen Gyatso in many ways after the latter's retirement in poor health in 1910.

By this time, nearing forty years old, Laden La was looked upon as a leader by the local people of Darjeeling, and when it was decided to establish a "Hillman's Association", he was the natural choice as Chairman. On 8th November 1917, this fledgling organisation⁴⁷ delivered a Memorandum to the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, requesting that Darjeeling be separated from Bengal, as the people of the hills had little in common with the people of the plains. The document⁴⁸, which was largely drafted by Laden La, argued that they were, indeed, very distinct, by race, religion, history, geography and language. This petition, signed by representatives of all the ethnic groups, is perhaps the first formal petition that Darjeeling should become a separate district, with a local government of its own. After the petition was delivered, a deputation of hillmen visited Calcutta, and delivered an address to the Viceroy and to the Secretary of State for India in person. As reported in *The Darjeeling Advertiser* for 25 December 1917:

"Were it not for the deputation of hillmen, who presented an address on 7th instant in Calcutta, Mr Montagu would possibly have had nothing to impress on his mind the

46 Rev Moss (1981/2) mentions that in 1916, the Manager of the Tukvar Tea Estate, Charles Bald, told him that Laden La was "a thoroughly competent police officer, an unusually talented man, and a very warm personal friend".

47 The Hillman's Association was only formally established in 1919—Cf Dr Sonam B. Wangyal (2002), pp.163ff.

48 The full text is published, inter alia, by Dr.S.Wangyal (2002), pp. 229-31 and R.Moktan (2004), pp.90-92.

existence of the summer capital of Bengal and its polyglot inhabitants, whose needs are as important as those of others. The deputation must have made a great impression on the Viceroy and the Secretary of State, for members representing this district appeared in their gorgeous national dresses, each different from the other, and so distinct from anything else that the Commission had seen. They said that they had no sympathy with Home-Rule, but since it was the policy of Government to work towards it, they asked that the hillpeople deserved consideration. They showed how in every way they were distinct from the rest of the races of India, and urged for the constitution of a North East Frontier Province.”

A further petition was sent to Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India, London, in February 1920, and as this has not been reprinted in any of the collections of documents that have recently been published, we reproduce it in full in Appendix 4 for the sake of record.

Further meetings were organised and petitions were signed. One meeting on 13th March 1920, was attended and supported by many of the European tea-planters and other residents of the District. However, these attempts to separate Darjeeling from Bengal were destined to fail. It is remarkable that a serving police officer could act as the leader of such a political group, but that was the case, and it speaks much for the moral integrity of Laden La, who was not afraid to express his strongly held views on political matters. It is also remarkable that his British senior officers, allowed a senior police officer to play a political role in this way.

At the level of political and secret contacts with Tibet, Laden La was doing all he could to foster good relations between Tibet and British India. He knew many high officials in both countries, and he was perceptive about how people from different communities and countries thought about different matters. He was therefore in a unique position to mediate and foster good relations, which he always did in an honourable and positive manner. He corresponded regularly with his friends in Lhasa, and many visitors from Tibet were entertained at his home in Darjeeling. He sincerely believed that the interests of both countries would be served by a close relationship.

Laden La had great respect for the Sikkim Crown Prince, Sidkeong Namgyal, who had been to Oxford University. The Crown Prince was made responsible for the forests in Sikkim, and introduced many innovative measures to protect the environment. Laden La corresponded regularly with Sidkeong Tulku, both while he was Crown Prince, and when he became Chogyal, after his father's death, in early 1914. Unfortunately, he died in December of that year, which was a great blow for Sikkim, and he was succeeded by his younger brother⁴⁹. When the Chogyal's

49 We reproduce in Appendix 2 a particularly poignant letter, written in the month before Chogyal Sidkeong Namgyal died, showing how he was planning his coronation ceremony.

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sister, Princess Choni, married Raja S.T. Dorji of Kalimpong in April 1918, Laden La was the chief supporter of the bride⁵⁰.

His police activities at this time were not limited to frontier affairs, and a fine large gold Omega pocket watch bearing the inscription "Presented to Sardar Bahadur Laden La by The Darjeeling Himalayan Ry. Co., in recognition of services rendered in the Railway Gang Case 1918" bears testimony to this fact. We have found no family papers relating to this case, but the beginning of the trial was reported by *The Englishman* for 5th and 8th February, 1918⁵¹:-

"Today before Mr A.T.Banerjee, Special Magistrate, began the trial of the sensational case in which Rajendra Lal Biswas, Khagendra Nath Bose, Nepal Chandra Aich, Niroda Baran Ray, H.N.Gupta, Ghansyam Kya, Abdul Khan, Sarup Kya and eight others, some employees of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, and other merchants, stood charged with having, it is alleged, formed a gang to habitually steal goods conveyed by the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway..... Mr Sen opened the case explaining how in different ways the abstracting of goods consigned to stations on the D.H.Railway from Siliguri upwards was going on with the help of the accused for which the Railway Company had to pay heavy damages to parties every year."



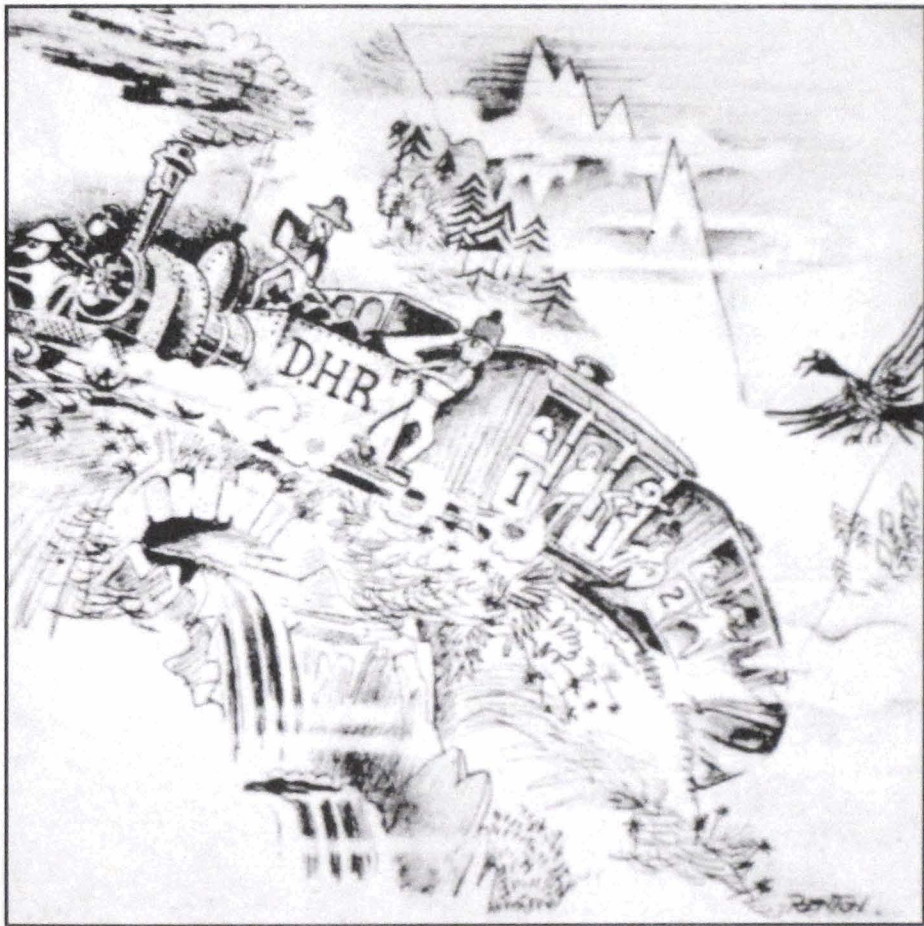
Gold Watch presented to Laden La by the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company

50 See Appendix 3 for a contemporary account of this wedding.

51 Our thanks to Terry Martin for tracking down this reference.

The size of the watch, demonstrates that he must have played a key role in solving the case !

Apart from his normal official duties and those relating to the war effort and his political activities, being a devout Mahayana Buddhist, Laden La involved himself deeply in the religious affairs of the District. He was on the managing committees of at least ten local monasteries and gompas, and he was always ready to help in any matter relating to them - religious, cultural and financial. In addition, he accompanied the Governor of Bengal on tours of Sikkim in 1917, and of the Chumbi Valley in 1918⁵². There is no doubt that he led an extremely busy life.



Bound for Darjeeling

52 Cf Gourlay (1918) and (1920).

Chapter 10

The Bell Mission to Lhasa, 1920-21

By 1920, with the war in Europe over, and with Russia out of the equation after the Revolution of 1917, the Dalai Lama invited Sir Charles Bell, the Political Officer in Sikkim, to spend time in Lhasa. He had earlier been an assistant to Claude White in Sikkim, and an administrator of the Chumbi Valley after the military expedition left Tibet in 1905. He had also been responsible for the Dalai Lama's party in India between 1910 and 1912, and had become as close to His Holiness as any European could be. Initially SWL was not part of the British party, which consisted entirely of members of the Political Department, but he kept in close touch with their progress. The Mission was an undoubted success, and Bell had very constructive discussions with the Dalai Lama himself, and with members of the Kashag, or Cabinet, headed by Tsarong Shape. On a personal level, Bell was extremely interested in Tibetan culture, and spent much time with his Tibetan friend, Palha-se, collecting material for his books that were to appear later in the 1920's, entitled *The History of Tibet*; *The Religion of Tibet*; and *The People of Tibet*. The Mission was gradually breaking down the suspicions regarding British intentions towards Tibet, that existed in many quarters, when the able Sikkimese Secretary to the Mission, Rai Bahadur Achuk Tsering suddenly died, and it became necessary to find a replacement. Sir Charles Bell immediately wrote to the Political Department saying that the only man able to do the job was Laden La, and he requested that he be seconded from the Police Department. Telegrams flew backwards and forwards, and after some time Laden La was instructed to proceed to Lhasa.

This was Laden La's first visit to the holy city, and it was an awe-inspiring experience for him to have an audience with the Dalai Lama in the Potala. He regarded it as an enormous privilege and responsibility, and every detail of his visit to the Potala was recorded in his personal diary with great reverence. Laden La's name crops up frequently in the reports of the Mission that are preserved in the India Office Library in London. Every letter received was translated from Tibetan into English by him, and every reply in Tibetan was drafted by him in English, and then translated and written by him in Tibetan. The English drafts and translations, in his neat and fluent handwriting, show that his command of both languages was comprehensive. His input into every aspect of the Mission was considerable. For instance, when permission was sought for the Reconnaissance Expedition to Mount Everest in 1921, it was Laden La who conducted much of the correspondence in Lhasa, and in recognition of this, he was granted a Fellowship of the Royal Geographical Society in London. Younghusband, who was intimately involved with the arrangements, cites the extraordinary help rendered by Laden La, who was in a position to help as was no other British Indian official.

This was a happy time for Laden La, even though the long absence from home was difficult for his family. He kept in constant touch with Darjeeling, although at this time there was no direct telegraph link between Lhasa and the outside world. Messages had to be sent to Gyantse by courier, and from there they could be telegraphed or posted to Darjeeling and beyond. Many of his friends continued to write to him in Lhasa, so he had a voluminous private correspondence, often relating to Buddhist matters, and in particular to the affairs of the Mahabodhi Society, of which he was the Representative for North-East India. Late in 1921, he returned to Darjeeling, where he had been promoted to Additional Superintendent of Police, which placed him on a par with the British head of the police in the District, but without most of the day to day bureaucratic duties associated with the position. His responsibilities mainly concerned matters to do with Tibet. He was also made an Honorary Aide-de-Camp to the Governor of Bengal, so that whenever the Governor came to Darjeeling, he was in attendance. In the Autumn of 1922, when Lord Ronaldshay (later the Marquis of Zetland), the Governor of Bengal, decided to visit Sikkim, Bhutan and the Chumbi Valley, Laden La organised his tour, and accompanied him for much of the way. Later, when Lord Ronaldshay wrote up the account of the journey in *Lands of the Thunderbolt, Sikkim, Chumbi and Bhutan*, he dedicated the book to "the Elder, the Cavalry Officer, and the Sardar Bahadur, the almost constant and altogether delightful companions of the rambles of which these pages are the record"⁵³.

Late in 1921, Laden La's aunt and mother figure, Ani Choki, died, a wealthy widow. Her brewery business had been very successful, and she left all her property in Darjeeling to her nephew. He used some of the inheritance to buy a small tea-garden, Alubari (Aloobari). This tea garden had been established in 1856, as one of the first commercial tea-gardens in Darjeeling, and is reputed to have been the location of Dr Campbell's initial experiments in tea making with the camellia bush.

53 Ronaldshay (1923), Preface p.ix. Although the account mentions no names, the "Sardar Bahadur", who is referred to several times in the book, is Laden La.

Chapter 11

Chief of Police in Lhasa, 1923-4

During 1922, correspondence had been taking place between Lhasa, New Delhi and London, regarding the establishment of a Police Force in Lhasa. Laden La's name had emerged as being the ideal man for the task, and once again the Political Department requested the Bengal Police to release SWL to undertake this delicate assignment. After extensive negotiations, he proceeded to Lhasa in September 1923. He was to be engaged directly by the Tibetan Government, and on arrival in Lhasa he was conferred the title of Dzasa, a hereditary title, commensurate with his responsibilities.

Once in Lhasa, he set about his new task with enthusiasm, perhaps best described in a letter dated 23rd November 1923, written from a proud father to his eldest son, Sonam Tobgay (Tom), affectionately known as Rinzing, who was in England at the time:-

“Dearest Rinzing,

... You will be glad to hear that His Holiness the Dalai Lama has appointed me as the Chief-of-Police in Tibet. In appointing me as such he has conferred on me the title of Dzasa – which is equal to Lord or Peer in English.

I received the order about my high appointment on the 2.11.23 – and according to Tibetan custom His Holiness, who is the King of Tibet – received me in audience on the 11th and conferred on me the title according to ancient custom by putting round my neck a large silk scarf. After conferment of the title he received me privately in his beautiful garden house which stands in the middle of a lake where I had a long conversation for about one and a half hours.

This day being the 3rd of tenth Tibetan month it was an auspicious day. I went to the great cathedral where many hundred lamas assembled and offered prayers for my success burning thousands of lamps. Then I went to the Ramoche Cathedral where I had the same prayers – I returned home in a great procession for breakfast. I wore the Tibetan General's⁵⁴ full dress uniform, a photograph of which I hope will be sent to you by the next mail. Then I went to Norbulingka, the summer palace of His Holiness, where he conferred on me this title of Dzasa as stated above. I returned home at about 4 p.m. through the streets of Lhasa city. On arrival many high officials called with presents and offered me scarves of greeting. On 12th November many officials and merchants called and offered scarves & presents. On 13th, 14th, 15th & 16th I entertained not less than three hundred guests. The Prime Minister presented me with beautiful silk and the other four ministers also presented me with beautiful

54 In 1912 the Dalai Lama had given Laden La the rank of *Depon*, or General.

presents. They spent the whole day on 14th with me.

The 18th was another important day. My friend the Commander-in-Chief Shape Tsarong went to the Army Head Quarters with his full body guards etc. All the military officers were present there. I went with my staff and a guard of honour received me just outside the Head Quarters. The Commander-in-Chief received me and offered me the seat of General Dzasa. I offered a silk scarf to the Commander-in-Chief and all the other Generals & officers offered me scarves. Then with the commander-in-chief we all went to his house where he gave a lunch. I took a photograph of the party and if it turns out well I should send you a copy.

On my strong recommendation I have got K.K.Mondo⁵⁵ as my assistant, and got him promoted to 4th rank as Kenchung. Everybody was thunderstruck when they heard the news of this promotion. I have also got eight other officials as my assistants, including Dome-se Kusho, the brother of the Maharani of Sikkim. I am doing a lot of improvements. In fact I am so busy that I don't go to bed before 12 p.m. every night."

Uniforms were designed and purchased, and the policemen were well trained in their newly acquired roles. The headquarters of the Force was located in the old Yamen, now vacated by the Chinese Amban. It was a building that housed unhappy memories for many Tibetans. Details are rather sketchy of this period, but Colonel Bailey, the British Political Officer to Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, visited Lhasa in July and August 1924. Bailey was given an appropriate welcome, but it was clear that all was not as well as it had been during Bell's visit just two years earlier.

Apart from law and order, Laden La felt that it was his duty to improve the basic quality of life of the inhabitants, to the extent that he could. His police force was set up extremely well and efficiently. Col. Bailey was able to report in August 1924 as follows:

"Sardar Bahadur Laden La has organised a very creditable police force for Lhasa city. The men are smart and dressed in thick khaki serge in winter, and blue with yellow piping in summer. They are stationed in different parts of the city. The fact of their presence has reduced crime in the city considerably and the inhabitants appreciate this⁵⁶."

One achievement he was delighted to claim credit for was the introduction of a police band, complete with bagpipes! On 27th July, he wrote in his diary:

"1 pm - On the invitation of Kashag went to Te-de-ling-ka(?) and took state lunch with the Shapes & Major Bailey & staff. For the first time I put my bagpipes, drums etc. to play at the State luncheon."

55 One of the boys who had been at school in Rugby.

56 Quoted by Mehra (1980), Vol.2 p.37/8.

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From the beginning, the police force was not very popular among many Tibetans. The monk proctors, who were used to maintaining order among the monks, and among the general population at festival time, felt that their authority was being threatened. The diary entry of Kozlov, a Russian official, for 31st March 1924 gives an interesting insight into the feelings of the monks towards the police:-

“It (the police) is both frightening and incomprehensible, especially for the lamas. The lamas detest it as they cannot understand why they, who often have to wake up at night and walk to their temples, should be stopped on the way, in an authoritative manner and even rudely, and demanded to show permits.... This may be a minor occasion for discontent, still the discontent is great.”⁵⁷

The soldiers in the army were also not very happy, because the force of about two hundred policemen not only looked smarter and better trained, but they were also better paid. More serious, however, was the resentment felt, most notably in Shigatse, about the additional taxes that were levied on the population, including those under the authority of the Panchen Lama, in order to pay for the modernising elements of Government – primarily the Army and the Police Force. This meant that much of the monk body was not fully behind the Dalai Lama, and certainly not behind Tsarong Shape, who was the main architect of the drive towards modernisation in Tibet. The situation was not helped when the Panchen Lama decided to express his unhappiness by leaving Shigatse, and travelling to Mongolia and China in late December, 1923⁵⁸.

Shortly after this, an interesting episode occurred. Madame Alexandra David-Neel arrived in disguise in Lhasa, after a remarkable journey from Western China. She was the first Western woman to succeed in making this journey undetected, and in early 1924 reached the Holy City in the company of her faithful servant. However, she was not as completely undetected as she imagined. Laden La was Chief of Police, and had met this indomitable French lady in 1910, in Kalimpong. He was certainly aware of her presence in Lhasa, but as she kept a low profile, he decided not to expose her, and it was not until she reached the British Trade Agency at Gyantse, that she decided to come into the open. Soon afterwards Laden La's daughter, Phurpa Lhamu (Mary), arrived in Lhasa, and remembered her father telling her about this remarkable French lady's visit to Lhasa.

Less considerate was the American, William Montgomery McGovern, who obtained a permit from the British to visit Gyantse in 1922, and promised not to proceed to

57 Andreyev (2003), p.229-30.

58 In early January, Laden La reported to Delhi that he may be asked to follow the Panchen Lama, and try to persuade him to return. He was told that, as he was in the pay of the Tibetan Government, he should go, if asked. Ultimately the Tibetan Government decided not to send Laden La, and instead dispatched three hundred troops towards Mongolia, but they were too late.

Lhasa. Soon after, however, he donned a disguise, and when he arrived in the Holy City in March 1923, he announced his presence. The fact that he was able to reach Lhasa without a permit and undetected, was a severe embarrassment to Laden La and the British, and was resented by the monk body and the "isolationist" faction in Lhasa. On his return McGovern wrote a book in which he was rather critical of Laden La's position in Darjeeling, implying that, in order to have acquired so much wealth and influence there, he must have accepted bribes, which was a very serious allegation against a serving police officer. As soon as he saw the book, in March 1925, SWL commenced a libel action against McGovern and the publishers of his book, Thornton, Butterworth & Co., and in January 1929 he won Rs.50,000 damages. However the assertions in the book remain, and have been used by some historians in their assessment of Laden La's character⁵⁹. What should be borne in mind when reading this book is that, McGovern had no reason to know that Laden La's wealth came from his paternal aunt, Ani Choki, as well as from an eccentric aunt of his wives. In breaking his promise not to proceed to Lhasa, McGovern had not behaved like a gentleman. With his arrogance, and lack of sympathy with the feelings of the Tibetans, McGovern was acting in a selfish and sensational way when he wrote his book. SWL had no doubt expressed his severe and sincere annoyance at this unprecedented breach of trust⁶⁰, which must have offended McGovern, so he might have looked for an opportunity to settle scores.

An awkward event occurred in March 1924, while Laden La was in Lhasa. Newspaper reports began to reach India and Tibet, describing how John Noel, the photographer on the Everest Expeditions of 1921 and 1922 (and subsequently the 1924 expedition), was arranging a series of Tibetan religious dances on various theatrical stages in the UK, including at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. The Tibetan religious establishment was outraged at this use of the dances for pure entertainment, rather than in their original religious context. Laden La was approached, and set about trying to find out the truth of the matter. He discovered that the dancers were not monks from Gyantse, as they had been purported to be, but were laymen, recruited

59 McKay (1997), p.131. McKay notes that "there was no investigation into the charges of dishonesty levelled against Laden La by McGovern. Clearly, some cadre officers were prepared to turn a blind eye to a certain level of corruption if the persons concerned were sufficiently valuable to them." It seems to us inappropriate for a historian to cast such unsubstantiated aspersions on Laden La's character in an academic book.

60 Cf McGovern (1924), p.23 of the London edition and pp.16-17 of the New York edition. McGovern acknowledges that Laden La was very helpful in 1922. He notes that "we found him a very acute and able man, and so soon as he was good enough to grant us his favour we found things mysteriously expedited, for not only did he give us letters of introduction to various people in Tibet, but he enabled us to secure able and faithful servants."

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from the Darjeeling Bazar, and he was quickly able to send a report to *The Statesman* newspaper in Calcutta:-

“... a communication was received by the Statesman on March 6th from a correspondent in Lhasa saying that it was reported that eight dandy-men were being engaged in Darjeeling to impersonate Lama dancers in England, and that, as they were not Buddhist priests, their presentation of these dances would be fictitious.”

Questions were asked in the House of Commons in London, and Noel received a rebuke from the India Office for his lack of sensitivity, and the matter was dropped, but not before the conservative faction in Lhasa, had made some political capital in Tibet from the episode. Presumably the rebuke was not strong enough, because in 1925 Noel again brought a group of “lama dancers” to London, and this, and certain aspects of the film he showed about the 1924 Everest Expedition, created another, and more serious, diplomatic embarrassment between Britain and Tibet⁶¹. Laden La was back in Darjeeling by this time and was involved in trying to calm the situation.

The opponents of modernisation were delighted when, in early May 1924, a small group of soldiers attacked some policemen in Lhasa, and a policeman died. Tsarong Shape, who was head of the Army, acted very promptly, severely punishing the soldier deemed to have started the fight, by the amputation of a leg, a punishment from which the soldier later died, and also cutting off the ear of an accomplice. The Dalai Lama was informed, and let Tsarong Shape know that he should not have inflicted such a severe punishment without due process of law. Matters were very tense, and on 5th May 1924, a meeting took place at Laden La’s house in Lhasa, attended by senior police and army officers. These officers decided to send a petition to His Holiness, saying that they supported Tsarong Shape in his action, and requesting that the Dalai Lama should not be angry. The petition was duly submitted, but Lungshar, who was seeking power for himself, spotted an opportunity to undermine the power and authority exercised by Tsarong Shape, and Laden La became incidentally involved. Rumours regarding this secret meeting began circulating, alleging that a plot was being hatched to remove political authority from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Tsarong Shape’s and Laden La’s names were associated with this allegation. Specific allegations regarding these events were to surface two years later, as described in the next chapter.

The stress showed in Laden La’s diary entries, as they are unusually very few and far between at this time. Most entries merely record social events after his wife and family arrived in Lhasa towards the end of May. Some entries mention dreams, and it seems that stress was interfering with his sleep. Family stories include efforts to

61 See, Patrick French (2004), p.338 and Peter H. Hansen (1996).

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poison Laden La. On one official occasion he detected an unfamiliar bubbling in his tea, and he was advised by Tsarong Shape that the tea had been poisoned; he quickly made his excuses and left. On another occasion, a shot was fired through a window of his house, but mercifully did not hit anybody, and on another occasion a bullet actually passed through his hat! When he had first arrived, his house in the old Yamen (the former residence of the Chinese Amban) was extremely haunted. Our aunt, Phurpa Lhamu (Mary), who visited her father in Lhasa, relates:

“when he first lived in the house and when lying in his bed, the hands of a Chinese lady, with all ten fingers, would appear at his window. He always slept with a revolver under his pillow, so when he saw this apparition he would take it out and shoot and the fingers would disappear. At other times, as he sat down to dinner in the dining room, a tall Chinese figure would stand in front of him and say in Tibetan, “this is my house” in a deep sinister voice. As usual, your late Ajo (grandfather) would take his revolver and shoot at the object, which would disappear. Your late Ajo said he had many such experiences, so before our arrival there he had the holy Lamas come and say many prayers to drive the evil spirits out.”

Presumably this exorcism was successful, as our Aunt did not see any ghosts herself. Uncle Palsang (Pat) used to add that, when firing the revolver, he would pray to Sangey Guru Rimpoche, and these prayers, rather than the pistol shots, were more effective in dismissing the ghost! While in Lhasa, particularly after his wife and family joined him, Laden La began thinking about spouses for his children. For Wangchuck, aged twenty-two, who had remained back in Darjeeling, a daughter of the Do-ring house was offered and accepted. Sometime after returning to Darjeeling arrangements were commenced for the marriage with the Do-ring daughter, but unfortunately she caught typhoid and died before any nuptials could be celebrated. For Mary, aged eighteen, a marriage with the son of another House was offered, but Aunt Mary told her father that she would prefer to return to Darjeeling.

Meanwhile, the pressure of intrigue was becoming intolerable in Lhasa⁶², and after just one year as head of the police, Laden La decided that it would be wise to tender his resignation to the Dalai Lama. In October he returned to Darjeeling with his family, leaving his Police Force in the hands of his second in command. Tsarong Shape was also feeling the pressure exerted by the conservative faction, headed by Lungshar, and a few days before Laden La was to leave, he decided to leave for

62 Rumours about trouble in Tibet were even reaching London. On 8th October, The Times noted that a “report that Mr MacDonal, the British trade agent, and Sonam Wangfel Laden La, late superintendent of police at Darjeeling, now on a political mission to Tibet, are being besieged at Lhasa lacks confirmation”. The rumours were indeed untrue, but were indicative of the atmosphere at the time.

India, ostensibly to visit the Mint in the Chumbi Valley, and then for a holiday in India. His youngest wife, later to become Mrs Jigme Taring⁶³, was at school in Darjeeling, so it was an opportunity to visit her. Tsarong realised that His Holiness had become more and more influenced by Lungshar and the "conservative faction", and that his life would be in danger if he were to remain in Lhasa as Head of the Army.



The Tibetan Mint at Gautsa in the Chumbi Valley photographed c1930

63 Tsarong Shape succeeded to the lands and titles of the previous Tsarong Shape. When taking over the House, he married all of daughters of the late Shape, but he only intended that the marriage to the eldest daughter be permanent. The other sisters were married to noble husbands, when they were old enough.

Chapter 12

Suspicion and Frustration, 1925-29

On his return to Darjeeling from Lhasa, Laden La suffered a minor nervous breakdown. The stress created by the attempts of the reactionary elements to undermine his position, had told on his health, and he was uncharacteristically tired and inactive, and was suffering from insomnia. By August 1925, he had sufficiently recovered to resume his full duties as Additional Superintendent of Police, as well as head of the District Intelligence Branch. In this capacity he was responsible for monitoring the situation over the border, and handling any matters relating to Tibet. His name had come up as a possible British Trade Agent in Yatung, but the Dalai Lama, who at this time was completely under the influence of Lungshar, suggested that this appointment would not be appropriate⁶⁴. Not all his tasks were politically sensitive, and one of his less arduous duties was as Honorary ADC to the Governor of Bengal. Lord Lytton spent quite a lot of time in Darjeeling, and in October 1925 he decided to visit northern Sikkim, with his wife and children. Laden La arranged everything. Lord Lytton wrote that during the departure "Laden La... was calmly efficient, inspiring confidence that all the confusion would eventually end in some ordered and desirable achievement", as indeed it did⁶⁵. Later, Lord Lytton requested that Laden La look after the King and Queen of the Belgians when they visited Darjeeling, and in recognition of his services the King awarded him the title "Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II". (One of the privileges of this title was that one could travel free of charge on Belgian Railways!)

Late in 1925, the Bengal Police Department received an official request from the Tibetan Government to stop the manufacture of false Tibetan copper coins in India. These coins were being exported from India to Tibet in large numbers, and were disrupting the economy of the country. SWL took on the job of locating the culprits, which was to take several months, because of the shortage of "leads". Finally, on 1st May 1927, while travelling to Gangtok he spotted a suspicious caravan of mules, just on the Sikkimese side of the frontier with Bengal. He was alone at the time, but he rapidly detected that most of the loads consisted of copper coins. He escorted the caravan to the nearby police post at Rangpo. The contents of the loads were examined in detail, and found to contain, among other legitimate trade items, no fewer than 194,081 false Tibetan copper coins. The traders were questioned, and they revealed how the coins had been purchased in Calcutta from a Newari businessman.

64 Goldstein (1989), p.134. Goldstein's account is well documented, but is biased against Laden La.

65 Lytton (1942), p.116.

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Telegrams flew from Rangpo to Calcutta, the precise location was identified from the description given by the Tibetan traders, and a raid was arranged. Laden La sent one of his inspectors to Calcutta on the night train, who was in time to witness the Newars being caught red-handed striking Tibetan copper coins in their factory in Raghunath Chatterjee Street. They found that preparations were well under way to produce false Tibetan banknotes, but fortunately those had not yet been released into circulation. The copper coins could be produced cheaply, and were sold in Calcutta at twenty five percent of their face value in Tibet, so several Tibetan traders had decided that this was a good item for them to export from India to Tibet! SWL collected and documented the evidence in a very systematic manner, and a trial was held in Calcutta later in 1927 and the culprits were duly found guilty and were imprisoned for several years. The false coins were such good reproductions that many examples circulated, undetected, for several decades, and even now can be found among old coins in Tibet⁶⁶. His Holiness wrote a very warm personal letter thanking Laden La for his role in stopping the manufacture of these false coins and notes⁶⁷.

Official relations between British India and Tibet were, however, at a very low ebb. Laden La's friend Tsarong Shape, had been demoted and was no longer in charge of the Army. The Police Force that Laden La had worked so hard to establish, had become undermined by political infighting in Lhasa. Effective power was firmly in the hands of Lungshar, even though he was not a member of the Kashag (Cabinet), and many competent officials had been demoted. SWL continued to report independently to Delhi on Frontier Affairs, which allowed the Viceroy to obtain a more balanced picture of events than had he only taken note of reports from the Political Officer at Gangtok, and the Trade Agents at Gyantse and Yatung. He must have been well aware of the rumours that had been circulated by Lungshar and his supporters, regarding what might have gone on at the "secret" meeting on 5th May 1924, but there was little he could do to stop this malicious gossip. However, two years after the event in question, in August 1926, the Khenchung⁶⁸ at Gyantse, "apparently" informed Norbhu Dhondup, who then reported the information up the line to Gangtok, from where his report reached Delhi and London. These rumours, dressed up in some detail, suggested that the army and police officers had, on the instigation of Tsarong Shape and Laden La, seriously considered wresting political control away from the Dalai Lama, leaving His Holiness only with religious authority.

66 For a detailed account of this case, based on Laden La's personal file, see N.G.Rhodes (1992), pp.90-96 & Pls.12-13, and also Xiao (1987) for an account based on Tibetan records.

67 Unpublished letter in our possession dated 21st day of 4th month of the Earth Snake year (1929).

68 The Kenchung was the senior monk official in Gyantse, and, along with much of the monk body, had been against the modernising elements in Lhasa, such as the Army and the Police.

This virulent accusation was believed by many in Lhasa, and did serious damage to the reputations of Tsarong and Laden La. To accuse a Mahayana Buddhist of such sacrilege is unthinkable. Norbhu Dhondup lived in Ghoom, in Darjeeling. As a young man, he had been recruited as an interpreter on the Younghusband expedition. Laden La had been a role model for him, and had frequently given him advice and encouragement in his career in the Political Service⁶⁹. Frederick Williamson, who was acting Political Officer in Sikkim at the time, reported that Laden La should be asked to give his side of the story, and matters rested there for nearly a year, before Bailey returned and was able to interview him. Laden La told Bailey that the meeting in his house in Lhasa in 1924 had been completely innocent, and was held purely to demonstrate to His Holiness that both the police and the army officers were united in supporting Tsarong Shape in the action he had taken in severely punishing the soldier who had killed a policeman. Nothing treasonable had been discussed, and he produced and translated his copy of the petition to His Holiness, which was signed by all the officers present, except for Laden La himself⁷⁰. Bailey reported that he was happy with the explanation given, but in correspondence with London he did say that Laden La had certainly committed "a serious indiscretion" in getting involved in local politics, to the extent of allowing the meeting to be held in his house. For some time, however, SWL must have felt somewhat uncertain over how matters might turn out. Would the Government accept Bailey's word over that of the Tibetan informants?

Bailey certainly continued to call on Laden La's assistance and in September 1928 asked him to visit Phari to obtain information about what was happening in Tibet. Laden La was very well received, and reported that "the two Jongpens of Phari, viz Kusho Den cha – Tsang (Eastern Jongpen) and Po-sho-se (Western Jongpen) accompanied by Tse-trung Pun-tso Ton-den (Sertam Kusho) of the officer-in-charge of the Government Bank, and the headmen of Phari, Bhutanese and Sikkimese, came to meet me about a mile and a half from Phari when I arrived there, and welcomed me by offering scarves. They did the same ceremony when I left Phari"⁷¹. He obtained a lot of information during his brief visit, but there was no question about visiting Lhasa, which would have required a formal secondment from his Police duties. Laden La had to wait until 1929, to find out whether he was fully vindicated but in recent years historians have put their own spin on these events.

69 As evidenced by many letters in our possession dated between 1910 and 1929.

70 A full translation was published by Goldstein (1989) and the original Tibetan document is now among the Laden La papers in our possession.

71 In a long report written to Bailey from Gangtok, dated 5th October 1928. Laden La papers in possession of the authors.

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Goldstein read the official records, and without any strong reason, suggested that the plot really had taken place, exactly as reported to Williamson and Bailey, but he gives little reason for this opinion⁷². Alex McKay, an historian from New Zealand, has written extensively about this issue⁷³, and also concluded that the rumours may have been true, but he added an additional dimension, suggesting that Laden La was ordered by Bailey to arrange such a coup, in order to further the interests of the “progressive” faction in Lhasa. However, the eminent British historians of Tibet, Hugh Richardson and Alistair Lamb⁷⁴ both dismissed the idea that there had ever been such a plot. Also, the Tibetan historian, K.Dhondup⁷⁵, clearly pointed a finger at Lungshar as having invented and disseminated the rumours, purely in order to cast suspicion on his great rival, Tsarong Shape, and to undermine the “progressive” faction in Lhasa. McKay’s version of events was subsequently accepted, uncritically, by Meyer & Brysac⁷⁶, and it certainly makes for a sensational conspiracy theory in the context of the Great Game! More recently, we have refuted McKay’s version in an article in *The Tibet Journal*⁷⁷, and we wait with interest to see how future historians will interpret these events. Our suggestion is that the rumours should be seen in the context of Lungshar wanting power for himself, and discrediting Tsarong Shape was a necessary step towards this end. Laden La was unfortunately caught up in this power struggle. Also Laden La had a few detractors in Darjeeling who sought to capitalise on the situation by writing against him to their British superiors. McKay was unaware of the ill feelings of some of the people he interviewed and so took this information at face value, and hence as corroborative evidence, rather than malicious gossip.



Laden La's Tibetan seal

- 72 Goldstein (1989), pp.121-137. McKay notes that “the best account of these events is by Goldstein, but despite his best efforts, the accounts given of the various actions and motives remain contradictory” (McKay(1997), p.109 & 252, note 23).
- 73 McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj* (1997) and ‘Tibet 1924: A Very British Coup’ (1997).
- 74 Richardson (1964) and Lamb(1989)
- 75 *The Water-Bird and other Years*, New Delhi 1986. McKay has completely ignored the conclusions of this book in his publications, although it is mentioned in his bibliography.
- 76 Meyer & Brysac (1999), pp.445-47.
- 77 “Sonam Wangfel Laden La – Tibet 1924 and 1930”, *The Tibet Journal*, Vol.XXVIII No.4 (Winter 2003), pp.77-90.

Chapter 13

Mission to Lhasa, 1930

In 1929, not only were relations between Tibet and India at a low point, but Lungshar also succeeded in souring relations with Nepal. The problems began in 1928, when a Sherpa called Gyalpo, was accused of spying for the Nepalese in Lhasa⁷⁸. He sought refuge in the Nepalese Legation building, and the Nepalese Agent refused to hand him over. According to Laden La's report, "...Lungshar got very wild at this. That very day, it appears, he consulted Kunphela and obtained the Dalai Lama's order. He, without informing the Lonchen and the Shapes, took about 300 soldiers and about 100 police, with 3 police officers, namely Dokar-Se, Lheding-Se and Yuru Kung went to the Nepalese Legation. The police officers and the police surrounded it and Lungshar himself climbed on to the roof of a house near the Legation and directed operations. Gyalpo Sherpa then got on to the roof of the Legation and removed the staircase⁷⁹ and while he was altercating with the police officers, a police sergeant, with a few men, got on top of the roof by means of a ladder and arrested him, while Gyalpo was firmly holding the flag-staff"⁸⁰. The Nepalese were naturally furious at this violation of their diplomatic immunity and demanded an apology. Gyalpo was incarcerated in a Tibetan jail, and quickly died from maltreatment. Norbhu Dhondup was sent to Lhasa to try to calm things down, but he was unable to persuade the Tibetan Government to apologise to the satisfaction of the Nepalese. The patience of the Nepalese was wearing thin, and they started to move troops to the frontier in preparation for an invasion. Finally, it was decided in Delhi that, the best hope would be for Laden La to try to mediate and he was directed to proceed to Lhasa post haste. Clearly, in Delhi, Laden La was still trusted, despite the unpleasant and damaging accusations of 1926.

Laden La immediately commenced telegraphic communication with the Dalai Lama, regarding his visit, saying that he would be carrying important communications from the Government of India, and trying to ensure that his visit would be viewed positively. The mission was regarded as very important at the highest level in India. In a telegram to the Secretary of State for India (in London) dated 12th January

78 Gyalpo Sherpa was born in Phe-ruk, Tibet, and when young came to Shar-Kham-bu in Nepal and for 10 years he became a Nepali subject. In 1912 he went to Tibet and purchased a lot of looted curios from the Chinese at a cheap price and sold them to Mr Percy Brown, of the Indian Museum, Calcutta and made his fortune. He became a great friend of Capt. Lal Bahadur the Nepali Representative of Lhasa and declared himself a Nepali subject. He opened a shop in Lhasa as a merchant. His chief trade was in pearls, corals, turquoises and silk etc.

79 One of the traditional Tibetan, removable, staircases.

80 Report, Laden La to Weir, dated 26th May 1930.

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1930, the Viceroy says “we realise that this is putting a great deal on Laden La, but as Tibetans would certainly not agree to receive a British officer, we must do (the) best we can”⁸¹. Laden La left Darjeeling in secret on 21st January, and met Col. Leslie Weir, the Political Officer Sikkim⁸², in Kalimpong and discussed his mission until midnight, and then continued on the following day for Gangtok.

Travelling in winter to Tibet was a real challenge, so he arranged for a trusted muleteer called Bhakto to accompany him to Yatung, and on 24th January they set off from Gangtok in a heavy snowstorm. It must have been a dreadful journey; every day was marked as “bad day” in his diary, and one entry noted that “the road was bad – my pony Tuna slipped on the ice and went down the hill and would have been killed had it not been for Jimmy Sais’s good hold”. The road up the Chumbi Valley and across the Tibetan plateau did not improve. With heavy snow, he dared not ride on the steeper parts of the track, for fear that his horse would slip on the ice, but “through the blessings of the Great Guru Rimpoche” he “passed the passes in sunshine”. Once beyond Phari, the wind became almost unbearable until the sanctuary of the Gyantse Trade Agency was finally reached on 2nd February.

Delhi now decided that, it would be better if SWL did not arrive in Lhasa before the Nepalese had received the latest communication from the Tibetan Government (known to be unsatisfactory), and he was advised to rest for a few days to recover his strength before leaving for Lhasa. On 8th February he proceeded onwards, in freezing temperatures and biting winds, arriving at Chushul on 13th February, just after crossing the river Tsang-po. He had one day in hand, as he had been instructed not to arrive before the 16th February, which gave the opportunity for a welcome day of rest. While in Chushul he heard that two hundred Tibetan soldiers were due to arrive soon from Lhasa, on their way to protect the frontier against the possible Nepalese invasion. On 15th February he passed the soldiers, who were carrying about a thousand rifles and twenty-five boxes of ammunition, and talked with their commander, Rupon Kyi-sur(?). Clearly the situation was becoming very tense.

Having arrived in Lhasa on 16th February, Laden La followed local protocol in terms of visiting the Tibetan officials in the correct order, and presenting his compliments. As soon as protocol permitted, His Holiness invited him on 19th February, in spite of the New Year celebrations that had just commenced. Clearly His Holiness was very keen to get the discussions moving as quickly as possible, bypassing the Kashag and Lungshar, and dealing with Laden La directly. SWL managed to persuade His Holiness that a full apology to the Nepalese Government was the best course of action. A

81 India Office Library Records, P/P&S/10/1078.

82 Col. Weir had taken over from from Bailey as P.O. Sikkim in October 1928. He had been the British Trade Agent in Gyantse from December 1909 until January 1911.

longer and more formal meeting was arranged for 21st February and Laden La recorded in his diary “Memorable Day – 3 hours 5 minutes with His Holiness”.

After these important meetings with His Holiness, the first Tibetan official on whom Laden La called was his old friend Tsarong Shape. In his diary entry of 22nd February he records “had a long conversation. He doesn’t look to be the same person – it may be due to illness”. The situation was very tense, and Tsarong was being sidelined by the new regime. Between then and the 26th of February, he visited the Lonchen and other ministers and explained to them the gravity of the situation, and reported on the discussions he had had with His Holiness. On the 23rd, he was asked to a meeting with Chense Kunphela, the young monk who was becoming increasingly trusted by the Dalai Lama, and who, with Lungshar, had obtained the order from his Holiness to arrest Gyalpo Sherpa. The meeting was called at Kunphela’s residence at Norbu Lingka Chip-ra, and lasted two and a half hours. Laden La recorded that “he is a young man of twenty-six with good common sense and very intelligent”.

The next meeting with His Holiness took place on 27th February with Kunphela in attendance, and it was a matter of going through the draft that had been negotiated between Delhi and Kathmandu. Later meetings took place every day from 2nd to 5th March, inclusive, fitted in between the New Year celebrations, with His Holiness and all his ministers in attendance, discussing the draft apology in detail. With great difficulty, Laden La managed to persuade the Tibetan ministers to make their apology more sincere, and after several changes had been made, SWL despatched a revised draft to Delhi and Nepal on 6th March. The suggested changes were agreed by wire by all parties, and the formal apology in writing was duly sent to Kathmandu. Finally, on 22nd March a telegram was received from the Nepalese government to say that they were now happy, and that their troops were being recalled from the border. The Nepalese celebrated the peaceful end to this dispute with a military parade on the Tundikhel in Kathmandu. In all respects Laden La’s meetings with His Holiness were very cordial, and the entries in his personal diary reflect his happiness and satisfaction. In a letter to Sir Charles Bell, SWL wrote that the Dalai Lama had talked to him very frankly, and that he had warmly recalled their meetings in 1921, referring to Laden La as the last of Bell’s group⁸³. On 11th March, soon after His Holiness and the ministers had agreed to a satisfactory wording for the apology, Laden La visited Lungshar in his house⁸⁴, and recorded in his personal diary “went to Lungshar – he received me with great honour. He assured me that he had nothing against me. More, he said in the presence of his wife that he is grateful for what I have done for him in India and England.”

83 Bell (1946), p.368.

84 Lungshar was not a member of the Kashag, and so had not attended any of the meetings at which the Nepal problem had been discussed with Laden La.

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The Gyalpo affair indicated how Lungshar and Kunphela had had the ear of the Dalai Lama, and were able to go over the heads of even the Lonchen and the Shapes (Cabinet Ministers). However, this episode did cause Lungshar a fall from grace in the eyes of the Dalai Lama, and never again did he wield as much influence although, later that summer, he may have been influential in finally arranging for Tsarong's demotion from the Kashag. It also speaks for Laden La's integrity that, at the outset the Nepalese had tried to object to his role as a negotiator, as they thought that he would be too pro-Tibetan. By the time the negotiations had been completed, the Nepalese expressed their thanks for his work in resolving the issue⁸⁵. Also, after 1930, the Dalai Lama wrote many more letters to Laden La than he had previously, and clearly His Holiness realised that Laden La truly had the interests of Tibet at heart.

Col. Weir acted as a link between Laden La and Delhi, and his only original contributions to the events were somewhat negative. On 29th January he wrote "please reply (keeping) me acquainted with your movements", and on 31st January he writes "I am surprised at your action in informing D.Lama that you were bringing important letters and messages. I see no reference in the instructions for your guidance from Foreign⁸⁶ for such action. Please do not proceed beyond Gyantse until further orders." Clearly Weir was somewhat ambivalent regarding the visit, and on 24th March, he sent a very brief and curt note to say "Please don't forget invitation for my visit to Lhasa this year". Laden La was able to reply by return that he had already raised the subject and was expecting a favourable response soon. However, in the end, Weir managed to ensure that some of the credit devolved on himself. He received a telegram from the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India:

"I am directed to inform you that the settlement which has been effected between Nepal and Tibet has been the cause of much relief and gratification to the Government of India. The Government of India consider that the success which has attended these long negotiations is due in large measure to your suggestion that Sirdar(sic) Bahadur Laden La should be sent to Lhasa and to the tact and ability displayed by him in the execution of his mission. I am accordingly to convey to you an expression of the Government of India's appreciation of the part played by you and by the Sirdar(sic) Bahadur in this affair and that this message may be conveyed to him, on the successful termination of his delicate mission to Lhasa."

Laden La's visit to Lhasa had been a remarkable success, war with Nepal had been averted, and the path cleared for an improvement in relations between Britain and Tibet. It is, however, interesting to speculate why this visit has been largely ignored

85 See Mishra, Tirtha Prasad (1991), for a detailed account, based on Nepalese records.

86 This was the Department within the Government of India that handled relationships with foreign countries, such as Tibet and Nepal.

or misinterpreted by historians. Hugh Richardson put the date as 1922⁸⁷, which must have been a misprint, but one which confused the issue for some subsequent researchers. Alex MacKay appears to believe David MacDonald, who asserted in a letter sent to his son, to be forwarded to Sir Charles Bell, that Laden La “was coldly received and soon had to return without accomplishing anything”⁸⁸, assertions which proved untrue. Fortunately, Laden La’s personal file of the visit has survived and has provided much information not easily available in the files in the India Office Library (now located in the British Library).

While he was in Lhasa, Laden La was happy to receive at least one letter from His Holiness the Panchen Lama, then in exile in China, who was clearly keeping up with events. It is worth quoting a full translation of this letter:-

To the highly qualified, the precious Chief of Police of Darjeeling, Dzasa Legden. I am increasingly happy that the sphere of your body which rivals the rising full moon of an Autumn night is well protected and that you are doing valuable service for the great British (Indian) Government and employing completely pure and auspicious actions. Here I am in good health and am trying to develop a sincere feeling towards the Buddha’s Teaching and towards all sentient beings. Since this country (Tibet) is the superior base for the Teachings of the Buddha, it may not be possible for sentient beings not to be well and happy. However, as a hindrance to religion and politics, acting on bad advice does not benefit in any way the unity between father and son, or the precious Teachings, or the welfare of the citizens. I also find it very worrying not knowing how much trouble we will have in the future, as a result of opposing our neighbour, the great British (Indian) Government. Therefore, without forgetting the racial consideration, and loyalty, please do whatever is necessary to arrive at a virtuous path and also try hard to assume the responsibility of maintaining our relationship without any obstructions. I would also like to mention that I have sent a detailed message through our representative, Rimshi Surkhang, concerning a broad range of actions. Through him, please convey any confidential messages without any restraint. Also, as in the past, please give all assistance possible, according to the needs of the local situation. In future, as well as taking care of your priceless health and observing your ever increasing virtuous deeds, please send (me) letters as often as possible. A scarf and a roll of yellow silk with dragon medallions accompany this (letter). Iron Horse year, 2nd month, 4th day (3rd April, 1930).

It must have pleased SWL to feel that his relationship with the Panchen Lama continued to be cordial, and that His Holiness supported the maintenance of good

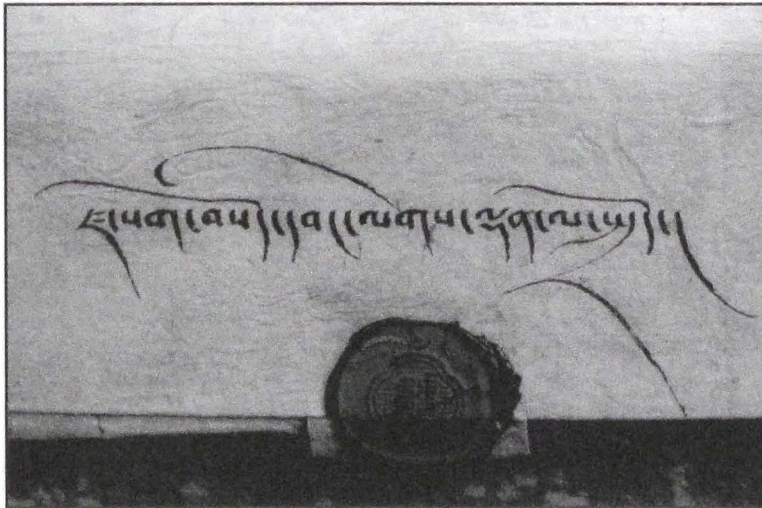
87 H.E.Richardson (1962), p.133. This was copied by Tsepon W.D. Shakabpa (1967). In Richardson’s earlier work, *Tibetan Precipice*, the episode is fully and accurately described, with the correct date.

88 India Office Records, MSS Eur F80 5a 93. The letter is addressed to MacDonald’s son and dated 9th September 1930, and is in the Bell papers, as it was forwarded on to Sir Charles Bell in accordance with MacDonald’s instructions, on 24th October 1930.

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relations between Tibet and British India, even after His Holiness had demonstrated his opposition to the modernisation of Tibet so dramatically in 1924⁸⁹.

Laden La stayed in Lhasa for two more months, partly on the instructions of the Dalai Lama, who seems to have been reluctant to let him go⁹⁰, and he was able to renew old contacts, and generally paved the way for an improvement in the relationship between Britain and Tibet. He sent detailed reports on the situation in Lhasa, so that Weir would be properly briefed prior to his visit, reporting that he was “thunder-struck to find how the Chinese influence has so suddenly been re-established in Lhasa”⁹¹. A Chinese delegation, headed by Miss Lew-Man-Ching, was in Lhasa at the time, and SWL met her at the house of Tsarong Shape on 12th April. Finally in May, Laden La returned to Darjeeling, arriving home on 31st May. Within six weeks he was heading back to Lhasa in the company of Col. Weir, Mrs Weir and Norbhu Dhondup, but not before two happy family events had taken place in Darjeeling, the marriage of two of his children.



Cover of letter from the Dalai Lama to Laden La

89 Unfortunately we have not been able to locate copies of any replies from Laden La to the Panchen Lama, or of any other letters from His Holiness, although the presence of a photograph in the family house dating from this period indicates that other correspondence may have taken place..

90 The Dalai Lama was ill for most of April, and delayed giving Laden La the formal invitation for Weir to visit until 29th April. Only then did Laden La leave Lhasa, on 5th May, an auspicious day.

91 Report of the visit from Laden La to Weir dated 26th May 1930.

Chapter 14

Two Weddings

During his short time in Darjeeling, family life was not neglected. He had been thinking about suitable spouses for his sons, and in the mid 1920's, he had arranged for his son Wangchuk Dorji (Willie) to marry a daughter of the Do-ring family from Lhasa, but unfortunately the girl had died before the marriage could be solemnised. Since late in 1929, his eldest daughter Phurpa Lhamu (Mary), had fallen in love with Chimi Tenduf La, a son of the prominent local Tibetan trading family, headed by Mr Sharab Lama. In January he arranged for Wangchuk Dorji to marry Nima Lhaki, the eldest daughter of Chimi Tenduf's eldest brother. Provisional arrangements for the nuptials had to be made while Laden La was in Tibet. As late as the end of May, Laden La wanted a small ceremony in July, with the major celebrations in October, as he knew that he would be heavily involved in Tibetan affairs until then. However, he was persuaded to hold the major ceremonies during his few days in Darjeeling in July, partly by family pressure, and partly on being assured by the Dalai Lama that the 9th July and 11th July were very auspicious days for weddings. The following article that appeared in the *Darjeeling Times* on 12th July 1930 is the only account of the weddings of our father and of our aunt that we have managed to find:-.

"TIBETAN WEDDINGS"

It seldom falls to the lot of residents and visitors to witness a Tibetan marriage ceremony, especially when the contracting parties are persons of standing and not only in the station but in the surrounding states.

Two such have taken place this week and both marriages have created the greatest interest among the townspeople, particularly the Tibetan folk who love to make merry when occasion offers.

On Wednesday the 9th Mr. Wangchuk Dorje Laden La, the second son of Sardar Bahadur S.W.Laden La, C.B.E., A.D.C. was married to Miss Nima Lucky, daughter of Mr & Mrs Sring La. According to Tibetan custom feasting and merry making goes on for days in the bride's house to which all friends and relations are invited and on this occasion lavish hospitality was dispensed by the parents of the bride and bridegroom.

Most of us in the station did not expect the marriage to be solemnised so soon, but intimation was received from the Dalai Lama a short while ago that the most propitious day for the ceremony was the one selected.

His Holiness the Lama of the Ghoom Monastery conducted the religious part of the ceremony and those who saw it could not help being struck with the air of solemnity which pervaded the room where the actual ceremony was being performed in marked contrast to the bustle and expectancy which prevailed outside.

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The ceremonial costumes worn were indeed gorgeous, the father of the bridegroom, Sardar Bahadur S.W.Laden La was attired in a *chhu-pa* of the richest of silk brocade, yellow being the predominating colour, embroidered with butterflies and chrysanthemums worked in blue. The bridegroom was also a striking figure in yellow silk brocade. The bride's dress was of a more sombre colour and design, the outstanding items being the quantity of jewellery worn for the occasion. Most of the nearer male relations also appeared attired in silks, the most noticeable part of the ladies costumes being the triangular head-dress peculiar to Tibetan gentry.

After the ceremony the bride and bridegroom came into the room where the assembled guests, both European and Indian, were introduced and the health of the couple proposed by Mr.A.A.Price who, in a short speech, wished the bridal couple a happy married life in Darjeeling.

The ceremony continued till a late hour, a multitude of persons from all parts of the country coming in to pay their respects to both families.

The second wedding of the week took place yesterday when Mr.Chime Tenduf La, son of Mr & Mrs Sharab Lama, Merchant of Darjeeling was married to Mary Phurpa Lama, daughter of Sardar Bahadur S.W.Laden La.

Fortunately the weather was all that could be desired and it was possible to carry out the procession from the bride's house to her new residence in the Market Square, where a large number of friends and townfolk had gathered to welcome them.

After the wedding ceremony the wedding cake was cut in the presence of a large number of assembled guests and the health of the bride and bridegroom drunk with much enthusiasm."

The Sharab Lama ancestors were Tibetan traders from Amdo and Kham, who had arrived in Darjeeling in the 1870's. They ran a quality grocery store in Darjeeling, which was proud to display the words "By Warrant of Appointment to the Governor of Bengal". Amazingly there seem to be no photographs that we have been able to find that record the weddings. Apparently, the photography was entrusted to Mr Henry Carpenter, an American friend of the bridegroom's younger brother Palsang (Pat)⁹², but the films were never retrieved by the family. With the arrangements so rushed due to Laden La's imminent return to Lhasa, it is possible that proper arrangements for photography slipped off the bottom of the priority list.

92 Mr H.A.Carpenter, a retired engineer, was a somewhat eccentric theosophist, who had visited Gyantse in 1926 and again in 1930. Cf. McKay (1997), p.95.

Chapter 15

Final Visit to Lhasa

With the optimism generated during his earlier visit, Laden La left Darjeeling for Lhasa on 16th July, with high hopes. This time he took his son Palsang (Pat) with him, but unfortunately Palsang became ill at Phari. He had contracted malaria while working as a tea planter in the Terai, and had a serious relapse. Laden La's diary records:-

"24 July - Miserable Day – 6 AM got up with heavy head. Pat was found very sick. His pulse beating 130 to 140 beats in a minute. 8 AM phoned to Dr Donyeot to come up with medicine to treat me and my son. Pat was serious – at about 12 noon he was under delirium and on one occasion I thought he was dying – he could not recognise me. I was very much upset. Dr Donyeot turned up at 7 pm and treated us."

The following day was not much better, and Palsang's temperature went up to 105 degrees. It was clear that he could not continue on to Lhasa, but Weir would not be delayed longer. It was decided that Dr Donyeot and Laden La's faithful servant, Ugyen, would accompany Palsang back to Yatung for further treatment, and at 8.30 a.m. he left in a dandy, with his temperature still over 102 degrees, while Laden La left in the opposite direction, heading for Gyantse. It was not an auspicious start to the journey.

On 4th August the party reached Lhasa, and on the 8th August the day dictated by protocol, they all proceeded to the Norbhu Lingka for the official reception by the Dalai Lama. Weir did little to express any gratitude for Laden La's good work in his earlier visit, and even stopped SWL from accompanying him on some important official visits, to which he did take Norbhu Dhondup. Laden La wrote in his diary on 27th August "Col. Weir told me that although we had obtained permission of the D.L. to take photographs, they might not like it and therefore we must not take photographs". Mrs Weir's anger was ignited on 5th September when she spotted Laden La filming some religious dances, when she herself had been told that filming would not be appropriate. She was not to be pacified when told that Laden La had been filming at the request of the Dalai Lama and not for his personal use. The final affront was when, on 11th September, Weir instructed Laden La to leave Lhasa early, and before the official leave taking visit to the Dalai Lama.

In his diary entry for 19th September Laden La gave vent to his frustration:-

"6.30 AM A messenger came from Dronyer Chempo to call me. Called at Norbulinka at 7.15 AM. Dronyer Chempo informed me that yesterday he received personal orders from the D.L. asking me to (?) – he sent messages through 2 Neshepas(?) to Col. Weir about my value to D.L. & D.L. wanted that I should leave together with Col. Weir which may cause misunderstanding. But this morning a letter came from Col. Weir

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saying I was urgently wanted by Govt. of India hence I must go – therefore D.L. permitted me to go to Trum-cha & report I went straight to Deki Lingka & saw Col. Weir in the dining room and reported the above facts. He at once remarked that it was under my instigation that the D.L. sent messages to stop me (leaving Lhasa early). I at once replied that I knew nothing about the above as I was away .. and I remarked that the Almighty is my witness. I then drew his attention to the action of RBND (Rai Bahadur Norbhu Dhondup) re a false report submitted by him against me to Col. Bailey about my mixing up with the Tibetan Army officers to rise against the Government.. and how ...RBND instructed the servants not to inform me about his and Col. Weir's movements.... I said I want justice – he cannot hang me without evidence. He said, quite so.”

Laden La was saddened by the apparent treachery of his former protégé. Had he had any guilty conscience regarding any “plot” in 1924, we feel that he would not have written like this in his personal diary. When he returned to Darjeeling, his diary is completely blank and Uncle Palsang (Pat) told us that the story that Weir had told His Holiness about his being urgently required by Govt. of India was a lie. However, Laden La did not leave Lhasa without saying his farewells. On the morning of 20th September he visited several officials to say good-bye, and then spent the whole afternoon with the Dalai Lama “and had interesting talks with him. He was very kind to me and blessed me with a large scarf and blue blessed silk knots”. The following day he called on Kunphela to say goodbye and then, after dispatching his luggage, he saw Col. Weir and Norbhu Dhondup. Later he called on various other friends in Lhasa, and prayed at the Ramoche Tse-pa Lhakang and at the Lhasa Tsuk-Lhakang. He finally left Lhasa at 5 pm, and found Weir waiting at the Che-ra bridge (presumably to ensure that he had really departed!). Laden La had left Lhasa honourably, having said warm farewells to His Holiness and to his friends in Lhasa, but his relationship with Weir and with Weir's assistant, Norbhu Dhondup, had broken down irrevocably⁹³.

Laden La's good work was, however, appreciated in Delhi and London, and in the King's Birthday honours of that year, he was given the C.B.E., a rare honour in those days. When he returned to Darjeeling, he realised that the time would shortly come to retire from the government service, and he looked forward with enthusiasm to the many projects in Darjeeling District to which he wished to devote more time.

93 In his book *Tibet and the British Raj* Alex McKay gives misleading information on Laden La. McKay relied heavily on one or two people he interviewed, who have their own agendas, and who made no effort to direct McKay to any of Laden La's descendants. It may seem petty to challenge McKay, but what appears in print is often taken as truth, so we feel we must correct these errors. One assertion is that Laden La and Norbhu Dhondup “competed for British favour. The contest was won by Norbu” (p.131). We feel that if McKay had researched more diligently, he would have realized that the two gentlemen were of different ages and backgrounds and their careers were in different branches of Government. Laden La never (cont. next page)



Monk proctor - Lhasa 1930

93 (cont.)

sought a full-time career in the "Frontier Cadre", as described by McKay, although he was seconded to the Cadre when his help was needed. Laden La lived a full and varied life, and his wealth came from his aunt's inheritance, and not from what McKay implies when he says that he "acquired considerable wealth". Moreover the hotel business, which McKay refers to, was not acquired with Laden La money, but was developed independently by Chimi Tenduf La, who was married to our Aunt Phurpa Lhamu (Mary). Another of McKay's assertions is that SWL "failed to gain government employment for his family" and that, on the other hand, Norbu Dhondup's daughter works for the Tibetan Government in exile. We are happy that this lady works for His Holiness, but McKay should have discovered that SWL's second son, Wangchuck Dorji (our father) was granted a commission with British Gurkhas (later the Indian Gurkhas) and became officer commanding the recruiting depot at Katapahar, Darjeeling. Then, in the 1950's and 1960's, when many refugees from Tibet settled in Darjeeling, our mother, Nima Lhaki, was a close friend and supporter of Mrs Gyalo Thondup (the wife of His Holiness's older brother) and was on the committee of the Tibetan Refugee Centre in Darjeeling. Our mother helped the refugees in many ways in Darjeeling. Our mother was also involved with the Darjeeling Branch of the All India Women's Conference. These facts were strangely ignored by those whom McKay interviewed.

Chapter 16

Active Retirement, 1931-36

On his return to Darjeeling, Laden La began to prepare for retirement, which officially took place in July 1931, at the age of fifty-five. On that occasion, long testimonials appeared in the Darjeeling and Calcutta papers, and the affection in which the majority of the population of Darjeeling held him was heartfelt. In retirement he was able to concentrate on his many religious, social and political activities. He was the president of the committees of several Buddhist monasteries, and was very active as the representative of the Mahabodhi Society for North-East India. Academically, he helped Evans-Wentz with a translation of the Tibetan book of the Great Liberation⁹⁴. He was the chief local Scout and an active Freemason. He continued to keep up with his many friends, in Europe, Tibet and India, maintaining lengthy correspondences. Mountaineering expeditions from both Germany and the UK relied on his good offices, not only in securing permission to enter Sikkim and Tibet on their way to climb Kachenjunga, Everest and other mountains, but also directing all preliminary arrangements for the expeditions. Among the interesting foreigners he met were the Russian father and son orientalists – the Roerichs. His interest in local politics continued and, now that he was retired, he was able to be less constrained than he had been in 1917, regarding his wish to see Darjeeling separated from the rest of Bengal, and once again he became the President of the Hillmen's Association. He was an Honorary Magistrate, and numerous visitors would come to his house to seek his advice and help. His door was always open and he acted as the effective representative of the people of the district⁹⁵, a role that gave him great satisfaction, as he was a truly caring and compassionate man.

Tibetan New Year (*Losar*) was a particularly important period for the Tibetan⁹⁶ and Sikkimese Bhutia communities in Darjeeling. For several days before, the house would be spring-cleaned, extra food prepared and stored, and the family prayer room would be adorned with offerings and *Derkas*, the piles of *khabses* (ceremonial pastries, only baked at that time of year). On '*nyj-shu-gu*' (the 29th day of the last month of the old year), two days before *Losar*, the lamas would come and send out the *Loo*, the evil spirit of the old year, amid much hilarity. On New Year's day itself local children would go round the houses of all the members of the community

94 Published by Oxford University Press in 1954.

95 At this time, democracy had not reached Darjeeling, so there were no elected representatives of the people.

96 Until the 1950's, the Tibetan population of Darjeeling consisted mainly of trading families from Kham and Amdo, whereas by "Bhutia" we refer to the Sikkimese families of Tibetan origin.

from about 3 a.m. offering barley and beer (*chang*) and wishing *Tashi Delek* (Happy New Year) to all. In return they would receive gifts of money. At about 8 a.m. family members would assemble in the prayer room, offer scarves to each other and the younger family members would be blessed by the elders. Prayers would be said before a ceremonial breakfast of sweet rice with raisins and Tibetan tea. Afterwards, relatives would arrive for an extended and convivial lunch. On one of the following days, SWL kept an open house, and all members of the local community were entertained, and many members of other communities would also be welcome. Although SWL himself was a non-drinker, alcohol flowed freely in his house on that day, and many local people would overindulge; according to Aunt Mary Tenduf La, after she had “given them one final” tot of whisky “for the road”, they would roll down the stairs and make for home! On following days, other families would keep open house, so the whole week consisted of feasting and festivities. On some prescribed auspicious days, the fourth or fifth day of the New Year, the local Sikkimese Bhutia and Tibetan families would have picnics on Observatory Hill (*Khangtse*). New prayer flags would be erected, and large picnic tents pitched in the early morning. Huge cooking pots were taken up to prepare the feast for the day. The *Derkas* were set up on traditional low tables. The families would then come up, dressed in their finery, and settle in their traditional areas. After lunch the Khamba families, in particular, would entertain everyone with dancing displays, the men dressed in their dashing short khos, with long sleeves and splendid swords. Some of the men would relax playing dice games, such as *Sho*. Others would be singing and dancing, and everybody would enjoy themselves until evening. Many prayers would be said, and towards the end of the day, everybody would circle around the holy shrine three times, and then line up and throw flour into air towards the shrine with the cry *Lha Gyalo* (glory to God). Mendicant dancers would come, and perform religious dances with simple masks and costumes. On another day religious dances, the *Ashi Lhamo*, would be staged.

One major event that occurred shortly after Laden La’s retirement was a meeting of Buddhists from all over the world at Sarnath in November 1931. At this meeting he was made chief representative of the Maha Bodhi Society for Tibet. He also arranged for a performance of Lama Dances at the Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath. Later, on his return via Calcutta, Laden La organised a programme of the same Lama Dances at the Red Cross Fête, held at the St Xavier’s College grounds on 21st and 22nd December. This was the first time that such dances had been held in Calcutta, and they created quite a stir. Two performances were held on each of two days, with

97 *The Xaverian*, Vol.V no.VI (1931), pp.319-20. See also, *Annals of St. Xaviers College, 1835-1935*, compiled by A.Verstraeten, S.J., p.318, unpublished manuscript in the Goethals India Library, held at St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata.

May the Buddhist world unite in spreading
the Dhamma

Devapriya Walisinha

Secy. Maha Bodhi Society

15/11/31

The Maha Bodhi Society has conferred
the office of Chief Representative of the
said Society on Sir Devapriya Walisinha C.I.S. for
the Tibet & I hope he will take interest
in the dissemination of the Saddharma
in the holy land of the Buddhists.

I wish him happiness & long life
to work for the welfare of our Holy Religion
Happiness to All

Sri Devamitta Dhammapala
Founder of the Maha Bodhi Society
& Director General

Holy Tripatare

Benares

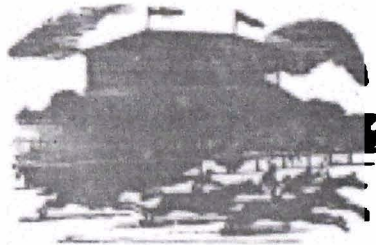
15 November

Buddha Year 2475
1931.

Lady Willingdon (wife of the Viceroy) attending the first day, and Lady Jackson (wife of the Governor of Bengal) on the second day⁹⁷.

One of Laden La's passions was horse racing at the miniature race course at Lebung, "the smallest, highest and crookedest racecourse in the world". He kept a string of horses at his stables near The Hermitage, and raced them at the regular May and October Gymkhana races, with his jockeys wearing a distinctive red and yellow sash – auspicious Buddhist colours. At Losar (Tibetan New Year), all the horses would come up to the house and a pat of butter would be placed on their forelocks, and a *khada* (ceremonial scarf) placed over their necks, to wish good luck for the coming year. His favourite horse, Gyatso, a present from Tsarong Shape in 1921⁹⁸, is reputed to have won one hundred and thirty six races, including the Governor's Cup a dozen times! According to our Aunt, Gyatso used to race to the front, and would then swish his tail so wildly that no other horse ever dared to overtake! Another favourite and successful horse was Kong-Bu. Some idea of the atmosphere of the racing is conveyed by the following account of the Governor's Cup on 5th May 1921;

"After a delay at the start Kong-Bu got off with a slight lead and passing the stand for the first time he led Lama and Saunterer. Saunterer was going very strong on the outside making the pace very hot. Passing the stand for the last time Lama, in trying to get in on the rails, fell, and the boy had a nasty fall, breaking his arm. Lama at this time had been going very well and looking all over a winner. At the Gymnasium, Puck moved up on the rails and half way down the straight badly crossed Kong-Bu, who was obliged to pull up, but soon got going again. Puck passed the post a neck in front. An objection was lodged and the race was given to Kong-Bu; a length between second and third."



DARJEELING GYMKHANA RACES.

May 7th, 9th and 11th. 1918.

⁹⁸ Other horses were presented to Laden La by the Dalai Lama, and Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) remembers riding one such prized animal over the Jelep La when returning from Tibet, and how he bolted near the top and they both got stuck in a snow drift, and had to be dug out.

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Laden La was in Lhasa at the time, and must have been delighted when he heard the news of this result as, not only was he the owner of Kong-Bu, the winner, but another of his horses, came in second. However, disappointments were not infrequent, and his children remembered how he sometimes returned home very dejected. At one of these racing events, on 8th May 1934, a Bengali freedom fighter⁹⁹ attempted to take the life of the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson. SWL took a leading role in calming the situation, as there was a serious risk that the angry hill-men might have attacked the Bengali population of Darjeeling.

Buddhism remained central to Laden La's life, and he was able to spend more time at the ten monasteries of which he was President, including Ghoom, Bhutia Busty, Alubari, Chitaray, Rimbik, Kurseong, Pedong and the Tamang Buddhist Gomba in Darjeeling. After the earthquake of January 1934, there was considerable damage at Ghoom Monastery, and he financed the repair and remodelling of the buildings. This was his favourite monastery, as he had fond memories of his education there under Lama Sherab Gyatso, and he also built a Chapel to the deities near the main monastery building. He was also largely responsible for the reconstruction of the Bhutia Busty monastery, and for the founding of the Alubari Monastery, which primarily served the Yolmo community, and of the Tamang Monastery¹⁰⁰, built to serve the Tamang Buddhist community. In a wider forum, he was Vice-President of the Bengal Buddhist Association, and General President of the All India Buddhist Conference.

Apart from conventional Buddhist teachings, SWL also took an interest in other religious writings, including those of the Theosophical movement. Apparently "Mrs. Salanave asked Sardar Bahadur S. W. Laden La, of Darjeeling, a well-known and very independent Buddhist scholar of Tibetan ancestry, if he thought that H.P.Blavatsky had real "inside information" about the higher Tibetan Buddhism. He replied that she certainly had, and that *The Voice of the Silence* contained the most profound Tibetan teachings"¹⁰¹.

Naturally, Laden La's interest in Tibet and in Tibetan affairs continued, and he received many warm letters from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Some of these letters comment intelligently on world affairs, and His Holiness asked SWL to send him whatever information he could on international events. One can see from these letters how His Holiness was analysing the political situation of the world, which he

99 Laden La took no part in the prosecutions that followed.

100 See Appendix 4 for an account of the inauguration ceremony for this Monastery, held in April 1929. Laden La held the position as President of the Tamang Buddhist Association for many years.

101 Charles J. Ryan, *H. P. Blavatsky and the Theosophical Movement*, Theosophical University Press, 1975, Chapter 8.

later set out in his Last Testament. Apart from the correspondence with His Holiness, Laden La also corresponded regularly with several Tibetan officials, including Tsarong Shape¹⁰².

During his time as District Commissioner of the Darjeeling Boy Scouts Association, the number of scouts and cubs rose from about two hundred in 1931, to over eight hundred by 1936. He was delighted when Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of the World Scouts Movement, accepted his invitation to visit Darjeeling. Baden-Powell was one of Laden La's heroes, as he embodied the ideals of simplicity of character, idealism, fierce loyalties and a strong religious faith, and he certainly had a wonderful ability to inspire others. These were values that Laden La also held dear. Baden-Powell, and another of Laden La's heroes, Lord Roberts, had made their reputations in the Boer War, and their fame spread across the "Empire", just at the time when Laden La was an impressionable young man. For many years, he kept framed photographs of these two role models in prominent positions in the verandah of his house in Darjeeling.

The work for the Scouts was complementary to Laden La's work with young children, as President of the Himalayan Children's Advancement Association, a position he had held since he founded the Association in 1909. Over 600 orphans and underprivileged children were educated and trained by this Association during his presidency. He was always concerned about helping the young people of the hills to satisfy their aspirations and to fulfil their potential, and he contributed generously to this work. In 1932, he took over as a very active Vice-Chairman of the Darjeeling Municipality, and was responsible for many of the civic improvements effected during the next few years. He was also instrumental in the reconstruction of the new building of the Victoria Hospital.

In September 1934, a "Provisional Anti-Terrorist Conference" was held at the Town Hall in Calcutta, organised by the Bengali establishment, and many local businessmen. The objective was to express the "deep abhorrence of the cult of assassination and its emphatic disapproval of the acts of terrorism which have besmirched the fair name of Bengal". It was noted at the meeting "with extreme regret the alarming growth of this baneful creed of anarchism in Bengal in recent years which is against all Indian traditions, religious, social and political"¹⁰³. A committee was established under the Chairmanship of Mr P.N.Tagore, with many of the business élite of Calcutta, but excluding any British representation. The objectives of the Committee were certainly not to perpetuate British rule in India,

102 We include an illustration of one such letter on page 47. Our thanks to Prof. Jimba for helping us read the contents of these letters.

103 Quotations from official pronouncements following this meeting.

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but to free the people from indiscriminate physical and mental suffering, and from the economic damage created by the terrorist acts. The Committee noted that the terrorist acts were often followed by inappropriate acts by the Police and Government, which merely helped recruit more terrorists. Many proposals were made that would increase employment opportunities for local people, at the expense of British and other outsiders, as well as proposals for promoting business and hence prosperity in the region. One proposal was to set up "Anti-Terrorist League" cells in other parts of Bengal, and Laden La was approached to be President for the Darjeeling Cell. He took over this new responsibility willingly, as he supported the objectives, in particular those that involved working for the prosperity of the hill people. Apart from the attempt on the Governor's life at Lebong, terrorism was never a problem in the Darjeeling hills¹⁰⁴.

There were some disappointments in his family life. Foremost perhaps was his eldest son Sonam Tobgay (Tom), who was educated in Britain, first at School and then at an engineering course at Glasgow. A sensitive boy, he must have been very lonely, away from his family for such a long period, and while at Glasgow, Tom had learned to drink alcohol. As a result, after he returned to Darjeeling in 1930, he never managed to establish himself, and sadly died in 1935. In about 1931, his second daughter, Doma (Dolly), aged barely sixteen, had married the promising young lawyer, Tenzing Wangdi¹⁰⁵, but the couple were not compatible, and the marriage ultimately broke up and both remarried.

One family problem that caused SWL much anguish at this time concerned Lucy. Lucy was the daughter of Yeshay Dolma, the adopted daughter of Ugyen Gyatso. By 1922, when Lucy was aged twelve, Ugyen Gyatso and both of his widows had died, as had Lucy's parents. SWL then adopted Lucy into his family and educated her with his own daughters. When SWL was in Tibet in 1930, Lucy eloped and when she returned, some outsiders persuaded her to sue Laden La, alledging maltreatment and being denied her inheritance. In 1933 the case came to court in Calcutta, and created considerable publicity. Initially Laden La had great faith in the legal system, but after a year, it was clear that the objective of the prosecution was to string out the case, by calling witnesses who were merely trying to damage Laden La's reputation in the community. Lucy also realised that others were shamelessly using her for their own purposes, without any regard to her own sensitivities. Arbitration seemed the best solution, and a panel of arbiters was appointed, chaired by the Rhenock

104 Some residents of the Darjeeling Hills did get involved with the Independence Movement, but never to the extent of disturbing the peace in the hills themselves. (cf Biswas & Roy (2003), pp.49-51)

105 Tenzing Wangdi eventually became a member of the Legislative Assembly of Bengal in the 1950's.

Athing from Sikkim, and including several respected members of the Darjeeling community, including Injung Sardar from Kurseong. The panel did not take long to reach a conclusion, and decided that there had been no mistreatment, a financial settlement was agreed, and the court cases were dropped. Among the witnesses to the final Agreement was the talented young lawyer, Mr Rup Narayan Sinha, whom Lucy later married. SWL was pleased to draw a line under this unhappy episode, but it had taken a toll on his health.

Laden La's younger grown-up sons, Wangchuk Dorji (Willie) and Palsang (Pat), were a great help and support with their father's numerous activities at this time. Wangchuk Dorji was an Honorary Magistrate, and was quite active in the community¹⁰⁶. Palsang (Pat) acted as his father's secretary, and was also a talented photographer. He had learned the skills of developing and printing at the studio set up by John Noel to process the films sent back from the 1924 Everest expedition. He practised his skills in later years and made a collection of glass plates, lantern slides, prints and films. Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) was a very spirited character, and her husband Chimi Tenduf La was a senior Honorary Magistrate and a very energetic member of the community¹⁰⁷. In this way the whole family supported Laden La in his many political and social activities.

From his second wife, Laden La had three lively daughters, and a young son who was at school at St Joseph's North Point. During his frequent absence from home, and even in his retirement, with his very busy life, Laden La was not able to spend enough time with his children. Their upbringing was largely left to his second wife, but they all loved him very dearly, and relied on him entirely to resolve all their problems.

Politics also proved frustrating, and there was increasing tension between the growing Nepalese population, and the other inhabitants of Darjeeling, which was not what Laden La had strived for. As the historian and sociologist Tanka Subba says, "a cursory glance at the various memoranda... indicated a tremendous strain that Laden La, the key figure in the region until the mid 1930's, had taken to keep the Hillmen's Association true to its name. It was his status as "Sardar Bahadur" and the respect he wielded among Nepalis that enabled him to stop this Association from turning into a Gorkha association"¹⁰⁸. In December 1934 he organised a meeting in Darjeeling, attended by about 600 people from all over the District, with the express intention of resolving the internal disputes between the three hill communities, the Nepalis,

106 After his father's death, Wangchuk Dorji obtained a commission in the Army, and eventually became Officer Commanding the Gurkha Recruiting Depot at Katapahar.

107 He later became President of the Hillmens Association and was appointed Rai Bahadur.

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the Bhutias and the Lepchas. After that meeting, Parasmani Pradhan proposed the establishment of the Hill Peoples Social Union, and in February 1935 they published a magazine called NEBULA (short for Nepali-Bhutia-Lapche). The petition submitted by the Hillmen's Association in 1934, had recommended that Darjeeling should not be incorporated as part of Bengal, but should have a separate status¹⁰⁹. However, the Government of India Act of 1935, ignored these petitions, and Darjeeling was integrated into Bengal, as a "partially excluded area", and at the same time it was decided that a representative from Darjeeling should sit in the Bengal Legislative Assembly. Although this was certainly not what Laden La had wanted, he decided to stand in this first election¹¹⁰. He campaigned hard, under the banner of NEBULA, the motto of the Hill People's Union. He hoped that, if elected, he would be able to fight for all the hill people of Darjeeling, and he had many supporters in the district.

The aims and objectives of the Hill People's Social Union, which was effectively the manifesto under which he fought the election, were:-

- a) To foster brotherhood and to augment further the existing tie of social unity among the different Hill-people, viz. The Nepalese, the Bhutias and the Lepchas;
- b) To promote social intercourse among the different sections of the different Hill-people, with a view to bringing about their general upliftment and to encourage the growth of education among them;
- c) To provide facilities for recreation – indoor and outdoor, in the towns in particular and in the district in general;
- d) To help the members during difficulties and distress and also, should the occasion arise, to help others in need;
- e) To afford shelter and accommodation for members and guests, wherever there is a local branch of the Union;
- f) To start an Unemployment Bureau;
- g) To educate public opinion among the Hill-people to learn to compose their differences among themselves.

108 Tanka Subba (1992), pp.80-81.

109 In October 1930, the "Gurkhas settled and domiciled in India" had submitted a similar petition to the Secretary of State for India – for the full text see Wangyal(2002), pp.232-34.

110 The other candidates were Rai Saheb Hariprasad Pradhan and Mr Gyan Tshering, both of Darjeeling; and Mr Dambar Singh Gurung of Kalimpong, who was elected after Laden La's death.

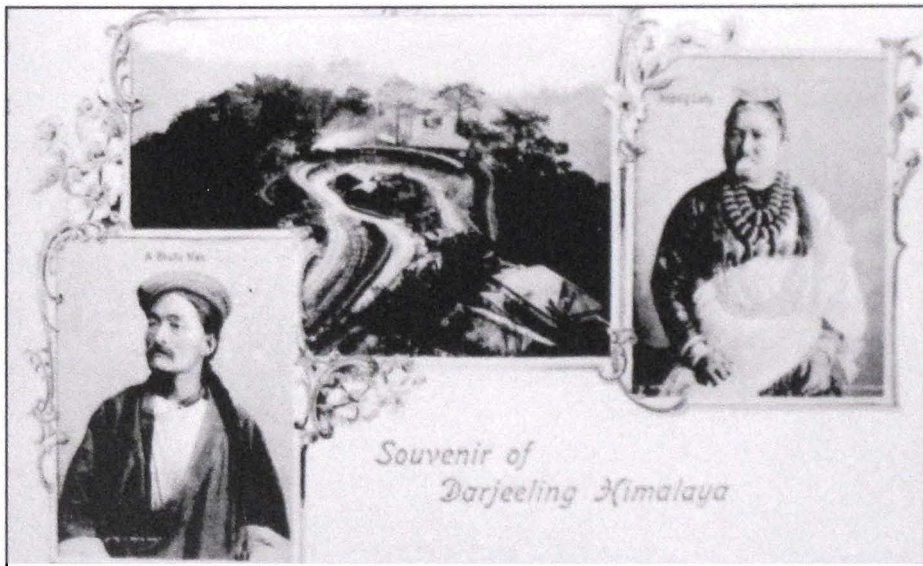
The election was to be held early in January 1937, and on Christmas Day 1936, he made the journey to canvas for votes in Kalimpong. As he left his house in Darjeeling, his younger children remember chanting "Ne-Bu-La, Ne-Bu-La, Ne-Bu-La..." until he was out of earshot. In Kalimpong, he received a very warm reception from his supporters, and he made a fine speech, but it must have been all too much for his health. That night, without any warning, he died in his sleep at the age of sixty.

In pleasant memory of a brief meeting at
Allahabad and with all fond wishes for an
enduring friendship between Tibet and India.

Nov 15th 1931

Jawaharlal Nehru

Signature of Pandit Nehru in Laden La's autograph book



Chapter 17

Epilogue

Laden La's death in Kalimpong in December 1936 was a tremendous shock, both to the family and to the community. He was on the threshold of a new career and overnight, suddenly, a light was snuffed out. Over three thousand people of Kalimpong, assembled to pay him their last homage, when his body was carried in a motorcar from Kalimpong to Darjeeling. His funeral, which was held with full Police honours, was the largest ever seen in Darjeeling, with the cortège stretching for well over a mile. Mr Percival Griffiths, the Deputy Commissioner¹¹¹, joined the funeral procession and attended the cremation ceremony at Ghoom Monastery.

In conclusion, it is worth considering the contribution that Laden La made in both Darjeeling and Tibet. Sir Alfred Croft's educational experiment that commenced when Laden La was placed in a European school can be regarded, in retrospect, as having been a success. Laden La played a significant role in developing good relations between British India and Tibet, after the watershed represented by the military expedition, led by Sir Francis Younghusband. The way that Laden La was able to relate with both the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama, and with the Tibetan officials during their visits to India, convinced the Tibetan Government that British India was a friendly neighbour. Although there was a setback in this relationship after 1924, Laden La should be given much credit for the reestablishment of good relations in 1930.

Laden La's contributions were not restricted to Tibetan affairs. As a senior officer in the Imperial Police, his main role was to maintain law and order in the Darjeeling Hills, and he was very successful in that regard. During his lifetime, Darjeeling remained peaceful and prosperous. He worked with the local people and he understood their aspirations, and in particular he tried his utmost to achieve autonomy for the Darjeeling Hills.

Perhaps the achievements that gave him most satisfaction were his work regarding the social and religious life of Darjeeling. He was instrumental in founding several Buddhist Monasteries and he established organisations caring for the welfare of children. He worked tirelessly to maintain good relations between the various communities that lived in Darjeeling, based on the principle of ensuring that each community retained, and was proud of, its religious and cultural identity.

111 Some years ago our cousin Sherab Tenduf met Sir Percival Griffiths in London, who warmly remembered our grandfather and remarked that "Laden La examined me in the Tibetan language, and declared me 'passed'".

His philosophy is best summarised by a quotation we have found in his handwriting, signed and dated 19th August 1923, and with his square Tibetan seal attached:-

“A loving heart is the great requirement! To regard the people as an only son; not to oppress, not to destroy; not to exalt oneself by treading down others, but to comfort and befriend those in suffering. To think no evil and do none; on the contrary to benefit all creatures.”

This was on one of the first pages of the autograph book kept by his daughter, Phurpa Lhamu (Mary), when she visited Lhasa. Everything that we have read about our grandfather indicates that he did indeed live by these precepts.

As we researched our grandfather's life, we realised what a remarkable man he was for that era and how much he had accomplished in his short life of sixty years. We respect his scholarly youth and the enthusiasm with which he embarked on his career, and how, with his deep religious faith, he tackled the adversities he faced. He was a natural leader and a man of action, who took control of situations. He always behaved in a straightforward manner, which left him open to the “slings and arrows” of the few who resented his success – he lacked a certain cunning. He was an ambitious man, with considerable panache. Some people have sought to criticise him for often wearing European dress, but so did most Indian officers and administrators at that time, and he also often wore traditional dress. With his influence in the Darjeeling hills, the British of course used him to further their own ends, but we feel that he honestly believed that everything he did was for the best, in terms of fighting for the development and prosperity of all the hill people and in fostering good relations between Tibet and British India. His official position brought with it many duties and responsibilities, but we believe that he was never forced to sacrifice his integrity.

Although he achieved tremendous success during his lifetime, before it was so tragically cut short, he must have been disappointed with some aspects of his life. He did not manage to achieve an autonomous Darjeeling. Also, in some ways, he was more successful in his professional career than as a family man, as is so often the case with such public figures. However, his achievements far outweigh his disappointments. He was an outstanding personality among the hill people of Darjeeling at the time, and we can only dream over what he might have achieved had he been elected as a member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly. In many ways he was a larger than life character who did not conceal his talents.

Our grandfather interacted comfortably between cultures and people of all social levels, and he would have smiled to see his descendants today, who have become truly global citizens.

**Report from S.W. Laden La on Observatory Hill
Dated Kalimpong, 9th May 1912**

Dear Sir,

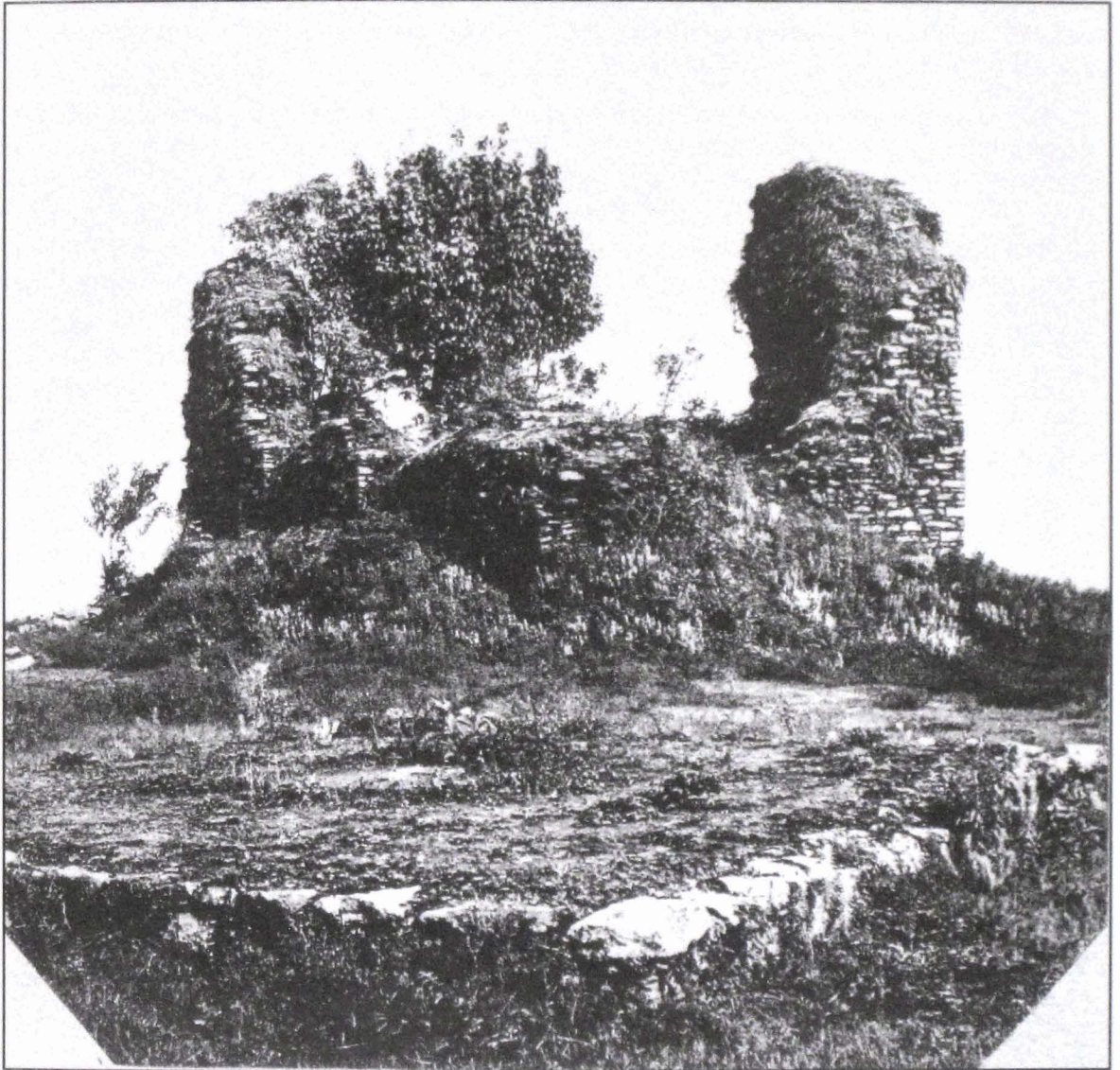
In obedience to your verbal order of the 2nd inst., I beg to submit below a small report re. Observatory Hill.

There was a Buddhist Monastery (The head lama of this Monastery was my great grand uncle) on the top of the Observatory Hill. This was a branch of the Dorling Monastery in Sikkim. The name of the Lama who founded this monastery was Dorje-Ling-Pa¹, and therefore this monastery was named after the founder Lama as Dorje-Ling Gompa or monastery. This monastery was destroyed by the Gorkhas in 1788 when they overran Darjeeling (then in Sikkim) – Jar Singh was the Nepalese Commander. The monastery was rebuilt on the same spot² and subsequently removed to the Bhutia Busti³ in Pon-lop Lhon-dhup's time. The old site was used by the Buddhists as a place of great sanctity and they make quaint offerings and libations there and set up religious flags - especially on the 3rd, 5th, 8th, 10th, 15th and 30th of each Tibetan month. They worship the Country God or guardian of the temples who is supposed to have been living on the old monastery site before man.

When I was a school-boy about 25 years ago, I remember having seen the remains of the wall of the old monastery on the spot where the Buddhists worship at present.

At that time we could scarcely see any castes than the Buddhists and a few Nepalese went up there to worship. The Nepalese used to say that they went up there to worship Dorje Gompa, i.e. the thunderbolt monastery. Some years after that I saw some Nepalese sacrificing goats, fowls and pigeons. This practice being against the Buddhist religion, Raja Paljor (?) with some Darjeeling Buddhists moved

- 1 Presumably the famous Nyingmapa tertön or treasure revealer, who lived in the fourteenth century. He was reputedly born in the Tang Valley in Bumthang, Bhutan, where his descendants still live.
- 2 According to E.C.Dozey (*A Concise History of Darjeeling District since 1835*, Calcutta 1922), the Monastery was rebuilt about 1860/1 on the flat area to the north-east of St Andrews Church, and finally to Bhutia Busti in 1878/9.
- 3 It seems much more likely that the monastery was moved to Ging in 1879, when the land at Ging was granted to the monks of Pemayangtse Monastery for the construction of a monastery (cf copy of Freehold Grant dated 28th Feb. 1879, signed by R.W. Walker, Dy. Commissioner, on the wall of Windamere Hotel). The monastery of Bhutia Busti is linked, not to Pemayangtse, but to the Pedong Monastery near Gangtok. A notice board at Ging Monastery refers to its establishment in 1818, but that must refer to when it was refounded St Andrews's church after the restoration of Darjeeling to the Sikkimese after the treaty of Titalya in 1817.



Ruins of the Monastery on Observatory Hill, Darjeeling; photograph taken — c1860

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the matter to the Deputy Commissioner (Mr Earle?) who stopped the practice of sacrificing and a chowkidar named Pento was employed to look after this, and the surrounding jungle. I think the chowkidar was paid from the Municipal D.I. Fund. Some papers in connection with this may be found from the office from which Pento was first employed as Chowkidar.

About fifteen years ago, three Hindu jogis occupied the upper cave, near the round pavilion. They were turned out by the police, for reasons not known to me. Since then the Marwaris, Baharis, Bengalis and other plainsmen were seen visiting the place and offering sweets, pan leaves and nuts and also placing cash money in front of the figured stones and the place of worship and gradually many of the plains people visited the place during the night. They say they go there to worship Mahakal Baba. I don't know how they came to know that there is a Mahakal Baba on the top of Observatory Hill.

The present site is purely a Buddhist sacred place, which is adjoined to the cave below. This cave, which is reputed to lead to the three Buddhist sacred caves in Sikkim and also to Lhasa. I remember seeing some Buddhist hermits occupying the cave some fifteen or twenty years ago.

There is also a chorten commonly known as the Chaitya or "receptacle of offerings" on the south end of the Hill. This chorten was on a ridge near the Snuggery House just behind the Chowrastha pavilion. As it was necessary to make the road broader behind the pavilion, the small hill had to be cut down; in doing so the then Deputy Commissioner, I think Mr Greer, called the leaders of the Buddhists, who gave their consent to its removal to its present site – I think the cost was met by the Government. This Chorten contains sacred images and scriptures and the Buddhists who visit Observatory Hill go round the Chorten and utter sacred words.

Last year a Nepali Brahmin, on public subscription, purchased a large bell, which is now in use by the Hindus at the place of worship. We now see a couple of Hindu Brahmins sitting the whole day near this place and they take away the offering that is offered there by the Hindus. This place is gradually turning into a Hindu sacred place. The Hindus visit the place even at midnight and ring the bell, which is a nuisance. There are stones bearing the figures of Country-Gods or Guardians. These stones are being disfigured by the red paint of the Hindus.

As stated above, the Buddhist people offer libations, which is against the Hindu religion, as they are supposed not to touch wine, but so far they have made no objections.

I think it would be better to stop the Hindus going during the night and to stop the Hindu Brahmins being there the whole day, as they might hereafter turn the place into a resort for income and gradually this may increase in numbers. They should only be allowed to go there during the day as the Buddhists do, to prevent nuisance.

Letter from Chogyal Sidkeong Namgyal Camp Kalimpong, 8th Nov. 1914

Dear Mr Laden La,

Yours of the 30th Oct. 14 just arrived before I started on Camp with Mr Bell for Kalimpong. He goes on to Nepal, but I am returning to Gangtok from here.

Yes, it was a sudden change. I was also very much surprised to learn that you are transferred to Jalpaiguri and Mr Gould to Punjab, as I was quite certain that you both were going back to Gyantse. We miss Mr Gould very much indeed, but I earnestly hope that we may have the fortune to have him in Sikkim as our Pol. Agent some day, before long. We all like him very much, as he was not only an energetic, able officer, but he has shown himself very kind and sympathetic to everybody.

I am so glad you had a talk with Lonchen Shatra about the piece of land at Chumbi and that Lonchen Shatra spoke to you favourably about the question. I have just sent off Rhenock Kazi to Lhasa with a representation to the Kashak, Lonchen Shatra, Shokhang, Chikhyab Khenpo & to the Dalai Lama for the price of our land at Chumbi and I hope the Tibetan authorities will reconsider our case, though I do not expect much from them. Anyhow, I will let you know when I hear the result.

It has not been settled when I shall go to Burma. According to the present situation I am afraid I shall not be able to go down to Burma this year, and I doubt also about coming to the N.B.M.Rifle* Camp in Feb. next, although I am very anxious to come.

I am very busy at present making preparation for the Durbar which is going to come off in Feb. next (a rejoicing ceremony of my accession to the Gadi), and I hope you will be able to come to it too.

Yours sincerely

Sidkeong Namgyal

(signed)

* The North Bengal Mounted Rifles were a volunteer corps with officers consisting mainly of tea planters from Darjeeling and from the Dooars

Bhutan Sikkim Wedding¹

The Darjeeling Advertiser, 16 April 1918

Beyond affecting the parties concerned, the wedding of the Maharaj Kumari of Sikkim with Kumar S.T.Dorji has a broader significance in that it draws the two states of Sikkim and Bhutan into closer relationship, for the bridegroom is the Prime Minister of Bhutan and the British Agent to that State at the same time. The match is moreover between two highly educated and advanced representatives of both countries.

The princess is the only surviving sister of the present Maharaja of Sikkim and was educated at a convent somewhere up-country. She speaks English with a nice accent, is accomplished, pretty and about nineteen years old. The Kumar is the son of the late lamented Raja Ugyen Dorji Bahadur, who was also Prime Minister of Bhutan. The Kumar was educated at St Paul's School in Darjeeling and though only twenty-one years old has been called upon to bear the burdens of a responsible office. That two such progressive young people should be drawn together was therefore natural.

When I wrote last week that Kalimpong was in the midst of festivities connected with the wedding, I of course meant that the Bhutan Durbar House and its vicinity were the centre of the busy scene. But though the house is quite a few miles removed from the Kalimpong Bazaar, the excitement spread to every corner of the town, everyone old and young, big and small, being invited and welcome at the feast and ceremonies and daily some five or six hundred being entertained. The obtaining of provision alone for such entertainments was a huge undertaking, especially when it is understood that according to Tibetan custom a feast is more than merely partaking of a meal at a stated time, but a continual serving of refreshments while the guests are watching some show.

But apart from the expense involved in the entertaining and the arrangement for the same by a host of attendants, the magnificence of the spectacles and the decorations, apart from the jewellery worn, must have been a most costly affair and then it has to be remembered that the festivities lasted for a number of days though on Friday, the 5th instant, the actual marriage took place. That was the auspicious day according to the Lamas or priests both for the Princess and her brother the Maharaja who was invested on the 5th with the full powers of a ruling Chief at

1 Our respectful thanks to Her Majesty, Ashi Kesang Wangchuck, the Queen Mother of Bhutan, for graciously sending us a copy of this account of the wedding of her parents.

Gangtok. The Princess had, indeed to leave Gangtok also on an auspicious day and was in consequence obliged to kill time on the way to Kalimpong. On the morning of the 5th before 8 o'clock, the bridegroom's party went forth to bring in the bride from Echa camp, Sardar Bahadar Laden La heading the deputation.

The procession with the bride wending its way to the Bhutan Durbar House was about a mile long, I watched it with peculiar pleasure. First came Bhutanese musical bands from Sikkim and Kalimpong, who were in turn followed by a pipe band. Next walked fifty boys with flags, followed by Pao dancers. Riflemen marched after them, and behind these were our mundals and people of Kalimpong followed by those from Darjeeling and Sikkim – all in gay costumes. But the gentry who came next made a still more brilliant show in their richly oriental dresses. Mr Laden La in the full dress of a Deputy Superintendent of Police preceded the bride's sedan, which was surrounded by the Councillors from Sikkim and half a dozen orderlies. Four bridesmaids rode on ponies after the sedan, followed by fully a hundred officials and men from Sikkim. I also saw Dr. Graham in the procession and Dr. Sutherland, who had fallen out to take a few photos.

At the gate of Bhutan House was a group of Tibetan chanters, and in the courtyard others blowing conch shells. At some distance were found the waiting bridegroom and his mother. The bride having alighted from the sedan was led by Mr. Laden La and the Councillors into the house, but before entering a curious ceremony was observed. The bride had to touch a heap of bags containing various kinds of grains for the purpose of bringing prosperity to Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet. The bags were covered with cloths and silks to represent the industries of these places. Some ten feet away stood girls with cups containing some spirit into which the people dipped their fingers, and then there were other emblems of good luck such as a huge utensil of water, also flour and cakes in other vessels. The procession passed through the sacred room, where the Dalai Lama had resided when he was in Kalimpong, and having there received the blessing of a Lama the bride was led into the audience hall.

The bride was then led up to take her seat on the right of the bridegroom and the Great Lama from Chumbi having pronounced them to be man and wife bestowed on them scarfs. The bride looked pretty in her rich costume. Over the head and face she wore a five coloured silk veil. She was dressed in white and yellow brocade with Mongolian pattern boots. On the head she wore coral and turquoise, her head ornament being studded with pearls, diamonds, emeralds and rubies. From her person were suspended by jewelled strings two big gold charm-boxes. Her belt was stringed with pearls, and among other ornaments she had on the back attached to her plaited hair a big one of turquoise and pearls. The bridesmaids were also richly attired, and the scene was a brilliant one with the Councillors and others of high

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rank sitting in the bridal group, while the Lamas in their clerical attire introduced a pleasant variety.

Having partaken of tea, the happy couple began to receive felicitations and presents from a host of people, but as it lasted from 11 AM to 2 to 2.30 in the afternoon, this part of the proceedings had to be postponed to another day, and I pitied Mr. Laden La, on whom fell the duty of placing the scarfs which accompanied each present on the happy couple. First came the messenger from the Dalai Lama with gifts. The Maharaja of Bhutan's presents were also tendered by a messenger, while those of the Maharaja of Sikkim were offered by one of the Councillors. Next came scarfs from the Lamas, then Mr. Laden La made presentations on behalf of the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, the Sub-Divisional Officer of Kalimpong, the Superintendent of Police and from himself, also as president of the Buddhist Community of Darjeeling on their behalf. After the fashion of English weddings, he took the opportunity of making a speech to propose the health of the couple saying that the bridegroom was indeed a fortunate man in having secured the jewel of Sikkim.

In the afternoon a feast was held for some 500 people and entertainments consisting of the Chinese dragon dance, the cloud dance, the Tibetan lion dance, the peacock, the buffalo and the paper pony dances, also a theatrical performance by the Himalayan Children's Amusement Association of Darjeeling. On Saturday there were Tibetan dances and feasts to boys and girls. On Sunday the giving of presents and scarfs was resumed in the forenoon, and more theatricals held in the evening with feasting, about half the retinue from Sikkim returning that day. Of the entertainments on other days I have already written, the Europeans being invited to a Garden Party and the children of the Homes also entertained. A word must be added in praise of the widowed Rani, the mother of the bridegroom, who was most anxious that everything should be done well and also to the Kumar who showed so much hospitality. My account is just a statement of events as they happened, but hardly brings out the picturesque Tibetan or Bhutanese effects of the celebrations which would require illustrations to make clear.

To

The Right Honourable Edwin Montague

His Majesty's Secretary of State for India

The Humble Memorial of the Hillmen of Darjeeling.

Dated, Darjeeling, the 11th February, 1920

Respectfully Sheweth :

That on the 7th December, 1917, His Excellency the Viceroy and Your Honour graciously received at Calcutta a deputation from the Darjeeling District, on the subject of the Reforms.

We have only recently seen a copy of the Ninth Despatch on Indian Constitutional Reforms sent to you by the Government of India (dated 5th June, 1919) and we have learned with great apprehension and disappointment that the Government of India, while not making their final recommendation, propose that the Darjeeling District should be partially excluded from the Reform Scheme and be treated as a "Backward Tract".

We, therefore, crave the liberty of again approaching you on the subject.

It appears to us that our case has been somewhat obscured by including it in the Despatch under "Backward Tracts", and our prayer for separation from Bengal has been misunderstood as regards exclusion from the general Reform Scheme. We had merely prayed for the creation of a New Hill Province of our own with fullest possible measure of Reform Scheme as granted elsewhere in India. As regards the inclusion to our District among "Backward Tracts", we disclaim the description altogether. In some respects ours is an advanced Tract and is in no way inferior to any other community, our people are as vigorous as any under the Government of India, the percentage of the literate population is well above the average for the Presidency. We would, therefore, emphasize our desire for the fullest possible measure of the Reform Scheme to enable us to contribute most effectively to the welfare of India and the British Empire.

As shewn in detail in our address of the 5th December, 1917, we live in a different world from the people of Bengal proper. There is no affinity between them and us. They differ from us geographically, racially, historically, religiously and linguistically. It is only the accident of the common British domination during the last few decades which has linked us together politically.

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We respectfully ask that at the present time, when the question of our political future is being determined, we should be granted the recognised right of self-determination. We do not wish to be dominated by the people of the plains. We are sure that if we were, we would be swamped by the millions of Bengal and our own people would not get their own rightful place in the Government of their own country. While the plainsmen could and would occupy posts in the Hills, we from reasons of health could not successfully compete for positions in the plains. We humbly submit that it would be a violation of the spirit of the age to compel us to submit to what would be to us an alien Government.

The comparatively small population of our district may be urged as an argument against constituting it a separate unit. But our population is increasing at a phenomenal rate and it is more for our descendants than for ourselves that we are so earnest in the matter. Moreover, if our original proposal be adopted, viz., that the portion of the Jalpaiguri District which (along with the Kalimpong Sub-Division) was annexed from Bhutan in 1865, should be excluded from Jalpaiguri and included in our unit, then, we should have a population about as large as that of New Zealand.

We regret that the Government of Bengal has not recommended the separation of this portion of the Jalpaiguri District. We would with all deference pray that this decision should be reconsidered. We do not ask for any Bengali speaking district. We only claim the tract to the East of the River Teesta known as the Dooars which is the region of the Tea Gardens. The Southern part of the Jalpaiguri District, where there is a preponderating Bengali population, and also the part to the west of the Teesta should rightly be attached to Bengal. But the Dooars is peopled by non-Bengalis. In addition to the hill people there are according to the Government of Bengal the Rajbansis and the Mechis. The former are a Mongoloid race and the latter are of Mongolian origin, and historically they belong to Bhutan and Sikkim. The Tea Garden coolies come from Behar and Orissa and in the use of Hindi, as the common language used by them in their intercourse with others, as well as in other matters they have more affinity with the hills than with Bengal.

The Government of Bengal urge that there is no great affinity between the Jalpaiguri District and Darjeeling. We hold on the contrary that there is a very close affinity, especially between the Dooars and the Terai. The population of both is composed of practically the same races. Both tracts have the same geographical relation to the Darjeeling district, occupying the plateau at the foot of the mountains. Both were annexed by the British Government from Hill Kingdoms. Instead of its position precluding it (as the Government of Bengal say) "from being conveniently joined on to Darjeeling" there is in our opinion the most natural connection between the two districts. With the development of the present roads and railways, Darjeeling, Kurseong, Siliguri and Kalimpong would be brought within a few hours of the Dooars.

We would anew refer to the suggestion to establish a North Eastern Province. Such it seems to us would be a source of safety for Bengal. Our District and people are intimately bound up with the neighbouring States of Nepal, Independent Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan, which surround us on three sides and whose history has been associated with States still further North. Their future development and connections are of vital importance to India as a whole but peculiarly to us. It is, therefore, desirable that the administration of this district should be in intimate associations with those who look after the foreign relations of the States with India. It is this consideration which led us to suggest the formation of a North Eastern Province (to include also the Himalayan tracks to the East of Bhutan) which would be in direct touch with the Government of India.

The strategic position of this corner of India would further thereby be strengthened, as it would ensure us to maintain a distinctiveness and act for the interest of the Empire, either offensively or defensively, as the hill people have loyally done in the past without the risk of coming under any baneful political influence that may be found in other parts of the country.

In conclusion we anxiously pray :

(1). That a New Province of our own be created adding the portion of the Dooars as suggested above.

(2). That we may not be deprived of the rights so graciously conferred upon all India by His Imperial Majesty the King-Emperor by granting the New Reform Scheme as the first step towards the realization of complete self-government.

We are certain that if this our right is denied us our natural development will be seriously impaired and that the seeds of trouble will be sown for future generations. The lessons taught by Ireland are eloquent in this connection. The people of Bengal and the great majority of the people of our District belong to entirely different branches of the family of nations.

And as in duty bound your memorialists will ever pray.

Opening of A Tamang Buddhist Gompa

Article from *The Darjeeling Times* – 20th April 1929

“An interesting ceremony took place in the Lower Beechwood Estate last Thursday the 18th, when the “Gomba” created by the Tamang Buddhist community was opened by Sir P.C.Mitter, K.T., C.I.E., Member of Excellency the Governor of Bengal’s Executive Council.

By mid-day the precincts of the building were crowded with a large gathering who had assembled to witness the opening ceremony. On arrival Sir P.C. Mitter was received by the President, Sardar Bahadur S.W.Laden La, the Vice-President and the Secretary of the Association and conducted to the chair where he was scarved by the attendant lamas with a scarf of greeting.

After chanting of prayers for welfare of Their Majesties, Their Excellencies the Governor and Lady Jackson and the Hon’ble Members, the President read an account of the Tamang Buddhist Association and the founding of the monastery being opened that day. In the couse of his address the Sardar Bahadur referred to the origin of the Tamang community and related how the community received its name. It appears that the ancestors of the Tamangs owned many ponies and while travelling from Tibet to Nepal were asked by the Nepali village headmen who they were and to what caste they belonged. The Tamangs thinking that the inquiry was in connection with trade, replied in the Tibetan language that they had for sale many ponies or in other words “Tamang”. The Nepali headmen thought they were of the Tamang caste and the name has stuck to them ever since.

Continuing he said that there are many Buddhist Monasteries in Nepal exclusively controlled by Tamang Lamas who go on periodical visits to Tibet to obtain religious instruction. Darjeeling has some 4,000 people of the Tamang faith and it was felt that that number required some sort of organisation for the benefit of the community and the promoters of the movement, Babu Singman Singh and the speaker, with the assistance of Munshi Gokal Singh Tamang, Vice-President, the late Babu Pratap Singh Tamang, Secretary, Lama Ugen Chemi, Babu Kalu Singh Tamang, Babu Dirga Singh Tamang, Babu Palden Tamang and others founded the Tamang Buddhist Association in Darjeeling in 1923 with a banch at Kurseong. The Association flourished with the help of Tamang gentlemen and Buddhists of different nationalities and many of the faith all over India joined the Association and through the united efforts of them, the monastery had been built where Tamangs meet together in the name of the Great Lord Buddha.

The building contains three Images of the past, present and the coming Buddha with the Buddha's Commandments and Scriptures. On the ground floor there is the Image of Guru Rimpoche, incarnation of the Lord Buddha, who was born out of a lotus flower in the Rawalswar Lake in the Mandi Raj (Punjab) and was the founder of Buddhism in Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. There are also Images of the God of Love, Chen-re-zi (Ava-loki-ta-swa-ra in Sanskrit) and other divinities. The monastery belongs to the red sect of which Guru Rimpoche is the founder.

In conclusion, the Sardar Bahadur thanked the Hindu gentlemen and others who have contributed to the funds of the Association mentioning particularly Munshi Gokul Singh Tamang, who erected the building at his own expense and donated a sum of Rs.5,000; Ugen Chimi Lama Tamang for his donation and other material help at a cost of above Rs.9,700 and to the City athers for selling the land at a nominal sum.

He also expressed gratitude to the Hon'ble Sir P.C.Mitter for his active sympathy in consenting to open the monastery, and his name will be cherished by all Buddhists for this graceful act.

Sir P.C.Mitter in a few well chosen words congratulated the community on their courage and determination in erecting the monastery for their spiritual welfare and he hoped that the community would prosper in every way in the future.

All the guests were later given an opportunity of going over the building and inspecting the various images and apartments in the 'Gomba', and were entertained with light refreshments before leaving."

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A Man of the Frontier

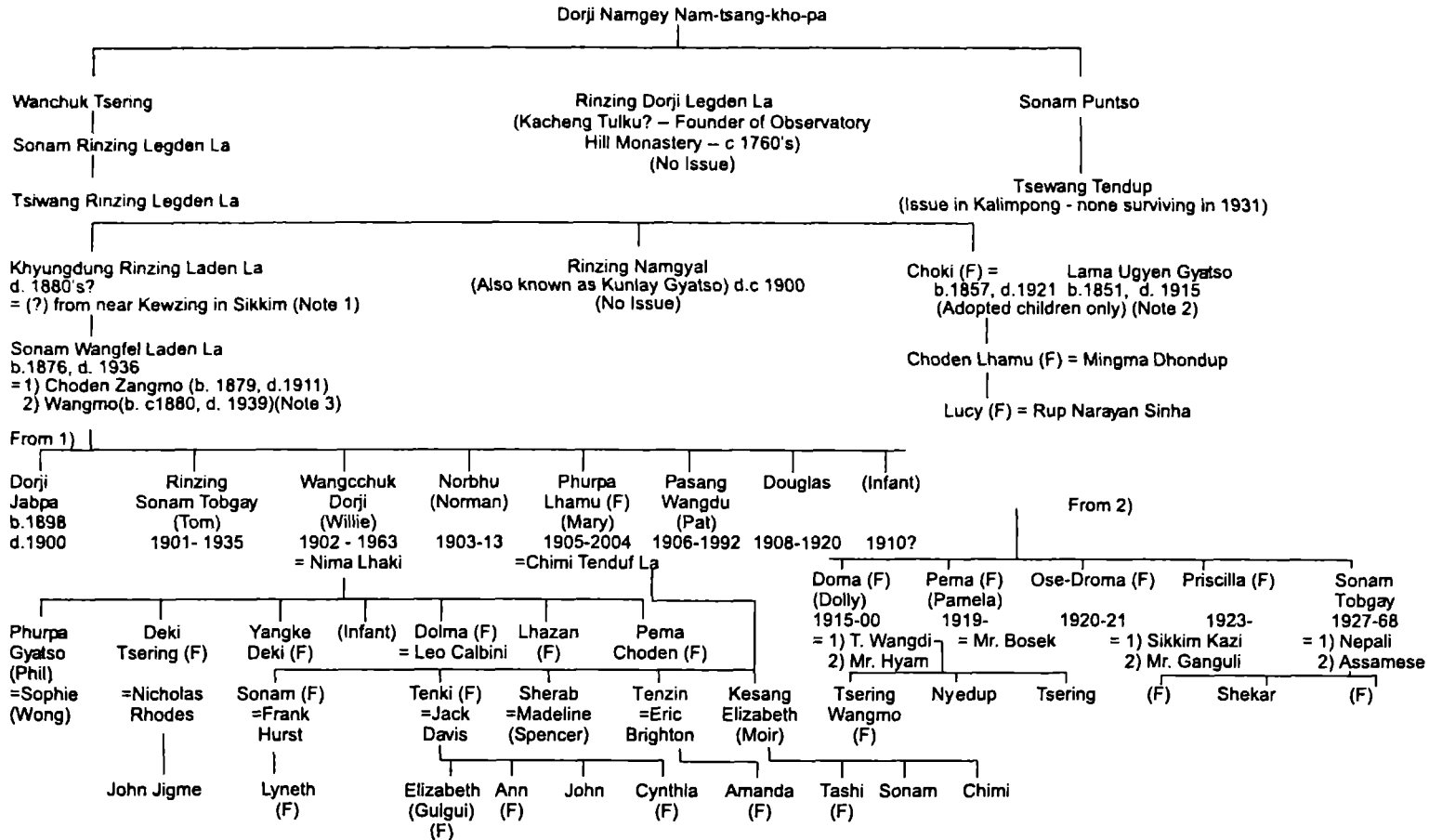
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1 In Biswas & Roy (2003), p.133, the date of publication is incorrectly given as 7th Sept. 1930.

Laden La Family Tree

Appendix 7



68

Notes. 1. Her brother's son was Ashang Lhatu, Head Lama of Doling Monastery in Sikkim until the 1950's.
 2. Lama Ugyen Gyatso married, as a 2nd wife, Chang Chub Dolma. He then adopted his brother's son, Boong Thoob, who resided in Yangang in Sikkim.
 3. Sister of Choden Wangmo. Another sister married Mr Shempa. They had 3 daughters, of which two married Mr. T.N. Pulger of Kami.



Group of young Bhutias, Laden La, standing right - 1890's



Ani Choki - Darjeeling - c1910



Lama Ugyen Gyatso with his 2nd wife, Chang Chub Dolma - c1900

Lama Sherab Gyatso - c1900

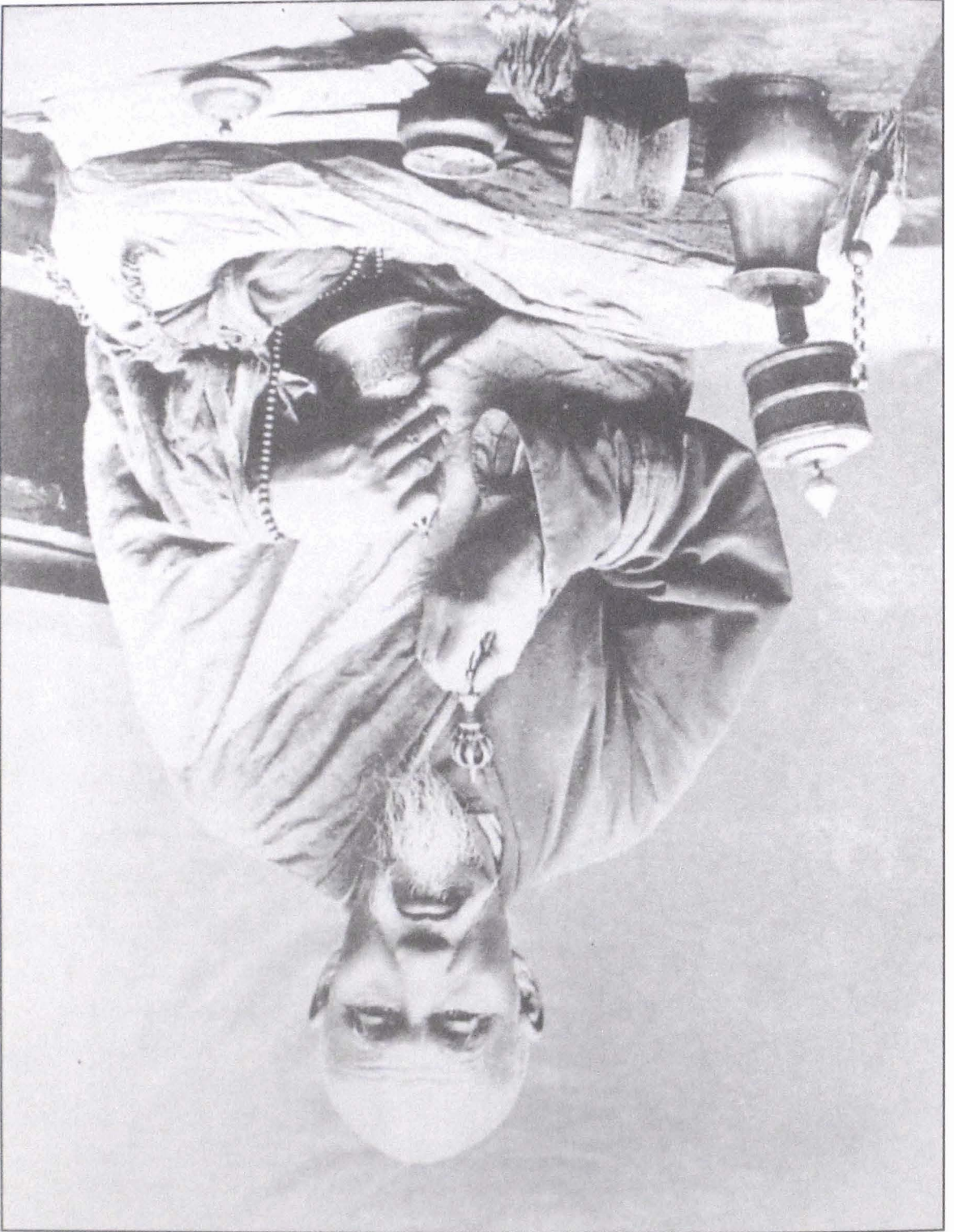


PLATE - 4



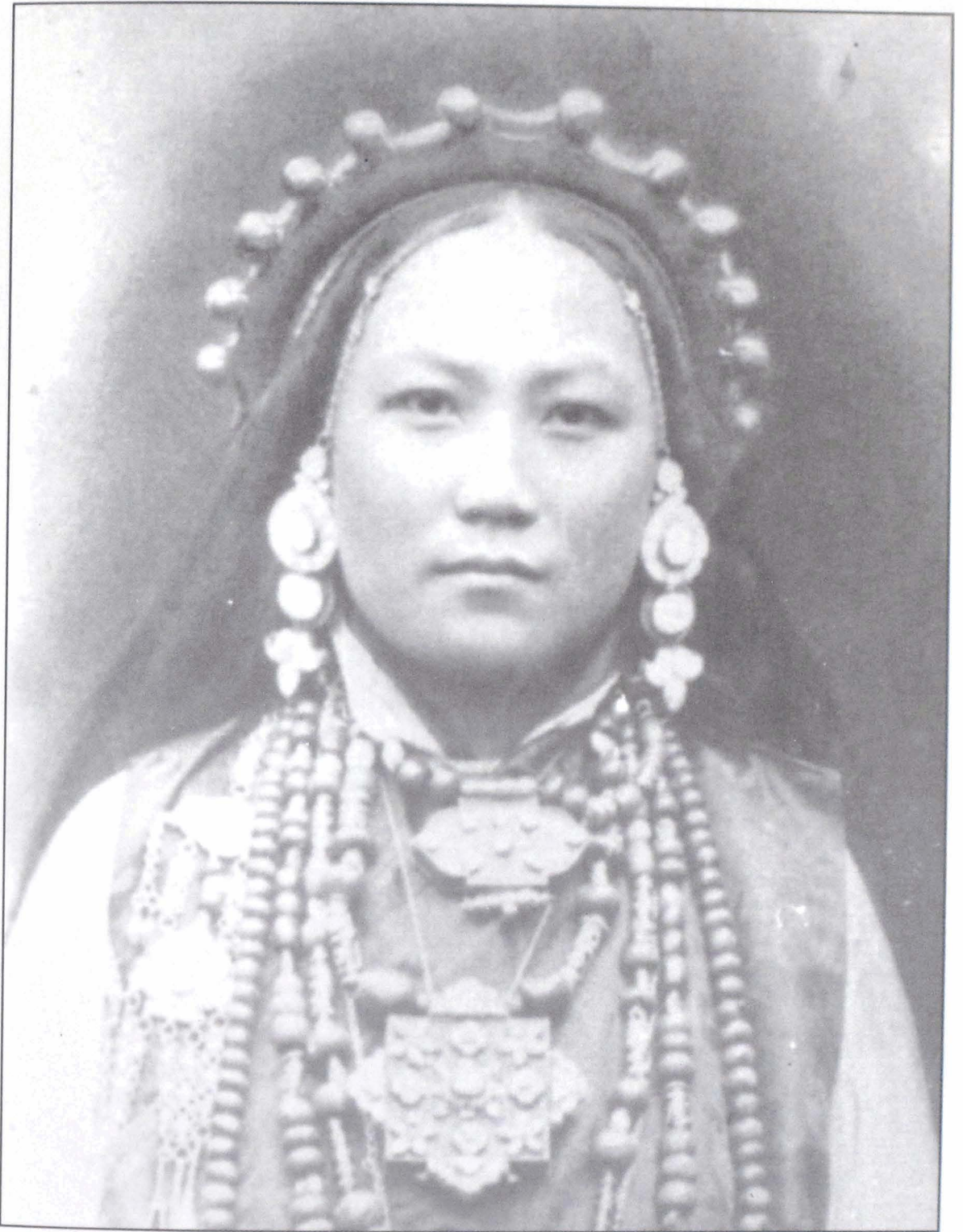
Lamas at Bhutia Busty Monastery, with Laden La praying - 1890's



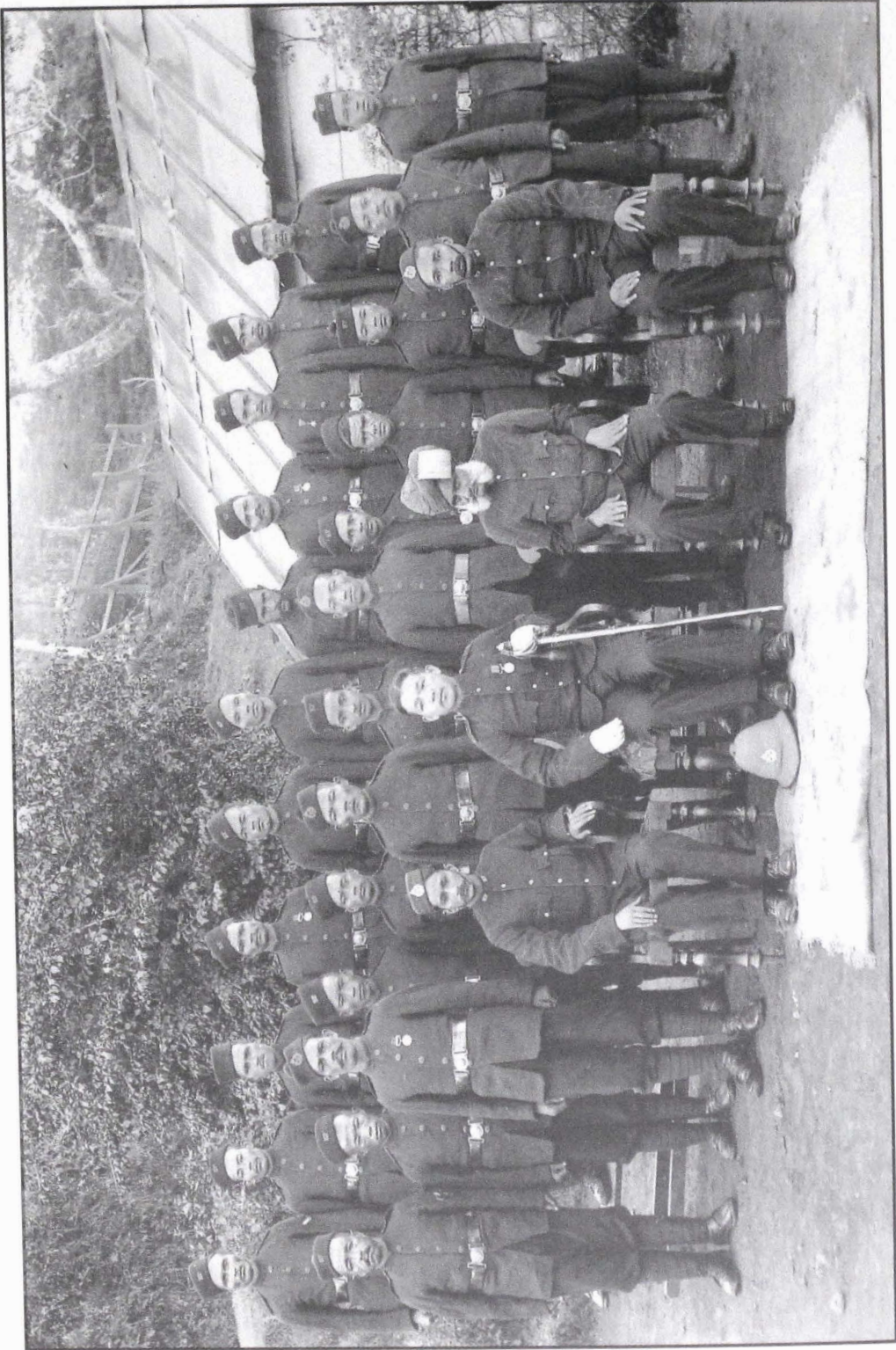
Bhutia Boarding School, 1888. Ugyen Gyatso seated, and Sarat Chandra Das at back



Laden La as a young man—c1907



Laden La's first wife, Choden Zangmo - c1910



Laden La as a young Police Officer, with his men - c1907



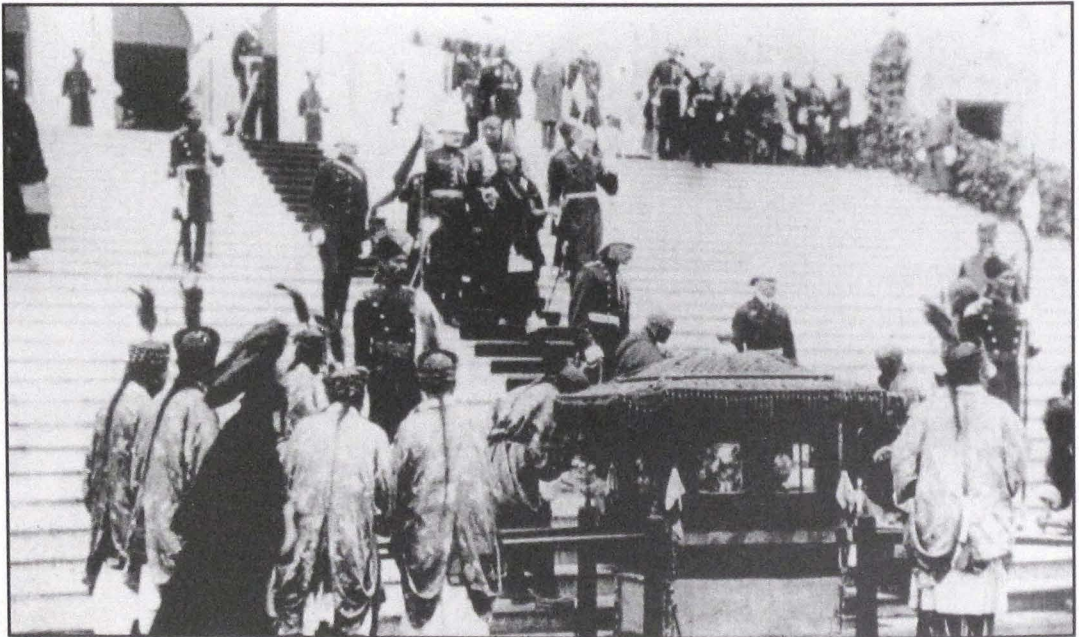
Laden La's first five children, Tom, Pat, Norman, Willie and Mary -c1907



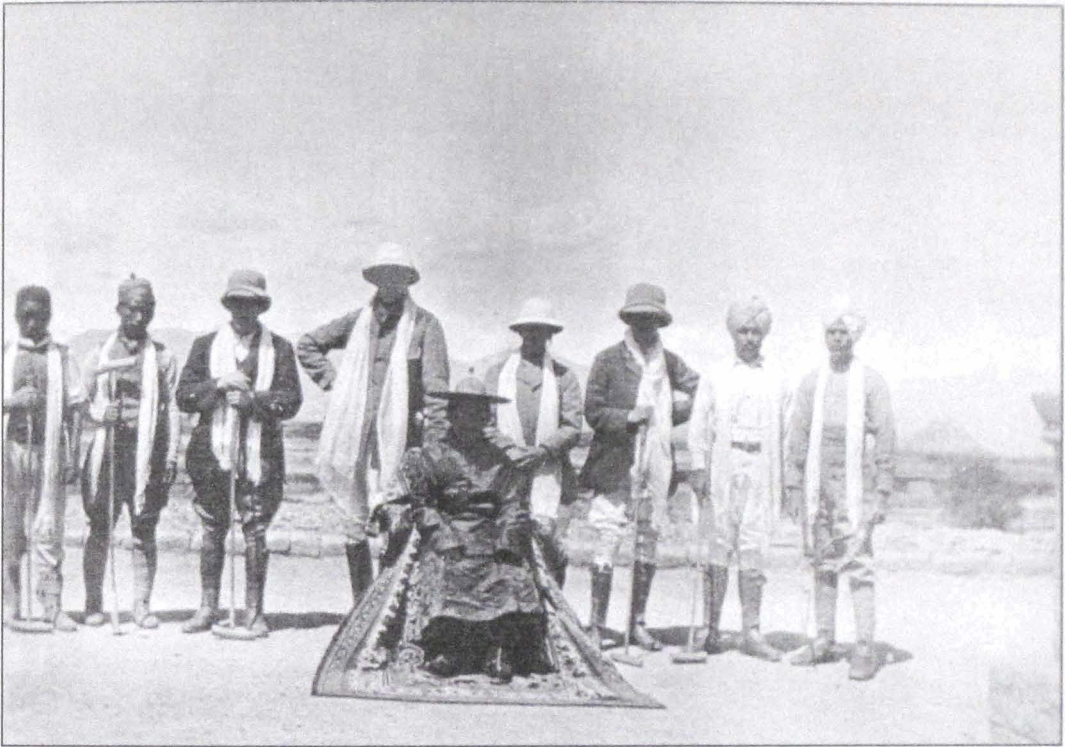
Laden La in one of the first motorcars seen in Darjeeling c1907; driver unknown



The Panchen Lama and party with Frederick O'Connor, Hastings House, Calcutta – January 1906



The Panchen Lama visiting Government House, Calcutta, Jan. 1906



The Panchen Lama at Gyantse, 1912. Mr. Basil Gould standing at back



PRINCE OF WALES VISITING THE TASHI LLAMA AT HASTINGS HOUSE, CALCUTTA - JANUARY 1906

The Prince of Wales visiting the Panchen Lama at Hastings House, Calcutta - January 1906



The Dalai Lama at Hastings House, 1910, with Crown Prince Sidkeong Tulku of Sikkim and Sir Charles Bell, Laden La standing extreme left



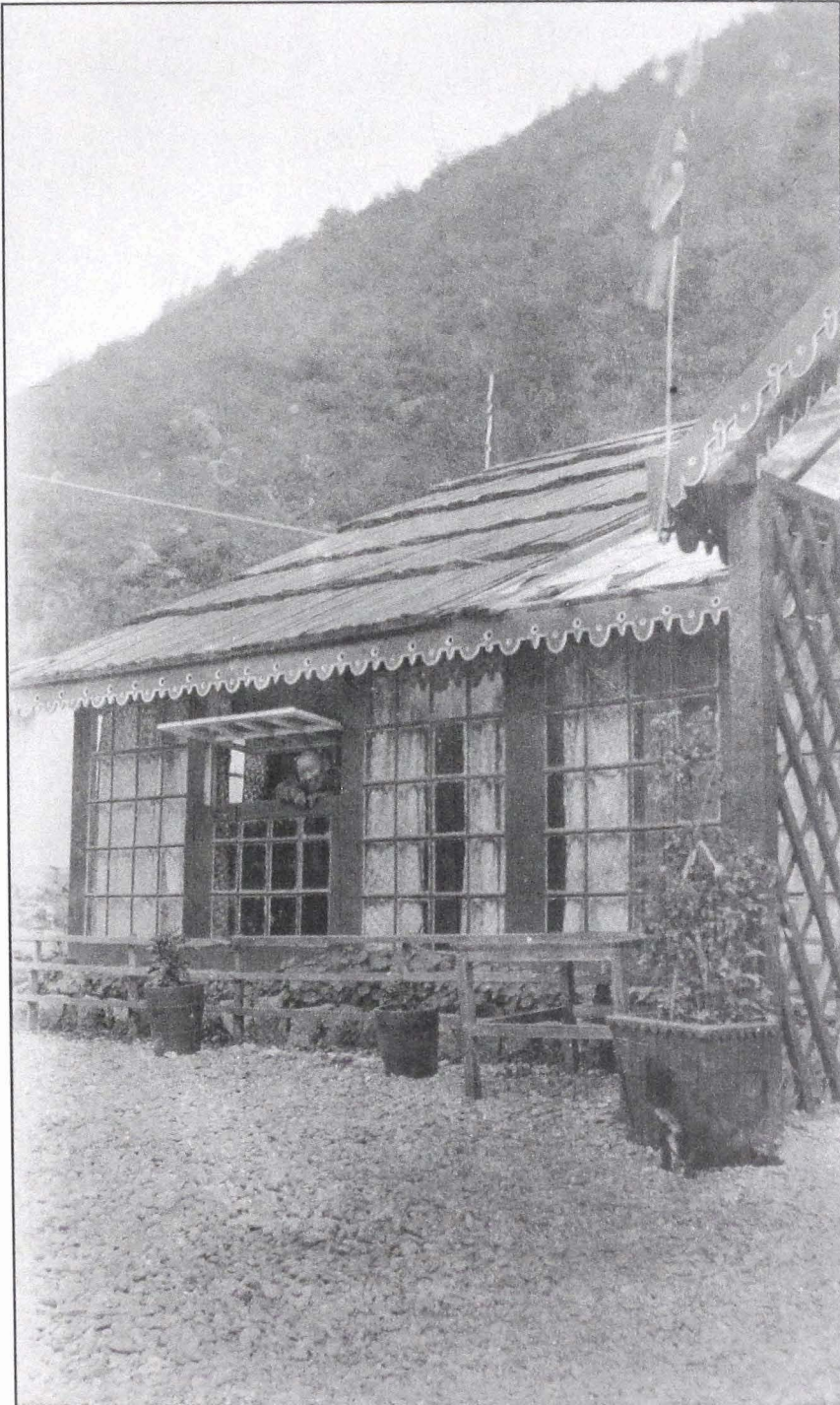
The Dalai Lama at Yatung, on his way back to Tibet – June 1912



Dalai Lama on horseback at Ralung, July 1912, on his return to Tibet



Dalai Lama returning to Tibet - near Ralung, 1912



His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Yatung - June 1912



Agvan Dorjiev with David MacDonald - June 1912



General Chung and Mr. Basil Gould at Gyantse, Laden La standing at left-c1913



Lama Dances at the British Trade Agency in Gyantse -c1912



Chinese officer on his way out of Tibet, 1913



With the Tibetan party at Buckingham Palace – June 1913





The Tibetan boys and Laden La ready for fox hunting in Shaftesbury 1913

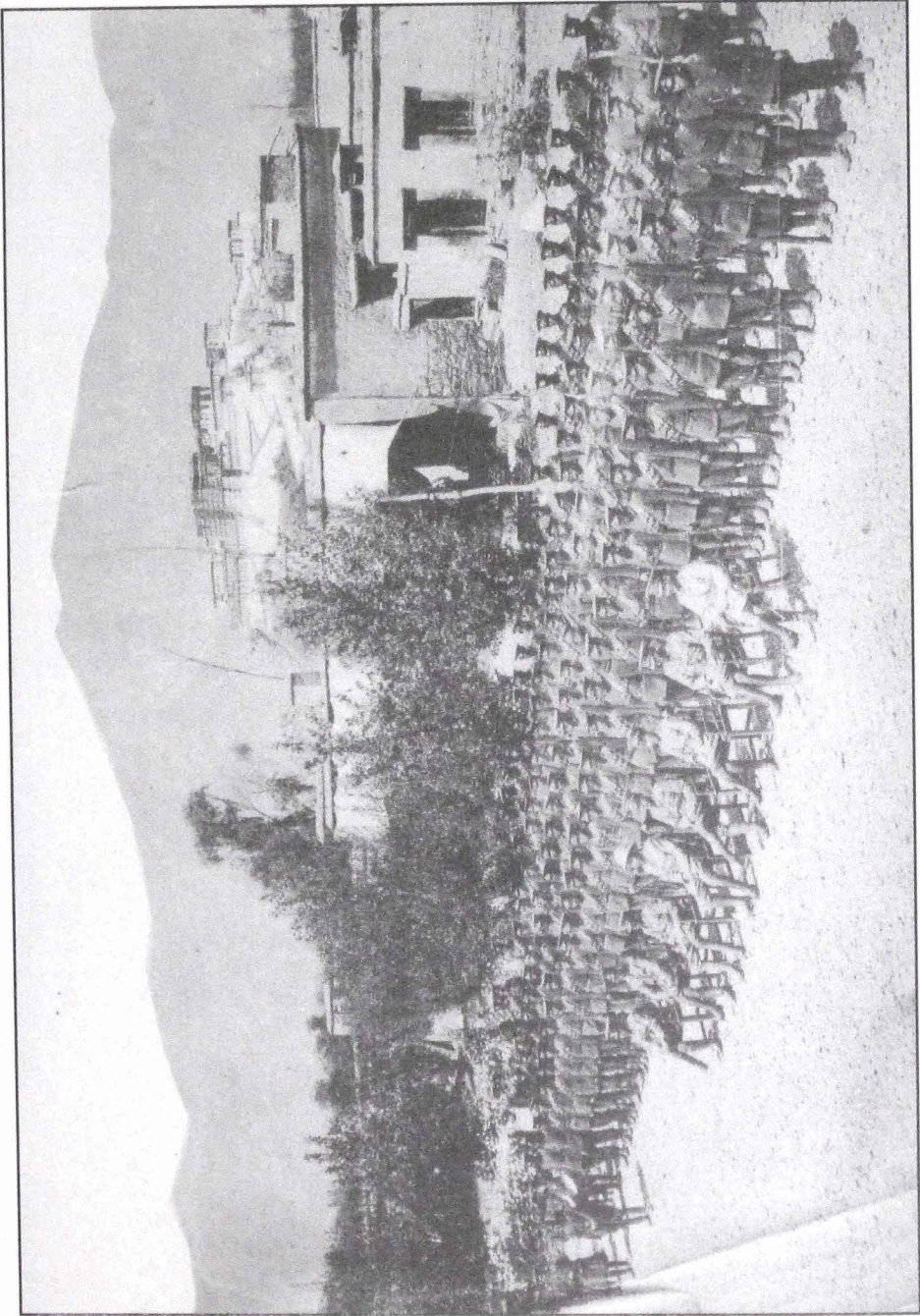


The Deputation of Hill People in Calcutta, 7th Dec. 1917
Standing from left: Dhanman Tamang, Athing Namthak, Yar-pa Dawa Lhondup Pulger,
Kusho Wangchuk Tsering, Kusho Gya-Karpo. Sitting : Trasho Singi Pulger,
S. W. Laden La, Khadga Bahadur Chettri.



Police Officers in Lhasa, 1923/24

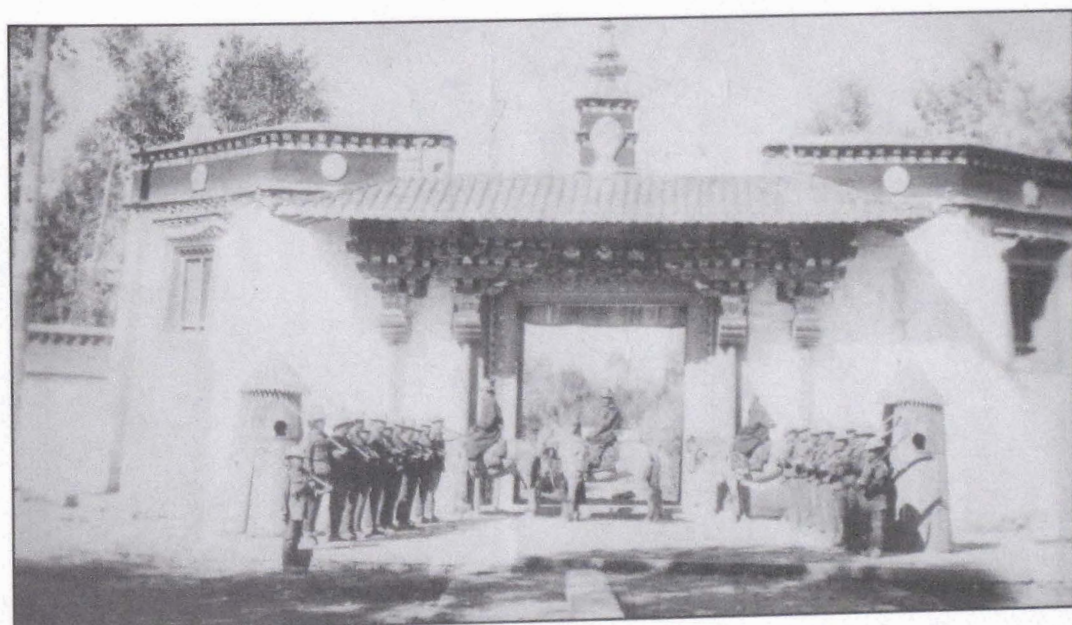
Laden La seated left.



The Lhasa Police on Parade in their compound, the Potala in the distance



The Lhasa Police Force, 1923/24, Laden La seated centre



The entrance to the Norbu Lingka, Lhasa 1923



The Governor of Bengal, Lord Lytton's family in Darjeeling,
Col. F.M. Bailey seated on right, Laden La at back - c1925



Arrival King of Belgium at Darjeeling 19.9.25

Singh's Studio

Arrival of the King of the Belgians at Darjeeling 19.9.1925



Laden La in dress uniform, before an audience with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lhasa 1930



Two Chang girls, posing with porcelain cat on chair, Lhasa 1930



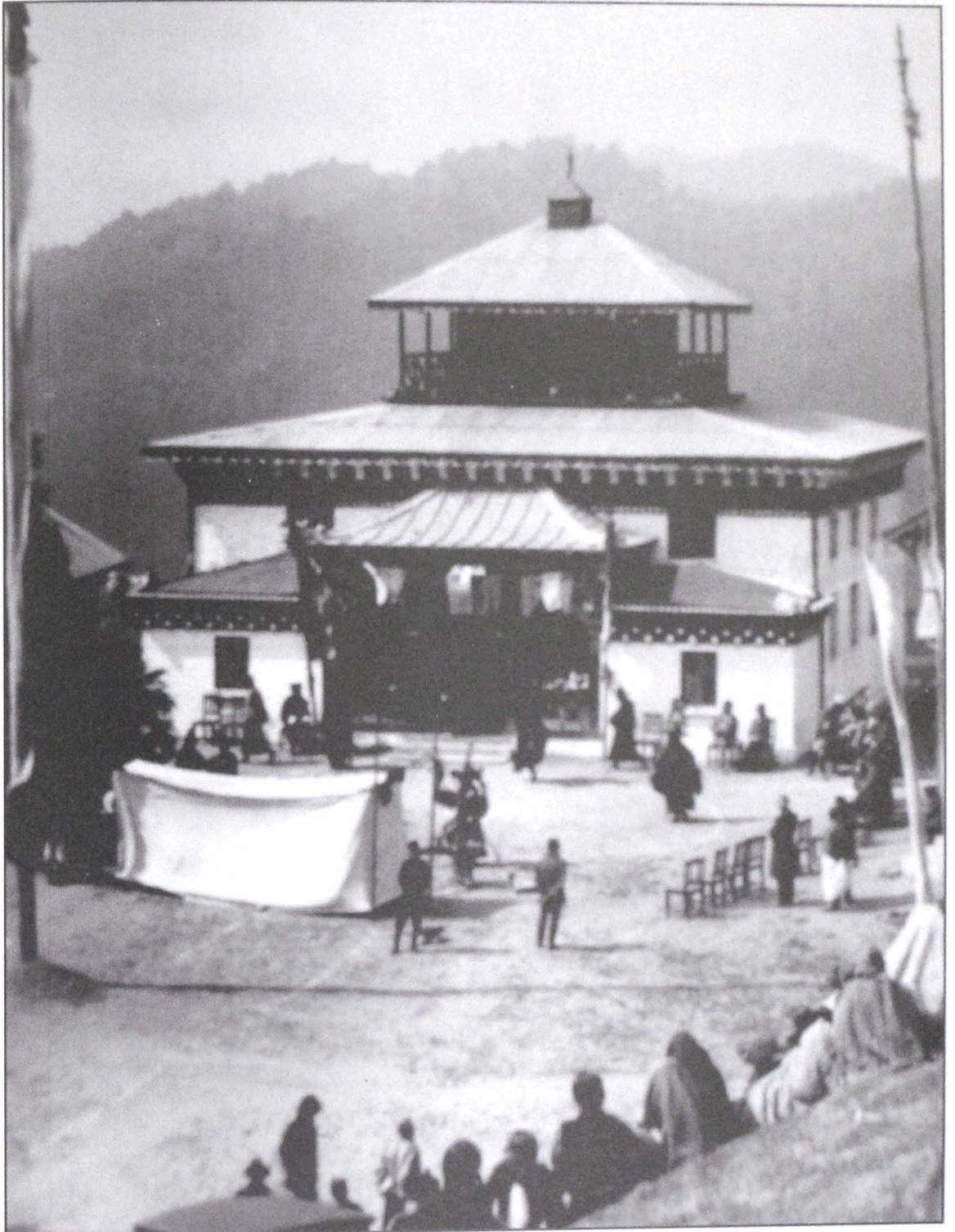
Laden La and Household, Lhasa, Feb/March 1930



With the Tsarong Family and the Chinese representative, Miss Lew-Man-Ching, Lhasa, 12 April 1930



With Col. Weir and party in Lhasa, August 1930



Ghum Monastery before the 1934 earthquake



Tibetan New Year 1929. Picnic on Observatory Hill. From left: Laden La, Mrs Laden La, Willie, Mary, Lucy and Dolly



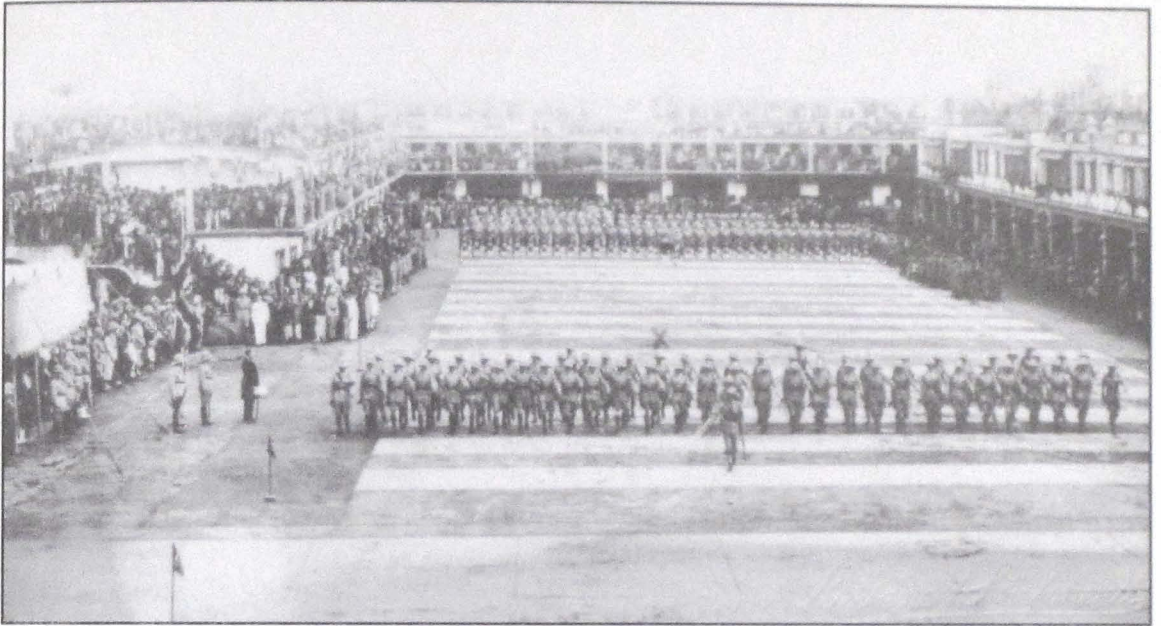
Laden La family ladies, Dolly, Mrs Willie, Mrs Laden La, Mary and Lucy, c1930^s



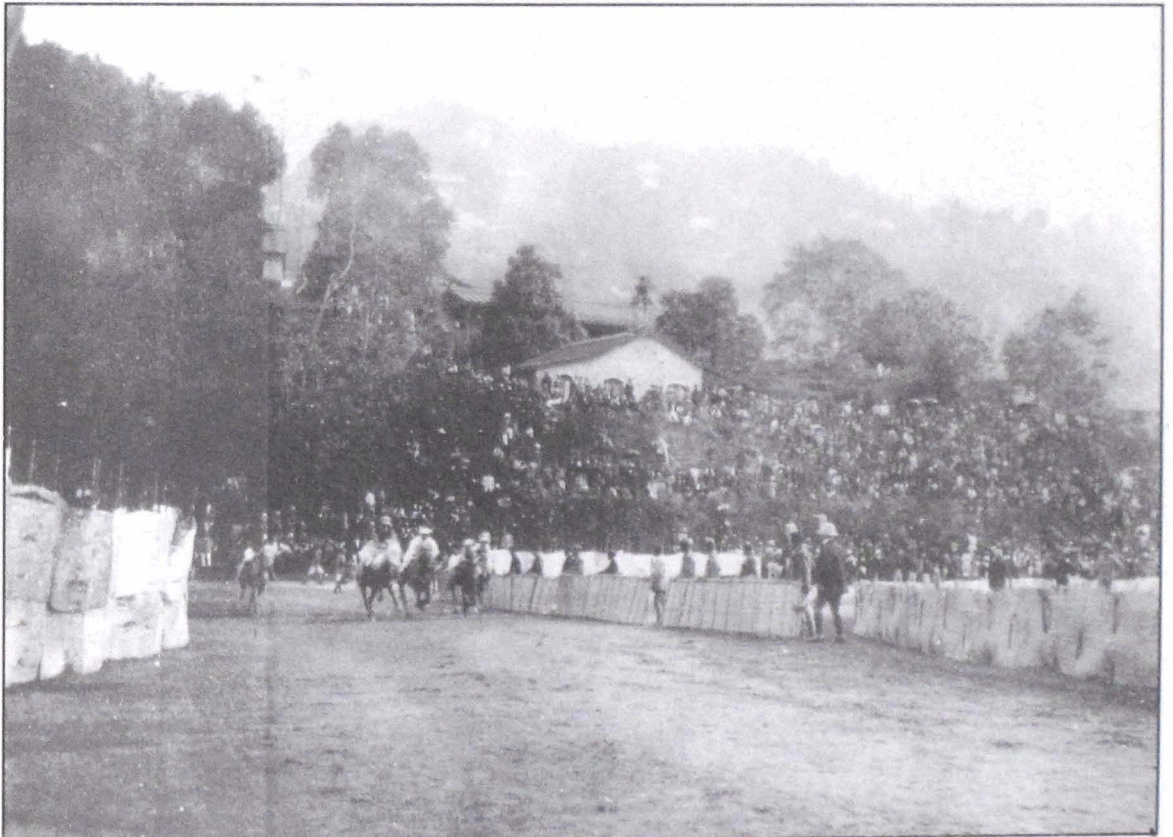
Gen. Bruce hosts a picnic on Observatory Hill for Sherpas who had served on mountaineering expeditions to Everest, Kanchenjunga, Nanga Parbat and Kamet, December 1934



Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) Wangchuk Dorji (Willie) and
Nima Lhaki, on Observatory Hill - c1930's



King's Birthday Parade - Darjeeling, 1936



Horse Racing at Lebong, 1930's



At "Pharine Villa" in Darjeeling, the house of the Singh Roy family, 1930's.

Seated: Khwaja Sir Nizamuddin, Minister in the Bengal Government, and later Prime Minister of Pakistan;
Raja Bahadur M Singh Roy of Chakdighi; Sir B.P. Singh Roy, Minister in the Bengal Government,
Laden La standing.



The Governor of Bengal in Market Square Darjeeling, Laden La in attendance



Nima Lhaki, Mrs Laden La, Phurpa Lhamu (Mary) & Wangchuk Dorji (Willie)
with Sir John Anderson's son - 1930's



Laden La campaigning in Kalimpong 25th December 1936, the day before his death



In Imperial Police dress uniform, Darjeeling, 1931



Apang
Lepcha
(Record
officer)

Karsang
Yolmo
(Aluqan)

(Khama
Trader)

Akay
Jamadar
(fire brigade)

Tsewang
Rinsing
(police inspector)

Kalusing
Lama
(Tamang)

Rai Sahib
Nima Lama
(Alubari)

(Tibetan
Trader)

Injung
Sardar
(Kurseong)

Nim
Tempa
Sherpa

Yap
Karma
Tsering

SI
L

Tibetan New Year 1929 - Panorama of Darjeeling Buddhist Community in Market Square



Yap Carma 'sering	Sheab Lana	W. D. Laden La	S.W. Laden La	Tromba Lama (of Ghum)	P.W. Laden La	Ugyen Chime Lama	Head Lama ofGing	Lhakpa Tsering (Ghum)	(Ghum resident)	(Tibetan Traders)	Singbir Sardar (of Alubari)	Dirga Singh Lama (of Kurseong)	Tsering (Naspati) Sardar
Amin Babu	Karma Paul	Mingma Tsering (police officer)	Mr Tempa (police officer)	Gokul Singh	Tobgay Sardar								