



# CHRISTIAN SETTLEMENTS IN NEPAL

**DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

Christian settlements in Nepal during the eighteenth century  
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**R. FULGENTIUS VANNINI O.F.M. CAP.**



**Christian Settlements  
In Nepal  
During the Eighteenth Century**

**Books by Fr. Fulgentius Vannini O.F.M. Cap.**

*Bishop Hartmann*

*The Bell of Lhasa*

*Tibetan-Hindustan Mission (in preparation)*

**CHRISTIAN SETTLEMENTS IN NEPAL  
DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

**FR. FULGENTIUS VANNINI**  
O.F.M. CAP.

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*DEDICATED*

*To the Capuchin Missionaries  
Of the Province of Bologna.*





## FOREWORD

When was the Gospel message first brought into the northern parts of India? The answer is not readily available. The uncertainty assumes an added complexity when we consider the fact that a geographical India in years past extended far beyond its present political boundaries. Nevertheless, it could safely be said that the Church made her existence felt there with the advent of the European trade and colonization. The presence of the Jesuits in Akbar's court, and thereafter the entrusting of 'the Vicariate of the Great Mogul' to the Friars Minor Capuchins are facts beyond doubt.

Unfortunately there is very little of literary material on the history of the Church in North India. Writings even on indisputable facts are so few that we are unable to construe a coherently whole history. A comprehensive work in the field is yet to see the light of day.

The present work of Fr. Fulgentius Vannini may not claim to be such a comprehensive history, for it is concerned primarily with the Christian settlements in the Nepal Valley. But in the course of the exposition, he unravels many a forgotten chapter of the Church in North India.

In fact, in everyone of his works he turns over the forgotten pages of the history of the Church in North India. His first work, *Bishop Hartmann*, published in 1946 and revised and reprinted in 1966, is the biography of the servant of God, Bishop Anastasius Hartmann, the Vicar Apostolic of Patna. The second work, *The Bell of Lhasa*, published on the occasion of the 750th death anniversary of Saint Francis of Assisi, is a narrative of the undaunted courage of those pioneering Capuchin missionaries, who braved all hardships to carry the torch of faith into the strongholds of Lamaistic Buddhism in Tibet. The present work, *Christian Settlements in Nepal during the Eighteenth Century*, may be

regarded as a companion volume to *The Bell of Lhasa*. For the origin and development of the Nepalese church are intimately associated with the birth, growth and fall of the Tibetan mission. It must be noted here that India was the gateway to the Western missionaries for all their missionary enterprises in northern India. Hence, all three works reveal many aspects of the history of the Church in North India.

It would be wrong to think that the Nepal mission was founded following the expulsion of the Capuchin missionaries from Tibet, who did not have any other alternative than to move down into Nepal. For the Nepal mission existed side by side with the Tibetan enterprise. It was a part of the reorganization plan of 1713, according to which there were to be as many as four stations linking Chandernagore, the Indian port, with Lhasa, the Tibetan capital. Experience had taught the missionaries that for the success of the Tibetan enterprise its pre-Himalayan bases ought to be strengthened. For one thing, the caravan route from India to Lhasa passed through Nepal, and therefore an establishment here was an essential requisite for the transfer of men and material. For another, a well-deserved rest to a missionary, who had trekked the treacherous *tarai* and was about to climb the foreboding heights of the Himalays leading to Lhasa, was something of a refreshing tonic. Moreover, the missionaries were only too eager to extend their field of activity steadily, depending on the availability of personnel and other material resources.

With this end in view, the first mission establishment in the Valley of Nepal was set up at Kathmandu, as far back as 1715. Kathmandu, in fact, continued to be the mission head-quarters till the force of circumstances brought the missions to a forced closure. The Church, the sign of God's presence in the midst of man, made her existence felt immediately. Her ministers, to begin with, engaged themselves in corporal works of mercy, and won the confidence of the king and the populace. But the Church also revealed herself as the sign of contradiction, when her ministers began a form of direct apostolate. Troubles and trials came in plenty. The enemies spread rumours that the missionaries were spies of a foreign nation. They were also associated

by the people with the Muslims who had been called by the king to put down a popular insurrection. All this resulted in their expulsion from Kathmandu in 1722.

The missionaries then moved into the kingdom of Bhatgaon where the Church grew in number and strength. When everything seemed set for a phenomenal success, the mission had to be abandoned for sheer want of personnel and funds. Still the spirit of the missionaries had not died out. They were back again in the valley within three years of their departure to reestablish the stations both at Kathmandu and Bhatgaon. A chapter to the history of the Nepalese mission was added, when a new station was opened in the kingdom of Patan in 1744.

The missionaries had built the Church in the Valley of Nepal with their sweat and blood over fifty years. But the collapse of the mission came all too sudden. It is associated with the seizure of the kingdoms of Nepal by the Gurkha kings. The new rulers—though some of them were in friendly terms—were highly suspicious of the missionaries. Meanwhile, repeated threats and an attempt by the British army from India to enter into Nepal to subdue the Gurkhas aggravated the suspicion of the Gurkha kings that the European missionaries might join hands with the British and spy for them. There was safety neither for the missionaries nor for their little flock in Nepal. Though they were not formally expelled from the Valley, it was next to impossible to tarry there any longer. The anticipated exodus occurred in 1769. The missionaries along with their little flock of Christians moved into India and settled down at Bettiah once for all.

In the building up of the Nepalese Church, not less than twentynine missionaries, for well over fifty years, toiled either directly or indirectly. Besides preaching the Word of God, they practised medicine, carried on the pioneering work of writing grammars and of compiling lexicons and translating important works on faith and morals in the native Newari language. No doubt, all these were done with the one objective of making Christ known to the people. They were fired with this zeal and nothing could stand in the

way. It is therefore pointless to ask if the missionaries could not follow methods other than what they actually did. It would indeed be unjust to pass judgment on times bygone with the categories of our modern age. Even with the new understanding of the theology of the missions, the basic fact remains today unchanged, viz. the world must be won for Christ, and the Light of Life should radiate in the heart of every man.

Fr. Fulgentius has done a creditable study regarding this pioneering work. As an Italian Capuchin, he has worked for thirtyeight long years in the dioceses of Allahabad and Lucknow. Few are more equipped and qualified than he to begin with this enterprise. It is a work of many years of silent study and patient research. Although he draws from the many original documents and makes this study 'scientific' to some extent, yet his facile pen transforms it into a pleasant reading and even at times thrilling. It is true, the study is primarily a work on Christianity in Nepal, but it throws ample light on the history of the Church in North India. I fondly hope that the work will be much appreciated by the general public.

20.12.1976  
Agra

Dominic Athaide O.F.M. Cap.  
Archbishop of Agra

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*Fr. Fulgentius Vannini O.F.M. Cap.*



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## INTRODUCTION

Very little is now known about the Catholic Settlements in the Valley of Nepal which existed during the eighteenth century. This is not surprising, for, as a matter of fact, the mission there began not as an end in itself but rather by force of circumstances as a stepping stone or resting place to reach the head-quarters of the remote Tibetan Mission in Lhasa. Historical data are scanty and therefore handed down sparingly and incidentally, simply to focus attention on the main theme in the larger context of the whole undertaking.

Further, in drawing up an account of the Nepal Mission, the writer is confronted with another initial difficulty. The Nepal enterprise being intimately connected with the Tibetan Mission, it is necessary first to summarise the events that led to the founding of the Tibetan Mission and explain the reason why the establishment of one or more missionary stations in Nepal was considered necessary for the existence and prosperity of the Lhasa venture.

### **Tibetan Mission**

During the Middle Ages, it was widely rumoured that tracts of land, somewhere in Central Asia, were inhabited by Christians. At the time of the Muslim invasion, it was believed that large Christian communities in Northern India had fled beyond the mountains to avoid persecution. Merchants and travellers, in their wanderings across the plains and uplands of Central Asia, came upon people whom they honestly believed to be followers of Christ. In an age of credulity and faith, these travellers' tales were easily credited, lending support to this wild legend.

Reports of the existence of Christian communities were so persistent and came from so many different sources as to make it unlikely to suspect that the information was baseless. Responsible people believed in them and missionaries were

urged to venture into the unknown lands to trace these lost sheep in order to bring them back into the true fold of Christ. Both the Jesuit and the Capuchin missions in Tibet were motivated by the hope of discovering these forlorn Christians and to minister to them.

While at the Court of Akbar, the Jesuits used to accompany the emperor wherever he went. In their frequent contacts with traders, pilgrims and adventurers, they heard again and again the same old story. Their desire to go and search for these abandoned Christians grew ever more. Finally, in 1601 it was decided to despatch a mission of exploration.

The mission was entrusted to Bro. Bento or Benedict de Goes, a Portuguese national and a member of the third Moghul Mission. He was then a man in his forties and had been chosen in preference to others on account of his experience and outstanding qualities; in particular, for his good knowledge of the Persian language and of the Muslim customs.

In October 1602, with Akbar's blessing, the brave Brother set out from Agra, following the route of the Indian Embassies used for commercial purposes to Cathay, a route which was reported to be full of Christians. It was an epic journey which was to make the humble Brother one of the bravest explorers that the world has ever known. Death unfortunately overtook him at Suchau, in the heart of China in April 1607.

The Brother passed away peacefully with a smile of satisfaction at having fulfilled the mission entrusted to him by his superiors. All along the way he had tried his best to locate the isolated pockets of Christians so much talked of by travellers, but found little or nothing of them. Earlier, he had written from Yarkand in Turkestan to the Jesuits in Agra informing them that Christians communities, if they existed at all, might be found in the mountain regions of Tibet.

A new attempt was made by some unnamed Jesuits to reach Western Tibet via Kashmir, but owing to snow-bound passes, the expedition had to be abandoned.

By now, it was evident that if there was any hope of discovering traces of Christianity in Central Asia, one must traverse new ground. Bro. de Goes' expedition had obviously followed a mistaken track. The solitary Jesuit pioneer who ventured to get into that unknown and isolated land through Kashmir might have been on the right path, but he was mercilessly beaten back by the overpowering forces of nature. The conclusion was clear: a different route of approach must be found.

This was finally accomplished in 1624 by Fr. Anthony Andrade, the pioneer missionary and explorer of Tibet. This intrepid traveller went there through Shrinagar, the old capital of Garwhal, following the course of the turbulent Alaknanda river. Having crossed the Mana and Churang passes he descended towards the basin of the Sutlej in Western Tibet. His exploits are too well known to be recounted here.

However, even in Western Tibet, Fr. Andrade did not come upon the elusive Christians. More attempts were made, but all in vain. By the middle of the seventeenth century it was generally felt by the Jesuits that the experience of the last few decades had it abundantly clear that no useful purpose would be served by continuing the search any longer, and it was called off.

It was now the turn of the Capuchins.

These sons of St. Francis had been labouring in Surat, on the Western Indian coast, since 1640. The commanding position occupied by the city in those days made it one of the most important business centres in Asia, the meeting place of travellers and merchants who carried on its extensive trade between east and west.

Unaware of the sad experience of the Jesuits at the court of the Moghuls, the Capuchins, like them began to be influenced by the constant rumours that Christians inhabited parts of central Asia, and believed this to be true. They were convinced that there were Christians in Tibet, sheep without shepherd, and everything possible must be done to reach them and cater to their spiritual needs, no matter how heavy the sacrifice might be.

Fr. Francis Mary of Tours, a French Capuchin who had been working in India for twenty years, was the most ardent

champion of this cause. He had read books, had made inquiries from travellers who had visited these remote regions and had collected sufficient materials to submit a well documented Memorandum to the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda. With these thoughts uppermost in his mind, he set off for Europe in 1701 to promote the cause.

At a special session of the Congregation of Propaganda, held on the 14th March 1703, to deal with the affairs of the Mission in India and China, the French missionary was invited to be present at the discussion of the Memorandum he had submitted. His arguments must have been both persuasive and compelling, for at the end of the session a Decree was issued authorising the opening of a mission in Tibet and entrusting it to the Italian Capuchins.

Within a short time, the six members of the first expedition, Fr. John Francis of Camerino, Prefect, Frs. Felix of Montecchio, Joseph of Ascoli and Joseph Mary of Fossombrone, missionaries, Fr. Francis Mary of Tours, Director or guide of the expedition, and Bro. Fiacrius of Paris, a lay brother, were ready to start for Tibet. Sailing from Leghorn on the 6th May 1704, the party directed its course to Alexandretta (former name of Iskendrum, in modern Turkey), trekked through the Middle East, took a sailing vessel in the Persian Gulf, called at Pondicherry and landed at Chandernagore. From there they travelled on to Patna, Kathmandu and finally to Lhasa, the Capital of Tibet, which they reached on Pentecost Sunday, the 12th June 1707.

It was a disastrous journey. Six missionaries had left hale and hearty the sunny shores of Italy, but only two, Fr. Joseph of Ascoli and Fr. Francis Mary of Tours, had had the joy of reaching their journey's end. Fr. Joseph Mary of Fossombrone fell seriously ill on boardship and was disembarked on the island of Cyprus with orders to go back to Italy as soon as he recovered. Two died on the way, while trekking through the Middle East, one of them being the Prefect of the Mission. The fourth, Fr. Felix of Montecchio, could not make it and remained at Chandernagore, the French settlement in the Bay of Bengal.

The Congregation of Propaganda and the Superiors of the Order came to know of the great losses and the enormous

difficulties encountered by the members of the first expedition and appointed the Prefect and Vice-Prefect in the persons of Fr. Joseph of Ascoli and Fr. Felix of Montecchio respectively. Earlier however, three new members (Fr. Dominic of Fano, Fr. John of Fano and Bro. Michael Angelo of Burgundy, a lay brother) had set sail from Europe to replace those who had lost their lives in the service of the mission.

From the 12th of June 1707 to the 25th of December 1711, one or more missionaries lingered on the Tibet in the anxious expectation of subsidies from Rome to provide for their daily living. Those subsidies having failed to arrive, the last two Capuchins still working in Lhasa, had to be recalled to avoid starvation. Meanwhile, two more priests (Fr. Francis Mary of Tours and Fr. Joseph of Ascoli, the Prefect of the Mission) had gone to their eternal reward. Indeed, by all human standards the first phase of the Tibetan Mission ended in a disheartening failure.

At this stage, the new Prefect Apostolic, Fr. Felix of Montecchio, prepared a fourteen point questionnaire and on the 12th September 1712, circulated it among the three surviving confreres, Fr. Dominic of Fano Fr. John of Fano and Bro. Michael Angelo of Burgundy. They were asked to pinpoint the short-comings, factual or structural, which had brought the mission to such a pitiful state and to suggest ways and means to give it new life so that it might prosper.

In view of the tragedies and the apparent failure of the mission, was it advisable to persevere in the effort, or was it not better to bring to a close this unfortunate chapter of mission history? This was the first and the most crucial question to be answered. On this score, opinion was unanimous. All felt that temporary reverses had to be expected, that initial failures are often stepping stones to success and that with some re-adjustments far better results would be obtained.

The answers given to the questionnaire plainly disclosed that shortage of funds, lack of organisation and want of personnel were the main causes that brought the mission to such a pass.

The annual allocation was patently insufficient, irregularly received and drastically reduced because of exchange, tolls, carriage and other incidental charges. Missionaries had been starving; they had been forced to eat herbs and roots in order not to abandon the mission, in the vain hope that some sort of relief might soon be coming. This was one of the points, the most crucial one, that had to be brought home to the authorities.

Next came the lack of internal organisation. Without modern travelling and banking facilities, it was impossible to keep open the long line of communication between Rome and Lhasa, unless a chain of stations linking the home base with the mission head-quarters was established. Moreover, it was desirable to post two or more priests in each place. As things stood, they felt abandoned and isolated like castaways on the high sea. It was felt that a more rational system of re-organisation would solve many difficulties.

Last, but by no means the least, was the problem of staffing the mission. In the first few years of its existence, there was a loss of nearly sixty per cent of its man power. The flow of missionaries was too slow and too limited in number. Their presence and activity had little or no impact on their immediate surroundings. New men, more evangelical labourers, had to be recruited if some concrete results were to be achieved. No doubt, Rome was fully alive to all this, but needed a reminder, a cogent representation of the case.

### **Re-organisation Plan of 1714**

The Prefect commissioned Fr. Dominic of Fano to go to Rome to represent personally to the Congregation of Propaganda and to the Superiors of the Order the sad suspension of a work that promised so well. The missionary had a strong, persuasive personality and had valiantly borne the burden of the day and its heat. The two other priests were in an indifferent state of health and could ill-afford a sea voyage.

In Rome, where he arrived in the fall of 1713, Fr. Dominic gave himself no rest. He repeated and stressed whatever had already been mooted in India. Wherever he

went and whomsoever he met, he never failed to impress on his listeners the urgency of opening new stations and the need of more men and means in the furthering of the cause.

It must have been a long, hard fought battle, for over a year was spent to bring home the point, but in the end the ardent Capuchin won the day. On the 9th January 1714, the Congregation of Propaganda decided that henceforth no less than 12 missionaries, excluding lay brothers, should be on the active role of the Tibetan Mission. The annual subsidy was also raised and the following five stations were to be maintained :

1. Chandernagore, in Bengal.
2. Patna, in the kingdom of Bihar.
3. Kathmandu, in the kingdom of Nepal.
4. Lhasa, in the kingdom of Tibet, also called Boutan.
5. Tron-gne, in the province of Takpo, south-east Tibet.

Two priests were to reside in each of the above mentioned stations, while Lhasa, the mission head-quarters, was to be served by four. The geographical position of Chandernagore, Patna and Kathmandu was such as to render communication more conveniently spaced. The effect of this would be that missionaries could meet more frequently, and that letters and other articles could be more easily forwarded from one end to the other of the vast mission area. It was also suggested to open another intermediary station at Gyangtse, in central Tibet. The solitary tract from Nepal to the Tibetan capital was considered too long (about two months' journey) to be covered at a stretch without making a long stop in between. Rome, however, thought it prudent that the plan which had already been sanctioned should be carried out first and proposals for future expansion could be gone into later, depending on the success of the present re-organisation scheme.

Chandernagore was, so to speak, the gateway to the Tibetan Mission, the harbour our travellers were bound to use on their way to and from Europe. Being the closest and

most conveniently situated outlet to the sea in respect of the geographical position over which extended the Tibetan venture, it was felt necessary to have a base or a foothold in this French settlement. This base would serve manifold purposes—to receive new missionaries, to enable them to rest a little after the strenuous journey, get them acclimatised to new weather conditions, learn the first rudimentary elements of the languages to help them in the long journey ahead, and so forth. On the other hand, residence here could be utilised as a clearing point for the incoming and outgoing mail and be very useful as a resting place for the aged, the infirm and for those who, at times, had to wait for months before being able to book a passage home.

The first missionaries, who halted in Patna in 1706 on their way to Lhasa, were most favourably impressed by the place. Here was life and activity and the town offered an excellent opportunity for missionary work. Besides, twice a year trading caravans arrived at and started from Patna for Nepal and Tibet, bringing and supplying goods to those widely scattered areas. These caravans would surely be of great assistance to the missionaries travelling up to Lhasa or returning from there. Patna was therefore a most suitable field of missionary activity and, as a link, in the long chain of communication between Chandernagore and the distant land of Tibet.

Another key position, en route to Lhasa, was occupied by Kathmandu. It was indeed, a good resting place for the weary traveller who had just crossed the unhealthy, marshy land of the Tarai, abounding in tigers and other wild animals, and was about to face the formidable challenge of the Himalayan solitudes. The Valley of Nepal was a compulsory passage for caravans, plying between India and Tibet. Looking back at the length of the journey which had already been left far behind, one of the first missionaries wrote to Rome: "We cannot hope to put the mission on a sound basis unless we get a foothold in Nepal". If Tibet was the statue, Nepal was the pedestal, the bloodstream in the life of the whole undertaking.

The utility of Tron-gne, in the province of Takpo (Dvagspo), as an integral part of the mission, has never



been clear. The town is situated near the eastern borders of Bhutan, at a distance of fifteen days' journey to the south east of the Tibetan capital. Apparently, it was meant to be either an alternative route to Lhasa, should the line of march through Kathmandu be closed because of wars and other similar occurrences, or as a resting place for the missionaries who chose to enter Tibet via Sikkim. With the opening of Kathmandu however, they preferred the Patna-Nepal route which was more conveniently spaced and offered more facilities to the traveller. It might also be that Fr. Dominic, who suggested the opening of the station at Tron-gne, had an eye on nearby Sikkim as a possible place for missionary development. In fact, correspondence was exchanged between the Prefect and the Maharaja of Sikkim on the subject.

Accompanied by six new recruits, Fr. Dominic was back in India, in August 1715, and moved on to Kathmandu in January 1716, to be finally in Lhasa on the 1st October 1716. In less than five months from his arrival in the Tibetan capital, he could write home to say that the organisation plan of 1714 had been implemented in full. Chandernagore, Patna, Kathmandu, Lhasa and Tron-gne were now full-fledged missionary stations, officially erected and sufficiently provided for in men and means. Much had been done in so short a time considering the pace with which things moved in those early days of the eighteenth century.

Everything went on satisfactorily up to 1721, when an unfavourable turn of events began soon to tell on the whole organisation. Missionaries stopped coming; the dead and the infirm could not be replaced and some of the stations had to be closed. The situation deteriorated so badly that by the end of 1734 only three priests were left in the Prefecture, and only two stations, Patna and Chandernagore, were maintained. The Tibetan Mission was once again on the rocks, chiefly due to sheer want of man-power, though economic difficulties were also keenly felt.

Towards the end of 1736, Fr. Francis Horace, the Prefect, was in Rome. He took it by storm, so to say. He did not budge from there; he did not go to see his native land or his dear ones; he pursued things relentlessly and refused to

do anything unless and until the fate of his sorely tried and dearly beloved mission was decided

It was for him a matter of life and death: either the mission should be suppressed or all necessary effort should be made to keep it going with relative ease and reasonable chances of success. In his impassionate plea, the Prefect made it quite clear that he was not out to impose his opinion on anybody; all he wanted was that those in authority should come to a final decision and adhere to it. In the present state of things his position was no better than that of a field commander without men and means at his disposal to carry on a most difficult campaign.

At first, no argument of the Prefect and no document produced by him to prove the great esteem in which the faith and the missionaries were held in the land of the lamas, made any impression on the sceptic Roman authorities. But gradually their mood began to change and a current of sympathetic understanding began mounting up in favour of the brave man who bore on his person the traces of hardship and starvation and who could speak with the tongue of an apostle.

The fruit of these protracted negotiations was that the re-organisation plan of 1714 was revived and the apostle of Lhasa was given the men and the means to achieve his objective with a promise of future aid if his plan succeeded.

### **The Third Phase of the Mission**

A hearty welcome with a deep feeling of joy awaited Fr. Francis Horace and his six confreres (Frs. Joachim, Florian, Tranquillus, Constantine, Cassian and Bro. Paul, a lay brother), as they entered the holy city of Lhasa in the late afternoon of the 6th January 1741.

All promised well from the very beginning. The Decree of Liberty of Conscience, issued by the Regent and the Dalai Lama, was there to guarantee "that all those who shall embrace the true law and shall keep it, shall be regarded by us, even more than before, as our loyal and faithful subjects, and that all such men and all the preachers of the true law are under our special protection."

Favoured by the new and friendly atmosphere that prevailed in Lhasa because of the publication of the decree of liberty of conscience and by the good will of the people, the Prefect plunged headlong into a new whirl of activities. At the Potala Palace and at the Regent's Court, among the nobles and the poor people in the streets, the old crusader moved about with ease and confidence, speaking to all of the new religion which had been legally permitted to be preached and established in the ancient land of the lamas.

The new missionaries were slowly coming out into the open. Within a few months they had learnt the language sufficiently well to make themselves understood and began to preach and to be engaged in the apostolate of the spoken word. The situation was decidedly tinged in rosy colours, so much so that in October 1741, when Fr. Francis Horace bade farewell to Fr. Joachim of Anatolia, who was returning to Europe, the Prefect told his old companion and friend to send one or two more priests to cope with the work which was daily increasing.

However, by the time Fr. Joseph Mary of Gargnano, the missionary who had been detailed to reinforce the small team of workers in the capital, was nearing his destination on the 27th May 1742, the little church of Lhasa had already gone underground.

On the Vigil of Pentecost, which that year fell on the 12th May, twelve catechumens were solemnly baptised in the small chapel dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady on the outskirts of Lhasa. This spelled disaster for the nascent Christian community in the capital.

Next day, the birthday of the universal church, the neophytes assembled again in the chapel for the evening service. While the Prefect was raising his voice in thanksgiving to God for the new wonder He had performed in their midst and was invoking the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit on the new converts, the envious lamas and their faithful acolytes alerted the various monasteries in and around Lhasa to stage a demonstration. Four hundred infuriated lamas and monks invaded the royal palace and threatened the Regent with dire consequences, if he did not withdraw the patronage he had

granted the missionaries and the Christians. Hemmed in on all sides and terrified at the fate that stared him in the face, the Regent declared forthwith that the missionaries had fallen from his favour and that suitable action would be taken against the Christians.

Words were soon followed by deeds. The new converts were flogged in the public square like common criminals, and the missionaries had to keep indoors for fear of being exposed to ridicule, insults and even to physical danger at the hands of the populace.

Meanwhile it was thought prudent to reduce the number of priests in Lhasa to three and to station the other three in Nepal, where better prospects of conversions were held out. The move was sure to be interpreted as an acknowledgement of defeat and the situation might improve.

The Prefect, Frs. Tranquillus of Apecchio, Joseph Mary of Gargnano and Bro. Paul of Florence still functioned in the capital awaiting developments. The Tibetan mission carried on for some time more and then came to a sad end.

Relations between the missionaries and the authorities became more and more strained; conversions were made impossible and, to make matters worse, the Regent issued orders to the Governor of Kuti, the frontier town, not to allow any priest to cross over the borders. It was further brought to the notice of the Prefect, a one time friend of the Regent, that he intended to wait till the Prefect's death to turn out the remaining missionaries from the country. It was well known that the days of the Prefect were drawing to a close and the end would not be far off.

The dejected and enfeebled apostle of Lhasa proved to be brave and wise to the last. Instead of letting his beloved confreres to be expelled from the country after his death, he forestalled the Regent's move and decided to quit. It was a soul-wrenching decision, the most painful and momentous he had ever taken in his life, a decision that brought him nearer to his grave. Though ill and suffering, the hope of establishing the reign of Christ in the land of the lamas had sustained and enabled the Prefect to carry on, but when all

hopes faded, the life too, of this great apostle began to ebb and fade away.

On Easter Monday, 20th April 1745, Fr. Francis Horace gathered the Tibetan Christians together in the church—twentyfour in number—to bid them farewell. In the name of his co-workers and his own, the aged Prefect exhorted his spiritual children to hold fast to their faith, to set good example and to pray that the separation may not be too hard or too long. At the end he gave them the Bread of Life, the Viaticum that would sustain and help them to face bravely the hardships and difficulties they were bound to encounter in their new solitary journey through life. They embraced each other with tears in their eyes, gave each other the kiss of peace and then the four valiant soldiers of Christ departed for Nepal. The gates of Lhasa closed behind them and they are closed to this day.

Earlier, an attempt was made by the missionaries to take down with them to Nepal the Tibetan converts. The Raja of Bhatgaon was willing to allow them to settle in his territory. But the plan was foiled by the Tibetan authorities who refused the Christians permission to leave the country.

Before concluding this introductory note we have yet to answer a question and to clarify a point.

The question is : what happened to those dispersed Christian communities which were rumoured to exist somewhere in Central Asia and which prompted the Jesuits and the Capuchins to go to Tibet in search of them ?

It is difficult to unravel the mystery of the lost Christians with any degree of certainty. Missionaries never came across settlements which could be called Christian in origin and character. How the story came into existence and gained ground is still a puzzle. Perhaps the striking similarity in the external symbols of worship between Christianity and Buddhist Lamaism might have misled merchants and travellers into thinking that there were Christians in Tibet. This is one of the possible explanations that gave rise to the belief that vast tracts of Asia were inhabited by Christian communities.

On the other hand, it is known that from the sixth to the end of the ninth century, Nestorian Missionaries had penetrated into Mongolia, Chinese Turkestan and possibly, Tibet in an effort to propagate the Christian religion. Whether and how far, the Nestorian monks exercised any influence in the religious development of Tibet or brought some Christian ideas into the camps of Buddhism is still open to discussion.

The point to be clarified is merely an academic one. Though Tibet had already been abandoned as a missionary field, and all activities were now centered on Nepal and Northern India, the enterprise continued to be known as the Tibetan Mission. Lhasa was still *de jure* or officially the head-quarters of the mission, while, in actual fact, it had already been written off the mission map. It was erected into a Prefecture Apostolic on the 14th March 1703, and went by that name till 1845, when the Tibetan territory ceased to be nominally administered from India and was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris working in China.

Nevertheless, it became pretty common among the missionaries, to bring it in line with the reality of things, to refer to the regions in which they exercised their ministry as "Tibet-Nepal Mission", a designation which was changed later, at the time when Nepal too was abandoned, into "Tibet and Upper India Mission" to give place finally to the name of "Tibet-Hindustan Mission". Anyway, the name of Tibet still adhered to the mission, in one way or other, so long as it was part of its extensive territory.

## FIRST MISSIONARY STATION AT KATHMANDU

Kathmandu had the honour to be the first missionary station in the Valley of Nepal. It was chosen in preference to the two other petty kingdoms because the route to Tibet passed through its territories.<sup>1</sup> The Raja's goodwill was therefore considered necessary for the success of the enterprise and to facilitate the transit of missionaries and goods directed to Lhasa.

It so happened that, while Fr. Dominic of Fano was sailing home, at the end of 1712, to represent the case of the Tibetan Mission, six new missionaries were on their way to India to reinforce the reduced band of workers. They arrived by sea route in two different batches and at different times. The first group, which consisted of Frs. Francis Horace of Penna Billi, Paul Mary of Matelica and Bro. James of Breno, a lay brother, reached Chandernagore on the 1st September 1713. Six months later, in March 1714, the second batch set foot on Indian soil. Their names are Frs. Joachim of Loreto, John Francis of Fossombrone and Joseph Felix of Morro.

As the Chandernagore residence was too small to accommodate the newcomers, they were divided between the hospices of Patna and that of Bengal. After some months, devoted to the study of the language and to acquire the necessary knowledge and experience of the people, to whom

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1. *Journal*, p. 74. The *Journal* by Fr. Cassian of Macerata is a 203 page Italian manuscript in octavo, narrating the events and experiences of Fr. Cassian Beligatti and his companions during their journey from Rome to Lhasa (July 1738—January 1741). The autograph manuscript was discovered at the end of the last century by Prof. Albert Magnaghi in the Macerata Municipal Library, the priest's native town in Central Italy. The Professor edited and published this valuable discovery in the *Italian Geographical Review* in 1901 and 1902. The relevant portion of this manuscript, concerning Nepal and Tibet, was published in *Il Nuovo Ramusio*. See Note 2 herebelow. The manuscript, whenever used as historical source of information, will be quoted as *Journal*.

they were going to announce the good tidings, the Prefect, Fr. Felix of Montecchio, took the initiative of consolidating the pre-Himalayan bases of the Tibetan Mission. Having seen to the needs of Patna and Chandernagore, he thought, the time had come to press forward once again to the interior fastness of Tibet and to establish, in the meanwhile, the first missionary station at Kathmandu.

It was a wise move and a daring scheme undertaken at his own risk and responsibility. When he conceived the idea of making a start in Nepal, as a first step to put into operation the plan which they had already mooted among themselves, no news had by then been received as to the outcome of Fr. Dominic's representation to Rome. This became known only a short time before the actual departure of the new missionaries for Nepal. The fact that fresh reinforcements had arrived from Europe was interpreted by the Prefect as approval, in principle, of the plan which had been earlier envisaged and discussed among the Fathers after the sad experience of the first two expeditions.<sup>2</sup>

Encouraged by this thought, Fr. Felix detailed Frs. Francis Horace of Penna Billi, Joseph Felix of Morro and John Francis of Fossombrone to go to Nepal and open the first missionary station at Kathmandu. After Christmas, on the 27th December 1714, they left Patna and reached their new destination by the middle of January 1715.<sup>3</sup>

### **Good Beginning in Nepal**

The three young priests set to work in the new mission with youthful zeal and confident heart, leaving the rest in God's hands. The new message they were proclaiming to

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2. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part 1, pp. 71-72. *Il Nuovo Ramusio* by Prof. Luciano Petech is a collection of letters, reports, travel accounts and other documents, relating to the work of the Italian Missionaries in Tibet and Nepal, published by the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (ISMEO), Part I, La Libreria dello Stato, Roma MCMLII; part II, Roma MCMLII; part III, Roma MCMLIII; part IV, Roma MCMLIII; part V, Roma MCMLIV; part VI, Roma MCMLV; part VII, Roma MCMLVI. This documentary work will be quoted as *Nuovo Ramusio*.

3. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 71-72.



the people of the Valley, the free treatment of patients with a considerable measure of success and, above all, the example of a truly dedicated life, made them popular from the very start.

The Raja himself, Jagat Jaya Malla Deva, was the first to patronize them. Realising that the newcomers were men consecrated to God and dedicated to the service of mankind, that they lived very poor and had no source of income, he volunteered to provide them with their maintenance. The offer was kindly but firmly declined. However, the missionaries gratefully accepted from His Highness the use of a small but comfortable house, which was given them free of rent.<sup>4</sup>

It was surely a good start. The priests were highly respected and could talk freely to anyone about their own religion. People went occasionally to see their little chapel (a simple room which served as a place of worship) and even to witness the ceremonies of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which they attended with profound reverence, attracted mainly by the novelty of the thing.

The ruler of this small kingdom did not disdain to invite these strangers to his royal palace, make them sit in his presence and feel at home with him. The conversation with His Highness touched on a variety of subjects and at times even religious matters were discussed. The *Raja Guru* or High Priest, the spiritual adviser of the ruler and an influential member of the Royal Council, took pleasure in conversing with the missionaries and felt no offence, when told that his religion and the religion of his people was not the true one.<sup>5</sup>

When Fr. Dominic of Fano, who, in the meanwhile, had been nominated Prefect Apostolic of the Tibetan Mission in place of Felix of Montecchio, returned from Europe in August 1715 at the head of six new missionaries, he found conditions vastly improved. The news of his success in Rome and the presence of fifteen young labourers to carry

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4. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 73-77.

5. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 97.

on the task served to boost the morale of the small band of workers and made every one rejoice at this rare achievement.

Among the new recruits brought by Fr. Dominic, we have to mention the names of Frs. Anthony Mary of Jesi, Bonaventure of Lapedona and Gregory of Lapedona, who would be connected with the mission field in Nepal.

On arriving at Patna, to continue the rest of the journey to Lhasa with the missionaries to be stationed in Nepal and Tibet, Fr. Dominic was told that the caravan journey to Nepal and Tibet had been postponed because of dacoits and robbers along the route. Impatient to keep waiting till the road was clear, and eager to visit the new Christian settlement in Nepal, Frs. Dominic and Gregory volunteered to join a Kashmiri trader, who at the head of a patrol party, was sent in advance to investigate the whereabouts of the dacoits and report to the chief of the caravan in Patna and advise him when to start and which was the safest route to follow.

The patrol party was able to reach Kathmandu sometime in March 1716, after nearly two months, having to travel amidst numerous difficulties and hardships. The whole trek was a series of adventure that unnerved the travellers and gave them a very anxious time.

It was a brave feat indeed, but no one foresaw the heavy penalty that would be paid for it. Fr. Gregory of Lapedona, a kind and generous soul living within a weak body, took ill on the way. He lingered between life and death for some months and eventually, on the 4th July, 1716, succumbed to his illness, aged 36. He was the first priest to fall victim to his own exertion in the newly established mission field of Nepal, scarcely after eleven months of his arrival in India.<sup>6</sup>

While waiting at Kathmandu for the arrival of the main body of missionaries and the bulk of the luggage, the Prefect had an excellent opportunity and ample time to acquaint himself with the state of things and the future prospects of the mission. He felt sorry, however, that the

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6. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 74-76, 83.

delay of the caravan would prevent him from presenting a wall clock to the Raja of Kathmandu at the time he would be calling on him—a present Fr. Dominic knew would be fondly cherished by His Majesty.<sup>7</sup>

The Prefect was very pleased with everything he saw; people were very friendly and responsive, the missionaries were loved and esteemed. The king had gone all out to make them comfortable and to offer them every facility in their medical work. Their activity at the time was mostly confined to an indirect form of apostolate, but the day would not be far when the tilling of the field would be followed by the sowing of the seed. If nothing untoward happened, there were very good hopes of establishing a flourishing mission centre within a short time. The soil was rich and promising and the labourers willing to break in the soil in toil and sweat.

Fr. Dominic then busied himself making a round of courtesy calls. He went first to pay his respects to the king of Kathmandu. He thanked His Highness for all he had done for the three Fathers and in particular, for having given them a rent-free house which had been confiscated from one of the *Pradhans* or nobles. So great was the friendly disposition of the Raja and the confidence he inspired that the Father was emboldened to point out that it was very good of him to have given them a place to stay, but this, of course, could serve only as a temporary measure and it would be much appreciated if he could kindly provide them with a suitable house of their own.<sup>8</sup> It was a well known fact that the Nobles, the high functionaries of the court, gained and lost the favour of the king in a routine sort of way. The missionaries were therefore liable to be thrown out of the house at any time without warning.

A visit to the Raja of Bhatgaon, Bhupatindra Malla Deva, a few kms. to the south-east of Kathmandu, came next on the list of engagements. Accompanied by Fr. Francis Horace, the Prefect called at the king's palace. The

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7. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 77.

8. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 77-78.

main purpose of the visit was to know the mind of His Highness and see whether he was disposed to welcome the missionaries in his territory. Earlier, a member of the royal household had reported the Raja as saying, "Why do not the Fathers who reside at Kathmandu come over to my kingdom and stay with me?"

Once admitted into the king's presence, the two missionaries were received most cordially and entertained to a friendly talk. However, the subject of establishing a house at Bhatgaon did not come up for discussion.<sup>9</sup> The visit made a good impression on the Fathers and the Prefect decided that, if a good opportunity presented itself, the priests should take advantage of it in order to open a new residence in the Valley of Nepal.

Before leaving for Lhasa, on the 4th August, 1715, Fr. Dominic made some important changes in the reorganisation of the personnel who had to remain in Nepal. He took with him to Tibet Frs. Francis Horace of Penna Billi and John Francis of Fossombrone and appointed for Kathmandu Frs. Paul Mary of Matelica and Anthony Mary of Jesi.<sup>10</sup> He left these two young priests under the leadership of Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro, who had already proved himself to be a prudent and experienced missionary.

One of the last recommendations of the parting prefect to the Fathers posted to Nepal was to advise them to go often to Bhatgaon to keep in touch with the king and his people. This, he said, might be providential in preparing the ground for the opening of another missionary station in the valley of Nepal. The object of the mission was, of course, to concentrate the main effort on Tibet, but Nepal held a key position in the whole reorganisation system. Besides, both territories had mutual religious, commercial and political association; the strength of Nepal would ensure, in the long run, a stronger hold on Tibet.

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9. *In India e nel Tibet, Missionari Italiani nel Paese dei Lama, 1704-1745*, Fr. Clemente da Terzorio, Roma 1932, pp. 300-305; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 78.

10. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 76-79.

## Expelled from Kathmandu

Although the Fathers at Kathmandu enjoyed the favour of the king and of a large section of the public, they were too often in trouble. And trouble started from the very beginning.

In 1715 an Armenian merchant, evidently not on good terms with the priests for one reason or another, spread rumours that they were spies in the service of the king of the Christians and had been sent to Nepal to prepare the way for the conquest of the land. It was such a blatant lie that the Kashmiri traders in the city took it upon themselves to clear the Fathers of such a malicious accusation. They pointed out that Christian countries were so far away, by land and sea, that it was impossible to conceive even the idea of such an absurd and fantastic venture.<sup>11</sup>

The reason, why this Armenian, himself a Christian, spread such a shameless calumny against the priests, is difficult to say. In a report written in 1750, mention is made of an Armenian Catholic, a merchant, who had become very rich by means of unfair business speculations. He was reprimanded several times by the priests and was told to make restitution of all ill-gotten gains. This he did just before he died. It may be the same person; in which case the merchant might have felt that the missionaries were interfering in what he thought to be his own private affairs and in order to continue undisturbed in his profitable business, he resorted to this mean expedient to get rid of the priests or to discredit their good name before the public.<sup>12</sup>

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11. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 73

12. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, page 272. The merchant, we read in the same report, was the cause of more trouble just at the time of his death. He was already an old man. One day while coming down the staircase leading to the chapel, he slipped and stumbled down, succumbing to injuries soon after. Creditors and acquaintances broke into the house of the deceased in the hope of getting hold of all his possessions. Not finding any, because he had already made restitution of all his ill-gotten gains secretly, they spread the rumour that a missionary had purposely pushed him down the staircase to rob him of all he had. A court case was filed against the priest and as a result he was expelled from Kathmandu. The particulars given in the report are not very helpful in establishing the year in which this happened.

In any case, it is a fact that the stigma of being spies in the service of an alien country remained and through out their stay in Nepal, the missionaries lived under the thinly veiled suspicion of being secret agents of a foreign power.

A year later, in 1716, a terrible plague devastated the land, taking a heavy toll. About 20,000 people were reported to have been the victims of this dreadful disease within the space of three months.<sup>13</sup> This lent support to the Brahmins' propaganda, who from the beginning were apprehensive of the presence of the priests in the capital and sought for an opportunity to have them expelled from the country.

Jealous of the popularity of the missionaries, fully aware of the reason why they had come to Kathmandu and grudging the apparent patronage of the Raja, the Brahmins began, on the 18th of July 1716, to stir up the feelings of the people in an effort to take their revenge and to assert once again their undisputed supremacy. The brown habit, they proclaimed, worn by these strangers, professing an alien faith, was surely a sign of ill omen. It was of an inauspicious colour offending the deities of the land and brought the curse upon the city and the country side. The only remedy to propitiate their gods, the protectors of their homes, they said, was to drive out of the country the bearers of this desircurse.

The Brahmins resorted also to the national oracle, giving the affair wide publicity. The oracle, to their dismay, gave no response and preferred to remain silent. Although this baffled his devotees, it nonetheless served to produce the desired effect.

The grip of fear was already spreading far and wide and everyone felt sure that the missionaries, preaching a new religion inimical to the national religion of the land, and wearing a brown habit, a dress of inauspicious colour, were responsible for all the evils which had befallen the country.<sup>14</sup>

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13. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part VII, p. 205 ; Terzorio, op. cit., p. 319.

14. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 82-83 ; part III, p. 271; part VII, p. 206; Terzorio, op. cit., pp. 319-320.

In the midst of the uproar, Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro wrote to the Procurator-General of the Order on the 10th November, 1716, to acquaint him of the situation and gave expression to his feelings in the following terms :

“I am not losing courage, nay, with God’s grace, I feel proud that this persecution has come upon our mission, knowing fully well that it is the loving design of heaven to put to the test the followers of the Gospel in order to reap a more abundant harvest of souls in God’s own time. What pains me most is the thought that we may be compelled to abandon the mission as we lack the necessary means of support.

“As the Prefect might have already informed you, we have lost nearly all our things and a good deal of money. Personally I refuse to believe that the devil will have the better of us just because we stand badly in need of funds to continue our missionary work.”

This passage refers to an incident which occurred at that time. One night some miscreants broke into the residence of the Capuchins at Kathmandu and decamped with whatever they could find in the house. It is difficult to say whether the incident was a part of the campaign the Brahmins had launched against the missionaries or it was just an ordinary case of looting—an occurrence which was pretty common in those days. Moreover, to aggravate still more the tense situation, the capital at that time was in the grip of a political agitation.<sup>15</sup>

“I do not think”, Fr. Joseph Felix goes on to remark, “the day in which we can reap the fruit of our labour will be far. I have to admit, however, that without the shedding of blood we cannot hope to hoist the glorious standard of Christ in this land to which we have come to announce the good news. I fully realise that the blood of the evangelical labourers has always been the seed which brought forth the flowers and the fruits of Christian faith”.<sup>16</sup>

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15. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part VII, p. 206.

16. Terzorio, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-319.

The missionary concludes by expressing his earnest desire to shed his own blood for Christ's sake so that it may bring "salvation to the people of this beloved country."

The wave of excitement was still mounting and there was danger that the missionaries may either be expelled or persecuted, when the Raja had to intervene to calm troubled waters. Publicly he assured the Brahmins and the people that he had never favoured the missionaries, that he never gave them any financial help, or for that matter, they never asked for anything. Their work was disinterested and their lives blameless. They had only one object in mind and that was the uplift of every class of people.<sup>17</sup>

On another occasion, the Raja had unhappily called in soldiers from the neighbouring Moghul territory to suppress some political disturbances. These soldiers were all Mohammedans, a race highly detested by the Nepalese. Their intrusion into the internal affairs of the country and the inborn dislike for the followers of Mohammed, made the people rise in revolt and put them to death.

This minor political event, unconnected with the life and activity of the missionaries, was again a source of more trouble. Most of the inhabitants of the Valley were unaware of the national identity of the priests. At the beginning it was commonly believed that these strangers had come from across the Indian border and were Mohammedans. Since the missionaries had no ear-bob and allowed their beard to grow, it was easy for them to be mistaken for Mohammedans and thus be exposed to danger.

The populace began to associate the despised Moghul soldiers with the bearded strangers and to make them the target of their political insurrection. The situation became so grave that the priests were in danger of being lynched by the mob. Here again the Raja had to come to their rescue. The missionaries however, had an anxious time and had to keep indoors.<sup>18</sup>

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17. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 82.

18. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 271-272; part VII, p. 206.



These and other similar unfortunate occurrences reduced considerably the popularity of the missionaries. The people were no longer friendly and sympathetic as in the beginning. On the other hand, the priests could not rely indefinitely on the goodwill and support of the Raja and of his court. It was well known that the royal throne was nothing short of a weather-cock, swayed and swerved in all directions by pressure groups and vested interests with the result that the Fathers were eventually told to leave the capital.

The only contemporary document, still extant, is not very helpful in assessing the real motive or the ultimate cause which brought things to such a pass. It simply states that the Capuchins were forced to leave the hospice of Kathmandu "because of the persecution launched against them by the Brahmins". It goes on to mention that they established themselves in the kingdom of Bhatgaon in the year 1722 and that they received a cordial welcome from the Raja of that place.<sup>19</sup>

In a later report written in 1750 by Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, at that time Prefect of the mission, it is stated that the Capuchins were made to leave Kathmandu on account of their brown habit which was considered inauspicious. The report quotes the Raja of Bhatgaon as saying that the inauspicious colour of the habit was the sole and only motive which caused the priests to be expelled from Kathmandu. It goes on to add that for sometime after shifting to Bhatgaon, they went about dressed in white clothes, as suggested by the Raja himself.<sup>20</sup>

These two reports lend support to each other that it was the brown habit, "a colour of ill omen", that prompted the Brahmins to trigger off the propaganda against the missionaries, blaming them for every misfortune and not resting

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19. *Rappresentanza* No. LXIII. The full title of the writing is *Alla Sacra Congregazione de Propaganda Fide deputata sopra la Missione del Gran Tibet, rappresentanza del Padri Cappuccini Missionari, dello stato presente della medesima e dei provvedimenti per mantenerla ed accrescerla*, Rome, 1733. It will be quoted as *Rappresentanza*.

20. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 180.

till the unfortunate priests were finally turned out of the country.

Strange as it may seem, the brown colour of the Capuchin habit figured largely in the history of the Catholic settlements in Nepal. We should have occasion to revert to this in more detail in the course of the present mission account.

### Transfers and Appointments

The three missionaries left in Kathmandu by the Prefect in 1716 were replaced within two years or so. Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro, the Superior of the Nepal Mission, replaced Fr. John Francis of Fossombrone, the founder of the Trongne station in south Tibet. The latter was compelled to abandon the high altitude of the Tibetan plateau because of ill health and climatic conditions. Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro was to return to Kathmandu, but only to die there of sheer exhaustion on the 31st August 1721, scarcely two months after his arrival in the Valley. His last remains were laid to rest alongside the grave of the much lamented Fr. Gregory of Lapedona.<sup>21</sup>

Frs. Paul Mary of Matelica and Anthony Mary of Jesi returned sick to Chandernagore on the 28th November 1718, and were substituted by Fr. Bonaventure of Lapedona, who, in turn, left Nepal in January 1722, due to poor health. Meanwhile a new expedition, consisting of Frs. Francis Anthony of Cingoli, Joachim of St. Anatolia and Seraphin of Civitanuova, arrived in India on the 10th August 1720. The last two missionaries had been appointed for Lhasa. On reaching Kathmandu on the last day of the year, they found a letter from the Prefect waiting for them. In it the Prefect ordered one of the two priests to remain in Kathmandu to help in the service of the station. The lot fell on Fr. Seraphin of Civitanuova.<sup>22</sup> This brave soldier of Christ laboured in Kathmandu and Bhatgaon for an uninterrupted period of ten years.

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21. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part VII, p. 235.

22. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. LII-LVII ; part III, p. 209.

## SHIFTING TO BHATGAON

Until the time of the Gurkha conquest in the 18th century, the name of Nepal was applied only to the central valley watered by the Bagmati river. Nepal was the valley and the valley was Nepal. It is perhaps the largest valley in these Himalayan regions, bounded on all sides by lofty mountains, covered with fertile and undulating fields watered by numerous winding streams, and studded with picturesque villages and towns. All life, commercial, social, and political, centered round the valley, which controlled the ancient caravan route between India and Tibet, the rest being but wild mountain country sparsely inhabited by small warring tribes.

It was Prithwi Narayan Shah (1723-1775), the Gurkha king and warrior, who consolidated the numerous petty principalities into a state, giving Nepal its national unity and identity. After the conquest of the valley in 1768, Prithwi Narayan Shah moved his capital to Kathmandu and from then onwards the term Nepal began to denote something more than the mere area of the valley.

As our missionaries appeared on the scene during this turbulent and decisive period in the history of Nepal, it is but meet to give a panoramic view of the political situation prevailing at the time and to illustrate the state of things that conditioned their life and activity in this new field of apostolate.

### **The Three Kingdoms in the Valley**

Before the unification of the country under the Gurkha power, the territory now known as Nepal was fractioned between the Chaubisi Rajas or twentyfour petty kingdoms, very often at war amongst themselves. Three of these principalities lay in the valley of Nepal. They were known by the name of their respective capitals, that is, Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan. Quarrels and petty strifes over trifling

matters were a common occurrence, weakening their position and eventually causing their downfall.

Kathmandu is situated at 27° 42' N. Lat. and 85° 18' E. Long. and rises 1,400 meters above sea level. It stands in the ominous valley, decked like a queen, amidst verdant surroundings. Below Kathmandu, to the south-east, lie the cities of Bhatgaon and Patan. These three capitals were within a short distance of a few kms. from each other, but the territories of each kingdom fanned out in different directions from the principal city of the kingdom, even far beyond the confines of the valley.

The missionaries have supplied us with some statistical data about the size of these three sister cities. The city of Patan, we are informed, was inhabited by twentyfour thousand families, Kathmandu by eighteen thousand and Bhatgaon by twelve thousand.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics need perhaps some clarification to be correctly understood. Very likely the number of inhabitants of each city does not refer to the capital alone, but to the whole area over which the jurisdiction of the principal city extended.

The census in those days, at least in Nepal, was not taken according to the number of persons but according to the number of families. A tax was levied on each family, facilitating in this manner to bureaucratic machinery of government in the collection of dues.<sup>2</sup> An average family was reckoned to consist of five members only,<sup>3</sup> a very realistic way of taking an account of the total population. The infant mortality was very high and the plethora of other contagious diseases reduced considerably the size of each family.

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1. *Journal*, p. 72. The same figures, in regard to number of families at Patan, Kathmandu and Bhatgaon, are given by Fr. Constantine of Loro (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 17-18) and Fr. Joseph of Rovato (*La Missione del Tibet-Hindustan negli scritti del P. Giuseppe da Rovato O.F.M. Cap.*, Fr. Gottardo da Como, Asmara, 1954, p. 59).

2. *Journal*, p. 72.

3. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p.



Sketch of the Valley of Nepal  
 Drawing by Fr. Cassian of Macerata



The Valley of Nepal, at the time of our missionaries, was ruled over by the Malla dynasty, which had come into power in the fifteenth century.

From 1702 till 1735, Jagat Jaya Malla Deva occupied the throne of Kathmandu. He was a man endowed with an erratic temperament and was easily influenced by the people around him or by the pressure of the moment, which made his kingdom house divided against itself. Under his rule the Capuchins were never sure what would happen to them next. It was this petty ruler who put a heavy toll on the early missionaries who passed through Nepal on their way to Tibet; who welcomed Fr. Francis Horace and his companions in January 1715 and who finally expelled the missionaries from Kathmandu in 1722.

At his death, he was succeeded by his son Jaya Prakash (or Prakasa) Malla Deva. He too had an uneasy and troubled reign. He was dethroned in 1746 by the intrigues of the court to regain control of his kingdom in 1750. During his reign, the missionaries did not fare any better than under the rule of his unpredictable father. Often they had occasion to reprimand him because of his partiality, injustice, cruelty and violent temper. Jaya Prakash Malla Deva lost his crown in 1768, when Kathmandu was captured by the troops of Prithwi Narayan Shah.

Far better instead was the position of the missionaries in the kingdom of Bhatgaon. Raja Ranajita (Ranjit) Malla Deva, who ascended the throne in 1722, proved himself to be a sincere friend of the Capuchins and a generous benefactor of the Christians. Throughout his long rule, till his tragic end in 1769 when he lost his kingdom and his life, the ruler favoured the activities of the missionaries and highly appreciated them for their exemplary life. The priests felt always at home with him and his people.

As for the kingdom of Patan, during the 18th Century a group of *Pradhans* or Nobles succeeded in establishing themselves as “king-makers” and held the throne of Patan at their mercy. For our purpose it is not necessary to give the names of the various rulers who succeeded to the throne during the time the Capuchins remained in Patan. It is

sufficient to mention that the dealings of the missionaries with the court were few and far between and in any case, they were never made the object of much consideration. Obviously the rulers of Patan or the group of powerful nobles who busied themselves in court affairs, had something more to engage their attention than to worry about a handful of strangers who worked quietly and unobtrusively.

There is no doubt that the missionaries carried some weight with the courts of Kathmandu and Bhatgaon. On occasions they were asked to use their good offices to reduce the tension that existed between the two royal families or to settle some of their petty quarrels.

The Valley of Nepal was predominantly inhabited in those days by groups of people known as Newars. It is difficult to trace their ancestral origin, but very likely, they were the product of an intermingling between the Mongoloid and Aryan races. They were simple, honest and hard-working people who earned their daily bread by toiling as farmers, tradesmen and craftsmen. Some of their handiworks in wood carving, sculpture, metal work and religious paintings still survive and show remarkable skill and beauty.

Concerning their religion, the Newars were divided between Hindus and Buddhists, with some peculiar characteristics of their own. In Kathmandu, Fr. Cassian of Macerata observed in his Journal, the Hindus and Buddhists were nearly equal in number; in Bhatgaon, 75% of the population was Hindus and the rest were Buddhist; while in Patan the majority of the population was Buddhist and only one third were Hindus.<sup>4</sup>

The mother tongue of the people of the Valley was called Newari, a language which belongs to the Tibetan-Burman group. This was also the language of the court till 1769 and was written in the Devanagari script.

### **Silent Years**

Reverting to the main point of our narrative, we have to note that the two Fathers expelled from Kathmandu in 1722

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4. *Journal*, p. 72.



and who took refuge in Bhatgaon were John Francis of Fossombrone and Seraphin of Civitanuova. Earlier, about the year 1718, the former Raja of Bhatgaon, Bhupatindra Malla Deva, had written to the Prefect in Lhasa inviting the Capuchins to settle in his domain, assuring him that they would be most welcome and well treated.<sup>5</sup> However, Fr. Dominic could not comply immediately with His Highness' request as he did not have sufficient men at his disposal to staff both Kathmandu and Bhatgaon. But he was very pleased that the priests had now moved into Bhatgaon as this would help to ensure the reorganisation plan of 1714 and enable the missionaries to maintain a foothold in Nepal.

The history of the Bhatgaon station, from the day of its inception in 1722 till the time it petered out, for want of man-power in 1731 is unfortunately a blank page. No account of the activities of those years or a report of any worthwhile event has come down to us. Those indeed were silent and hidden years, written only in the book of life by the recording angel.

A glimpse of the life of Bhatgaon, a fleeting moment of those formless, fugitive years, may be had from a report written by Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia. Referring casually to Fr. Seraphin of Civitanuova, he states that the poor priest went through a lot of trouble and suffered persecution on many occasions at the hands of the Brahmins, undermining the whole of his physical health.<sup>6</sup> Even Bhatgaon, we may conclude, was not a bed of roses; however, the work of the ministry went on all the same but not without opposition.

Two more missionaries were posted to Bhatgaon during this period to replace those who had left or had fallen ill. Fr. John Francis of Fossombrone, already a spent force, asked to be relieved and left for Europe in 1723 and Fr. Francis Anthony of Cingoli took his place. After some time, the latter fell sick and went back to Patna. He was replaced by

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5. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 113.

6. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 209.

Fr. Francis of Cagli, who died at Bhatgaon on Christmas 1730.<sup>7</sup>

The only Capuchin now left in Bhatgaon was Fr. Seraphin of Civitanuova. Feeling lonely, ill and worn out he decided to come down to Patna early in 1731 to be a companion to the only confrere, Fr. Francis Anthony of Cingoli, still in that station. There he closed his eyes in death in 1732.<sup>8</sup> Thus came to a premature end the first phase of the Nepal mission.

Nothing more can be said about the missionary activities of the Capuchins in Kathmandu and Bhatgaon during the years 1715-1731. Records speak of quite a lot of baptisms administered in danger of death, specially to children. No mention is made of adult converts, though there might have been a few.<sup>9</sup>

### **A Prisoner in the Lord**

The mission field in Nepal had already been abandoned for want of labourers and now the zero hour for Tibet was also fast approaching. The two missionaries there, Fr. Francis Horace, the Prefect Apostolic, and Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia, his only companion, had already served in Lhasa (we refer to the year 1732) for an unbroken period of sixteen and eleven years respectively.

The rarefied air and the cold climate of the Tibetan capital, and above all the starvation diet which these two lonely and courageous veterans had endured over the years had greatly impaired their otherwise strong physical constitution and reduced to nought their working capacity. On the other hand, the skeleton mission staff, which by the end of 1730 had touched the lowest level, bringing down the total numerical strength to five priests only, demanded that the whole line of communication between Chandernagore and Lhasa should be shortened, if the mission were to survive the present testing time.

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7. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 144; part V, p. 218.

8. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 209.

9. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 96-97.

The poor state of health of Fr. Francis Horace and the recent developments of the mission in Nepal made him decide finally on leaving the altitudes of Tibet for a lower and warmer climate.

On the 25th August, 1732, the dispirited Prefect made his way down to the south to see if a change of air and of environment might not be a means to restore his health.<sup>10</sup> This was a sad and memorable day for him. Fr. Francis Horace bade farewell to his companion and friend, Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia, who was visibly moved to tears, and set out in the company of some Nepalese Christians who had been newly converted in Lhasa, on the long and trying journey to the Nepal Valley.

The send off in Lhasa was grand and moving, in sharp contrast to the inhuman treatment the Prefect was to receive in Nepal. The Raja of Kathmandu, bluntly and without any formality, cast Fr. Francis Horace, worn out by fatigue and prostrated by illness as he was, into prison where he remained for several months.<sup>11</sup>

The prefect knew beforehand that he would not be welcome in Kathmandu and that by going there he might be arrested. But he had good reason for choosing Kathmandu in preference to the neighbouring kingdom of Bhatgaon, whose ruler, throughout his long reign had always been a trusted friend of the missionaries. The reason was that the few Nepalese Christians, petty traders by profession, whom the Prefect had taken down with him to Nepal were the subjects or nationals of the kingdom of Kathmandu. They had business there and also their relatives and friends, and they intended to stay there in spite of the unfriendly dispositions of the rulers towards them.

It was but natural for the Prefect to be in their midst and to minister to them notwithstanding the ill will of the Raja and the harassments he might be subjected to. He wanted to keep them together, to help them in their spiritual needs, and possibly to form the first nucleus of a small Christian

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10. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 87.

11. *Rappresentana*, No. LXIII; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 221.

community which in due course might be instrumental in bringing others into the true fold of Christ.

Fr. Francis Horace, in one of his reports to Rome, gives the reason which led to his imprisonment.

“For several months (most probably four or five) I suffered formal imprisonment and the spoilation of whatever was in the house. This was done by order of the king of Kathmandu instigated by the Brahmins, who considered himself aggrieved because I had made Christians of some of his subjects. They too had their property confiscated, but they endured it firmly, together with the violence they were put to, the threats and also flatteries used to make them renounce the faith. Their constancy angered him all the more”.<sup>12</sup>

Finally the plot engineered by the Brahmins came to light and the poor Father was released and allowed to do his work peacefully. Not only that, but the king himself encouraged him considerably, moved, it seems, by political considerations. He must have thought that it was not wise to ill-treat a person held in such high esteem by the Tibetan authorities as this might lead to some unpleasant complications between the two governments.

On release from prison, whatever had been confiscated was duly returned to him except for a few things which the guardians of law and order had coveted. He had also to pay some money by way of tips for the “good services” rendered by the government servants in keeping his things in safe custody.<sup>13</sup>

The Brahmins had taken advantage of Fr. Francis Horace’s foreign nationality to again cause trouble and to check the spread of Christianity. They worked themselves into a frenzy and circulated a report that the doctrine preached by this false minister was against the welfare of the country. It encouraged, they alleged, disobedience to lawfully constitut-

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12. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 97. Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 221) specifically mentions that Fr. Francis Horace was in prison for four or five months.

13. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 221.

ed authority which might eventually lead to revolution and anarchy. It was therefore necessary to nip this in the bud and prevent the foreigner from doing any harm by either banishing him from the kingdom or sending him to jail, and in this the Brahmins had succeeded.

The news of Fr. Francis Horace's imprisonment caused a stir in the capital. The *Raja Guru* or High Priest, called "Archbishop" by one of the priests because of his high office<sup>14</sup> was one of the first to come to know about it. He was a kind and understanding man. Out of sympathy or perhaps curiosity, or else moved by a sincere desire to ascertain the truth, he went to see the prisoner in his cell.

The two discussed the whole thing. The Prefect tried to make him understand how unjust the accusation levelled against him was. He explained how the Christian law was not opposed to established secular order, and that it endeavoured in every way to foster good relations between the rulers and their subjects and did its best to inculcate obedience and reverence for all those in authority.

The *Raja Guru*, having some experience of the other Capuchin missionaries in Kathmandu and knowing that their conduct was blameless and their teaching above suspicion, readily understood the point. He was convinced that the priest had been falsely accused by some interested party and used his good offices to get the prisoner freed from jail.

"The royal person", continues Fr. Francis Horace his narrative, "having assured himself of truth (that the Christian law was not against the established government of the land), was pacified ; so much so that it was proposed not only to grant the Capuchins a permanent residence in Kathmandu, but also to give them a royal decree of liberty of conscience. The king even called me in his presence to favour me with such a privilege, but I deferred accepting the invitation because I could not afford the thirty Roman scudi (about Rs. 70.00) for the presents which were to be given on such occasions to the Secretary of State, the Keeper of the

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14. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. 97.

Seal and to the other ministers of state, whom one must honour in keeping with the custom of the land".<sup>15</sup>

In another report the Prefect stated that he declined to accept the decree of liberty of conscience for another reason. He felt that the mission was on its last leg. Since 1721 no new recruits had been coming out and there was no news about the arrival of new re-inforcements to fill the depleted ranks. If things continued in this way, it was inevitable that in the near future all missionary stations would have to be abandoned one by one. There was therefore no point to accept the decree of liberty of conscience when no one would be left in Kathmandu to make use of it.

The invigorating climate of Nepal had somehow restored Fr. Francis Horace's failing health, but his mind was not at peace. His thoughts were often centered on the lonely missionary now left in the uplands of Tibet. He too badly needed rest and a change of climate.

After mature consideration, the Prefect deemed it advisable to recall his confrere from Tibet. It broke his heart to see that even Lhasa, where he had prayed, toiled and suffered for so long in the hope of winning souls to Christ, must now be abandoned. But in the present circumstances the poor man could find no other solution.

On receipt of the Prefect's letter asking him to come down to Nepal, Fr. Joachim proceeded to wind up the affairs of the mission. The news that he would be leaving shortly caused a sensation. All were ready and even eager to welcome new white lamas, as the European priests were called, to Tibet and no one was prepared to see even the last of them leave so soon and so unexpectedly.<sup>16</sup>

Having made the necessary arrangements for the safe keeping of the chapel, monastery and other articles he could not take with him, the missionary doctor took the road to Nepal towards the middle of August 1733.<sup>17</sup> The parting

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15. *Rappresentanza*, No. LXIII; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 97-98.

16. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, 221-222.

17. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 222.

was sad and sadder were the thoughts that accompanied him all the way to Kathmandu. His departure from Lhasa meant the retreat from a forward position which had been held for so long in spite of overwhelming difficulties and upon which the future of the whole enterprise was staked.

For a year or so, Frs. Francis Horace and Joachim who arrived in Nepal in the month of October 1733, laboured together in Kathmandu and Bhatgaon respectively.<sup>18</sup> They worked and studied together late into the night till their eyes were heavy with sleep, and their labour was well rewarded. They succeeded in converting some adults and in administering the sacrament of baptism to quite a number of dying children.<sup>19</sup>

Bad news continued to pour in. Down in Patna, good Fr. Francis Anthony of Cingoli, the only resident priest in the station, had gone to his reward towards the second half of the year 1734.<sup>20</sup> With his untimely death, being still in his forties, the whole mission staff was reduced to three priests only.

Years later, writing about the three surviving Fathers, Fr. Francis Horace described them in these pathetic terms: "One had been a missionary for seventeen years and was now weak and unfit for work (Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia); another had served in the mission for twenty-two years, was about seventy years old (actually he was only sixtysix) and was blind of one eye, (Fr. Peter of Serra Petrone who had been working all the time at Chandernagore) and the third (the Prefect himself) had completed twentyfive years of service in the mission land".<sup>21</sup> None of them had ever been home on leave for a well-deserved rest.

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18. There are still three letters written from Bhatgaon by Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 171-178) in which he states that he was working at Bhatgaon, while the Prefect took care of the Christians at Kathmandu.

19. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 222.

20. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 98.

21. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 96.

It was indeed a pitiful state of affairs. Following the death of Fr. Francis Anthony, the harried Prefect felt bound to take another painful decision. Both he and his companion were to leave Nepal and come down to Patna. Fr. Joachim was to replace the much lamented Fr. Francis Anthony, while the Prefect himself was to press on to Bengal to await the arrival of some news or some new priests at Chander-nagore. Disheartened but hopeful, he was still expecting that relief of some sort would soon be coming or that some new missionaries were on their way.

The decision to withdraw from Nepal was a painful one in more ways than one. A new atmosphere of trust and confidence had begun to prevail over the land and there were good prospects for conversions. The few Christians in Kathmandu and Bhatgaon entreated the two Fathers not to leave them orphans.<sup>22</sup> They were all newly converted, and were like saplings in a nursery, still in need of care, still wanting to be guided and strengthened by that moral light and spiritual food which had to sustain them all through life. But, no matter how painful it was for the pastor to leave the newly born lambs alone and unprotected, it could not be helped. There were Catholics in Patna too, sheep without a shepherd who might stray from the fold unless someone was there to watch over them.

Besides, there was another consideration which weighed on abandoning Nepal, that is the fear that the mission property in Patna might be confiscated. On the death of the owner or the tenant, if no one came forward to claim the property, it was taken over by government or ransacked by the rabble. That was the law of the land in those days.

Frs. Francis Horace and Joachim had scarcely reached Patna, at the end of December 1734 or at the beginning of January 1735, when they learnt that another blow, the severest of all, had struck the mission like a bolt from the blue. It left them stunned with grief and shock. Rome had decided to cut down the number of missionaries. That was the fatal communication they received and not the longed for news that new priests were on their way out to India.

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22. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 222-223.



Short of funds and hard pressed by other commitments, the Congregation of Propaganda had passed a resolution on the 29th November 1732, to the effect that the Tibetan Mission was to be maintained, but that the personnel had to be reduced to five members only. It was further resolved to reduce the annual allocation at 500 Roman Scudi, that is about Rs. 1,100.<sup>23</sup> That tolled the death knell of the mission and prostrated it to the dust.

The decision of Rome electrified the Prefect into action. Having appointed Fr. Joachim as his lieutenant with residence at Patna, he got ready to leave for Europe to represent in a language of fire the hopeless state of the mission.

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23 *Rappresentanza*, Summary No. III.

### III

#### MAKING A NEW START

The second start of the mission in Nepal was more or less similar to the first. Here too, one of the priests, the Prefect himself, was sailing west to enlighten the authorities in Rome of the sad plight of the dying mission while three young recruits were moving east to strengthen the remaining few. Similar contretemps were very much the rule rather than the exception in those early days of slow communication and difficult transport. It was thus impossible to maintain contact between head-quarters and the missionaries working thousands of kilometers away. None knew what was happening.

In 1735 the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, fearing that the number of missionaries might be below the statutory level fixed on the 29th of November 1732 (years had passed without news and the Superiors in Rome did not know how many missionaries were still alive), decided to send out new reinforcements.

Three young priests, Frs. Edward of Cingoli, Sigismund of Jesi and Vitus of Recanati, were therefore deputed to go and replace those who might have died or whom age and infirmity might have disabled. The three priests landed safely at Chandernagore on the 27th September 1736.<sup>1</sup>

Another happy event occurred soon after their arrival. The Vice-Prefect, Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia, still in Patna, was wondering what to do with the newcomers, whether to go with them to Tibet or detain them in Hindustan, awaiting the outcome of Fr. Francis Horace's representation to Rome. Unexpectedly however, he received two letters and then two delegations from the Rajas of Kathmandu and Bhatgaon asking him for missionaries.<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 3.

2. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 3-4 ; part III, p. 224.

These two kinglets, well impressed and edified by the work of the former Capuchins who had served in Nepal, were anxious to get back some members of the same religious body for their respective territories. Having heard that new missionaries had arrived from Europe, they hastened without delay to procure their services.

Their envoys were already in Patna in January 1737<sup>3</sup> to petition the Vice-Prefect to send the newcomers to Nepal. The King of Bhatgaon was so determined to have newcomers that he enjoined his messenger, Bhavani Datt Bhaju, not to return alone, even if he had to wait for two or more years. There was also a letter from the *Raja Guru* of Kathmandu, the spiritual adviser of the Raja, or the theologian of the ruler as some of the Fathers called him, urging Fr. Joachim to do all in his power to oblige his master.<sup>4</sup>

Both kings were holding out many promises. They assured the Vice-Prefect that the Fathers would be well received, well accommodated and every facility would be given them in the pursuit of their work. Notwithstanding such clear promises, Fr. Joachim remained for a while undecided, not knowing whether it was advisable to accept the tempting offer or turn it down.

The Vice-Prefect was well acquainted with the Raja of Bhatgaon. He was sincere, loyal and a friendly person, very much attached to the priests and it was certain that he would keep his promises. But he was somewhat apprehensive of the new ruler of Kathmandu. The former Raja had died and Fr. Joachim had every reason to suspect that the son might be like his father, unfriendly and temperamental.

On the other hand, to oblige one and refuse the other would be unwise. The road to Tibet passed through the territory of the Raja of Kathmandu and the missionaries, in their own interest, were anxious to be in his good books. Before coming to a final decision, Fr. Joachim thought it prudent to inquire about the character of the young Raja. He was informed that he differed greatly from his erratic

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3. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 224.

4. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 3-4.

father; he was kind, generous and understanding and there was no reason to doubt his sincerity in inviting the Fathers to his dominion.<sup>5</sup>

On the 13th March 1737, trecking twenty-five days across the Indian plains and the first ramparts of the Himalayan range, Frs. Joachim and Vitus arrived safely in the Valley of Nepal.<sup>6</sup> Before leaving for his new destination, the Vice-Prefect made some changes in the small team of missionary workers. Fr. Edward of Cingoli was left at Chandernagore to help the aged and half blind Fr. Peter da Serra Petrona, while Sigismund of Jesi was put in charge of the Patna station. True to his word, the King of Bhatgaon received the two priests with open arms giving them a royal welcome.

The first thing the missionaries did was to ask His Highness to issue Decree of Liberty of Conscience. To this request the Raja replied, "I am the Decree of Liberty of Conscience. All those who will embrace your law will be considered my subjects just as before, and they will be your subjects in all things pertaining to your law. And I will be very glad if they embrace it".<sup>7</sup>

Within a few months of their arrival, the king of Bhatgaon donated Frs. Joachim and Vitus, in the name of Pope Clement XII, a large house capable of accommodating five or six persons. There was sufficient room to make one of the apartments into a chapel. He further presented Fr. Joachim with a thirty kilogramme bell, having the names of Jesus and Mary inscribed around the base.<sup>8</sup> And, before the year was out, the Raja graciously granted the missionaries the written Decree of Liberty of Conscience.

### **Gift of a House at Bhatgaon**

The gift of a large house and the Decree of Liberty of Conscience are something so extraordinary and unique in the mission history of Nepal that they must be dealt with in some detail.

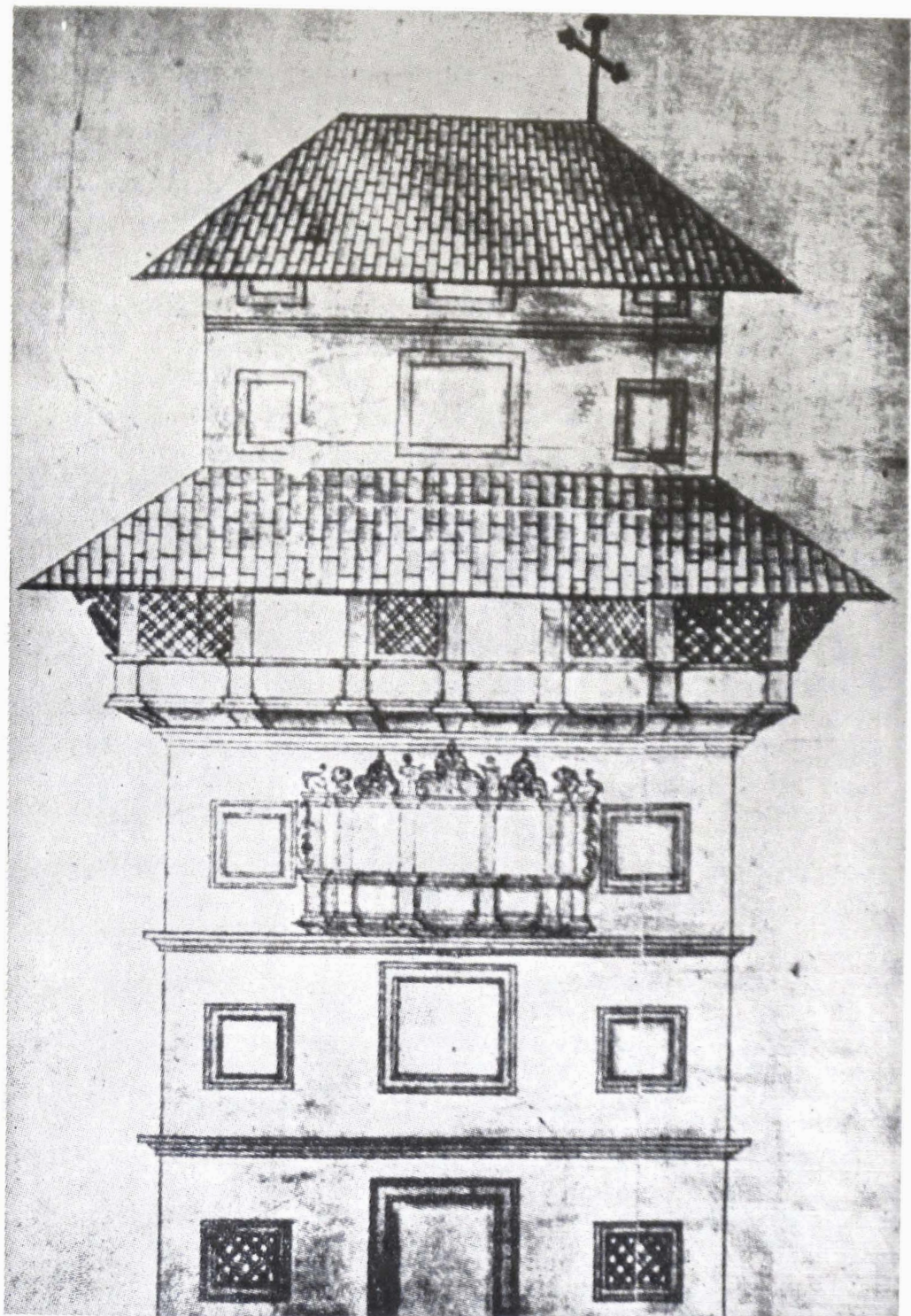
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5. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 224.

6. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 4.

7. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 4.

8. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 4; part III, p. 224.



The house at Bhatgaon  
*Drawing by Fr. Cassian of Macerata*



Before handing over the building, the Raja, at his own expense, had it repaired and readapted according to the wishes of the two missionaries. On the 4th October 1737, feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the Founder of the Franciscan Order, Frs. Joachim and Vitus said Mass for the first time in their new dwelling.<sup>9</sup>

The deed of gift written on a palm leaf was executed on the 31st October 1737. The translation is as follows :

“Health ! We, Jaya Ranajita Malla Deva, king and lord, are pleased to offer as a gift to Frs. Joachim and Vitus, Italian Capuchins, in the name of Pope Clement XII, the house situated on the western side of Bhatgaon, known as Laskokwath, which is bounded on south by the main road, on the west by the road bend, on the north by the main road, and on the east by the Bhagisimha’s house, measuring 42 cubits and 8 fingers in height, 16½ cubits and 4 fingers in length, except for the buffaloes’ rooms essential for the said animals.

“We further order that the said house should not be restricted or encroached upon in anyway or by any person, either in its internal or external comforts, but it must be kept always in the present form, together with all the privileges and burdens according to the laws of the land and the right to sell or exchange it.

The scribe is the astrologer Jaya Narayana. The date is the year 858, on the 7th day of the half clear moon of the month of Kartika.”<sup>10</sup>

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9. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 224.

10. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann zu einer Geschichte der Kapuzinermissionen in Tibet, Nepal und Hindustan*, erstmals herausgegeben von Dr.P. Adelhelm Jann O.Min.Cap., Luzern, 1925, p. 29; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 219-220; *L’Impero Anglo-Indiano, (Nepal – Bengala—Indostan) attraverso i manoscritti inediti dei missionari Cappuccini Italiani*, Roma, 1935, p. 5. This writing will be quoted as Terzorio B.

According to *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, p. 282, the cubit is a linear measure of about half a meter in length and is divided in 24 fingers.

According to Fr. Cassian of Macerata (*Journal*, p. 70), the house at Bhatgaon was a five storey building, isolated like a tower, measuring 14 *gaz* in length, 13 *gaz* in breadth and 30 *gaz* in height. The *gaz* is a linear measure still widely used in India and Nepal, which falls a little short of a meter.

The questions which need some explanation are: why was the house donated to the priests in the name of Clement XII and what was the legal value of the deed written on a palm leaf? And again, what was the significance of buffaloes' room being excluded from the gift?

It appears that at the very beginning, the Tibetan missionaries had received oral instructions from Rome to purchase all immovable properties in the name of the Holy Sea represented by the reigning Pontiff. This instruction was later embodied in a Papal Decree dated 12th December 1718.

As for the legality of the deed gifting the house, according to the custom of the land, gifts could be made in three different ways. The first was oral, the second was written on a palm leaf, while the third was engraved on a copper plate.

The first mode of gift indicated that the gift was at the goodwill of the donor, that is, it could be revoked at any time, for any or no reason at all. It was not uncommon, specially with the Nepalese nobles, to offer a gift mainly of immovable properties or other non-perishable goods as an act of goodwill or friendship, and then reclaim it, if the recipient fell into disfavour.

A deed written on a palm leaf conferred on the recipient ownership only for the lifetime of the donor, and on the donor's death, his heir or successors could reclaim it.

The third mode of gift inscribed on a copper plate was an irrevocable perpetual gift. It was like a sacred trust which no power on earth could repeal.

The deed of gift of the house at Bhatgaon having been written on a palm leaf, the missionaries would be legally dispossessed of it on the death of Ranajita Malla Deva.<sup>11</sup>

It was customary for a room on the ground floor of certain houses on the periphery of the town, to be reserved to give shelter to the sacred bull of that area. The priests were given one such house with the result that they were put to

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11. The above information has been culled from the *Journal*, p. 70; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 77-78; part III, p. 225.



great inconvenience. For one thing, the house was very high but narrow, resembling more a turret than a human dwelling. The ground floor had only two large rooms with no sanitary arrangements and no proper kitchen.

The Raja was very considerate and provided the priests both facilities at his own expense. A lane adjoining the house was closed and a small building was put up. The ground floor of this new construction was made to serve sanitary purposes and the upper storey was fitted as a kitchen and store-room. On the top of the kitchen, there was a terrace.<sup>12</sup>

The house was located near the Bhairo Temple, the protective deity of Bhatgaon, and one of the most imposing building of the capital.

### **Decree of Liberty of Conscience**

On the 18th November 1737, the king of Bhatgaon took another great decision in favour of the missionaries. He granted them in writing the Decree of Liberty of Conscience. The royal decree runs as follows:

“We, Jaya Ranajita Malla, King of Bhatgaon, in virtue of the present document, grant to all European Fathers leave to preach, teach and draw to their religion the people to us subject, and we likewise allow our subjects to embrace the Law of the European Fathers, without fear of molestation either from us or from those who rule in our kingdom. Nor shall the Fathers receive from us any annoyance, or be obstructed in their Ministry. All this, however, must be done without violence and of one’s own free will.

“Krishna Simha Pradhan, Prime Minister, is the witness to the document, and Sri Kasi Nath is the scribe.

“Given on the 11th day of the month Margasira, in the year 861 of the Nepalese era; May the day be auspicious.”<sup>13</sup>

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12. *Journal*, pp. 72-73.

13. *Bullarium Ordinis Minorum Capucinatorum*, Vol. VII, p. 263; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 222-223; Terzorio B, p. 6.

In handing over personally the decree of liberty of conscience to the missionaries, the Raja told them: "I give you this document, but in return I want from you another document whereby you pledge yourselves to stay forever in Bhatgaon".

At this act of royal trust and generosity, the two missionaries issued the following statement:

"In the name of the Lord, Amen. We, Bro. Joachim of Anatolia, Vice-Prefect of the Tibetan Mission, though unworthy, and Fr. Vitus of Recanati, Superior, Capuchin missionaries of the same mission, adoring the true living God and Saviour of the world, beseech Him to enlighten the people sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death.

"Acknowledging our great debt of gratitude to the king of Bhatgaon :

- (1) for having received Frs. Seraphin of Civitanuova and John Francis of Fossombrone, Capuchins, when they were sent into exile by the king of Kathmandu,
- (2) for having always favoured them,
- (3) for having sent again for the fathers from Patna, after they had already left his dominion,
- (4) for having made over to us this year free of cost the house known as Laskokwath; and finally,
- (5) for having granted us the decree of Liberty of Conscience, as it is shown in the document, dated the 18th November 1737, which is the crowning of all that can be expected by the missionaries, we deem it right and proper to accede to the kind of petition of the king, that is, to pledge ourselves that some missionaries of the Capuchin Order will always reside in the city of Bhatgaon, on condition that the gift of the house and the decree of Liberty of Conscience will always remain in force.

"We hereby promise it to the best of our ability and confirm it by affixing the local seal to this letter. I, Bro. Joachim of St. Anatolia, confirm the above by signing this paper with my own hand.

“Given at Bhatgaon on the 19th November, 1737”.<sup>14</sup>

It was not easy to keep this pledge. If missionaries were not forthcoming in fairly good numbers, even Bhatgaon would have to do without them.

Fr. Edward of Cingoli referring to this particular difficulty in a letter addressed to the Procurator General of the Order wrote: “The king of Bhatgaon has granted us the Decree of Liberty of Conscience and besides, he has presented us with the gift of a house, which may cost four or five thousand rupees, but all this will be of no use unless the Congregation of Propaganda makes a determined effort to send out new recruits”.

The Vice-Prefect likewise emphasised the shortage of missionaries at this critical moment. He complained ruefully that the mission had already lost a golden opportunity and remarked that if priests had been available earlier, the station at Bhatgaon would by now be a flourishing centre of Christianity, instead it is struggling hard to make a new start and to stand on its feet.<sup>15</sup>

### **In the Kingdom of Kathmandu**

There was also great rejoicing in Kathmandu at the arrival of Frs. Joachim and Vitus.

When the two priests went to pay their respects to the Raja, His Highness was very pleased at their coming and entertained them to a friendly conversation. He insisted that the two missionaries remain in Kathmandu and to entice them to remain, he promised to grant them soon the Decree of Liberty of Conscience and to provide them with suitable accommodation.<sup>16</sup>

The goodwill and kindly disposition of the ruler towards the missionaries was demonstrated by granting them, on the 24th October 1737, the Decree of Liberty of Conscience and the customary transit facilities within the limits of his territory.

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14. Terzorio, *op. cit.*, pp. 355-357; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 6-7; part IV, pp. 221-222

15. Terzorio, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-358; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 7.

16. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, 225.

The fact that Jaya Prakash Malla Deva was the first, amongst the three rulers of the Valley, to grant them the Decree of Liberty of Conscience, is a positive proof that he welcomed them with an open mind and without any misgivings.

After a lengthy introduction in flowery language and a lavish display of titles, the Decree of Liberty of Conscience comes to the main point and states:

“We have never given any heed to the malicious tongues of certain people who in the past accused the priests of having done evil actions. Fr. Francis Horace and Fr. Joachim, Capuchins, requested us to personally examine their religious books and see if anything objectionable was to be found in them. Having taken vision of their sacred books, we are pleased to say that their books give honour to God, the master of creation and destruction, and that they are good”.

This portion of the Decree of Liberty of Conscience refers undoubtedly to the years 1733-34, when the two priests laboured together in Nepal. Needless to add that the evil actions alleged to have been done by the priests were nothing more than breaches of caste rules.

The document goes on to say: “On our own initiative, we have called Frs. Joachim and Vitus from Patna. No one therefore should harass or do any harm to those who, of their own free will, embrace the way of life professed by the two priests. If, by any chance, European merchants, that is, French, English and Dutch, visit our country, they should not be burdened with custom duties beyond the measure established by the laws of the land. No one should do them wrong as they are respectable people.

“The noble Raja Prakash Malla Deva and Thakur Sri Devananda, illustrious Chamberlain of the king, are witnesses of this document.

“Given on the 15th day of the month of Asvani, in the year 857; May the day be propitious”.<sup>17</sup>

The two missionaries might have been somewhat disappointed at the wording of the document. It was colourless

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17. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 32-33; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 217-218.

and meaningless; nevertheless they appreciated the gesture of goodwill extended to them by “the noble Raja Prakash Malla Deva”.

It was not so easy to obtain a house at Kathmandu. The Raja took more than four years to provide the priests with suitable accommodation. Meanwhile, Fr. Vitus of Recanati, who was posted from the beginning at Kathmandu, had to put up with a native Christian by the name of John Baptist, one of the converts made earlier in Tibet. The zealous missionary made himself happy in his new environments and started learning the first elements of the language and to acquire some knowledge of the Sacred Books of the Newari from his host who was, we are informed, fairly well versed in them.<sup>18</sup>

Those lonely years (because of the political conditions in Moghul territories, passes were closed and the two priests remained completely cut off from the world) were not without some spiritual consolation. Fr. Vitus succeeded in bringing into the Church ten adults, and Fr. Joachim, through the practice of medicine, baptised thirty persons in danger of death and instructed a few adults, who were eventually received into the Church in 1742.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Largest Expedition**

A wintry fruitless season had engulfed the desolate mission but now there were signs that the advent of spring was not far and there could be discerned, through the mist of the dying winter, a golden horizon heralding a new era. Unexpectedly, the long-awaited news was received that Fr. Francis Horace, the Prefect of the Mission, had reached Chandernagore in September 1739, bringing ten more missionaries, eight priests and two lay brothers, the largest expedition which upto that time had ever embarked for the east.

On the 6th February 1740, the Prefect, at the head of eight missionaries (Frs. Sigismund of Jesi, Innocent of Ascoli, Tranquillus of Apecchio, Florian of Jesi, Cassian of Maerata, Constantine of Loro Piceno and Bros. Liborius of

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18. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 225.

19. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 225-227.

Fermo and Paul of Florence) moved into Bhatgaon on his way to the Tibetan capital.

Next day the party was received by the Raja of Bhatgaon. One of the fathers put on record the happenings of that memorable occasion:

“We were received in a most cordial manner. The king sat on an elevated seat, while we squatted on the ground according to the custom of the land. He was dressed in white, except for the headgear which was scarlet, had no shoes, but wore a pair of slippers richly embroidered. His Highness had the name and age of each of us taken down on a piece of paper. We were with him for one hour and before taking leave he gave expression once again to his feeling of pleasure and offered us his services. The following day, the ruler sent his son to us to return the visit, bringing along a lot of eatables. Sometime later, His Highness himself came to see us at the hospice”.<sup>20</sup>

The Prefect was anxious to continue his journey to Tibet as soon as possible so as to cross the high mountain passes leading to Lhasa before the onset of the rainy season. But circumstances were against him and he had to make a long stop in Nepal. Small-pox in an epidemic form was raging all over the land, the passes were closed and no one was permitted to travel from one country to another. And so, from the 6th February to 4th October 1740, eleven Capuchin missionaries had to make Nepal their home. The disappointment of being held up in this manner gave way to the pleasure of being in one another's company. They could pray together, study together and exchange views and think of the future in a land where the sovereign and his people were so kind and friendly.

Making the best of the forced stay in Nepal, the Prefect set about to do some useful missionary work. A tall iron cross was erected, with the permission of the Raja, over the mission house on the feast of St. Mathew, February 24. Earlier in the morning, a solemn high mass had been sung by the small religious community in the presence of a few local Christians.

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20. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 15-16.

The cross installed over the building could be seen at a great distance. It stood there like a beacon, tall, dark and conspicuous, against the wintry Himalayan sky, beckoning to the people of that ancient land that Christ, the Saviour of mankind, had come to stay with them.

Later on 5th June 1740, Fr. Francis Horace made bold to present the Raja with an apologetic treatise which had earlier been translated into the Newari language. The missionary wanted to sound His Highness and those of his court as to whether they had given any serious thought to the idea of embracing the Christian law. Fr. Joachim had been trying to persuade the Raja and his subjects to give due thought to this, but had always met with an evasive reply.

The Raja, on the excuse that he was at war (it was merely a petty squabble) with the kings of Kathmandu and Patan, pointed out that he could not give due consideration to such a serious matter as his mind was too preoccupied. He added further that the missionaries, being new to the country should first endeavour to be well acquainted with the language before entering into any religious discussion or controversy.

His Highness, however, did not dismiss the idea but promised to invite the Brahmins and the Fathers to debate on the merits of their respective religion in his presence. If the Christian Law, they had come to preach to the people of Nepal, was proved to be the only true religion to obtain salvation, he and his subjects would not hesitate to embrace it.

Moving into Kathmandu, a few days later, the Prefect made the same overture to the Raja of the place, meeting more or less with the same response.

The atmosphere in the town had decidedly changed for the better since 1732, when poor Fr. Francis Horace had been thrown into prison. He was already well known and the social contacts he had established in the capital in the past made it easy for him to gain the favours of the ruler and of the nobles. Even Dardan Singh, the man who had taken a leading part in his imprisonment, had become or pretended to be a good friend of the missionaries. On the whole, the Prefect felt that the people were well inclined towards Christianity. But out of human respect, or fearing that, when put

to the test, the Decree of Liberty of Conscience would remain a dead letter, and the people were therefore reluctant to come forward and enlist themselves in the army of Christ.

Patan, known in the ancient days as Laltipatan, was the third kingdom in the Valley of Nepal ruled by the Malla dynasty. It was the most populous town of the three Himalayan domains, full of temples and monasteries, situated in idyllic surroundings. The goodwill of the Raja was indispensable in the plan to establish the mission in Nepal. The three capitals were so close to each other and their interests so interconnected that it was virtually impossible to succeed in one kingdom and fail in another without jeopardising the whole undertaking.

Contacts were made in view of establishing a new mission station at Patan; the possibility of conversions was explored and other particulars examined in the light of past experience. The impression gained by the Prefect was not very hopeful, but on the whole not discouraging. Patan and its present ruler, Vishnu Malla Deva, seemed to be more refractory to the message of the Gospel than Kathmandu and Bhatgaon.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile the rainy season was drawing to a close and final arrangements had to be made for the expedition to Lhasa. Before setting out for Tibet on 4th October 1740, the Prefect had already made up his mind to leave two priests and a lay brother in Nepal in the persons of Frs. Vitus of Recanati, Innocent of Ascoli and Bro. Liborius of Fermo.<sup>22</sup>

Fr. Joachim, who had been in Nepal since March 1737, was to go to Lhasa with Fr. Francis Horace and the rest of

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21. The information under this sub-heading has been culled from the *Journal*, pp. 68-96; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 8-28; part III, pp. 227-228.

22. *Memorie Istoriche delle virtu', viaggi e fatiche del P. Giuseppe Maria dei Bernini da Gargnano* by Cassian of Macerata Verona MDCCLXVII, pp. 15-16. This book will be quoted as *Memorie Istoriche*; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 20. All the other Missionaries went to Tibet except for Fr. Sigismund of Jesi, who, because of his poor condition of health, was told to return to Patna for treatment.



the party. But he was not to remain there for long as he was already too old and worn out. His mission was to introduce Fr. Cassian of Macerata, the new missionary doctor for Lhasa, impart to him the secrets of the medical art and then go home for a needed rest. And, while going home, he would take with him the letters and gifts which the Dalai Lama and the Regent would be sending to the Pope in return for the letters and gifts which His Holiness had sent to them. He would also be in a position to acquaint the Superiors at home with the latest developments of the mission.

### **Exchange of Letters**

Soon after the Raja of Bhatgaon had donated a house to the priests and granted them the Decree of Liberty of Conscience, Fr. Vitus of Recanati made it a point of duty to inform His Holiness the Pope of all the kindness showered on the missionaries by Ranajita Malla Deva and of the promise the priests had made to remain permanently in his dominion.

Benedict XIV, the then Pope, was not slow in realising the importance and significance of all these events. In order to foster good relations between Rome and Bhatgaon and to take full advantage of these good tidings for the spread of the Gospel, the Holy Father forwarded to His Highness the following paternal message:

“Pope Benedict XIV to the noble and mighty king of Bhatgaon.

“Noble and mighty king, health and the light of the divine grace.

“Our beloved son, Fr. Vitus of Recanati, a member of the religious order called Capuchins, has conveyed to us the happy news that Your Highness wants us to send you some members of that religious family and order them to live in your kingdom to teach the people under your rule the Christian faith and guide them in the way of eternal salvation, the only blessing which a wise man must seek and long for. We gather from the desire you have expressed that Your Highness is endowed with prudence of mind and keenness of judgement.

“It being your bounden duty to strive after the happiness of your subjects and to see that they are obedient and submissive to your commands, you will not find anywhere in the world another religion which more strictly orders obedience to kings and their magistrates and which wages a more relentless war against all those vices which pervade human society and corrupt it like a contagious disease. Such is the purpose, provided they be well observed, of the rules of conduct given us by the Author of our most holy religion, the Supreme Lord of heaven and earth.

“Accordingly, our charity towards all mankind and your kindness towards our missionaries prompted us to direct some of the members of the Capuchin Order to set sail at once to carry to your parts of the east the light of divine knowledge and to prepare for your people an easy and safe way to our heavenly home and its joys everlasting.

“Oh, would to God that as you give our missionaries, whom the same zeal animates, the royal permission to devote to this duty their energies and their means, and that too, after exposing their lives to so much danger in traversing the boundless tracts of sea and land, so you also take the lead and set an example to your own people ! This would surely give us the greatest pleasure and be for you a salutary source of happiness.

“What makes us conceive such hopes is the promise contained in your own letter (the text refers to a copy of the Decree of Liberty of Conscience transmitted to the Pope by Fr. Vitus together with a covering letter), that is, that you will protect the missionaries with the shield of your royal authority, in order that they may be free to preach openly in your kingdom and that there may be no obstacle to the embracing of their teachings. For this we are deeply grateful to your Highness and pray to God, the author of all good things, to favour you with His light and bestow on you all prosperity.

“Given in Rome at St. Mary Major under the Fisher’s ring, on the 1st May 1742, the second year of our Pontificate.”<sup>23</sup>

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23. *Bullarium Ordinis Minorum Cappuccinorum* Vol. VII, pp. 262-263; *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 31-32.

On receipt of this letter the Raja of Bhatgaon replied to Pope Benedict XIV, on the 7th September 1774, in these terms:

“Most High Lord, health!

“His Highness Jaya Ranajita Malla Deva, mighty in his speech, to the Royal Highness Benedict XIV, most high Pontiff, says this: I am doing well here, and how is Your Highness in your distant kingdom ?

“I have thought over the letter which has been sent to me by Your Highness. In regard to the Law (that is, the invitation extended to the Raja by the Pope to embrace the Christian Law), I am not in a position to follow it at present; as for my subjects, I do not know what to say. I have ordered the Father to see if my people have the right disposition to embrace it; if they do, the priests have only to endeavour to make them embrace it. Besides, I have told the Fathers to speak freely about their religion anywhere in this country and whosoever, of his own accord, will receive it, I have given my word that he will not be molested.

“Further, in the past there were no European articles in Nepal, but now, by the goodness of Your Highness, there are European articles, and priests who devote their lives to the welfare of my subjects, and the people here are so pleased and satisfied with their work that I feel it my duty to take all possible care of the Fathers. Moreover, the things which cannot be found in your place may be ordered from here and I will send them to you. Your Highness is my friend, and so long as I am here, you need not worry about the things which might happen in these parts under my jurisdiction, for you may rest assured that I will honour my commitments and do whatever is expected of me.

“I stand badly in need of a good medical man and I would feel very much obliged if you would kindly send me one. All things are known to Your Highness and there is no need for me to write more, and with this I come to an end.

“Written in the year of the solution of debts 864, the first day of the rising moon in the month of Bhadrapada. Keep fit”.<sup>24</sup>

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24. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 226-227; Terzorio B, p. 8.

The letter is sincere and gives an insight of His Highness' mind and character. Whatever might have been the faults and failings of Ranajita Malla Deva, it is sure that he kept his word to the end. The missionaries and the Christians never had any reason to complain about him.

### **Another House at Kathmandu**

Fr. Joachim was back in Kathmandu in the month of December 1741, bearer of the gifts and complimentary replies from the Dalai Lama and the Regent in Lhasa to the Pope's gifts and letters. Before proceeding to Europe, the veteran missionary remained for sometime in the station to rest a little after the strenuous journey and to press for a permanent residence in the capital.<sup>25</sup>

In an interview with Jaya Prakash Malla Deva, Fr. Joachim reminded His Highness of the promise he had made earlier to donate a house to the mission. At the same time, the Raja urged Fr. Joachim for the appointment of one of the priests at Kathmandu. The bargain was struck: the mission got a house and the Raja a resident priest.

It is true that since 1737, Fr. Vitus of Recanati was putting up at Kathmandu with a Nepalese Christian but after sometime, he found it more convenient to stay at Bhatgaon with Fr. Joachim. Every Sunday and on feast days one of the priests used to come to Kathmandu to say mass and minister to the spiritual needs of the few Catholics of the place and then return to Bhatgaon.<sup>26</sup>

The reason given for abandoning Kathmandu temporarily was that there were more Catholics at Bhatgaon than in Kathmandu. On the other hand, economic reasons must have influenced the priest in this matter also. Moreover, on the departure of the Prefect and his party in October 1740 for Lhasa, two new missionaries were stationed in Nepal. It was but natural that they should be under the personal care of a more experienced confrere, that is, Fr. Vitus of Recanati, the Superior of the mission in Nepal who was then residing at Bhatgaon in the house donated by the Raja. Even John

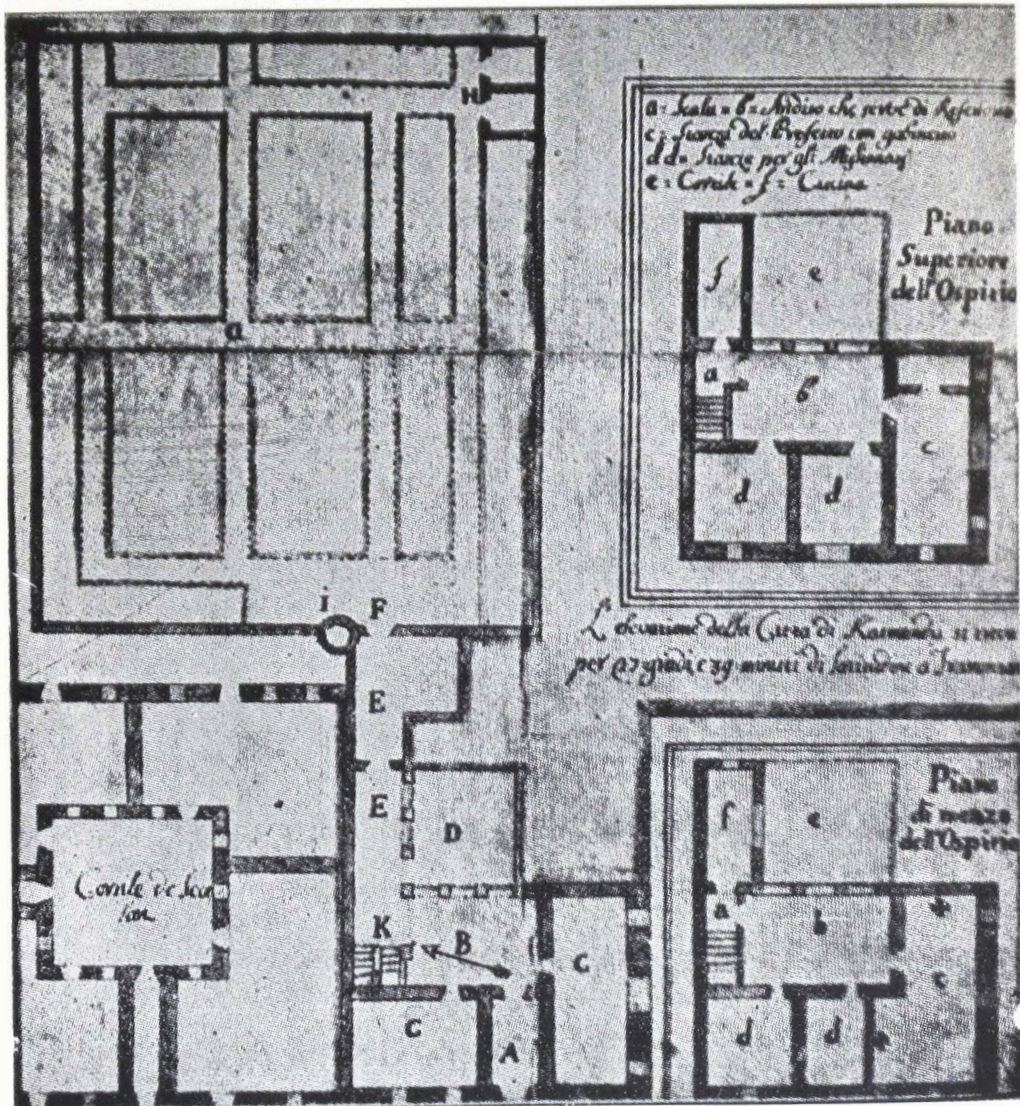
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25. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 233.

26. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 18.







Plan of the house at Kathmandu  
 Drawing by Fr. Cassian of Macerata

Baptist, who was giving hospitality to the priest at Kathmandu, had gone to Tibet with Fr. Francis Horace and his companions.

The first two Capuchins to enjoy the comforts of the house donated by the Raja of Kathmandu to the mission were Fr. Innocent of Ascoli and Bro. Liborius of Fermo. They moved into the house at the end of 1741 or the beginning of 1742.

The title deed of the house at Kathmandu was inscribed on a copper plate to denote that it was given to the mission "forever and a day". The document is dated the 17th December 1741.

We are indebted to Sir B.H. Hodgson, the British Resident in Nepal in the middle of the 19th century and a member of the Asiatic Society, for bringing to light this precious document and for its translation into English.<sup>27</sup>

Omitting the introduction to the deed of gift, which is a mixture of conventional terms and high sounding phrases, Sir Hodgson translates the relevant portion of the document as follows:

"Jaya Prakash Malla Deva, prince of Nepal, gives for the establishment and worship of the Capuchin Fathers a beautiful site situated in Talsi thali of Wontu tol in an unoccupied place and also a two storied open quadrangular house.

"The bounds of the location are: west from Jaga Dharma Singh's house, south from the house of Dhanju Suryadhan and Puraneswar, east and north from the main road.

"The subjoined are the limits or extent viz. for the house, the fixed measure for 4 houses and 16 cubits, 7 fingers breadth in excess, and for the open quadrangle of the house, three quarters of one house allowance and  $12\frac{1}{2}$  cubits in excess, exclusive of a private road or excess of one house measure with 22 cubits above. For the location the limits are the allowance fixed for 13 houses and 3 cubits and 4 fingers breadth in excess. Such are the boundaries and extent of the gift of the above named illustrious prince.

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27. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 223-226.

Eye witness Raja Prakash Malla Deva. Date 862 of the Nepal era, 10th day of the dark half of the month of Margasira.'<sup>28</sup>

Fr. Cassian of Macerata informs us that the property donated to the Capuchins by the king of Kathmandu, contained within its boundaries a garden and a well.<sup>29</sup>

### New Mission Station at Patan

To ease the tension which had been built up in Lhasa after the events of May 1742, it was decided to reduce the the number of missionaries serving in the Tibetan capital. Three young priests Frs. Cassian of Macerata, Constantine of Loro and Florian of Jesi, were told to get ready and leave for Nepal at the end of the rainy season. They arrived at Kathmandu on the 13th October 1742, after fortyfive days march across the tableland of Tibet and over the rugged country of Nepal, a near record time.<sup>30</sup>

With the arrival of these priests from Tibet, there were six resident missionaries in the Valley of Nepal, sufficient to staff the stations of Kathmandu and Bhatgaon and even to comply with the wishes of the Raja of Patan, who in the meantime had asked for the services of one or more priests.<sup>31</sup>

Patan was the largest and the most prosperous city in the Valley of Nepal. It was but fair that the mission should have a foothold in the capital of this [small Himalayan kingdom. The first priest to be posted there was Fr. Constantine of Loro who took up residence in the capacity of Superior on the 23rd August 1744.<sup>32</sup>

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28. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 30.

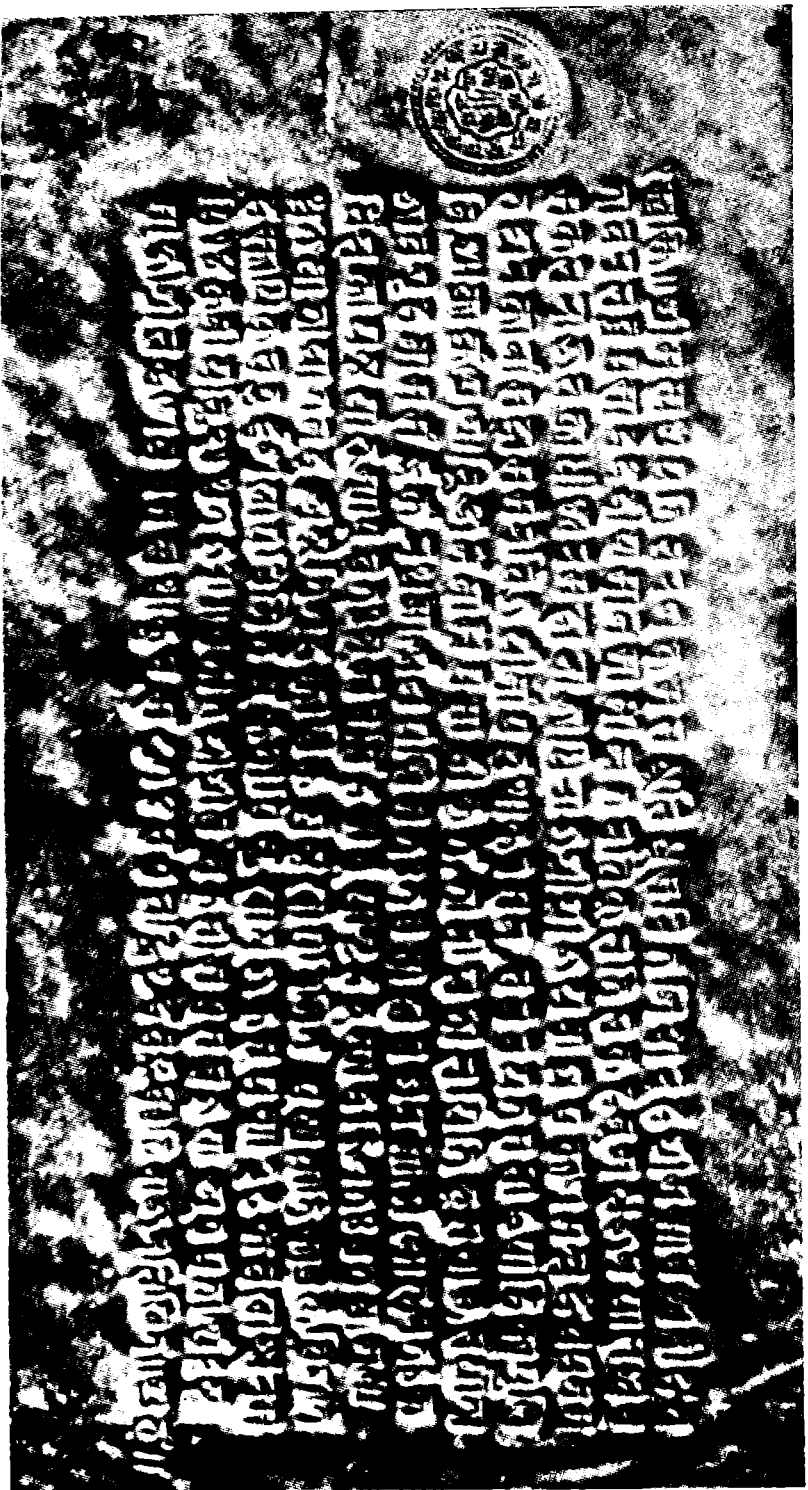
29. *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 21.

30. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 135.

31. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 20.

32. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 161. Fr. Constantine should have taken up his residence at Patan much earlier, but he did not feel like shouldering such a heavy responsibility and asked the Prefect to send some one else in his place. The Prefect however, ordered him to go and settle in Patan. The humble priest bowed his head in obedience to the wishes of his Superior.





The deed of gift of the House at Patan inscribed on a copper plate



Here again, the Raja of Patan, Raja Prakash Malla Deva, was pleased to welcome the missionaries, to grant them the Decree of liberty of Conscience and offer them the gift of a comfortable house. Though the deed of gift of the house was executed at a later date on the 12th April 1754, we have the testimony of Fr. Constantine himself that the mission came into possession of the house on the 4th August, 1744.<sup>33</sup>

The deed of gift of the Patan house was also inscribed on a copper plate. The translation of the document by Sir Hodgson, after omitting the introductory lines, is:

“Raja Prakash Malla Deva, prince of Nepal, gives for the establishment and worship of the Capuchin Fathers a beautiful location, situated in unoccupied ground, within and above the Dhara (fount) of Tanigal tal and also an open quadrangled house of 4 stories.

“The boundaries of the location are as follows: west from the road of Matsyendras Rath, north from the Javo Bahal road, east from the land of Kachingal Koyash, south from the house and land of Amer Singh Babu; and the following the limits or extent, viz. for the house the measure of 6 house locations and 38 cubits square in excess ; and for the garden 14 houses’ measures and 21 cubits in excess thereat.

“Such are the limits of what the above illustrious prince has been pleased to give, whereat is eye witness Chandra Shekhar Mall and the scribe of the deed of gift is Kotiraj Joshi, and the date of gift 874 of the Newar era, dark half of the month of Caitra 6th day”.<sup>34</sup>

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33. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 161.

34. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 31; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 229-230.

The expressions “situated in Talsi thali of Wontu tol”, used in the deed of gift of the house at Kathmandu, and the other “without and above the Dhara (fount) of Tanigal tal”, used in the deed of the house at Patan, indicate the sectors of the respective cities in which the houses were located, *tal* or *tal* meaning sector or quarters.

Likewise, the expressions used in both documents, such as “the fixed measure for 4 houses and 16 cubits, 7 fingers breadth in  
(Contd. on page 60)

From a letter of Fr. Joseph of Rovato, a missionary of the 16th expedition, we learn that the house of Patan was situated close to the "Bughero Temple", the most imposing building of Patan in those days.<sup>35</sup>

For other particulars of the deeds of gift of the houses at Kathmandu and Patan see foot-note 34.

After residing for two months in Patan, Fr. Constantine addressed a letter to the Procurator general of the Order, giving news of himself and of the people he had been sent to serve. On the 11th August 1744, he writes, "I went

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(Contd from page 59)

excess" seem to be linear measures, referring to the special rules of town planning in force in both capitals. The size of a house depended on its location, namely, whether it was in the centre of the city, on a main street or on a lane (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, p. 282, note No. 7).

The two copper plates, still in excellent conditions, are at present in the Mission Museum of the Capuchin Order in Rome. On leaving Nepal in 1769, the missionaries took them down to Chuhari. Later, they were transferred, probably by Bishop Hartmann, to the Bishop's Archives in Patna.

In 1848, Bishop Hartmann was in Darjeeling up to the end of June. During his sojourn there, he came to know Sir B.H. Hodgson, and it led them speaking on the interesting topic of the former Capuchin Missions in Tibet and Nepal, a subject very dear to both of them. The original copper plates, writes Sir Hodgson, were put into my hands by Dr. Hartmann with the observations that, though frequently shown to learned Pundits and Europeans, no one was able to gain the least inkling of the meaning of these documents. The two documents, in fact, are a mixture of Newari and Sanskrit which makes it difficult to decipher them.

Sir Hodgson, a research scholar of note, published in 1848 an account of the two documents in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* under the title "Relics of the Capuchin Mission in Tibet". In 1909 Fr. Felix Finck, a Belgian Capuchin of the Lahore Diocese, took the two copper plates to Rome (*Die Akten-sammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 30-31; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part IV, pp. 223-224; *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1848, p. 225).

The size of the deed of gift of the house at Kathmandu is 23,3×21,9 cms., while the deed of gift of the house at Patan measures 30×15,5 cms.

35. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

from Bhatgaon in the company of Fr. Vitus of Recanati, the Superior of that place, to see the Raja of Patan. The purpose of our visit was to ascertain the intention of His Highness regarding the opening of a new station in the capital. We were received most cordially and readily obtained permission to come and stay in his kingdom". The audience must have been brief, as in the next breath Fr. Constantine states that the Raja told them to come again soon to see him.

Three days later, Fr. Constantine, in the company of the Superior of Bhatgaon and Kathmandu, Fr. Florian of Jesi, called again on the Raja. In the course of conversation, His Highness informed the priests that he had already allotted them a house and they could now come and live in his kingdom whenever they wanted.

This welcome news took the missionaries by surprise as they did not expect such a great favour from him. As a matter of fact, the Prefect, fearing that the Raja of Patan would not be so generously disposed towards them as the two other rulers of the Valley, had directed Fr. Constantine to stay in Patan if possible and at the same time he was told not to bother the Raja about accommodation but to take a house on rent.

On the 20th August, Fr. Constantine went to see the house which was donated and was most favourably impressed. As far as we know, the mission house at Patan was better and more comfortable than the houses at Kathmandu and Bhatgaon.

As soon as Fr. Constantine took up his residence in the new quarters, he made it a point of duty to see his benefactor to thank him for his kind generosity. On this occasion, the Raja received the missionary in his private apartment, a mark of familiarity, the priest observes, "which we have not yet experienced in dealing with the two other rulers of the Valley, though we are on more friendly terms with them".

On the same day at the end of August 1744, the Raja granted the missionaries the Liberty of Conscience. It was merely an oral undertaking. But that did not make much difference, remarks Fr. Constantine, as the rulers of these

countries give and take back whatever they have granted in a most disconcerting manner.

The people of Patan, in the opinion of Fr. Constantine, seemed to be more liberal and less caste-conscious than the inhabitants of Kathmandu and Bhatgaon. They did not mind taking medicines compounded by the missionary doctor and were not so strict in the observance of their daily ablutions, though they were stubbornly attached to the age old traditions of the land. The high percentage of Buddhists in Patan, we may note in passing, was bound to make an impact on the Hindu minority and on their religious manners and customs.

Fr. Constantine concludes that the queen, nobles at the court and persons whom he chanced to meet socially appeared to be friendly and happy to have him in their midst.<sup>36</sup>

By the end of 1744, the missionaries had succeeded, in the face of many difficulties, in consolidating their position in Nepal. It was by no means a small achievement to have been able to establish the three stations of Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan in so short a time, specially if we consider that the Nepal Valley, in the general plan of the Tibetan Mission, destined to play the role of a transit camp for the missionaries travelling between the plains of India and the uplands of Tibet. However, the culmination of the mission in Nepal sadly coincided with the anticlimax of the mission head-quarters in Lhasa.

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36. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 160-163.

## IV

### KATHMANDU THE MISSION HEAD-QUARTERS

Broadly speaking, the history of the mission in Nepal may be divided into two parts: from its inception till about 1745, a period during which the mission established itself and grew in strength and moral prestige; and from 1745 to 1769, when the Nepalese enterprise suffered a series of reverses which reduced its potentiality, till eventually it had to be closed down.

There is no doubt that the first thirty years of its existence were characterised by a gradual work of consolidation and expansion in spite of lack of personnel and other disadvantages. While the remaining twentyfour years saw the decline and fall of the Nepal Mission amidst the wars that brought the whole country under the control of the Gurkhas. This indeed was a sad misfortune. The end came just at a time when the toil of the past was about to bear some fruit. It was more or less a replica, under different circumstances, of the Lhasa Mission. It made a good start but ended in a disappointing failure.

#### Uneasy Situation

The first warning signal of the danger ahead came in the wake of the collapse of the mission in Tibet. This was followed soon after by the death of Fr. Francis Horace, the valiant Prefect Apostolic. This hero of the Tibetan Mission ruled these ecclesiastical territories for twenty eventful years. His personality, his courage and his far-sightedness had been a guiding star, an inspiration and a tower of strength to all in the darkest hours of their troubled history. It was inevitable that the closing of the mission in Lhasa should affect the Catholic settlements in Nepal, for both territories were closely associated socially and politically.

But the severest blow came to the mission from the death of Fr. Francis Horace. Overcome by age, exhausted by

infirmity and saddened at the thought of having to abandon Lhasa, this brave apostle of Tibet breathed his last among his sorrowing confreres, at the mission house of Patan on the 20th July, 1745. He was a leader of men and a man of God, ready to show the way and set the example. His successor in office, unfortunately, proved himself unequal to the task.

On the death of the Prefect, Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio (Nicolo' Lanzi) took over the government of the Prefecture. He was a member of the 9th expedition and had laboured in Lhasa from January 1741 to April 1745. Appointed Vice-Prefect in 1743, nominated Prefect in 1746, Fr. Tranquillus took official charge of his new assignment two years later. No doubt, he was a first rate missionary, zealous, untiring and enterprising, but as Prefect, the moving power behind every undertaking, he lacked the commanding personality of his predecessor. Besides, he was wanting in some of those qualities, specially tact and prudence, which were so necessary for a man in his position.

To add to all these disadvantages, the political situation of the day, already tense and uncertain, began to deteriorate, upsetting in its wake the normal state of things. Just at a time when the missionaries had overcome the initial difficulties of their apostolic activity and expected to settle down and do some fruitful work, a devastating storm was gathering over their heads.

It was at this stage that Prithwi Narayan Shah, the rising star of the Gurkha warriors to the west of the Valley, cast his long shadow over the mountain tribes of Nepal, making it impossible for our missionaries to forge ahead with their plans.

Fr. Tranquillus set up his head-quarters at Kathmandu, which became *de facto* the centre of operation of the whole mission enterprise for a period of about twenty years.

### **The Labourers are few**

The coming to Nepal of the four Tibetan exiles in June, 1745 (Frs. Francis Horace of Penna Billi, Tranquillus of Apecchio, Joseph Mary of Gargnano and Bro. Paul of Florence) should have helped, in the ordinary course, to



strengthen the three Catholic settlements in the Valley. But in spite of this help, the scarcity of men, in a field full of promise, began soon to be felt because of unfavourable circumstances.

During the winter of 1745, to avoid the danger of the Terai, Frs. Joseph Mary of Gargnano and Cassian of Macerata crossed into India, leaving behind seven of their confreres. Fr. Joseph Mary had come to India at the invitation of the Raja of Bettiah, in north Bihar, to found a mission in his territory, while Fr. Cassian was bound for Patna to undergo medical treatment at the hands of the European doctors in the station. For the past eight months, he had been suffering from bouts of fever and intermittant attacks of dysentery, making him unfit for any work.<sup>1</sup> Sufficiently recovered, he was back in Bhatgaon on the 11th March 1746, to fall again a victim to an infectious disease which he contracted while attending on plague-stricken people. It was evident that Nepal was not the place for him to live and work.

As the Prefect wished to visit the mission stations in India, he left Kathmandu on 21st November 1746. He took with him Fr. Vitus of Recanati and Fr. Cassian of Macerata as both needed rest and change of climate. The Prefect returned alone to Nepal in March 1747.<sup>2</sup>

The next priest to move from the Valley was Fr. Innocent of Ascoli, the Superior of Bhatgaon. He had already served in the mission for a period of ten years and asked and obtained leave to go home in 1749. By the end of 1749 the numerical strength of the missionaries in Nepal had thinned down to five only, three priests (Frs. Tranquillus of Apecchio, Constantine of Loro and Florian of Jesi) and two lay brothers (Bros Liborius of Fermo and Paul of Florence). Meanwhile there had been no possibility of replacing those who were compelled to leave the field of labour because of age and infirmities.

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1. *Memorie Istoriche*, pp. 48-49.

2. *Memorie Istoriche*, pp. 56-58.

It was indeed a bleak prospect. On the departure of Fr. Innocent of Ascoli, the Prefect was forced to close down the hospice of Patan<sup>3</sup> till the arrival of re-inforcements, making it a visiting station in the meantime.

It fell upon these five brave soldiers of Christ to shoulder the burden and face the worries of missionary life for a number of years.

Unfortunately, the historical period covered by the years 1745-1764 is conspicuous by the absence of documents, except for a few stray incidents here and there, like lights and shadows along a highway flanked by stately trees. The Mission in Lhasa had come to an end; so the main reason of the whole undertaking had passed out of history. Because of this, they were no longer interested in recording the happenings of those days. We shall therefore chronicle the main events of the time in the light of the few documents which have come down to us.

There is nothing spectacular to record at this particular stage of the mission history. The main activity of the priests consisted in visiting the sick from house to house, in giving free medicines to patients, in baptising dying children (a thing which was very common because of the infectious diseases which so often devastated the land) or in doing any kind of social service which might endear them to the people. In this way they had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the people and to talk to them about religion.

The humble dedicated life of the missionaries was instrumental in attracting the attention and gaining the confidence of the people, besides being an object lesson on Christianity. Often people used to enter the chapel, assist at the religious services and inquire on one point or other of their religious belief, while others were all admiration and praise for the religion professed by these foreign ministers of God. Not a few expressed the desire to become Christians, if they could only find independent means of livelihood, their only source of income being the large revenues of the temples.<sup>4</sup>

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3. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 177.

4. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 180-183.

Three large crosses erected atop the hills surrounding the valley were influencing in a silent and most eloquent manner the mind and hearts of the people to the message of the gospel and giving value to the life and activities of the missionaries.<sup>5</sup>

### **Far and Wide**

As was to be expected, the priests stationed in the Valley did not confine their activity to the three capitals only, but ventured far into the interior of the country making contacts and exploring possibilities of expanding their mission field.

The Prefect in particular, distinguished himself in this kind of apostolic activity. He became known as the roving apostle, always on the move. For years he travelled far and wide, over hills and mountains, across rivers and swift torrents, in every kind of weather, always on foot, very often ill clad, ill fed, urged on to do his best in the fulfilment of his duties. His apostolic excursions and the good work done by his confreres in the Valley made them known in far distant places.

Already in 1750, some of the Chaubisi Rajas of Nepal, among them Prithwi Narayan Shah, king of the Gurkhas, had either written or sent delegations to the Prefect asking him for one or more priests to be posted in their respective kingdoms.<sup>6</sup> The invitation was invariably accompanied by the most tempting promises. To his great regret, the Prefect could not oblige any of them because of the shortage of personnel. Gradually the motive underlying these invitations became increasingly apparent. They were influenced more by morbid curiosity to have a foreigner at their courts or by the hope of some material gain, specially in the way of free medical facilities, than by the sincere desire to hear the new message brought to Nepal by these strange men of the West.

If the number of conversions was relatively small (we hear occasionally of a few converts being made now and then in Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan), their efforts to put the

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5. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 177.

6. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 178.

enterprise on a solid footing and make it prosper was truly remarkable.

“Here in Nepal or Lower Tibet, as it is at times called, we have done whatever is possible to make Christ known to the people of this land”, we read in a report forwarded to the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda on the 13th October 1750 by Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio. The report goes on to say that the missionaries have preached the message of Christ to the kings, to the common man in the street, to the Brahmins and nobles and to other classes of people, leaving no means untried to succeed in their purpose. Even religious tracts and literature were pressed into service to spread the faith.

The ordinary people, the report comments, were responsive to the preaching of the Gospel than the Brahmins and nobles. Nevertheless, conversions were rare due mainly to the fear of being outcasted or of being deprived of an honest livelihood. Therefore, Fr. Tranquillus proposed to buy land and distribute it to the landless farmers who had become Christians, so that they might support themselves and their families and give the surplus produce to the neophytes who had been thrown out of employment because of their conversion.<sup>7</sup>

Fr. Tranquillus further proposed that the land be purchased in the name of the Church at Bhatgaon, which was dedicated to the Annunciation of our Lady. Being in the name of the Church, the property would be thus safeguarded as it would be considered a sacred trust which no one in Nepal, because of the religious mentality of the people, would ever dare to alienate, encroach upon or mortgage, and it would not be subject to the regulations of land tenure in force in the country. In this manner the Church in Bhatgaon would remain for all times in peaceful possession of whatever was purchased in her name or owned by her. It was surely a sound suggestion, but Rome refused to put its seal of approval to it.<sup>8</sup>

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7. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 177-184.

8. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 186.

It is a fact, however, that at a later date the Christians were given land to cultivate by the Raja of Bhatgaon.<sup>9</sup> The manner, conditions and the time this was done are unknown. In all probability they were granted fields on a lease basis.

As already mentioned elsewhere, the Raja of Kathmandu, Jaya Prakash Malla Deva lived in exile during the years 1746-1750. He spent his days in caves and hide-outs, in huts built of straw and sticks. It was but natural for Fr. Tranquillus, animated as he was by an ardent missionary spirit, to go and see him during his temporary exile. Commenting on these visits, the Prefect writes: "Many a time I called on him and many a time he sent for me during his illness. On three occasions in particular I had the chance to talk to him at length and to take him to task. I reminded him of his duties and I exhorted him to mend his evil ways. He seemed to be convinced of what I had said and asked to be given a copy of a Catechism book to study and meditate. On my next visit after some time, the Raja stated that he had read the book and that he liked it very much. In reply he was told that having realised the truth, now he was in duty bound to follow it".<sup>10</sup>

Once re-instated on his throne on the 30th April 1750, the Raja conveniently forgot his past and continued to rule his unhappy country without any moral restraint. In the process even the missionaries and the Christians were not spared.

Fr. Tranquillus in his report written about this time, mentions frequently of persecutions being waged against the Christians.<sup>11</sup> Actually, it was nothing more than an unfriendly and unco-operative attitude of the ruler towards them, which led to a series of harassments and annoyances. In other words, the Raja of Kathmandu was a mere opportunist. He sided with the Christians when it suited his purpose and the very next moment turned against them to please the powerful Brahmins and other pressure groups. It was only a game of political expediency. But it is a fact that the

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9. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

10. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 182.

11. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 257-275.

priests and the Christians at Kathmandu were most of the time unhappy over one thing or another.

### Changing into White

If the situation in Kathmandu was not very pleasant, that of Bhatgaon, on the contrary, was bright and rosy. Here the Raja and the priests were on most friendly terms and everything went on peacefully and smoothly. It is worth reporting the following incident which will give an insight into the mutual trust and esteem that existed between them.

For some time past the Raja of Bhatgaon had been asking the priests to change the colour of their habit. Being dark brown, it was considered to be of an inauspicious colour. This had made them unwelcome wherever they went. The Nepalese dressed in white and His Highness wanted the priests to do the same. So insistent was he on this point that the Prefect, though reluctant to change the colour of the habit, was nevertheless, prevailed upon to give his consent.

One fine day, the 23rd July 1750, the ruler sent four noblemen to the Capuchin Hospice at Bhatgaon. The humble Friars were taken aback when informed that these four gentlemen had been ordered to escort them as a guard of honour to the Royal Palace. There the priests found the audience hall packed to capacity with the elite of the town. All invitees had already arrived, except for the *Raja Guru* who happened to be late and had to be summoned by a special messenger as no public function could begin unless he was present.

Seated on his throne, while the Fathers were placed in front of him, His Highness began to talk informally to them. Then he addressed the gathering and paid a glowing tribute to the missionaries. "It is because I want to honour them publicly", he said, "that I have called you here today. As you know, the colour of their dress is not in keeping with the one we use in Nepal. It is therefore my wish and the wish of every one that they should go clad in white."

To understand the meaning of this statement, we must recall the impression the Capuchins had produced on the

mind of the people in Nepal from the very beginning. The Nepalese, on the whole, highly appreciated these poor sons of St. Francis for their dedicated life and exemplary conduct, yet, often they were made the laughing stock of the people because of the funny dress they wore.

To begin with, the colour of the habit was inauspicious and so the priests were looked upon as scare-crows. Their beard caused them to be mistaken for Muslims who were detested in the country; the cord or girdle around the waist reminded them of the pack-saddle of a donkey, and the pointed hood of the Capuchin habit looked to them like the muzzle of an elephant. Not a very pleasant picture indeed, specially for a man engaged in social activity or who wants to win the confidence of the people.

By way of introduction, the Raja asked the priests whether they would have any serious objection to go dressed in white. On being assured that they were ready to comply with his wishes, His Highness handed to each of them personally the new type of dress he had ordered for them, beginning from the Prefect down to the last missionary. This consisted of a simple white cassock, without the hood at the back, and of a sash, which was to be worn round the waist instead of the girdle or cord.

Having accepted this new type of dress, the priests were directed to go into the private apartment of the Royal Palace to don it.

Boundless was the joy of Ranajita Malla Deva when the priests emerged into the audience hall dressed in white clothes. He was overcome with joy and was in a talkative mood. He again addressed the distinguished gathering and praised the ministers of God to the skies. Among other things he said that they had been in his kingdom for a long time, but he had never heard anyone speaking evil of them and they had never done anything evil; on the contrary, every one was very pleased with them and all appreciated very much their disinterested service.

His Highness concluded by adding that he knew that the missionaries did not seek honour, silver or gold or any property and the only way for him to acknowledge their

merits and show esteem for all the good they did was to invite them to his royal palace and in the presence of the dignitaries and nobles of the land give them the new form of dress personally and make them change into it in his own residence. Then, turning to the priests, he said, "Now you may go and inform everyone you meet that this white dress has been given to you by the King in person".

Before taking leave, the ruler asked the priests if they would like to be accompanied back to the hospice by some of the nobles. This was a little too much for the poor Capuchins, who humbly declined such an honour.

The beard still continued to be the object of a long controversy, but finally the Prefect, a man of strict discipline and accustomed to traditions, refused to have it trimmed or shaven.<sup>12</sup>

There is no denying the fact that the prestige of the Fathers at Bhatgaon was very high in the estimation of all. They claimed to have abolished some superstitious practices, to have reconciled husbands and wives who had been separate, and in quite a number of cases, to have prevented the surviving wife from throwing herself alive onto the pyre of the deceased husband. Not a small achievement indeed in those days of rigid caste system and religious bigotry.<sup>13</sup>

### **New Reinforcement**

The three priests and two lay brothers still labouring in Nepal had to wait for six long years before receiving new reinforcement. The first missionary, in fact, to arrive in Nepal after 1745 was Fr. Anselm of Ragusa, a member of the 12th expedition. He reached Kathmandu at the beginning of 1751. His presence in the Valley, however, did not make much difference to the strength of the priests posted there. Fr. Constantine of Loro, on completion of his ten years' service in the mission, asked to be repatriated and left for Europe at the end of the same year.

The next batch of recruits, five in all, left Europe in 1752 and arrived at Patna in 1753. In January 1754, three of

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12. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 179-181.

13. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 189-190.



them (Frs. Bernardine of Paludano, Onophrius of Monte Cassiano and Bro. Lawrence of Peretola, a lay brother) were assigned to Nepal.<sup>14</sup> After a year or so, Fr. Benedict Mary of Genoa, a member of the same expedition, first posted to Patna, replaced Fr. Onophrius of Monte Cassiano, who returned to India at the beginning of 1755.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of these reinforcements, the number of missionaries continued to remain stationary. Even before the new labourers could reach their field of apostolate, one of the Nepal veterans, Fr. Florian of Jesi, had passed into eternity. Sick and exhausted, Fr. Florian of Jesi had to leave the valley at the beginning of 1753 to seek rest and medical treatment in Patna. But he died at Bettiah on the 4th February, 1753, aged 49 years, while on his way to the capital of Bihar.<sup>16</sup>

Fr. Benedict Mary of Genoa, the latest arrival in Nepal, a brave and self-sacrificing priest, was soon carried off by death on the 4th July 1755, at Kathmandu, while nursing some Christians stricken by a contagious disease. He was laid to rest in the new cemetery chapel of the station. In the same year, Bro. Liborius of Fermo, who had been in Nepal since 1740, came down to Bettiah to recoup his health.<sup>17</sup>

And so by the end of 1755, only three priests (Frs. Tranquillus of Apecchio, Anselm of Ragusa and Bernardine of Paludano) and two lay brothers (Bros. Paul of Florence and Lawrence of Peretola) were clinging to Nepal, while the station of Patan remained without a priest.<sup>18</sup>

### **Fresh Trouble in Kathmandu**

Again there was trouble in Kathmandu in 1752. This time a renegade woman reported the Fathers to the authorities for having committed various crimes and began to

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14. *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 154.

15. *Memorie Istoriche*, pp. 173, 205.

16. *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 250.

17. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 191; *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann* p. 33; *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 175-176.

18. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 190.

blackmail them throughout the capital. In this way she tried to take revenge, as the missionaries had reprimanded her for abandoning the faith. She was further instigated to do this by a group of people, mostly Brahmins, who nursed ill feelings against the poor priests. They hoped that, by having the priests sentenced to a term of imprisonment or relegated into exile, they might grab their belongings and come into possession of their riches, which were thought to be considerable.

As a matter of fact, the accusations levelled against the priests by this renegade woman consisted, in the main, in some acts of imprudence committed by the priests in denouncing the national religion in too strong a language and in the breach of caste laws by the Christians, for which the missionaries were held responsible. These acts of imprudence, in a caste-ridden society, incensed the Brahmins who sought to take revenge.

The priests were tried, but the prosecution failed to produce convincing proof as it was all a camouflage. At this particular time the missionaries were on very good terms with the Raja and the judges were afraid of incurring the displeasure of His Highness by convicting the accused.<sup>19</sup>

The Raja of Kathmandu, we read in the same report, never called on anyone, but for once he made an exception in the case of the poor Capuchins. He visited the Church, talked to them about religion and assured them that he would always be their friend and protector. He even went to the extent of suggesting to enlarge the church as the present one was too small. Poor Raja! he was in trouble, and he thought, the humble Capuchins were in a position to deliver him from his difficulties. And so they did. The Raja of Kathmandu was engaged in a war (a mere petty quarrel) with the Raja of Bhatgaon and so the mighty Jaya Prakash Malla Deva made use of the good offices of the Capuchins to negotiate the terms of peace.<sup>20</sup>

If the Capuchins were powerful enough to settle affairs of state between two petty rajas in these Himalayan regions, they were unable to bridle the tongue of the renegade woman.

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19, 20. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 189-190.

Having failed at Kathmandu, she went to Patan and there she continued her defamation campaign against the poor priests. Even here the case was tried, but the judges acquitted the priests *in absentia* for lack of evidence.<sup>21</sup>

Another unfortunate incident occurred in 1753. In that year the Prefect was imprisoned. If we are to believe what one of his confreres, not very sympathetic, wrote about it, we have to conclude that, though Fr. Tranquillus was a very zealous missionary, he was nevertheless, an extremely imprudent man.

It was alleged that the queen of Kathmandu had committed adultery with the son of the *Raja Guru* and both were imprisoned. The Prefect went to see them and even spent some money on them in the vain hope of doing some good in spite of the fact that the Raja had expressly forbidden him to call on them. The result was that the paramour was cut to pieces in the presence of the queen and it was fortunate that the priest did not meet the same fate but had to spend some time in jail.<sup>22</sup>

Fr. Tranquillus might have been tactless or imprudent in dealing with people, but he was by no means a weakling or a coward. Fearlessly he reprimanded the Raja of Kathmandu for his injustice, cruelty and profligate life whenever occasion demanded it. He did it in all honesty and sincerity believing that such was his duty as a priest. Had he acted with more self-restraint, he might have rendered better service to the mission.

Retorting to the admonitions of the priest, the Raja once said, "What am I to do? If my subjects would obey the law of the true God, His Majesty would surely set everything right, but they do not want to obey, adore and serve Him, and so they are chastised and ruled over despotically".

On this Fr. Tranquillus said to him, "as a ruler and master of your people you are in duty bound to set an example and then you have the right to expect submission and obedience from all your subjects."<sup>23</sup>

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21. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 189-190.

22. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 188.

23. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 199.

## **Calling on some of the Chaubisi Rajas**

In his report to the Prefect of Propaganda in Rome, Fr. Tranquillus mentioned that the king of Gurkhas and the king of Tanahu had written letters or sent envoys to him requesting the services of one or more priests in their dominions. These two principalities, situated respectively to the north-west and the south-west of the Nepal Valley, were then part of the Chaubisi Rajas, into which Nepal was divided in the early 18th century. On receipt of this intelligence, Rome directed Fr. Tranquillus to personally visit these two kings at the head-quarters in order to ascertain their disposition towards the Christian message.

Accordingly, in the month of December 1755, the Prefect and Fr. Anselm of Ragusa, both stationed at Kathmandu, went to pay a courtesy call on Prithwi Narayan Shah at his Navakot residence, a small town in the kingdom of the Gurkhas. The Raja was just recovering from a long illness and this made him welcome the two priests all the more eagerly. His Highness thanked them for all the trouble they had taken to come to see him at this particular moment and expressed his admiration for the noble work they were doing in the Valley.

The visit lasted eight days. During this time His Highness reiterated his great desire to have some missionaries in his domain and went to the extent of suggesting to Fr. Tranquillus to leave Fr. Anselm with him for the present. On his part, he added, he would be ready to provide the priest with house, land, servants and anything else he required to make himself comfortable and feel welcome in his territory.

Needless to say, the Prefect was compelled to decline the tempting offer. He however, tried to assuage the Raja's disappointment by promising some priests in the future, should any arrive from Europe.

The goodwill of the Raja is evinced from the fact that Fr. Tranquillus had gone to Navakot also to ask His Highness to be allowed to cut timber from the forest and to transport it to Kathmandu for the construction of a new church there and to obtain exemption from all transit duties. The path to Nepal from India passed through Lahuri Nepal or little Nepal, which was then under the control of the Gurkhas. The

missionaries urgently required transit facilities for goods and baggages forwarded to the mission head-quarters in order to save funds. Prithwi Narayan Shah was pleased to grant both the requests with royal magnificence.<sup>24</sup>

During the summer of 1756, Fr. Tranquillus was with the Raja of Tanahu in his summer residence at Devghat, at the confluence of the Kali Gandak and Trisuli Gandak rivers, a few days journey from the Valley.

The reception given to the visiting priest by the Raja and his court was even more enthusiastic than that of the king of Gurkhas. His Highness showed himself extremely pleased and overjoyed at his visit.

On this occasion Fr. Tranquillus had taken with him a book entitled *A dialogue between master and disciple on the principles of the Christian religion*, which had been compiled by the Fathers in the Newari language. This gave occasion for inquiries to be made about the Pope, his power and prerogatives and about the territories and rulers of the west. There were also discussions on religion and other similar subjects. The conversation drifted gradually to the motive which made the missionaries to come to Nepal and on the nature of their work and activities.

The presence of the priest at Devghat and the reading of the book brought by Fr. Tranquillus made some impact on all concerned. One day the Raja sent the Prime Minister to call the Prefect, as His Royal Highness wanted to write to the Pope and was much intrigued about the way he was to address such a high dignitary. So impressed was the Prime Minister about the merits of the Christian religion which he had read in the book that, speaking to Fr. Tranquillus about it, he remarked: "Yesterday and today I have been with the king; together we have read the book you have given us. The religion of our gods is good for nothing, and our acts of religion, we boast so much about, have no value before God."<sup>25</sup>

The Raja of Tanahu did write to the Pope to offer him his

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24. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 193-194.

25. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 194-197.

homage and to ask for priests. It is a letter full of deep feelings in which His Highness informs the Pope that all, the king and his subjects, will welcome the priests most cordially, they will be left free to propagate their religion, will be trusted, will not be harassed and that the message, they will announce to his people, will not fall on deaf ears. The letter was accompanied by a rhinoceros' horn as a gesture of goodwill.<sup>26</sup>

Notwithstanding the pressure brought to bear upon Fr. Tranquillus by the Raja, the priest returned to Kathmandu within a week. It was the intention of the Raja to keep the priest for one year or at least till such time as new missionaries would come to stay in his dominion.

After a few months, in autumn 1756, Fr. Tranquillus was again on the road. For forty-three days he travelled along rugged and narrow paths, over steep and stony terrain, to visit a second time the Rajas of Gurkhas and Tanahu and to call for the first time on the Ruler of Lamju, another of the Chaubisi Rajas to the north of Tanahu. Wherever he went, the Prefect distributed religious literature and talked to all of the Christian message he had come to announce to the people of these lonely Himalayan regions.<sup>27</sup>

### **New Prefect Apostolic**

Though not yet in his fifties, Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio was already feeling the weight of the advancing years. His continuous apostolic peregrinations had caused him a fistula in the hip which needed prompt medical attention. Besides, he had lost all his teeth and this made him feel a little embarrassed whenever he had to speak in public. Listless, tired and dispirited, the poor man had already written to Rome in 1753 and again in 1754 requesting his Superiors to relieve him of his office and expressed the wish to be repatriated. No doubt, he had worked himself to the verge of exhaustion and now needed rest badly. Meanwhile, he decided to come

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26. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 196; part IV, pp. 231-232.

27. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 200-202.

down to Chandernagore for treatment and left Kathmandu in December 1757.<sup>28</sup>

At Chandernagore he was advised to proceed to Pondicherry, where he could find excellent surgeons. Overcome by illness and unable to work, he made up his mind to retire and return to Europe. Accordingly, on 2nd February 1758, he nominated Fr. Joseph Mary, the founder of the Bettiah station, Vice-Prefect of the mission until new dispositions were received from Rome. At the same time he addressed a circular letter to all his confreres, notifying them of his departure and the appointment of the provisional superior and embarked for Pondicherry.<sup>29</sup>

In the meanwhile, Fr. Nicholas Felix of Pergola, a priest of the 10th expedition who originally had been appointed for Bettiah, was ordered to replace the Prefect in Nepal.

On reaching Pondicherry, Fr. Tranquillus underwent medical treatment and felt greatly improved. Nevertheless, he dismissed the idea of returning to the mission as he was still too tired and too frustrated. Hearing that some French vessels had arrived from Europe, he went to the warf to enquire whether some missionaries had arrived, if not, at least some letter. He had been waiting for news for a long time. He was delighted to know that there was some news but sadly disappointed as the news was not of the kind he had been waiting for.

The Procurator General of the Order had written to Fr. Tranquillus in Bengal, in the belief that he was still in the mission, exhorting him to remain at his post and giving hopes that he would soon be relieved of his duties. This unexpected communication made him change his mind. Instead of pursuing his voyage to Europe, he returned to Bengal in the hope that he would still continue to be Prefect of the mission till the appointment of his successor.

In Bengal he was told that the majority of the missionaries felt, it was not proper for him to take over the Superiorship

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28. *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 178; Terzorio B, *op. cit.*, p. 11; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 190.

29. *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 179.

of the Prefecture after having already relinquished it of his own accord and having actually left the territory of the mission with the intention of going home. This news did not upset the humble Friar and on the 21st December 1759, he was back in Kathmandu to work in the capacity of an ordinary missionary.<sup>30</sup>

At long last, the Congregation of Propaganda decided to give Fr. Tranquillus a successor. The new Prefect was appointed on the 23rd June 1755, in the person of Fr. Antonine of Monte Alboddo. This priest, a member of the ninth expedition, was already on the high seas when he was elected. He was informed about it on his arrival at Rome on 7th August 1756. Not feeling inclined to return to India, Fr. Antonine of Monte Alboddo tendered his resignation. In his place was nominated Fr. Anselm of Ragusa on the 18th September 1758.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, Fr. Anselm of Ragusa, who was due for home leave and was besides, stricken with gout, had to come down to Bettiah late in January 1761, on his way to Chandernagore to board a sailing vessel for Europe. On reaching Bettiah he came to know that Fr. Joseph Mary, the Vice-prefect and the chaplain of the station, had passed away peacefully some days earlier. While stopping at Bettiah to minister to the small Catholic community, of the place, till the arrival of the new chaplain, Fr. Anselm received news, brought by members of the 18th expedition, of his appointment.<sup>32</sup> This made him decide to remain on in the mission. His decision was strengthened by the fact that, if he were to go home, the Prefecture would again be without a Superior for a long time. On the other hand, Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio had exposed himself to severe criticism from some of his confreres for relinquishing his post and electing a Vice-Prefect in his place.

In Patna, Fr. Anselm met the newcomers (Frs. John Gualbert of Massa, Michael Angelo of Tabiago and Seraphin of Como), who had arrived at Chandernagore in July,

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30. *Memorie Istoriche*, pp. 179-180.

31. *Memorie Istoriche*, pp. 173-174, 200; Terzorio B, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 117.

32. *Gli scritti del Padre Marco della Tomba*, Angelo De Gubernatis, Firenze, 1878, p. 12.



1761. Late in autumn of the same year, the four of them directed their steps to Bettiah. Here they parted ways: Frs. John Gualbert and Seraphin pressed on to the Valley of Nepal; Fr. Michael Angelo was posted provisionally at Bettiah; and Fr. Anselm was requested by the octagenarian Raja of Bettiah, a prisoner of the Nawab of Bihar, to accompany him to Patna.<sup>33</sup>

### Opening of Navakot

And now we turn to Nepal for some news. Fr. Nicholas Felix of Pergola, who had been in Nepal for about a year, breathed his last at Bhatgaon on the 24th January 1759, aged 51 years. He was the last priest to die in Nepal.<sup>34</sup>

The 24th March 1760 was a memorable day in the history of the Nepal Mission. On that day Fr. Tranquillus blessed the church at Kathmandu, dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, in the presence of the small Christian Community and other missionaries in the Nepal Valley.<sup>35</sup>

This was the second church in Kathmandu. Each of the three stations in the Valley had a chapel of its own, which consisted merely of a large room within the mission house, set apart for the purpose, while the present church at Kathmandu, the mother church, so to say, of the Tibet-Nepal mission, was a separate building standing on its own ground, a humble, lonely Christian place of worship rising unobtrusively among the towering temples and pagodas of the capital. Besides a chapel, the three stations in Nepal had their own Christian burial ground.

The arrival at Kathmandu of Frs. John Gualbert of Massa and Seraphin of Como gave Fr. Tranquillus the opportunity to leave Nepal for good. In the fall of 1763, he bade good-bye to his co-workers and headed for the south, in the com-

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33. *Memorie Istoriche*, p. 235; Terzorio B, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

34. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 22.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 33. The document states that the exact place of the church and other particulars are unknown, as the paper from which the information was taken was torn off. Terzorio B *op. cit.*, p. 12, quoting from the Mission Archives of the Order in Rome.

pany of Bro. Lawrence of Peretola, for a well-deserved rest.<sup>36</sup> However, because of the scarcity of priests, he could not go home and was detained at Chandernagore, where he died on 21st May 1768. He had served the mission for an unbroken period of nearly thirty years.

The last missionaries to enter Nepal before the final exodus of 1769 were Fr. Anselm of Ragusa, Fr. Joseph of Rovato, who had recently arrived from Europe, and Fr. Michael Angelo of Tabiago. The first two priests left Patna on the 18th December 1763 for Bettiah. Here they were joined by Fr. Michael Angelo of Tabiago. Together they set out for Nepal after the full moon of January of 1764, as the most favourable time to travel during the most dangerous lap of the journey. It was to be a long and wearisome trek undertaken at a time when the army of Prithwi Narayan Shah was poised to conquer Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan.

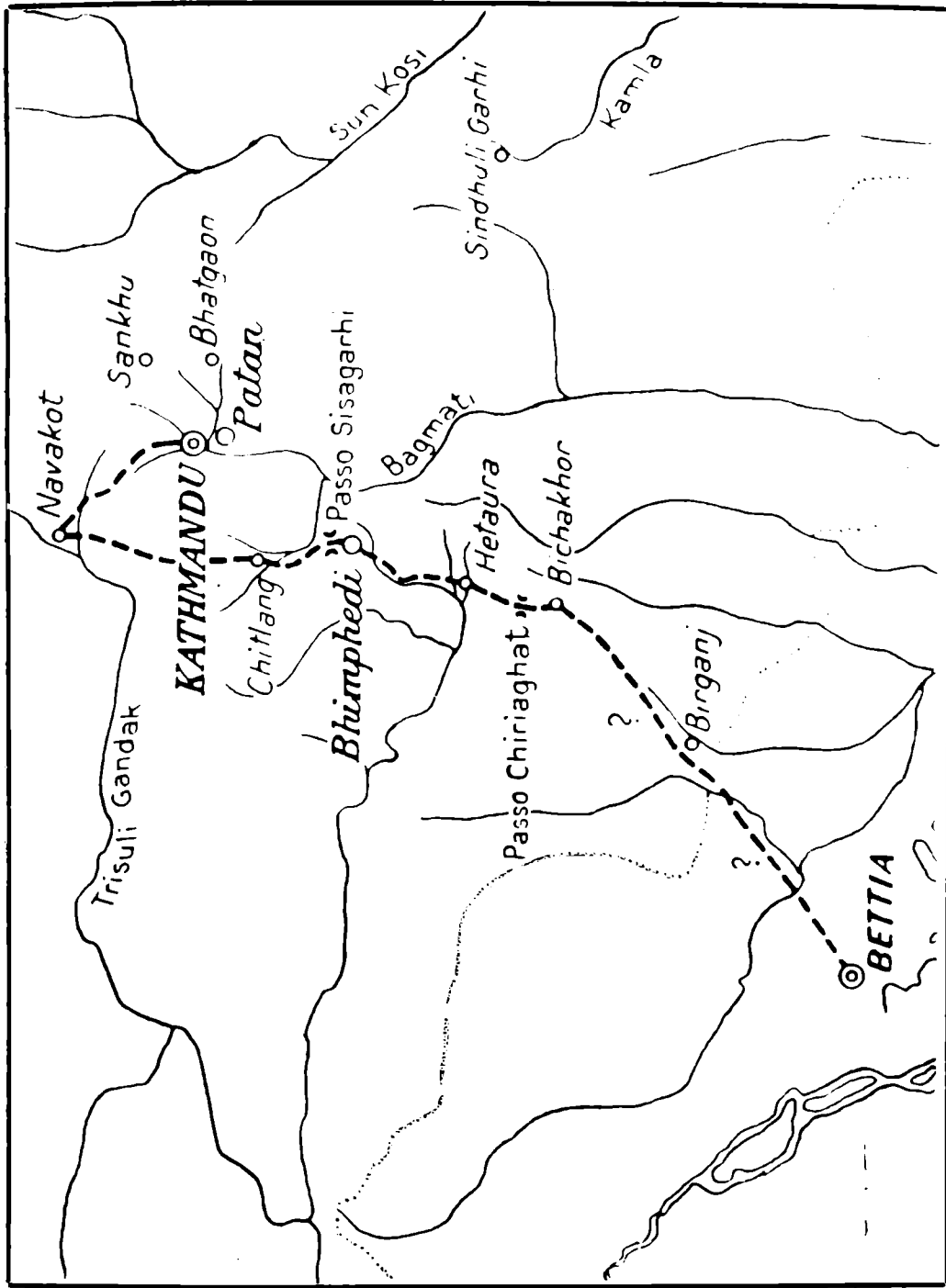
While on their way to the Valley of Nepal, the travellers were stopped and harassed several times by the Gurkha guards in control of the area. At Lahuri Nepal of Chitlang, a day's march to the south-west of Kathmandu, they were ordered not to proceed further unless their travelling papers were endorsed once again by Prithwi Narayan Shah. Messengers were sent to the royal head-quarters at Navakot, but no answer was received. It was only after an anxious waiting of twenty days that the Raja of the Gurkhas finally sent word to the priest directing them to come and see him at his residence at Navakot, a three days journey further up the road. This place, not to be mistaken with the town of the same name situated in the Gurkha territory, lay to the north-west of Kathmandu and occupied a key position in the strategic war of conquest which Prithwi Narayan Shah was waging against the Malla dynasty.

Two days after their arrival at Navakot, that is, on the 19th February 1764, the priests were admitted to a public audience. The royal hall was nothing else than a straw pavilion open on all sides, supported by poles.

During the public audience, which lasted two and a half hours, the Raja disclosed to Fr. Anselm the reason why he

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36. *Gli scritti del Padre Marco della Tomba*, p. 19.



Itinerary of Fr. Joseph of Rovato from Bettiah to Kathmandu in 1764  
 With acknowledgment to Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato (Rome):  
 From *Il Nuovo Ramusio II*, by Prof. Luciano Petech, Part IV



had called them to the royal head-quarters. His Highness wanted a distant relation of his to be treated by the missionary doctor. At the same time he brought pressure on the Prefect to leave a priest, rather a doctor with him at Navakot. Any white face, to the oriental imagination, had magic charms to heal all kinds of disease.

Fr. Anselm had no intention to oblige. However, he felt bound to accede to the Raja's request, as he was now virtually the new master of Nepal, and the priests had interest to maintain friendly relations. On the other hand, the Prefect tried to strike a bargain. He asked the Raja to issue a document of protection to the missionaries travelling between India and Nepal. The priests residing in the valley of Nepal were already experiencing the effects of the blockade imposed by the Raja on men and goods in transit. His Highness was pleased to grant them the *parvana* or document of safe-conduct, with it went also the exemption from road duties.

Again, there was a long delay at Navakot. Quite a number of people came to the missionary doctor for treatment; among others, we may mention the Raja's own son, Simha Pratap Sah.

Having posted Fr. Michael Angelo to Navakot, a priest who had sufficient knowledge and experience with medical practice, and having at last obtained permission to leave, the two missionaries moved down to Kathmandu which they reached on 4th March 1764. It had taken them nearly three months of hard travelling to cover a distance which in the ordinary course would have taken about a fortnight.<sup>37</sup>

The position of the missionary at Navakot was precarious and far from satisfactory due mainly to the political uncertainty of the time. "A small house and a small church," we read in a contemporary report, "were built and the priest was left free in the exercise of his priestly ministry".

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37. Fr. Joseph of Rovato has left to us two accounts of his travelling from Patna to Kathmandu; Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-48 and pp. 49-60.

A number of baptisms of dying children are also recorded.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of 1764, the Prefect returned to India.<sup>39</sup> With his departure from the Valley of Nepal, the headquarters of the mission moved out permanently from Kathmandu to settle in Indian territory.

With the opening of Navakot, the Capuchins maintained four mission stations in Nepal manned by four priests (Frs. John Gualbert of Massa, the local Superior, Seraphin of Como, Michael Angelo of Tabiago and Joseph of Rovato), but this was not to be for long.

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38. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 294.

39. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

## COLLAPSE OF THE MISSION

Ninety kms to the west of Kathmandu, among the mountain tribes of Nepal, lived the famous Gurkhas, a warrior race. They are the descendents of the Brahmins and Rajputs who were driven out of India by the victorious Moghuls and took shelter in the western hilly districts, whence they gradually pushed their way eastward and finally captured the Valley of Nepal.

Their present ruler, Prithwi Narayan Shah—the name means “The Lord of the Earth”—an ambitious, crafty, cruel but exceedingly capable soldier and diplomat, was about this time planning the conquest of Nepal. He did it most craftily. His emissaries had spread unrest and discontent among the kings of the Valley. He played them off one against the other like pieces on a chess board. When confusion was prevailing, he came forward, and posed as a liberator and peace-maker. The peak years of the war were between 1763 and 1769, though the battle of intelligence and wits had already started long before.

Realising his inability to wage war alone, the Raja entered into a treaty with the petty rulers scattered round about the mountain tracks of west Nepal. Shrewdly he assured them of their autonomy and independence, giving them to understand that if they joined in a military pact they would become more powerful and command greater respect. In reality it was only a ruse to enslave them whenever he felt they were wavering in their faith or betraying their allegiance. At the same time this would further his plans in the conquest of the Valley of Nepal. He wanted to safeguard himself against any surprise attack on the western borders when he moved east to subdue the Malla dynasty.

Believing he was strong enough to overpower the rulers of Kathmandu, Bhatgaon and Patan, the Gurkha warrior moved

eastwards, but at Kirtipur inside the Valley proper, his army suffered a major defeat and he narrowly escaped death by fleeing into the mountains. The date of this battle is said to be the year 1757.

Kirtipur, to the south-west of Kathmandu, had to be captured before a direct attack could be launched on the three cities of the Valley. It was a well fortified place situated on the top of a plateau shaped ridge, commanding the entrance of the Valley from the west.

This humiliating defeat made the Raja of Gurkhas change his tactics. He realised that he could hardly hope to take the three kingdoms of the Valley by force and decided to compel them to surrender by starvation. He posted his troops at all strategic mountain passes to cut off all supplies coming from India and Tibet. His orders were ruthless and drastic and most faithfully carried out. Any one caught on the road even with a little salt was to be hanged immediately on the nearest tree. The garrison did not hesitate to wipe out the inhabitants of a whole village because they had dared to carry some cotton into Nepal. It was a most horrible sight to behold so many people hanging on trees by the way side.<sup>1</sup>

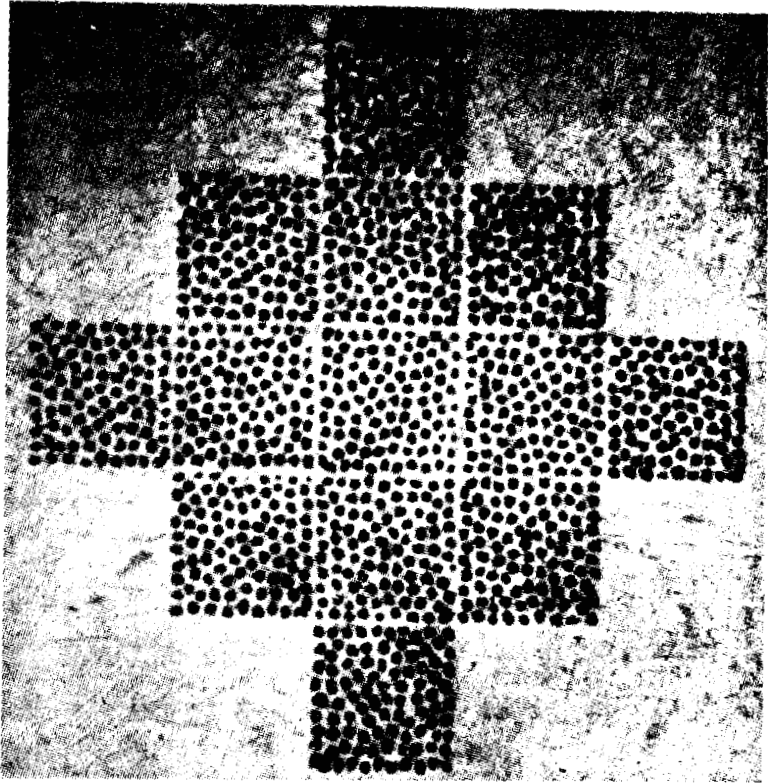
It was at this stage that the last missionaries to Nepal appeared on the scene in 1764. At the time Prithwi Narayan Shah was nestled in the strategic fort of Navakot dominating the Valley, posed to swoop down like an eagle on a bird of prey.

Towards the middle of 1764, Prithwi Narayan Shah advanced a second time on Kirtipur as a preliminary step to conquer the Valley of Nepal. After a siege of several months, when he realised that his army had failed to reach the top of the fortress, and that his brother Surya Pratap Shah, one of the field commanders, was hit by an arrow in one eye, he was

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1. The narrative, upto the year 1769, is based largely on *An account of the Kingdom of Nepal* by Father Giuseppe of the Roman Mission, that is Fr. Joseph of Rovato, published in the *Asiatic Researches*, Calcutta, 1790, Vol. II, and on *Mission Account from 1763 to 1769* by the same author, Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-99. The first account deals mainly with the political aspect of the war, while, the second account refers chiefly to the mission history of those troubled days.





Design of a Gurkha block House  
*Drawing by Fr. Joseph of Rovato*



compelled to abandon the battle field. The king's brother was later treated by Fr. Michael Angelo of Tabiago whose medical skill was instrumental in saving the other eye.

Two years later the king besieged Kirtipur for the third time. On this occasion the command of the expedition was entrusted to his brother Surya Pratap Shah. Recounting this historical event which opened the way to the downfall of the Malla dynasty, Fr. Joseph of Rovato writes:

“When the inhabitants of Cirtipur (Kirtipur) had already sustained six or seven months siege, a noble of Lalit Pattan (Patan) called Danuvanta fled to the Gorcha party and treacherously introduced their army into the town. The inhabitants might still have defended themselves, having many other fortresses in the upper parts of the town to retreat to. The people at Gorcha had published a general amnesty; the inhabitants, being greatly exhausted by the long siege, surrendered themselves relying on the promise of amnesty.

“In the meantime, the men of Gorcha seized all the gates and fortresses within the town, but two days afterwards Prithwinarayan (Prithwi Narayan Shah), who was at Navacuta (Navakot), a long day's journey, issued an order to Suruparatna (Surya Pratap Shah or Surpratap Shah), his brother, to put to death some of the principal inhabitants of the town, and to cut off the nose and lips of everyone, even those of infants who were not found in the arms of their mothers; ordering at the same time all the noses and lips which had been cut off to be preserved that he might ascertain how many souls there were, and to change the name of the town into Naskatapur, ‘the town of cut-noses’.

“The order was carried into execution with horror and cruelty, none escaping except those who could play on wind instruments; although Fr. Michael Angelo, without knowing that such an inhuman scene was then enacted, had gone to the house of Suruparatna and interceded in favour of the poor inhabitants. Many of them put an end to their lives in despair; others came in great numbers to us (that is, the missionaries) in search of medicines; and it was most shocking to see so many living people without their lips and noses resembling the skulls of the deceased.”

This barbarous treatment was provoked partly by the stubborn resistance put up by the inhabitants of Kirtipur, who for ten years had defied the best efforts of the Gurkha troops, and also by the arrogance of the commandant of the citadel, seconded by all his people. During the second attempt to conquer the fortress, the king of the Gurkhas had called upon to surrender, but instead of surrendering, the commandant despatched by means of an arrow a most insolent answer.

After the capture of Kirtipur, Prithwi Narayan Shah sent his army to lay siege to Patan. He surrounded half the city to the west with block houses and engaged the inhabitants in deadly combat. The hospice of Patan was within range of the enemy fire and the priest in charge, Fr. Joseph of Rovato, was compelled to flee and take refuge in Kathmandu with all the Christians and Catechumens in the station.

The inhabitants of Patan were about to surrender to avoid the fate that had befallen the people of Kirtipur when suddenly one night the Gurkhas lifted the siege. They had withdrawn in order to pursue the British forces advancing on Nepal.

### **Under Suspicion**

In 1767 the Raja of Kathmandu, realising the inability of the three kings of the Valley to cope with the conquering power of the Gurkhas, asked for help from the East India Company. The Company's agents grasped this opportunity to further their own cause in Nepal and sent a force under Captain Kinloch. Heavy odds were against it and the military expedition was doomed to failure before it even got underway.<sup>2</sup>

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2. The expedition was inadequately prepared and was made to wage war without being acquainted with the Gurkha soldiers and their fighting methods. Besides, all odds were against it: Kathmandu had sent guides to lead the expeditionary force along the right paths; the guides were intercepted by the Gurkha warriors and put to death. The season was also unpropitious. It was in August, the time in which the jungle land or Tarai, lying on the southern borders of Nepal, was ravaged by cholera and malaria. Ignorance of the hill terrain "where ten men could check twenty thousand by simply rolling down stones" and other factors contributed in no small measure to the defect of the military expedition. Captain Kinloch died after calling to his side Fr. Mark della Tomba.

This abortive intervention of the Company in the internal affairs of Nepal spelled misfortune for the missionaries. The king of the Gurkhas suspected that they had a hand in it.

It was but natural for Prithwi Narayan Shah to hold such a view. He equated the power of the European priests to that of the *Raja Gurus* who had a decisive say in every issue, even in military matters. Moreover, no one can blame him for being unacquainted with the different nationalities of the people of the west and for his presumption that the missionaries were British, or at least in league with them.

The first effect of this unfortunate misunderstanding was that the priests in Nepal were forbidden to have any communication with those in Hindustan. They remained cut off from their confreres in India at a time when funds, news and supplies were most urgently needed. The result was that the Capuchins in the Valley were forced to take loans and to dispose of some household articles in order to support themselves and their converts.

The situation was bleak, but not without some redeeming features. Surya Pratap Sah, the king's brother, did not forget what Fr. Michael Angelo had done for him and tried to demonstrate his debt of gratitude in a practical way. Besides, the first-born son of the Raja of the Gurkhas, Simha Pratap Sah, the heir apparent to the throne, developed a strong personal liking for the missionaries. These two influential members of the royal household saved the priests from a lot of trouble.

Fr. Mark dalla Tomba, who at that time stationed in Bettiah, was often in communication with the Fathers in Nepal, being their neighbour on Indian territory. Not hearing from them for sometime, he was apprehensive of their safety, specially after the British expeditionary force under Captain Kinloch had made an attempt to invade Nepal. He was very anxious to know how they were getting on, fearing the worst.

Impatient to be kept waiting and anxious for news, Fr. Mark asked a trusted friend of his, a Brahmin, to go to Nepal and deliver a letter to the priests, enquire about their welfare and then return to Bettiah. To facilitate his task the

messenger was given a pair of binoculars to give to one of the priests for presentation to Prithwi Narayan Shah.

The messenger reached Kirtipur safely. There he found the king with his personal staff and, by mere chance, even Fr. Michael Angelo. The latter had apparently been summoned to Kirtipur on an important matter. The reality was that he was wanted to be put under arrest, as he came to know afterwards.

Admitted to the royal presence, Fr. Michael Angelo presented the binoculars to His Highness, knowing that he would greatly treasure it. But even this did not soften his heart and he remained stiff and uncommunicative.

Outside the reception room, Fr. Michael Angelo was told in the name of the king, in plain-spoken language, to stop all communication with the priests on the other side of the border. This applied also to the despatching of letters, unless they were written in Hindustani, so that they might be read and their contents understood by the censors. The priest tried to explain his inability to comply with the order, specially in the case of letters coming from Europe. None of the priests was allowed to open the correspondence of another in order to translate it in Hindustani. He pleaded to be allowed at least to write the last letter to his confreres in India and to send it through the same messenger, but was bluntly refused. He begged and remonstrated and asked to see His Highness again to clear all misunderstanding, suspicions and misrepresentations, but to no purpose.

Prithwi Narayan Shah and his advisers had already made up their mind that the priests and the messenger were spies or foreign agents in the service of the Europeans. They must be dealt with most severely.

The hour was late and Fr. Michael Angelo obtained leave to join his confreres at Kathmandu, happy to be out of the clutches of the king. The poor messenger, who was at first thought to have been sent back to Bettiah, was in fact detained, cast into prison and finally relegated in a far away corner of the Gurkha Raj, under charge of espionage.

It is difficult to understand why the king did not arrest Fr. Michael Angelo there and then. He might have changed

his mind or he might have feared a reprisal on the part of the British force, thus leading to unnecessary complications and making him alter his plan in the prosecution of the war against the Malla dynasty.

In the meantime, the king of Kathmandu had come to know, through secret intelligence, that Prithwi Narayan Shah wanted to put the priests to death, and sent word to them not to enter the territory under the control of the Gurkhas as their lives were in danger.

### **Fall of Kathmandu and Patan**

The next important town to fall to the Gurkhas was Kathmandu. Jaya Praksh Malla Deva dared to call the British troops against 'the Lord of the Earth' and now he must be made to suffer the consequences of this act by the might of his military strength.

Feeling confident that the British force would not strike again, because the season to cross the Tarai had already far advanced, Prithwi Narayan Shah recalled his soldiers to the Valley of Nepal and directed his military operations against the city of Kathmandu.<sup>3</sup> The capital was encircled by the Gurkha army. But the city surrendered due more to the clever use of secret intelligence than to the force of arms. At night Gurkha agents, mostly Brahmins, sneaked into the capital holding out promises and threats and disseminating disunity and discontent in the enemy camp. When the city capitulated on the 25th September 1768, the Raja of Kathmandu fled to Patan with hardly 200 soldiers who still remained faithful to him, a clear indication that the Gurkha agents had done their work well.

At the beginning of the siege, the priests at Kathmandu sent their best church articles, chalices and other valuables to Patan. Fr. Joseph of Rovato was there to take care of them. Shortly after, Fr. Michael Angelo stealthily crept

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3. The marshy, unhealthy strip of land stretching beneath the lower ranges of the Himalayas between India and Nepal is called Tarai, the kingdom of malaria and cholera. Communications between India and Nepal were closed from the beginning of April to the end of October.

into Patan, taking with him all the Christians of Kathmandu. The Gurkhas had entrenched themselves in the small Christian cemetery of Kathmandu and the church and the hospice were exposed to enemy fire.

Frs. John Gaulbert of Massa and Seraphin of Como decided to stay on in Kathmandu, trusting the word of Surya Pratap Sah. And they were not let down. In fact, the night Kathmandu was captured, he sent four Brahmins to the friary to protect the priests from the insults of the soldiers and to spare the place from being looted.

Within a month or so, Patan also fell with a minimum of bloodshed. Prithwi Narayan Shah had made use of the same tactics and achieved the same results. Meanwhile the kings of Kathmandu and Patan fled to Bhatgaon.

After the fall of Patan in October 1768, Frs. Michael Angelo of Tabiago and Joseph of Rovato made it a point of duty to go and pay their respects and offer their services to the new master, protesting their loyalty and asking for his protection. The Raja gave an affirmative answer to all their requests; when the priests left the royal palace, however, they felt more uneasy than when they entered it, indicating how much he could be trusted.

The priests could have spared themselves the trouble to ask for protection and other favours from the 'Lord of the Earth'. In the eyes of Prithwi Narayan Shah, they had already compromised themselves badly with the British, who were no friends of his, and with the Malla dynasty, under whose rule they had laboured faithfully and loyally all these years.

Pleased with the progress of his military campaign, Prithwi Narayan Shah left for his winter quarters at Navakot, appointing a governor for Kathmandu and Patan.

Fr. Joseph of Rovato informs us that the governor was a bitter enemy of the Europeans and that, perhaps it was he more than any other, who had insisted on the king of the Gurkhas to put the priests and the Christians to death. The following incident gives an idea of the whole situation.

### **Put to Test**

A Gurkha soldier had asked for some drinking water from a Christian, knowing full well of his religious affiliation.



No sooner had the soldier gulped it down than he burst out complaining that he had lost his caste. In his fury he demanded the fee for the legal purifications from the poor Christian, who was in no position to pay such a big amount.<sup>4</sup>

The case was referred to the governor. Unceremoniously and without making any inquiry, he ordered the poor man to be cast into prison with his hands tied at the back. While this was going on, blows, kicks and insults were mercilessly showered upon him.

Hearing this, Fr. Michael Angelo rushed to the governor's residence to plead for mercy. He was chased away by one of the attendants, who did not hesitate to resort to grossly abusive language. In his helplessness, the priest tried to enlist the good offices of a highly placed Brahmin who, in the past, had been, or posed to be a good friend of the missionaries; but he too refused to see him.

Not knowing what to do next to alleviate the suffering of the poor Christian, Fr. Michael Angelo called on him and encouraged him to hold firmly to his faith and to suffer everything for Christ's sake after the manner of the first martyrs. Strengthened by these consoling words, the Christian, whose name has not come down to us, replied that he was ready even to die for the faith he professed and held so dear.

While the priest was speaking to the prisoner, some people of rank had gathered around them, expressing in unmistakable terms their contempt for the priests and their followers, thinking that this was their last hour.

Fortunately their last hour had not yet struck. A personal attendant of the king's eldest son, Simha Pratap Sah, on his own initiative and out of compassion for the poor

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4. "The expenses of an expiation of this kind, which was performed during our stay in that country, was by my Brahman estimated at Rs. 2000; but the natives alleged that it amounted to ten times the sum"—writes F. Hamilton, in his *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* Edinburgh 1819, p. 20.

Christian, braved the ill will of the governor and his advisers and obtained orders that the prisoner be treated more humanely and be given something to eat, pending formal trial.

The governor must have given in most reluctantly. But, the day after he sent soldiers to round up all the Christians and a Brahmin who was helping the missionaries in the translation of their books into the Newari language. None of them was found at home; they were all with the priests. Enraged the governor issued orders to handcuff all the Christians, the priests and those who had been in the service of the missionaries down to the washerman, and to produce them before him.

Even on this occasion their last hour had not dawned. Unexpectedly the king and his first-born son were on their way from Navakot to Kathmandu. By the evening of the same day on which the governor had ordered the Christians and those arrested with them to be produced in shackles before him, His Royal Highness and his son arrived at a fort, not very far away from the capital, where they intended to spend the night. Due to this the governor was compelled much against his will to rescind his order.

Fr. Michael Angelo immediately contacted the Raja's son who had already been acquainted with the new disturbing development by his personal attendant. In a few words, as it was late in the night, the priest was assured that the matter would be looked into the next morning and that everything would be put right.

The next day, before the king and his son entered the city, the Christian who had been detained in jail had already been set free. He must have had a hard time, for fifteen days after his release he still bore on his hands and body, the marks of the punishment inflicted on him.

Reprimanding the governor for the action he intended to take against the priests and the Christians, Prithwi Narayan Shah told him that he had acted hastily and inconsiderately. The Raja went on to say that, if he wanted to punish them at this stage, he could have done it personally, but that the time for this had not yet come.

It is evident from this that 'the Lord of the Earth' had already thought out of a plan to deal suitably with the priests and their followers in due course.

### **Settling in Chuhari**

With the surrender of Bhatgaon, which took place in January 1760, without any appreciable resistance, the supremacy of the Malla dynasty had come to an end and a new order was emerging to shape the history of Nepal.

All this time the missionaries and their converts lived in fear about their future. The constant question they asked themselves was what was to be done. And a satisfactory solution to their problems was not so easily forthcoming.

Unable to contact their superiors at home or in India (all communications with the outside world had been interrupted), the four priests got together for a family council to review the situation in the light of the latest developments.

After some hard thinking, the missionaries arrived at these conclusions: One thing was sure they were under suspicion and now lived in disgrace. Therefore, no fruitful missionary work could be done. It was a sad realisation, but a factor of primary importance in deciding the future course of action to be taken.

On the other hand, the new master had deprived the Newaris of the rights and privileges granted to them by the former rulers. This was a serious setback to the Christians who were eking out a living from the cultivation of fields which had been given them on lease. Once deprived of their honest living, they were apt to give scandal and even renounce their faith, thus undermining the future of the mission and ruining whatever was left of their good name and reputation. With a family to support and an empty stomach, a man becomes desperate and may throw off all moral restraint.

Another important factor was that the mission of Nepal depended to a large extent on the mission in India. Without the possibility of free communication and transit facilities, it was bound to wither away like a plant deprived of its natural nourishment. And it was pretty sure that Prithwi Narayan Shah would not go out of his way to favour the missionaries.

Taking all aspects of the situation into consideration, there seemed to be only one alternative, either the fields taken away be returned to the Christians and the missionaries be assured that their living conditions would not be affected by the new regime, or they should leave the country and settle elsewhere till better days returned.

The missionaries, anticipating the worst, had already approached the authorities of the East India Company at Calcutta, seeking permission to settle the Nepal Christians in Indian territory.<sup>5</sup>

The unfortunate and trying position of the missionaries and the Christians was brought to the notice of Prithwi Narayan Shah by his son, Simha Pratap Sah. It did not take long for the shrewd Gurkha warrior to find a solution. It was far better for all concerned, if they chose to go into voluntary exile. This would save him from taking drastic action against them, which was not without risk. He was still undecided whether to punish the priests or not and the kind of punishment to mete out to them as he was apprehensive of some kind of reaction on the part of the British.

On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that, though Prithwi Narayan Shah was 'the Lord of the Earth', cruel to a degree, yet he was superstitious and was afraid that, if he inflicted any punishment upon these holy men of God, the vengeance of heaven might fall on him.

Not all the priests, however, were required to leave the country. One was enough to escort the Christians wherever they wanted to go and to minister to their spiritual needs. The Raja was keen on detaining two other missionaries, not, to be sure, that he or his people would avail themselves of their services, but as hostages. Should per chance the British expeditionary force come again to cause trouble, he could have two European priests, two white *Raja Gurus* to bargain with.

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5. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 43.

Earlier, at the end of 1768, Fr. Seraphin of Como had left for India to acquaint his superiors with the new situation<sup>6</sup> and to make arrangements for the oncoming Nepalese Christians.

Fr. Joseph of Rovato was chosen to lead the courageous band of Christians into exile. On the 4th February 1769, they rallied round their beloved pastor, and all without exception preferred rather to go into voluntary exile than face the uncertain situation which now weighed so heavily upon them. Even a bed-ridden patient, who had to be carried all the way in a palanquin, preferred rather to go with his brethren in the faith and die in a foreign land than to be left behind all alone.

With a sad and heavy heart they bade farewell to their homeland, to their relations and friends and walked out into the unknown, without means of support, sustained in their ordeal by an abiding faith. All hoped and prayed that their exile might not be too hard or too long. They felt sure that the day would dawn when they would be able to return to their beloved country and live there in peace.

After trudging along for thirteen days across the mountains and valleys that divided Nepal from India, they reached Bettiah safely on the 17th February 1769.

How many were the Nepalese Christians who came to India? Fr. Joseph of Rovato states that their number and names are given in a separate sheet of paper, which had been attached to the report. Unfortunately that paper has been lost. However, as we shall see at some length in the next chapter, their number varies between 55 and 58 in addition to five catechumens.

At Bettiah the Nepalese refugees found Fr. Seraphin of Como and the sixty odd local Christians to welcome them.<sup>7</sup> Fr. Mark della Tomba, the chaplain of the place, had left

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6. Fr. Seraphin of Como wrote a letter from Bettiah on the 27th December 1768, stating among other things that he had arrived at Bettiah on the 20th December 1768. (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 230).

7. That there were odd local Christians at Bettiah in 1769 is stated in a report written by Fr. Seraphin of Como (*Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritture riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali*, Vol. 836, *Congregazione del 15 Giugno 1773*, ff. 239-244).

the station before the new incumbent had arrived. However, preliminary arrangements had already been made to resettle them at Chuhari, a small village, nine kms to the north-west of Bettiah.

When the British troops captured Bettiah in 1766, the mission suffered some losses. By way of compensation, the East India Company made over to the mission two hundred tax free *bighas* of land (about sixty or seventy hectares) in the village called Chuhari, two or three days' march from the Nepal borders.<sup>8</sup> Here the Nepalese exiles settled in 1769, and here their descendants are still cultivating the fields allotted to their forefathers.

Re-settlement operations were soon under way. A straw chapel and a number of straw huts were erected at Chuhari to accommodate the Nepalese refugees. Fr. John Gaulbert of Massa, a veteran of the Nepal mission, and Fr. Eustace of Cassino, a newcomer, were posted there to look after the spiritual and temporal welfare of these poor people who more than ever needed the support and encouragement of a loving Father in this time of trial.<sup>9</sup>

The two missionaries left behind in Nepal as hostages (Frs. John Gaulbert of Massa and Michael Angelo of Tabiago) were allowed to join their confreres in India within a few weeks. Realising that no useful purpose would be served by their presence in Nepal, the danger they were exposed to in case the British force made another attempt to invade the country, and finding it impossible to live without means and without any source of income, they approached once again the king's son to intercede on their behalf in order to obtain permission for them to leave the country.

It was no easy task. The matter was made an object of discussion at the royal court. The king and his council were at first unwilling to yield, but gradually they came to the conclusion that the motive which prompted them to detain the priests might be like a two-edged sword which may eventually recoil on them. The British, they must have thought,

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8. *Gli scritti del P. Marco della Tomba*, p. 20.

9. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

might resent that two *Raja Gurus* of their religion were kept as hostages and this might urge them to move against the new master of the land.

Having at last obtained leave to go, the two Fathers set about to wind up the mission affairs. Whatever pieces of furniture or other household articles were there to be disposed of was sold to pay all outstanding debts, among which figured a loan of Rs. 100/- taken from the king of Bhatgaon. Whatever was left over and above went to defray the expenses of the journey.

Touching was the farewell which the priests bade to Simha Pratap Sah. He had been to them an angel of comfort, consolation and hope, a help in trouble and a shield in danger. It was good, he confided to the Fathers, that they should go now, while the going was good, as their lives were in great danger. Besides, he was not sure whether he could be of any assistance in case the situation took a turn for the worst. However, he assured his friends of his kind personal benevolence to them and to their religion and hoped to be able to call them back as soon as possible, or at least after his father's death.

The missionaries in turn offered their services to their friend and benefactor and thanked him sincerely for all he had done for them. At the end they handed over to Simha Pratap Sah the keys of the house and he promised to look after the mission property during their absence.

It was indeed a sad day. The hope that peace may soon prevail over the divided and war-torn land and enable the messengers of the Gospel to return to Nepal to continue their unfinished work, however, cheered them on their way down to India.

### **Forbidden Land**

Both the priests and the Newari Christians were of the firm belief that the days of their exile would not last long and this expectation was not unfounded.

Fr. Searphin of Como who had first hand knowledge of the situation, writing about the future prospects of the mission, remarked that for the present, that is, so long as Prithwi

Narayan Shah was in power, there was no possibility of staging a come-back. The ruler was openly hostile to the missionaries. But his son, Simha Pratap Sah, the heir apparent to the throne, "not only was very well disposed towards the priests, but also towards the Christian religion and he might have eventually embraced it. He had already given evident signs of his attachment to the faith".

The esteem and love which Simha Pratap Sah felt for the Christians was also indicative of his disposition towards the faith. "Whenever he writes to the missionaries", we read in the same report, "he never fails to send the Christians his good wishes, calling them brethren."<sup>10</sup>

The same sentiments are expressed in a letter of Fr. Seraphin to a friend. He writes: "The King's son would like to have a priest with him night and day and he cannot stay long without his company. Whenever together they speak, as a rule, of our religion, he understands it very well and feels much attracted by it. He wants the Christians to live and behave as true Christians. Though our Christians in Nepal are poor and earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, yet very often he calls them in his presence to speak to them and ask them questions."

Fr. Seraphin goes on to say, "Once I greeted him with these words: 'May the Lord grant you the grace to become a Christian', to which he replied 'I cannot become a Christian just now', that is, so long as my father is alive, which expresses the great hope that he would not hesitate to become one on his accession to the throne."<sup>11</sup>

Prithwi Narayan Shah died in January, 1775. He left two sons Simha Pratap Sah, the friend of the missionaries, and Bahadur Sah, the second son of the conqueror. The former succeeded his father, while the latter was sent into exile.

Simha Pratap Sah did not forget the promise he had made to the missionaries and wrote several times to Fr. Joseph of Rovato, who had in the meantime been nominated Prefect

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10. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 302-303.

11. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, 231-232.



Apostolic (1769-1786), to send priests to Nepal. Alas! the invitation could not be accepted because of the paucity of priests.<sup>12</sup>

The new ruler of Nepal was not alone in his request for missionaries. About the same time the Rajas of Kaski and Palpa, to the west of the Valley, and some other chieftains, wrote to the Prefect expressing their desire to have two or more priests in their respective territories.<sup>13</sup> Even in this case, Fr. Joseph of Rovato had to regret, he could not comply with their requests.

The reign of Simha Pratap Sah was short. He died a natural death on the 17th November 1777,<sup>14</sup> leaving an infant child as heir to the throne, Rana Bahadur Sah.

At the time of Simha Pratap Sah's death, his brother Bahadur Sah lived in exile at Bettiah. There he continued to be on friendly terms with the priests, specially with Fr. Michael Angelo, his old friend, whose medical skill he had experienced more than once. Before returning to Kathmandu, where he had been invited by the people to be the Regent, Bahadur Sah reiterated his sentiments of esteem and affection for the missionaries and promised to call them back to Nepal and to give land to the Christians so that they may live in peace in their own countries.<sup>15</sup>

But, this was not to be. The Queen-mother of the infant king, Rajendra Lakshmi, soon caused trouble and after a

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12. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 153, 155. In a report submitted to the Congregation of Propaganda in 1773 (*Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritture riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali*, Vol. 836, *Congregazione del 15 Giugno 1773*, ff. 239-244) by Fr. Seraphin of Como, in which he gives a detailed description of the sad plight to which the mission had been reduced both in men and means, we read that there are only seven missionaries in the whole territory of the Prefecture: two of them were not keeping good health, while three more had already completed ten years' service in the mission and were due for repatriation. According to the same Fr. Seraphin of Como, no less than six missionaries would be required for Nepal alone because of the peculiar conditions of the place.

13. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

14. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 165

15. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 165, 170.

tussel for the Regency, Bahadur Sah had to flee for his life to Bettiah again and then to Patna, where he took up permanent residence.

In spite of his troubled life, Bahadur Sah's attachment to the priests remained unchanged. Probably, while still in Patna, he donated, as a token of love and affection for the Fathers, a large bell, named 'Maria', about three feet in diameter to the Patna Cathedral, which had been blessed and opened to service three years earlier. Around its base it bears the inscription: "Bahadur Sah, Prithvi Narain regis Nepal filius, dono dedit anno 1782."<sup>16</sup>

This friendship of Bahadur Sah with the Capuchins aroused the suspicion of the British with whom Nepal was distinctly unfriendly. As a consequence, two of them underwent imprisonment in Patna for sixteen months. The lot of the Capuchins at this historical juncture was truly unhappy. First, they had been accused by the new master of Nepal of

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16. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 45.

Bahadur Sah is styled an ingenious, but exceedingly superstitious man. Col. Kirkpatrick (*Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, London, 1811, p. 120 and F. Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 250) relates "That upon certain missionaries, offering to instruct him in the most useful branches of mineralogy and metallurgy (respecting which the prince was very curious). provided he would embrace the Christian faith, he cautiously replied that his rank in the state made it inconvenient for him to accede to the proposed terms, but that he was ready to substitute two or three men, who would make as good proselytes as himself. The missionaries rejecting the expedient, and the Regent not comprehending, or affecting not to comprehend, why three souls should be of less estimation than one, very gravely inferred that the holy Father could only be prevented from accepting so fair a proposal, by the desire of concealing his ignorance of the arts, which he had professed himself qualified to teach"

Commenting on this, Bishop Hartmann (*Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 47) remarked "That if this proposal took place, the king in his judgment was wrong and Kirkpatrick seems to lead his readers intentionally into disrespect of the missionaries. Although one soul is as costly as another, still the conversion of one Sovereign is more important than the conversion of three men, because on the conversion of the Sovereign often depends the conversion of the whole nation".

being in league with the British and had to leave the country. Now, they were accused by the British of siding with Nepal<sup>17</sup> and they were thrown into jail.

Returning to Nepal after the death of the Queen-Regent in July or August, 1785,<sup>18</sup> Bahadur Sah took over the Regency without any opposition. In 1795 Rana Bahadur Sah removed him from the Regency and two years later put him to death.

During the time of his Regency, Bahadur Sah solicited the Prefect to send missionaries to Nepal, and so did his successors to the throne of Kathmandu. The desire to re-open Nepal as a missionary field was earnest and sincere. The Congregation of Propaganda had manifested in no uncertain manner its mind on the realisation of this plan.<sup>19</sup> But it was only wishful thinking. The truth of the matter was that the mission could not afford the men to embark on such a venture at this particular stage of history.

On the 17th May 1784, the Congregation of Propaganda had issued a Decree annexing the northern portion of the

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17. In this connection, we read in a note copied by Bishop Hartmann out of the archives of Chuhari, and written by Fr. Romuald of Senigallia, "on the 19th June 1783, the Fathers were taken prisoners by the soldiers on account of a calumny against them, and were led to Patna, where they were kept till the 24th October 1784, when their innocence came to light and they were set free by the order of the English Governor General. On being released, they returned to their former place and office".

Bishop Hartmann (*Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 45) adds a foot-note to this information and states that the Fathers who had been imprisoned must have been Fr. Romuald of Senigallia himself, then posted to Chuhari, and Fr. Michael Angelo of Tabiago, the then missionary at Bettiah, that is, the two priests, who, living close to the frontier of Nepal, were more suspected than anyone else of being in collusion with the Nepalese government. The note concludes stating that "The Prefect Apostolic (Fr. Joseph of Rovato) at that time stationed at Patna, does not appear to have been imprisoned, as his name occurs in the Baptism Register of Patna during the years 1783 and 1784".

18. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

19. *Ibid.*

Vicariate of the Great Moghul to the Prefecture of the Tibetan Mission. With this new addition, the missionary field of the Capuchins extended over the whole of north India. Europe, the supply base of man-power, was bubbling over with wars and other political disturbances, with the result that missionaries could not come out and the dead, aged and infirm could not be replaced.

The three priests, therefore, who between 1786 and 1797 were sent to Nepal, went there merely to keep in touch with the royal family at Kathmandu, or in order to keep open the line of communication, hoping against hope for the day when there would be men and means available to make a new start. That day never came.

The first Capuchin to go to Nepal, after the exodus of 1769, was Fr. Joseph of St. Marcello, a missionary of the 23rd expedition, who landed at Chandernagore on the 24th July 1783. He left for Kathmandu at the end of 1786 and remained there till the beginning of 1789.

Fr. Charles Mary of Alatri, who had arrived from Europe in October 1784, was the next missionary to go to Nepal. The Vice-Prefect of the time, Fr. Mark dalla Tomba (the Prefect had died at Patna on the 13th December 1786), thought it advisable to send a companion to Fr. Joseph of St. Marcello. The latter had fallen ill and none of his confreres in India could go and see him because of the malaria in the Tarai which kept the track closed to travellers for eight months in the year.

Fr. Charles Mary's stay in Nepal was short. He went to Kathmandu at the end of 1787 and was again back in India by the end of the following year. While there, news reached him that he had been elected Prefect of the mission and he was bound to return to his head-quarters at Patna.

In a letter written to the Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda, the newly appointed Prefect wrote:

“It is already two years now that we have re-opened the mission in the Small Tibet (i.e. Nepal) and during my sojourn there I experienced all the kindness of the king. I practised medicine and received in return all what was necessary for my maintenance. The king would never have

allowed me to leave, had I not been elected Prefect of the mission. I promised him to come back, circumstances permitting. On taking leave he presented me with an elephant and gave me money and servants to make a comfortable journey. In the Small Tibet I found three houses established by the former missionaries. As things stand at present, two priests would be enough to carry on the work, if only the Congregation of Propaganda would send them to us.''<sup>20</sup>

But the men were not to be had. A year or so later, the Prefect recalled Fr. Joseph of St. Marcello from Nepal to post him elsewhere, where his services were more urgently needed.

The last two Capuchins to enter Nepal were Fr. Romuald of Senigallia, who was then the chaplain of Bettiah, and Fr. Joseph of St. Marcello, who went to Nepal for a second time. The first remained there for nine months in the year 1794; while the second spent the last thirteen years of his life at Kathmandu, where he died on the 9th November 1810.

Figuratively, Frs. Romuald of Senigallia and Joseph of St. Marcello stand for the best and the worst of the Capuchin missionaries in Nepal. The Regent was so pleased with the conduct and service of Fr. Romuald that, when he left the country due exclusively to age (he was about sixty years at that time) and ill health, that he gave him as a present two elephants and a lot of costly silk.<sup>21</sup>

Quite different is the story of Fr. Joseph of Marcello. If we have to believe whatever has been written against him, without making allowance for exaggeration and prejudice, we have to conclude that he was the black sheep of the mission, a fugitive and a disobedient, who fled to Nepal to escape punishment inflicted upon him by his Superior, the

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20. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. LXX—LXXI; *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 47.

21. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann* p. 45. The note adds that so long as Bahadur Sah was alive, he used to send every year to Fr. Romuald at Bettiah 'either an elephant or a highly valued horse with precious cloth'.

Prefect Apostolic. A black spot in an otherwise glorious page of mission history.<sup>22</sup>

After the Gurkha war of 1814-1816, a treaty of peace was signed between the British and the Napalese by which, among other things, Nepal agreed to accept a British Envoy in Kathmandu and both parties bound themselves to refuse permission to any European to enter the country. Thus the way was precluded for the Capuchins to re-establish the mission in Nepal, even if they had the men and the means to claim once again their rightful inheritance.

The mission in Nepal has never been officially closed, nor were the missionaries turned out from the country. On the contrary, bitter criticism has been expressed in some quarters for abandoning this apostolic field in such a hurry without proper authorisation from the Superiors.

The exodus of 1769 was only a temporary measure, dictated by circumstances. The priests and the Christian refugees at Chuhari walked out of the Valley with the intention of returning to their homeland and to settle there once again to peaceful work amidst the familiar scenery of the surrounding hills. They still claim that they belong to Nepal.

Throughout the years down to the present times, the Nepal territory has always been attached to an ecclesiastical unit with its head-quarters in India. It was at first part of the extensive Patna Vicariate, then it was incorporated in the short-lived Prefecture Apostolic of Bettiah, and it is now, under the jurisdiction of the Patna Diocese.

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22. Referring to the unworthy life of Fr. Joseph of St. Marcello, Bishop Hartmann wrote (*Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 48-49): 'Fuit cum Romualdo per aliquot tempus in Bettiah, sed ob conductum scandalosum cum quadam muliere, quae sibi peperit filiam, a praefecto incarceratus, aufugit in Nepal, et 1810 in Kathmandu obiit. Ipsius filia postea, omnibus naturae et gratiae donis ornata, Missioni de Purneah exemplo et facultibus vitam splendoremque dedit.'

## VI

### SPIRITUAL FRUITS

The Italian Capuchin missionaries laboured in Nepal for a period of about fiftyfour years. No less than twenty-nine of them, in different successive expeditions and for various lengths of time, were devoted and their energies and talents utilised, to the spreading of the Gospel among the people of that ancient land.

As the curtain dropped over the Nepal Mission and the last labourers of the vineyard walked out from the scene of their apostolic activities, it is but natural to give a retrospective glance to see what was the impact which the Christian faith made on the people of the Valley and what progress was made in the work of conversions.

It may be said, from the very start, that apart from several thousand baptisms ministered at the point of death, the results obtained were rather disappointing, and, in any case, out of proportion with the toil, the means and the number of priests engaged in the work of evangelisation. This, of course, is purely a human evaluation of the missionary activity carried on in Nepal.

On the other hand, one has to bear in mind that we are not dealing with a mission already well established, but with a new venture set against unfamiliar surroundings, and which, before making any headway, had to find its bearings. Initial difficulties, lack of adequate means, and above all the irregular flow of labourers were bound to make themselves felt and slow down the pace of work.

#### Some Statistics

The earliest available record of Baptisms ministered mainly to adults at the hour of death and in particular to dying children dates back to the year 1738. In a comprehensive report submitted to the Congregation of Propaganda by

Fr. Francis Horace of Penna Billi, the then Prefect Apostolic of the Tibetan mission, we read:

“During the eight years I had been Prefect (1725-1733), Holy Baptisms had been ministered in Tibet, Nepal and Patna to 2,587 children who had departed this life soon after their admission to the Church of God.”<sup>1</sup> It may be noted here that though Fr. Francis Horace was elected Prefect Apostolic of the Tibetan Mission on the 13th August 1719, the news of his appointment reached him only on the 15th September, 1725.

Most of the Baptisms mentioned by Fr. Francis Horace in his report, as we shall see later, were conferred on dying children in Nepal.

The next official source of information comes from a report written from Kathmandu in 1750 by Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, the successor in office to Francis Horace. It gives detailed information of the baptisms performed in danger of death in Nepal from 1737 to the year 1750.

“The number of baptisms”, so runs the report, “ministered in Bhatgaon was 1,127; in Kathmandu 229; in Patan 909; in Thimi 109; in Kirtipur 6.” The report gives the list of fifteen more towns and villages lying in the Valley of Nepal, or scattered over the hill side, in which 145 baptisms were conferred, making a total of 2,525 baptisms.<sup>2</sup>

The same report gives also the number of baptisms which were conferred on dying children and adults in Tibet and in the State of Bihar, or to be more exact, in Patna. This information is of particular interest to us, as it helps to ascertain more correctly the number of baptisms performed in Nepal.

Speaking about Tibet, the report states that forty baptisms only were ministered to dying children and adults in Lhasa and surrounding areas during the entire period the Lhasa Mission had been in existence; while the number of baptisms which had taken place in Bihar, from 1736 to 1750, is put down at fifty.

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1. *Rappresentanza*, No. LX; *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 94.

2. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 255.



The reason why most of the baptisms to the dying were ministered in Nepal is that every year some infectious or other disease plagued the country and so the mortality rate was very high. This was not the case in Tibet, where the dry cold climate and the pure mountain air kept the disease rate remarkably low. As for Patna, the conditions there were quite different. The priest in charge of the station moved chiefly among the Christian community of the place, which was pretty numerous and moreover scattered over a wide area, which kept him fully occupied. His contacts with the non-Christian population were therefore rare and occasional. In consequence he had hardly any chance of baptising dying children or adults.

Another reason which explains the large number of baptisms in Nepal is given by Fr. Francis Horace in one of his reports.

Referring to the many opportunities and the great ease which enabled the missionaries to minister baptism to dying children in Nepal, Fr. Francis Horace remarks that the parents themselves send for the priest whenever they see that their children are about to die in order to be cleansed by the purifying waters of baptism. The parents, he adds, had been instructed by the missionaries that this was the best way to make their offspring enjoy the glory of God.<sup>6</sup>

The last source of information regarding the number of baptisms ministered at the point of death in Nepal, is to be found in an annotation made to the old Baptism Register of Chuhari, which reads:

“This is to bring to the notice of the missionaries who come after us that a lot of historical records and other particulars of this Mission in Tibet and Nepal have perished, not on account of the carelessness of men, but because of the climatic conditions of these regions and of the number of insects that infest buildings. All this makes it very difficult to keep manuscripts in good condition for a long time.”

The annotation goes on to say, “The present Prefect Apostolic had drawn my attention to this sad state of things,

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3. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 94.

and had requested me to gather with care and diligence all available data regarding the baptisms ministered to dying children by the past and present missionaries so that something might be left on record of all that has been done in the Mission”.

After this introduction the annotation remarks: “Having done this to the best of my ability, I have found that from 1737 to 1755, 6,900 dying children have been baptised in Tibet and Nepal, in addition to the dying children baptised by Fr. Seraphin of Civitanuova and his co-workers from 1718 to 1721, at a time when a most disastrous plague devastated the land. The number of these baptisms could not be ascertained, as all relevant records could not be traced. Then again, from 1755 to 1769 in Nepal alone 1,183 dying children have been baptised.”<sup>4</sup>

There are also other statistics, but these refer mostly to the baptisms ministered by a particular missionary or in a particular year, or even over a number of years: For instance, Fr. Cassian of Macerata informs us that through the practice of medicine he succeeded in baptising 272 dying children at Bhatgaon in the year 1742-43.<sup>5</sup> Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio writes that in the year 1750, 600 children and 6 adults were baptised.<sup>6</sup> And again, the same priest, in a report submitted to Rome, states that between 1740 and 1748, 2,000 children and 500 adults had been baptised.<sup>7</sup>

However, all these particulars are like broken pieces of a mirror, which though good in themselves, fail to convey the dimension and beauty of the whole.

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4. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 34-35. The priest who compiled these statistics is very likely Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia, a member of the XXII expedition, who worked in the mission from 1826 to 1842. He is the author of a valuable account on the Tibet Hindustan Mission submitted to the Congregation of Propaganda (*Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritt. Congressi 1841-1842*, Vol. 8, ff. 578-585 v.), in which some other important statistical data are given. Accordingly, the Prefect who told Fr. Joachim to compile these statistics was Mgr. A. Pezzoni.
  5. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 151.
  6. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 183.
  7. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 177.

Two more missionaries give the sum total of baptisms ministered in danger of death in Nepal, but the figures stated by them differ so greatly as to make it impossible to reconcile them. Fr. Anselm of Ragusa informs us that the total number of baptisms up to the year 1756 was 9,000;<sup>8</sup> while Fr. Seraphin of Como puts down as 20,000 the number of dying children and adults baptised up to the year 1769.<sup>9</sup>

The following table may perhaps give an approximate idea of the total number of people who received baptism at the point of death in Nepal from 1715 to 1769.

From the year 1725 to 1733	2,587
„ 1737 to 1755	6,900
„ 1755 to 1769	1,183

Number of baptisms not accounted for 1,500

This makes a total of 12,170 baptisms and an average of 225 baptisms per year, a figure which may be considered conservative.

More easy is the task to ascertain the number of adult converts and the baptisms of children of Catholic parents. Though, even here there are some discrepancies, the difference is so negligible as to make it immaterial. In fact the lowest and the highest number of baptisms of this category varies between 78 and 82.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, there are also other statistics which widen the gap still more. But it is pretty clear from the whole

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8. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 192.

9. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 232.

10. Fr. Joachim of Anatolia, in a report submitted to propaganda quoted above under foot-note No. 4, gives the sum total of Christians in Nepal at 78; while Fr. Hilarion of Abtei O.F.M. Cap. (*Mss.*, p. 85), Prefect Apostolic of Bettiah, basing himself on an old manuscript kept in Chuhari, gives the total number of Christians baptised in Nepal at 82. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p. 34, writes: "Christiani in Nepal baptizati a Missionis origine usque ad eius suppressionem 1769, sive adulti sive infantes in libro registrati sunt 79". Fr. Anselm of Ragusa (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 192) states that upto 1756 seventy people had been baptised including adults and children as well as those who had died and those who were still alive.

narrative that the writer does not want to pin-point the exact number of converts, but rather to give, in a round figure, a fair idea of their whole strength.<sup>11</sup>

Some sort of confusion arises in the statistics from the fact that the number of those who died in Nepal, before emigrating to India, is not included in the sum total of Catholics; or even because the few Nepalese Catholics who were baptised earlier in Tibet have not been taken into account.

Anyway, as Fr. Joseph of Rovato in his report to Rome states that he is enclosing in a separate sheet of paper the list of all the Nepalese converts, we are inclined to think that the list of Christians, giving all particulars, such as the name, age and date of baptism, embodied in an old historical manuscript which used to be in Bettiah, has been copied from the original, or in any case the figure given is nearest to the correct number we can get.<sup>12</sup>

According to this manuscript the total number of Nepalese Christians was 82, twentyfour of whom died in Nepal before 1769. The number of marriages recorded is nine.<sup>13</sup>

Concerning the number of Catholics who emigrated to India, we have another set of statistics equally reliable, which

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11. Fr. Seraphin of Como in his report to the Congregation of Propaganda, 1773 (*Arch. Prop. Fide, Scritture riferite nelle Congregazioni Generali*, vol. 836, *Congregazione del 15 Giugno 1773*, ff. 239-244) reports that fifty or even more Christians and three catechumens were taken down from Nepal to Chuhari in 1769. Fr. Joseph Alphonsus of Palermo, a missionary of the XVI expedition, speaks of fiftyfive Christian families having been converted in Nepal upto 1768 (*Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 295). In all probability, he means fiftyfive converts still surviving at the time in which he was writing. In the same report Fr. Joseph Alphonsus of Palermo mentions that after baptism the Christians "are exempted from the royal jurisdiction and placed under the authority of the priests". It is difficult to understand the exact meaning of this assertion. It may be a reference to the Decree of Liberty of Conscience or to some extra powers granted to the missionaries in dealing with their followers.

12-13. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 98. The total number of Nepalese Christians is taken from the manuscript of Fr. Hilarion of Abtei, quoted above, under foot-note No. 10.

gives the following break down figures of immigrants: three Christian families of thirteen souls from Patan, nine Christian families of thirtyeight souls from Kathmandu, two Christians families of four souls from Bhatgaon, two other Christians (presumably orphans or unmarried adults) and five catechumens, in all fiftyseven Newari Christians, fourteen families and five catechumens. And so, taking into account the twentyfour Christians who died in Nepal, according to the manuscript quoted above, the difference between the two sets of statistics of the number of Christians who emigrated to India, is reduced to one unit only, namely their total number was either fiftyseven or fiftyeight.

There may be a few more converts whose names are not recorded. From an annotation made in one of the registers of Chuhari, we learn that the Baptism Register of Nepal was started by Fr. Vitus of Recanati on the 4th of October, 1741, and that the last entry was made on the 5th September, 1768. Previous records were either lost or never maintained.<sup>14</sup>

It is indeed a very humble record; a record which can hardly compensate the labourers of the vineyard for all the sleepless nights, the working days, the scanty meals they had so patiently endured over the years and all the toil and suffering they had undergone. Nevertheless, the little flock of Nepal compares favourably with the early Christian communities, so high was the standard of their Christian faith. On this point opinion is unanimous.

The Nepalese Christians, writes Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia, are few but they are very staunch and steadfast in the profession of their faith. We make very few converts in Nepal, it is true, remarks Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, but we want them to be true followers of Our Lord. And Fr. Joseph of Rovato does not hesitate to call the Newari converts the best Christians in the whole mission. He describes them as being poor, honest, God-fearing and hard-working.<sup>15</sup>

### Slow Progress

Fr. Joseph of Rovato, who had an intimate knowledge of

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14. Terzorio B, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

15. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 172; part III, pp. 227-228; Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

the people of Nepal, having spent five years among them, listed four principal reasons which, in his estimate, were responsible for the slow progress in the work of conversion.

The Nepalese, he writes, are very poor. Because of their extreme poverty verging on destitution, they are fully occupied in the things of this world, in a desperate attempt to eke out a living just sufficient for the day. Under such adverse economic conditions, they have no time to spare nor have the right disposition to devote themselves to the pursuit of religion.

Ignorance and prejudice was another major obstacle which hampered the progress of the Church in Nepal. According to Fr. Joseph of Rovato, the Nepalese in general have a primitive and confused conception of religion. They hardly know anything about their own religious belief and no one can expect them to understand, much less to appreciate, the fundamental principles of another faith, having no sufficient knowledge to make comparisons and to draw their own conclusions. They are ready to listen, eager to know, always willing to approve whatever you say, but when it comes to the point of taking a decision or breaking away with the past, a magic spell holds them back to their age old traditions. They are so firmly rooted in the belief and practice of their ancestors that no new idea or different way of life appeals to them. Further, they seemed pleased and satisfied with themselves and their religious system.

As it can be easily realised, the uncertain political situation of the time and the war-like conditions prevailing in the country over the years, were bound to adversely affect the activity of the priests. "Since I came to Nepal", notes Fr. Joseph of Rovato, "we have always been at war. The three kingdoms of the Valley are invaded by the Gurkha army. People live in fear and they are not in a fit mood to talk about religion". It is easy to understand this, concludes the missionary, but only those who have gone through such dreadful experience know better than anyone else the dire consequences of this state of things.

However, the greatest obstacle of all to the work of conversions was the rigid caste system in force in Nepal. It had such a grip on the mind of the people that the idea alone of

losing their caste was enough to make them give up any serious thought of changing their religion. Commenting on this particular point, Fr. Joseph of Rovato remarked that the Nepalese are so attached to their caste that "they preferred to die within it than to live without it."<sup>16</sup>

The geographical position of the country too, went a long way to keep it isolated from any external influence. Tucked high in the Himalayas between India and Tibet, the land-locked kingdom of Nepal remained for most of its history largely immune to change. It imported, so to say, civilisation, religion and culture from the neighbouring territories of India and Tibet, but offered a strenuous and stubborn resistance to the infiltration of any other type of religion which was not part of the Hindu and Buddhist heritage.

### **Christianity and Caste**

In Nepal the Capuchin missionaries came face to face, for the first time, with the caste system. It is true that their confreres in India were confronted with a similar problem. But the latter felt the impact of the caste system to a lesser degree, labouring as they were, under different conditions.

It is therefore a matter of great interest to know how the missionaries in Nepal tried to tackle this social problem which affected their work and the life of their followers most intimately. Did they want their converts to sever all connections with the family and caste, or did they try to reconcile the caste system to the Christian faith by coming to a compromise in an effort to reach a peaceful co-existence between the two? Though no definite policy had been formulated, or at least we cannot gather any substantial evidence of this from their writings, it is clear from the few stray incidents related by them, that they strove by every possible means to find a solution to this pressing problem.

To all appearances, the priests made a distinction between the religious and social life of a person. Every convert should be allowed to live and practise his Christian faith in all its integrity without harassment, fear or compromise. Socially

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16. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

however, he should still be considered a member of the original caste to which he belongs, without being discriminated against, or losing his rights and privileges solely on account of the new religious faith he has embraced.

This would have been an ideal solution to the problem; the only snag was that in a typically Hindu community, it is near to impossible to draw a line of distinction between the religious and social life of a man. Anyway, it is pretty sure that the missionaries in Nepal tried to find a solution to the problem by working things out in this direction.

The first and most striking instance on record goes back to the year 1750. It refers to the Catholic burial of a child which took place in Kathmandu in that year. The whole narrative—a lengthy report of about 7,000 words—is nothing short of a tug of war between the priests and the non-Christian relatives of the deceased and other interested people. The priests were insisting on the recognition of the departed as being still a member of her caste and requesting the Hindu relatives to make all preparations for her Christian burial and to carry the body to the grave, while the Hindu relatives went all out to disown the child and refused point blank to have anything to do with the ceremony, on the plea that the deceased had fallen from her caste. It was a hard fought contest which ended in a draw, the priests winning some points while losing others.

The whole story may be condensed as follows:

On the 28th March 1750, being Holy Saturday, a widow and her three children were received into the church at Kathmandu together with a man from Bhatgaon. The widow was given the name of Anne, while her three children were christened Lewis, Vincent and Mary. On the 7th May, Mary, the youngest of the three, a child of four years, died of small-pox.

The relatives of the deceased and the members of her caste were expected to make all arrangements for the Christian burial of the child. However, they were just waiting for an opportunity such as this to vent all their feelings of contempt and hatred on the poor widow for having become a Christian and refused to take any part in the burial. On



hearing this, the priests went straight to the Raja of Kathmandu, Jaya Prakash Malla Deva, who only seven days earlier had been re-instated on his throne.

The Raja received the missionaries most kindly and directed them to discuss the matter with his master of religion. The *Raja Guru* told the priests not to worry and to go home, assuring them that everything would be set right, for such was the order of the king and his own.

This was only the beginning of a long story which kept everyone concerned busy for two or three days. There is no need to go into many details; for our purpose it is enough to state that the poor child was eventually buried in the small Christian cemetery of Kathmandu by the people of her own caste, though under heavy pressure.

The burial over, the relations began haunting the poor widow in order to extort from her the fee required for the legal purifications. To save the disconsolate woman from endless trouble, the missionaries smuggled her out to Bhatgaon and put her in the house of a Christian family.

Meanwhile Lewis, her first-born son, aged six years and five months, was stricken with a contagious disease and died in the mission dispensary at Kathmandu on the 22nd May 1750. The sorrow stricken mother could not be called at his bedside; nor could she attend the burial for fear of harassment.

The day prior to little Lewis' death, the harried priests, still under strain, called once again on the Raja asking him what was to be done for the burial in the event of the poor child's death. The obliging Raja deputed one of his ministers to go and persuade the relations and the people of the same caste to do their duty. If they buried the deceased, the minister told them, they would inherit the patrimony left to the first-born son by his father; otherwise the patrimony would go to fill the coffers of the Government Treasury.

It was a tempting inducement and all agreed to the proposal. However, it was only an excuse to pacify the missionaries and the government official. Soon after, they sought the advice of the chief Brahmin of their caste, an inveterate

enemy of the missionaries, who strongly dissuaded them to perform the burial. He explained that the deceased had lived with the missionaries, that he had eaten rice and taken medicines from their own hands, and this was such a heinous crime that not even the legal purifications would be enough to re-instate them in their caste. This was too much for those simple people and they refused to budge.

The story is not yet over. All the while the poor widow was subjected to relentless persecution in a determined bid to force her to renounce faith. She moved from house to house, from place to place so that they might lose track of her whereabouts and leave her in peace. Not even her mother's house was a safe refuge. Wherever she went, she was taunted, abused, despised and ill-treated like a renegade or an out-caste; nevertheless, she stood her ground bravely like a valiant woman.

Moved to compassion at the pitiful plight of the poor widow, the priests sought to put an end to all these vexations. They sent in an application to the Raja of Kathmandu, a copy to the *Raja Guru*, soliciting them to declare that the unfortunate woman had not fallen from her caste just because she had become a Christian. The petition was accompanied by a small present in conformity with the custom of the land.

The Raja received the missionaries with a broad smile and referred the case to the *Raja Guru*, the supreme judge in all controversies concerning caste and religion. The High Priest promised to look into the matter and to give his verdict.

“We must have gone to his house over a hundred times, once or twice daily”, so reads the report; but still no hopeful sign of a pronouncement was in sight. Finally one day, in the presence of the priest and others, the *Raja Guru*, called the woman and had her questioned minutely on her life, on her belief, on her habits, her association with the missionaries, whether she had eaten with them, or taken food from their hands or cooked by them and so forth. Not finding anything incriminating, the High Priest declared that to all intents and purposes, she was still a member of her caste.

This was indeed very good news, admitted the priests, but still not good enough to calm the emotionally surcharged

atmosphere. They wanted this declaration to be made public so that in future all may know that the Christians should not be ostracised or banished from their caste.

At this request, the *Raja Guru* demurred and stated that before making a public pronouncement to that effect it was necessary that one of her relations should come forward and acknowledge her as still being a member of his caste.

It was difficult to find a relative of the poor widow in Kathmandu ready to do this act of charity as most of her relatives were living in far away places. At last the missionaries came upon a young man who was related to the unfortunate woman. They acquainted him with the particulars of the case and exhorted him to come to her rescue. This he promised to do. However, once produced before the High Priest, the young man solemnly declared that he had never met the woman and he did not know who she was.

The report does not say why the young man changed his mind overnight. Very likely he was under pressure by the people of the same caste.

Again, the priests went in search of another in-law ready to sponsor the cause of the sorely tried Christian woman. Unfortunately, we do not know how the whole sad story ended. The report was despatched to Rome at this stage, and there is no follow-up of the incident in later correspondence.<sup>17</sup>

The permission granted to the Christians to draw water from the common well was yet another break-through in the caste system. It was truly a great concession, which might have been granted grudgingly or under pressure of the royal favour of the three rulers of the Valley, but it is there to show that the Christians were not to be made to suffer any social disability on account of their religion.

We do not know the time and the manner in which this concession was made, but it may reasonably be assured that it was not without strong opposition. When Prithwi Narayan Shah became the new master of Nepal, the priests approached him and requested him among other things, to kindly allow

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17. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 257-271.

the Christians to draw water from the common wells as they did in former days, but this time the petition was turned down.<sup>18</sup>

In another chapter of the present publication we referred to the case of a renegade woman who caused a commotion in Kathmandu and Patan by accusing the missionaries of having committed numberless crimes. As already explained, these crimes were nothing more than breaches of caste laws, incurred by the missionaries and their followers.

The renegade woman first filed a suit in the court of Kathmandu in 1752. She was instigated to do so by the Brahmins and other influential people, who were determined to have the Christians debarred from their caste. In spite of all arguments brought forward by the prosecution, the case was lost. Having failed at Kathmandu, the renegade woman and her supporters tried again their luck at Patan; but even here the decision of the court went against them.

The sentence given by the panchayat or Court of Kathmandu was to the effect that no Christian loses his caste by keeping the Christian law, but rather by breaking the law of the land; while the Court of Patan ruled that the accusations brought against the priests and the Christians did not constitute a cognisable offence.<sup>19</sup>

Here again, the royal favour enjoyed by the priests and the Christians in Nepal at that time might have restrained the hands of the panchayat from disposing of the suit on merits or in conformity with the caste laws. Nevertheless, it goes to prove that the missionaries left no means untried to bring home to all their point of view in this matter.

### **No End to the Controversy**

Did the priests finally succeed in making the Nepalese accept their contention that no Christian loses his caste solely on account of his conversion? We are not in a position to say. All documents, except the few we have quoted, are silent on the point. Yet, perhaps, the case of the

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18. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 242-243.

19. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 189-190.

poor widow of Kathmandu we have related in this chapter, may be typical of the whole situation prevailing in Nepal from the beginning of the mission history down to the time the priests and the Christians were forced out of the country. A dogged fight went on between two opposing camps, each one upholding strenuously its own principles, without any hope of coming to an amicable settlement or reaching a compromise. This state of things might have found the priests at times on the winning side, and, on other occasions, on the losing side, depending on the human element or the particular circumstances in which the contest took place.

In general, we may say that the authorities, that is, the Rajas of the three petty kingdoms of the Valley, appeared to have taken a rather conciliatory view of the whole issue. They were naturally worried more about the political problems endangering their throne and safety than about some religious subtleties, the meaning and importance of which they could hardly grasp.

The real trouble-makers were the Brahmins, the people of high caste, who, more than anyone else, realised the potential danger the Christian faith would pose to their religious establishments, should they allow it to grow and entrench itself in their midst. These were the ones who urged, through intimidation and threat, the relatives of the new converts either to reclaim them or to ostracise them from their society.

The persistent and deterrent action of the Brahmins within their own fold, coupled with the methodical harassment meted out to the neophytes by relations and friends, was the root cause that checked the work of conversion among people who otherwise were well disposed to receive the Christian message.

## VII

### APOSTOLATE OF THE PEN

The literary activity of the Capuchins in Nepal, whatever might have been its nature, had but one objective in view, namely to facilitate their task in the work of the ministry. Their writings were meant either to enlighten the people on the Christian doctrine or to equip the future generations of missionaries with the necessary knowledge to carry out their pastoral duties with competence, dignity and efficiency.

It is therefore clear from what we have stated, that all their literary production had a very limited scope. They were all hand written and were all intended exclusively for private use. No other consideration, literary or otherwise, ever weighed in the mind of the writers.

The chief merit of these literary exertions rests in the fact that they were the first attempt ever made by any foreigner to write in or to translate from the Newari language. Though they might not have come up to the expected standard, nevertheless, they deserve all our admiration. It was a hard task, undertaken by men of good will with sincerity of purpose and a spirit of sacrifice. As a matter of fact, they were all beginners, with no professional training to their credit and insufficient means at their disposal to make a success of their undertaking. In spite of all, they did succeed in producing some works of lasting value.

The writings of the Capuchins in Nepal may be classified under the following heads:

#### **Apologetic and Catechetical**

The exposition and vindication of the Christian faith was a subject of vital importance to the missionaries, having been sent to propagate the teaching of the Gospel in non-Christian countries. It is therefore obvious that their literary endeavours should be directed chiefly to making known the message

of Christ and to defend it from any attack. No less than seven booklets or books, all apologetic and catechetical in their character, were written or translated into the Newari language by the Capuchins. Unfortunately none of them has come down to us. Available data are not very helpful in assessing the plan and length of these works, their literary value and obvious limitations.

In all their literary activity the missionaries were helped by a paid language teacher. Particular mention is made of a certain Brahmin, Bal Gobinder, a man of considerable wit and ready eloquence, who for some personal reason was very attached to the priests and had taken a keen interest in all their missionary activities.<sup>1</sup>

We know of the existence of the following apologetic and catechetical writings, either because they are mentioned by some of the Fathers in the course of their correspondence or through some other contemporary sources.

1. The translation into the Newari language of the *Le tresor de la doctrine Chretienne* from the original French text by Mgr. Nicholas Thourlot (1590-1651). It was translated by Fr. Francis Horace of Penna Billi during the years 1733-1734 while he was in Nepal. The version is mentioned twice by the translator himself and the same number of times by Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia.<sup>2</sup>

It is not clear whether Fr. Francis Horace rendered the full text into the Newari language, a lengthy work of nine hundred pages, or if he abridged it here and there, retouching some passages and adding some others, so to make it more suitable to the religious conditions existing in Nepal. The presumption, however, is that the translator shortened and re-edited the whole book adapting it to the needs of the Christians and catechumens of the place, as he had

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1. *Journal*, pp. 80-81, states that Bal Gobinder sided with the missionaries in the hope of receiving some favours from the Raja of Bhatgaon, who was very friendly with the priests.

2. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 175, 178; part III, pp. 88, 154.

formerly done with the version of the same catechism into the Tibetan language.

2. During the same period, Fr. Francis Horace translated the *Christian Doctrine* by Cardinal Bellarmine (1542-1621) into the Newari language.<sup>3</sup> This catechism was considered then a standard work and as such enjoyed wide reputation over the years.

Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio informs us that the Newari version was enriched with new material to better serve the purpose for which it was intended. Whatever was found wanting in the original text, he writes, was supplemented in this new edition.<sup>4</sup>

3. A strictly apologetic treatise was written by Fr. Vitus of Recanati in the year 1740. The exact title of the work is unknown. Its main theme, according to Fr. Cassian of Macerata, was to prove that Christianity was the only and true religion revealed by God to men to obtain eternal salvation.

Before presenting the booklet to the Raja of Bhatgaon on 5th June 1740, the language teacher suggested to the priests to illustrate the front page with some kind of drawing or water-colour sketch, depicting the nature of its contents. This, he added, was in conformity with the custom of the land. Fr. Cassian of Macerata, the most talented artist of the group, drew a sketch of our Lord surrounded by His apostles, and underneath appeared the caption, written in the Newari language and Devanagari script: "Go out into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature; he who believes and shall be baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe shall be condemned".

This apologetic booklet should have been presented to the Raja of Bhatgaon a few months earlier, but Kasi Nath, the Chief Brahmin of the Royal Court, wanted to secure a copy beforehand in order to discuss the subject with the three other members of the Brahmin Council and be prepared well

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3. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 88, 154.

4. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, p. 172.



in time to meet the challenge. On account of this he managed to postpone again and again the interview with the Raja under one pretext or other.

A meeting was held at the Royal Palace and all arrived at the conclusion that none of them was ready to change the religion of his forefathers. The ruler, obviously not to disappoint the missionaries who had come from far away places to make converts, advanced the proposal that, if they were not ready to become Christians, they should at least send some ordinary people to the priests so that they might be enlisted among their followers. The proposal was unanimously approved.

Having been informed of the subterfuge by Bhavani Dutt, a friendly Brahmin, the missionaries let them know that they had come to Nepal to make Christians only those who came forward of their own accord and were fully convinced of the truth of the message they were preaching, and not those who would come to them to suit their own ends.<sup>5</sup>

The other four apologetic and catechetical writings are:

4. *A catechism booklet.*
5. *A dissertation on the seven capital sins.*
6. *An exposition of the seven sacraments of the Church.*
7. *A dialogue between a master and disciple on the merits of the Christian religion.*

All these compositions are anonymous, being very likely the outcome of a combined effort of two or more priests, more competent in this kind of work.

The writings mentioned in Nos. 4, 5, 6 and 7 were not parts of the same volume, but four different booklets or codices, as we read in the document from which the present information has been taken. They were taken to Rome by Fr. Anselm of Ragusa and presented in 1771 to Mgr. Stephen

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5. *Journal*, pp. 72-74, 80-81.

Borgia, the Secretary to the Congregation of Propaganda, who, in turn, transferred them to the library of the Urban College.<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt as to the existence of all the above writings. Already in 1747 Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio mentioned them all and a few more, in a letter to the Procurator General of the Order, even though he asserts that the above composition were parts or different sections of the same book. Here is what he wrote:

“A book has been compiled and rendered into the Newari language. It is clear and to the point exposition of the doctrinal and moral teaching of the Church, so essential to the knowledge of every true Christian. Special care has been taken to explain the acts of faith, hope and charity vis-a-vis magic, superstition, sorcery and other beliefs or practices. The Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church are expounded one by one in their true meaning. The Seven Sacraments of the Church, the Seven Capital Sins and the five senses of the body are also treated as part of the religious formation of the Christians and the catechumens.”<sup>7</sup>

Here we find, perhaps, a complete list of the literary output of the Capuchins in Nepal on apologetic and catechetical subjects, in addition to the works translated or written earlier by Fr. Francis Horace and Fr. Vitus of Recanati. It does not matter much whether each topic was a part of the same volume or its contents were distributed in various booklets.

Being all hand-written, they underwent several and substantial changes in the course of years, as knowledge, experience or expediency suggested either a revision of the text or a more elaborate exposition of the subject matter. And so, what was originally contained in one volume might have been subsequently broken up in different booklets. This was probably the final stage of the writings at the time the Capuchins left Nepal in 1769.

Earlier in the same letter, Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio referred to the apologetic booklet written by Fr. Vitus of

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6. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 70-71.

7. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 172-173.

Recanati without mentioning him by name, and according to what he wrote, it was evident that a new section had been added to it. The new edition contained also the fundamentals of the Christian faith.

### **Lexicon Writing**

The most precious and the most important literary work, in point of general interest, was the compilation of a Newari-Italian dictionary. It was a late fruit, a fruit that ripened at the very end of the Nepal mission history, nonetheless, it was such an outstanding achievement as to make it worth waiting for. The credit for this rare accomplishment goes unanimously to the keen mind and far sighted vision of Fr. John Gaulbert of Massa, a Capuchin who had been labouring in Nepal from 1761 to 1769.

It is not out of place, however, to advance the suggestion that this Newari-Italian dictionary was the culmination of a patient and methodical work taken in hand earlier by one or more priests and which Fr. John Gaulbert had the joy to bring to completion.

On leaving Nepal, the missionaries brought over to Chuhari all documents and writings pertaining to that abandoned mission field. The Mission House at Chuhari remained, for a century or so, the repository or treasure-house of all the material that was taken down from Nepal and stored there for safe keeping. And it was at Chuhari that Mgr. A. Pezzoni (1777-1844), one of the Vicars Apostolic of the Tibet-Hindustan Mission, came across three Newari dictionaries and listed them in the following order with the following remarks:

1. Newari-Italian dictionary, in quarto, written on paper made out of wood and compiled by Fr. Juvenal.
2. Newari-Italian dictionary, in quarto, revised edition, written in the year 1762 by Fr. Gaulbert of Massa.
3. Italian-Hindustani-Newari dictionary, in folio, by an unknown author.

Mgr. Pezzoni found the three dictionaries in Chuhari and he left them there for the perusal of the new recruits. In a

foot-note he cautioned the reader to be very careful in making use of them. Being the first attempts at lexicon writing, he remarked, they were still imperfect and full of mistakes.<sup>8</sup>

It must be understood that Mgr. Pezzoni's criticism refers exclusively to the Hindustani portion of the dictionary. He was a renowned Hindustani scholar and he knew what he said. It does not, however, appear that he was acquainted with the Newari language, or at least that he was competent enough to pass such an unfavourable judgement.

Now there is no difficulty in understanding the priority of these three dictionaries. Of all the known and unknown authors, Fr. John Gaulbert of Massa was the first in the field, the only one who lived and worked in Nepal for a number of years. Fr. Juvenal of Nizza and the unknown author of the Italian-Hindustani-Newari dictionary came out to India at a later date, at a time when the Nepal enterprise had already come to an end. Further, Fr. Juvenal himself acknowledges his indebtedness to the dictionary compiled by Fr. John Gaulbert. On the second page of the dictionary which goes by his name, we find this annotation:

“This dictionary is the first attempt at writing in Newari made by Fr. Juvenal”. The missionaries of those days used, as a rule, the third person singular whenever speaking of themselves.

The annotation goes on to say: “Because of this the writing of the letters is ill-shaped. The orthography however, I think, is correct and according to the original text made by Fr. Gaulbert. Besides, there are some hundred terms extra which have been inserted in the body of the dictionary, all of which are taken from books, in addition to the numerals, the names of the months, of the week and at the end the names of the signs of the zodiac”.

The annotation goes back to the year 1792, as given on the same sheet of paper, that is, just one year after the arrival of Fr. Juvenal from Europe. He was a member of the 25th expedition which left Italy in 1790 and landed at

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8. *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, pp. 70-71.

Chandernagore on the 16th October 1791. That clinches the issue. This being the case, we may easily surmise that Fr. Juvenal's dictionary is not a revised, but rather a deteriorated copy of the original made by Fr. John Gaulbert.

There is no clue as to the exact time the original Newari-Italian dictionary was compiled. The date given by Mgr. Pezzoni, that is, 1762, is surely incorrect. Fr. John Gaulbert might have begun writing the dictionary in that year and he might have completed it before he left Nepal, or at the latest during the time he was in charge of the Nepalese Catholic congregation at Chuhari.

The Italian-Hindustani-Newari dictionary is nothing other than a re-arrangement or a combination of the pre-existing material into one volume, made very likely towards the end of the 18th century. The Newari portion of the dictionary is therefore, a carbon copy or an extract of the work done earlier by Fr. John Gaulbert, or otherwise based on the manuscript of Fr. Juvenal. It is difficult to say which of the two. As such, it is a labour of love and good will but devoid of any literary merit. The same may be said with regard to the Hindustani section of the dictionary. We know that the Capuchins in India had already brought out an Italian-Hindustani dictionary way back in 1760.<sup>9</sup>

The only survival of these dictionaries is the copy that was made out from the original by Fr. Juvenal. What happened to the other two lexicons is a matter of mere speculation. They might have found their way into the private collection of an amateur of old manuscripts, or their destiny may be linked with the mysterious disappearance of the

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9. According to Fr. Joseph of Rovato (Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 73), this Italian-Hindustani dictionary was compiled by Fr. Joseph Mary Bernini, the founder of the Bettiah Mission, who died there in January 1761. In the opinion of Fr. Joseph of Rovato, Bernini's dictionary was perfect in every respect. It is difficult therefore to explain how Mgr. Pezzoni could call it 'very imperfect and full of mistakes'. Fr. Bernini was a better Hindustani scholar than Pezzoni himself. It might have happened that Bernini's dictionary was recopied or manipulated by some incompetent person or persons and in the process quite a few mistakes might have crept into the original text.

Tibetan-Italian and Italian-Tibetan dictionaries written by Fr. Francis Horace of Penna Billi.<sup>10</sup> Anyway, Fr. Juvenal's manuscript was discovered in the Mission House of Chuhari or of Bettiah by Felix Finck O.F.M. Cap. (1868-1932), a research scholar from Belgium attached to the Lahore Diocese.

During the first world war, the Capuchin Fathers of the Province of Tyrol, the missionaries in charge of the Prefecture Apostolic of Bettiah, were repatriated by the government and Fr. Felix Finck was sent to Bettiah as Administrator Apostolic. On relinquishing his post in 1921, he took the dictionary with him to Lahore as a precious relic of the past. The manuscript was later sent to the Vatican Missionary Exhibition of 1925. From there it was transferred to the missionary archives of the Order in Rome and it is still there to this day.

The manuscript is 24×14 cms; volume and the body of the dictionary consists of 492 pages. The dictionary follows the order of the Devanagari alphabet. Each term, written in the Newari language and Devanagari script, is followed by a short explanation of the meaning of the word in the Italian language.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Newari-Italian dictionary by Fr. John Gaulbert of Massa, in spite of all its faults and defects, is the first and still the best and most copious dictionary of its kind that has ever been written so far.<sup>11</sup>

### Miscellaneous Writings

Considerable is the contribution of the Capuchins to the knowledge of Nepal in the fields of history, ethnology, geography and other allied subjects. None of them, of course, had the intention of writing anything with a set purpose or with some degree of professional scholarship. Nevertheless, since they lived through the most crucial years in the

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10. See "Remarks on the Tibetan Manuscript Vocabularies in Bishop's College, Calcutta", by Fr. Felix Finck in the *Journal and Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, new series, vol. VIII, No. 10, pp. 379-397, Calcutta, Baptist Mission Press, 1912.

11. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, p. XCVI.

history of the country and since their activity was conditioned by the events of the day and the environment of the place, it was but natural that quite a lot of valuable material should have found its way, at least incidentally into their letters, reports, travelling accounts and other documents. It is not possible here to go into details and we shall highlight only the most important contributions in the various fields.

**History :** The most valuable historical record on Nepal is due to the pen of Fr. Joseph of Rovato. He was an eye-witness, the only eye-witness, who cared to put things on paper, of the decline and fall of the Malla dynasty and of the rising into power of Prithwi Narayan Shah. In a 6,000 word-account which is still the most reliable source of information on these turbulent years, the missionary describes the capture of Kirtipur, the invasion of the Valley and the submission of the three major cities, Kathmandu, Patan and Bhatgaon and the rule of the new master of the land.

After a short introduction, meant to set the narrative in its proper perspective, the author proceeds to the core of the matter and gives a clear, factual and unbiased account of the events that changed the course of history in Nepal.

Fr. Joseph of Rovato was requested to write the account by a civil servant of the East India Company. It was translated into English by Mr. John Shore, who later became Governor General of India (1793-1798), and published for the first time in *Asiatic Researches*, Volume II, Calcutta, 1790<sup>12</sup>. The relevant portion of the document was reproduced in *Account of the Kingdom of Nepal*, London, 1811, by Col. Fitzpatrick, and it has been used extensively ever since by all writers of Nepal history.

The worthy missionary wrote also another account, more or less of the same length, on the siege and fall of Nepal Valley, though not so informative, or at least of not so great interest to the general public as the one we have referred to above. Here, the author is concerned mostly in relating the fate that befell the mission in those dreadful days and, in the course of his narrative, quite a few precious details have been brought to light.<sup>13</sup>

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12. *Nuovo Rumusio*, part III, pp. 303-316.

13. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-99.

Apart from these two important documents, the historical data supplied by the missionaries are seldom a source of primary importance, though at times valuable material to confirm some events or to establish dates which are still very uncertain. The death of Prithwi Narayan Shah, for instance, which is still a matter of controversy, occurred in January 1775. And there can be no doubt about the accuracy of this information. Fr. Joseph of Rovato, in a letter dated Patna, 7th February 1775 and addressed to Mgr. Borgia, the Secretary of Propaganda, wrote: "This very night I received a letter from the son of the king of the Gurkhas, the new master of Nepal, in which he gives me the news of his father's death....."<sup>14</sup> Likewise the restoration to the throne of the Raja of Kathmandu, Jaya Prakash, took place on the 30th April 1750. Even in this case no one can call in question the testimony of Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, who was in Kathmandu at that time and who had reasons to remember the date.<sup>15</sup>

A careful perusal of the writing of the Capuchins would reveal quite a few trifling incidents and minor events that went unrecorded by contemporary chroniclers. This would help a good deal to throw a new light on men and things which otherwise would remain somewhat out of focus. The character of Prithwi Narayan Shah, Jaya Prakash and Ranajita Malla Deva, an important element in the evaluation of the history of those troubled days, is described by one or more missionaries on different occasions.<sup>16</sup>

**Geography :** Descriptions of towns, villages and other places of interest occur often in the travelling accounts left to

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14. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

15. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, p. 257.

16. Twelve letters written from Nepal by Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, between 1745 and 1757 have been published in *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 166-202, in addition to a long report written from Kathmandu in 1750 and published in *Nuovo Ramusio*, part III, pp. 257-275. Fr. Joseph of Rovato also wrote eight letters from Nepal between 1764 and 1766, which were published in Gottardo, pp. 42-77 and a letter-report, dated Patna, 29th December 1769, referring to the events in Nepal from 1763 to 1769 and published in Gottardo, pp. 86-99.



us by the missionaries. At least three of them, Frs. Cassian of Macerata, Constantine of Loro and Joseph of Rovato, deserve special mention here. All their writings are still extant.

Fr. Cassian of Macerata traversed Nepal from South to North in the year 1740. He devotes fiftyone pages of his *Journal* to Nepal. Nothing escaped his keen observation. Since he was 'a master of the art of depicting travels', as he was described by Sven Hedin, the noted Swedish author and explorer, one may be sure that his colourful and facile pen produced something which is worth remembering even today. His description of Bhatgaon, its temples and pagodas, its monuments and tiled roofs, to quote an example, is so vivid and precise as to make this historical town come back to life again as it stood in the middle of the 18th century.

Not satisfied with his picturesque descriptions of the country, Fr. Cassian of Macerata had a try at cartography too. His sketch of the Valley of Nepal, which appeared in his *Journal*, would have done him much credit, had it come to light earlier.<sup>17</sup>

Another fascinating travel account through Nepal from the southern borders to the frontier town of Kuti, is given by Fr. Constantine of Loro. In reading it, one has the feel of suspense and danger that accompanies the traveller in wading through icy cold water, in crossing over the flimsy, rickety bridges, in traversing deep, swift-flowing currents on small country boats, along trails that put to a severe test the adroitness of the wayfarer.

At Kathmandu Fr. Constantine came across a sensational discovery. In the Royal Palace, he writes, there is a large stone slab on which are written a few words in fifteen different characters or alphabets. As an example of the European or Roman character, the following nouns of seasons are inscribed on it: *Automne Winter Hivert*. This goes to prove, Fr. Constantine concludes, that in time past Europeans must have visited the country. The date on the slab is given

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17. *Journal*, p. 72.

according to the Nepalese era and calendar, corresponding to the 14th January 1645 of the Christian era.<sup>18</sup>

Equally absorbing is another travel account by Fr. Joseph of Rovato. However, his pen runs freely after the flora and fauna of the countryside, the awful beauty of the landscape, the orography of the region, its winding streams and deep valleys.

The missionary's experience of crossing the Nepal Tarai, the kingdom of wild animals and the eternal abode of fever, is informative and telling, a truly exciting account that makes a lasting impression on the mind of the reader.<sup>19</sup>

**Ethnology:** Their most important work on ethnology has been lost. It was written by Fr. Constantine of Loro in 1744, at the latest in 1747 while he was in Nepal. We learn from contemporary sources that it was a book of considerable proportions and of great intrinsic value. Of all this nothing is left now except the bare title of the writing and a skimpy extract of about four pages. However, the title of the book, *Concise news on some customs, sacrifices and idols in the kingdom of Nevar or Nepal*, gives us an idea of its contents and importance. The extract serves, if nothing else, to establish the size of the book, a work of approximately two hundred pages. Further, it makes it clear that the writing did not deal exclusively with topics concerning Hindu ceremonies and religion, but covered also some important features of Buddhism in Nepal.

The book was illustrated with some fifty designs, drawings and water-colour sketches. We have it from the testimony of the extract itself as well as from an old document written by Fr. Joseph of Rovato and later transcribed by Bishop Hartmann.<sup>20</sup>

From all that we know, this was apparently the plan of the book. A figure was drawn on paper; it might have been the

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18. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part II, pp. 8-21; 23-26; 46-83.

19. Gottardo, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-62.

20. The extract is printed in *Gli scritti del Padre Marco della Tomba*, Angelo De Gubernatis, Firenze, Le Monnier, 1878, pp. 300-304; *Die Aktensammlung des Bischofs Anastasius Hartmann*, p p. 70-71.

figure of a deity, of a religious ceremony, the design of a dress and the like; underneath was the caption in the Newari language and character followed by the description in Italian of the subject depicted in the design. The book ended with the Newari alphabet.

Who was the author of the drawings or water-colour sketches, one might well ask. Here again, we are in darkness. However, it is reasonable to suppose that Fr. Cassian of Macerata, a man endowed with a special gift of drawing, was the one who illustrated the book. He was in Nepal during the time the book was written.

The *Journal* of Fr. Cassian of Macerata comes next in order of importance. His 15,000 word narrative on Nepal is filled with the lore of that ancient Himalayan kingdom. All the festivals, religious celebrations and social events that took place during the nine months, February-October 1740, he remained in Nepal were witnessed by him and put down on paper in a manner which he alone could do.

The missionary seldom speaks of himself in his *Journal*. His experiences were, perhaps, too private and personal to be shared by others. "It was the knowledge of new countries and new men, their culture, customs and above all their religious ideas and festivals, which Beligatti wished to preserve for the western world", so remarked Sven Hedin in a glowing tribute to the *Journal* of the humble friar.

His factual descriptions, free from unnecessary technicalities, of the customs and folklore of the people of Nepal is comprehensive and penetrating. Modern professional writers have little to add to, and much less to make reservations for, the mass of ethnological information which so freely and easily gets into his pages.<sup>21</sup>

**Religion :** An appreciable study of Nepal Shivaism, the best that has ever been made by a western author so far, was made by Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro in 1717. It is a fruit of patient research work undertaken with the intention to get an insight into the religious mentality of the people in order to be at home with them whenever conversing on religion.

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21. Sven Hedin, *Southern Tibet*, IX volumes, Stockholm, 1917-1922. The author deals with the *Journal* of Fr. Cassian Beligatti in vol. II, p. 268; vol. III, pp. 15-23.

In the exposition of his subject, the writer touches upon the origin of the caste system, the *avatara* or incarnations, the Hindu cosmogony and other popular traditions.<sup>22</sup>

In a kind of introduction to this essay, a 4,500 word composition, Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro remarks that at the beginning he found it very hard to get some knowledge on the religious beliefs of the Nepalese, as they were reluctant to read 'even two verses' of their sacred books in his presence. Somehow, he states, he managed to grasp at least the most essential elements of their religion and with God's grace he compiled a book refuting their errors, which attracted much attention.

The passage indicates, beyond doubt, the existence of yet another apologetic treatise in the Newari language. Nowhere else is it mentioned. In a later correspondence the missionary refers to the translations made by him of 'some books' on the religion of Nepal.<sup>23</sup> Even of these we have no knowledge. Nor do we know whether these translations or abridgements of texts, were parts of the original Sacred Scripture of the Hindus, which by the way is in Sanskrit, or mere versions from manuals on Hinduism. Further, the allusion is so vague as to imply also that the translations made by Fr. Joseph Felix of Morro refer to that type of Buddhism which is practised in Nepal.

### Conclusion

In general, we may conclude that the writings of the Capuchins on Nepal compare favourably with similar works published afterwards by western scholars, even though the latter might have been better prepared for the task. On the other hand, the missionaries had an advantage over them in the sense that they knew the local language, and their long association with the place and with the people contributed in no little way to produce better quality of work.

It is a pity that so far no one has taken the trouble or found the time to examine more closely the contribution of the Capuchins on the knowledge of Nepal. It would surely make a rewarding study.

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22. *Nuovo Ramusio*, part I, pp. 96-106.

## APPENDIX

### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON NEPAL MISSIONARIES

We shall give here, in an alphabetic order, the names and a short biographical note on the twenty-nine missionaries (twenty-six priests and three lay brothers) who, from 1715 to 1769, laboured in the mission field of Nepal. No mention will be made of the other priests and lay brothers who passed through that Himalayan kingdom on their way to or from Tibet, being not officially appointed to minister to the people of the Valley.

Traditionally, Capuchins added the name of their native place to the name they were given on entering their religious Order. Whenever possible, we shall give, within brackets, the baptismal name and surname of each of them.

#### Missionary Priests.

1. *Anselm of Ragusa* arrived at Chandernagore in 1750; served in Kathmandu from 1751 to 1761; nominated Prefect of the Mission on the 18th September 1758, took charge of his office in the middle of 1761, setting up his head-quarters at Patna; at the beginning of 1764 was once again in Nepal, proceeding at the end of the same year to Chandernagore, where he remained confined to his room suffering from gout and other ailments; resigned his office because of illness and left for Europe in December 1769; died at Ragusa (Sicily) on the 15th April 1776, aged 59.
2. *Anthony Mary of Jesi* (Stefano Cacciatori) landed at Chandernagore in August 1715, worked for about two years (1716-1718) at Kathmandu; returned sick to Chandernagore on 18th November 1718; sailed back to Europe reaching his homeland in 1726; died on 25th January 1738, aged 52 years.

3. *Benedict Mary of Genoa* (Gazino), on his arrival from Europe in 1753, was posted to Patna; after one year or so was transferred to Kathmandu, where he died on 4th July 1755, while nursing some Christians stricken by a contagious disease, aged 33 years.
4. *Bernardine of Paludano* arrived from Europe in 1753; reached Nepal in January 1754, and repatriated in 1765. No other details are available about the length of time he remained in Nepal or of his subsequent postings.
5. *Bonaventure of Lapedona* (Giacoma Filippo D'Alberto) set foot on Indian soil in August 1715; stationed provisionally in Patna, was called up to Lhasa in 1717, where he remained for about three months (July-October, 1717); due to political unrest in the Tibetan capital, was sent to Nepal, where he worked from December 1717 till January 20th 1722; died at Chandernagore in 1735, aged 55 years.
6. *Cassian of Macerata* (Giovanni Beligatti) set sail from Lorient (West France) on the 11th March 1739 and cast anchor at Chandernagore towards the end of September 1739; accompanied the Prefect Apostolic to Tibet reaching Lhasa on 6th January 1741; left the Tibetan capital on the 30th August 1742, coming down to Bhatgaon, where he remained till the 21st November 1746, except for a few months spent in Patna on medical treatment; was Superior of the newly established Bettiah Mission from 1749 to 1755, spending the rest of his time, always in poor condition of health, in Bettiah, Patna and Chandernagore; sailed back to Italy on 18th February, 1755, reaching Rome after an adventurous voyage on the 7th August 1756; at home he continued to write and occupy himself about the affairs of the mission; died at Macerata on the 4th February 1791, aged 83 years.
7. *Constantine of Loro Piceno* (Giuseppe Liberato Mochi) was a travelling companion of Fr. Cassian of Macerata and followed him to Lhasa in 1741 and to

Nepal in 1742; on the 23rd August 1744, was sent to open the mission station at Patan, remaining in Nepal till he embarked for Europe on the 12th December 1751; died at Ascoli Piceno on the 31st August 1770, aged 66 years.

8. *Florian of Jesi* (Pietro Domenico Zara) was a travelling companion of Fathers Cassian of Macerata and Constantine of Loro Piceno and followed his two confreres to Lhasa and Nepal, where in October 1742, he was appointed Superior of the mission house at Kathmandu; sick and tired, left the Valley of Nepal at the end of 1752 or the beginning of 1753 for rest and medical treatment in Patna; died at Bettiah on the 4th February 1753, aged 49 years, while on his way down to the capital of Bihar.
9. *Francis of Cagli* (Antonio Lanzi) disembarked at Chandernagore in August 1722; stationed at first in Patna, was sent to Nepal round about 1727 and died at Bhatgaon on Christmas day in 1730, aged 34 years.
10. *Francis Anthony of Cingoli* (Francesco Saverio Castiglioni) sailed into Chandernagore on the 10th August 1720; was in Patna till 1724, in Bhatgaon till 1727 or 1728, returning to Patna where he died in 1734.
11. *Francis Horace of Penna Billi* (Luzio Olivieri) arrived at Chandernagore on the 1st September 1713, leaving soon after for Patna; on the 27th of December 1714, set out for Kathmandu to open the first missionary station in the Valley of Nepal; was taken up to Lhasa by Fr. Dominic of Fano, the Prefect Apostolic of the time, reaching their destination on the 1st October 1716, and remained in Lhasa for 16 years (1716-1732); nominated Prefect Apostolic of the Tibetan Mission on the 13th August 1719, received news of his appointment on the 15th September 1725; reasons of health compelled him to abandon the high altitudes of Tibet and on the 25th August 1732, made for Kathmandu, where he was imprisoned for several months; at the end of 1734 came down to Patna to

take charge of the station, the only priest there, Fr. Francis Anthony of Cingoli, having meanwhile passed away; in December 1735 sailed for Europe to represent to the authorities the hopeless state of the mission; confirmed Prefect Apostolic in 1738, headed the 9th expedition, consisting of eight priests and two lay brothers, and was back to Chandernagore on the 25th September 1739; passing through Patna and Nepal, was once again in Lhasa on the 6th January 1741, from where he departed with all his confreres on the 20th April, 1745; died at the mission house at Patan on the 20th July 1745, aged 65 years.

12. *Gregory of Lapedona* (Domenico Mercuri) landed at Chandernagore in August 1715; accompanied the Prefect Apostolic to Kathmandu, where they arrived in March 1716, and died there of sheer exhaustion on the 4th July 1716, aged 36 years.
13. *Innocent of Ascoli* (Angelo Marini) was a member of the 9th expedition and reached Chandernagore on the 25th September 1739; stationed at Bhatgaon in January 1740, divided his time between Bhatgaon and Kathmandu till he went back to Europe in 1749, and died in the Middle East while on his way home, aged about 43 years.
14. *Joachim of St. Anatolia*, at present Esanatoglia, (Simone Gioacchino Albrici) arrived at Chandernagore on the 10th August 1720 and was ordered to proceed as soon as possible to Lhasa, reaching his destination on the 1st May 1721; for twelve uninterrupted years (1721-1733) remained in the Tibetan Capital, engaged chiefly in the practice of medicine; by the middle of August 1733, moved down to Kathmandu, arriving at the station in October 1733; worked in Bhatgaon till the end of 1734, in which year or the beginning of 1735, took up his residence at Patna; during the absence of Fr. Francis Horace (1735-1739), ruled the mission in the capacity of Vice Prefect; on arrival of three new recruits from Europe in 1736, moved up to Nepal and was in Bhatgaon on the 13th March 1737; from there he joined the party which left the Valley of



Nepal on the 4th October 1740, to be in Lhasa on the 6th January 1741. However, he had not gone to stay; he was to take to Rome the replies and exchange of gifts which the Regent and the Dalai Lama would be sending to the Pope, and at the same time post the authorities on the progress of the mission; late in October 1741, left Lhasa, stopped over at Kathmandu in December 1741 to obtain the gift of the house from the Raja, reaching Patna in the winter of 1742; spent some months there and was in Chandernagore in October 1742; sailed for Europe in 1744, arrived at Rome in June 1745 and died in his native town on the 3rd August 1764, aged 80 years.

15. *John Francis of Fossombrone* (Bacciaglia) on arrival at Chandernagore in March 1714, left for Patna and Nepal, entering Kathmandu towards the middle of January 1715; joined the party led by Fr. Dominic, the Prefect, and was in Lhasa on the 1st October 1716; early in 1717, was entrusted with the task of opening a new mission station at Tron-gne, south-east Tibet, where he remained till about 1720; back to Kathmandu, fell foul of the Raja and repaired to Bhatgaon; embarked for Europe in 1723 and died at Surat, while on his way home, in 1724 or 1725, aged 47 or 48 years.
16. *John Gaulbert of Massa* (Angelo Nicola Miti) travelled to Goa via Lisbon, entering the Chandernagore harbour in July 1761; at the end of the year, went to Nepal, leaving the Valley in March 1769; spent the rest of his days, with the exception of home leave between 1780 and 1784, at Chuhari with the Nepalese colony, where he died on the 30th October 1796, aged 67 years.
17. *Joseph of Rovato* came to India, by land, travelling through the Middle East, sailed into Calcutta on the 18th December 1762, and five days later, was in Chandernagore; spent most of the year 1763 in Patna, wherefrom on the 18th December, set out for Nepal, reaching Kathmandu at the beginning of March 1764;

left the Valley on the 4th February 1769, taking with him the Nepalese exiles and settled them in Chuhari; nominated Prefect Apostolic on the 19th March 1768, took charge of his office in 1769, setting up his headquarters in Patna, where he died on the 18th December 1786, aged about 55 years.

18. *Joseph Felix of Morro* (Angelo Vitali) was in Chandernagore in March 1714; stationed since the beginning of 1715 at Kathmandu, left the Valley of Nepal for Tron-gne in 1718 or 1719; was the last resident priest of that missionary outpost, moving out from there in the spring of 1721, heading for Lhasa, Kuti and Kathmandu, where he died of sheer prostration on the 31st August 1721, aged 40 years.
19. *Michael Angelo of Tabiago* was a travelling companion of Fr. John Gaulbert of Massa and came to India via Lisbon getting into Chandernagore in July 1761; was posted to Bettiah wherefrom in January 1764, set out for Nepal; from 1764 to 1768, was the first and only missionary at Navakot, to the north-west of Kathmandu; in 1768 joined his three other confreres working in the Valley of Nepal and left for India in March 1769; was stationed again at Bettiah, where he laboured, with the exception of sixteen months (June 1783-October 1784) spent in jail at Patna under suspicion of collaborating with the Nepalese government, till the time he went back home in 1785.
20. *Nicholas Fidelis of Pergola* (Giovanni Filippo Baldacelli) disembarked at Chandernagore on the 2nd August 1743; served for some years at Bettiah, went to Nepal towards the end of 1757 and died at Bhatgaon on the 24th January 1759, aged 51 years.
21. *Onophrius of Monte Cassiano* (Nicolo' Dionisi) was expected to come to India with the members of the 11th expedition in 1748, but, because of illness he repatriated and joined the 13th expedition finding himself at Chandernagore in 1753; in January 1754, was assigned to Nepal, returning to India after one year or so; stationed at Chandernagore, was sent,

after the fall of that French settlement into the hands of the East India Company in 1757, to minister to the French Catholic refugees at Serampore, a Danish settlement situated on the right bank of the Hughli river, north of Calcutta; on peace being established, Chandernagore was restored to the French in 1763 and Fr. Onophrius returned to Chandernagore, where he died on 3rd October 1768, aged 52 years.

22. *Paul Mary of Matelica* (Mattia Ciccarelli) arrived at Chandernagore on the 1st September 1713, served for about two years (1716-1718) in Nepal; returned to Chandernagore on the 28th November 1718, from where he sailed back to Europe in 1726; towards the end of 1738, was deputed to collect funds in Mexico for the support of the Tibetan Mission; died at St. Anatolia (at present Esanatoglia) on the 2nd June 1751, aged 71 years.
23. *Seraphin of Civitanuova* (Pietro Marone Gerbozzi) landed at Chandernagore on the 10th August 1720, reached Kathmandu on the 31st December of the same year and there he remained till 1722, when the mission shifted to Bhatgaon; served in this last station till 1731 and died at Patna in 1732, aged about 45 years.
24. *Seraphin of Como* (Rezzia) travelled to Goa via Lisbon in company of Frs. John Gaulbert of Massa and Michael Angelo of Tabiago, reaching Chandernagore in July 1761; at the end of the same year or at the beginning of 1762, was in Nepal, leaving the Valley in December 1768; stayed on for a while in Patna and Chandernagore, repatriating on the 29th January 1772; died at Pesaro on the 20th November 1804, aged 79 years.
25. *Tranquillus of Apecchio* (Nicolo' Lanzi) reached Chandernagore on the 25th September 1739, and Lhasa on the 6th January 1741; appointed Vice Prefect on the 27th November 1743, left Lhasa with the other missionaries on the 20th April 1745, taking charge of the mission at the death of Fr. Francis Horace of Penna Billi on the 20th July 1745; nominat-

ed Prefect on the 20th September 1746, took over his office in 1748, setting up his head-quarters at Kathmandu; on expiry of his term of office, left Nepal on 9th December 1757, with the intention of going home, appointing in the meanwhile a Vice-Prefect in the person of Fr. Joseph Mary, the founder of the Bettiah Mission; he had already gone as far as Pondicherry, when he received the news from Rome to continue in his work for want of personnel; was once again back to Kathmandu in December 1759 in the capacity of a simple missionary, to leave for good the Valley of Nepal on his way home at the end of 1763, but was detained because of shortage of priests at Chandernagore, where he died on the 21st May 1768, aged 60 years.

26. *Vitus of Recanati* (Carlo Nicola Belli) on arrival at Chandernagore on the 27th September 1736, moved on to Patna at the end of the rainy season, where he joined Fr. Joachim of St. Anatolia going to Nepal, reaching Bhatgaon on the 13th March 1737; spent most of his time at Kathmandu, leaving the station on the 21st November 1746; died at Chandernagore on the 4th June 1747, aged 44 years.

### **Missionary Lay Brothers**

27. *Lawrence of Peretola* (Bianchi) arrived from Europe in 1753, went to Nepal in 1754, returned to India at the end of 1763, sailed for Europe in 1764 and died in 1798, aged about 75 years.
28. *Liborius of Fermo* (Tommaso Antonio Piattoni) disembarked at Chandernagore in September 1739, served in Nepal from 1740 to 1755, after that went to Bettiah till 1757 to recoup his health; his whereabouts from 1758 till 1769 are unknown; may have returned to Nepal in 1758 to come back again to India in 1764; died at Bettiah on the 20th September 1769, aged 61 years.
29. *Paul of Florence* (Amatucci) was a printer by profession; before entering the Capuchin Order, had been in the service of the Grand Duke of Tuscany and

worked with the ducal press in Florence. On account of his knowledge of printing, was solicited to go to Tibet to operate the complete printing press with mobile types in Tibetan characters, which Fr. Francis Horace had taken to Lhasa with the members of the 9th expedition; Bro. Paul followed therefore the itinerary of this expedition, leaving Rome in July 1738, sailing from Lorient in March 1739, casting anchor at Chandernagore in September 1739, pushing on to Patna, Nepal and Tibet, reaching Lhasa on the 6th January 1741; moved out from the Tibetan capital with all the other missionaries on the 20th April 1745, settling down in Nepal till December 1757, when in the company of Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, came down to India with a view to go home; his subsequent postings till the time he sailed for Europe in 1761 are unknown; was lost at sea; the ship on which he was travelling never reached her destination.

The summing up of these biographical notes reveals that six missionaries died in Nepal. One died in Bettiah just out of the Valley, to seek medical treatment in Patna. One was lost at sea and two died on the road, while on their way home; of the remaining nineteen missionaries, ten returned home and nine died in India.

Considering the length of service in Nepal, the roll of honour is headed by Fr. Tranquillus of Apecchio, who laboured in that mission field for sixteen years. Bro. Liborius of Fermo comes next with his fifteen years of uninterrupted activity; they might have been even more, but there is no conclusive evidence to prove it. The third is Fr. Vitus of Recanati, who spent thirteen years and eight months in instructing in the faith the Newari people. Six missionaries laboured in the Valley in Nepal from ten to twelve years; while the others served for a shorter period of time, ranging from one to nine years.

## **Bishop Hartmann**

**Fr. Fulgentius Vannini O.F.M. Cap.**

St. Paul Publications, Allahabad (India), 1966, pp. 471

This is a fascinating biography of the servant of God, Bishop Anastasius Hartmann, Vicar Apostolic of Patna 'who wrote with his own tears and invisible blood a glorious chapter in the annals of the Church in India'. It is also a veritable source of information on the growth of the Church in North India.

## **The Bell of Lhasa**

**Fr. Fulgentius Vannini O.F.M. Cap.**

New Delhi, 1976, pp. 473

This work is a historical account of the Capuchin Mission in Tibet from 1704 to 1745. It narrates the adventure of the Capuchins to bring the Message of the Gospel into the strongholds of Lamaistic Buddhism. It is also a tribute to the courage of the early Tibetan Christians who endured untold sufferings for the sake of their faith.