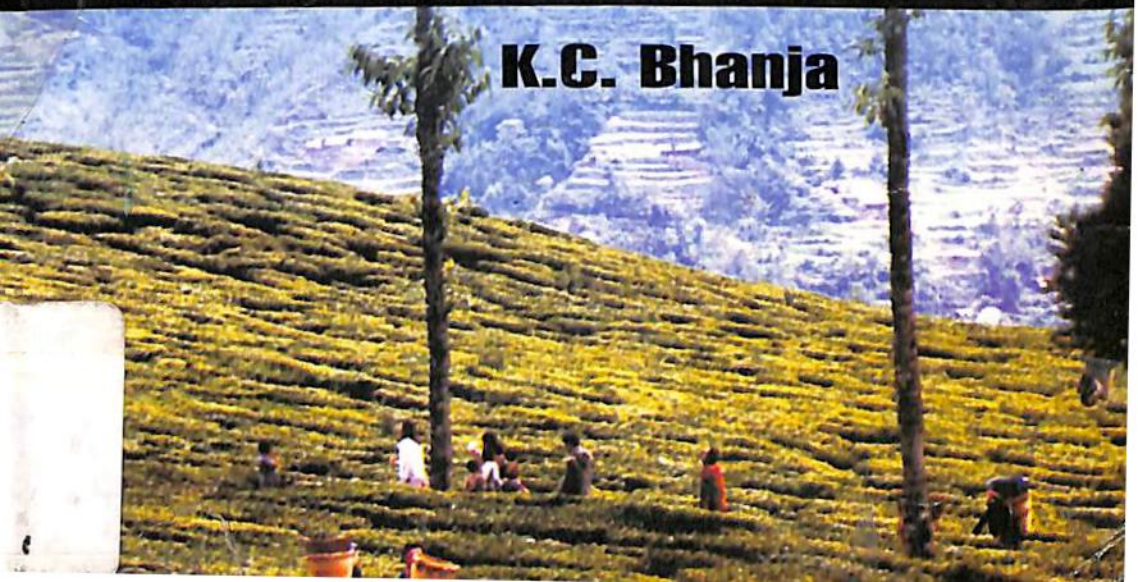




HISTORY OF  
DARJEELING  
AND THE  
SIKKIM  
HIMALAYA

**K.C. Bhanja**



# History of DARJEELING and the SIKKIM HIMALAYA



**K. C. BHANJA**



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## REVIEWS

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Copy of the first review of LURE OF THE HIMALAYA published in the Illustrated Weekly of India in its issue of November 17, 1946.

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Further evidence of the growing interest of Indians in the exciting sport of mountaineering is provided by a book which has just reached us. It is "*Lure of the Himalaya*", by Dr. K. C. Bhanja, which is published by Gilbert & Co., Darjeeling, the price being Rs. 5-8.

### GOLDEN ROOF OF THE WORLD

This volume is a well-produced summing-up based on published accounts of Everest expeditions (including the Houston air expedition), but it also incorporates a good deal of very entertaining "mountain lore" and is written from a slightly different angle from most books on mountaineering.

Successive chapters deal with different stages in the trying journey across the "golden roof of the world" to the still unconquered and untrodden height—the trip from Darjeeling towards the windswept plateau, the march to the "battle zone", the survey and task of finding a footing, the fairyland of the glacier camps, the real ascent and the struggle for victory. Each chapter refers to the experiences of successive expeditions along that particular stage of the climb, while the chapter covering the last stage considers the possibility of Mallory and Irvine having got to the top when they were lost in 1924.

### FUTURE ATTACKS

We join issue with Dr. Bhanja when he looks upon the Houston expedition's flight as the final conquest of the world's highest peak and later says that "Everest expeditions, man's supreme adventure to reach the highest pinnacle of the globe, are now things of the past." Surely this is not the case.

No man has yet set foot on the highest point of the mountain and, with science ever on the march, who can say for certain that at some future date aircraft with special equipment for sub-stratospheric flights will not drop parachutists supplied with all the apparatus needed to live and move at great heights, and be able to control their fall so as to land just where they choose on the summit or slope of the mountain?

It would be just as thrilling as any of the efforts to scale the peak from glacier camps and is likely to reward the men who undertake it successfully with a mine of scientific information, including possibly a solution of the mystery of the snow men of the Himalayas.

The second review (on receipt of the author's letter of suggestive protest) published on December 29, 1946, in the column of the Illustrated Weekly of India under the head "AS WE SEE IT".

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### FLIGHT OVER EVEREST

In a recent issue we referred to a volume, "Lure of the Himalaya" by Dr. K. C. Bhanja, and ventured to disagree with the author's contention that the tale of Himalayan climbing was over with the final conquest of Everest by the Houston Expedition which flew over the lofty summit in 1933. It was never, however, our intention to belittle the performance of the Houston Expedition whose achievement followed the solution of many problems of aerial exploration which had to be faced for the first time when, as Dr. Bhanja points out in a letter to us, aviation was not as advanced as it is now.

"Of course aerial science may one day enable men to alight upon the top of Mount Everest from the air," adds Dr. Bhanja. "But as long as that final victory is not won, the Houston flight can well be interpreted as a triumph by air." We agree.

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In appreciation of the work, Mr. J. O. R. M. Watt, M.A. (Abord.), 13, Dominion Avenue, Leeds, 7, England, writes: "I have read Dr. Banja's book, "*Lure of the Himalaya*". Quite apart from the extremely interesting matter contained in it, the manner of its writing is excellent, and makes entertaining as well as instructive reading. I can thoroughly recommend it to the general reading public."



## SIKKIM

### A SHORT SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF SIR JOSEPH DALTON HOOKER

Joseph Hooker is the second son of the late Sir W. J. Hooker, Director of the Kew Gardens in London. He was born in 1817, at Halesworth, Suffolk. After completing his medical studies at the Glasgow University, Hooker obtained in 1839 the medical degree, M.D. At this time his father was professor of botany.

He accompanied Sir James Ross who led the famous Antarctic Expedition of 1839-43 to which he was attached as an Assistant Surgeon. But he says that he on his part devoted himself to botanizing in the Antarctic regions. The results of his botanical studies were later on published by him in six volumes. Hooker was a man who was far ahead of his contemporaries, and he went so deeply into the subject that on the basis of comparative studies of plant life in those regions with reference to those already accomplished in other parts of the world, he came to many novel conclusions which unveiled the laws governing the apparently bewildering growth and distribution of plants over the globe.

He was bent on acquiring more knowledge of botany. Two opportunities soon presented themselves to this aspirant. He was either to proceed to the Andes or India for scientific exploration. Happily enough, his choice fell on India, and it was a piece of great fortune that the matters eventually took shape in a Government mission for which a sum of £400 per annum was granted by the Treasury for three years. Hooker had, however, to spend nearly double the amount for the enterprise. The Sikkim Himalaya was selected for him both by Lord Auckland and Dr. Falconer, the Superintendent of the Botanic Garden at Calcutta.

Hooker left England on November 11th, 1847 and sailed for India. On his way he spent some days in Egypt, at Aden, Ceylon, and Madras. He arrived at Calcutta in January, and began to botanize in the hills of western Bengal. Thereafter he travelled across the mountains of Birbhum and Bihar to the Soane valley, wherefrom his traverse lay over the Vindhya Range leading to the Ganges at Mirzapore. From Mirzapore he reached Bhagalpur by boat and finally struck north to the Sikkim Himalaya.

Aid and patronage of two personages on the spot proved invaluable to him. One was the self-made man, Mr. Brian H. Hodgson, B.C.S., who had been for many years the Resident at the Nepal Court. Rising from the status of an ordinary man he rose to the eminence of a man of science by dint of dogged perseverance. Fully twenty-five years were spent in research on various branches of science, including ethnology, zoology, and the study of birds and animals of the Himalaya. In appreciation of his valued assistance both direct and indirect, Hooker says: "To be welcomed to the Himalaya by such a person, and to be allowed the most unreserved intercourse, and the advantage of all his information and library, exercised a material influence on the progress I made in my studies, and on my travels."

The other was Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling, and "the Governor-General's agent, or medium of communication between the British Government and the Sikkim Rajah." Campbell not only accompanied him in many of his tours in the Sikkim Himalaya, but left no stone unturned in ensuring his success. Without Campbell's aid Hooker could not have possibly secured permission to enter into eastern parts of Nepal as well as to reach the Tibetan passes thereof. Excluding Khatmandu, the capital city of Nepal, this land was strictly forbidden to the Europeans. It was all due

to Campbell's friendly influence on the then Nepal Minister that made the negotiation fruitful.

Hooker conducted scientific exploration in the Khasia Hills as well as in many parts of the world. The honour conferred on him are too many to mention. Space and scope of the book forbid us to enter into any more details in matters relating to his career.

A great contemporary of Hooker was the world-renowned Darwin, who propounded scientifically the doctrine of evolution of living creatures. Hooker, who was a friend of Darwin not only played the part of a friendly critic in connection with the elucidation of his speculations on the origin of species, but probed into the corresponding phenomena underlying evolution in plant life. In 1868 in his presidential address at the Norwich meeting of the British Association, Hooker while dealing with Darwin's views of evolution of animal life, brought out botanical facts which made Darwin's expositions stand out in clearer definition. Hooker's ideas naturally made immediate and a very great appeal to the audience.

Sir Joseph Hooker published his valued work, *The Himalayan Journals*, in 1854, being an account of his expeditions in Bengal, the Sikkim and the Nepal Himalayas, the Khasia mountains, etc. It is a storehouse of information and is a classical work on the subject.

#### HISTORICAL—SEARCH FOR A KING

The civilization of Sikkim, it is said, began from a village called Yuk-sam, situated at its extreme north-western part. It is the last inhabited place towards Kangchenjunga, which lies to the north of this picturesque level tract of land. Beyond Yuk-sam is a dense forest chocked with scrubs and heavy undergrowths where sunshine cannot penetrate. Yak-sam is a Lepcha word

meaning "three monks" or explicitly "the meeting place of three lamas."

Probably towards the end of the seventeenth century, a Buddhist monk named Lhatsen Chembo travelled from Tibet to Yuk-sam where he was met by two other lamas who hailed from the south and the west. At that time the country was in a wilderness of dense forest and peopled by the primitive Lepcha folks. These lamas introduced for the first time Buddhism into Sikkim.

The name of the first would-be king of Sikkim was predicted. It was "Pun-tsok." So messengers were deputed to all parts of the surrounding country in order to search out a man of that blessed name. Pun-tsok was at last found out and after being annointed with holy water was crowned king of Sikkim. Being seated on a rough huge stone his coronation took place amid the Lepcha community of Dubdi and the Pamionchi region. This story seems to be of legendary origin. Probably Hooker is correct when he writes that these lamas "were the means of introducing the first Tibetan sovereign into the country."

The temple of Yuk-sam is situated on a lofty hill at an elevation of nearly 1000 feet above Yuk-sam. It is called the *Dubdi* monastery. It was built in 1701 A.D. and has the reputation of being the oldest monastery in Sikkim, although it appears that the Sangachelling monastery, three day's march away from Yuk-sam, came into existence in 1697 A.D. These dates given in the Gazetteer of Sikkim are, however, not reliable, as according to some authorities, who were in direct touch with the literatures of Sikkim and Tibet, the most famous Pamionchi monastery of Sikkim wherefrom Dubdi is just two days' march away was built in 1450 A.D. If that be the case the Dubdi temple must have been built still earlier, and consequently the King who first held the sceptre of Sikkim was throned a little earlier than

the time of establishment of this oldest sanctuary. That this latter view is authentic would be evident from what follows.

The red-mitred lamas of Tibet suffered persecution in the hands of the dissenters, the Yellow-capped monks, who were the followers of the great saint, Tsong-kha-pa. This persecution was evidently set on foot soon after, if not earlier, the Galden monastery hidden in a circle of mountains twenty miles away from Lhasa had been founded by him in 1409 A.D. Undoubtedly the three lamas in question hailed from Tibet being persecuted by the reforming party. This being so, the history of Sikkim can well be traced back to the time of Tson-kha-pa which means at least the beginning of the fifteenth century. *stop*

The lamas of the Pamionchi monastery once compiled the history of Sikkim and preserved the same in this temple. In the year 1787 when Pamionchi was the capital of Sikkim, the Nepalese waged war against the Sikkimese, and plundered all the monasteries to the west of the Tista. It was at this time that this valuable history was destroyed by the Gorkhas with the exception of a few sheets with one of which Dr. Hooker and Dr. Campbell were presented, when they visited the Pamionchi monastery in 1448.

Dr. Hooker writes :

*stop*  
 "This remarkable and beautiful manuscript was written on thick oblong sheets of Tibetan paper, painted black to resist decay, and the letters were yellow and gold. The Nepalese soldiers wantonly employed the sheets to roof the sheds as a protection from the weather."

#### LAMAS WITH RED MITRES

In 641 A.D. Sron-tsan-gampo, the then king of Tibet, invaded China. The king Taitsung of China came to terms with him and gave his daughter

Wencheng in marriage with him. Two years later he married Bhrikuti, a princess of Nepal. These two royal consorts, initiated in Buddhism, won the heart of the king, and Buddhism was then destined to be the State religion of Tibet where the people were worshippers of devils and demons.

It was Santa Rakshit, a prince of Jessore (Bengal), a hermit and a learned Buddhist teacher, who first carried the gospel of Buddhism into the closed land of Tibet. After the death of the king, Sron-tsan-gampo, his son, Thri-sron-de-tsan, ascended the throne, and being ordered by the hermit, Santa Rakshit, who was held in high esteem by the Tibetans, invited Padma Sambhava from India to visit Tibet.

Padma Sambhava ("Born of a lotus") was the adopted son of Indradyumna, the king of Orissa. Professor Roerich writes: "At the birth of Padma Sambhava all the skies were aglow and the shepherds saw miraculous tokens. The eight-year-old Teacher was manifested to the world in the Lotus flower."

Padma Sambhava was a *Tantric* Buddhist priest. And as *Tantrism* pertains to the mystical practices in mediæval Hinduism, Padma Sambhava was an occultist too. In the Tibetan Scriptures, are mentioned his various psychic powers, such as flying in the air, vanishing like air, making a serpent harmless, summoning the rain, etc., etc.

*Tantrism* does not lend itself to exposition in the hands of the sceptics who are not prepared to study the subject at the feet of a master. The application of common sense or erudition relating to other spheres of knowledge count for little or nothing in realising the inner significance of the doctrines of the *Tantras*.

The criticism of the ignorant is consequently devastating. It is, therefore, quite natural why, say, McGovern in his "*To Lhasa in Disguise*" represents this Teacher as "polygamous, wine-bibbing Padma

Sambhava," and in another place as "the sensual founder of Lamaism". The Japanese priest, Kawaguchi, in his "*Three Years in Tibet*" found his doctrines so obscene that he was constrained to keep the literature under lock and key. These travellers, no doubt, voice the feelings of the uninitiated, and on the face of things their criticisms are quite justified. But as the poet sings: "and things are not what they seem," so is the apparent anomaly of the Tantric philosophy, the real interpretation of which is shrouded in mystery.

Be that as it may, the followers of Padma Sambhava who wear read conical caps now hold the sceptre in the hierarchy of not only Tibet but also of Sikkim and Bhutan.

In 1038 a great Buddhist saint named Atish Dipankar at the age of sixty entered into Tibet and preached the gospel of Buddhism free from the taint of Tantrism which lays special stress on the acquiring of occult power. It is said that on his way to Tibet he rode upon a horse in such a way that he was always found seated in the air, nearly half a cubit off from the saddle. Atish, after living in Tibet for thirteen years, passed away at the age of seventy-three in 1053 A.D. He left behind him nearly one-hundred original works on Buddhism.

Prof. Roerich's research tells of a mysterious event which took place when Dipankar passed by the retreat of Milarepa, a mystic poet of Tibet (1038-1112 A.D.). The Tibetan saint intending to put the worth of Atisha to the acid test "appeared sitting on the end of a blade of grass." In response to this occult manifestation, Atish made a similar demonstration. While the blade of grass on which Milarepa was seated became slightly bent, that under Atish showed absolutely no sign of drooping. On being accosted by Milarepa, the great Teacher smiled and said that although his knowledge was on a par with that of the Tibetan hermit, the very

consciousness of the former having hailed from a country where the Blessed Buddha himself lived and preached his doctrines exalted him.

Although the adherents of Atish Dipankar who put on yellow caps number very few in Tibet, and are conspicuous by their absence in Sikkim and Bhutan, this great Teacher, known as Palden Atisha in Tibet, is held in great esteem in all these countries.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century Tson-kha-pa appeared on the scene and took the whole of Tibet as if by storm enjoining very strict discipline on the priests as well as his followers. He forbade the monks to take to the culture of occultism as it is calculated to hamper spiritual progress. He rose against the red-mitred lamas and their creed, and the Yellow Caps became predominant by degrees. What now follows has been gleaned from M. Huc's *Travels in Tartary, Tibet and China* who accomplished his extremely arduous journey during 1844-46.

The Buddha Chakdja, the then head of the Red Caps, finding his authority repudiated was determined to visit the reforming lama. Tson-kha-pa took no heed of Chakdja as he entered his chamber. He did not raise his eyes, but continued telling his beads. Chakdja's red cap struck against the beam of the door and fell to the ground. He then abruptly entered into discussion "by a pompous eulogium of the old rites." Tson-kha-pa interrupted him in these words: "Let go cruel man that thou art, let go the louse thou art crushing between the fingers. I hear it cries from where I sit, and my heart is torn with commiserating grief." Chakdja had really at that time seized a louse under his vest and was "endeavouring to crack it between his nails." Chakdja amazed at this occult powers of Tson-kha-pa prostrated himself at his feet and acknowledged his supremacy.

Thereafter the followers of Tson-kha-pa or the Yellow Caps fell foul of the Red Caps who could not



be easily persuaded to accept the doctrines of the new sect.

Hooker gathered the following facts. The lama of the Phodang monastery (the chapel royal) headed the dissenters and persecution was rampant in Tibet. The Red Caps were caught and their "mitres plunged into dying vats kept always ready at the lamaseries." The red-mitred lamas thereupon took refuge in Sikkim and Bhutan. It was at this time, in my opinion that the history of Sikkim began in a lovely corner of the land skirted by impenetrable jungles lying to the south of Kangchenjunga.

Although there is many a John Doe and Richard Roe amongst these *Tantric Lamas* who practically does nothing but rotates a prayer-wheel in accompaniment with the sonorous intonation of "Om mani pemay hum", there are, however, only a few who are adept in occultism.)

#### THE LAND OF LIGHTNING

Why Sikkim is called the Land of Lightning can be well imagined from the following words of Dr. Somervell of Everest repute.

"Sikkim with its continual mists and heavy rainfall is one of the most fertile countries in the world. Something grows on every square foot of ground, and the jungle is so thick below the immense and the stately trees as to be well-nigh impenetrable."

For nearly five months in a year lightning continually flashes on the gloomy canopy of heavens surcharged with rain-cloud that dashing against the far-flung ramparts of the Tibetan plateau depletes itself into unparalleled downpour. It is this heavy rainfall coupled with prolific flashes of lightning in the atmosphere helping in the formation of nitric acid that has enriched this part of the Himalayas with the exuberant growth of both flora and fauna.