

CHAPTER XLIV.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV.

The Maharaja as a Pilgrim—From Almora to Manasarowar.

The Maharaja in June 1931 resolved to make a pilgrimage to Lake Manasarowar and to Mount Kilas in the Himalayas. In the previous year His Highness had visited Badari Narayan. The royal party left Mysore on the 18th June 1931 and reached Almora on the 24th of the same month and remained there till the morning of the 27th. Six retired Indian sepoy who had seen war service—three of them Ghurkas and the other three Kumaonese—were engaged to guard the party right through. The party also carried its own arms and ammunition. The party that accompanied His Highness consisted of Messrs. 1. N. Rangachar,* Surgeon. 2. Sadeg Z. Shah, Assistant Secretary to His Highness. 3. Colonel A. V. Subramanyaraj Urs, Hon. A. D. C. 4. Major S. Gopala Rao. 5. Captain Nabi Khan. 6. Lieut. Nanjaraj Bahadur of the Mysore Lancers. 7. A. Venkatasubbayya, Manager, Private Secretary's Office. 8. C. V. Subramanyaraj Urs, Mokthesar, Khas Samukha. 9. K. Venkatarangayya, Clerk, Private Secretary's Office. 10. C. Krishnappa, Sub-Assistant Surgeon. Mr. Pratap Singh, Tahsildar of Almora, who was on duty with His Highness on the occasion of the trip to Badari Narayan was deputed by the United Provinces Government to accompany the party to arrange for transport and other requisites.

The first start towards the destination was made on the morning of the 27th June at 5-30 when the ponies and guides were ready, and the first stage a distance of 8 miles was reached at 8 a.m., taking up residence in the forest bungalow situated on a hillock. There were pine trees all along the route and patches of cultivation in terraces on hill slopes and along the valleys. The bridle-path is tortuous and follows the hillsides. Here some large-sized

* The account of the trip appearing in the following pages is taken from the diary kept by Dr. N. Rangachar during the time.

cardamoms were presented to His Highness by the local people. The night was fairly cool with a bright moon and there was mist in the valleys in which was running a small stream. The whole of the kit was carried on mules.

The next camp at a distance of about 10 or 11 miles was reached on the morning of the 28th. The first part of the journey was all uphill for about 3 or 4 miles till a cool ridge was passed, when the route was all downhill. All through there were pine trees and a halt was made at the forest bungalow as in the first stage. There were small plots of rice cultivation in the valley, where a small stream was flowing.

At 4 a.m. on the morning of the 29th the journey was commenced for the next camp, a distance of 12 miles, with the aid of lanterns as it was still dark. The party walked for about 4 or 5 miles along the course of the stream referred to above till the Sarju river was crossed, spanned over by a nice suspension bridge. As the valley was very narrow and tortuous, it was very warm even in the early morning. But the valley became broader towards the Sarju and after crossing this river on ponies, an ascent of two miles was made before the camp was reached. All the ryots of the village turned up in the evening to pay their respects to His Highness who graciously enquired after their welfare, and before they departed they shouted "Mysore Maharaja Ki Jai!" "Kilasa Jatra Ki Jai!" and went away quite pleased.

On the 30th as usual the party started early in the morning and reached the camp at a place called Berinag at 8 a.m. The first 6 miles were covered on foot as the path was mostly level. As towards the end there was a steep zig-zag ascent for about 3 miles, this was accomplished on horseback. On the way there were small villages with patches of cultivation. Berinag where the next camp was made was full of huge pine trees. A large number of villagers turned up with their drums and welcomed His Highness. Here His Highness granted an interview to Thakore Dev Singh Bhist, a wealthy land-lord who owned a tea estate and a dairy in the neighbourhood.

On the 1st July the next camp Thal at a distance of about 10 miles was reached. On the way the party met three European missionary ladies who had settled there.

On the 2nd July the next camp Sandeo was reached, a distance of 10 miles and on the 3rd July another camp Askot, about 5000 feet above the sea level. Here His Highness was welcomed by Rajwar Vikram Bahadur Pal, the biggest land-lord there, and by his uncle Kumar Khadga Singh Pal, a retired Deputy Collector. It rained throughout the day. In the valley a kind of paddy was grown which did not require a constant supply of water. There were also found many mango trees.

On the 4th July, Askot was left at 3-30 a.m. and the party descended down a steep valley for about 3 miles and where the roaring rapids of the Govri Gunga was crossed, which joined the Kali Ganga a mile or so further on. The party then made an ascent on the right side of the Kali river in the opposite direction of its course, the path being quite narrow in some places and also very slushy on account of rain on the previous day. In some places the path was several hundred feet above the bed of the river, and the sides of the valley being almost perpendicular, the least slip by the ponies would have ended disastrously. The camp at Balavakot was safely reached at 8-30 a.m., a distance of 12 miles.

On the 5th July a start was made from this camp at 3-45 a.m. and the next camp Dharchula, a distance of 11 miles was reached at 7-30. In this part of the country were grown rice, maize, plantains, mangoes, lemons and oranges. At this camp His Highness was accommodated in the local school-building and the rest of the party were accommodated in tents. Near the camp, it was found that several coir ropes had been fixed across the river Kali to the Nepal side, and from one of the ropes a trapeze-like thing was hung with an inverted V-shaped piece of wood resting on the rope, from the two limbs of which the trapeze was hanging. People crossed the river just as a monkey does, holding on to the rope by fingers and toes only, supporting their hips in the trapeze. Women and nervous people, however, actually sat on the cross-bar,

tied with a piece of cloth to the trapeze itself and were pulled across. His Highness granted an interview in the evening to Swami Anubhavananda of the Ramakrishna Thapovan situated at about a distance of two miles.

The next day's journey to the camp at Khela, a distance of 10 miles, was a very tiresome and difficult one. As the route was not negotiable by laden mules, the kit was all sent by coolies. The route followed up the course of the Kali was very narrow, in some places only 3 feet wide or even less. It was passable for about 4 miles and the last piece of about 4 miles was a very steep zig-zag ascent paved with rough stones and slippery. It made one feel almost giddy to look down into the valley. At Khela as there was no room to pitch tents, the party took up their residence in a few houses belonging to the Patwari of the place.

A halt was made at this camp on the 7th July and the party left on the 8th for the next camp at Thithla at a distance of 8 miles. This was reached at 9-30 a.m. It had rained heavily the previous night and the ground was all damp. The tents had been pitched in a small sloping field and the weather was so cold that warm clothing was called for. In the evening a good many villagers came to the camp for medicines and as much as could be spared was readily given.

On the 9th July Galagar was reached and on the 10th Malpa, a total distance of 21 miles. The latter was the most dangerous part of the route and tired the party very much. "We walked over rough stones and boulders," says Dr. Rangachar, "right on the river bank, now running this way and now that, up and down, helter-skelter! We again crossed the Kali where it was narrowest and began our ascents and descents through rugged narrow paths, always precariously clinging to the edge or side of a precipice." Captain Nabi Khan's poetic effusion relating to this march is amusing:

"From Galagar to Garbayang, we crawled eight miles
Over boulders and rocks of every size,
To call it a road is all damn lies,
It is a short cut to Heaven, if you slip sidewise,

The Medical Professor—what shall I say of his fate?

Every few steps he progressed, he made a long wait.

For a mile we passed through the Nepal State,

The 10th of July is a memorable date.

Our beloved Maharaja, he led the whole way,

His kindness and charity, my words fail to say,

O! Lord of the Kailas! to you we all pray,

O! Guard and protect him each hour of the day.”

On the 11th July the party left at 5 a.m. for the next camp Budi and reached it at 9 a.m., a distance of about 7 miles. The party rode for about a mile and then had to walk, as it became unsafe to ride. The path was extremely narrow and, as usual, on the edge of a precipice, with gaps in several places due to landslips. These were bridged by beams thrown across and covered over with rough pieces of wood laid across, with earth on top. There were several landslips, some of them recent, and in one spot was heard a large stone falling into the valley with a crash as soon as the party had passed the place. It was raining most of the way. There were seen huge masses of snow in the water in the valley on either side of the route. The camp was pitched on a flat piece of ground about 2 acres in extent. There was bright sunshine till 4 p.m. and the weather afterwards became cloudy with chill winds blowing. The elevation of the place was 9600 feet.

The next day Garbayang a distance of 5 miles was reached. At Garbayang there was a school with 30 children who welcomed His Highness with songs. The elevation here was 10,500 feet and the temperature early in the morning was 56 degrees Fahrenheit. In the evening several Tibetans came to sell the locally made woollen carpets and boots. The sole of the boots was made of thick woollen twist and the top was made of multi-coloured pieces of broad cloth, velvet etc., and reached up to the knee. In some cases the sole which was an inch and a quarter thick was covered with thin leather. Here at some distance was witnessed the third day funeral ceremonies of the Bhotias. A quantity of wood had been piled up and set on fire, round which the people danced to the

music of drums and cymbals,—men, women and children—with a shield in the left hand and a naked sword in the right. Now and again, they drank from a small cup a kind of liquor prepared out of fermented rice and jaggery.

An enforced halt of 2 days was made at Garbayang as one of the bridges ahead required repairs. The night was very cool and on the next day from 8 in the morning till 2 in the afternoon, there was brilliant sunshine and then alternate sunshine and drizzling rain. Some Tibetans were found here with ponies for sale. These people kept their hair uncut, parting it the centre in front and plaiting it behind just as women in South India do. These Tibetans had very little growth of hair on the upper lip and no beard, but were found strong and sturdy. A Tibetan village headman from Takalakot said to be a military officer who had to mobilise a thousand fighting men when called upon by his Government to do so came here with another Tibetan supposed to be rich but in tattered garments. They paid their respect to His Highness and noted down the strength of the party, the weapons in their possession and the object of the visit and then left. Later, the Rani of Sanghai from the United Provinces, a most venerable-looking old lady who was also on a pilgrimage to Kailas, had an interview with His Highness. On the 14th there was nothing eventful. His Highness and some of the party went down to the river-bed for a walk and the advance party for the next camp left at 12 noon.

On the 15th July Garbayang was left at 6 a.m. and the next camp was Kalapani, a distance of a little over 9 miles. The party had to descend at first to the bed of the river Kali, a distance of about half a mile. It was very slippery and more than two inches of clay had stuck to the soles of the hob-nailed boots worn by the party. In very many places it was impossible to ride or go in a *dandie* and much walking was tiresome owing to the rarefied atmosphere. The altitude at the camp was 12,000 feet above the sea level, causing giddiness to a few of the party.

After making a halt on the 16th at Siangchum a distance of about 5 or 6 miles, the next camp Takalakot was reached on the

17th at 10-30 a.m., though at the time the party started, there was pouring rain. The village which was in Tibetan territory was fairly large. The houses were built of mud and stone and roofed over with mud on wooden joists and sticks. The villagers were found to be extremely ugly and dirty, varying in complexion from jet black to brown and all the men wore large ear-rings in their left ear. Immediately behind the Mysore camp on a ridge about 300 feet above was the residence of the Jungpon (a Tibetan Commissioner and District Magistrate) which looked like a castle. Attached to it was also a large Buddhist monastery. The Jungpon paid a visit to His Highness in the evening and presented some Tibetan carpets. The interview took place with the help of Bhotia interpreters and group photos were taken. He was accompanied by his daughter, a girl of 14 or 15 years who was much interested in the binoculars and cameras which the party carried. The Jungpon was tall and well-built and had an air of authority about him. Many Tibetans were revolving their prayer wheels. Here and there stones smeared with red earth were piled up, and amidst the piles sticks were fixed, to which rags of various colours were tied and on some of the stones Buddhist prayers were found carved.

On the 18th July at eight in the morning the Maharaja with some of the party started on a visit to the Jungpon. A zig-zag ascent had to be made over a pathway which was slippery on account of the soil being loose and stony. When the top of the ridge was reached, the Jungpon conducted His Highness through a narrow passage to his residence. After passing through a gate and ascending a few steps, the party entered a sort of courtyard in which his mules were housed and on a small terrace was tied his ferocious Tibetan dog, barking and tugging at his ropes to reach the strangers. Another dirty courtyard was reached through a flight of steps in which several blacksmiths and silversmiths were working at a saddle. They were very dirty and one of them was ferocious-looking. The Jungpon next conducted the party to his private room, where they were all seated. The room was dark with only one window and on one side there was an image of Buddha and various other images, with silver and bronze bowls

containing consecrated water, bells and other accessories of worship, all neatly arranged on wooden steps. The walls were painted with dragons, parrots, deer etc., on a green background, and the whole smelt of stale butter and ghee. For himself the Jungpon had a cosy raised dais with cushions and Tibetan carpets. Above him, on the wall were hung some firearms of Chinese make and a small stringed musical instrument on which he played some short Tibetan airs. A gramophone with some records was presented to the Jungpon and he was taught how to handle them. A pair of binoculars also was presented. The Jungpon having shown much interest in the nice Malacca walkingstick which had a dog's head with a silver muzzle carved at the end of its bent handle which His Highness held in his hand, the same was readily presented at which the Jungpon was mightily pleased. By the side of one of the passages was a dark room which was used as a lock-up.

Next, the party was conducted to a large adjoining monastery which was several storeys high, all with mud roofs, with small covered openings on the top for ventilation and the escape of smoke. In a fairly spacious hall supported on crudely carved pillars, there were wooden seats for the Lamas and long narrow mattresses for the smaller Lamas and the boy priests or novices arranged in rows for them to sit or eat their food.

On a higher level was the sanctum in which there was a clay image of a sitting Buddha painted in gold with a pleasing expression and another of the Dalai Lama, with various accessories for worship consisting of silver and brass cups, lamps full of butter with burning wicks, drums, cymbals etc., too numerous to mention. There was also a bowl made of the upper half of a human skull lined inside with silver plate out of which consecrated water was poured out with a spoon to the devotees. All round in shelves the library of the monastery had been arranged. The whole place was dark and smelt of stale butter. The Lamas and their pupils were very dirty and were clad in brown or chocolate gowns with a waistband and had their heads close cropped. The chief Lama was then visited and he was found to be a very old man. He made kind enquiries regarding His Highness and others of the party and gave

some consecrated things consisting of some incense mixed with dry moss and a piece of thin muslin received from the Dalai Lama with his blessings. In all the dark passages there were the prayer wheels and drums, which the devotees turned round while passing. His Highness took leave of the Jungpon at about 11 a.m. and returned to camp under a hot sun.

In the evening at about 5 o'clock a party of Tibetan dancers, some men and two women, were sent by the Jungpon for the amusement of His Highness and the party. The dancers were all fantastically dressed, the men wearing masks and baggy trousers which bulged out when they danced round and the women wore several tassels round the waist that spread out along with their skirts. The dance lasted for about half-an-hour to the accompaniment of a Tibetan drum and a pair of brass cymbals worked by a woman. Several Tibetan curios such as carved painted tables or stools, bronze bells, silver filigree work, kettles were brought to the camp for sale.

There was not a drop of water on the ridge and women carried water in iron drums on their backs from the river. The Tibetan men and women were strong and sturdy and when they wished to show respect to others, they put their tongues out several times. They lived mostly on meat either fresh or dried and 'Sattu' (fried wheat powder) and rarely some kind of bread.

On the 19th July His Highness again paid a visit to the monastery and presented Khillats to the chief Lama who held a regular religious durbar. The head Lama took his seat on a special dais and he was first given consecrated water and some tea. The other Lamas were then given the same and betwixt chantings they all partook of dried meat, "Sattu", and some cake. The devotees made their offerings to the Lama and in return got his blessings.

On the 20th July a start was made at 5 a.m. to the next camp at a place called Rungung, a distance of about 8 miles. The elevation at this place was 14,400 feet. Perfect stillness prevailed throughout but for the jingling of bells on the necks of ponies belonging to the party or the bark of the village dogs. There were

no birds seen on the route. Rice was underboiled at these heights and the lips and noses of several of the party became cracked on account of the cold to which emollients had to be applied.

On the 21st July the next halting place Gori Odial about 11 miles was reached at 8-30 a.m., the march occupying about 3½ hours. Here were seen a few yaks that were used for carrying pack-loads.

The next day Manasarowar was reached, at a distance of about 10 or 11 miles, at about 9 in the morning. When the end of the Gurla Pass was reached, the sun rose and the mists cleared and a clear view of Lake Manas was obtained. After descending for about a mile from the Gurla Pass towards the Manas Lake and going for about 3 miles over the broad level ground along its shore, the camp was reached at about 9 a.m., pitched only about 30 feet from the water's edge and in full view of the lake, a distance of about 10 or 11 miles from the last camp. His Highness and all the Hindus in the camp bathed in the Lake and the water was so cold as made one gasp for breath. Tarpan or oblations were then offered to the names of ancestors, as this was a sacred lake not only for the Tibetans but for the Hindus also. The elevation was about 14,900 feet. The Rani of Sanghai also travelled with the Mysore party from Garbayang and some sadhus who were also on a pilgrimage to Kailas were helped with money and provisions.