

CHAPTER XLV.

Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV.

The Maharaja as a Pilgrim—From Manasarowar to Mount Kailas and return.

On the morning of the 23rd July, the party left the western shores of the Lake and went along its water's edge towards the north for about 6 miles. On the way on a steep hill with loose slippery side towards the lake, there was a monastery which His Highness visited. About here several ducks were seen of moderate size, some white in colour with a black patch over their heads and others grey or brown. There were also some kinds of smaller birds on the shore which flew away on the approach of the party. The camp which had been pitched at a distance of about 11 miles was reached at 9-30 a.m. Nearby was a hot sulphur spring and over the hillock was a monastery. About noon a glimpse of the Kailas peak was obtained through a gap in the clouds. Piercingly cold winds blew throughout the day, though the sun was shining.

On the 24th leaving at 5-30 a.m., the foot of the Kailas Range was reached at about 8-30 a.m., a distance of about 8 miles. On the way small hares were seen running about. There were only two houses near the camp and a large herd of yaks was seen here. On account of the rarefied atmosphere, it was found that neither man nor beast could exert much. There was here a Tarjan or assistant to the Jungpon who could depute any one he liked to act for him in his absence. His Highness visited his residence and was conducted to a somewhat dark room with a single small window, furnished in the same style as that of the Jungpon at Takalakot. There was also a stringed musical instrument like a Banjo on which the Tarjan played two short Tibetan tunes singing them himself at the same time. The dwelling of a Tibetan shepherd was also visited. It was a pit about 10 feet square and waist deep in the ground and smoothened with mud-paste and roofed over with cloth made of yak hair. There was a mudstove inside for cooking and in one corner there was a small image of Buddha with cups for water,

lamp etc. It was quite snug inside, the whole family residing in that single room. Many Tibetans, especially women, applied jaggery paste to their cheeks and over their nose as a cosmetic which made them hideous-looking. This they did to prevent cracks in the skin. There were also seen some black crows which were four times the size of those in India.

On the morning of the 25th July a start was made for the next camp at a distance of about 7 miles. The whole Kailas Range here became distinctly visible. The party had to cross over to the other side of the maidan which was mostly boggy with innumerable, small, tortuous streams coursing through it to go to Darchin where the camp was. In this place was the residence of the governor appointed by Sikkim to which country the place was stated to belong. The governor was known as the Raja Loba and the camp was pitched opposite to his residence with a hill stream intervening. The other abodes consisted of rowties only in which several families lived. As soon as the camp was reached, information was received that the governor had too much liquor the previous night and had very severe bleeding from the nose. He was treated by the Maharaja's doctors, Mr. Rangachar and his assistant, and it was found to be one of the worst cases treated by these doctors. The governor was a tall, sturdy, fair-complexioned individual with bushy hair and he recovered in the evening. After 5 p.m. His Highness with some of the party paid a visit to Gangta-Gompa, the biggest of the five Buddhist monasteries round about Kailas. It was not as big as the one at Takalakot but was equally dark and dirty inside. It was also a mud and stone storeyed structure. His Highness was received at the entrance of the monastery by an old Lama with burning incense, to the accompaniment of the blowing of trumpets, horns and other instruments on the topmost mud terrace. His Highness presented some red banath pieces and some cash to the monastery.

26th July—Darchin was at the foot of the Kailas Range on its eastern aspect. It was from this spot that pilgrims went to the right and finished circumambulation or parikrama of Mount Kailas. The party left camp at 5-30 a.m., followed the base of a ridge for

about 2 miles, when they came across a flat-bottomed valley with a river flowing through it and separating Mount Kailas from another hill chain. As the party entered the valley, they again turned to the right and followed up the river on level ground for about 5 or 6 miles and saw the peak in its southern and western aspects. About the middle of this valley there was a monastery known as Nendiphu on the other side of the river which was not visited. High up on the Kailas side, there were some ibex grazing. Owing to the high altitude and also on account of some sulphureous smell here and there, exertion was very difficult for both man and beast of the plains. The last 3 miles was a gradual ascent over loose stones to Didiphu, another small monastery on the side of a stream. The party was completely tired by 11 a.m. The camp had been pitched at the foot of Mount Kailas on fairly level ground and the Mount itself was very near. A good stream flowed down from the Kailas into a river down the valley.

In the evening Dr. Rangachar, Major Gopala Rao and the Tahsildar Mr. Pratap Singh mounted their ponies and went up a rocky and slippery ascent to the base of the Mount said to be 18,000 feet above sea level, the elevation of the camp itself being 16,200 feet. The base of the peak was almost a parallelogram and the Mount rose perpendicularly and the top was shaped like a dome. When they reached the base, they found two huge masses of snow had formed a buttress against it and through a triangular opening below at the junction of the two masses a beautiful stream was found gushing forth. In a small niche in a snow-wall was a beautiful snow Lingam about 9 inches high and 3 inches in diameter. The niche had the shape of a saracenic arch. It and the Lingam at its entrance were so perfect that it was difficult for the visitors to say if it was an accidental formation in the snow or the handiwork of any skilled devotee. As it was about to get dark, the visitors marched down carefully, in some places over hard snow, to the camp, collecting on the way three specimens of a flower known as Brahma Kamal or the Brahma Lotus, greyish in colour, and reached the camp at 7-30 p.m. Some pigeons near the camp were observed.

The second stage of the Parikram of Mount Kailas began at 5-30 on the morning of the 27th July. For the first 3 or 4 miles the route lay over a steep and stony ascent, tiresome both to men and animals, till a ridge called Gowrikund, 18,600 feet above sea level, the highest altitude during this trip, was reached. The ascent however was nothing to the local Tibetans. The Gowrikund was found to be a small frozen lake, with sheets of ice on it, with rough craggy sides. From this ridge an easy descent of about two miles over loose stones was made into the bottom of a valley through which a stream was flowing. The valley was quite marshy and added to the difficulties of the march. The sun was sharp and there was a sulphureous odour also. At short intervals were found several heaps of stones with carved Buddhist texts interposed. When the camp at Zindiphu was reached about 10-30 a.m., it was found to have been pitched right in front of a small, dirty monastery.

On the morning of the 28th when the party started as usual at 5-30 in the morning, a clear view of Goorla Mandhatha Range was obtained. After proceeding for 3 miles down the valley along the stream, Barkha maidan was again reached, the Parikram of Kailas being finished. Barkha itself was reached at 8-45 a.m., a distance of 7 miles. The party were pleased that their pilgrimage had thus far succeeded and that their return journey was begun. In the evening as the sun was setting in the western horizon, a mass of clouds above appeared golden and as the rest of the sky was clear, a distinct view of the whole Kailas was obtained, while the full moon rose on the eastern horizon.

On the 29th in deference to the wishes of the Rani of Sanghai, His Highness camped on the borders of the Manas 2 miles south of Jieu Gompa and many had a dip in the Manas as the day happened to be a full-moon day. The day was remarkable in that strong gusts of cold wind brought down all the rowties between 4 and 5 p.m. Subsequently the wind ceased fortunately. At about 7 p.m. in the eastern horizon opposite to the camp just where two ranges of hills sloped towards each other and in the gap the Brahmaputra flowed out of Lake Manas, the full moon—a

brilliant, beautiful, big sphere—slowly rose up leaving a long silvery column of its reflection in the calm waters of the lake and gladdened all, giving an opportunity to Mr. Nabi Khan to expose his camera. On the way a lean, lanky cheeta was observed to go up a hill.

Three more stages on the return journey were completed on the 30th and 31st July and 1st August respectively, a total distance of 32 miles. On the 2nd August the party proceeded to Khojarnath to visit a well-known monastery there. It was situated south-east of Takalakot on the Mopchu or Karnali river. On the way were found small, neat villages with well-cultivated plots containing luxuriant peas, barley and a kind of wheat which was called Jav and watered by diverted hill streams that formed neat canals. Each village had its sheep and cattle grazing on the green grass bordering the canals. The intense green of the cultivated fields was a pretty sight. The canals were bordered by some blue, wild flowers. The latter half of the route consisted of ascents and descents. The camp was reached in 4 hours.

The village of Khojarnath was in the Sikkim territory and consisted of a semi-circular plot of sloping ground, about 2 miles in diameter, with a chain of hills for a background and a broad river the Karnali separating it from another chain of hills on the Nepal side. The monastery was situated right on the river bank unlike other monasteries perched on steep precipitous hillocks. On entering through a crooked, covered passage, the party came to a square, open space with buildings on all the four sides. The main shrine was covered *terra cotta* with mud plastering outside the walls. On the terrace a round brass disc with a brass deer on either side greeted the eye in front. On entering the gate, there was a small courtyard the walls of which were painted with neat figures of Buddha, flowers and wild animals. On proceeding through an inner door on either side of which revolving prayer drums or casks covered with leather were fixed, the party came upon a small room on either side of which stood two painted clay giants about 8 feet high. It was said that one of them represented

Ravana. Beyond was a hall about 20 feet by 50 feet with wooden pillars in two rows, and two rows of seats covered with mattresses for the Lamas to sit in prayer. At the further end of the hall, there was an image of seated Buddha with all the accessories for worship. Behind this, there was a space of about 4 feet right across and at the farthest end of the hall over a pedestal about 4 feet high were 3 standing metallic images cast out of an alloy with more of copper in it, of Seetha, Rama and Lakshmana, each about 7 or 8 feet in height with a Prabhavali or a frame of Gothic shape behind them. The whole casting was of exquisite workmanship. Across the base of the pedestal, there was a perfect elephant at one end and a horse at the other end, and in between, several gods and goddesses in a sitting posture. Above this, there was something like the stalk of a lotus, on either side of which were two nymphs with bent backs and looking upward with folded hands. Then over this came the lotus petals, the lower half turned downwards and the upper half set upwards to form the top of the pedestal. On this stood the image of Rama with Seetha to the right and Lakshmana to the left. In fact, the pedestal formed a beautifully designed bracket for the images. The faces were painted nicely. There seemed to be more of silver in the alloy out of which the images had been cast. The Prabhavali or the setting frame showed designs of peacocks and other animals with some creepers and was very beautiful. There were also two lions crouching on either side of the base and when the hands were put behind the base, a gust of air was felt. The figures were draped in cloth of gold and some jewellery containing mostly turquoise and there was an embroidered head-gear also over each image. The whole casting was faultless and full of beauty. How old the images were it was unknown. There was also a narrow, dark passage for pilgrims to go round the main shrine. On a high bench facing the images, there were several large silver and gold bowls containing ghee with wicks placed in the centre and burning day and night. There was an open Prakar or compound round this building in which innumerable revolving prayer drums were installed. In a room there was a huge drum or cylinder about 10 feet high and 5 feet in diameter, with iron rings to set it going, and inscribed all

over with the sacred mantram "Om mani padme ham" in Tibetan script. The wheel was constantly revolved by an old woman sitting nearby. On coming out, the party turned into another door on the left and on entering a similar very large hall paved with mud and rough stones, found in a dark room a painted huge clay image of Buddha as if seated on a stool or chair. In a large room to the left of the hall there were several painted clay images of rishis or saints all seated cross-legged and in an attitude of prayer. Opposite to this room, *i.e.*, to the right of the hall, in another similar dark, large room there were again seven such, all sitting cross-legged but with their hands clasped in various attitudes denoting what were called *Mudras*. These latter were known as Saptarishis or seven saints. To the left of the Buddha shrine in another dark dungeon, there were two wild-looking figures of Kala and Kali, all of painted clay and leather. In one corner of the roof of the main hall, there were found suspended a crudely stuffed gigantic wild yak and a tiger. The party then adjourned to the first floor of the building where they were shown clay images of Kali and Lakshmi installed in a large library containing many printed Tibetan scriptures. This monastery was very much clearer than those seen before. The surroundings however were very dirty, and outside the building on a wall was shown in gigantic letters made of mud-paste and painted white the same "Om mani padme ham." Nearby was a small detached tower supported on a square base, with each side composed of a low, round arch. After leaving the monastery, His Highness and the party went to the residence of a young Lama higher up the valley—a neat building of mud and stone. The courtyard on the first floor had a wooden flooring and was neat and had nicely painted walls and wooden railings. On one side of this courtyard on a sort of gadi or dais sat the Lama aged only 16 and by his side on a lower seat was found a child Lama aged only 6 years. Both of them were supposed to be incarnations. Both were fair-complexioned and had a very smart appearance. The elder Lama had a bushy hair and was reading some scriptures. He had, it was said, made a vow not to stir outside the building for three years. He made kind enquiries of His Highness who presented him with two pieces of

red and bright blue banaths and some cash. The Lama gave to His Highness and the others his blessings and prasad.

From Khojarnath which was left on the 3rd August 1931 the return journey to Almora occupied 21 days, the latter place being reached on the 24th August. At Pala on the 5th August the Tibetan territory was left behind and the party entered the Indian territory. On the 6th August at Garbayang the local Bhotias danced in a circle before His Highness with a shield in the left hand and a sword in the right to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals. On the 9th August when the party was on its way to the camp at Galagar, a big stone fell injuring two or three coolies but not very seriously. Some tent poles they were carrying were smashed. On the way to the next camp Thithla a big stone got loose from above and Mr. Venkatasubbaiya and his pony had a hair-breadth escape, passing as it did right in front of him and falling into the valley. On the 15th a halt was made at Askot as it was raining heavily, and here the Rajwar Saheb invited His Highness and the party to tea. On the 19th on the way to the camp at Saniodhiar, the path lay through pine forests and several villages were passed on the way with their luxuriant crops and streams. Most of the villagers were waiting to have a *darshan* of His Highness and showered flowers on him when he passed them. There was a small orphanage maintained by an American missionary lady. On the 20th the camp at Bageshwar was reached. Bageshwar was found situated right on both the banks of the Sarju rapids. Here the party camped in the spacious dak bungalow which was situated only about 20 feet from the water's edge. To the left was a very nice suspension bridge, about 60 feet long, the width of the river. The elevation was 3200 feet. There were two bazaars, one on either side of the river. The people here gave a most enthusiastic reception to His Highness decorating the streets and showering flowers on him. The prominent citizens waited on His Highness in the evening and presented an address in Hindi, enclosed in an embroidered velvet bag, praying for a donation for extending the local school-building. On the 21st August Binsar was reached, a distance of 17 miles. His Highness camped in the bungalow of

Mr. Devi Lal Sha, a rich merchant of Almora. On the 24th Almora was reached and a halt of two days was made. During these two days His Highness granted interviews to Government officers and to several of the prominent citizens, and souvenirs, Khillats and liberal presents were given to all who had rendered service to His Highness. Almora was left on the 27th August and Mysore was reached on the 7th September, greatly to the joy of His Highness' subjects and of the members of the Royal family, thus completing the pilgrimage and returning safely to his Capital with all his followers after a hazardous journey of 2 months and 20 days.