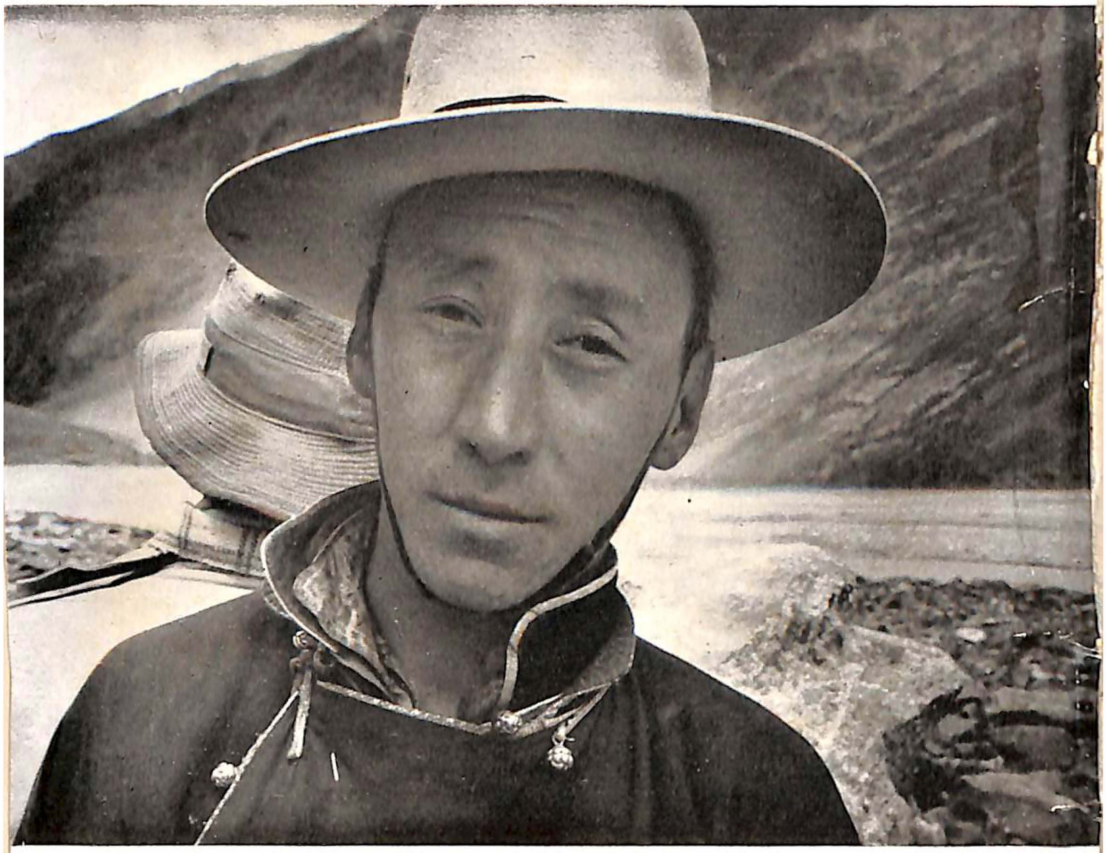

A member of the vanishing nobility of Ladakh

ON AN INDIAN BORDER

PRAN CHOPRA

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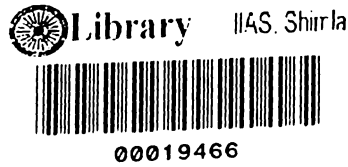

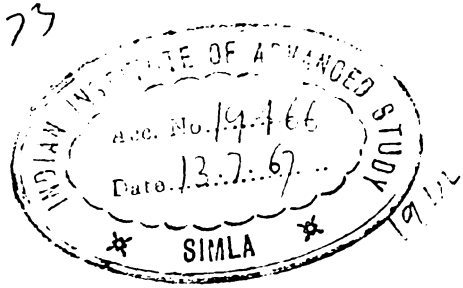

PRINTED IN INDIA
BY G. C. RAY AT NAVANA PRINTING WORKS PRIVATE LIMITED
47 GANESH CHUNDER AVENUE, CALCUTTA 13 AND PUBLISHED
BY P. S. JAYASINGHE, ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY

INTRODUCTION

MUCH HAS BEEN heard for some years now about the barren stretches of land which lie along India's northern frontier, but comparatively little about the colourful people who eke out a precarious living there. They are the northernmost inhabitants of India and in some ways the most remarkable. But to most of our people they are only strangers.

One result, however, of the trouble with China has been that India's attention has been sharply turned towards them. Though the defence of the frontier by the armed forces remains the first concern of the country, the second and partly related one is also gaining importance: the care of the isolated communities which live just short of the frontier. Neither money nor effort is being spared to see that those who live so close to such a sensitive frontier are reasonably contented and well looked after. Earnest attempts are being made to understand their problems and, as knowledge is gained, to find the right answers. The ultimate objective is to integrate them more closely with the people of the rest of India, and the more immediate one, as an official document of the Punjab Government puts it, "to wean them away from the Tibetans".

Agencies of administration which for generations have thought only of the plainsman have now penetrated into these valleys across the high and often hazardous mountains which separate them from the plains. Resident officers have been posted in places which used to see only touring officials and even that only once in 10 or 15 years. As a result of this change, useful information is beginning to accumulate at New Delhi and in the capitals of the northern states.

To add to this information the third dimension, so to speak, of personal impressions, an increasing number of officials of the northern states, often of high and policy-making ranks, have been going out on extensive tours of the most remote corners of the border areas, gaining first hand acquaintance with the people and their environments, which are sometimes dramatic. It was in

company with a party of such officials, all of them most closely concerned with the area, that I made my first instructive and leisurely tour of the border valleys of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, though my acquaintance with Ladakh has been more spread out over the years and its beginnings antedate India's troubles with China. In all these areas—Lahul and Spiti in Punjab, Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh in Kashmir—it has been possible to see different stages of the unfolding of a fascinating drama in the past few years, the impact of change, of modern times, upon people whose links with the outside world have been rudimentary for many generations. Especially clear was the impression of change in areas which were re-visited, whether after a year, as Kinnaur or after almost a decade, as Ladakh which I last saw at the end of 1953.

This book—long delayed as manuscript by the exigencies of the emergency, the difficulties of writing about some of the subjects discussed—is a result of these tours and the homework which preceded and followed them. My observations relate only to Lahul, Ladakh, Spiti and Kinnaur. But since similar terrain and climate usually breed similar people and problems, it is possible that what is stated in the pages which follow has some relevance also to the border valleys further to the east, especially those in the northern marches of Uttar Pradesh. The nature of the country and, even more, the cultural influences which have mingled in it vary little in the western and central sectors of India's frontier with Tibet.

These tours have left diverse and vivid impressions on the mind, all of them highly stimulating but many in conflict with each other and very difficult to coordinate; the changes have been so many, so sudden and are still so incomplete. The scene is dominated by what has been inherited from the past: the rugged, merciless country, culture patterns which are most unfamiliar to an Indian, and rigid traditions which have stood the test of time. And yet the strongest impression is one of change, for better or for worse, achieved or impending.

The causes of change are many and not all of them are new. But the two most compelling and recent ones are first, events in Tibet and on our frontiers, and second, the Indian response to them, more especially the ardent efforts now being made to make the Indian presence on this border a more concrete reality than it has ever been.

The combined effect of the two causes in the past few years has been to disturb some of the most basic conditions governing the lives of these people—their severe isolation from much of the outside world; their precarious balance with the forces of nature, which are ruthless and dynamic in these parts; their fine institutions of community life; the synthesis they have achieved between Central Asian lamaism and the bizzare Hinduism of the hills.

A change in any one of these conditions would have altered life in these valleys, though at a pace which would not have been harmful. But a simultaneous change in all of them, as is now taking place, can get out of control. That is why I was not surprised to find that many well-intended acts of the government are producing results which it does not desire, and that of the hundreds of people I met while trekking through the valleys not a few admitted to feelings of doubt and uncertainty.

Visiting Sikkim some time after my first treks through the border valleys of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, I came across a more acute expression of this uneasiness in the Sikkimese capital, Gangtok. In an interview for a BBC television programme, the Maharajkumar of Sikkim, now the Maharaja, admitted to fears of a cultural upset in his mountain kingdom. This tiny state, a protectorate of India, has always been a bridge between Indian and Central Asian cultures. Like the border valleys of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Kashmir, Sikkim was also influenced by both neighbours but was left free by each to absorb or reject whatever it would, to compound out of the interplay of influences from across its borders a culture which it could call its own. But now that there is tension between the neighbours, this little cultural buffer looks with misgivings upon some possible consequences, of which the least profound could easily be a deep disturbance of its cultural personality.

These valleys on our borders, whether on the Indian side or across, have known India on the one hand and Tibet and China on the other as their only major neighbours, whose relations with each other have moulded their own personality. So long as there was peace between the two sides, the intermediate territories were at peace with both sides and with themselves. But a state resembling an emotional trauma has been created for them by the border clashes between India and China and their minds are filled with some understandable doubts. A more extreme form of these mis-

givings appeared in a speech last year by a delegate of Nepal at the United Nations: he deplored the discord between India and China, and feared that one or the other would absorb Nepal though as friendly neighbours, friendly to Nepal (which they still are) and to each other (which they are not) they had been two harmonious cultural parents. In November, 1963, almost a year after China's attack on India and on the 18th anniversary of the United Nations, the King of Nepal said in a U. N. Day message, "Nepal feels a sense of uneasiness because of the unfriendly relations in which her two big neighbours India and China, have been living".

Such doubts have created unforeseen difficulties for India, whom circumstances have obliged to assume an increased responsibility towards these areas. In discharging this responsibility India has undertaken or promoted special programmes for the economic development of the valleys, but her efforts are sometimes received with a tinge of resentment, not unlike the resentment India herself used to show in receiving foreign aid in the early years of her independence. The situation is complicated by the difficulties of guiding static societies through a period of transition. Hence the need for Indian authorities, which are new to this task of the consolidation of frontiers, to avoid carrying fixed ideas and objectives to an unfamiliar land. The danger, as is obvious in some areas already, is that Indian officials, who go into these valleys with large funds at their disposal, may expose themselves to the classic mistakes made by aid-givers: treading on sensitive toes, underestimating the strength of local institutions and traditions, attempting too much ineffectively instead of a little with efficiency, sapping local initiative instead of harnessing it to advantage. But some encouraging signs are available already to show that the right mixture of caution and eagerness is beginning to be discovered. How quickly the discovery is completed by the pioneers and adopted by the rest will decide the success of our frontier policy.

New Delhi
May 31, 1964

PRAN CHOPRA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some of the material used in this book appeared in *The Times*, London, *The Statesman*, New Delhi, and in programmes broadcast by the BBC, London, and All India Radio, New Delhi. The author's acknowledgements are due to them.

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PLATES

I

THE NATURAL STAMP

THE LAST INHABITED valleys on the Indian side of the frontier with Tibet lie enmeshed in the great tangle of mountains, the greatest in the world, which is known as the Western Himalaya. It stretches from the vicinity of upper Nepal in the east to an area much further north where Kashmir meets China and Afghanistan, and the principal ranges lie east to west with a northward sweep as they approach Kashmir. The two biggest ranges are the mid-Himalaya and the Great Himalaya, which are roughly parallel to each other and enclose between them an interminable land of plateaus and valleys, narrow, winding, high and extremely arid. This land would be a continuous strip, were it not cut by lofty off-shoots transversely thrown out here by the mid-Himalayan range and there by the Great, to meet the other across a landscape of snow and boulders. In the interstices of this mesh live the most mountain-bound citizens of India, including the Ladakhi, the Lahula, the Spitial and the Kinnaura.

They live in a wild and mountainous arc which runs for over 500 miles, nearly north to south from Ladakh to Kinnaur but curving eastwards as it plunges further to the south. At the northern extremity the Kunlun range separates Ladakh from Sinkiang and at the southern extremity the Dhaula Dhar separates Kinnaur from Uttar Pradesh. The Kinner Kailash mountains of the Great Himalayan range lie between the eastern and north-eastern faces of the arc and western Tibet; the mid-Himalayan range separates the western face from the valley of the Beas in Punjab and the State of Chamba in Himachal Pradesh.

At the lowermost end of the arc is the Kinnaur valley of Himachal Pradesh, where the Sutlej flows through its highest reaches in India. A little above it and to the left is the valley of the Spiti river, a major tributary of the Sutlej. Higher still and a little more to the left is Lahul, which is really three valleys in one: those of the Chandra, the Bhaga and their joint stream, the

Chandrabhagha. The latter is better known outside Lahul as the river Chenab though its valley is better known as Pattan. At the northern end is the vast plateau of Ladakh through which flows the Indus, one of the greatest rivers of the Indian sub-continent. Kinnaur, Spiti and Ladakh share long frontiers with Tibet, while Lahul is wedged in between Ladakh and Spiti.

The largest of these territories is Ladakh, a vast and arid plateau of about 18,000 square miles lying between 70°-40′ and 80°-30′ east and 32°-20′ and 36° north. Most of the area is the drainage of the Indus river. With an annual rainfall which rarely exceeds three inches, Ladakh produces only grass and some scrub in most of the open places, which are exposed to fierce and destructive winds. There the inhabitants are wild-looking graziers, the Khampas, cousins of the same tribe in Tibet who have made guerrilla action against the Chinese a second occupation. In some secluded valleys, wheat, barley and some dry fruits are grown in fields which rise up to nearly 14,000 feet above the sea. This is where the Ladakhis proper live, Bhots or Buddhists by religion, strong of body, unclean in appearance, but excellent farmers, like Bhots everywhere in these valleys.

The rainfall and moisture which have made the Kashmir valley such a comfort to the eye, are stopped by the Great Himalayan range from entering Ladakh. The barrier that shuts them out can be clearly visualised at the main gate which pierces it, the Zoji La. This pass is only about 11,500 feet high, not a great altitude as altitudes go in these parts. In fact proceeding north and eastwards from Zoji La to the Indo-Tibetan frontier beyond the Spanggur lake one has to cross many passes which are higher. The very next after Zoji La, the Fatu La, is nearly 2,000 feet higher and the last, Chang La is about 6,000 feet higher. But neither of them is as deeply snow bound as Zoji La because they are situated in the arid zone of low precipitation, the moisture coming up from the plains being barricaded at Zoji La, which is often blocked by snowdrifts as much as 80 feet deep.

It is the aridity more than the height and cold which have reduced Ladakh to the desolation which it has become, a vast dust bowl, very fertile wherever the water can be brought to nourish the soil but otherwise either steep and frigid rocks or broad valleys thickly covered with air-spun dust. Here and there, as at a few places near the Leh airfield and at many more further upstream

along the Indus, the dust banks up along the bare backs of the rocky mountains to present a fascinating sight.

Parts of Ladakh are no higher than 11,000 feet, like the valleys of two tributaries of the Indus, Shyok and the Nubra. Leh itself is only 11,500 feet. The cold here can be intense but not such as to be unbearable. In the first week of November, 1963, when I last visited the border area, the cold, though a little late, had begun to be intense. The nights could be quite uncomfortable even at Leh and in spite of a reasonable covering—unavailable during earlier visits—now provided by the yurt, a circular tent, originally of Mongolian design but now adapted to the needs of the Army, made out of a double layer of canvas material which is stretched on the two sides of a wooden frame. Water stored in buckets in a mud-and-stone walled enclosure at night used to freeze into solid shapes by the morning. In outposts closer to where the fighting occurred with the Chinese, the temperature was lower, the wind more piercing, the ground under the foot, especially at night, like muddy slabs of ice. But through nearly half the year the days are quite warm, especially if the sun is clear, the nights not much colder than in Punjab during the middle of the winter, and life would be bearable if not so completely deprived of moisture. But dryness makes even these months a hazard to life. Each sign of moisture in the body has to be carefully watched against the dehydrating action of the dry winds and hot sun—which makes animal and plant life difficult and rather scarce. It is not till the Chang La ridge is reached—over which jeeps run now at 18,000 feet and sometimes even a light truck —that even altitude becomes a hazard to the biological processes of life. The mind begins to deteriorate there along with the body, not only the limbs but even the brain slows down. It is unfortunately in this area that most of the fighting had to be done. In the winter of 1962-3, when every drop of advantage had to be taken out of each ounce of the supplies received, it was found that meat and vegetables froze as hard as bits of rock; they had to be boiled to make them edible, but neither water nor fuel was easy to find. Supply trucks stopped in their tracks because the fluid in the batteries froze; guns suffered seizures in the act of firing, the mechanism jammed by the frozen grease.

These frost-bound stretches are without any villages or hamlets. In the broad valley of the Indus, however, near Leh and in the

surrounding areas, and in the areas of Kargil which are on the Indian side of the cease-fire line with Pakistan, a little under 90,000 people manage to live in reasonable comfort. In fact Leh itself shows many signs that life could even be vigorous. In Kargil Tehsil, which lies between the Leh Tehsil and the valley of Kashmir, conditions are even better and in summer months could be described as almost pleasant.

About the only occupation of the people is cultivation—such as it is—and out of 58,000 persons whom the 1962 census found to be employed, 50,000 were cultivators and only about 1,000 persons described themselves as urban and non-cultivators. But of course the cultivation is so meagre in most places and during most parts of the year that next after the 50,000 persons listed as whole time cultivators the largest category was the non-workers—including, of course children and the aged—who numbered 30,000. The land engages so little of the owner's energy that there is no scope for agricultural labour, and apart from tilling the land that one owns, the only occupations are some trade and a little household craft and industry.

Lahul—which, like Spiti and Kinnaur, is described in greater detail a little later in these pages, covers an area of nearly 1,800 square miles. Most of it is the upper catchment area of the river Chenab though a part of the area to the north-east drains into the river Indus. Both the rivers flow into Pakistan when they leave Indian territory. With Kashmir to the north, Kulu to the south, Chamba to the west and Spiti to the east, Lahul lies between north latitude 30°-8′ and 32°-59′ and east longitude 76°-59′ and 77°-50′. Most of it consists of the valleys of the Chandra and the Bhaga, the two arms of the Chenab in its highest reaches, and a large and mostly unexplored mass of glaciers and mountain peaks which is enclosed between the arms. But the most fertile and populated part of Lahul is the narrow valley of Pattan where the Chandra and the Bhaga join to form the Chenab. The total population of Lahul is about 14,000 roughly half of it in the Pattan Valley.

The Spiti valley, a rough and elongated triangle about 90 miles in length lies base to base with Lahul with the straight and high ridge of Kunzum separating the two. At the apex of the triangle the Sutlej flows in from Tibet and is joined by the Spiti river about thirty miles inside Kinnaur, as the valley of the Sutlej is called. Spiti covers an area of just under 3,000 square

miles between north latitude 31°-42′ and 33° and east longitude 77°-37′ and 78°-50′. But with a much larger area than Lahul it has a population of only a little over 6,000 because the habitable part of it rarely exceeds two or three miles in width. The main tributary of the Spiti is the Pin river, whose valley, near the lower end of the Spiti, is an exceptionally formidable area.

From the point where it starts about 25 miles above the confluence of the Spiti and the Sutlej, the Kinnaur valley curves south-westwards towards the Simla hills, with a large off-shoot, the Baspa valley, branching off at Karcham, where the Sutlej takes its first big westerly curve. Along most of its 80-mile course through Kinnaur the Sutlej tumbles down at a furious pace and at many places its slope is 100 or 150 feet a mile. Like the Spiti river the Sutlej is of little use for irrigation here because its current is too fast and its banks too steep and high. The river bed is at an altitude of between 2,500 and 4,500 feet, the banks rise sheer to between 7,000 and 9,000 feet. From there to about 10,000 or 11,000 feet there are a few stretches of gradual slope, where most of the villages and their fields lie, and from this ledge the peaks rise sharply to heights above 20,000 feet.

Its two main contrasts are the Hungrang valley at the upper extreme and the Baspa valley at the lower. The former, next to Spiti and identical to it in many respects, is extremely arid but with splendid cultivation on small patches; the latter is broader, more green and fertile, but its crops and farmers do not compare with those of the Hungrang valley. In fact the difference between these two ends of Kinnaur is so marked and there are so many gradations between them, in the terrain, fertility, language, culture and racial composition of the people, that generalisations about Kinnaur break down at one point or another as they do not when made about Lahul or Spiti. Also, in its cultural environment, especially the predominance of Hindu influence in its lower reaches, Kinnaur is very different from Spiti. Nevertheless it is fairly distinct from the country below Rampur-Bushair, the seat of the Rajput dynasty of Bushair which ruled Kinnaur until several of the states of the Simla hills were merged to form Himachal Pradesh. The area of Kinnaur is 2,500 square miles and its population nearly 41,000.

The main administrative centres of the whole area are Leh (11,500 feet above the sea), Kyelang (over 10,000 feet), Kaza

(12,000 feet) and Kalpa (9,000 feet). Out of these, Leh is the fastest growing, the most directly affected by what is the theme of this book: the impact of social and economic changes unleashed by the border fighting between India and China. In successive visits—admittedly, they were separated by nearly a decade—I saw the place transformed from a happy isolated town dying on its feet since the changing modes of world travel and trade made it quite unimportant as the central Asian cross-roads, to a busy cantonment at the border, bursting at the seams. Its population is now higher, its importance greater than ever before. More people and vehicles crowd its streets now than they have ever done, and more significant than the change in numbers is the change in types: in tongue, garb, ways of travel and other business, they do not represent the kingdoms and republics of the old Silk Road, but the states and cites of India from where large numbers of men have moved up north to help defend the threatened frontier. At a street corner in Leh I talked one day to a shopkeeper—Leh's main street is longer and its shops more numerous than ever in living memory or anywhere else in the border valleys —who belongs to Hoshiarpur, a city in the plains of Punjab, who for 40 years has been keeping a shop in what was once a central Asian mart. He said his shop had never been busier, because along with the armed forces a large number of other people have also come—either from different parts of Ladakh itself or from somewhere in India—who look after the needs of this growing cantonment. He and his shop, and other shops like his which meet similar needs, discover that their business has never been better.

In the shops there is a curious change of merchandise. Somewhere from the deep recesses of the bigger shops, a keeper can still pull out an old Tibetan rug, or riding boots and saddles made in Sinkiang, large and genuine pieces of turquoise or a real camphor from China or a papier mache box from Peking, its original vivid red turned into a dull black by age and usage. But these shops or these goods are the exceptions (what usually passes for them is generally fake, unwrapped with the greatest mystery for the benefit of the army officer who is in a hurry or does not have much else on which he might spend his spare money). The rule is soap or butter, playing cards, textiles and buttons and needles, torches and battery cells, cigarettes and matches and packets of

tea and a dozen other things—all brought from the plains—with which a soldier likes to supplement his mess rations. The bazaar is still dominated by the old palace built in the style of the Potala at Lhasa, the faces in the street are still the broad Mongoloid faces of the Bhots or the slightly more narrow and refined ones of the Muslims of Kargil or (some) of Gilgit, both types still wearing a scraggy beard. The dress is also the embroidered fur cap, with long unwashed hair gathered inside it or descending from it in a long pigtail; the ankle length woollen coat gathered at the waist with a rope of hair; necklaces of multi-coloured beads or, in the case of women, a woollen hood decorated with turquoise. But in the first place more and more of the local people are seen dressed in shirt-and-trouser styles imported from the plains, some even sporting a necktie. In the second place, the younger boys who retain the long-coat dress for its warmth wear their hair short and are clean shaven—a surprisingly smart set who probably fancy themselves as local teddy boys. In the third place the proportion of the men from the plains—soldiers, administrators, merchants—has grown enormously in the period between my two visits, and far more often than one sees a mule caravan come into the bazaar one meets jeeps and trucks of the army and civilian establishments.

Of the four main administrative centres in the border valley Leh alone has a mosque: the still surviving proof of what distinguishes Ladakh from Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur. While the culture of the latter three valleys is wholly a product of the Hinduism of the Indian hills and of Buddhism as it flourished on both sides of the border, the culture of Ladakh also shows traces of West Asian Islam which came to it through neighbouring Baltistan, a territory of the Shia Muslims of Kashmir. But the predominant religious landmark is the dozens of white "chortens" which dot the brown rock of the area. Leh is the only place of any secular consequence in Ladakh (of much greater religious importance is the seat of the Hemis monastery, also in the Indus valley and about 18 miles to the South East). Leh alone boasts of an astronomical observatory, said to be the highest in Asia, a civilian airfield the highest in India, a few gardens.

In the whole of Lahul, Kyelang is the only place which boasts of a regular street with a string of shops on one side and in a few short stretches on the other side as well. It stands high above

the Bhaga river, only four miles from Tandi where the Bhaga meets the Chandra. It has the only police station of Lahul, the only telegraph office, the only rest house and until recently had the only hospital though lately another has been opened in the Pattan valley. The Moravian missionaries made it their main base of work in all the border valleys of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh and now the Punjab government has made it the headquarters of the newly formed district of Lahul and Spiti. (Not only Punjab but all the states of northern India have recently opened new districts along the border with Tibet to ensure closer administrative integration of the border areas with the rest of India.) Because of the building skills imparted by the Moravian missionaries to the Lahulas, Kyelang has the best houses in the whole district and a fine belt of poplar trees, another of the legacies of the mission. Perhaps half the population of Lahul outside the Pattan valley lives in Kyelang, along with the best traders, the richest farmers and some of the leading Thakurs or the old barons of Lahul. Three of the best known monasteries of the valley are within a few miles of this village, so that in its streets may be seen not only the temporal but also the spiritual elite of Lahul.

Although it can claim none of the distinctions which have made Kyelang the seat of the district administration, Kaza has become the seat of the tehsil administration of Spiti. It is not as large as Rangrik, the largest village of Spiti, not as fertile as Kyibber and Lossar, the two highest villages, not as historic as Dangkar, not as sacred to the pilgrim as Kyi which boasts of the biggest monastery of the valley, nor the centre of trade or a junction of tracks, nor a pleasant place in any way because it lacks even the awesome grandeur of much of the rest of Spiti. It was chosen to be the tehsil office only because the Nonos of Kiuling, the hereditary sub-magistrates of Spiti, have their ancestral seat just across the Spiti from here and used to hold their court at Kaza. Though it is beginning to expand now, when we visited Kaza it was a place of perhaps three or four shops, two or three times as many houses and a suffocating inn for muleteers. One remembers it chiefly as a place where breathing was difficult and a mule was lost while fording the river.

Kalpa is scenically the finest place in the whole of Kinnaur and in many ways justifies its selection as the headquarters of the new district of Kinnaur formed by Himachal Pradesh. It nestles

at the feet of the magnificent Kinner Kailash range, directly below the central peak which rises to more than 21,000 feet. It commands the main route to the Tibetan border, is not very far from the confluence of the Baspa and the Sutlej valley and claims an advantage which even Kyelang does not possess: while Kyelang is about 10 miles short of it Kalpa lies beyond the Inner Line, the barrier which no foreigner has been allowed to cross without a permit since the earliest years when the British recognised that the border with Tibet could some day become a sensitive line for security. This chief village of the valley was popularly known as Chini until the Himachal government, recently renamed it as Kalpa, reviving a name left behind by tradition.

The ranges which enclose these valleys are pierced by a number of passes of varying fame and much notoriety since there is not one among them which does not frequently claim the lives of travellers. Across a broad saddle between Lahul, Spiti and the routes to Tibet, near the north-eastern face of the arc, lies the Bara La Cha (translated by some, from Tibetan, as "a pass surmounted by a cross-road") which gives both Lahul and Spiti access into each other and into Ladakh. Although it is the gentlest of the passes in this area it is 16,000 feet high and is the earliest to become snowbound. Closer to the middle of the arc, Lahul and Spiti are separated from each other by a short off-shoot of the mid-Himalayan range, the Kunzum ridge, with a pass of the same name at 15,000 feet. This is the next to be shut down by snows.

Across the mid-Himalayas themselves are two passes, both better known than the Bara La Cha or the Kunzum, which lead from the headwaters of the Beas into the valley of the Chandra: the Hampta pass at 14,000 feet which is heartily disliked for the difficulties it offers, and the Rohtang pass at 13,400 feet, which literally means "a heap of bones". The former usually becomes impassable by early October but unusually at any time of the year since heavy snowfalls have been recorded there in May, June and September. A part of the RAF Mountaineering Association's expedition to Lahul in 1956 was turned back by heavy snows on the Hampta in May, and another expedition found the pass obstructed by September snows two years later. The Rohtang pass closes any time in October. Both the Rohtang and the Hampta passes open into a backyard of Lahul, but from here a path leads upstream along the banks of the Chandra to the Kunzum ridge,

over which the Kunzum pass leads into Spiti.

Kinnaur has a few surprisingly good outlets—over the Shipki La, at 12,000 feet, into Tibet; along the banks of the Spiti river, also at 12,000 feet, into Spiti (other routes into Spiti, though shorter, are higher and more hazardous); and along the banks of Sutlej towards Simla, crossing the Narkanda ridge at only 9,000 feet which is snowbound only for about two months in the year and even that not for many days at a time. Other passes, which lead from Lahul to Chamba or from Kinnaur to Garhwal or from any of these valleys into Tibet, are practically unnamed and much more difficult for the ordinary traveller. They are used only by the sturdy shepherds and after September by hardly anyone at all.

This situation is beginning to change under the pressure of the border emergency. Where the pressure is greatest, as in Ladakh, the change is more marked. Even in the middle of November, 1963, at the time of my last departure for Leh, army convoys were still using the road over the Fatu La and journeys over the Chang La by vehicles other than jeeps had only just been called off. Elsewhere also changes are bound to occur, especially in traffic over the Rohtang Pass from Manali into Lahul. The second most ambitious road undertaking which owes its origin to the Chinese threat—the first is the new Hindustan-Tibet road to Kalpa and beyond that to the border—is the new route, yet to be developed, to Leh. This will go over the Rohtang and the Bara La Cha to penetrate Ladakh from the south-east instead of the present route over the Fatu La which comes in from the south-west. The new route will be deeper inside Indian territory and therefore safer than the present one which, at Kargil, is only between a mile and four miles from parts of Kashmir territory held by Pakistan. It is also dominated at this point by a hill-feature held by Pakistan. The new road will also cut the distance between Leh and the nearest railhead, Mandi, which is only half as far away as Pathankot, the present railhead for Ladakh. Once this road is developed, enough will be done about the intervening passes to keep them open for bulk traffic for a longer part of the year than they are at present. But these changes still belong to the future and do not alter the fact that life in these valleys has been shaped by the severe isolation to which they have been subjected in the past. The principal cause of the isolation is the early closing of the passes which, at the time of our treks four

years ago had followed a routine, unvaried over the centuries, that except the road over the Narkanda ridge, all routes and passes into these valleys are shut down by snow for about half the year and sometimes more. The snow may lie only three or four feet thick as in the more arid areas of Spiti, upper Kinnaur or parts of Ladakh, or it may be as much as 20 or 25 feet deep as in the Pattan valley and the lower reaches of the Chandra and Bhaga valleys. But everywhere a long period of hibernation begins, when movement outside the house is virtually impossible. It is partly to ease the isolation with neighbours that houses are huddled together, especially in the Pattan and Spiti valleys, sometimes with passages running from one to another. But the world beyond the immediate neighbours is out of reach. Work in the field comes to a stop, the schools are shut and even the cattle wealth of each family has to be crowded into the house in the ground floor barn and fed on dry fodder which the family remains busy collecting throughout the summer months. The family's own food of dried meat and pounded cereals and fuel of scanty twigs barely lasts these months, but there is compensation in the indoor work which each family now puts through, mainly mending, repairing, making the sturdy shoes and weaving the coarse woollen cloth, the pattoo, which everyone wears throughout the year.

When the snow begins to melt, the heftiest animal in the barn, the yak, is taken out to perform an amazing feat on the high passes. This heavy, panting monster of stored up energy with his huge shoulder muscles, scouts the snow with sensitive feet and his footsteps become the trail for men to follow over the treacherous snow. Because the passes are uneven, especially the major ones which lead out of the valleys like the Rohtang, the Kunzum and the Hampta, the strength of snow under the foot is unpredictable and mishaps are common. But with an intelligence and judgement not to be suspected in an animal of such brute appearance, the yak picks his way around the pitfalls even where the surface suggests no clues to the eye and becomes an invaluable pathfinder for men and loaded mules. In valleys where the yak is scarce the same role is played by sheep and goats and sometimes by mules, but not with the same unerring instinct.

My acquaintance with this area grew by stages. A trek over the Rohtang pass in much younger days was followed about ten

years ago by a flight into Leh, which gave me my first glimpse of such stark aridity, of the hazards of a journey across Himalayan ranges, and of the strangeness of these areas to a person from the plains of northern India. The air route from Srinagar had been familiar to some pilots of the Indian Air Force for a year or two. But the civilian aircraft which I was permitted to board, after much pleading with "higher authorities", was the first to be allowed to make this flight. My co-passengers were some sheep of a breed being introduced into Ladakh for the first time as an aid to local economy, and their keepers. The latter were carrying into Ladakh what had impressed them most in the bazaars of Srinagar—some kerosine oil lamps and a petromax lamp to replace or supplement their wick-and-butter lamps which at best give a little glow, some acrid smell and much smoke of a heavy, soot-laden type. They also carried lengths of mill-made cloth of garish designs. These obviously would soon replace their own home-made and far more colourful textiles.

A journey which a mule-caravan takes a fortnight was completed in 90 minutes. But the slightest mischance or a miscalculation in the pilot's cabin could have made this one's last journey. That is why in the glass bubble of the cabin the pilot sat unrelaxingly with a set face, vigilant eyes and hands which alertly darted every now and again from knob to needle and back to the stick. Behind the pilot sat the navigator, droning out a constant stream of instructions while alternately he pored over a largescale map and a pair of magnifiers built into the floor of the aircraft. Uneasiness surrounded the passengers like a vapour which makes breathing difficult. Therefore no one was surprised when a Muslim pilgrim returning from the Hedjaz rolled out his mat as soon as we landed and offered prayerful thanks for the safe end of the journey.

Half an hour after we left Srinagar on our way to Leh we found that the country spread out below us was no longer the green and gentle vale of Kashmir but the most awesome scrambling together of snowfields and rocky eminences that can be seen anywhere in the world. Some of the most famous mountains stood out bright and clear in the sunny skies on either side of us. The Nanga Parbat, Mount Godwin-Austen, Nanda Devi, Nun Kun and many other peaks which have been made famous by international expeditions moved past us like landmarks in a railway journey.

With the same unruffled looks with which one would pick one's way down a familiar street, the pilot would identify various river beds or snow-peaks and glaciers, which were his only guides in this breath-takingly beautiful isolation. He would point to some famous mountain peak still a few minutes flight ahead of us, and tell me that from there he would take a step turn to the right, up to the sparkling waters of such and such a river; and then he would fly upstream along the course of the river to such and such a glacier of unusual expanse. And then he flew his aeroplane along the route he had picked as anyone else might drive a car down a road in New Delhi, marked with roadsigns and traffic signals. Before our wondering eyes had become used to the glittering snow scenes around us he had landed the plane on the vast and arid plateau of Ladakh, where a solitary one-room building, with nothing like radio control or a searchlight in it, marked his landing strip.

Of the difficulties of the flight we had our first glimpse even before we took off from Srinagar. While we waited at the airport, the pilot and his crew cancelled and restored the flight at least two or three times within the course of an hour. The eyes of a layman like myself could discover no change in the skies which would either justify the flight's cancellation or its restoration. But the pilot pointed to a little ball of a cloud which lay wedged in between two rocky cliffs a little above the horizon. He said the flight could not be attempted until this cloud disappeared. But since the rest of the sky was as blue as one could hope for, this appeared to us a very fastidious precaution to take. We were shortly to discover how mistaken we had been.

In those days the airfield at Leh used to be a very rudimentary affair, with a runway much shorter than was needed. The only aircraft it could take were unable to fly at the only altitudes one would have considered sufficiently high to be safe, because at a lower height there was always the risk of collision with treacherous hillsides. Unable to fly higher, the aircraft in which we flew had to stick dangerously to narrow and winding valleys, flanked by steep mountains which rose a few thousand feet above us on both sides. The pilot took sharp twists and turns, like a scooter driver on a road congested with traffic, and even then he appeared nearly to graze the walls of the valley.

At one stage of the journey we were flying over an area which

was especially dense with craggy mountains. The valley narrowed on both sides of us, and the only movement possible was forward, strictly along the axis of the valley. After two or three minutes we saw a mountain barrier which appeared to stretch right across our path, and at the same time appeared to be much higher than our line of flight. When I looked at the pilot, he did not show the slightest sign of concern, and instead he said with a laugh "that is what we call the gateway". He kept flying towards the mountainside which he had so laughingly dismissed, and when we were dangerously near it (or so it seemed to us), he took a sharp turn to the left, made a steep ascent in altitude, and in one leap cleared the barrier through a narrow gap. This is where the cloud had been when we viewed the gap from Srinagar and the need for caution now became obvious. Once we had crossed "the gateway" we could see ahead of us the brown crumbling, dried up mountains of Ladakh which give it the appearance of a desert.

How vastly different was the second flight to Leh, about ten years later! We took off from Chandigarh, not Srinagar, the distance was twice as long, the route entirely different and only the time taken was almost the same. We did not land at what would barely have passed for an airfield, its landing strip only a patch of the dusty plain which the local population had just cleared of the stones. It was a double track runway of perforated steel plate. A larger runway of concrete was just being completed—and during a casual count on a single morning we saw planes landing and taking off within less than three minutes of each other. Our cargo contained a few sheep this time also, but only for the kitchens of the army, the rest of it reflected the vast and varied needs of the army at the front. The plane, a transport of the Indian Air Force carrying a gun in the tail, had a pressurized cabin for the passengers and the crew, and its gas masks were a little-used facility. It flew at more than 30,000 feet, not only above the mountain peaks but also above all turbulence of the weather. From the huge glass bubble in the nose of the plane, equipped with radar for the navigator we could see up to the horizon on three sides without a hillside or a peak obstructing the view. The famous mountains were visible still, their summits peeping out of the calm ocean of clouds which lay below us; but they seemed far off and of little consequence.

The glamour of ten years ago had gone, replaced by safety.

Six years after the first flight to Leh, I walked up to Bijli Mahadev, in Kulu valley, which supplements from the ground the impression of tumultuous mountains one had gathered from the air during the flight from Srinagar to Leh. The temple of Bijli Mahadev is a tiring eight-mile walk and a climb of about 4,000 feet from Kulu. But the end of the journey is as good a reward as I have ever seen for a similar effort in the hills. A sense of ease and spaciousness hangs about this place like a quiet perfume. It made one wish that one had the time to spend a night on the downy brown of its pine needle carpet which lies spread out in a clearing beyond a final belt of trees. At the edge of the clearing is the brown and rocky bluff on which the temple stands. Perhaps it is a very important temple and very sacred to its devotees. To those who are interested in them, it offers fascinating and elaborate legends about the annual destruction of the idol by lightening and its mysterious reconstruction, unaided by human hands. But how superfluous it appeared to me, because no temple can produce the rapture which this landscape communicates to anyone who would let it. In this panoramic vision of endless creation, every hill seemed a transfigured devotee, kneeling in more constant thankfulness than any man can render.

In the heavenly circle which this peak discloses, one arc of the horizon stumbles sharply down the hill more than 4,000 feet to where Kulu lies tidily spread out like a town in a toy land. The miniature farms of Bhuntar are seen on one side and those of Kulu on the other while in between and all around lies a world of terrace cultivation like a largescale map in high relief. Near Bhuntar is the passionate confluence of the Beas and Parvati though from this height it appears a most indolent meeting, with all the fury of the Parvati drained out of it by the distance.

But much of the rest of the vast circle of landscape is a shimmering snowline, iridescent in the setting sun in which I saw it. The mountains of the Spiti border in the direction of the Pin-Parvati pass, the snow fields on the approaches to the Hampta pass, the snow peaks which flank the Rohtang pass, a few of the giant peaks of Bara Banghal—all these lie spread out to view like the choicest items in some glittering, heavenly dowry for man.

Five years ago one made an unprepared attempt to reach the

Hampta pass, with neither enough time nor equipment and unaware that a year later we would be making a more elaborately thought out trek into the valleys, starting again with the same delightful first leg, from Manali to Chatru, the usual night halt before crossing the pass. Allowing ourselves only two days for what needs at least three, we returned to Manali in a state of exhaustion but the richer by a fund of some pleasurable hours.

The delights of the Hampta trek begin at the starting point because the first landmark of the route is the bridge over the Beas at Manali, a swaying unsteady looking work of tree-trunks and wooden planks which is nevertheless more beautiful (and certainly more appropriate to the surroundings) than a structure of steel.

The river is still the pure and dazzling colour of melting snows, still undimmed by the silt of the hills further downstream. It broadens out here into a cool froth after its roaring, boiling run through the gorges upstream, near Kothi.

Across the bridge the road splits into two forks stretched out in opposite directions: to the left and upstream, Kothi, Rahla, the Rohtang and Lahul as many signboards proclaim with urgency; to the right and downstream, as muleteers rather than signboards point out, Prini, the Hampta village, the Hampta Pass and Spiti. For over two miles the path is almost a road but only, as you discover at Prini, because it is also the way to Naggar, much further downstream and a former capital of Kulu. At Prini it splits again in two, or rather into a two-thirds and a third. The "road" goes to Naggar and a narrow path over boulders starts you on the steep climb to Hampta which improves later on but on this and some other stretches is barely "muleable" (Why not this word, seeing how many roads have been declared "jeepable" and lately even "truckable"?).

From Prini (below 7,000 feet) to the Hampta village, from there to Thandapani and thence to Sethan at 11,000 feet is an arduous but a delightful trek of about seven miles, alternately climbing up hot and bare hillsides where the path is a thick carpet of dust, or through cool forests with sloping floors of blue iris or across large and sunny glades blown about by the purest breeze—there is nothing here of the mule-stench of trading caravans which hangs over camping sites on the Rohtang trek. Sethan itself is a gem. It is a cluster of clean looking houses (much cleaner looking

than the people) which crown a grazing field and with their prayer flags fluttering in the wind and the sun seem irrepressibly gay. Its people, as of many other villages here commanding high ravines, are partly of Tibetan descent. Change of cultivation, from a coarse and at one time wild variety of rice to potato, has brought new prosperity to the village. Hence a number of new houses, still being built or just completed, the latter with glass-paned windows instead of crude apertures in the wall which have to be boarded up in winter or during the rains. We halted a few minutes here for a chat with the farmers and moved on to Chikka, the base for climbing the Hampta pass.

From Sethan Chikka is about two miles and a drop of about 1,000 feet to the banks of the Hampta Nal, a stream fed by glaciers, and then across. With a little thought and some expenditure this stretch could be made as safe as any other, but at present it doesn't inspire much confidence, as one discovered quite by chance.

Crossing Sethan much later in the afternoon than one should we asked a handsome Gaddi shepherd about the way to Chikka. His first bit of reassuring answer: "The only bridge over the Nal has been washed away. You will have to cross the torrent by a snowcap."

And where would we find the snowcap? "See those three mountains across the valley?" He pointed to three steep and rocky eminences which, as far as we could make out in the fading light, were all alike. "Skirt the base of the first. On the brow of the second you will find three snowslips. Aim at the middle one and track it to its bottom. It spans the Nal with its foot." To raise one's morale perhaps he added this for good measure: "Keep bearing to the left. If you go right you will be lost."

A shallow saucer of a plain with a bitter cold wind screaming down the mountainsides and the Nal roaring at the edge is all that is Chikka. How one could do with a log of fire here, and something more firm to spend the night in than a midget tent on frozen ground! But the discomfort of the night is amply rewarded by the first gorgeous sight in the morning of the mountain peaks, a good 15,000 or 16,000 feet high, which lead you to the Hampta Pass, itself over 14,000 feet and nearly 1,000 feet higher than Rohtang.

The Hampta Pass, like the Rohtang, is a gap in the Pir Panjal

range, a limb of the mid-Himalaya. This stretch of the range (there is another, similarly named, between Jammu and Kashmir, pierced by the Banihal Pass) starts north of where the Beas begins and separates the head of the Kulu Valley from the lower reaches of the river Chandra before it meets the Bhaga to form the Chenab. Up to Rohtang the range travels eastwards and then in a sweeping curve broken only by the Hampta Pass it moves south-east to separate the Kulu Valley from the middle reaches of the Chandra and from the Spiti Valley.

To the right of the pass is the 20,000-foot Deo Tibba, its peak surmounted by a strange formation which looks from a distance exactly like a South Indian temple, complete with a towering "gopuram", but is only an optical illusion according to a local legend.

The most vivid sensation of being "away from it all" begins in these seven miles from Chikka at 10,000 to the foot of the pass at nearly 14,000. The climb is not so tiresome as on the last dreary ascent to Rohtang, and instead of the bleakness which stuns the mind as you approach that pass you are enticed here through fold after fold of Alpine charm—and in utter stillness, which only adds enchantment to the visual beauty of hillsides clothed in a million flowers. The Hampta Nal, which keeps you riotous company throughout the uneasy night at Chikka now plunges into caverns of snow and flows, unseen and unheard, beneath the frozen floor of the valley. The winds do not rise till high noon and the hours before that are drenched in silence.

The risks of the journey add edge to its delight. For most of the way beyond Chikka there is not even the semblance of a path. Either you have to cling as best you may to narrow tracks made in steep hillsides by herds of goat or descend to the dip of the valley and slither along on snow as hard as ice—it gives a firm enough foothold when it is level but can be very slippery over the slightest incline.

Most of the time one found this tracklessness to be only a thrill. But a few hundred yards from the pass and at a height of perhaps 13,700 feet it became an annoyance. The valley broadens out here into a small tableland and the Nal, before it burrows into its bed of snow, breaks into numerous rills, each a separate wayward stream. Forewarned by no one, we veered to the wrong side of the valley and soon found ourselves enmeshed in a watery network.

Just as we saw hopes at last of breaking through, we met two Spitials coming down the pass—perhaps the first men to cross the pass this season. They warned us that our only possible route now pointed backwards!

And then finally and four years ago, another departure from Manali for the Hampta pass, for a longer trek and for the first chance of a close acquaintance with Lahul and Spiti, in the company of a party of senior officials of the Punjab government, headed by Mr. E. N. Mangat Rai, at that time its Chief Secretary, and including his wife, Champa.

The start was delayed by the usual things—the right number of mules not turning up at the right time, the loads being of unsuitable sizes and shapes, last minute doubts about the medical kit, a hitch in the kitchen which leads to fears of starvation later in the day. But by sunrise the pleasant hill resort of Manali on the banks of the river Beas was already behind us, lost in the folds of the mountains we had already crossed. By the middle of the afternoon we had again set up our camps at Chikka, but this time successfully to cross over the next day to the other side of the mid-Himalayan barrier. Few journeys in India offer such an abrupt change of scene as a trek from one side of the mid-Himalaya to the other. Chikka, at 10,000 feet, is still surrounded by green, almost forested hillsides and any clearing contains a wealth of florescence—daisies, edelweiss, pink and blue forget-me-nots, buttercups, white and purple anemones and rhododendron flowers ranging from a pale mauve to flaming red. Walking towards the Hampta pass from Chikka many members of our party and especially Champa and Bali, our visionary looking guide, wove for themselves heavy garlands and nosegays of a great variety of flowers, many of them brilliantly multi-coloured. At the foot of the pass there was a wild splendour of yellow. Thick bushes which we could not identify threw up tight clusters of small yellow flowers, dotting with brilliance the grey sands of the Hampta Nal, a stream of glacial origin.

But on the other side of the pass, just a day's march from Chikka, Chatru which is not much more than 10,000 feet in altitude, offers only stone-dust and majestic cliffs of barren rock. There is a glacial stream near Chatru also, but instead of the sparkling blue-green waters of the Hampta Nal, its waters are

murky and loaded with silt. It tumbles down a steep hillside on which there is not a blade of grass to bind the soil, so that silt and stones come cascading downhill with the water. The pre-eminence of silt, stone and torrents increases as one goes deeper into Spiti.

To the bleak and lunar landscape of Spiti—as also of the major part of Ladakh, Lahul and upper Kinnaur—the Hampta pass gives a fitting introduction. At one time it used to be well enough maintained to be fit for mule traffic. But when the Rohtang pass was brought to its present stage of development, with an improved surface and even a restaurant in a shack made of sandbags which is used mostly by muleteers, the Hampta pass fell into decay till nothing remained even to show the track. The climb near the top is over a heap of unstable rocks, craggy and awkwardly poised in a tangle, to which local porters have given the nick-name "the stairway to grief". The foothold the stairs offer is so precarious that mules have to be abandoned at Chikka and the baggage reduced to human loads.

Across the top the difficulties increase, if that is possible. The decline is so steep that some of it has to be negotiated by crawling on one's bottom. When the snow lies heavy (as it did not in the year we crossed the pass) an unsure footfall can prove dangerous as Nalini Jayal, now Deputy Commissioner of the district of Kinnaur, confirmed from personal experience. Over breakfast at Kalpa he told me the story. In 1956 (he was then in the Indian Air Force) he accompanied the RAF Mountaineering Association's expedition to Lahul. He was ahead of the other members of the party when he reached the top of the pass, after a climb made doubly arduous by heavy snowfall. He remembers turning round to tell the others to rope up, but thereafter remembers only a slip of the foot and a sudden, swishing fall down the other side.

In the financial accounts of the officials with whom I travelled there is an entry which the auditors of a secular State can only wink at. It says: "To Amba Datt for the Hampta God—eight annas." But in that phrase is buried a sense of emotional release which many of us do not frequently experience. The climb up to the pass had been more difficult than we had expected: the ascent was more steep, the rock more tiring, the boulders more menacing. At times the pass bordered on the dangerous at least for town dwellers like us whose acquaintance with the mountains

is at best fitful. We had been warned to make the crossing before noon—crossings in the afternoon are considered risky because of high winds and the danger from rocks or from slips of glaciers. But we were a couple of hours behind schedule and still far from the top when the steep and winding "stairway" slowed us down further and demoralised some. Meanwhile a loud boom on our right suggested that some expanse of snow had already tumbled.

Therefore the hardiest among us were visibly relieved when we reached the top, which is marked by a huge vertical boulder with coloured rags or selected stones placed at the foot by grateful travellers. This is the god of the Hampta, whose terrible countenance is the rock-strewn waste at the top of the pass. While we waited near it for the stragglers to catch up someone suggested that an offering should be made in gratefulness and everyone who would have scoffed at the idea at Chandigarh meekly handed a little bit to Amba Datta, an attendant with the party, to be placed at the feet of the god. It must have been the most natural thing to do in the circumstances, for how else would reassurance have flooded the hearts of all of us so suddenly?

From similar emotions, which time congeals into superstition, a familiar part of the landscape of the valleys has sprung. Wherever rivers have to be forded or risky passes crossed or danger encountered in any other form, there the people erect memorials (called chorten in Ladakh, Spiti and Lahul and shughars in upper Kinnaur) which are either crudely shaped out of piled up stones or gracefully shaped into an elaborate bell like structure, and in either case constantly decorated with bits of coloured cloth by grateful wayfarers. Some time oddly shaped trees are put to the same use or else a rock to which the winds have given a striking form. The powerful response of the local people then invests these inert objects with a reputation for supernatural potencies. At the approaches to villages long walls are sometimes seen, built out of delicately carved stones which carry the unvarying formula of the Budhist prayer, *Om Mane Padme Hum*. But these have another significance too, that the man who causes the wall to be built and any one who places on it a stone inscribed with the magic words earns merit at the hands of heavenly powers. In this sense the Mane walls do not differ much from the recitation of the scriptures arranged by the well-to-do followers of many other faiths either to avert an impending misfortune or in thank-

fulness for one averted. Only, in the atmosphere of the valleys, where everything emphasises the smallness of man compared with the elements, the stones of the Mane wall acquire special powers or at least a reputation for them. The superstitious always leave a Mane wall to the right as they pass it, never to the left, even if to do so they have to make a considerable detour. It is considered a sin, from which escape is regarded as impossible, to remove a stone and to take it away even though the motive may be the worthy one of cherishing an interesting piece of carving. A forest officer who was our walking companion during a part of an earlier trek, a man too well educated to be given to avoidable superstitions recounted how, in disregard of the warnings of the feeble-minded, (as he considered them to be) he removed a stone from a Mane wall in Spiti. For a long time nothing unfortunate came to pass, and he was confirmed in his healthy cynicism. But then illness broke out in his family with such virulence and persistence that his thoughts turned again to the stone. He persuaded a friend journeying into Spiti to restore the stone to the very wall from where he had taken it himself, and thereafter of course it was inevitable that when the illness finally left his family he should attribute it to this act of expiation.

But the jurisdiction of the Hampta god seems to be limited. It does not extend beyond the pass, or else the goodwill we thought we had won would not have deserted us later the same day when we were exposed to the most difficult moments of the entire trek through all the valleys.

After crossing the pass we descended into the valley of an unnamed tributary of the Chandra. The next stage of our route, which had to be covered before dusk, lay on the other bank of the tributary but crossing over to it was impossible at this late hour of the afternoon. We had violated, though against our wishes, another of the axioms of trekking in the mountains, that snow-fed streams must be forded well before mid-day, before the melting of snows under the sun swells the stream to proportions and a swiftness too dangerous for a crossing. Bridges are scarce in the outlying branches of the Chandra valley, and still more scarce in Spiti as we were repeatedly to discover in the course of our journey.

The safest thing would have been to wait for day-break. But hoping to reach the dak bungalow at Chatru before nightfall we had sent back our tents at Chikka with the muleteers who were

returning to Manali—and camping without tents at 13,000 feet in an isolated pocket in the mountains was unthinkable. Therefore we were forced to the unwise alternative of proceeding downstream on the wrong bank of the tributary along a path which did not exist.

We made a start and for an hour or so we had no regrets because the terrain was gentle and offered no difficulty. But then came a spot where the only possible route lay across the face of a flat, featureless rock, sloping at probably 60 degrees towards the swift current of the stream below. A carcass placed anywhere on the rock face would have rolled into the waters below in a matter of seconds, without meeting any obstacle on the way to break its fall. Once more we were to regret that we had not brought our tents along, though we knew that bringing them over the Hampta pass also would have been extremely difficult.

We were rescued again by the people who had helped us over the Hampta—a road gang of local labourers under a tireless and intrepid leader from the plains. The latter surveyed the rock from the near edge and decided to gamble on a crack, a mere line of a fault in the rock which would give his men a foothold only a few inches deep. On this he spaced out about ten of his most sure-footed men, close enough to each other to pass us on from hand to hand. Within the reach of their extended arms and clawing the rock sideways with our hands instead of walking on it with our feet, we crawled across in single file. Mr. Mangat Rai issued a strict injunction that no one should make a start until the person preceding him had reached safety at the other end—obviously a wise precaution, since if one man had tumbled while others were also crossing, everyone would have lost nerve or clawhold and tumbled as well, to the same grave of ice-cold foam.

The next few days were uneventful, and we were grateful for that! The strongest sensation of the next morning was derived from looking back on the treacherous rock-face we had crossed with difficulty. Our journey now lay on the far side of the Chandra, from where we could get good a look at the nameless gorge of the rock on the other side—a good look but from a safe distance! At Sethan we had said a long good-bye to human habitation. Chikka, Chatru, Chotta Durra, Barra Durra, Batal, Kunzum, Shitikar, Thakche—this long succession of names which were to be our overnight halts or brief resting places on a five-day march

are only dots on the map and sometimes not even that. Each is distinguished from the surrounding wilderness only by a little water and some grass, but none of them has any permanent dwelling of the people of the valley, not the meanest hamlet nor a square yard of cultivation. Each may be populated from time to time by a mule caravan making an overnight halt but in the morning each reverts to desolation, being the richer only by a few more burnt stones and the ashes of twigs. For the past few summers a little more prolonged encampments have been made by road labour, but even these move on when the allotted task is finished, and though their legacy to the dot may be slightly more substantial it is usually nothing more than a few stones piled up to mark a place of worship or of thanksgiving.

For five days we moved up and down between altitudes of 12,000 feet and 15,000 but neither at the higher level nor the lower did we find any evidence that any one had ever made a permanent home here. For the first four days a long range of mountains stood to our right which separates the Chandra valley from the fairly well populated valleys of the Beas and the Parvati. To our left was an even higher complex of mountains whose peaks enclose the enormous Kulti glacier system. On the fifth day we crossed the Kunzum and left the Chandra valley behind us. Then we had on our right the watershed between the Spiti and the Parvati rivers and on our left the mountain ranges which lead to the Bara La Cha pass and the Chandra Tal (or lake) where the Chandra river starts. For more than half this journey the high conical peak of the Shigri mountain kept us constant company and we also had a fine view of the Shigri glacier, both on the right bank of the Chandra. The route from Chatru to Batal used to be on the right bank at one time, across the mile-long snout of the Shigri glacier. But it has now been shifted to the left bank which offers a much broader view of the glacier and one that lasts nearly a whole day's march. At Batal however one has to cross over to the right bank again to start the climb to the Kunzum pass.

But in spite of these peaks and glaciers in the near distance, and in spite of the large tracts of the muddy snow of previous years on which we had to walk even on the right bank, especially between Barra Durra and Batal, it was difficult to believe that we were travelling at an altitude ranging around 14,000 feet. The

sun was piercingly hot and the scalded landscape shimmered in a heat haze. The air was hot and dry—the annual rainfall here is about two inches—and whenever the sun fell directly on us we had to stop repeatedly to dip our handkerchiefs in wayside streams to keep our faces and necks cool with fresh moisture. The heat of the sun bounced back from the dust and the mica-loaded rock of the route to make walking a strain on the eyes.

On the other hand the shade and, even more, the night could be bitterly cold. The next halt after Batal is Shitikar. Here, on our way back we were caught in a fine drizzle of rain during the day and a heavy downpour at night which made the cold push needles into our backs from the floor of the tents while outside the chill hung about us like a malicious fog. Two wet nights at Chikka, this year and the year before, had acquainted us with this kind of discomfort but not with its intensity in an exposed place like Shitikar and at a much higher altitude. The discomfort was made much worse by the uncertainties which surrounded the next stage of the trek, the journey over the Bara La Cha. Each inquiry that we made about the likely weather there from our porters or mulemen or from passing shepherds brought a contradictory reply, while the cold seeped through our morale.

Practically from the start of the Spiti valley but more especially from Kioto downwards our path was flanked by huge embattlements of rock which appeared to be hard themselves but sent immense volumes of gravel and shingle cascading down to the river below, leaving not even a ledge of rock or stable soil on which a road may be based where the heaps lay across the alignment. The engineering problems they will present when they lie in the path of roads meant for motorised traffic are obvious. They cannot be shifted out of the way, and an alignment can neither be pushed through them nor laid across them. But in terms of the sights of Spiti these heaps are something to marvel at. One of the largest plains in the valley, at Pangmo, which has been suggested by the Punjab government as the site for an airfield, is a surprising mound of gravel which has absolutely smooth walls of such an evenly graded incline that they might have been machined. The top, which measures about a mile and a half in length and about half as much in width is so even that with a little effort it could be made as level and smooth as a reasonably good play-

field. Elsewhere the heaps are evenly sloped cones of rubble which rest against the rock from which they have descended.

A geological note on Spiti says that the importance of the valley to the geologist lies in that "here is an almost unbroken series of marine deposits dating from the earliest era in which animal life is known to have occurred on the earth to one of the latest geological periods." The rock structure it says is "the Tibetan zone which extends through Kanawar and Spiti into Lahul and affords an almost unbroken sequence of sedimentary deposits ranging from the Cambrian to Cretaceous." Rock, rubble and river combine to give Spiti its fascinating profile: steep, towering, cliffs of hard rock at the outer edges of the picture, next the cone heaps of rubble which lie tilted against the rock, next and closest to the centre the flat, soft and yielding plateaus of gravel which must have been the river bed once, and at the centre the river itself which, in a single stream or several, keeps cutting deeper and deeper into the bed, creating banks which are straight and steep and make it impossible to put the water to use in the fields. That the plains of heaped gravel were once the bed of the river is shown by their sloping sides, which contain layers of the conglomerate which a river like the Spiti sweeps down from the mountains.

These features of the Spiti landscape extend well beyond the frontiers of this valley. They are to be seen as much in the Hungrang valley, the uppermost part of the Kalpa valley and closest to Spiti, as in the upper portions of the Chandra and Bhaga valleys, the plateau of Ladakh and, according to descriptions brought by travellers, in the Jaskar and Lingti plains which lie between Spiti and Ladakh. The causes are the same nearly everywhere: extremely low rainfall, extreme scarcity of vegetation and the damage done by high winds and heavy snows. This is what makes the areas closest to the Tibetan border a bleak land of terrifying erosion where crumbling hillsides assume weird shapes and rocks become a dried up mass of rubble. For miles together there is not a morsel of soil on them and even in the so-called months of monsoon their stark nudity remains wholly unclothed by vegetation. The sun pierces them in summer, the frost shatters them in winter and with high winds or melting snows their fragments crumble into the valleys below. In the swift flowing streams of the mountains the broken hillsides become an immeasurable

quantity of silt which creates formidable problems for expensive projects like the Bhakra dam.

But considering the hardship that geography imposes on these areas, what is more striking is not their aridity or desolation but the amazing quality of agriculture wherever it occurs. And, oddly, the finest crops are to be seen in areas which, being closer to the border, are more starkly inhospitable. The reason however is not that aridity helps agriculture but that these areas are inhabited by Bhots and Kanets of Mongol origin who must be counted among the finest farmers of India. The potato and barley yields they achieve are higher than in the plains even though they lack all artificial manures and their irrigation facilities are of the most rudimentary kind. Only the diligence and hard work of the farmers and some excellent home-grown techniques explain the lush fields of Spiti and upper Kinnaur though elsewhere, in the Pattan valley in Lahul and most of Kinnaur below Kalpa, especially in the Baspa valley, nature also lends a more kindly hand. Here water is a little more plentiful, the slope of the soil a little more helpful, the flat areas are more extensive and therefore a larger acreage is under cultivation though yields are a little lower, especially at the lower end of the Pattan valley and in parts of the Baspa valley which are inhabited by Kanets of Hindu origin and Rajput and Brahmin immigrants from Kulu and Chamba. In the middle reaches of the Kinnaur valley, between the Hungrang and Baspa valleys, there are also some villages which can boast of apples, grapes and walnuts of a surprisingly good quality. There are apples in some villages in Ladakh which for sweetness and perfume would put the best produce of Kashmir to shame.

What hinders the spread of agriculture and fruit culture, apart from the severe limitations imposed by a very meagre working season and shortage of water and cultivable land, are a complex of superstitions and the primitive state of communications. The institutions of lamaism have played a most beneficial part in keeping down the population and therefore the pressure on land. But they, especially the monasteries, have developed in this process a vested interest in restraining agriculture also, lest its extension should make it possible for the population to expand and for the functions of the monasteries to decline. A fear of curses has lived in the minds of the people up to very recent times, preventing them from tapping new sources of irrigation and an increase in

the area under crops. The most fearful of the curses, according to beliefs promoted by the lamas is that of the *loo* or the water spirit, which is said to protect each source of water to keep it from being tapped. These fears are rapidly declining now and the demand for facilities to develop new water sources grows more rapidly than the capacity of the authorities to satisfy it. But the odd incident occurs even now which harks back to earlier years.

Poor communications are an even greater hurdle than dark fears which inhibit growth. During the whole of the trek through Spiti we did not see a single wheel on the road, not even a wheel barrow, nor a mile of any kind of road which could have taken vehicular traffic. Therefore everything had to be carried by porters or else by mules and horses, the latter being the fastest thing still in the valleys as it has been through the centuries. Things have been improving during the past four or five years, but in the 30 miles of the Pattan valley, undoubtedly the most fertile and productive area in the whole of Ladakh, Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur, there was only one bridge on the Chenab and even that only a foot-bridge, tossed about and sometimes overturned by the winds. One afternoon we watched anxiously for 20 minutes while a man, just one single man, made painful progress over it, halting long enough after each step for the bridge to come to rest again. One or two jhulas completed the sum of facilities for crossing the Chenab until more began to be provided more recently to improve defences.

The Sutlej had only three bridges in upper Kinnaur. Even at Ribba, the village with the best grapes and apples, the river could be crossed only over a jhula, a narrow plank of wood, about one foot by three, suspended by wires and a pulley along a wire-rope stretched about 130 feet across the turbulent stream. The Spiti river had only four jhulas throughout its entire length of 90 miles in Punjab and only three footbridges. All the latter were frail structures of tree-trunks and planks which trembled as you stepped on them. Before crossing one at Rangrik, the biggest village in the valley, we asked if it would be safe for us to do so. We were comfortingly told "Probably safe enough for one man at a time" and as we started walking across it we discovered that the advice was not an exaggeration. Mules, loaded or not, had to wade through the river at all these crossings, which frequently meant that they had to swim through as best they could and casualties

among them were not uncommon. Another footbridge, near Moorang, was an affair of twigs and planks with gaping holes in both. It so scared mules that they had to be pushed across by the muleteers and the day before we were to cross it a frightened mule had lost its load as well as life. The third alone, near the mouth of the Pin valley, was reasonably safe, but even the unsafe ones were remembered with gratitude when we had to ford one swift stream or another riding mules which were up to their bellies in water.

Walking through one valley or another we had glimpses of what it means to provide bridges in these areas. In the Pattan valley I met a man who had been waiting for four days, sitting from morning till evening at the same spot each day, waiting for a single bag of cement to arrive by a mule caravan which was to pass that way. Two stages before Rangrik in the Spiti valley we met teams of porters carrying timber all the way from Manali, in the Kulu valley, for a footbridge over a tributary of the Spiti river, carrying it in a five-day march up the Hampta pass at 14,000 feet, then over the Kunzum at 15,000 feet and then along 60 miles of a cruel road. One morning near Kaza we met 14 persons, both men and women, who were spaced out beneath a length of wire-rope which they were to shoulder for seven days to the site of a proposed jhula. The heavier rope across the Sutlej at Ribba which I saw a few days later had been carried there from Rampur by 80 men in a 14-day march.

These are only a few dramatic details of a proof which is all-pervasive, that what is being done to improve communications is the biggest thing happening in the valleys. But in the meantime, for the traveller of today as for the traveller through the centuries, plodding slowly behind or ahead of the tingling bells of his mule train has its own advantages. Not the least among them is the chance to taste the charms of the odd blue-water stream, tumbling down from some glacier or snow field to meet the traveller made weary by the sun. To dip one's feet in it and to splash its cold waters on the scalded face is a sufficient delight, but a bath is bliss. Some of the most remembered hours of our treks will be those we spent on the banks of the icy *nallahs* or submerged in their waters while our travel schedules wilted in some notebook or the other. Alternately to let the water sweep down one's back and to roast on the hot stones nearby has sensations which do not exist elsewhere.

Another advantage is the acquaintance which a slow journey offers with the people of the valleys and with the odd traveller passing through them. Some of the most rewarding conversations of these weeks were held with people who happened to fall in step with one (or one with them) during one long march or another. Like this we met most of the types which mingle in these valleys now: the *gaddies* or the graziers of Kulu who perform amazing trekking feats as they march for days behind their flocks, sleeping in the open at heights of 16,000 feet and above with only a blanket to cover them and two or three lambs which they put on top of themselves; the Gurkha labourer, pushed by poverty out of his own valleys in Nepal, who comes here each working season after marching for 20 days or 25; the landless ones of lower Kinnaur who are also pushed out by poverty but who rarely venture outside their valley; the Kashmiri labourer, conscious of the special political position of his valley who threatens to complain to "Nehru sahib" against his supervisors; the labourer from the plains of Punjab who is ultimately going to be a colonising element here; the *dak* runner or the age-old carrier of mail, with a bunch of bells tied to his walking staff; the wild looking Khampa soldiery of Tibet, who have all the swagger of the stragglers of an irregular army even when they are busy breaking stones by the roadside; the Tibetan refugees, smooth-faced, hard-working, good at taking their discipline; the occasional lamas, who have come with the Tibetans and without the aid of their scriptures and monasteries try, not always successfully, to keep up their spiritual status; the Hesis or the wandering minstrels and entertainers in all these valleys, whose women have the audacious look of those who have known how to use their charm; and engineers and mechanics from South India who have brought their unfamiliar languages into these, the most northerly corners of India. There are not many Spitials to be seen on the road, because the state of full employment they have in their own villages in the working season is such that they do not have to stir out in search of jobs and love of adventure does not disturb them much.

But the Lahulas and the people of upper Kinnaur returning from their wide-ranging trade journeys make a fine sight as they swing along behind their mules. The Sikh soldiers of Punjab are to be met on the roads in Kinnaur and Spiti, going to or returning from their defence pickets on the Tibetan border, covering more

than 20 miles a day when they go home on leave and so full of the duty done in defending the country that they are not always careful in concealing the location of their exploits. And the shopkeepers of Punjab, the vigilant *banias*, are seen carrying their portly selves into all the valleys as the roads are opened, ready to seize any commercial opportunity that might come their way.

But the most interesting man to be met on the road is the muleteer. His trail is a mixture of flies and stink, but in these valleys where human types are scattered like beads in the play den of a tempestuous child, he is the one constant thread running through all of them, at home with each, needed and welcomed by all and, because of his travels, a fund of information and humour. On his person and in his trade is reflected the process of change which has overtaken the valleys. When the only contact of the valleys with India was at the seasonal trade fairs, the muleteer's only load was the goods he bought and sold at the fairs: wool, pashm, salt, yaks' tails, amber and amulets from Tibet; the grain, cotton piece-goods, tobacco and metal ware which he carried to Tibet; a little of the produce of his own valleys, mainly *kuth* from Lahul and *chilgozas* from Kinnaur; and a little of the things which he needed for himself in his own home. But now, with the times, his load has changed. On his outward journeys he carries the stores which the army needs or the armed border police, whether at the most forward pickets or at base stores which are being rapidly established near the administrative centres of the valleys and at the junctions of major tracks. Ammunition is the most frequent load, followed by gelatine packings for the blast charges used in road construction. His return journeys are either without a load or he carries the goods of soldiers going home on leave or of the units being replaced. And his beat changes as the roads develop, most rapidly in the Simla hills where the great new National Highway Number 22 is being built to replace the old mule track with the fascinating name of the Hindustan-Tibet road. The muleteer and his animals used to be a familiar sight in the bazaars of Simla not so long ago. But since an 80-mile long motor road connected Simla with Rampur-Bushair, the mule train has been pushed that much closer to the Tibetan reaches. In the coming months he will be pushed closer still as the road, which his loads are helping to build, blasts its way ever closer to the border. Mostly he takes the competition in his stride, but the voluble

Lahula is not entirely impersonal when, with a choice selection of words, he greets the jeep which pushes his mules off the track.

With his load and beat, the muleteer himself is changing too. Until a few years ago, he was either a man from Lahul or, more frequently from Rampur-Bushair, said to be the biggest mule junction in Asia at one time and certainly gifted with a stink even now which is equal to that reputation. There were few "outsiders" in his trade because few knew of the earnings to be made in it. But now it has been invaded by men from the plains on the one hand and from Tibet on the other. The man who was traditionally the village potter has come from the plains or from the semi-hill districts of Punjab. His inherited trade had already declined with the coming of machine-made pots and pans of metal. But, with his train of donkeys, he was still in demand as the goods carrier in the village when he heard of the carrying trade opening up in the border valleys, with fancy rates available for any one who (and whose animals) could survive the hazards of the terrain and the weather. The potter-turned-carrier made an entry with his donkeys many years ago but lately has been making a more determined bid. For a year or two he does well with his donkeys and then changes over to mules. The Khampas of Tibet came fully armed with their well-fed mules, refugees like themselves from the Chinese invasion of their country. They were familiar with the weather and the terrain, and their animals were the handsomest under a pack saddle in the valleys. Therefore they made good quickly and continue to be greatly in demand. Their mules are obviously better looked after than of the Lahula, the Bushairi or the Punjabi. They are healthier and better groomed and their harness still has the more colourful trappings they brought with them from Tibet, distinguished by a couple of huge plumes, the yaks' tails, mounted on the head of the mule or suspended from the neck. In their wayside encampments they are now seen as frequently as those of the others, building the same laager at night out of goods off-loaded from the mules, making the same bustle in the morning as breakfast is cooked out of coarse, powdered barley, using the same copper vessels bought in Kulu or Rampur, with tight-shut lids for pressure cooking at high altitudes, and uttering equally blasphemous and harassed sounds as their mules too stray miles away from the encampment in search of very scarce fodder.

There is range and complexity in the muleteer's relations with his mules. He kicks them and beats them, but alternately uses the most endearing terms when he tries to coax them and usually calls them by pretty names, sometimes the names of cinema stars which have strayed up to his ears. He is quite ready to overload the mule in order to earn the extra bit of money; but should a mule fall ill on the way he thinks nothing of spreading a sheet and spending the whole night with the animal until it feels better. Love of a tool which brings him money must be partly responsible, but when he loses a mule as he often does—down the slippery side of a steep ravine or while fording a swift current—he feels a personal loss in which there are other elements too. His relations with those who engage him are also varied. He can be as stubborn as his animals when he argues about his rates. But if he is kindly treated he readily undertakes in the course of the journey jobs which are not his responsibility, and should a squall come or the wind rise suddenly in the course of the night he is as ready with his help as those who are engaged for it. That is why when he makes his laager near the employer's tents, as he often does, the tingling of the mule bells may be disturbance in one's sleep but there is assurance too in that sound.

But farmers or traders, shopkeepers, soldiers, mule men, dancers or labourers, all those who manage to live in the upper reaches of these valleys make one impact in common on the casual visitor from the plains, as all of us were in our trekking party. They are a tremendous proof of man's capacity to survive, even to thrive, in the most adverse physical conditions. We had vaguely heard of the harshness of Spiti or had read about it. But seeing it was an entirely new experience, which shook one more than mere terrain had done till then. But to see in this waste what the farmer achieves without the meanest of mechanical aids or others do so far away from their more comfortable homes was like being given a strong dose of optimism. It proved how greatly even the humblest folk are willing and able to strive to extend the frontiers of their lives.

II

PATTERNS OF LIFE

MONSOON ASIA ENDS in the valleys along India's borders and Central Asia begins. That is why the change in the physical landscape—abrupt in Ladakh, the Hungrang, the Spiti, the Chandra and Bhaga valleys though more gradual elsewhere, especially Kinnaur below Kalpa—is accompanied by other changes as well, in the dress and appearance of the people, their language and institutions, their religion and culture. The place-names, the hills, the people here belong to a different world than the plains of the Ganges, the Jamuna, the Krishna or the Godavari. This combines with physiological factors to heighten the impression on the traveller's mind that the familiar India of flat plains and low hills has been left behind and a country which is excitingly new has begun. The rarefied air makes perception more sharp, the senses more keen, which probably explains why for most of us the feeling of being in unfamiliar surroundings first became strong at Batal, where we also had our first experience of difficulty in breathing.

First intimations of the change come at Manali, at the head of the Kulu valley, and at Rampur-Bushair, the last major outpost of the plainsman in the Sutlej valley. Manali, on the banks of the Beas, has always been the first major halt for the traveller coming into the Kulu valley from Lahul and Spiti over the Rohtang and the Hampta passes. Over the years it has acquired a racial sediment of strong Mongol faces: shop-keepers, inn-keepers, mendicants, vendors, flotsam of all kinds, all huddled into a narrow street off the main bazaar of the town though groups of them may be seen any day elsewhere too, by the side of the river on summer evenings or around a log fire when the nights are more cold. Their main if not the only garment for all seasons is a long coat of coarse wool, gathered at the waist with loose folds above which become capacious pouches for every conceivable purpose. From there the mendicant may pull out his prayer wheel

or rosary, the rogue whatever he may have picked up in a shop, the traveller his bag of powdered barley which is his staple diet, and everyone a bit of tobacco to chew or to put into his pipe, or a wooden cup lined with silver or copper for a wayside drink of water or, as is more common, of *chang,* the barley beer. The *gaddi* shepherds of Kulu wear the same garment too and in the folds across their chest a new-born lamb may sometimes nestle, making one of the prettiest pictures to be seen these hills. A dog I had bought in Spiti was similarly carried across the Rohtang and delivered to me at Manali. Things may change with him as time passes, but so far the Spitial or the man from the Jaskar plateau among these aliens at Manali has not abandoned his habits of uncleanliness for which there might be some justification in the cold and waterless wastes of his home valleys but none in Manali. Even in this comparatively warm place (its altitude does not exceed 7,000 feet) he bathes but rarely and when the crust of uncleanliness on the skin or in the hair becomes uncomfortably thick he rubs in a wad of butter and rubs it off. The women stick to the custom of their homes never to undo the tight plaits of hair on their heads once they have been made, with not a little ceremony, at birth. Only death can part them even now. Rampur-Bushair has been the inland port for much of the trade and traffic with western Tibet, which was once voluminous though in the past four or five years it has become a casualty in the Sino-Indian conflict. Crowded and most colourful trade fairs used to be held on the banks of the Sutlej at Rampur, each fair leaving behind its own traces of the people coming in from across the border.

But both at Manali and Rampur-Bushair the unfamiliar is thickly covered over with the familiar: the population and culture, both predominantly Hindu, of the Kulu valley and the Simla hills respectively. It was not until I landed at Leh, in Ladakh, that I had my first vivid experience of the Central Asian element in the rich and varied tapestry of India. Many things had changed in many ways by the time of my second visit to Ladakh, in November 1963. But at the end of the first flight, some 10 years earlier, the strangeness was a very strong sensation. Looking out through the window as the plane taxied to a halt, and hearing the first voices as I jumped from the door—there was no gangway—I could easily have imagined that the plane had strayed off course and landed in some other country. All the attendants at the airfield

wore fur caps and long cloaks gathered at the waist with numerous coils of a rope of hair. Many of them wore pigtails and thin wisps of beard which floated in the cold, dry wind. Those who stood idly by carried rosaries, and although many others were expertly fixing stays on the plane or handling fire extinguishers and oxygen cylinders, they too would have fitted more easily into a setting of incense and idols. A few minutes later one of these busy ones offered to escort me to the monastery at Leh where I wanted to record some Tibetan music. The conversation between him and the lamas at the monastery had no relation at all with the sounds of conversation heard anywhere else in India. On the way back from the monastery I was not at all surprised to see that at the head of a street, a mere dirt track, a conspicuous roadsign stood which showed the way to China, Russia and Tibet, in addition to Delhi. It seemed a very tourist like but an inevitable thing to do to have a photograph taken beneath the signpost!

But strong though they were, these impressions were to be replaced by others, still stronger, gathered in Spiti a few years later. Within a few hours of leaving Chattru, still filled with our eagerness to respond to whatever this unfamiliar valley might offer, we ran into a brace of horsemen, something like Himalayan teddy boys, riding on gay new saddles, dressed in silken scarfs and bright-coloured shirts, wearing fur caps turned up at the ears, dashing past on the short swift-footed horse which is still the prince of all travel aids in Spiti. An hour or two later we found us peering into a small and smoky tent where an ancient Tibetan refugee ran a restaurant for road labour, selling Tibetan tea and Tibetan barley beer. At Lossar, the first village in the Spiti valley and described by some as the highest in the world (13,400 feet) we met our first crowd of Spitials, men, women and children, with Mongol faces. The short, stumpy women, broad-faced and red, had a kind of attractiveness which comes of living in the mountains but there was nothing in it which would remind one of the traditionally more well-known areas of India. Near a halt further on, the people of Hanse gave the chief member of our party, Mr. Mangat Rai, a musical reception on brass instruments which belong as much to Mongol ceremonial as Indian: a couple of brass trumpets, nearly three yards in length, which looked more impressive than they sounded, two pairs of large cymbals about a foot each in diameter and two or three types of drums, including one which had the

deep rich notes of the *naqhara* which came to India with Muslim invaders. Both at Lossar and Hanse the members of our party were given the typical offering of a lamaisery, a scarf. Many other receptions of the same kind followed, one of the largest one at Rangrik where the band, the costumes of the temporal and the spiritual elite and the huge banners they carried could not be repeated anywhere else in India except in the Himalayan folds. On their strings and pipes they played music which can only be heard here and in the landmass to the north.

But the cream of these impressions was reserved for Kaza. Here, as a mark of its presence, the government had arranged to celebrate the annual Independence Day on August 15, 1960. Though as a national holiday this ranks lower than the Republic Day observed each year on January 26, climatically it is more suited to the intense cold of the border valleys, and as the first ceremonial of its kind so close to the Tibetan border it had received high priority for its claims on all local resources. Word had been sent to all the villages of the valley, inviting people to come, and for two or three days they kept pouring into the plain near Kaza where they set up their queer encampments. But the largest number came on the afternoon before the festival, their long trains of mules coming down in the light of the setting sun. Their route lay across the brow of a hill directly opposite our tent, and as one watched them ride in, wearing fur caps and long robes and knee-boots of multicoloured leather and wool, one thought they could have been the "extras" in a Hollywood film of some Mongol army.

Next morning they gathered in a large square opposite one of the only two public buildings in Kaza, the office and local headquarters of the special armed constabulary which has been organised to assist the military in defending the border. Their silken cloaks of brilliant colours, their queer-shaped hats embroidered with gold and silver, their jewellery and trinkets, especially of the women, the ceremonial robes, hoods and caps of the lamas—and all the most senior ones of the valley had gathered there—glittered vividly in the clear sun. And in their midst stood the chief guest of the morning, Mr. U. N. Dhebar, a former President of the Indian National Congress and at that time chairman of a special commission for all the tribal and isolated communities in India. He was dressed, as do all the leading politicians in India, especially

if they belong to the Congress, in an austerely unadorned dhoti, shirt and cap of home-spun *khaddar,* conspicuous only by being so starkly white. He and any one dressed like him would have been a most familiar figure anywhere else in India, able to merge into any background; the dress would be noticed only if the wearer were noticeable. But here he seemed a man from a different world, the difference heightened by the close proximity of all the others, the flamboyantly clad Spitials all around him. When he stood up to address them, beneath the tricolour flag of India he had just unfurled barely 30 air miles from the Tibetan border, the contrast must have impressed him and his audience alike. A phrase which occurs in an official publication of the Punjab Government appeared more packed with meaning here than anywhere else on the trek. One of the government's tasks in the valleys, the publication says, is "to wean them away from the Tibetans". Equally meaningful was the notion Mr. Dhebar had elaborated earlier the same morning in an interview, that one of the reasons why the valleys must be opened up and developed and their emptiness overcome was that all through history a vacuum so close to these borders had invited the galloping hordes of central Asia.

For all the fascinating interplay of the forces of history which the border valleys have seen, they have never been the makers of history themselves. Ladakh, which has been the least passive has had wars with Western Tibet on the one hand and the valley of Kashmir on the other; it has also extended its sway southwards into Spiti. But even its armies have not done as much marching themselves as they have been marched against. Lahul and Spiti have been even more pacific. The sway that each held over its neighbouring areas was rather brief in terms of secular control though the cultural imprint was deep and abiding. In fact the history of these valleys is proof that cultural penetration and conquest by the armies are two very different things. Not only does the former leave a more lasting imprint, it is often the culture of the vanquished rather than the victorious that exercises the greatest influence. The impact of cultures more than the course of battles has given shape to the personality of the valleys.

The early history of Ladakh is rather vague. From the earliest times it is known to have shared some cultural, racial and spiritual affinities with Tibet but in temporal affairs it was under an in-

dependent prince. For several centuries the flow of cultural influence was from Ladakh to Tibet: Buddhism for example travelled in that direction in the footsteps of Ladakhi and Kashmiri preachers. In later years Tibetan scholars proceeding to centres of learning in Kashmir and further south travelled through Ladakh, and later still the lamaistic forms and institutions of Buddhism which developed in Tibet had an influence on Ladakh also, as they had on other large areas on both sides of the Himalaya. There is some evidence that for a time a Tibetan prince exercised temporal authority over Ladakh as also over Chinese Turkistan and Nepal, but he was soon to encounter the influence of Kashmir in Ladakh.

For about five centuries, from the 11th to the 16th, many rival influences clashed in Ladakh, especially those of Tibet and Kashmir, and to a similar extent of Skardu and Baltistan. But towards the end of the 16th century one of the greatest of the princes of Ladakh, Chovang Namgyal, annexed the western stretches of Tibet. A later and greater prince, Senege Namgyal, the reputed builder of the palace which still dominates the landscape of Leh, marched almost up to Lhasa and made the intervening territories his tributaries. His son Delden Namgyal, maintained this phase of expansion, which is the only one of such extent and duration to be credited to these valleys. But it came to an end when Ladakh itself was threatened and in large part overrun by the Kalmuk Tartars. They destroyed a part of Leh and were induced to leave only by the gift of the province of Rudok in Western Tibet, which had remained in Ladakh's power to dispose since the days of Senege Namgyal.

In an overlapping but a more brief phase of extension Ladakh gained control over Spiti on the one hand and Balistan on the other. But it became a tributary itself to the Muslim governors of Kashmir, and remained so until it was annexed by the Dogra rulers of Kashmir who had sent in an army under General Zorawar Singh. The Dogras combined Ladakh with Gilgit and made it into a unified province. But since the area was remote they left it much to itself and in later years too, when Ladakh, along with the rest of Kashmir was brought under the control of the Government of India, the latter's administrative jurisdiction was complete but its daily exercise was concerned mainly with the fact that the areas joining Ladakh—Tibet on the one hand and Sinkiang and

the rest of Chinese Turkistan on the other—were in a sensitive and disturbed state. For the rest the administration's main concern was to keep the trade routes to Ladakh open for bringing in carpets, wool, borax, gold and ponies from the north, in exchange for sugar, spices, cotton cloth, saffron and metalware from the south. The trade, incidentally, when it moved south from Leh, did not go so much to Srinagar as to the Kulu bazaar and Hoshiarpur.

The times have been much less eventful for Lahul and Spiti. Their people were not warlike enough to conquer any neighbouring territory and to mould its history. On the other hand they have always had some aggressive and acquisitive neighbours, the Rajput Kingdoms of Kulu and Chamba which fought each other and Ladakh, and the dynasties of Ladakh and Western Tibet which fought Kulu and Chamba when they were not busy fighting each other. There is only one reference, and that as late as A.D. 1800, to a Lahul contingent which, fighting under the banner of the Gyephang Lha, the spirit of the mountain which dominates the Rohtang Pass, assisted the ruler of Kulu against the ruler of Mandi. One of the rulers of Spiti, Raja Rajendra Sen, is believed to have invaded Kulu and made the latter a tributary for a short time towards the end of the sixth century A.D. But apart from these two instances Lahul and Spiti have been less the invaders than the invaded. This is not because their people lack hardihood. In physical endurance they are far superior to the people of the valleys of Kulu and Chamba, and in their far ranging trade operations through hazardous territories the Lahulas at least have also shown a quality of daring and venturesomeness. In fact because of these qualities Mr. Mangat Rai thought they would make an excellent Regiment of Highlanders for patrolling the border. But the spirit of invasion does not seem to form part of their genius. On the other hand their valleys have been invaded repeatedly by the armies of Kulu, Chamba and Ladakh in raids against each other.

The earliest rulers of Spiti appear to have been a Hindu dynasty which carried the frequently used suffix of Sena. They clashed twice with the Kingdom of Kulu, also ruled by a Hindu dynasty which carried the equally frequently used suffix of Pal. In the first encounter, towards the end of the sixth century A.D., the Spitial dynasty won but in the second, towards the beginning of the seventh century, it was defeated and so weakened by the defeat

that it was overthrown by an invasion from Ladakh. For nearly three centuries thereafter Spiti remained a part of the Kingdom of Ladakh. For the next 700 years or so, Spiti's relations with the Ladakhi kingdom fluctuated according to the vicissitudes suffered by the dynasties ruling that kingdom itself. Intervals of a semi-independent vassalage to Ladakh alternated with periods when Spiti was incorporated into that kingdom. But being so remote and inaccessible, Spiti was left more or less to itself, to govern itself as it may. For a time it even paid tribute to Kulu, though more to buy peace than in recognition of any suzerainty. A gathering of the headmen of the different administrative divisions of Spiti and a parallel gathering of the headmen of the village carried on the administration through the agency of certain hereditary officials or the Gyalpos as the chief executives. Officials from the Ladakhi court at Leh visited Spiti at harvest time but their functions did not usually extend beyond the collection of a tribute. In the meantime, with the establishment of a centralised monastic system, the hegemony of lamaistic culture became much more complete than the political suzerainty of Ladakh.

The next major change came as late as the middle of the last century. First the Sikhs conquered Kulu and raided and plundered parts of Spiti without attempting to separate the valley from Ladakh, which itself in the meantime had passed under the influence of the State of Kashmir. Next the British defeated the Sikh states and principalities on the west bank of the Sutlej and thus inherited the territory of Kulu and dominance over Kashmir, Ladakh and Spiti. They detached Spiti from Ladakh and after a brief period of three years, during which they farmed the collection of the revenues of Spiti to the Chief Minister of the Kingdom of Bushair, they made a separate revenue settlement of Spiti and demarcated its boundaries with Ladakh and Tibet.

But their interest in Spiti remained limited, for all practical purposes, to two objectives. First, they wanted to develop a route through Spiti to Chang-Thang, the wool district of Western Tibet. For that reason they added Spiti to Kulu, the wool mart for the trade through Lahul. Second, through the leading families of Lahul and Spiti, which already had close commercial, cultural and marital links with the leading families of Tibet, the British wished to establish their own links with the latter. Hence the opinion recorded in the Gazetteer of 1883 that "a trifling amount of

revenue" to be collected in Spiti mattered much less than recognition of "the tenure of the British government in Spiti". Once this recognition was established the privilege of administrative powers was left largely to the hereditary officials who had already exercised it for centuries.

By and large, the history of Lahul forms a parallel to that of Spiti, except that the wars between Kulu and Chamba and Kulu and Ladakh were more frequently fought over the territory of Lahul than of Spiti, and that the cultural influence of Chamba on Pattan is stronger than of any Hindu kingdom anywhere else in the valleys except that of Bushair on lower Kinnaur.

The baronial families of Lahul, which described themselves by the Ladakhi word Jo or the Hindi word Thakur depending upon whether the influence of the Kingdom of Ladakh was stronger or that of the Kingdoms of Kulu and Chamba, seem to have paid tribute to all three of them.

Faint traces of the history of Lahul, mainly discovered in a study of the languages of its three valleys, go back to about 2000 B.C. But the first authentic record dates back to no earlier than A.D. 635 when the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang identified the valley as Lo-hu-Lo. Towards the end of that century the forces of the kingdom of Chamba attacked Kulu through the Kukti pass and the valley of the Chandrabhaga or the Chenab. Until the founding of a new Tibetan dynasty at Leh, in Ladakh, in about A.D. 1000, the Pattan valley of Lahul or the valley of the Chenab seems to have been predominantly under the influence of Chamba and the Chandra valley under that of Kulu. The position of the Bhaga valley was indeterminate. Until about the start of the 11th century A.D. the influence of Ladakh in Lahul was weak and was repeatedly extinguished by Kulu and Chamba but thereafter it was strong for about five centuries until the Ladakh kingdom, weakened by attacks by the Baltis and Sokpos in the 17th century, called in the aid of Kashmir and became a tributary to that state.

At this stage Kulu asserted its influence again and conquered the whole of Lahul, including the Pattan valley which it took from the state of Chamba. During this phase of the control by Kulu the boundaries of Lahul on the plains of Lingti on the way to Ladakh were fixed approximately where they lie now. Some villages continued to pay tribute to Ladakh but rather like some in

Spiti had paid it to Kulu, more to buy peace than because it proved anything. The Jos were subjugated and they took the name of Thakurs, which they retain to the present day. Only one of the four Jo families, the Jos of Barbog in the Bhaga valley, continued to resist and were stripped of all powers. But in the middle of the nineteenth century, Lahul passed through the same phases as Spiti. First the Sikhs conquered Kulu and thus took over Lahul as well. Then the British defeated the Sikhs and captured Kulu, Lahul and other territories then controlled by the Sikh rulers.

But, through the agency once more of the hierarchical system of monasteries, which owed cultural and religious allegiance to monasteries in Tibet and Bhutan, the cultural influence of lamaism gained the upper hand from about the start of the 14th century. The purer form of Buddhism brought from India in about the 8th century by Padma Sambhava gradually lost ground.

The history of Kinnaur, like that of the state, Bushair, of which it formed a part, has yet to be processed authoritatively from its raw materials. The latter, in the form of the records of the successive courts of Bushair at Kamru, in the Baspa valley, and Rampur on the banks of the Sutlej, are probably more ample than those maintained by the Wazir of Lahul and the Nono of Spiti or the dynasties which preceded them. But the records have not yet received the historians' attention. Tracing the few known facts backwards, since the later are more accurately known than the earlier, the period immediately preceding the establishment of British suzerainty in Punjab and the hills of Simla and Kulu was marked by a number of wars, of varying intensity, between Bushair on the one hand and on the other the Gurkhas of Nepal and the Rajas of Kulu. The attacks by the Gurkhas began about the end of the 18th century and within the first couple of years of the 19th they established a number of forts in the lower parts of the state. But the Kinnauras put up a much stronger resistance to the invaders by burning their bridges and crops and harrassing the Gurkhas as they attempted to penetrate the steep and narrow gorge of the Sutlej upstream of Wangtu. At one time the Raja of Bushair retreated to Kamru for the defence of the state treasures there, with the Gurkhas in pursuit. It was bands of Kinnauras who saved him by halting the Gurkhas about six miles upstream from Wangtu at Choltu, a

place now adorned with one of the prettiest rest houses in Kinnaur.

Parts of Bushair south and west of Kinnaur were virtually under Gurkha rule from about 1803 to 1814, when with the encouragement of the British who were themselves engaged in hostilities with the Gurkhas at that time, the Bushairi forces captured most of the forts of the invaders and the British extended recognition to the then Raja of Bushair. More or less contemporaneously with the hostilities with the Gurkhas, Bushair was also engaged by the kingdom of Kulu. The first rounds went heavily in favour of Kulu though subsequently Bushair recovered most of the territory it had lost. Earlier still Bushair was at war successively with Tibet and Ladakh for the control respectively of the eastern and western portions of the Hungrang valley and in both the wars it gained the upper hand. By the start of the 17th century Bushair had already gained unconditional control of the western portion of the Hungrang valley from Ladakh.

Events prior to this are recorded more in legend than history, including the origins of the dynasty which ruled Bushair until, with the independence of India, the princely states gradually vanished. There is nothing in authentic history either to confirm or deny that dynasty's claim that it can trace its ancestry through 120 generations to Parduman, a grandson of Lord Krishna, the hero of the Hindu epic, the Mahabharat. One of the beliefs which has flourished in this area of uncertainty is that upon their deaths the Rajas of Bushair used to be reborn as the reincarnations of the Dalai Lama. Since the Dalai Lamas themselves claimed to be their own reincarnations, facts and dates, let alone the actual event of the deaths of the Rajas and the Dalai Lamas, must have been very difficult to coordinate. But the belief should have helped to bridge the gap, and must have been encouraged for the purpose, between the Hindus at one end of the kingdom and the Buddhists or the Bhots at the other end.

Because of their historical background, both recent and remote, these valleys have become a fascinating mixture of the racial, cultural and religious influences to which they have been exposed. Travelling through them is like making a journey through the cultural strata of history. Broadly, these influences came from the vast and arid regions of central Asia on the one hand, and on the other from the northern, mountainous fringe of monsoon Asia.

But each of these two areas is too large for any description to apply uniformly to the whole of it, and with each local variation in the central Asian plateau or the mountain cultures of northern India, their cultural influence upon the border valleys has also varied. The picture is complicated by several other factors: the fact that we are dealing here with an area which for centuries was the crossroads of history, receiving and retaining the footprints of many influences far removed from the immediate environment; the fact that in more recent times, however, the valleys have been cut off from the outside world and whatever influences they had imbibed till then were left to inbreed among themselves behind this isolation; and the fact that with the attack by China and India's response to it, the valleys have been suddenly thrown open again to the impact of a world which changed radically while they remained static behind their walls of mountains.

The main ingredients of the culture of the valleys are of two kinds. First, the Mongoloid races—themselves a mixture—of the regions which extend north from India's frontiers, the central Asian forms of Buddhism, certain social institutions like polyandry, and the diet and methods of farming—all of them reaching their most recognisable and evolved shape on the Tibetan plateau. Second, the Hindu culture which established itself in the northern-most mountains of monsoon Asia and the Rajput races which developed it, in some ways more intensely Hindu than people further down in the plains who have been exposed to the neutralising and more cosmopolitan trends of the modern world.

On the central Asian theme there are two variations; one far more influenced by the Islam of the central steppes than by Tibetan institutions, and seen to its best advantage in northern and western Ladakh; the second, more in evidence in Sikkim and Bhutan, where Islamic traces are replaced by the lamaistic Buddhism evolved in Tibet. Similarly the valley of Kashmir, largely of Muslim inhabitants though ruled by a Hindu dynasty, added a variation, again largely seen in Ladakh, on the more constant theme of the predominantly Hindu and Rajput kingdoms on the mountainous fringe of northern India.

The non-Islamic central Asian personality, of which the most conspicuous element is Tibet, and the Hindu kingdoms established by Rajput dynasties in Chamba, Kulu and Rampur-Bushair, have moulded the language, culture, religion and racial composition of

Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur. What follows applies more to these three valleys than Ladakh.

The influence exerted upon the three valleys by the areas to the north-east and south-west of them, respectively, have never been in a static balance. Neither has been strong enough at any time to absorb any of these valleys entirely and the strength of each pull has varied with time and place. Broadly, the Hindu and Rajput influence has been predominant in Kinnaur, conspicuous in the Pattan valley of Lahul, feeble in the Chandra and Bhaga valleys of Lahul and in parts of upper Kinnaur, and feebler still in the Spiti valley and the Hungrang valley of Kinnaur which lies next to the Spiti valley and in fact geographically forms a part of it though administratively it is included in Kinnaur.

From the time we left Manali on our way to the Hampta pass till we reached Trilokinath after more than four weeks of walking we did not see a single building which could be described as a Hindu temple. On the other hand Buddhist prayer flags flew at the entrance to every habited place on our route and most of the villages had provided themselves with one or two monasteries, whether large or small. Some of the monasteries, like the Kyi Gumpha and Tabo monastery in Spiti and the Kardinge, Shishur and Guru Ghantal monasteries in Lahul are large and important centres of the cultural life of these two valleys and have influenced much besides the religious beliefs of the people. What part they must have played in bringing about a transborder orientation among the people should be obvious because these and other monasteries like them were for many years the only places which imparted education, of a kind, not only to the lamas and chomos (or nuns) who joined them but also to the children of the laity. Their cultural links with similar institutions in Tibet and Bhutan were fairly close.

The heads of these institutions were incarnate lamas. While the reincarnations of the deceased lamas may of course be discovered by the mysterious system of signs and symbols prescribed by the clairvoyant, they were either usually found in Tibet or, being found elsewhere, had to spend long periods in Tibet for education and instruction. Journeys to Tibet even by the junior lamas were frequent and sometimes the senior lamas of Tibet used to make a round of the monasteries in Lahul and Spiti. The

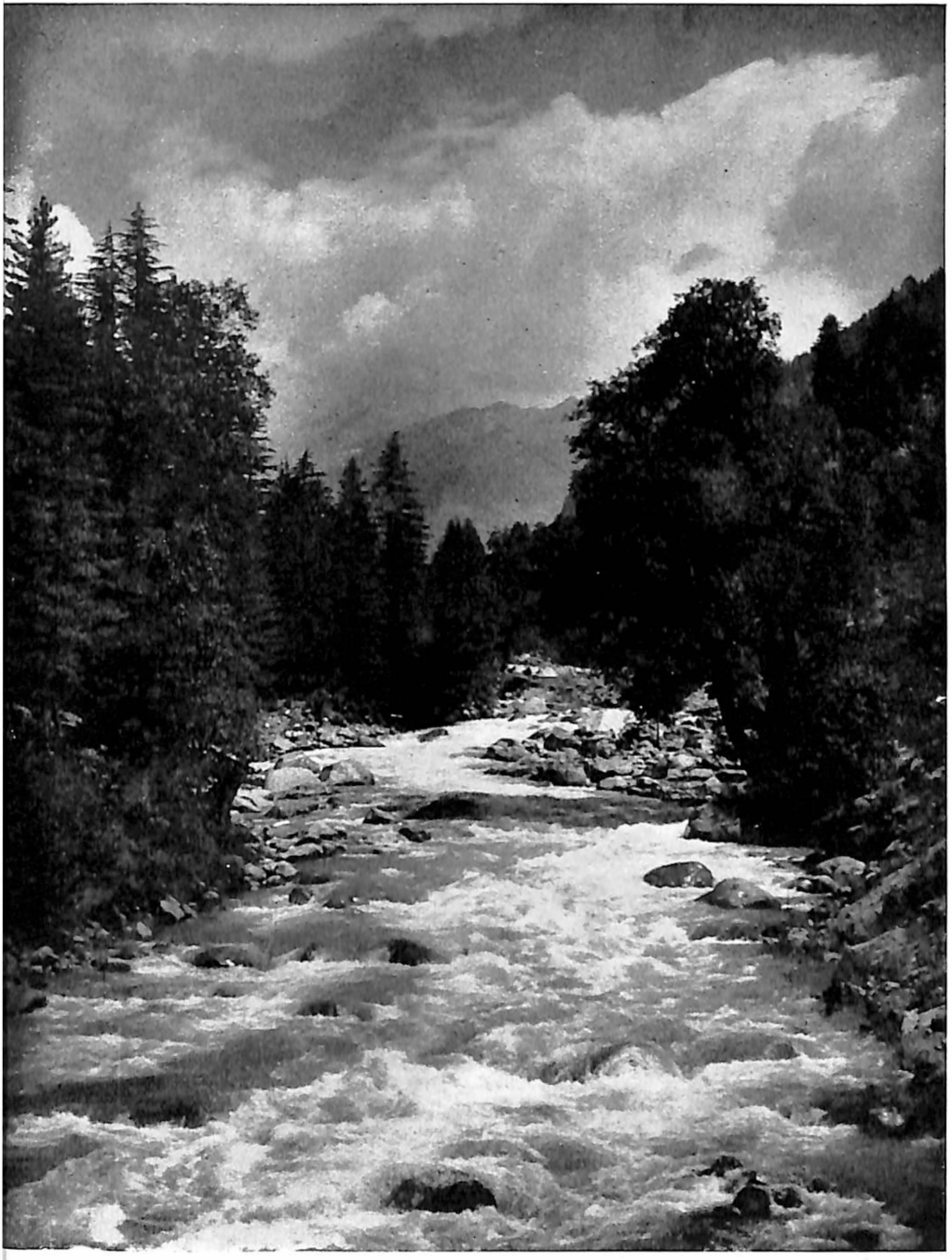
stir which such a visit used to make and the excited attention it drew to the apex of the lamaistic pyramid in Tibet has been described by Sir James Lyall, once the Settlement Officer for Lahul and Spiti, who was present when the third Grand Lama of Tibet visited the Guru Ghantal monastery in Lahul, the most powerful in this valley, which overlooks the confluence between the Chandra and Bhaga rivers at Tandi. He says, "He travelled in quaintly shaped, bright-coloured tents carried on yaks, with a considerable retinue of monks. I saw him seated on a throne or platform built up in the open air, dressed in a mitre and silken canonicals, extraordinarily like those worn by Roman Catholic Prelates. The monks formed a lane in front of the throne, up which the Lahulas advanced in the most reverential manner to receive the blessing and a bit of silk, to be worn, I believe, as a talisman. After backing out of the presence they made the circle of the throne, praying aloud as they walked. I saw one poor man present a pony, so that the value of the offerings must have been considerable."

Even the temple of Trilokinath, the first Hindu temple seen, as I said, in a month of walking, is not without a strong element of the lamaisery in its ritual and ceremony. The time I walked from Tandi downstream along the banks of the Chandrabhaga was one for a seasonal pilgrimage to this temple and I met many pilgrims in their wayside encampments. It was interesting to see that the great majority of them were Buddhists and many were the new Tibetan refugees who have been reaching these valleys in large numbers since the Chinese occupation of Tibet. There were relatively few Hindus from Kulu, the plains or even the Pattan valley, and the temple itself gave the answer why this happens.

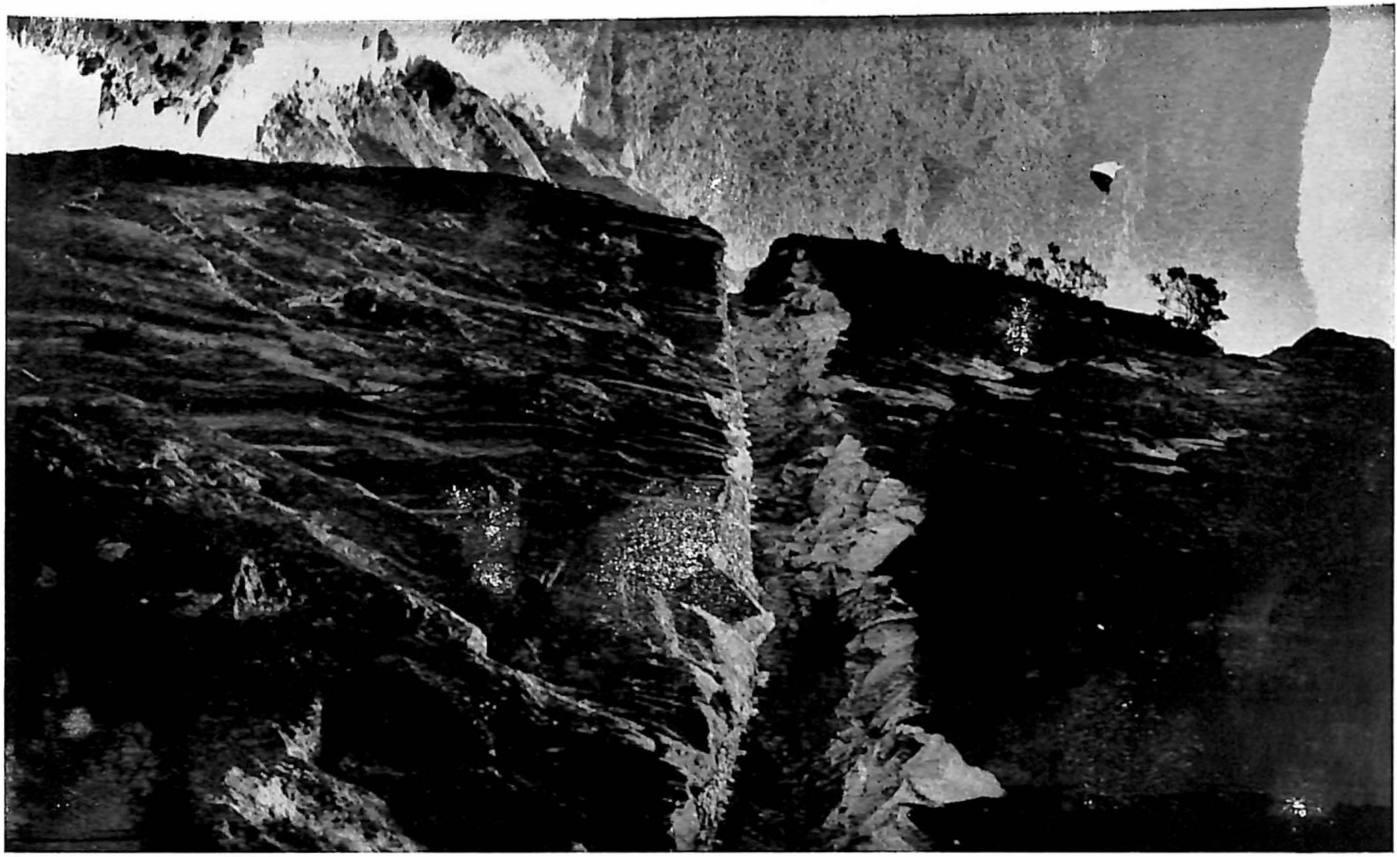
The name of the deity in the temple, which has given its name to the place also, literally means "the Master of the Three worlds". But depending upon whether he comes from the lower reaches of the Beas valley, or the middle reaches of the river and the valley of the Chandrabhaga, or from places closer to the main Himalaya, that is Spiti and upper Lahul, the pilgrim may call the deity by the Hindu name of Shiva or by the Buddhist name of Avalokiteshwara or by the Tibetan name of Chan-re-zig, the deity of which the Dalai Lamas claim to be the reincarnations. People from Chamba and Kulu throng the annual festival of the temple in August, along with people from Lahul, Spiti, Ladakh and Zangs-

kar. But the ceremonies are performed by Buddhist priests and lamas, who may be said to have adopted the deity. As the Thang-teong Gyalpo, one of its reincarnate forms, the Chan-re-zig founded, according to a legend of Spiti, the *buzhen* sect of mendicants, entertainers and religious reformers who are said to have revived the Buddhist faith in these valleys when it was about to be extinguished. At the opposite end of the Pattan valley, the village of Tandi reflects an etymological mixture in its name. Being the confluence of two rivers, the Chandra and the Bhaga, it is sacred to everyone and each of the main cultures of the area links the name with its own sources. According to the Buddhists the name was Tang Ti to begin with and later it became Tandi by the normal process of phonetic change. The Hindus say the name began with *Tan Dehi*, or the place where *tan* or the body was given up, this being the place where they believe Draupadi died, the joint wife of the Pandavas, in the Mahabharat. The Buddhist households here have pictures of Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna but the scriptures in their household chapels are of the Buddhist faith, are written in Bhoti and recited by lamas. Upstream from Tandi on the banks of the Chandra, I saw the same duality in the castle of the Gondhla Thakur, who said, "Our personal faith is Hinduism, and the public faith Buddhism".

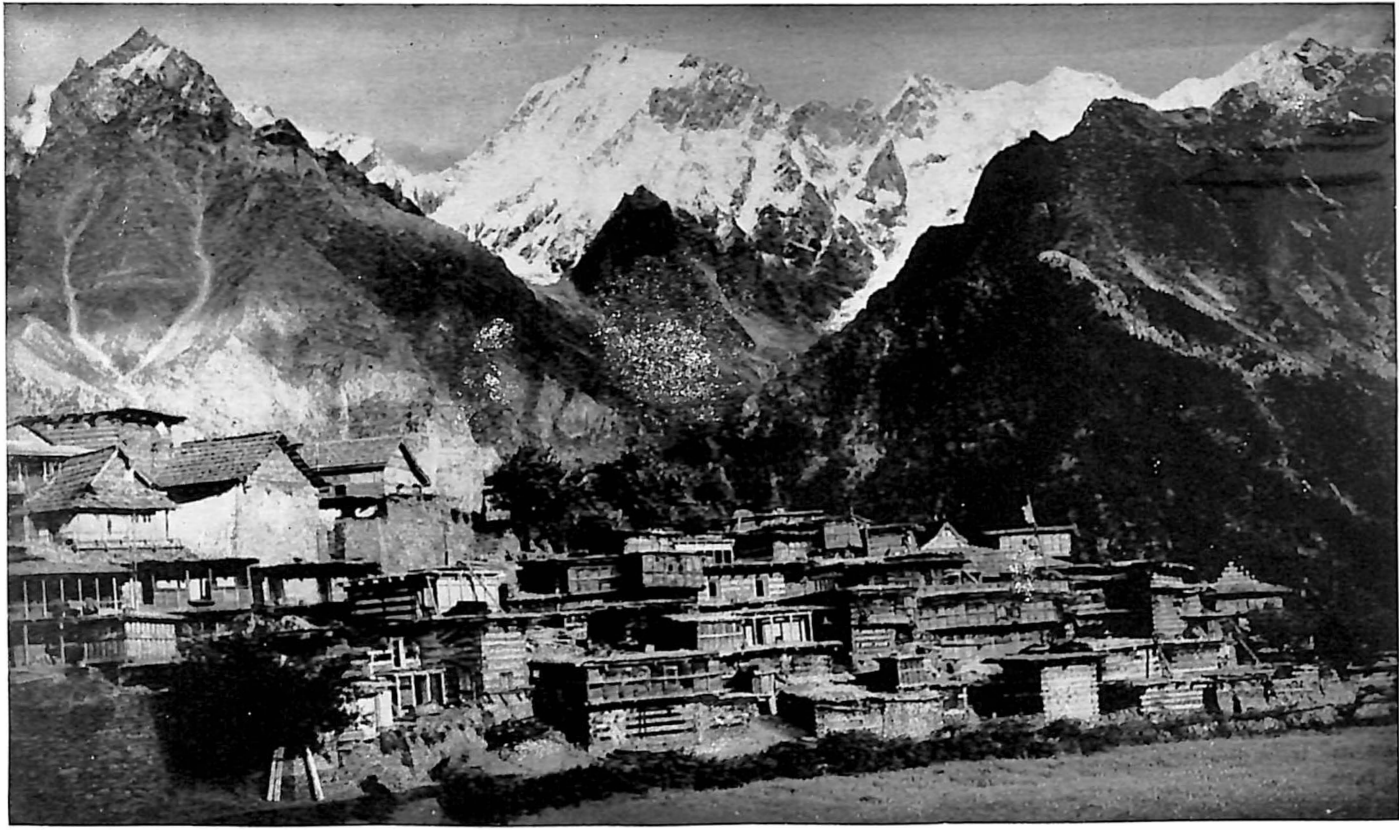
The journey into Kinnaur, which could have begun at the end closest to the Tibetan frontier down the banks of the Spiti river, started instead at the other end, from Rampur-Bushair up the banks of the Sutlej. Therefore one first came to that part of the valley where the Hindu influence blowing in from the Simla Hills and the seat of the Rajput rulers of Bushair at Rampur was the strongest and its mixture with Tibetan influence took the most curious forms. The coexistence between the Hindu temple, usually built to a local *deota* or deity, and the Buddhist lamaisery, which forms an integral part of the monastic system centralised in Tibet, begins at the very beginning, at Rampur, and may be traced up the Sutlej to as far as only about 20 or 30 miles from the border. The next halt after Rampur is Sarahan, now a little village but once, under the name of Shantipur, the seat of a kingdom which twined its legends with those of Lord Krishna. But the architecture of its Hindu temple shows the influence of the architecture of the lamaiseries seen across the border. In most of lower Kinnaur and the Baspa valley the temple and the lamaisery are seen side



The Beas at Manali



The Hindustan-Tibet Road across the Tranda Dhank

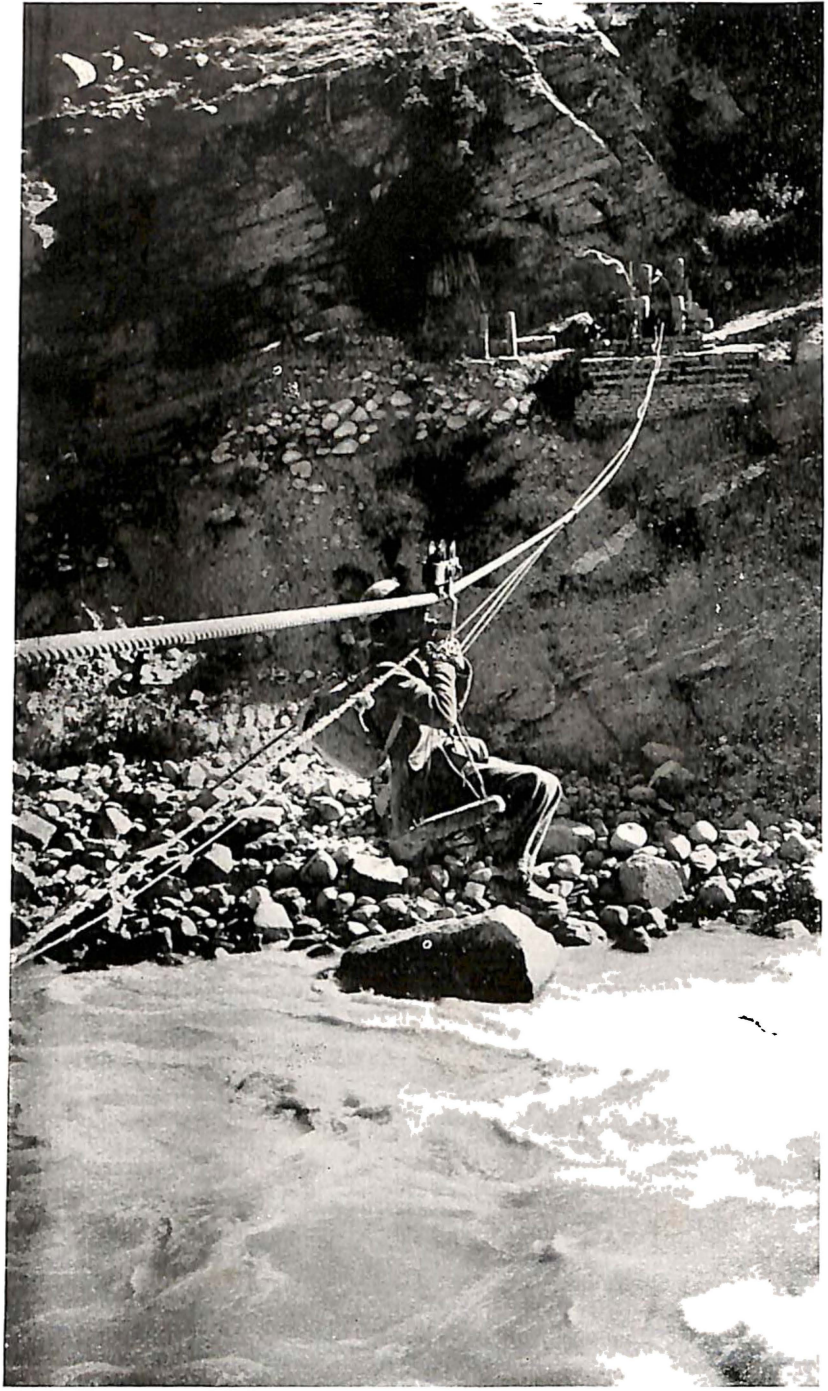


The Village of Kalpa, at the foot of the Kinner Kailash Range

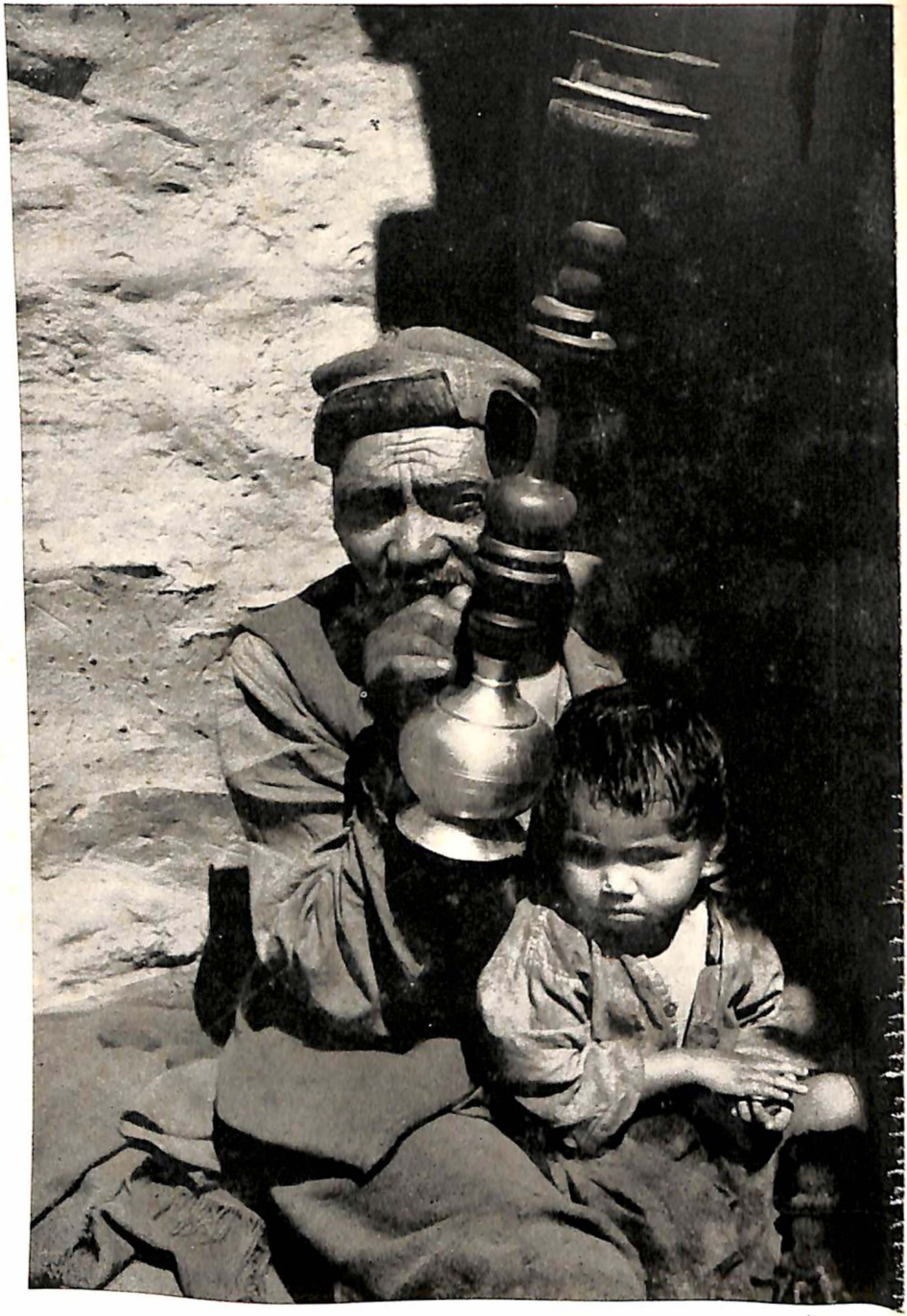
Perched on a Volcanic crater, the Kyi Gumpha in Spiti

A trader at Sangla, in Chini Valley, selling wool after returning from Tibet

Tibetan women refugees working as road labour in Spiti



Crossing the Sutlej by "jhoola" at Ribba in Chini Valley



A shop-keeper and child in the Pattan Valley

by side, in the same public square if not even in adjacent buildings, and at Sangla, the main village of the Baspa valley, I found the attendant of the *deota* temple temporarily in charge of the Buddhist monastery because the lamas of the latter were on a visit elsewhere. When I asked if the "oracle" might also be shared in case of a temporary shortage of talent, since the priests of both temples are asked for oracular guidance on simultaneous occasions like sowing the crop or harvesting it or starting the annual journey into Tibet for trade, the question was not treated as entirely an irreverential joke. On the way to Sangla I heard at Beuri of the senior lama in charge of the monastery there who describes himself as a Hindu.

Further up the Sutlej, at Ribba, I learnt that speaking through an oracle—a shared oracle perhaps?—the local *deota* had become the senior manager of the lamaisery. But before he could take this additional spiritual charge he had to be purified by Buddhist ritual and a lama had to convert him to *ahimsa* or non-violence. Since blood sacrifice plays an important part in the ritual of the demonology of the hills, which is really what Hinduism has become here just as Buddhism has acquired a vast pantheon in Tibetan lamaism, the Ribba *deota's* renunciation of it must be regarded as a considerable act of abstinence. But in return for the honour conferred on him he even enjoined *ahimsa* on all the other *deotas* within his jurisdiction. In the Hungrang valley, tribal strains have mingled with Buddhism, and an official team which went to Spiti via this valley records being shown two cups made out of human skulls in a monastery which are used by the lamas as drinking cups on special occasions. Upwards of Ribba and then into Spiti the painters of the monasteries have created their own admixture of the two religions. The Buddhist deities painted on the walls in some monasteries hold the symbols of Hindu divinity in their hands, the *trishul* and the *chakra*. At the Kyi monastery in Spiti I had seen a Buddha painted with a face more suitable for any member of the Hindu memonology. When I mentioned this to one of the lamas I met in the monastery at Jangi, he told me of a Buddha in the monastery at Shalkhar, on the way to Spiti, who has been painted with a thousand arms, a familiar motif in the paintings of Hindu gods. He said not even the traditional painters of the Lippa valley who are usually engaged by the monasteries in upper Kinnaur and Spiti are free of extraneous influence and

only painters freshly imported from Tibet could be relied upon to paint pure images. Or else the paintings had to be imported from Tibet.

Many of the lesser ceremonies, like those attending birth and marriages, are performed by many people under the auspices of both lamas and pandits, the two acting simultaneously sometimes. The more dreaded ceremonies which form part of the death rites are performed either only by the lamas or only by the pandits but the fusion of Hindu and lamaistic practices exists even here. On the one hand even the Hindus of Kinnaur, at places as far down as Kothi, call in the lama when sickness is serious or a death befalls the family. The treasurer of the *deota* temple of Kothi, whose deity is the most powerful in Kinnaur, is not prevented by his office from leaning on the superstitions of lamaism. As he explained when I met him in July, 1961, "only the lamas know how to show the way to the soul in the difficult journey which lies ahead of it. Therefore when a member of my family fell seriously ill, I called in the lamas to try their medicines, and if they failed, to release the soul of the deceased". This apparently, they do by shaking the dead by his head a little, while pronouncing the word *p' ad*. The ceremony is known as *p' oa gyabche* and is called so because *p' oa* means the stomach and that's where, according to the lamas, the soul resides.

On the other hand it has been noticed even in the Bhot areas that while the names of all the stages of the funeral ceremonies are Tibetan and heavily loaded with the ritual of lamaism, the basic stages have Hindu forms. The body is cremated on a funeral pyre, the ashes are collected after a fixed number of days and are then consigned to some sacred river or stream, the place most commonly used for the deceased of the richer families being the confluence of the Chandra and the Bhaga. But lamaism has added to this austere procedure the elaborate variation that the ashes are sometimes shaped into an effigy of the deceased, dressed in all the finery in the wardrobe of the deceased, even the jewels in the case of a woman, and kept before a set of idols for several days of ritualistic feasting. How long this goes on depends upon the resources in wealth and affection which the survivors can muster. At the end of this ceremony another starts: the effigy, placed on a horse and under a canopy, is led to the river and dismantled; its ashes are now consigned to the waters, as they

would have been in the first place. But a take-off even from this variation is the more bizarre one that to cheat death a realistic effigy of the person on the sick-bed is taken to a mock funeral in the hope that the angels of death, believing the sick one to be dead at last, will detach themselves from him.

Another form of the admixture of the two cultures occurs in the names of persons. I had already seen some evidence of this in Lahul—but none in Spiti—where three of the four leading families had not only alternately used the title of Jo or Thakur but also had two names usually for each member, a Tibetan name obtained at a baptism performed by a lama either in Tibet or Ladakh, and a Hindu name given to the child at a more perfunctory ceremony performed at home by a pandit. As Thakur Prem Chand or Jo Phungchuk Dawa explained to me at Kyelang, "One name is for use in relations with Tibet, the other for use in the Kulu bazaar" where trade exchanges take place with Hindu merchants from cities like Amritsar, Ludhiana and Dhariwal. The practice of adding an Hindu name to the Tibetan started, he said, with his great grandfather.

But without the same sophisticated reasoning guiding their actions, many other people whom I met had assumed names in both the languages, especially in lower Kinnaur, or else in naming their children had used a language other than the language of their own name. My first introduction to this was Dawa Tschering, son of Ram Sen, the owner of a tea stall at Chaura. But many others followed. On the register of the only high school in the Baspa valley, at Sangla, I found entries like "Galden Tschering, son of Chaudhary Ram", or "Sanam Dorje, son of Arjan Das", or "Tanzim Chopel, son of Gurdev". A more neatly accomplished mixture was the names of two traders I met beyond Ribba, who combined words of both languages in a single name! One of them was Tschering Ram and the other Dawa Singh.

At the tea stall at Chaura I met a man from Poorbani, a village nine miles from Kalpa, who said the only temple in the village had the image of only one deity, the Buddha, "but all of us also believe in Kali", he added, with obvious respect for one of the most dreaded goddesses of Hinduism, who always wears a gory face and sometimes a necklace of skulls. The temple is also a lamaisery which has 15 or 16 old jomos and two or three younger ones who have joined more recently. "But they all come from

Hindu households", said my informer from Poorbani, putting his finger on an anomaly which had struck me when I read the figures of an earlier census in the gazetteer of the state of Rampur-Bushair. According to these there is not a single Buddhist in the whole of Kinnaur, an impossible thing to believe about a valley which touches Tibet for more than half of its entire length. Inquiries and gossip led one to what is probably the real cause, that all the enumerators employed for the census were officials of the court of Rampur, ruled by a Rajput dynasty, who possibly regarded it as a sign of loyalty worthy of reward that all the persons in their area had been counted as Hindus! To a smaller extent, but only slightly smaller, the same thing happened in the 1910 census in Lahul, where the enumerators were mainly Hindus. What assisted them was that by that time the Thakurs had also assumed Hindu names, but probably even more helpful was the actual duality of the faith of the population. In all the three valleys there is such a strong an admixture of Hinduism in the local forms of Buddhisms, that the misrepresentation could be accomplished by an enumerator without too much of a strain on his conscience. Therefore I was not surprised when I was told later that of the 27 households in Poorbani 20 are listed as of Rajputs, seven of Harijans and none of the Buddhists.

That the influence of Ladakhi and Tibetan contacts was once the stronger one, especially in Lahul and Spiti, is proved among other things by place names. Several place names have Tibetan origins and Ladakhi orientation. The name Lahul for example literally means "the southern country" and describes the position of the valley as south of Ladakh. "Spiti" means "the middle province", a reference to the position of Spiti between the Ladakhi Kingdom and Tibet, while "Lossar" or "the south waters" describes the position of the village as the first habitation on the Spiti, the southernmost river of the Ladakh kingdom. Phonetic suggestions of their origin are contained in many other place names like Wang Tu, Chu Ling, Sang La, and Shog-tong in Kinnaur, Thak Che, Rang-rig, Pangmo La and Thang-gyud in Spiti and Barbog, Gungrang and Kye Lang in Lahul. On the other hand names with an obviously Indian origin like Trilokinath at the Chamba end of the Pattan valley are relatively few. Linguistically, all the three valleys, as also Ladakh, belong to the Tibeto-Burmese family, though in recent times they have acquired a strong admixture of

Hindi and from prehistoric times have inherited traces of the Munda tongue which also appears in the languages of some of the tribes of eastern India.

The influence of Tibetan lamaism and the strong institutions of community life which it has created must be held responsible at least in part for the failure of the Moravian mission to find many converts in these valleys. The mission had the benefit of the services of some devoted people, like Pastor Heyde, who remained at his post at Kyelang for half a century and returned to Germany only to spend the last two years of his life there. Also, it performed commendable service to the people, especially of Kyelang and the Bhaga valley. It taught them how to build better houses, how to weave and knit and grow vegetables, it added the poplar to the valley's flora which still forms a very pleasing feature of the aspect of Kyelang; and the missionaries introduced a better system of education than the monasteries provided, and the first public health and medical service, however rudimentary, which the people of the valleys have known. And yet the Lahul Mission congregation, the largest in the three valleys, consisted at its height of only 21 adults and 27 children, among whom there were only 15 accredited communicants. Instances of marriage between the local people and outsiders, especially foreigners, must be very obscure if there are any. During all the treks I heard of only one story, and that a rather nebulous one, of a Negi or a minor Rajput official at Pooh, in upper Kinnaur, whose daughter is said to have married an Englishman in the early 40's. There are no examples in any of these valleys to parallel the case of the Banons of Manali, two generations of Englishmen who have married Kulu women and have not only settled down in Manali but acquired considerable standing and influence in the country. Nor is there a parallel to the Stokes of Kotgarh, descendants of an American who married locally and by taking to apple cultivation transformed the economy of the area.

Visual evidence—though none other—of the influence of Tibetan Buddhism has received a spurt in the past two or three years with the arrival of a large number of Tibetan refugees. Tibetan restaurants improvised in dingy shacks in the midst of road labour camps have become centres of leisure-time gatherings and places of gossip. A much larger number of people, mostly Tibetans but not all of them, are now seen on the roadside carrying miniature monasteries

made of tinsel hanging by the belt, or coin-size images of the Dalai Lama hanging by a bracelet or a necklace. Wherever among the refugees there is a lama of some renown he becomes the centre of the affection both of the believers and others, and we came across an interesting example of this on the road being built between Chota Durra and Burra Durra in the Chandra valley in Lahul.

We trekked twice through this corner of Lahul, first on our way into Spiti up the banks of the Chandra and over the Kunzum pass and then, a fortnight later, going downstream to reach the Pattan valley via Khoksar, Gondla and Tandi. During this fortnight evidence piled up of the difficulties of road-making in this area as well as of the determination with which they are overcome.

With few machines to help them, gangs of road labour had made long stretches of the road both wider and more firm. Curves which were too sharp had been straightened out, steep gradients levelled, and a few thousand square yards of retaining and breast wall built to hold back unstable hillsides.

Some of us were just commenting, near Chota Durra, that at this rate the foot of the Kunzum would soon be accessible by trucks when we came to a large gap where a road had been—and a good road at that—a fortnight earlier. In place of the road there was just a rubble heap now of shattered rock. Unsuspected by anyone, a glacier had been melting into a mountain-top lake in a cluster of peaks which are above the road but invisible from it. One day the lake burst, and with it the hillside nearest the road. What had been regarded as a solid cliff, too stable to need reinforcement, came crashing down with such a roar that it also caused a landslide on a hill on the opposite bank of the Chandra. The road, with all its mettle and its very foundations and ballast, was washed down to the banks of the river. White scars on the cliff above the road showed where huge chunks of the rock had been torn off by the rushing waters and let loose on people who did not even know that the lake existed.

There were no casualties when the road was destroyed, and for this a local group of lamas worked out an explanation very suitable for themselves. Among the refugees there was a young lama—the seventh successive reincarnation of the Head Lama of the great monastery at Khojar—whose 14-year old face was a memorable image of smooth innocence. He had built himself a camp near Barra Durra, where he was venerated not only by Tibetan

refugees but almost equally by non-Tibetans, including a few Sikh members of a picket of the Indian border police.

But ever since he fled Tibet he had been handicapped by the lack of a monastery, though he was less aware of this himself perhaps than the far cleverer cluster of attendants around him who missed the offerings—especially his older brother, who had rightly been deprived of his idleness by the authorities and put to work as the mate of a Tibetan labour team. When the hillside burst and before the cause could be traced to the melting of an unknown glacier, the lamas pronounced it to be the work of spirits. The cause of the spirits' anger, it was said, was that with such a senior lama living in the midst of such a larger number of devotees, nothing had yet been done by any one to build a monastery for him. Since the spirits were kind-hearted, they had only given a warning and avoided casualties—this time! Therefore a monastery should be quickly built or else worse would follow. And something in fact began to be done about it. Within days of the accident, the rudimentary beginnings of a monastery were constructed by the labourers in their leisure time.

Two days after leaving Chota Durra, we were walking another stretch of the new road, close to Gramphu, where more cynical labour from the plains of Punjab was at work. A couple of hours before we reached the spot, a woman labourer had died there. She was hit on the head by a falling stone. But all that her gang-mates did was to send for the roads department doctor to remove the body to hospital, and for the labour supervisor to work out the compensation due to her dependants under the Workmen's Compensation Act. In the meantime stone continued to be used for the road and no temple took shape either on the ground or in the hearts of the labourers.

Among the lesser things which show the influence of life in Tibet, though the common factor of an identical climate must also make everything alike throughout the area extending northwards from these valleys, is the diet of the people and the way it is eaten. The affluent host—whether the big monastery at Kyi in Spiti where we sat for a brief repast, or the smaller one at Jangi in the Kalpa valley where one stopped for a briefer one still, or the Gondhla Thakurs in the Chandra valley or the Khangsar Thakurs in the Bhaga valley in whose respective castles the refresh-

ment was more leisurely, or the Paljor Lama of the Shishur monastery in Kyelang at whose house an elaborate meal was served or a teacher at Jahlma in the Pattan valley or the chief trader in the Baspa valley—a host of this kind seats his guests on the floor on Tibetan carpets which have brilliant colours and intricate patterns. In front of each guest he puts a low table, carved and painted a bright red or amber, to which the food is brought in courses by attendants who are sometimes assisted by members of the family. The more humble host does the same, though his carpets may be faded or there may be none at all, and his tables unpainted except by grime and smoke (how terribly smoky the unventilated houses of these valleys can be, except in Lahul where the construction is much better now, was brought home to us in Spiti both at the Kye monastery and a house we visited at Hanse, and in Kinnaur in a house at Jangi where I attempted the hopeless task of photographing a dingy interior).

The food served also is often the same whether the host is a Hindu Brahmin of the Pattan valley or a Mongoloid Bhot as in the monasteries or the fluctuating Thakurs of Gondhla or Khangsar. Or at least it is basically the same, though the variety of the dishes and the quality of the cooking differ with the status of the host, and the bowl in which everything is served if it has sauce or gravy may be a fine piece of china taken out of a carved sideboard or a plain cup of wood just removed from the folds across the bosom of the host.

The most frequent first step in hospitality, whatever the place and time and whoever the host, is what passes for a cup of tea but is almost a meal in itself. The tea leaf used is often of an inferior quality but that matters very little because the flavour of tea is in any case imperceptible, being heavily overlaid with that of rancid butter. Salt is used instead of sugar, the mixture is vigorously stirred in the kitchen (sometimes with a human tibia bone, it is said) and when it is brought to the guest in a tea pot its main virtue is that it is piping hot and if one is hungry it kills the appetite straightaway.

An unavoidable ingredient of all meals is *sampa*—*Sattu* to the man of Kulu and the plains below—which is barley, dried, parched and powdered. I had it at breakfast one morning at Kyelang and when the host repeated it at lunch he added variety to it with a spice of explanation. What I ate at breakfast, I was told, was a

thin soup of barley, known as *thugpa;* but now it was thicker and had dumplings in it, though of the same stuff, and its name was *polda.* At dinner of course the main item would again be *thugpa.* The more wealthy, however, vary the gruel with vegetables (if there are any in season and available within a radius of ten miles or so) and if they have a special guest they also add a little meat, the older the better. Fresh meat is rare and seems not to be in demand either, since the usual practice is to kill goats and sheep at the start of the winter, to dry the meat and to preserve it like that through the year while the meat similarly preserved in previous years is eaten. The slices left unconsumed at the bottom of the pile become a delicacy after a few years. In recent times a privileged few have added poultry to their diet though even the ailing Thakur Pratap Chand whom I met at Khangsar, in the Bhaga valley, in his castle and the last seat of the waziri, had to send for eggs to Kyelang, 10 miles away.

Next only to barley as the main cereal food of the valleys is buckwheat, though in the lower reaches of Kinnaur and especially in the Baspa branch two other kinds of grain are also grown, *phaphra* and *ogla.* From of all these though most from the buckwheat the people derive the only item of their diet which can be compared with *chapatti,* which in the plains of India is practically the universal equivalent of bread. Buckwheat is made into a not unpalatable kind of pancake, soft, spongy and made slightly sour by the fermenting process which the dough goes through before it comes to the cooking stage. The cooking of this as of all other foods is done in mustard oil though yak's butter is also used in Spiti and animal fat in upper Kinnaur. The pancakes are usually eaten by themselves or with *thugpa* but as a special favour a host sometimes serves a kind of curd with them.

Anything which the host may serve outside this menu is not a product of the valleys but an item imported at great cost from across the mountains which surround them. But there are three exceptions, the apples and grapes of Ribba, in upper Kinnaur, and the various kinds of *chang* or beer, *arak* or whisky and *angoori* or grape wine, which are the product of local ingenuity. Departing unwisely from the tolerance shown in many other matters, and even on this in the valleys of Lahul and Spiti, the authorities have tried to inject a dose of prohibition into Kalpa. But the valley man's attachment to drinks is such that it will be

more difficult to wean him from them than from Tibet. In most of these areas *chang* plays an important part in all rituals and its acceptance or refusal determines many issues of great importance. Offering and drinking *chang* in great quantities forms an important part of the ceremonies connected with agriculture, and there are many of them, when the ploughing is begun, or the seed sown, or the sickle first put to the ripened crop. When a marriage proposal is made for instance, the bridegroom's representatives offer a pot of *chang* to those of the bride. If the drink is refused it means that the proposal has been rejected, but if the pot is put to the lip by the bride's agents the groom's future is as good as settled, and the degree of welcome he may expect can be measured by the welcome extended to the drink.

The poor man's *chang* is made of barley, the richer man's of wheat and the aristocrat's of rice, which is mostly an imported grain. But whatever its ingredients the *chang* is usually a rough tasting drink while *arak* can be a reasonably good drink, taken after dinner, if it is made well and heightened with saffron as the more expensive liquors distilled in Rajasthan are. However it is with the *angoori* of Ribba that the Bacchic possibilities of these valleys are really reached. The grape vine grew profusely in the valley until about 1860 when a vine-pest reduced the crop to a fourth. But where it survives it remains profuse even now, as in Ribba. This tiny village, connected with the outside world only by a muletrack and in winter only by a length of wire rope stretched across the riotous stream of the Sutlej, produces a grape crop which has never been accurately measured but is estimated at 75 tons per season. At the time of our visit every backyard and doorstep in the village was dark under the shade of vine spread out on crude scaffoldings and heavy clusters of grape hung down through the mesh. The village also produces a fine crop of apples which again has never been weighed but our host alone claimed to reap about three tons in a good year. Since there is no market yet either for the grapes or the apples, both are turned into explosive drinks of a great variety, and all of them are locally consumed. The crop is pulped under foot, then buried into the ground in casks of slate and allowed to ferment throughout the summer, then distilled in batches throughout the long months of the winter. The methods are crude, therefore the taste has an edge to it, but the possibilities are obvious.

With Ribba the height is reached of the lush fertility which can be achieved not only in the Kinnaur valley but also in Lahul and Spiti. Its hold is precarious since it needs the combined help of a number of favourable factors and if any one of them is absent the crop can perish. The most treacherous of course is the weather, as a woman working in the fields near Jispa explained, high up in the Bhaga valley, close to the Inner Line and where the climb begins for the Bara La Cha pass. She was harvesting her crop of barley though it was still much greener than those I had seen a few days earlier, in the Pattan valley, still standing in their fields. It was even greener than some in the Bhaga valley itself, but she said she was afraid that since the snow had been meagre in the preceding winter it could be heavy and early this year, and rather than lose everything she must gather now whatever she could. Her fears were not imaginary. Two years earlier her efforts had been nipped in at both ends. Sowings had been delayed by late and heavy snowfalls at the close of the preceding winter and to put the seed in she had to melt the snow in her fields by throwing earth on it. In the succeeding winter snow had fallen much earlier than expected and her barley did not even get the time to develop the grain.

But when the weather helps and the soil is suitable and the water available, one can find crops and orchards which cloak the memory of the desolation which is otherwise the rule. And this is even more true in the higher reaches of the valleys because the water of melting glaciers has more fertilising power than that of the clearer streams lower down. The tiny fields of Kyibber, a village in Spiti at a height of more than 13,000 feet which we passed through in the third week of August, were dense with as fine a crop of barley, already dry as gold, as one can hope to see anywhere. As we approached Kyibber, we could see on the opposite side of the gorge of the Zengpa Lungpa the village of Chijim, whose crops were still jade green but promised as rich a crop when ripe as those of Kyibber. In the valley of Pattan, which is slightly broader and lower in altitude, crops extend to the very edge of the river bank on one side and any climbable facet of the hill on the other. Wherever the harvest had been gathered, as in the slightly warmer villages of Phura, Jahlman and Taljun, it stood in great mounds on the roofs of the houses or was laid out to dry in the fields in neat rows of bushels. In the colder

valleys of the Bhaga and the Chandra it stood in as close-packed a pattern of varying shades of green as I remember seeing anywhere.

During the trek through Kinnaur I saw a profusion of the scarlet tassels of the *phaphra* drooping heavily with seed. In the more shaded villages of the Baspa valley, which has been described as "the most romantic valley in the Himalaya" and should make a fine holiday resort, the *ogla* crop, which is the most valued of the indigenous grains of Kinnaur, was still a gay mass of its pink and white flowers. At higher altitudes and on hills more exposed to the sun it had already been burnt to a rich shade of brown, roughly between rust and bronze, as it lay on the dull brown of barren rocks like a carpet put out to sun.

Nor is grain or the grapes and apples of Ribba the only crop that flourishes in these oases scattered in the mountainous desert of the valleys. In Shainsha village in the Pattan valley I met farmers who were picking the seed of the *Kuth* crop though it was still a little green "but too valuable already" as one of the farmers explained "to be left in the field now. It might be stolen". In Tandi village the *Kuth* root was being gathered for sale—at Rs. 150 a maund at the farmer's doorstep or Rs. 200 a maund in the Kulu bazaar, to be exported to China, the United States and France where its oil is used as the base for many perfumes and incenses. The biggest grower of *Kuth* in the Pattan valley, Seth Maya Das, the aging but still very agile head of a vast joint family, estimated that on an average he annually makes Rs. 1,700 from an acre of this three-year crop. In the first bazaar—of two or three shops—which I saw in Kinnaur, a shopkeeper (a Sikh, the inevitable emigrant!) was buying a wild-grown herb called *Karu* at Rs. 60 to 70 a maund and he hoped to sell it at twice that price at Delhi. Further up in Chini great heaps of the *chilgoza* cones lay gathered in every village, a free gift of the wild forests of pine which grow in great abundance here. This was about the middle of September, and about the middle of October the *chilgoza* seed would be sold at Rs. 100 to Rs. 120 a maund. An average family earns Rs. 500 a year from this source alone, in spite of the fact that the middle man, usually a man from the plains, has already entrenched himself in this trade and takes away a large portion of the profits.

Limited though it is in area—only about one acre per square

mile is cultivated in Spiti, five acres per square mile in Lahul and less than 10 in Kinnaur—agriculture has given the people of the three valleys, especially of the first two, a look of prosperity and well-being which could be the envy of an average village in the planes and even an above the average village in many parts of the Kulu valley. Practically every house that I saw in the three valleys of Lahul, except near the Chamba end of the Pattan valley, was neatly built of stone, and thanks to the training imparted by the Moravian missionaries, those built in the past half a century or more were not only large but also well ventilated. There was little of the haphazard piling together of half baked bricks, liable to be eroded by the rain, which one can see in many villages in Punjab, one of the most prosperous states of India, nor the dingy squalor which is the rule in the hill valleys generally except when the house-owner happens to be particularly well-off. The house has a plan related to functions, the three dominant ones being drying the harvest, giving shelter to cattle in the winter, and gathering manure. These between them have dictated the outline of the houses in Lahul.

Unlike the villager in the plains, the Lahula does not believe in sharing his room with his cattle. Therefore he gives over the whole of the ground floor, known as Po, as the winter residence of his sheep, mules and *dzos,* a cross between the Spitial yak and the Kulu cow, which are his favourite milch and draft cattle. His own living and working rooms are on the second floor, called Nipuri, with an inner room for use in winter and an outer room and a varandah for use in summer. Most houses also have a guest room known as the Chinna. Usually there is also a third storey, the Shumpori, for storing fuel. Since flat fields are scarce and more valuable for cultivation, the roofs are flat and are used for spreading out the crop and fodder to dry. These also stand the weather more effectively than the sloped roofs of slate more common in Kulu. The severe winds of winter pass over them instead of hitting them direct and blowing them apart. The snow could lie more heavily on them instead of slipping down the slope. But it has become the custom with the hardy people of these valleys to clear the snow after each fall. To keep the winter and the winds out of the crevices left when stone slabs are piled up without mortar for building the walls, the houses are plastered both inside and out by a mixture of cow dung and soil. But I

was surprised to notice that the mixture does not smell here as it does in the villages in the plains, and for this the valley people have probably to thank their dry winds.

But even more surprising is the absence of the smell of manure in the house of the Lahula, considering that he stores not only the excreta of his cattle but also his own throughout the winter, and the need to do it has added another conspicuous feature to houses built in recent years, especially in the Chandra valley. Separated from the house by the stairway, a hollow, vertical chute is built with a lavatory at the top and storage at the bottom, on which lime is thrown from time to time as a deodorant. This in the course of time becomes the finest manure available in the valleys though it is used only by the Mongol Bhots, not by the Hindus, whether the Rajputs of lower Kinnaur or the Brahmins of the Pattan valley. This is one of the reasons why the crops are far superior in Spiti, in the Hungrang valley of upper Kinnaur and the Chandra and Bhaga valleys. These areas are inhabited mainly by the Bhots.

Inside the house are the Lahula's implements of life, his picturesque high saddle for riding mules, covered with Tibetan rugs of gorgeous colours and design, pack saddles for his sheep and other pack animals, bowls of stone brought from Skardu, in Ladakh, vessels, sacramental or utilitarian, of iron and other metals which are usually bought in the Kulu bazaar, a loom which is still often made at home but is being replaced by those of a better design supplied by government-sponsored industrial institutes, and large bins for storing the grain which are made of slate slabs held by wooden frames. The decorations are usually few except in the houses of the rich, but even in others a few odd pieces of bric-a-brac may be seen on the walls or in the shelves which the trading member of the family picks up in his long tours of Tibet or the Kulu marts. In each house a room or a corner of a room is set apart as the family's private chapel and in some, like the Gondhla castle of Thakur Fateh Chand, the room is a musty museum of the spiritual arts of the valley. Hardly any houses, except those of the Thakurs, can match the wealth of *thankas*, manuscripts and idols which are displayed in the monasteries, but wherever they exist they are displayed to greater advantage than in the monasteries. They are not covered by the cobwebs and soot which usually pervade these places of worship where lack of

cleanliness and even elementary hygiene is appalling. One of the most disappointing places throughout our treks was the Kyi monastery in Spiti, one of the most important anywhere, which stands most picturesquely on top of its conical mountain of shale but inside is as filthy a place to visit as can be contrived. Its treasure of manuscripts and paintings can barely be examined under the crusts left on them by years of neglect.

The house of the Spitial is much less attractive than the Lahula's though even this is made of more lasting material than most in the plainsman's village. Passing through Kyibber we saw the making of massive bricks, each about two feet in length and eight or nine inches in depth and height, which are made by a process rather like that of making slabs of concrete. Small gravel is mixed with the sandy soil of the valley which appears to contain a cementing element. When water is added and the mixture pressed into a frame, it hardens into a stone-like brick and the houses made of it stand up to the pressures of the wind and snow to which they are subjected. The ventilation is poor, the general design aiming more at keeping out the cold than letting in light and air and the result, as we found while visiting a house in Hanse, is cheerless. The central courtyard was surrounded on three sides by rooms and on the fourth by the entrance door. The separation between the cattle and other inmates was not as complete as in the houses in Lahul though it was more than is usual in a village in the plains. The rooms on the ground floor, mainly meant for use in winter, were dark and very poorly ventilated, but those on the upper floor, more used by the family and more in summer, were brighter and bigger. The roof was flat, and for the same reason as in Lahul, and the rooms were more bleak except the prayer room to which the implements of the elaborate ceremonies of Tibetan Buddhism lent some colour. But the poverty of appearance here was less the result of actual penury than of lack of knowledge about how to live better, which either education brings or contact with the outside world. As an indication of the state of economic well-being in Spiti, what is more interesting is not the lack of light and air in the houses but the wealth of silver ornaments worn by women and the fact that few people may be seen in any village who look undernourished or badly clothed. Official records both about Lahul and Spiti, which are particular on these points, contain only one brief entry each under

the heading "Famine": "There has never been any famine in Lahul" and "Famine in Spiti has never been recorded." I doubt that there is any area in the plains which can boast of a similar record.

As in its religion and culture, so in the appearance of its villages, houses and people, Kinnaur is a bridge between the purely Buddhist inspirations of Spiti and the predominantly Hindu ones of Rampur-Bushair; and even within Kinnaur each area is a bridge between those on either side of it. The Hungrang valley, being closest to Spiti, resembles it most. The villages are a tight huddle of houses, flat roofed, made of stone, and with little ventilation. The dress of the women is the same as in Spiti, and they display the same weakness for silver ornaments. The men, whose travels to Rampur are frequent, retain much of the dress of Spiti but have succumbed to the charms of the Rampur cap, a low round thing of felt, without a brim but gaily lined in front and on one side with coloured velvet, which cuts a dash all its own if it is worn at the right angle and in Kinnaur is equally popular with men and women. By the time Jangi is reached, about 70 miles downstream from the border of Spiti, both language and dress drop resemblances with Spiti, the people appear less ruddy in the face and are of weaker frames, the children in the street show lack of nourishment, and since the caste exploitation increases as the Hindu element rises, the Harijans or the lower castes add to the appearance of poverty in the village. Although the snowfall here is nearly ten feet in the year there is about eight inches of rainfall too. Therefore the weather is comparatively mild and aridity far from being severe. Some forests appear, a few of them good ones, and with timber comes a change in the look of the houses. There is less need for them to be huddled up and are frequently seen to be strung out in a line. Flat roofs are interspersed with sloped ones of slate but whether flat or conical all houses have one thing in common, a balcony of wood. Prudence declines as scarcity lessens, and compared with the Spitial and the Lahula the Kinnaura is reckless in his use of timber even though his supply of it, much more than in the other two valleys, is not unlimited. He uses wood where stone with a little effort would do as well, and neither he is the gainer nor his village and area. For a year or two the wood, sliced and planed at some expense, looks prettier than the more lasting stone, but it suffers rapidly

at the hands of weather, warps, cracks and darkens, giving the houses which it once adorned a more shabby appearance and the village an added look of poverty. But this may change if the measures now taken by the authorities succeed. Curbs have been put on cutting timber even in the common lands of the village, where the householder hitherto had ampler rights, and in housing schemes financed by government loans people are encouraged to use stone instead of wood.

The basic structure of the house is similar in most parts of Kinnaur. The need for a place to ferment and distil the grape adds a structure to the house in grape growing villages. Fodder or crop hung by strings or loops or on the ground near houses with conical roofs adds another difference to the appearance of the house. But essentially the house remains the thing that it is everywhere in these valleys. The space on the ground floor, called the "ogra", though divided into rooms, is really a barn for the cattle. The upper storey, ascended by a stairway if the householder is well off or else by notches cut in a tree trunk, has the living rooms or the "dafi". In between there is usually a store or "phar". The interiors are more decorative in the houses of the rich—and just as the poor are more conspicuous than in the more equalitarian Spiti, so are the rich. Even Kinnaur, in spite of the greater wealth of materials around it, has nothing of the wealth of arts and crafts which Kashmir and even Ladakh produce on the one hand and the NEFA tribesmen produce at the other end of the country. But it produces more—mainly woollen textiles and some silver jewellery, both for domestic consumption —than Lahul and Spiti, whose bleakness in this respect is surprising.

It is probably not a coincidence that throughout Lahul the appearance of well-being is most conspicuous in areas where the population is predominantly of Mongol extraction, whether the people are known as Bhots or Kanets, and is least conspicuous in areas inhabited mostly by people of Hindu origin whether they call themselves Kanets, Rajputs, Brahmins or Harijans. Elsewhere in the valley the same equation expresses itself in a slightly different form. Given the same conditions of living, the former group seems to do better for itself than the latter. The difference between the physical environments of the Spitial and the Swangla Brahmin of the Pattan valley, for instance, is so great that it over-

shadows the difference in personal capabilities. But the superiority of the racial group closest to the Spitial becomes obvious even in the Pattan valley when it lives in the same or adjacent villages with the Swangla or the Rajput. The same is true of Kinnaur, where the prosperity of the Baspa valley, such as it is, is to be traced more to the kindnesses conferred by nature than to the quality of its inhabitants, while that of the Hungrang valley has been achieved, as in Spiti, by the hardy race inhabiting it in spite of the extremely trying physical conditions. The conclusion this suggests is confirmed in Ladakh where the holdings are small and the people generally prosperous among the Bhots, while in neighbouring Baltistan, where the population is mostly of Muslims, poverty is the rule although the environment is very similar.

Except when he is too rigidly on his guard, the Rajput or the Brahmin of the Pattan valley or lower Kinnaur is quite ready himself to admit the difference. When I asked them why the quality of agriculture and the looks of the villages declined steadily as one proceeded down the banks of the Chenab towards the Chamba border, many Hindus in the Pattan valley first tried to explain away the difference by referring to alleged decline in the quality of soil and scarcity of water. But in more frank moments they admitted that some habits and customs came in the way too. "Our society is to blame," said the Hindu shopkeepers of Jhunda and Tuljah, and elsewhere I heard "our brains" being blamed and "our conservatism." In Kinnaur persons of both Mongol and Indian extraction agreed that the former are more willing than the latter to try out new openings for committing their resources in manpower and money, and are not held back by inhibitions, whether of an economic nature or social. People of Hindu origin decline, for example, to use human refuse as manure except where Harijan labour is at hand to help them out. On the other hand the Bhots use it diligently and to great advantage. The children, even of the Brahmins, are not sent to school as readily as those of the Bhots are. And neither the Brahmins nor the Rajputs (except in lower Kinnaur) have adopted the two institutions of the Bhots from which the latter have derived great benefit, primogeniture as the law of succession, as in Spiti, and the polyandrous marriage as the basis of social organisation, as in all the Bhot areas of Lahul. From this derive two important handicaps that afflict the Hindu: his fields get more rapidly fragmented, and in

his villages less manpower is spared for other economic pursuits such as trade and grazing. His institutions of collective labour are also more feeble than of the Bhot though nowadays what worries the more thoughtful ones among the latter also is that each one of their three advantages—customs of inheritance, the system of marriage and collective self-reliance—is being eroded by the impact of some recent events, such as the decline in their contact with Tibet and the "modernisation" which proceeds in the valleys as their communications with the outside world improve.

The worries belong to a later chapter but not the institutions, of which the most widespread once but most rapidly declining now is that of polyandry. Distasteful by the new standards of a more sophisticated individualism which have entered the valleys from the plains, polyandry helped large parts of Lahul and Kinnaur to keep the lid on the population. Its advantages were so clearly recognised that the Rampur-Bishair state instituted a fine once to be imposed on separate marriages. The weather and the high altitude helped not a little since these too are said to reduce fertility. But without the custom of the younger sons automatically becoming the husbands of the eldest brother's wife upon attaining maturity it would not have been possible for successive census reports to record a mere nominal rise in the population. Since all brothers lived in the same household, polyandry kept another economic hatchet in check, the fragmentation of holdings upon succession from father to sons, a process which in the plains of India has been making a mess of agriculture. Complications regarding paternal relations were forestalled by the wise wife by adopting an arbitrary system of her own to fix the paternity of each child. Either she decided and declared the paternity of the child before its birth, or else fathered her children upon the various brothers in a series determined by age, the eldest being declared to be the child begotten by the eldest brother, the next by the second brother and so on. By either system she avoided a disputed paternity, especially in the case of a child handicapped in any way whom its real father may not wish to own up.

In Ladakh and Lahul, where the system of polyandry shows greater durability even now than in Kinnaur, its rigours were reduced and therefore acceptability increased by two factors built into the system, by social practice in Ladakh and by economic practice in Lahul. It is the custom in Ladakh that only the next

two brothers are allowed to share the eldest brother's wife (while up to six brothers may share her in Kinnaur). The other brothers, if any, can marry an heiress if there is one, who has inherited property in the absence of brothers, and can spend the rest of their lives as Magpas, or husbands who are "perpetually on probation" as a Ladakhi saying goes. Custom gives the heiress the right to shed a husband any time she wishes to by a simple ceremony of divorce, which is common to all the valleys, of breaking a thread with the husband. If they cannot find an heiress or do not wish to, the younger brothers go into a monastery, and nearly a sixth of the population of Ladakh is usually in religious houses. In Lahul the excesses of polyandry are reduced by the wide-ranging economic pursuits of the male. It is quite customary for the venturesome Lahula to send one brother in the family to his trading trips to Tibet and Kulu and another to other occupations in the plains (the levies raised in the valleys in times of war by the British used to consist mainly of the Lahulas) so that in effect the joint wife of the brothers had only one or at the most two husbands at any time. On the other hand in Kinnaur, though less in the upper part of the valley than the lower, most brothers stayed at home most of the time, making the system less acceptable to men as well as to women, and to men for the additional reason too that, as of course in Lahul also, the age of the wife is naturally related to that of the eldest brother, who is the first to marry her, and she is well past her marriageable prime as well probably her child-bearing days by the time the younger brothers come of age. It was therefore natural to find, though amusing still, that whenever one asked for the opinion of the Lahula and the Kinnaura about the virtues of the system the younger people showed marked disapproval and the older did not. Also, the younger people who made a polyandrous marriage were more reluctant to admit it than the older and an inquirer who is short of time, like a census enumerator, can easily come to a wrong conclusion. But whether old or young, most people one met recognised that the passing of polyandry would create economic difficulties by increasing the population and with it the pressure on land, and by breaking up the holdings, as brothers with separate wives took the next natural step of dividing the household and the holding.

The division will probably spread with speed once an important present restraint on it goes: that even in families in which more

than one son has taken a separate wife to himself, property is not being divided yet because the father and the eldest brother, both still committed to the old system, still wield considerable personal influence and prestige. But when that generation passes, those who have broken away from the custom will not be able to hold the family together, being themselves the violaters of the customary bonds. Fragmentation of holdings may then occur more rapidly than in some parts of the plains of India which have a tradition of the joint family system even with separate marriages for all the sons.

The economic purposes of polyandry were served in Spiti and among the Thakurs of Lahul by the system of primogeniture. Only the eldest son was entitled to his father's property and by a natural economic consequence though also because of other customs he alone was able to take a wife and raise a family. Therefore the population was kept down and the fragmentation of holdings was prevented. As soon as the eldest son came of age he married and the father retired into a small house on the son's property. The other brothers and sisters usually retired to the monastery although their maintenance there was a charge on the family property. They could, if they chose, remain with the eldest brother and claim subsistence but in return for working for him in the field or the house. For the working of both polyandry and primogeniture and therefore for the economy of all these valleys and presumably of the adjoining valleys also, the monastery was a helpful institution. Without it the surplus daughters in areas of polyandry and the sons and daughters in areas of primogeniture who did not inherit a share in the land would have remained a disruptive force, as they have been among the Hindus of Kinnaur who began noticeably to move away from polyandry about 20 years ago. But when the monastic system was at its height it took care of all the surplus population on a community basis because the maintenance of the monastery and its inmates used to be the first charge on the earnings of each family. In fact in Spiti most families had hereditary cells in one monastery or another where all its surplus members could lead a life partly of worship and partly of certain kinds of work in the village. Therefore a strong vested interest existed in the community to keep the monastery alive and in the monastery to keep polyandry and primogeniture alive. Now all three of them are crumbling

simultaneously because of separate causes, and instead of propping each other up are bringing each other down.

One found the advantages of the system most clearly in evidence in Lahul—not because the monasteries were in better health there, which they were not, but because of the natural tendency of the Lahula to attack opportunity wherever he finds it. To him polyandry has not meant the relegating of spare daughters to the monastery so much as the doubling of the labour force. Many do go into the monastery—or did until recent years—but many more take to productive work. Women relieved of household chores, which became the responsibility of the joint wife who was in return relieved of work in the field, practically took over the major part of agricultural work. At the same time the younger sons, relieved of the time consuming cycles of agriculture and not too terribly drawn to domesticity with an elderly wife, accepted and developed vocations which required long absences from home, especially trade with Tibet.

The hefty entry the Lahula made into the Tibetan trade does him special credit because he was hemmed in by two competitors, both better placed than he was. To the north-west was the Kashmiri trader, especially of upper Kashmir, who had traditional rights, written into a treaty between Kashmir and Tibet in the 16th century, which gave his claims on the wool exports of Western Tibet a high priority over the claims of others. The routes which were open to him between Srinagar and Tibet are also easier and better provided with grazing for the pack animals than those across lower Ladakh which the Lahula had to use. The Kinnaura in the south-east had the advantage of one of the easiest passes into Tibet, over the Shipki-La, and the only trade route which has been carefully maintained for many years, the Hindustan-Tibet Road. For much of the 200 miles between Simla and the Tibetan border the road was only a mule track until the recent exigencies of security began converting it into a motor road, but it was always the best looked after route between the two countries. In the discussions four years ago between Indian and Chinese officials about the Sino-Indian border dispute, the Indian side produced documents dating back to the start of this century under which the Indian and Tibetan governments undertook specific responsibilities for the maintenance of this route. It was on the basis of rights acquired under these treaties that large mule trains and

even larger flocks of sheep and goats, each carrying a load in bags ingeniously slung on their backs, used to proceed to Tibet, both for trade and the latter for grazing also on pastures on the Tibetan side of the Shipki pass. (Three years ago, in villages close to the border I came across several flocks and mule trains on their way to or back from Tibet. A year later I found that even grazing had been stopped under Indian orders, issued in anticipation of the termination of the Sino-Indian trade agreement.) But with no treaty rights to protect him and in spite of the difficulties of terrain the Lahula gradually acquired a fair share of the wool trade with Tibet.

It is not clear that the Spitial and the Kinnaura have been equally energetic in seizing the opportunity created by their social institutions for diversifying their economic pursuits. A considerable amount of trade is done by the Kinnaura, especially if he belongs to the villages above Kalpa, but considering the greater gifts which nature has conferred on his valley and the relatively great density of population in it he could probably have done better. The Spitial on the other hand does very little trade but his natural resources are far more limited. He suffers a severe shortage of fuel and fodder (the only dispute between two adjacent villages which we came across in Spiti, apart from one over the use of the Rangrik *Kuhl*, concerned the use of the bushes which grow on the La Darsa plateau between Kyibber and Kyoto and which anywhere else would be dismissed as miserable scrub). In fact so acute is the shortage that many people we met on the trek, of both sexes and all ages, thought nothing of walking ten or fifteen miles to collect a bundle of twigs and leaves. Since through the long months of the winter cattle and sheep and goats have to be fed on whatever can be stored up during the brief summer, the Spitial's capacity to keep enough pack animals for trade is very limited. On the whole he appeared to have made such use of his opportunities as was possible and he was ready for a further dose of ideas and implements which would help him to live better. As the Bhots in Lahul and to a less extent in Kinnaur (except in parts of Kinnaur which are adjacent to Spiti), he raises excellent crops in extremely unfavourable conditions. The yields he achieves are higher than in the other two valleys and for him also limitations on marriage have meant a larger labour force, especially of women.

It displeases the visitor from the plains to see women, and almost women alone since men come in only for the really heavy tasks, double-bent in the fields, sowing, watering, hoeing, reaping and harvesting the crop. And if he comes in from Kulu he cannot help noticing the contrast between the Lahul women who are drably dressed and do not easily wear a smile and the Kulu women whose laughter is infectious and the dress a gay profusion of colours especially in the months soon after the rains. But any conclusion he may draw about the women of Lahul being a suppressed or exploited community would be entirely wrong because in many ways they have a social and economic status which is higher than of the Kulu women and certainly higher than of the women in many conservative communities in the plains. If she has no brothers, she and not male nephews or other kinsmen inherits the whole property. She can retain it all her life as a maid or she can take a husband to come and live with her. She may not leave her own estate and go to live with her husband, but that only ensures that property inherited by the daughter is not neglected and she does not, as a propertied woman, attract merely the avaricious in whose household she may herself be neglected. The widow of a man who has no brothers inherits the estate and both in Lahul and Spiti a daughter who chooses not to go into a monastery can claim a maintenance on equal status with her brother's wife. In practice the status is even higher because not being encumbered with responsibilities about the household she is a more productive unit of labour in the field. It is only among the Hindus of Kinnaur that her status is lower because among them she cannot inherit property.

Not only the monastery but many institutions and habits speak of a strong instinct for collective self-reliance which until very recent times was a distinguishing and most admirable characteristic of the Lahula, the Spitial and the Kinnaura alike. Some of the land of the village belongs to the *deota* or the monastery and its cultivation is the responsibility of the community as a whole. But in all the villages in whichever valley where one took the trouble of going to see this collective land one found it to be as well cultivated as any other. Its produce goes to no one in particular and those who work on it do not acquire a higher claim on its fruit than those who do not. Yet when his turn comes to contri-

bute his labour to this field no one declines, since joint responsibility has not meant in these valleys, and in respect of this field it still does not, that no one recognises his own part of it. Hence the unmitigated merriment with which a part of this crop is consumed for one common purpose or another—in the Pattan valley in an annual feast for all those who may have worked in the course of the year on village amenities for the common benefit of the whole community, such as making a village path or building an irrigation channel. The major part of the crop becomes the nucleus for an emergency grain store.

In the Sutlej valley, around Kalpa and upwards, in the wild forests of the *chilgoza* tree, the Pinus Gerardiana, another form of co-operation flourished checked until a few years ago. The trees are a wild growth, difficult to cultivate (and how to do so is one of the toughest problems facing the expert here) and since no one can claim to have planted them no one can claim to own them. Therefore they are owned commonly by the village in whose area they grow. When the season is ripe the *chilgoza* cone drops to the ground in great quantities, but even so to collect it over scattered areas and to pile it up in the village is a hard task, and harder still is the task of wresting more cones from the tall tree and wresting the seed from the hard, obstinate cone. Ownership and extraction both require—and hitherto were not denied—joint responsibility and work by the community as a whole. Even until four years ago I found in villages closer to the Tibetan border that when the time came each household spared such labour as it reasonably could, a young man to climb the tree, or one or two younger women to collect the cones as they came down to the ground, or old folk to bake the cones for extracting the seed at home. But the collection was equally divided between the households of the village regardless of how much labour—or any at all—had been contributed by each.

Even the more hazardous job of making irrigation channels or *kuhls* as they are called used not to damp the willingness of the villagers to band together for the collective performance of a function which might be of no direct benefit at least to some of them. Nothing grows without irrigation in these valleys of scanty rainfall. But building a *kuhl* is far from easy. The water of melting snows flows through deep gullies or a remote fold in the hills or even over the edge of a precipice. It can be carried to fields

only through channels cut in the face of sharply rising rocks where a slip of the hand or the foot could mean death on the spot. Opposite Jahlma in the Pattan valley I was shown a *kuhl* which had been carved in rock by workmen who wielded their tools with one hand while with the other they hung by the rock above. The *kuhl* led to so small a crop area that a less hardy people or those in less desperate need of land would have abandoned it. But here each family in the neighbourhood contributed labour, including some whose lands were far from the *kuhl*. The villagers of Tillingi and Khangwa near Kalpa made a *kuhl* of their own a few years ago by allotting turns for labour by each family. "We had a system of fines for absentees", as one of the villagers told me, "but I do not recollect our ever having to use it." (Yet by the time of my first visit to Kinnaur in 1960, both the villages had become a laboratory proof of the decline of this wonderful expression of collective will.) The people of Rangrik in Spiti have dug a *kuhl* which is over five miles long and runs at a height of about 13,000 feet and for the most part lies across the face of cliffs. In Chihjim, a village opposite Kyibber in the valley of the Zengpa Lungpa 14 families have been in an active partnership for some years to build a *kuhl*, which is equally high and runs across even more hazardous rock faces, for irrigating a new plot of land which they have jointly acquired. Each family donates two men per day for all the six months when the land is not covered by snow. At the time we met them they had already struggled with the project for two years but had been defeated each winter by a glacier or a landslide. But such is the strength of self-reliance in the much less "modernised" Spiti that when the people of Chihjim met our party, which included senior officials of the Punjab government, they did not ask that the *kuhl* be built for them by others (as the people of much of Kinnaur, a valley more exposed to contemporary trends, have begun to ask) but only that they should be given iron pipes which they could dig into the hillside over stretches where the open *kuhl* is more vulnerable. How long this spirit will last depends in part upon how quickly Spiti too falls under the magic spell of "development".

III

PRESENT EFFORTS

NOTHING IN THESE valleys makes a more exciting sound today than an air engine overhead or the massed charges of rock blasting powder or, wherever the powder has thundered already, the sound of jeep horns and the whine of trucks taking a steep gradient in high gear. These are not only the sounds of progress in remote mountains. They are evidence of the strong Indian response to the challenge thrown by the Chinese. They can now be heard at the border and above it almost any day, but when we heard them for the first time they were comparatively rare, even though our treks began and ended with them.

A few hours after leaving Sethan on the opening day of our journey into Spiti, we stopped in our tracks to listen to the staccato sound of a helicopter above us. It would have attracted attention in any case when heard in surroundings so unaccustomed to it; but that day and at that place it was an important sound since it carried with it the much bigger rumble of rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union.

For some days before the trek began there had been talk at Chandigarh, the Le Corbusier capital of Punjab, that government or the army intended buying some helicopters to help in developing border communications and that two rival machines were being tried out, one Russian and the other American. Some flights had been made already, from Ambala over the Simla hills, which are relatively low, through the valley of the Sutlej in Kinnaur and thence into the valley of the Spiti. But it was thought that the real test would be a direct flight through the Beas valley into Lahul or Spiti over the much higher mid-Himalayan range.

While claims were made for both machines, neither had yet actually made this flight. The day before we left Manali, the American helicopter made a dash up to Rohtang but was turned back by bad weather. It hovered over the rest house where we were staying, settled briefly in a forest clearing quite near us and

then retreated down the valley towards Kulu. The machine which roared above us as we trekked beyond Sethan carried no visible markings and we never discovered whether it was Russian or American. But gleaming in a sunny, blue sky, the blue of its glass bubble looking like a vivid fragment of the sky above, the helicopter flew dashingly on in the direction of Rohtang. A little later we saw it returning from the direction of the Hampta pass and some days later we learnt that it had made a landing on the Bara La Cha, the mountainous heart of Lahul and Spiti.

Apparently the helicopter had completed in as many minutes a circuit for which we had set apart about twenty days, and by that much it had brought nearer the day when the border with Tibet would be more effectively watched than it has been in the past. In other circumstances the feat, whether accomplished by a Russian machine or an American, would also have brought the sad reflection that the days of trekking in these valleys would soon be over. As in Ladakh already, mule tracks and the ever winding foot paths would be left only for those who could not afford to fly and thus would fall into disuse and neglect. But on a trek of which one purpose was to look at some aspects of the defence of these valleys and their growing orientation towards the rest of India, the sound of the helicopter had a different and a far more reassuring meaning. It was a long and long overdue step taken not a day too soon.

This feeling of reassurance was to return, and more powerfully, a few weeks later. Trekking through Kinnaur at a place about 20 miles from the Tibetan border I stopped one morning for a pull at my flask of tea and to admire the deep gorge of the Sutlej river which tumbled in fury about 3,000 feet below me. Before I could distinguish the sound of its blades from the road of the Sutlej, a single-engine plane with the markings of the Indian Air Force flew past me, zig-zagging through the valley with hills rising about it on both sides. It came in suddenly round a bend in the valley, flying in from the direction of the border, and within a minute or two had disappeared round another bend in the direction of Kalpa.

How times change! In 1960 this was still an uncommon sight and therefore exciting. Since then it has become a common occurrence, and the people of these valleys have become as accustomed as any town dweller to the comings and goings of aircraft—not

just the single engined plane of the kind I saw threading its way through the Sutlej gorges that day but much bigger and more sophisticated aircraft. Resting one morning near the Leh airfield last winter, a casual and in no way an unusual morning, I saw a plane landing or taking off every two or three minutes, coming up the valley in a single file, more than one or two were visible at the same time, and several times during the flight from Chandigarh to Leh it was possible to peep out of our aircraft and see that we had more winged company than would have seemed imaginable only two or three years earlier.

Other things have changed also—for example the controversy which Mr. Krishna Menon, at that time our Defence Minister, raised when he decided to go in for a Russian plane, the AN-12—at that time still flown by Russian pilots!—to do military service in such a sensitive area. The history-making split between the Russians and Chinese was then known already to many, and most people derived a curious sensation from the knowledge that the Russians—to whom the most far-fetched motives were attributed by some—were helping India defend her borders against China! This of course added more than uncommon noise to the controversy Mr. Menon had raised, and the loudest in raising it were those who were least able to imagine that only a couple of years later the Soviet Union would be assisting India in manufacturing the MIGs —far more specifically a military aircraft than the AN-12.

At the time of our trek through Spiti, the AN-12s had landed only at Leh and Chishul in Ladakh. Some smaller planes, mainly Dakotas, had begun a commercial service between Srinagar and Leh; Spiti, Lahul and Kinnaur had been visited only by supply-dropping planes or an odd flight of a helicopter or two. But it was possible to see that sooner or later airfields would have to be set up at many more places not only in Ladakh but elsewhere also and one of the purposes of the trek through Lahul and Spiti was that senior officials of the Punjab Government should be able to see for themselves some tentative sites which were being considered at Chandigarh both for civilian and military uses. We walked across two, one in Spiti and the other in Lahul, but many more had been seen by a team of army officers whom we met at our first halt after crossing the Kunzum pass. They were returning from a far-flung reconnaisance which in a magnificent sweep of a ride had carried them upto the borders of Ladakh

and Western Tibet. In their journey to the lake Tso Morari across the wasteland valleys of the Tsarab and the Lingti, they had selected plateaus which could serve as airfields, many of these far higher than the 11,500-foot high airfield at Leh, the highest ever used by civilian aircraft in India.

But the major effort at opening up the valleys is still concentrated, and with reason, on building roads on which trucks might run one of these days (and on certain stretches are running already). The cost is fabulous and can be justified only in terms of military needs. A mile of road here costs four times as much as in the plains, maintenance costs as much again within seven to ten years, and the figures mount as particularly rocky stretches are encountered or a valley negotiated where the soil is unstable. The organisational effort required is also so great that it would not have been geared up if the Chinese threat had not arisen. But neither effort is spared now nor money. A great deal has been accomplished already and more will be within a few years now that momentum has been gained. In Ladakh, where road building had a much earlier start and one could take a jeep from the Leh airfield into town as many as ten years ago, it is possible now to go by truck from Leh to Kargil, Sakti, Hemis and Gangles. Leh has travelled far from the days when "Gypsy Davy" wrote to "Lady Ba", in a delightful album of letters, that "Leh lies hundreds of miles from any road on which a wheel might turn, but there are legs enough at her service. She is a famous trading centre". Now the trade has gone but there are plenty of wheels. The roads have been so aligned that they can be, and are now being, widened to take trucks and more extensions to the border will follow. Between the valleys of the Beas and the Chandra an unloaded jeep can now be taken over the Rohtang pass, though so far this is more a feat to be performed occasionally than a service, and within one or two more working seasons it should be possible to do the same over the Kunzum. But trucks from Manali now run a part of the way up the Rohtang climb, to Rahla, the usual night halt before attempting the pass. Along the banks of the Chandra and the Bhaga roads have made more rapid progress. The main mule track of the Pattan valley, from Tandi to Thirot, is being made fit for jeeps, as also a small stretch from Kyelang up the Bhaga towards Jispa. Jeep wagons run a daily passenger and goods service, and have been running it for

about five years, from the district headquarters at Kyelang to Tandi, Gondhla and Khoksar, near the foot of the Rohtang pass, and more recently right upto the foot at Gramphu. Military jeeps can now go from Gramphu to Chattru, Chota Durra, Burra Durra and the foot of the Kunzum pass at Batal, while across the Kunzum work is in progress on a road which will carry jeeps upto Kaza. Permanent bridges on these routes are still a matter of the remote future. But surprisingly good suspension bridges over the Chandra have been built—some not so very recently—at Chatru, Khoksar and Tandi, in addition to an exceptionally good one at Batal, with small Bailey bridges of iron over tributaries of the Chandra where they cross the road. Expenditure still lags behind the money available, which is an indication of the difficulties of construction work in the valleys. In some cases, like the projects for trunk roads from Khoksar to Gramphu on the one hand and Kyelang on the other, the expenditure amounts to only 50 per cent of the allotment. But the pace is improving.

But the biggest achievements of the road engineer, not only in the valleys but anywhere in India, are to be seen in Kinnaur where the Hindustan-Tibet road is being replaced by the National Highway Number 22, a much less dramatic name but a project which is breath-taking in conception and execution.

Much of the success of this venture is the result of the tenacity shown by its designer, Mr. G. R. Nangea. He was Chief Engineer, Himachal Pradesh, at the time when plans for an all-weather motor highway right up to the Tibetan border first began to be taken up seriously. In the discussions which followed, he introduced the concept, still little used in India, that mountain roads should not violate geography. Taking their cue from rivers, they should respect the natural slope of the valley, penetrating the mountains along the alignment of the river instead of alternately climbing up and plunging down across ridges and dales. If such a route did not take the highway through any village on the way, then the village should be linked to it by a feeder road instead of the alignment of the highway being twisted away from the river. And if natural obstacles came in the way, like especially difficult rock formations, then these should be blasted through, or a way found across them, instead of being skirted and by-passed.

One result of the acceptance of his views was the abandonment of a much favoured formula: take the mule-track as it stands,

scrape at the hillside which flanks it, put mettle and surface on the ground and depart only when necessary from the alignment carved by generations of mules, even if it means that high-powered trucks of the future must follow in the footsteps of the mule. Another consequence was that methods of road-making had to be devised which are not a little frightening and must have been accepted by road labour only when an intrepid engineer like himself set the example.

The sources of this concept became obvious as we trekked through the valleys, especially Lahul and Spiti. First, the economic affinities of each valley are usually with the plain into which it drains, and like its water its commerce should also follow the natural drainage. Second, the most fertile soil and the most prosperous villages of a valley are not located on its high ridges (except in parts of Kinnaur), which are too steep and barren for cultivation, but usually a little lower in the valley where the hills take on a gentler slope before their final steep fall to the river bank. A road which follows the river, rising above it only in search of greater stability not shorter routes is therefore most likely to secure the largest number of users. Third, in these days of motorised hill transport, the gradient matters even more than distance. A longer road with easy gradients on which a truck may move at 30 or 40 miles an hour is more useful than a shorter one where the gradient may be cruel to the engine. Therefore it is better to stick to the river even along a bend than to make a short-cut over the intervening ridge. Fourth, the sunny-side river bank is more free of snow for a longer part of the year than ridges which are higher. And finally, since powerful machines and blasting techniques are now available, as also ways of making bridges for all kinds of loads, it is less necessary than formerly to take the long way round, as mule caravans do, up a hill or deep into a side valley, to avoid a rock or a minor chasm.

Departures from this concept make its validity more obvious and departures—one is sorry to record—have occurred even in Kinnaur where its acceptance has been the rule. Four years ago I had reason to marvel at the tenacity with which designers, contractors and workmen had stuck to the idea that in areas of snowfall the sunny side of the road must be faithfully hugged whatever the construction problems. When easier stretches seemed possible on the opposite bank they remained faithful to the bank they

were on, the left bank, right the way down from Narkanda to Rampur and up to Wangtu, where they had to cross over to the right bank because the next stretch on the left is in abysmal shade. Walking beyond Wangtu to Karcham, where the Baspa joins the Sutlej and the latter takes a sharp turn north-eastwards to face its sources in Tibet, we found workmen and engineers crawling like flies on a formidable rock-face, marking out the line the road would follow—still on the sunny side, still along the line of the river. They had turned away from two easy alternatives, because both were at variance with the accepted principle. A short way beyond Wangtu the Hindustan-Tibet mule track climbs a steep hillside towards Kalpa over the Urni ridge and for emergency uses has already been converted into a track fit for jeeps though they have to rise over a thousand feet in less than three miles. They could have improved this track at lower cost and surfaced it, beating the schedule to the border by weeks. But the track abandons the river and crosses a high ridge; and the gradient is sharp, unsuitable for trucks. Therefore it was given up.

Another alternative was the left bank of the river from Karcham upwards, where a well-used mule track already lies over hard rock and needed only to be widened and surfaced, offering obvious savings in time and effort. But this is a shiveringly shady side in winter, much longer under snow and exposed to heavy snow slips. At one point four or five gullies which are permanently filled with snow join up to form an avalanche which pours its load of snow and stones on the mule track below. This was abandoned too and the hard way chosen across the Shilty Dhank, a stretch of about four miles where the road would be a notch cut in the face of perpendicular cliffs rising about two thousand feet above the river bank. With less experience behind them the organisers and workers would have found this a formidable task, but a good road had already been blasted by them into the face of similar cliffs between Chaura and Wangtu and the feat could be repeated, with invaluable advantages in the long run.

But revisiting Kinnaur two years later one discovered a shrinking back, not on the part of civil engineers, who with less equipment and organisational resources had already made a strong dent in the rock, at a cost of nearly a million rupees, to be widened and blasted later into a proper road, but on the part of army engineers, presumably more used to dangers, who had taken over

in the meantime. (The take-over itself seemed unfortunate. An organisation in full steam by now, needing only more equipment to do better still, was displaced and its momentum—and a year—lost.) Against the soundness of an accepted principle, which was quite obvious by then, army engineers went over to the shady side, with little advantage to the immediate military uses of the road and less to its long term civilian uses. Nothing but the rock of the Shilty Dhank seems responsible for the change because six miles upstream from Karcham the rock ends and the road returns to the right bank and sound construction. But the two unnecessary crossings of the river, first to the left bank and then back to the right mean two bridges across a wide and raging river, plus the danger of disruption by snow slips.

A more serious departure, justifiable, if at all, in terms of the exigencies of time and the urgent needs of the army, has occurred in Punjab, where the road into Lahul and Spiti will cross the 13,400 feet high Rohtang pass and its branch into the Spiti valley will additionally crawl over the 15,000-foot Kunzum pass. The Rohtang at least and in a sense the Kunzum also could have been avoided. The natural drainage of Lahul lies along the banks of the Chandra and the Bhaga and their joint stream, the Chenab, into Chamba and the plains below. A road along this alignment would reach the plains more quickly, through new roads already under construction to the big rail head at Pathankot, than over the Rohtang pass to Kulu, which is still a mart hidden away in the hills and miles away from the nearest railway. Also, it would pass along the Pattan valley, the most populated, fertile and productive part of Lahul; and it would not be snow-bound for a substantial part of the year, as the Rohtang is. The drainage of Spiti lies along the Spiti river to its junction with the Sutlej and its travelling companion, the National Highway Number 22. Here the traffic into and out of Spiti would acquire the same all-weather facilities as the whole of Kinnaur since the new Highway crosses no high passes and no stretches which would be snowbound (except the six-mile stretch now injected into it, unwisely, by the army). On the other hand traffic over the Kunzum would suffer the same obstacles of gradient and weather as that over the Rohtang, if not even worse. It would only escape two psychological barriers: that mule tracks exist already over the Rohtang and the Kunzum and it is easier to think out ways of widening them than a whole new alignment; and traffic

from Spiti and Lahul to Kulu and thence to Pathankote remains a domestic affair of the state of Punjab, but it would cross administrative boundaries between Punjab and Himachal Pradesh if it went from Lahul to Chamba or from Spiti to Rampur, and lower down would have to come back into Punjab again.

As things are now the road over the Rohtang is a minor mistake, but it will be magnified many times over by events which are now afoot. The road from Srinagar to Leh via Kargil is hardly dependable as the sole route for the defence of Ladakh. There are places where it is only about a mile from the Pakistan border and at one point is dominated by hill features which are in the hands of Pakistan and have been fortified by her. A few medium-range guns trained on the road from the hill features can cut this vital artery for the defence of all areas north of Kargil. To forestall the risk the defence authorities have planned another route, far deeper inside Indian territory and therefore safer, which will also make a substantial cut in the distance between Leh and the nearest railhead, at Mandi. As it is planned at present, the road would go over the Rohtang to Tandi, then along the right bank of the Bhaga to the source of the river, near the Bara La Cha, and thence to Leh. But over the Rohtang the route would be snowbound for a substantial part of the year. Because of the differences between the weather and terrain the Bara La Cha is open for much longer, but in this context to no avail because the snowed-up Rohtang will cut the route in any case. The alternative calls for greater daring in construction, more intensive exploration of possibilities, because it would have to negotiate the little known stretch of the Chenab where it cuts its way through a gorge to flow from Lahul into Chamba. This is the route of the natural drainage from the snows of the Bara La Cha to the plains of the Ravi and Chenab valleys. What this route would mean to the defence of the northern frontier came home to me in November 1963 in a forward post in Ladakh. I met a Sikh artillery officer there who had just returned from a long reconnaissance to an area close to the Bara La Cha. Two years earlier he had been on a trek from Trilokinath, at the lower end of the Pattan valley, to the Bara La Cha. So in his trek last November, approaching the pass from the other side, he had linked the two parts which could form a proper road along the drainage. Several times in the course of our conversation with him, he referred to the snows which were

now about to shut him in for a period of a few months, making air traffic extremely irregular and cutting the road to Srinagar at Fatu La. He recalled how, at a very early stage of the invasion of Kashmir by forces from Pakistan, an Indian army unit had carried light tanks and guns over the Bara La Cha and arrived in Leh just in time to hold up the attack. The road to Ladakh from Srinagar was then already threatened by the invaders and it was only an adventurous deployment of a little known route that saved Ladakh. Once or twice he wished to route were a more developed affair now, a more dependable alternative to the road over Futu La—but abandoned the subject when he remembered the snows over the Rohtang!

But to turn from mistakes to achievements. Our journey through the corner of Lahul nearest to Spiti, along the middle and upper reaches of the Chandra, had shown us enough, one thought, of what human ingenuity could do to overcome the difficulties of terrain. But the real eye-opener were the two journeys into Kinnaur, four years ago and two, the first as an introduction to problems and the second to achievements. While provisioning ourselves at Rampur for the first journey, I found my travelling companion and guide, Mr. Bedi, provisioning us for many more days than we expected to take on the road but any surprise in me was strictly the result of my ignorance. Within 24 hours I was to discover what hazards attend on the road, and therefore on the traveller, in these mountains. During a brief halt at Chaura one heard the valley and the night reverberate to the loud thunder of explosions, the sound racing itself from hill to hill until it vanished in the direction of Rampur. Next morning we found our way blocked and the extra provisions now appeared a wise safeguard in an area where nothing that is easily edible is available locally. A synchronised battery of powder blasts had been let off in an environment of boulders and fractured rocks and more debris had come down than was anticipated. The unintended halt would have been longer than one could afford if an over-enthusiastic supervisor had not led his men to clear the road while stones overhead were still coming loose. As extra help for uninitiated visitors from the plains he put a pole of pine across the gap where the road had been the previous day. He led us to the end of pole nearest us and said "now you go across but do not look down". We did not till we had crossed over, and when we did we could see pebbles dropping straight

into the Sutlej about five or six hundred feet below from where the pole rested on loose stone heaps at either end.

The next dose of introduction came at the Tranda Dhank, the most fearful stretch of the road until the Shilty Dhank is reached upstream from Karcham. Dhank means a rockside, but not necessarily a rockside like this and the name does not prepare you for what you have to encounter. The rock rises in a gently convex curve from the river bank to about 1200 feet above where a little crown of grass marks the end of the bare vertical and the edge of a flat. The first stage of construction here is a check across the rock by the experts for marking out the line which the road must follow. Then workmen tied at the end of ropes are lowered about five hundred feet from the crown above, with the simplest instruments in their hands to make holes into the rock face and slip iron bars into the holes. Next, wooden planks, each less than a foot wide, are placed on these bars and used by other workmen as the ledge on which to stand and work. At this stage either charges are exploded or a deeper ledge hacked into the rock with hand tools along the line marked by the engineers. Once this is done the worst is over and the danger to life comes not from a foot slipping off the plank or the knot of the rope coming loose, the end of either mistake being in the river about six hundred feet below, but from rocks falling after or even before a blast. In the course of time the ledge becomes a track on which jeeps may run—or bounce and tumble along but somehow keep the right side up—but only under a highway code peculiar to these parts. We were given an early lesson in this code as we drove up to Chaura, where we had to abandon transport and take to our legs and porters. The jeep had practically to be reduced to a bare flat on wheels, without the hood or windscreen, to enable it to crawl under the overhanging rock. Everyone on board was asked to double up on his belly, while, to save inches in width on a road barely as wide as the jeep, the spare wheel which was mounted on the side closest to the hill had to be removed. The driver of the jeep, who had been on this road two or three times in the few months preceding, laughed at our fears and insisted that conditions used to be much worse and the risk of disaster more imminent, though we thought this to be hardly possible. But when I dismounted at one point to take a photograph, my action was unmistakably frowned upon. It is a thing

not done that a passenger should dismount while crossing the Dhank, because that would demoralise the driver! The risks explain the touching signs which workers and engineers have left behind of the relief felt when particularly difficult sections were completed. At a dozen points on the road between Chaura and Wangtu—the latter marks the Inner Line, which runs parallel to the border with Tibet—they have erected humble looking memorials to the completion of critical phases of the road, or to providential escapes from danger or to those who did not escape. About 200 persons had died in building the road until the time of my tour two years ago and the most difficult stretches were yet to be attacked. Twelve persons had died in the few weeks preceding my tour and the body of the 13th was in a vehicle immediately ahead of me as I drove back from Chaura to Rampur.

The cost, serious in terms of lives, is also remarkable in terms of money. As the Sikh driver of a contractor's jeep remarked, commenting on the money being invested both in construction and services—for example, the high rates being paid to anyone who would dare carry goods across such a road—"Government has let loose a river of money in these hills and any one who dares can come and have a dip. But hang it, one needs the courage of the devil to drive here". I had heard the same comments from another driver, also a Sikh of course, near Tandi, in Lahul, and heard it again from yet another one who works on a similar road being made from Gangtok, in Sikkim, to a pass into Tibet at Nathu La. Although jeep traffic has rapidly building up on the road, the driver's strong advice, when one asked him, was to walk it!

But the results of this exceptional expenditure of money, lives and efforts are already convincingly visible. The journey from Chaura to Wangtu and some distance beyond, made in July two years ago and entirely by jeep, was a very different affair from that of two years earlier. It took fewer hours than the days we had spent in 1960 and where jeeps passed with danger trucks are doing now without difficulty. The army organisation, now in full gear as the civilian one had been earlier, is in evidence everywhere. Upto Jeuri, 16 miles upstream from Rampur, the civilian organisation is still in charge of the National Highway. But at Jeuri the Directorate-General of Border Roads takes over, nominally a civilian organisation since it is under the charge of the Ministry of

Transport of the Government of India, but run in all its higher echelons by officers loaned by the army, more particularly by the Corps of Engineers and the MES. The Board has set up a para military organisation under officers of the regular army which is manned by retired officers of the defence forces who have been recalled to service, or others recruited through civilian agencies but who come under the disciplinary provisions of the Army Act. And under these, finally, the Pioneers,—blue caps or turbans, grey shirts, khaki trousers, black boots, all on army issue—and the usual bedraggled army of casual labourers, mostly from Nepal. The road has been divided into sections, each under a detachment of the Pioneers, whose encampments now dot the landscape. In complete contrast with what I found two years earlier, when the civilian set up was doing what must in the circumstances be regarded as a remarkable job, with the barest minimum both of men and machines, the new organisation has set itself up elaborately. It has medical facilities in attendance, plenty of transport, wired and wireless communications, centralised kitchens from which meals are carried to the Pioneers at their work sites and wherever one drives along the road at meal times one can see the Pioneers of each section sitting down in rows by the roadside to be served a hot meal by carriers. Sometimes one finds them unwilling to co-operate with the traffic and during my second visit I heard many more complaints about this than during the first, but the roadside scene is changing rapidly. Old bridges of pine wood tree trunks are being replaced by Bailey bridges. Two long ones have been set up already across the Sutlej, one at Wangtu and the other at Kareham, and stacks of material lie piled up at Jeuri for more of them. Thanks to these, to meet a convoy of army transports or the blue jeeps and trucks of the DGBR—the Japanese Nissans—marked with the project name "Deepak" is not an unusual thing. The dump at Jeuri daily grows in size with material carried up from the base depot near Chandigarh and already there is a large pile there of all kinds of machinery. Bulldozers and mechanical shovels and hundreds of automatic drills now handle jobs which used to be done almost entirely by hands a few years ago, though these were also determined and quick. Not only is there much more machinery now than before but it is operating far deeper into the mountains. As each machine completes the jobs allotted to it on one stretch it is pushed ever closer to the border. The thunder of

blasting powder has been pushed up too. Even four years ago it kept me company up to only three marches short of the border. But during my second visit to Kalpa it mingled with the sound of jeep horns much more than it used to; and it had invaded areas much closer to the border. Any one hearing it on the other side should have no doubt about what it signifies, and if Indian officers were to negotiate again with the Chinese they will not have to use old documents, as they had to in their infructuous negotiations four or five years ago, to prove that India has always used, maintained and been in charge of the road right upto the border at Shipki-La.

Sooner than would have been imaginable if the Chinese had not attacked us, exceptionally fast motor journeys, considering the mountain depths being penetrated, are going to be possible right upto the Tibetan border. The road has been so skilfully designed that its gradients are easier than those of highways between Simla and Kalka or Jammu and Srinagar. Landslides will continue to be a danger for many years, or at least an obstruction to traffic if not threat to lives, as happens as every year in the Kulu valley. And unfortunately it will happen just when, with the rains coming to an end, the valleys are ready to export their produce. But when it opens, the road will bring in much more of everything, of goods and ideas, than the mule trains could have done, and—for better or for worse—isolation will cease to be a factor in the making of these valleys.

Thanks to the Chinese a neglect of communications has ended which was not without its comical aspect. Under postal regulations, which can be as rigid as in any government department, only a postal office which has the status at least of a sub-post office can have the priviledge of sorting the mail and the staff required for putting all mail for a post man's beat into a separate package. But for the whole of Lahul and Spiti there used to be only one sub-post office and that at Manali, on the plains side of the Rohtang pass. A letter addressed from one village to the next anywhere in Lahul or Spiti had to make two journeys over the Rohtang, one to the Manali sub-post office to be sorted and placed in the package for the village concerned, and the second for delivery first to the collection centre at Kyelang and then to the addressee. If the pass happened to be blocked, as it often is in winter, the letter could easily be delayed by weeks during either of these journeys. Arrangements in Kinnaur were not much better,

except that the Sutlej, which took the place of the Rohtang with no bridges across it for miles to link a village on one bank with another on the opposite, does not get snow bound and the problem was more of distances than of the weather. For some time the anomaly persisted that while one department of the government was pouring out money generously to open up the valleys, another was not even willing to revise its regulations for the same purpose.

The "river of money" which the National Highway represents is joined by many little streams which in a sense are more natural to the scene. The "river" will cost, in Kinnaur alone, more than twice as much during the third plan as all the other schemes put together and certainly would not have been let loose on the district if the Chinese had not imposed a military necessity upon India which had to be met regardless of the costs involved. But purely in economic terms it is a luxury which the country cannot afford, however beneficial it might prove to the valley—and how far or how soon it will prove so, and whether it will be more harmful in some ways, are matters of conjecture still. If the trade with Tibet had not come to an end, and if instead with the opening up of the economy of that country by the Chinese its need of Indian goods had increased, the economic imbalance which expenditure on the new road involves would have been greatly reduced. But the indigenous traffic which Kinnaur can offer in the forseeable future, either of imports or exports, would not warrant an all-weather highway for high speed traffic. At a fraction of the capital and maintenance cost more durable roads could be built in the plains which would benefit a much larger number of people per mile and on which much heavier and more paying traffic would run far sooner than it ever will in these remote, sparsely populated and marginally productive valleys. These doubts about the economic rationale of a highway in these parts, strong enough about Highway Number 22 in all its reaches upwards of Rampur, are stronger still about the motorable highways being built in Spiti and the Chandra and Bhaga valleys of Lahul. They are further strengthened by a comparison between the border valleys and some of the more densely populated areas in their immediate hinterland, for example, outer and inner Seraj and the Parvati valley in the Kulu sub-division, and the neighbouring areas of Mandi and Chamba which form part of Himachal Pradesh. Because these areas do not present a problem of defence nor their inhabitants a problem

of any cultural weaning the expenditure on them per head of the population or per square mile of the territory is much less, whether on communications or other projects. The usual considerations are applied there, and rightly, of how much benefit will result for how many people and how soon from a given expenditure of money. But the need for applying such yardsticks to the border valleys, whether in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh or in any other of the northern states of India, has been extinguished by the more imperative military and psychological needs created by the impudence of the Chinese presence on the northern border.

But the expenditure on secondary communications and on agricultural and social welfare schemes—though the latter are open to doubts of another kind—are in no need of any adventitious justification. They are an answer to felt needs, or at least most of them are, and they are not too far ahead, like airfields and motorised highways, of what the present and immediately forseeable state of the economy requires. About a hundred million rupees are to be spent in Kinnaur, Lahul and Spiti on improving internal communications. Mule tracks leading from the side-valleys to the main are being improved and bridges less loaded with risks than the present ones are being provided wherever necessary. Although most of the effort in Punjab is still along the banks of the Chenab, the Chandra, the Bhaga and the Spiti—all of them the main rivers of the district—in Kinnaur the subsidiary valleys are also being opened up. Seven such valleys, which drain into the Sutlej, will get one road each under schemes carried over from the Second Plan into the Third Plan which are to be completed by the start of the summer of 1966, and four more valleys will get their roads under new schemes which will be started in the course of the Third Plan. Out of these eleven valleys six are within the upper 70 miles of the district, closest to the international border and most in need of reorientation, another is the Baspa valley, where the road will be along the traditional trade route to Tibet; one more will serve the Bhabe valley, which leads from Karcham to the Pin valley of the Spiti river; one will help to maintain a part of the old route of the Hindustan-Tibet road which is to be replaced by National Highway Number 22; and one will link Kalpa, at present on the old route, to the Highway. These, and the secondary roads being built in Lahul and Spiti, would have been considered if the times were normal, as adequate carriers of the dose of "change" which the

valleys are ripe to absorb for the time being. They would also have prepared the way for the day when the valleys would be ready to absorb, without too great a disturbance of their conditions of life, the next and much stronger dose represented by motorised highways which will bring the "outside" world into the valleys with a greater impact than they are ready to sustain at present.

Next only to communication, the largest share of the money available for the two districts is being spent on agricultural and horticultural improvements, including irrigation works, soil conservation and improvement of the forests, and it is in this that the greatest promise of well-being resides. With a healthy sense of opportunism, and taking advantage of the arrival of the road, the programme has been given a turn in Kinnaur which justifies the money spent on it even if it does not justify the road. In this district its emphasis has shifted from self-sufficiency in essential foodgrains to an economy linked to cash crops. The aim in Kinnaur, as in the neighbouring valleys also, used to be to ensure better nourishment for the people, not by bringing in more foodgrains from outside as is intended now but by putting more land under foodgrains within the valley, by increasing yields, and by increasing the variety of products. The objective was not unrealistic, at least not in Kinnaur. With its variations in terrain, soil and climate and improvement in secondary roads, the district could have reached a fairly self-sufficient economy though not at a very high level of subsistence. The cattle wealth of the upper, arid regions, based on the yak and its hybrid, the churu, could have provided enough dairy products as protective foods. Some observations made two years ago by the Deputy Commissioner of Lahul and Spiti have raised doubts about the yak and its hybrids as milch animals, but even if subsequent and more thorough research had confirmed the doubts, the import of cows would not have been difficult without a highway. The Muslim *Gujjars* or cow-herds have been driving their herds into and out of Kinnaur for generations, using only the mule-tracks. Even now they prefer the tracks to the road because of the grazing the latter offer *en route*. The lower, more green and fertile areas could have provided more fodder and foodgrains. The midlle reaches are already producing as much fruit and oil bearing nuts as the valley itself can consume and in the Baspa valley there are possibilities of fish culture. New pasturage would have been needed for the sheep

to replace the excellent pastures to which flocks used to be sent in Tibet and which are now shut off. But these would have been available in areas of Kashmir adjoining Spiti through the intervention of the central government. More irrigation *kuhls* would have been needed than exist, and some money to prime these balancing sources of economy. But these could have been provided at a fraction of the cost of the road. In other valleys also, agricultural production could have been raised without investing enormous sums of money in elaborate communications leading to the plains. Neither the import of fertilisers for the small acreage involved, nor the construction of small irrigation works to increase the acreage, even by means of small thermal-powered lift schemes, would have required a motor-worthy highway.

But because the road is there, planning has taken a different turn. Traders who can no longer go to Tibet are being encouraged to take to the transport trade, not on mules but motor transport. A cooperative transport society has been formed of some traders displaced from Tibetan marts. *Kuhls* are being built—the largest in the valley, the Bhuktu kuhl near Kalpa, was completed between my two trips to Kinnaur—but as much for fruit farms as food crops. In fact the possibility has been accepted that some of the land already under foodgrains will be diverted by the farmers to fruit cultivation because of the possibilities opened up by the road. Expenditure in the Third Plan on yak breeding, poultry farming and improvement of foodgrains is to be less by a third than on exportable fruits and nuts. It has been assumed, though the assumption has yet to be tested, that the apples of Kinnaur (some of them admittedly are of a better quality) will be able to compete with those of the hills nearer Simla which will not have to bear such a heavy transport bill; and that the cultivation of grapes, which are another major item, will not be hit by the government's commitment to prohibition. But if the assumptions prove correct Kinnaur's agriculture will develop cash links with the plains which it would not have under the earlier notions of planned improvement.

One of the best examples of the new trend is the Bhuktu experimental fruit farm which is the pride of the schemes sponsored by the government. During my re-visit to the area I found it to be a great improvement on what it was two years earlier, with a greater variety of fruit trees laden more heavily with their produce,

and the sale of cuttings, seeds and sapplings firmly taking an upward curve. Experiments at the farm have shown Kinnaur, or at least certain parts of it, highly suited climatically to certain types of dry fruits which are at present imported from Afghanistan (when our difficulties with Pakistan do not interfere with this trade). Some of the trees which are flourishing most have been imported from Afghanistan. Kinnaur's grapes for the table and wines can also compete in quality with those grown anywhere else in India. Better strains are being produced of walnuts and almonds and of apricots of a variety locally used for extracting oil. With possibilities, which have been confirmed at the farm, of growing fifty varieties of apples and twenty five varieties of grapes, the scope for exports should be limited only by the area available for cultivation and the costs of transport. Sensing the chance that might come in a few years the growers are making increasing demands on the farm. But the danger is that should the demand for the fruit prove insufficient to overcome the handicaps of distance and haulage, the valley will fall between the two stools of a cash economy and improved subsistence.

Some of this love of dry fruit farming has also penetrated into Lahul and Spiti. Experiments are being made now with planting resin grapes in both the valleys and two nurseries for other fruits which were still in embryo during our trek through the district were carried a stage further last year. In a couple of years the nurseries, at Thirot in Lahul and Tabo in Spiti, will begin distributing fruit cuttings and plants to farmers. But these projects are modest in scale. The main theme of agricultural improvements continues to be either foodgrains or plants and herbs, like *kuth* and pattish, a kind of aconitum, for which the valleys have a climatic advantage not available elsewhere. More realistically than in Kinnaur, the attempt is less to make the valleys cash-rich than to increase their local food resources. Two of the most valuable experiments being attempted will, if they succeed, increase the locally available supply of milk and increase the yield of wheat per acre. An impression seems to have been carried away by some of the visitors to the valleys that because of the high fat content of the milk of some hybrids of the yak, Spiti and to some extent the other valleys too could become centres of the dairy industry for the benefit of the plains. But present studies suggest that even for their own needs of milk, which are at present being partly met out of powdered

milk supplies sent by CARE, Lahul and Spiti will have to import improved breeds of cow from the plains. Thoughts have therefore turned again to better subsistence than more cash. A variety of wheat seed is being tried out which survives under snow and, because of the longer time it spends in the ground, yields nearly 50 per cent more grain than the seeds at present in use. The current wheat cycle in the valleys exactly runs counter to the cycle in the plains. Wheat is sown there in April or May, when the crop is ready to be harvested in the plains of Punjab; it is harvested in September, when ploughing is about to begin in the plains for preparing the fields to take the seed of the new crop. But now seed is being put in, to begin with only in experimental farms of course, before the start of the winter snows, with just enough time given it for sprouting. The sprouts lie dormant under the snow while storing in sustenance from the soil, and when the snow melts and the sun shines again, they shoot up with greater vigour and produce more grain than seed put in at the end of the winter. Taking its cue from some progressive farmers who are themselves willing to experiment with their crops, the agricultural authorities are trying out a new potato seed with results which have been most encouraging so far. New trees are being introduced to increase local resources of fuel and timber; and to reduce the strain on the meagre resources in fodder the number of goats, the voracious nibbler, is being drastically cut, in Lahul even more by the people on their own initiative than as a result of the government's efforts. Irrigation facilities are being expanded at a cost of Rs. 1,600,000.

To carry out the schemes, to control the funds and to do the hundred other jobs which an administration assumes, not always wisely, administrators have gone into the valleys in much larger numbers than have ever been seen there. Compared with the state of Bushair, whose control of Kinnaur may have been infirm but was not incomplete in conception, the Government of India, reflecting the fragmentary purposes of the British Government in Lahul and Spiti, (and even these were never fully committed to paper nor fully transmitted to independent India) set up only an informal control over their administration. But even Kinnaur used to have only one *tehsildar,* with one or two assistants. They used to look after the whole of what is now known as the district of Kinnaur but was then the tehsil of Chini. Lahul had a *Naib*

Tehsildar and two *patwaries,* though the former had the exalted title of *Wazir* or minister which was given him more for reasons politique than administrative. His judicial powers were those of a third class magistrate. Spiti had a *Nono,* whose functions and powers roughly corresponded to those of the Naib Tehsildar in Lahul. Superior officers used to tour the valleys though most infrequently and their visits were brief except when, at an interval of ten years or more, revenue settlements had to be revised. Most of the villages had their headmen and elders but there were no resident representatives of the higher government except the *tehsildars.*

But since the border valleys of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir were converted into full-fledged districts the usual resident apparatus of district administration has been planted in each, though with some modifications, in the hope of reaching a greater familiarity first and then an understanding of the problems of an area which is so different from the plains but urgently needs to be understood and assimilated into the rest of India. Although the population of the border valleys of Punjab and Himachal Pradesh combined is under 60,000, which is not much more than that of one of the lesser towns of any single district in the plains, they constitute two separate districts between them, Lahul and Spiti being one and Kinnaur another, each with a Deputy Commissioner assisted by two or more sub-divisional officers and a sizeable body of revenue and other staff, all resident at their posts all the year round. The office of the Deputy Commissioner of Kinnaur for example employs nearly 300 persons of various grades, who live in the village of Kalpa, whose own population does not exceed that number and even the population of the Kalpa revenue estate, which includes several surrounding hamlets and settlements, is not more than about four times the number of the district employees of the government living in their midst. While this preponderance creates problems of its own, and they have by no means been solved yet, it ensures at least that if the quantity of men injected from outside will help to achieve the kind of administration required in these areas then it has been or will be achieved soon. The trouble however is that quantity, immaterial in most administrations, is most so in areas where one of the factors to be considered is the psychological sensitivity of the people to anything which is too drastically unfamiliar to them.

Like all states in northern India which have a border with Tibet or China, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have also created special units in their secretariats, directly under a Border Areas Secretary in Himachal Pradesh and a Hill Areas Commissioner in Punjab, to maintain liaison with the border districts on the one hand and on the other all departments of their own governments or the Central Government which are specially concerned with the border. An excellent institution, dormant for many years, has also been pressed into active service in Punjab which should help to rub out the edges of this psychological problem even if it does not achieve much else. Lahul and Spiti, like some other border valleys in northern India, are listed as Scheduled Areas under the Indian constitution and for administrative purposes are in the same category as Tribal Areas, needing the same kind of special attention. To provide this attention to Lahul and Spiti a Tribes Advisory Council has been in existence in Punjab practically since the start of our independence. Although it met but rarely during the first ten years of independence, during the last six it has met regularly every six months, alternately in Lahul or Spiti and in the plains. Usually the Chief Minister presides and the former holder of that office, Mr. Pratap Singh Kairon, who is personally responsible for breathing some life into this body, has converted these meetings into a roving government in miniature. The Chief Secretary to the government and the heads of all the departments concerned with the valleys in any way are required to attend and sit alongside five members of the Council who are elected directly by the people of the valleys in addition to some who are nominated. All plans and projects relating to the development of the valleys are placed before the Council, the comments and suggestions of the elected representatives of the people are invited, and unless an issue requires further examination decisions are taken and recorded on the spot. The action taken on them has to be reported at the following meeting. This, with the rather more than the usual autonomy given to the Deputy Commissioner, makes for a concentrated form of the "single line" organisation which has been successfully worked out in the North-East Frontier Agency in Assam.

There are some flaws in the system, some inadequacies on the side of the elected representatives, some signs of undue haste resulted from the temperament of the former Chief Minister. But

the device is pliable, capable of growing up enough to take the strain of the special situation which exists in the border areas, and the important thing is that it has been brought to life. Already it has helped in releasing tensions by giving to the people of the two valleys a responsible forum which is readily available.

In theory a similar organisation exists in Himachal Pradesh also but its possibilities have yet to be tapped. The state has a single Council for all its tribal and scheduled areas, including Kinnaur, which makes it a less specialised body for dealing with the special needs of a border district. But its real handicap is that it rarely meets. After a gap of nearly two years it met for about an hour two winters ago, while the Council in Punjab meets not only twice a year but for two or three days each time. Therefore decisions are never taken as quickly as in Punjab and the government has so far lacked the benefit of a direct exchange of views between the elected representatives of the border areas and the highest political and administrative authorities in the state. The reflexes of public opinion are as complex in Kinnaur as in Lahul and Spiti, as unfamiliar to the usual administrator. The need for consulting local leaders is therefore as great. To some extent the need may be met by a new organisation which has been formed, as part of the experiment in decentralising local administration which is being made throughout India under the name of Panchayati Raj. Each village directly elects its own council by adult franchise, a new version of the traditional panchayats which have given the experiment its name. A group of panchayats elects an intermediary known as a Samiti, and all the Samities in a district elect an apex body called the Zilla Parishad or the Council of the District to which quite sizeable powers of planning and execution have been entrusted. The district of Kinnaur has also acquired its Parishad now and has begun its meetings under the Deputy Commissioner. The Parishad lacks the status and the decision taking powers which the Advisory Council acquires in Punjab when the Chief Minister presides and the Chief Secretary attends, but it can claim an advantage over the Council. Through the panchayats its roots go deeper and into more villages, it can dredge up more of the people's real views, and in expressing them its members are not inhibited by the presence of the Chief Minister.

Kinnaur has an administrative advantage not available to Lahul and Spiti. Its parent state of Himachal Pradesh, lacking the full

status of a federating unit of the Indian Union which Punjab has, functions more directly under the supervision of the Central Government. By a central decision its border district has been placed under the charge of an officer of a new central service which has been specially created for the border areas, the Indian Frontier Administration Service; the district of Lahul and Spiti on the other hand remains, like any other district in the plains or in an inland state, under an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, the successor to the Indian Civil Service. The Deputy Commissioner of Kinnaur remains in the same relationship with the Government of Himachal Pradesh as any IAS officer in charge of any other district of the state. But he is recruited from a service which will soon acquire specialised experience of border administration and is recruited from among people who have an aptitude for these outlandish jobs. The present Deputy Commissioner for example, Mr. N. D. Jayal, formerly administered a district in NEFA and as a mountaineer once, with many peaks to his credit, is at home in a district where many points rise to well above 20,000 feet and any extensive tour involves passes rising to very high altitudes.

Because of its historical background, Ladakh has always had a more elaborate local administration than Lahul and Spiti though perhaps not as elaborate as Kinnaur. The seat of the state of Bushair, at Rampur, was near enough to Kinnaur for the usual limbs of administration to stretch into the valley. Therefore Kinnaur was never as much of a neglected outpost as Lahul and Spiti. Ladakh, which came to form part of Jammu and Kashmir long before British influence extended into the state, was not as accessible to Srinagar as Chini was to Rampur. But being an area conquered by force it had to be ruled very rigidly. Hence the greater panoply of officialdom sent up from Srinagar. In later years the Jammu and Kashmir government took the enlightened step of absorbing one of the traditional leaders of Ladakh into the government at Srinagar. The Kushak Bakula, the Great Lama of the Hemis monastery, not far from Leh, was appointed minister for Ladakh affairs. This also tended to expand the local administration at Leh (besides giving enhanced status and protection to the monasteries against the usual erosion of religious authority in these valleys). Even at the time of my first visit to Leh, more than 10 years ago, the district offices were more conspicuous than they

were several years later in Keylong, Kaza and Kalpa. But during the second visit last year I found them as large as subdistrict offices anywhere in the plains, or even district level offices at many places. Apart from the well-known habit of an administration to expand, what has contributed to its growth in Leh is the obligation it has assumed for meeting some of the needs of the large army encampments in the neighbourhood. Many of the kitchen supplies and some of the labour for the army are provided by the civil administration and this function grows from year to year. In the past year or two it has grown particularly rapidly, partly because the size of the army has grown and partly because the Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Butalia, has shown himself more than willing to assume increased responsibilities.

Like Mr. Jayal in Kinnaur, Mr. Butalia also belongs to the Frontier Administration Service and in theory his relations with Srinagar are the same as Mr. Jayal's with Simla. Ladakh is as much a district of Jammu and Kashmir as Kinnaur is of Himachal Pradesh. But there are three important differences. Himachal Pradesh is more closely integrated with the rest of India than Kashmir is in constitutional terms; it is more subordinate to the Government of India in more matters than Kashmir so far. This, on the face of it, should have given Ladakh fewer contacts with New Delhi than Kinnaur has, should have made it more completely oriented towards Srinagar than Kinnaur is towards Simla. But the needs of border defence have made a difference. Although the civil administration is larger in Ladakh than in Kalpa and has more functions to perform, it is more closely linked with the needs of defence. Whatever the constitutional position the Leh administration's informal contacts with the army are greater; therefore also the Deputy Commissioner's with New Delhi. Legal forms made him more dependent on Srinagar, practical reality on New Delhi.

The second important difference is that there is a dichotomy in popular attitudes in Ladakh towards outside authority. The Ladakhis are far more resentful towards the influence of Srinagar than the Kinnauras are towards Simla's; correspondingly they welcome New Delhi's influence even more than the Kinnauras do (though the latter are by no means resentful, in fact are more cordial than the Lahula and the Spitial, so long as the administrative personnel take care not to weigh too heavily upon local resources and susceptibilities). The reason for the difference is not

far to seek. In the first place the Bushair State's relations with Kinnaur matured more naturally and slowly than Ladakh's with Jammu and Kashmir; the element of conquest was less conspicuous there, therefore the resentment of the conquered was minimal. In the second place Bushair had the advantage that even before it absorbed Kinnaur there were a number of Kinnauras in its service, holding positions of respect and responsibility. Therefore its administration could be extended into Kinnaur, through these officers, without exposing the territory to the feeling that alien rulers had taken it over. Ladakh on the other hand was put under Kashmiri officers drawn from Srinagar whose attitude towards the local population bordered on contempt and insolence; the latter reciprocated with hatred. By the time of my second visit to Ladakh the feeling could be clearly sensed that the Ladakhis would be greatly relieved if the district were detatched from the State of Jammu and Kashmir and made the direct responsibility of New Delhi. At a number of meetings I had last November, jointly with a few Ladakhis and Kashmiris, it was quite easy to identify the source of these feelings. The most prominent among the Ladakhis present at one meeting was a lady of the former nobility of Ladakh, a person of great charm and dignity, who was hesitant in her expression but clearly had things to say which she would have preferred to say herself. Among the Kashmiris was a junior member of the official hierarchy. Far from showing her the deference which her position deserved, if not superior personality also, he interrupted her constantly, diverted her answers and generally interposed himself between her and the conversation. If she felt herself deliberately shut out at the end I would not be surprised, nor if her Ladakhi attendants and assistants felt offended.

Unfortunately the Ladakhis do not have an outlet for their feelings which the Tribes Advisory Council has provided for the Lahula and the Spitial. Nor does the local equivalent of the panchayat for Kinnaur fill the gap quite adequately. Ladakh has the advantage that a couple of its representatives are elected directly to the assembly in Srinagar, and one of them, the Kushak Bakula, is a senior minister there. But since the general state of feeling towards the men of the Srinagar valley, who have traditionally been the exploiters of Ladakh, is unfriendly, these outlets also, in far off Srinagar, are not an adequate substitute for an active local council.

IV

OMENS, GOOD AND BAD

HALF THE IMMEDIATE task of the government in these valleys, "to wean them" from their earlier cultural stance, has been accomplished by events in Tibet, some recent, others a little remote. What remains will be accomplished by the passage of time, and from what one could see during the tours the pace will quicken further. The ultimate task, of more completely integrating the valleys with the rest of India, without detriment to them or the country, still presents some complexities. But most of them, fortunately, are the result of our own shortcomings and therefore amenable to remedies we can supply ourselves.

Without regret in his voice and merely as a neat summing up of the current trends, the Paljor Lama of the Shishur monastery in Lahul said to me one day in Kyelang that what he sensed most at present was "a decline in the atmosphere of Tibet". The most potent causes of the decline, as he described them, reside in Tibet and have been brought into play by the Chinese alone, without India having to make any effort. The first is the blow struck by the Chinese at the mystery and the "inviolable divinity" of the monasteries and lamas. Entirely for their own purpose, of laying prostrate their only intangible enemy in Tibet, the belief of the superstitious in the occult powers of their monastic institutions, the Chinese barbarously exposed the helplessness of the lamas against the powers of the mere man. Proceeding with cynical calculation they stripped the institutions of lamaism of every shred of mystery and scoffingly invited the senior lamas to call whatever spirits they could to their aid. As the refugees arrived on the Indian side of the border, they brought with them stories of the weakness betrayed by those whom everyone in Tibet and many in the valleys had believed to be possessed of invisible sanctions: lamas were shut into dark chambers of the monasteries and invited to prove they could live without food; lamas were pressed into the most menial services, even scavenging and carrying loads; lamas

were driven to the limits of human endurance and forced to admit that they were no better than mortals. As part of their campaign to wreck the rings of halo with which the monasteries surrounded themselves, the Chinese diverted the resources of the monasteries, first of the lesser ones and progressively of the bigger, to the prosaic tasks of maintaining the sanitation of streets in their vicinity or sparing funds and teachers for secular schools, and sending their inmates for clerical jobs in government offices. A religion based on a simpler and a more pure faith, such as the Buddhism which was carried to these valleys from India by Padma Sambhava in the eighth century, might have survived such a ruthless smashing of idols, but not one like the lamaism of central Tibet which had shrouded itself in the legends of its mysterious powers.

Next the Chinese struck a blow which was directly felt in the valleys. The principal monasteries in the border areas of India have maintained close religious connections with monasteries in Tibet. They have exchanged offerings with the latter for many years, have received their principal instructors from them, sent their own lamas to them for higher instruction, and most important, have usually discovered the reincarnations of their deceased abbots in Tibet. For some years before they actually invaded Tibet the Chinese had been severely discouraging too much traffic of the faithful across the border with India. The senior lamas were dissuaded wherever possible and later prevented from imparting religious instruction to the visiting faithful. It was made even more difficult for them to visit India to reside in her monasteries. The next step followed as soon as their control of Tibet was firm enough for this. They refused to allow any "reincarnation" discovered in Tibet to leave the country, thus depriving some of the most important monasteries in the valleys of their chief attraction for the novitiate: a reincarnation which carried the lineage of the monastery's abbotship to a hoary past. At the time of my tours four important monasteries had thus been struck: the Hemis monastery in Ladakh, the Kardinge monastery in Lahul, and the Kye and Tabo monasteries in Spiti which usually have a head lama in common. One of the lamas I met in Dalhousie, the head of the monastery at Bodh Gaya in Bihar, had just discussed the problem of this vacuum with the Dalai Lama at Dharamsala. He had brought with him, and had spread to the four monasteries, the optimistic assurance by the Dalai Lama that "within a year"

he would be back in Tibet and "everything would be all right again". The *Avtaras* or the reincarnations would be allowed to come to India to lend their brilliance again to the monasteries which had lacked it. As four years have already passed since the assurance was given, the Dalai Lama's own reputation for prophecy must have suffered not a little.

The results of the Chinese action can be seen at many places in Lahul, Spiti and Kinnaur. Opposite Kyelang, on the other face of the gorge of the river Bhaga, is the monastery of Kardinge, one of the most authoritative in Lahul. Hung by one of the rafters in its main prayer room, there is an appeal, written in Hindi, which shows the straits to which the monastery has been reduced. It traces the antiquity 6f the monastery to 900 years ago, eulogises the services of the last head lama, "Norbu, a resident of Kardinge village", regrets that he "abandoned his mortal body" in 1946, expresses gratification that "to save the ignorant and to lead them out of the darkness of doubt", he took birth again in the city of Lhasa, which it claims "has been revealed to us through the occult powers of the lamas and the sciences of astrologers", and finally registers the moan that "we have no funds and this misfortune stands in our way like a mountain that cannot be crossed; for in order to bring out a lama incarnate a large sum of money must be paid to the government of Tibet". "So", it adds in the end, "we appeal to our friends to subscribe generously in cash or in kind, to make it possible for us to solve our problem."

Some more details came as I talked to the few inmates now left in the monastery. When the reincarnation was first divined and a deputation sent to fetch him, his mother refused to part with him because he was still too young. Some years later the mother agreed but, as the appeal records, the Tibetan government demanded more money than the monastery could find. Finally and only about four years ago a deputation went again with the supplication that so much money was not available. But in the meantime the Chinese had taken over Tibet and they sent the deputation back with the terse reply that "reincarnations are no longer an item of export". While waiting for the Dalai Lama's prediction to come true, the monastery has to make do with a childhood photograph of the reincarnation which shows him attired in the ceremonial robes of his future.

The resident lamas were shy to admit their plight. Some one

who appeared to be a spokesman was a 25-year-old youth, handsome, frank-faced, more like a good-hearted peasant than a man of learning, who would have looked good behind a plough. He had become a lama when his grandfather, also a lama, died and a place fell vacant in the cell or a kind of pensionary which his family, like the other Buddhists, maintains at the monastery for its younger sons. When his evasions had run out as one questioned him he admitted that the number of lamas and chomos as well as the size of the offerings by the people had greatly declined, and not even the appeal in the name of the Norbu lama had done much good. When one pressed him to say why, he scratched his head and grinned with embarrassment but in a while confessed that "people do not believe in us now". On a more materialistic plane he added "the new entrants do not like the only kind of food the monastery can afford to give them now". But a more respectable answer was given by an old chomo who had joined us by now. She said "We are very humble members of the lamaisery. We cannot attract people to the monastery. Only a reincarnate lama can do that, and we do not have one these days." But her optimism was as sturdy as the Dalai Lama's and like him she too said with confidence that "in a year or two everything will be all right again".

I asked her why there were so few inmates about in such an important monastery. She said many more were on its rolls but they had gone for a month of meditation to the monastery of Guru Ghantal, also in Lahul, on a peak overlooking the start of the Chenab river at Tandi. She was about to say how many had gone when the young lama interrupted her and said the monastery in fact had very few inmates. A very small number had gone to Guru Ghantal. The fact was that hardly any had joined the monastery for some years, and even fewer chomos had come than lamas. The old lady, her face wrinkled, eyes made misty more by her conditions of life than age, her dress, once the warm red colour of the sect, now made a drab dark by the same smoke which covers the wall paintings of the monastery, chipped in again. "Some chomos are in the making in the village of Kardinge. They have been designated already and they will come when their bread is due here." So in the evening I went to Kardinge, once the capital of Lahul, a key point on a major trade route, the seat of the Barbog Jos, the ones who had refused to sur-

render to the Hindu Rajas of Kulu and Chamba when they held their alternating sway over Lahul.

In the only public square of the village I met some of these chomos of the future, all of them little girls, the oldest among them probably less than ten years of age. Quite unconscious of the different kind of life which awaited them, or at least had been designated for them for the time being by their parents, a life of celibacy (in theory, though not necessarily in practice) they were playing with many other children from whom they differed only in this that their own heads had been shaved. Long-haired or shorn, the children made a lovely picture of young health such as few villages even in Punjab would be able to show. As the grown ups of the village joined the group and conversation flowed freely, I asked the parents of a few of the chomos-designate their plans for the future of their daughters. I was surprised at the contemporaneity of their answer. I asked them whether the girls were being prepared in any special way for the life ahead of them. They said that like most of the boys of the village and many of the girls, the shaved ones too were at school, where they are taught in Hindi, not in Bhotia, which is the language of the area and of the monasteries and their scriptures. Some of the parents said they would like Bhotia also to be taught to their children (which, incidentally, has since been started in Spiti) and here there was an undercurrent of resentment in their answers. But what surprised me was not the resentment—that was to be expected—but the genuine readiness with which they added that Hindi was even more essential because more and more the living of the children as they grew up would have to be earned in India. This fitted in with much of the rest of their conversation, which showed an easy, even an opportunistic acceptance of the changing times, a thing characteristic of the Lahula throughout the centuries past, whether the direction of the change favoured one neighbour or another, and whether it concerned the dominant religious influence or methods of cultivation. He has been always equally ready to describe himself as a Bhot or a Hindu, Kanet, or Rajput, depending upon the prevailing wind and the balance of advantage. He has the flexibility of a much invaded people.

Without any conspicuous exception the fathers of the designated daughters agreed that the girls would have to decide for them-

selves. As custom required they had been marked to fill the places vacated in the family cells in the monastery by girls of earlier generations. But whether they would in fact follow that path to the end depended upon them. This seemed an unconvincing reply even in Lahul but only till the next morning when, in Kyelang, I went to see the new industrial training centre started by the government. There I met at least half a dozen girls, in their late teens or early twenties, who had also been designated and shaved in their childhood, had actually entered the monasteries associated with their families, but had changed their minds as soon as they acquired the right to. They returned to a normal life of domesticity, husbands and children and of course long hair too. I was amused to see that of all the girls they were the most careful about their hair, combing it between sessions on the loom, constantly adding to the gloss and sleekness of what was already a much healthier growth because of the shaving endured in childhood. When I recollected the filth in which I had seen Spitial jomos and lamas living even at the major monastery at Kye I was not surprised that these, who seemed particularly neat and smartened up, had recoiled from such a life. Their abundant good health, reflected in their good looks, chose their path for them as the slope might choose a river's.

This it seems is not an isolated happening because even in Kinnaur I came across the fears of the lamas that other girls might do the same. The monastery at Jangi, one of the few that I saw which is relatively cleanly maintained, also has another distinction, that apart from the rudimentary one which the road labour at Burra Durra has built for the 14-year old Khojar lama, the Jangi monastery alone, as far as I could gather, has a reincarnate lama at its head, and an important reincarnation at that. He was discovered at Nesang, within Kinnaur, spent six years in Tibet for his early training, but managed to come away with the refugees, again like the Khojar lama. He will complete his period of training and learning at the Tashigong monastery, near the border of Kinnaur, and then assume his important-sounding function as the suzerain of the monasteries of Parang, Jangi, Lippa, Assrang, Akpa, Moorang and Namgiya (the last village on the Indian side before the border is reached). During the few tours he made of the monasteries in upper Kinnaur the more experienced lamas accompanying him left instructions behind that while

every effort should be made to recruit more lamas and chomos, the latter should not be less than 30 years of age "because younger ones sometimes change their minds when they grow up" as the lama then in charge of the Jangi monastery put it when I met him. But he had doubts whether there would be much recruitment now. "People ask us," he said, "what is the use of becoming lamas, seeing that even senior ones had to flee Tibet." And I found his fear justified in the Baspa valley. In the village of Sangla I was told that some senior lamas had visited the valleys, asking for recruits, but only one boy, who was the son of a deceased lama, had joined them and three boys had left school to join them at Rakcham, at the head of the Baspa river and a short distance from the border.

The decline in offerings and recruitment is not the lamas' only worry. A more positive one is the expected loss even of that which they possess at present. Its most vivid expression came at Kaza in the little building, hastily put up, where Mr. U. N. Debar stayed along with some members of his commission. By the light of a gas lamp he held a conference one evening with ten or twelve of the most senior lamas of Spiti who had come to see him in a deputation. In that darkening room, crowded with the religious elite of the valley, I was reminded of the scene at the August 15 public meeting a day or two earlier, because the contrast between Mr. Dhebar and his audience was as astonishing here as it had been in the glare of the sun in the public square. The brittle light of the gas lamp heightened the austerity of Mr. Dhebar's clothes, again a simple ensemble of uncompromising white. But it picked out a hundred glints of as many colours as it fell on the ceremonial robes of the lamas, their extraordinary hats of embroidered silk and the silver-headed staffs which a few of them carried. To their faces it lent an added mystery as it lit up one portion and left the rest in darkness, emphasising the bent of a moustache here, or there the slant of an eye, the wispiness of a beard, the height of a cheek bone, the unfamiliar shape of a nose. To make their respective meanings clear both sides had to use an interpreter at times.

The lamas had come to request that their monasteries be exempted from laws, applicable in the plains for some years and now extended to the valleys, under which large landed estates could be disbanded down to a specified size and the land parcelled

out among tenants who had a certain years' standing on it. No tenant of the monasteries had exercised this right yet but the lamas feared that this would follow in the wake of the winds of individualism which have begun blowing through the valleys. Mr. Dhebar's reply was characteristic of him. A disbeliever in the sanctions of law where those of love will do just as well, he advised the lamas to retain the affection of the people if they could, so that no one should wish to deprive the monastery of its lands. "If you lose their love and seek the protection of the law, how would you differ from the acquisitive feudalists of the plains for whom this law was devised?" Their only answer could have been the one they were not ready to give, that the loyalty of the people to them was not as solidly grounded as it used to be and in the course of time would give way to the self-interest of the individual. It has not done so yet in many cases and I came across only one, even that not a fully verified one, in which a person who was one of the lamas of the monastery at Jangi and additionally also a tenant had acquired a right on the land he had been cultivating. But the trend was obvious enough and in spite of a couple of new monasteries and some being rebuilt, mostly in Kinnaur, the decline in their influence was obvious. Less obvious but perceptible was a dent in the authority of the *deota* temple of the Hindus and during my second visit to Kinnaur three years ago I came across a case, probably the first important one of its kind, in which the people of Kamru, in the Baspa valley, had threatened a law suit against the managing committee of the *deota* temple for mismanaging the land of the temple and misappropriating the crop yield. This is not too long a way behind some recent events in the Hungrang valley at the opposite end of Kinnaur. Taking advantage of the legal rights newly conferred on them, about 500 tenants of absentee landlords applied for rights of ownership. By the time of my first visit about 400 applications had been sanctioned already. The remaining were either being considered or were under a writ petition filed by the landlords. During the second visit I found that many applications had been put in, some successfully, by people in the Kalpa and Nichar areas also. For the time being the belief persists, encouraged undoubtedly by the present owners, that a curse will befall anyone who takes over the lands of the *deota* or the monastery. But in a place like Kinnaur, where pressure on land will develop

faster than in Lahul or Spiti, neither monasteries nor *deotas* will be immune for long against land hunger, especially since between them they own 10% of the total cultivated area. When these changes occur in a traditional and hitherto static society they do not stop at the walls of the monastery or the temple. At best they are delayed there.

One of the most intriguing questions facing the valleys now is what will happen to the structure of society in them if the influence of the monastery should finally crumble, to be followed in the not too distant future by that of the *deota* temple. There are possibilities of both ill and good in this decline, but which are the stronger is not certain yet. On the one hand both institutions are the breeding ground of superstition and in perpetuating the latter they have a vested interest. On the other hand they are the anchors of the three most protective institutions of the valleys: polyandry, primogeniture and habits of collective self-reliance.

That the valleys could very well do without the superstitions does not need to be proved. But it came forcefully home to us—the Deputy Commissioner of Kinnaur, Mr. Jayal, his wife, Amina, and myself—at the village of Chooling, near Kalpa. An old woman, a Harijan, has a small piece of land below this village which is watered by a small spring in the hill above it. The old woman, Heer Patti, found that her fields were not getting enough water. In the middle of July she decided to call the *deotas* to her aid and appealed that Chandika, the *devi* of the temple at Kothi, regarded as the most powerful in Kinnaur, be sent to be worshipped and propitiated at the tiny spring—which she believes profits only from this worship and grows neither when rain falls nor when the snows melt. She and three others, also Harijans, who joined her, gave a feast for the *devi* which consumed what must amount to a few years' savings in a Harijan family. A goat, eighty pounds of fine grain (imported from outside at heavy cost because the valley does not produce either wheat or rice), and more than 25 bottles of liquor had to be contributed by each of the four. The priests of the temple and any one who cared to join were feasted on this throughout an afternoon and evening, but the one request she wanted made to the *devi* was put off till so late at night that the chief operator of the temple decided that the *devi* had gone to sleep and could not be woken

up. Heer Patti had to pay towards the expenses of the night sojourn of the *devi*: 48 pounds of wheat, 12 pounds of unrefined sugar and eight pounds of an expensive oil not usually produced in these parts. Twenty-five hours after the ceremony began, which consisted of some eating, more dancing and a lot more drinking by men and women alike, with large libations of wine for the *devi* also, Heer Patti's question had still not been put to the *devi,* let alone answered. The little clearing in the forest where the ceremony was being held was now a place recking with the smell of liquor and two or three men lay under the trees lost to the world. · Among them was the Treasurer of the temple and the chief conductor of this insensible waste.

The treasurer himself, also known as the Kardar, had given another proof the previous day about the prevarications practised in the name of the *devi.* On its way to the clearing a number of supplicants surrounded the *devi,* which consists of two long and flexible poles of willow wood encased in silver plate, a heavy rectangular platform, on that a complete circle of many faces carved in wood and covered with gold plate, a large face of copper or bronze in the middle of the circle, and the whole crowned by a shock of coarse-hair plumes. The image and the mode of consulting it are identical in every detail to similar practices all over the Kulu valley in Punjab. The supplicants, many of them poor road labourers and others peasants who are not much richer, whispered their questions to the Kardar and by way of offerings to the *devi* gave the Kardar two or three rupees for each question. The attendants who carried the *devi* on their shoulders jerked it to a rhythm on the flexible poles and as each question was put to it by the Kardar—the man who had told me a couple of days earlier that to rid his own house of illness he called in lamas—one attendant or the other tipped his shoulders one way or another, tipping the *devi* in a clock-wise direction if the answer was "yes" or the other way if it was "no". "The man does not tip his shoulders", as some one explained it to me. "The *devi* does it for him."

We decided to bowl a tricky one—"will it rain in the next three days?"—and duly added our fees. With much bouncing of the *devi* up and down the Kardar repeated the question thrice—since it came from outsiders—prefacing it each time with his set formula: "After the Sat Yuga (the Golden Age) came the Treta

Yuga, and after the Treta Yuga came the Dwapar Yuga. Then stone was stone and wood was wood. Then even the false became true. Nevertheless I will do my utmost to give you every joy and will remove all your grievances if you answer this question." When he put the question the third time the image tipped and the Kardar interpreted the answer as "No". The sky was blue that day in a valley in which in any case it does not rain much. But that night there was a sharp shower. By next morning an explanation had been prepared: About 400 people had gathered in the clearing in the course of the night, including the revellers, and together had prayed to the *devi* for rain. She repeated the reply she had given to our question, but it was now more fully elaborated, that if the people had been the *devi's* good and united followers she would have given them rain immediately, but since they were not she could not oblige them. Then the people promised to be on good behaviour and hence the shower had followed.

Two years earlier I had been given another example of the flexibility of the gods by the people directly involved. Because of uncertainties about conditions in Tibet, the people of the Baspa valley, as of course of the other valleys as well, had been in two minds whether to take their trading caravans across the border. As their custom demands, they consulted the *deotas* in all the seven villages of this valley who are allowed to use the route up the banks of the Baspa to Raksham and then across to the appointed mart in Tibet. All seven of the *deotas* shook their heads negatively and most of the villagers decided not to go. But Jamna Das, the youngest brother in the chief trading family in Kamru, once the capital of Bushair state, a person so meek of appearance that one would not normally suspect in him the courage to argue with his *deota*, decided to try again. He made a particularly large offering to the *deota* and then presented his argument: that he had already sent his sheep to Tibet and if he did not follow he did not know what might happen to them. For the sake of the sheep the *deota* relented and allowed the trader to go. The day we entered Sangla from the direction of the Sutlej he entered it from the direction of the border, returning with specially large profits. He was cheered in the streets of Sangla and Kamru and when we met him the next day he talked of a further offering to the *deota* though the season for offerings had now ended.

But to return to Heer Patti. With so much of her money gone —she alone had spent about Rs. 500—and no assurance obtained that she should get more water, we found her quite happy still on the morning of the third day. It did not matter, she said, that she had not been assured of more water. She had had the satisfaction of feasting the goddess and she could be sure that she would be protected if illness or even death visited her. It was for the *devi* to decide what should be done. The duty cast on the likes of her was to be obedient. Though one felt sorry for her gullibility, one could also be sure as one left her, that if her crops failed for lack of water she would feel the loss a little less. She had done her best, had even called in the most powerful *devi* of the valley, and if still her crops did not prosper she must read in that the will of the goddess and bow to it.

Neither Heer Patti's failure with the *devi* nor the success of Jamna Das with the *deota* gave one a clear answer to the question whether it would be best for the valleys if the temples disappeared. The Harijan woman had squandered more money than she could afford, the trader had spent some which he could have employed more profitably elsewhere. But both had gained a psychological cushion, which, not being educated enough, they do not yet know how to dispense with. He had obtained the sanction of the gods, for his satisfaction and that of his people, for something he had already decided to do. She had gained strength to bear a loss which would probably befall her in any case. When their habits of thinking are changed by the spread of education, their inner need for consulting the gods will disappear and then they will either not invest in consultations or, if they are forced by custom to do so still, it will be possible to say more clearly that anything which chains them to these superstitions must be struck down. But in the meantime? Would they fall or survive if this support were suddenly removed?

What adds to present uncertainties is lack of information about the surviving value of another role the *deota* temples have traditionally played, of being an emergency relief centre for the village and a cooperative society to help the people tide over sudden difficulties. Throughout my earlier trek through the valleys I had heard from people about an excellent practice which has grown around the temple that at the time of the harvest each family contributes a fixed percentage of its crop to the granary of the

temple and in times of distress draws from it according to its needs. Out of cash offerings to the deity another fund is built up which is used by the community for meeting any urgent need of money. People seemed aware of the value of this practice, judging by the pride with which they pointed to it. Negi Govardhan Singh (formerly the Tehsildar or Thong-pon of the Chini Tehsil which covered nearly the whole of what is now the district of Kinnaur) boasted to me at Sangla one day that "our *deota* is our best run cooperative society". But two years later I found a deputation of the people of Lippa, upstream of Jangi, complaining to the Deputy Commissioner that the *deota* (and also the more well off among the people of the village) had refused to help them to rebuild their houses which had been destroyed in a fire the preceding year. If this is a representative complaint the temple could be said to have lost its claim on support by any public authority, since its other function, as a place of worship, is purely a matter for the worshipper's conscience. But if it still functions as a community chest, without the malpractices which some people are complaining of in the village of Kamru, then it should be assisted to survive. Not only would it relieve the government of responsibilities which the latter must otherwise take upon its own shoulders, it would also preserve the habit of self-reliance which, spreading from the temple to many other things, has served the community eminently in the past. Even if the government could replace the temple as the source of relief, it could not, as the *deotas* do, induce among the people the will to join hands with each other, a will they need constantly in the midst of their harsh environment.

Largely this is true of the monastery also. Its links with allied religious practices may need deliberately to be loosened. But not its links with the people unless it can conclusively be proved either that it is no longer serving or that it no longer needs to serve its traditional economic function: to make polyandry and the law of primogeniture possible by becoming a safe reservoir for the men and women who are surplus to the economic needs of the community. Circumstances within the valleys rather than the social values of outsiders should decide whether the survival of the monastery should be encouraged or not. This crucial test for every measure is sometimes ignored because opinions are accepted which should not be. A member of Parliament who represents Lahul and Spiti wrote to the Prime Minister once that lama-

ism is "a curse", the monasteries are places of "indolence" and worse, and the law of primogeniture is "an obsolete system" which should be abolished. Similar opinion has sprouted in the valleys, mostly from seed dropped by outsiders, about the system of polyandry and even those who practice it admit it with a sense of shame. In Ladakh last winter, I came across incidents of this "shame" which surely add up to more than a coincidance. I found that the reluctance to admit the continuance of polyandry was greatest near the main concentrations of the Indian Army. Troops drawn from many parts of India have been in these encampments for long enough to have noticed how greatly their own social institutions differ from those of Ladakh, especially in respect of the institution of polyandry.

In the tortuously rising streets of Leh, I met two men of the Indian Military Police one morning some months ago, both on the look out for any men of the Services who might have crept into these out of bounds parts of the town in search of pleasures of the flesh. I asked the two partrolling M.P.s, both from U.P., whether there was much evidence of prostitution in the town, and their answer was astounding. They had both mistaken the existence of polyandry for what they know to be prostitution; and since polyandrous marriages are still the custom (though it is changing) they dismissed the whole vista of houses tumbling upon each other as a warren of prostitutes!

This distorted awareness of the difference has spread from the soldiers to the local population, and in this confrontation of attitudes the one that has prevailed is that of the soldiers. Their moral frowning upon what appears to them to be the local equivalent of the red light practices in the plains has infected the hitherto innocent Ladakhis also and they too now believe polyandry to be something which is best denied. Hence their stout insistence that polyandry has been banished from among them and now exists only in some remote fringes of the valley. It is probably true that the system has declined more rapidly in areas which are closer to the encampments of the army and the headquarers of the civil administration. Both have expanded greatly in the past couple of years and with them the job opportunities offered by them have also increased. This has made it possible for more men than in the past to enter into separate instead of shared marriages. But the economic change has affected comparatively few people. The others have

either moved away from polyandry (or pretend to have done so) only because of a newly discovered sense of shame about the institution. But neither shame is relevant here nor the opinions of those whose own social systems are the result of an entirely different kind of economic environment. What is required is not a moral verdict on these institutions but a hard-headed assessment of the extent of the present economic need for them.

Even in earlier times the need for the monastery or something like it was not universally felt. For example, polyandry was practised in a number of Hindu areas in Kinnaur, but without a monastery to which the unmarried daughters could retire. The temple of the *deota* did not receive any inmates, male or female, and the unmarried daughters remained at home, as a part of the family's labour force. When one asked whether this could be one of the causes of the more rapid decline of polyandry among the Hindus, one could not get any conclusive evidence either way. Many attached some importance to this cause, but others gave equal importance to other causes: that the Hindus, who usually predominate in the lower reaches of both the Kinnaur and Lahul valleys, were more open to the influence of the plains, and since fewer of the sons in a Hindu family travelled out of the village for long periods, polyandry among them developed disruptive strains more quickly. But what the real causes were needs as much to be discovered as the moral virtues of the system or its lack of them.

A safeguard which is needed always and everywhere but most so in places like these valleys when static societies are subjected to rapid change is that social institutions which are the result of economic conditions should not get too far out of step with changes in the economy. If polyandry declined because the economy has now expanded and can reliably support a larger population, then good would certainly result from the change. Similarly if the law of primogeniture were abolished because fragmentation of holdings can be safely supported, or else countered by other devices, then no one would be the loser by the change. But if either declined out of a sense of shame or because ideas more suited to a different economy have invaded the valleys or because the political objective of changing the cultural orientation of the valleys requires a deliberate weakening of the monasteries, then the result would certainly be imbalance and unhappiness among people who

have so far been reasonably contented and in spite of their physical handicaps have achieved a standard of living which is higher than the national average.

While the recent happenings in Tibet have produced social results in these valleys which are of doubtful value, they have produced two economic results which have been disastrous. The trade with Tibet has come to a stop and some valuable grazing pastures in Tibet have been lost. In the absence of a survey one can only go by guesswork, but even conservative estimates show that quite a large number people depend on this trade for at least a part of their livelihood, especially in Kinnaur and Lahul. It has been their traditional occupation for many generations. Groups of villages and distinct areas have had their fixed marts in Tibet, some fairly close to the border, others much deeper inland. The Baspa valley traders for example have their mart at Doongbra, which is not very far from the border ; those from upper Kinnaur and the Spiti valley have to go as far as Gartok across extremely dry and barren marches and use up a sizeable part of their carrying capacity for their own provisions for the journey. On the other hand those who go to Doongbra need to worry mainly about the loads they wish to offer in exchange for Tibetan goods. They also have another advantage over traders elsewhere, that the rates at which they barter their goods have been fixed by an old agreement inscribed on a copper plate. Fluctuations in the market, mainly the result of supply variations, do not affect them. Salt for example, which costs them as much as Rs. 40 for a month's supply (for themselves and their cattle) if it is brought from Indian markets, is given them at Doongbra at the rate of one load (sufficient for a month) in exchange for two of inferior grain, like *phaphra* or *ogla* which they grow themselves. All the wool on the sheep used for carrying the salt to Doongbra is sold to the Baspa traders at one rupee per sheep while they are able to sell it at the Rampur festival at sixteen times that price. The welfare of the Baspa valley is therefore tied up a great deal with what happens to the trade. Much the same dependence upon it exists in other areas too.

As might have been expected, since the conflict with China began the trade has been running into increasing difficulties. But the odd thing is not that this should happen but that the impression should exist among all the traders whom I met that some of the

difficulties could have been avoided. Four years ago I met traders returning from their traditional marts in Tibet who were unanimous in their view that the trade should have been allowed for a couple of years more and then given the chance to taper off instead of being abruptly cut. Also the restrictions were not applied uniformly, and timely information seems not to have been sent to the valleys that the export of wheat and rice to Tibet had been banned by the Government of India. Many traders who went to the border with both these commodities, since these are the traditional items of export from the Indian side, were obliged by the border posts to jettison their stocks. Those who went across with other commodities found the Tibetans as willing as before to honour their commitments and when they were returning they were assured that apart from items the export of which had been banned by the Chinese, trade could continue as before. But policy seems not to have been uniform either about routes or commodities. Some posts allowed the traders to go through, others did not, and some of the traders I met on the Hindustan-Tibet road said they could get through one post or another if they tried more than one, and commodities prohibited by one were allowed by the next.

Practice—since *ad hoc* decisions taken in isolation should not be called policy—seems to have changed a little next year and some traders at the upper end of the Baspa valley were allowed to take their customary loads of finer grain. But since permission came later than expected the Indian traders found that their Tibetan counterparts had left the rendezvous and they had to leave the grain with others, against the assurance—and Tibetan assurances in this trade have always had the force of formal agreements—of Tibetan goods to be delivered in exchange the following year. According to the government's own information the Tibetans, though allowed by the Chinese to consume the grain, refused to do so because that they said this would be betrayal of their Indian friends. But since then security considerations have intervened and Indian traders have not been allowed—but all of them have not been stopped either!—to go across at all, even at their own risk as in earlier years, or to wind up their affairs at marts where they have had dealings all their lives. Many of those whom I met in these valleys have complained that if they had been warned of the possibility of the total stoppage of this traffic

they would have retrieved their assets in time.

I came across two kinds of explanations, both related to border security and both heard from officials as well as others, for the restrictions placed on this trade, whether erratically to begin with or abruptly later. First, that selected traders might be put by the Chinese to their own purposes of doing propaganda for them on their return to India; and second, that through tales carried inadvertently, information might seep through about valuable works being completed on the Indian side, or the impression might be spread that they are being completed more rapidly on the other side by the Chinese. But apart from the fact that this seems an excessive precaution to take in respect of people whose loyalty to India in this conflict is not being questioned by any one, it does not tally with the laxity shown so far with regard to the Tibetan refugees.

One aspect of the presence of the refugees in the valleys is that it goes counter to the concern, excessive in some respects, which is shown about countering various kinds of Tibetan influence. This anxiety is carried to the extent of changing place names, discouraging art forms which came from Tibet, declining the desire expressed by many for the teaching of the Bhoti language in schools, and possibly it also came in the way of trade with Tibet as much as Chinese restrictions. But the obvious impact of the injection of so many Tibetans into an area which has so many affinities with Tibet is overlooked. Even more important in the immediate context is the effect of their presence on border security. Their own love of Tibet, combined with the contrast between the treatment meted out to the lamas by China and India, must have created among the refugees a disposition wholly in favour of India. But obviously there is a greater chance of risky elements being concealed among them than among Indian traders. To plant spies among refugees is not a new ruse, nor is there reason to believe that the Chinese would be above using it. Yet for the past four years or so the refugees have been allowed to wander up and down the valleys, able to watch all that moves on the road. The load carriers among them go right up to where military loads are unloaded, carrying boxes of ammunition with the type and the number of rounds in each box clearly marked on the outside. A few scores of Tibetans can be seen daily crossing any of the major points on the Inner Line, a security barrier

of some importance, without the permit required of all foreigners (and even required of Indians since about two years ago).

During our trek through Spiti four years ago we became acutely aware for the first time of the risks involved in this laxity. The total number of Tibetan refugees in Spiti was not very large at the time, in absolute terms. But with about 500 of them around they formed almost a tenth of the total population. The cultural affinity between them and the people among whom they moved is so great that if their assimilation in India were the only problem it would be accomplished here better than anywhere else. But this also showed how indistinguishably a Tibetan could vanish into a crowd of Spitials should his functions require him to do so, and at Hanse one of them, a lama, provided a proof which was hardly needed. Two of us went to see a Spitial house in the village and met the lama there, surrounded by a group of eager listners. He had a persuasive tongue and a face which was just enough lacking in intelligence to put one off one's guard. As translated for us by a schoolboy, he spoke convincingly of the benefits which he claimed Communism had conferred on Tibet. He did not ommit to add that Indian authorities had done even more for Spiti and he said he had not seen anything in Tibet like the fine new suspension bridge at Batal. But should he choose to change his tune, among people he was so much at home with, the authorities, mostly drawn from the plains and unacquainted with the local language, would probably not discover it until much later. The charm of his tongue, spread through the long winter evenings when little can be closely observed in the valleys, could do more harm than anything said by an unwary trader.

Allied to the traders' is the problem of the graziers. Every village in these valleys has a few hundred sheep at least and the flocks of many are much larger. Apart from being the carriers of the trade with Tibet the flocks make a substantial contribution to the wealth of these villages. But their survival depends upon the pastures available to them in Tibet until recently. The hills below Kinnaur, Lahul and Spiti are too wet in summer for the health of the flocks and in fact the graziers of the Palampur tehsil of Kangra district annually drive their vast herds of sheep and goats to grazing grounds in upper Lahul, in the plains beyond the Bara La Cha pass. It takes them three weeks or more of terribly hard going to escape the humidity of the lower hills which

causes foot and mouth diseases among the flocks. But such is their need that they not only face the ordeal year after year but by doing so have established unshakeable rights there. Some of the Lahul flocks go to these plains too, but mostly the latter have been monopolised by the *gaddies* of the Bara Bangal area of Palampur. Graziers in much of Lahul and most of Spiti and Kinnaur have been taking their sheep to pasturages beyond the village of Shipki, in Tibet. But since about four years ago they have been forbidden from doing so by Indian orders.

Whether or not they should have been allowed to take their sheep over at least so long as the Chinese let them is the same kind of question—not very relevant now—as whether the trade should have been allowed to continue so long as the Tibetans wanted it. But since the decision to ban the grazing must have been a possibility known for some time to those who took it, some thought should also have been given to alternatives, like the grazing grounds in the valleys and plains of the Rupshu area which is under the administrative control of the government of Kashmir. Because inter-state borders are involved a certain amount of delay in opening these pastures to flocks coming from Punjab and Himachal Pradesh would be understandable, but not the absence of any visible effort to open them. The graziers of Spiti have urged, but with what results is not yet known to them, that rights be granted to them in the Rupshu pastures.

While the severance of our economic ties with Tibet has dried up two old and important sources of livelihood, the authorities have found it a complex task to open up new ones. There is no dearth of money or good intentions—in fact some of the problems which are forming up are the result of a surfeit of both. But the consequences are not entirely those that government does or should desire. Some are bad because the tasks are unfamiliar, others because a coordinated frame of policies has yet to be discovered. Many of the schemes of the authorities in Lahul and Spiti are being financed entirely by the Government of India ; for the others the Punjab Government gets a matching grant from the Centre. These are privileges which are available to other districts in Punjab only in a very attenuated form or not at all. (Comparable assistance is not given by the Centre to Himachal Pradesh for its schemes in Kinnaur because nearly the whole of the Himachal budget comes out of Central aid and a breakdown of

the finances behind any individual scheme would be illusory.) Governments at both levels, Central and State, have overthrown in the case of schemes for the border valleys considerations which they would rigidly apply elsewhere—and rightly—like the ratio of costs to benefit and the real needs of the community. They have pushed through schemes which they would reject in other circumstances as uneconomic or unnecessary. The main roads are a military necessity and therefore outside the limits of other considerations. But irrigation for example is being provided in Kinnaur at a cost of Rs. 1,000 per acre of the commanded area, which in other places would be regarded as prohibitive. In Lahul, where average standards of health are higher than in the plains, 18 doctors have been deployed for a total population which barely exceeds 12,000. If this ratio were accepted for the country as a whole, of a doctor for every 670 or so of the population, the national medical bill would run to a fantastic size. In Spiti schools are being opened by offering extra inducements to teachers and subsidising the costs, though attendance continues to be extremely meagre and even enrolment grows only because of the stipends available—at the rate of two rupees per month for a boy in a primary school and five rupees per month if he is in a middle school. A student who shows slightly above the average ability gets more facilities showered on him, including free meals, than a child anywhere else in India except in a few more border valleys and tribal areas. A visiting Member of Parliament wrote to the Prime Minister after a tour of Spiti: "I found no boys in the schools. At Lossar I found that there were 14 boys on the rolls but none was present. At Hansé there were nine on the rolls but only two could be collected with great difficulty on my visit to the school." The total expenditure on development per head of the population is far higher in these valleys than in the plains, the net returns are lower and the need for many of the schemes is less urgent.

If loss of money were the only damage which misconceived "development" could do the loss would not be serious because the total sums involved are not very large. But the greater damage seems to be that because of the eagerness with which government takes on responsibilities in these areas the habits of self-help which used to be such an outstanding feature of the social life of the valleys are rapidly dying out. If there were any proof that by handing over

to the government jobs which they used to do themselves people were giving more time to productive purposes which would otherwise have been neglected then the change would not have been unwelcome. But nowhere is there any sign that this is in fact happening—or even that it can happen, considering that new opportunities are extremely limited for the people to invest their time in. The tendency is to wait on the government's aid and pleasures, and since the government has its own procedures what the people themselves could do today—and for centuries have done—is put off till next week. In the meantime people move farther away from what they have learnt from necessity: some excellent equations with nature, a delicate balance between what they expect of life and what life can yield in these bleak and far-off surroundings.

Examples multiply annually to prove that as isolation breaks down and "assimilation" proceeds the community dissolves into the groups and individuals composing it ; and it is not surprising that the most numerous examples come from Kinnaur which has never been so isolated as Lahul and Spiti and has received the special attention of the government for a longer period, whether as part of the state of Bushair or later of Himachal Pradesh. The people of Lippa who came to the government for the help in house building which they used to get from their *deota* are not the only straws in the wind. The people of Leo in the Pooh sub-division, closest to the border, least "opened up" until recently and therefore least expected to betray this weakness so soon, were digging a *kuhl* for themselves when they heard that elsewhere this work was being done by the government. They suspended the project and asked the government to provide the help which they have done very well without in the past. The villages of Tillingi and Khangwa near Kalpa, whose *kuhl* building by voluntary, free and collective labour was a model of self-help only a few years ago declined to contribute any labour in 1960 even though special inducements like part payment were offered. The labour was required for what is at present the biggest irrigation project in the Kinnaur valley, the Bhuktu *kuhl*. But, as I was told at Kalpa two years ago, "each village complained that the next was not cooperating and the situation was saved for us only by hired labour brought in from outside". Gathering the *chilgozha* cones in the forests upstream from Kalpa has ceased to be the shared business of the whole village which it used to be. The forest

still belongs, nominally, to the village as a whole which adjoins it, but first each caste started marking out its share of the area and exploiting it separately from the other castes, and then each family.

In Lahul and Spiti there is an insistent demand—because community effort has not declined as much yet as in the less isolated Kinnaur—that building *kuhls* and planting forests should be left to the people themselves because they are proven experts at *kuhls* in both the valleys and additionally at tree planting in Lahul. From government they want only technical guidance, some financial help and scarce materials where they are needed. But government departments, probably anxious to meet their expenditure targets, have been stepping in where they should not have, since thus they hasten the day when their withdrawal becomes impossible because in the meantime people lose the habit of doing things for themselves. This has happened already in the tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, to some extent in NEFA, and on a much larger scale in India as a whole. Not only at the level of local works but even in larger causes the voluntary banding together of people without the intervention of the government is a thing which has disappeared. Compared with only twenty years ago there are far fewer voluntary organisations today which are actively engaged in the service of the community, whether by running orphanages or schools or dispensaries or by collecting funds for meeting special emergencies.

Other consequences of "over-administration" affect the administration itself although the effects might be more transitory. Merely by being there a government department is tempted to assume functions with which it is unfamiliar (as the forest and irrigation departments did in Lahul before the lessons of discretion were learnt) and because it is new to the jobs it undertakes it invites a failure, however partial, in fields in which the people themselves are the best experts available. In this way forests were planted in Lahul which did not prosper, *kuhls* were built which did not run, bridges and buildings were located, against the advice of local knowledge, at places where the avalanche rules (as the DGBR is doing now with a part of its road in Kinnaur). The result is not only loss of money and effort, which is less important, but at least a temporary loss of the respect of the people, which government most urgently needs since it has gone into areas which have not known it before.

A second consequence, important in the context of the border valleys, is a degree of local resentment. In one way or another all the three valleys have known a great deal of autonomy or self-governance. Because of the limited purposes of the British government in Lahul and Spiti both the valleys were left pretty much to govern themselves as they could under the Wazir in Lahul and the Nono in Spiti, both of them regarded by the people as "one of our own kind" in a way a person from some far-off state of India can never hope to be regarded. In Spiti there was the additional factor of the remoteness of the valley from the seats of higher government, whether it be the district headquarters at Dharamsala or the state capital at Lahore (and later Chandigarh) or the government of the country at New Delhi. Kinnaur was in a different category. The purposes of the dynasty which ruled the state of Bushair, which included Kinnaur, were not limited, and the seat of the government was at nearby Rampur. But much of the state administration of Bushair was mainly in the hands of Kinnauras, the Negi caste of Rajputs. If anything it was the Kinnauras who ruled the non-Kinnaur parts of Bushair. Now most of the senior employees of the former state have been taken over by the government of Himachal Pradesh and are posted at Simla. There are relatively few Kinnauras in the district administration and none in its higher rungs.

The conclusion this suggests is not that India should also limit its purposes in Lahul and Spiti or that "outsiders" should not be employed there or in Kinnaur but that the government's presence, while being effective, should also be discrete. The kind of mistakes should be avoided of which one found an extreme example in Gangtok, in Sikkim. At a time when the Sikkimese mind was most uneasy about the future of its autonomous status the Indian Political Officer there set up a printing press—of all the least urgent things !—employing a staff of 80 Indians who with their families and guests make a conspicuous crowd in the bazaars of Gangtok. Less serious but also to be avoided is the presence of any non-essential Indian staff in Lahul, Spiti or Kinnaur. Government, like other employers, does not employ staff which is known to be inessential. But the standards of essentiality should be more rigidly applied where, in the first place, the people have their own institutions for performing many of the functions which governments perform elsewhere ; in the second place, where respect

for the susceptibilities of the people is as important a thing as the performance of many of the lesser and routine functions of the government ; and in the third place, where sources of livelihood are limited and any avoidable strain on them means an avoidable hardship for the local people. Whether in development work or in the day-to-day business of administering the valleys it would be best to leave to the people tasks which they have shown to be well within their competence ; therefore too elaborate a set-up, such as the district staff in the plains are used to, is best avoided. A few wide-awake senior officers and experts, sympathetic and observant, ready with advice and action but only when required, with enough powers for action without procedural delays, would be far more useful—and less likely by their mistakes to invite the jibes of the people—than the usual array of a district office with its usual mixture of the competent few and the indifferent many. The latter would be a greater liability in such sensitive areas than anywhere else.

Because of the mistakes made in the earlier stages, some of these resentments, proceeding from one cause or another, could be sensed in each of the three valleys. Broadly, the change-over to a more responsive administration was welcomed, but not in all its aspects and not by everyone. Thakur Pratap Chand, whose actual status now is a bit indeterminate (the powers of the Nono of Spiti have lapsed), said to me at the seat of his Waziri at Khangsar one day that " as a Naib-Tehsildar I was under-employed ; but now there is a Deputy Commissioner and two SDOs and a whole lot of other staff". And for good measure he added "so many officers and so many mistakes! ", listing for me the failures of the forest and irrigation departments in schemes which were started against the grain of local experience. One tried to dismiss this as the grumblings of a man on his sick bed (he was very ill at the time) who in his old age feels dispossessed of the trappings of office, however meagre they might have been. But one heard the comment from so many other Thakurs too that it was impossible not to detect the sour undertones of a class. At lower levels there were misgivings of another kind, about "all these government officers " —not to mention the residences of the officers—submerging precious land which is so scarce in all the valleys. At the time when we went to Kyelang there was talk of setting up the district secretariat at the edge of this village, and there was a buzz of uneasi-

ness in the local population. "All the new offices and houses these people want!" was a frequently-muttered comment and the mildest were those who said: "We have nothing against the officers. But we do not want them in our midst. Let them take their offices somewhere else."

Even in Kinnaur, where the population is not so distinct from the officers who come from the rest of Himachal Pradesh, the lower rungs among the latter confess to being treated always as "they" instead of as "us", a distinction which has acquired an edge because of an unjustifiable denial to the Kinnaura of certain extra emoluments paid to others. Sometimes the "they" degenerates into "Kochas", a term of no endearment which the local population reserves for those who come from the Simla hills. As members of the local community, they said, they were always received with polite aloofness, never as fully welcomed and trusted neighbours, in spite of the added custom they brought to the shopkeeper or the higher rent to the houseowner. It is probable that many of their misgivings were imaginary, a creation of the hard circumstances surrounding them in areas where all kinds of comfort are in very short supply. But this only gives further proof of one of the reasons why only the necessary minimum of staff should be brought in. No one who is not at ease with himself can be so with his neighbour, and unless he is he cannot act as "ambassador" which the Prime Minister has urged government employees to be when they are sent to remote or tribal areas.

Some of the shortcomings of the government's efforts—and these co-exist with a great deal of good that is being undoubtedly done—flow from one common source, that neither the policies nor the action to implement them are coordinated parts of a comprehensive whole. There is an abundance of piecemeal action, in fact an over-abundance, but the pieces do not add up to a framework which should govern and guide the action. The approach—departmental—continues to be one which is customary with administrations but is inadequate for an area where an outstanding factor is that its customs and institutions are unfamiliar to those who have to guide them now through a difficult period of transition. At the lower levels a great deal of understanding has been gathered of the problems involved and some interesting solutions have also been grasped. But either these have yet to travel sufficiently high along the rungs of the secretariats or having

travelled have not yet received the attention they deserve. This accounts for three serious gaps, among others, which exist in our policies : education, protection for the land rights of the local people, and the position of the underprivileged.

Schools are being opened at great expense in all the valleys and in some of them at least attendance has improved phenomenally though not in all. The headmaster of the middle school at Jahlma in the Pattan valley recalls days when he had to march off in different directions each morning to round up students from various villages and yet never had more than 20 in the school on any day. Now he has 110, including ten or twelve girls. The high school at Sangla has 202 students, including one girl in the matriculation class and about 35 in other classes. The number of children at school has gone up from 30% of the total five years ago to 60% today. Therefore the state of the Spiti schools reported by the Member of Parliament is not universally true. But before the students came there should have been an educational policy for them, and yet one found no evidence of that either in Lahul and Spiti at the time of our trek or in Kinnaur during either of my two visits there. The books, the curricula, the methods, the medium are the same as in schools in the plains although there are a dozen differences between the students. I heard some of the authorities one met defend the sameness as one way of achieving the integration of the valleys with the rest of India, which essentially means the plains. But this ignores the fact that the inherited reactions of the child in the valleys and his own observations are different from those of the child in the plains on several things which are of great importance to him. From his infancy he sees that he has one mother but many fathers ; that the man he calls his father sometimes disappears for many months and his place is taken by some one else ; that the lama and the *deota* and frequently both are approached for guidance on every important occasion and on some not so important; that sometimes his father stays at home and his mother works in the field ; that many of his aunts and uncles do not live in the house or in their own houses but in a monastery ; that as soon as his father becomes the master of the house in which he lives the grandfather is pushed out into a small hut which the child in the plains would regard as a place for the servants of the family ; that some of his elder relations get married and others do not ; that every day of the

year great quantities of liquor are made and consumed by every one in the house and in the neighbourhood. None of these things happen to the child in the plains and yet books designed for the latter are given to the child of the valleys without a change and he is deprived of all reasonable chance of making an adequate adjustment between his surroundings and his learning. Unless it is assumed that education makes no difference to the values of the child at the conscious level or the sub-conscious this lack of an educational policy, which reflects a lack of policy on all the values involved, makes nonsense of what should be a basic consideration in the valleys : that social values should not change more rapidly than the economic conditions of which they are the product. So long as the economy needs these institutions or they continue to be a natural product of the environment of the valleys, contempt for them should not be bred in the child's breast either by his education or by the thoughtless comments of outsiders.

Similarly the requirement has been ignored that the impact of the outside world should not at any stage exceed the capacity of the people to absorb it. The military situation demanded that big highways be built regardless of the economic and social costs involved. But it did not demand many of the other steps which have followed, especially the development of the land without a corresponding development of the capacity of the local people to hold on to the land. Unless it is corrected in time, this imbalance will hurt Kinnaur much more than the other valleys. If unsuspected new mineral or other resources are not discovered, land in Spiti will never become attractive enough for the outsider and the people can rest assured in their tenures at least even though other earning avenues cease or pass out of their hands, like trade, grazing and the business of the carrier. The cultivation of *kuth* and the fancy price it sometimes fetches can attract the outsider to Lahul. But in the first place the earnings from this herb are most unsteady. In the second place, and that is more important, the Lahula is more than a match for his immediate neighbour in the lower hills, the Kulu man. It is the latter who is in danger of being bought out by the former in the unlikely event of the Lahula becoming much richer than he is. But the Kinnaura lacks the Lahula's wit and though his land might conceivably begin to blossom if the government's plan succeed this will only make him both a worthwhile and an easy prey, as

he has already become in some fields. In his valleys there are more muleteers from the plains than in Lahul, more Muslim *gujjars* from Jammu, more outsiders as middlemen in the *chilgoza* trade or—especially—as shopkeepers. If his land should produce all the apples and dry fruits and grapes for the press and the table that the government hopes it will, and should the produce be able to compete with that of areas closer to the main centres of consumption, the eyes of the plainsman will turn first to the produce and then to the land. Therefore when the Dhebar Commission toured these valleys it was urged (only in Kinnaur) to ensure that the purchase of land by outsiders would be prohibited by law. But since the Constitution assures equal rights to all Indians everywhere for residence, trade, business and commerce, legal bars will be difficult to impose. The panchayats in Kinnaur have tried the next available alternative. They have passed resolutions that no one should sell land to a non-Kinnaura. But whether that will work depends upon how far the general will can continue to prevail. In many matters it has already begun to break down into individual wills.

The third gap in our policies in the valleys concerns a broad social question: how far and by what means do we wish to prevent the rise of inequalities where the present societies are largely equalitarian. No detailed census of land holdings has yet been completed there and the one conducted along with the last census, in 1961, has yet to yield its tables. But such surveys as have been made confirm the impression one can gather even without them that the excessively poor are as few as the excessively rich. An exception to this generalisation is the Harijan of lower Kinnaur. His lot is indeed much worse than that of the average Kinnaura. Another exception is the four Thakur families of Lahul who are the richest landlords. But for the rest the valleys are free of the feudalism of the old rural societies and the capitalism of the new urban ones. One of the reasons why one gathers an impression of general well-being on travelling through the valleys, especially Lahul and Spiti, is that one does not find, as one does in the plains still, any hideous patches of acute poverty which might erase the impression left by the affluence of some. Everyone, or nearly, has a reasonable house, a certain amount of jewellery, fairly adequate clothing and food which is neither in great abundance nor very rich but, combined with the climate, seems to make a gift of good

health to most of the people. The total resources of the region are meagre but no one has cornered such a large share of them that any one should be reduced to starvation. The main source of wealth is land, which is mainly used for subsistences farming and does not easily change hands. Cash crops as well as commerce, the two sources which enable some to get much richer more quickly than others and then to multiply their riches at the cost of others, are still in their infancy. A few valuable herbs, some exportable fruit and the trade with Tibet are the sum total of commerce and commercial agriculture, but even in these so many people have a share, large or small, that they have not yet become the cause of inequalities. The practice of primogeniture in Spiti and the turning out of the father into the "small house" and the younger sons into the monastery would appear to be permanent inequalities thrust upon some by the social customs of the valley, and to some extent they are. But the total wealth of the family is so little that when a share of it goes to the dispossessed ones—they get a part directly in their own right and a part indirectly because their upkeep is a charge on the community—what is left with the eldest son does not make him conspicuously rich. Government therefore finds in these valleys, readymade, what it is trying to create elsewhere in India, a society in which there are no conspicuous inequalities. But now that it is injecting mobility into the economic and social life of the valleys, it can succeed in creating the tide which, unless it is regulated in advance, can carry to some unaccustomed prosperity while it leaves the rest on the barren beach. Some steps have been taken already, but these relate to the diversion of social welfare funds to the under-privileged, not to wealth-producing items like lands newly wrested from the forest or newly brought under irrigation.

Many of these problems will yield their solutions when a basic question is answered : for what reason have we gone into the valleys ? The most urgent and immediate reason of course is the defence of the border in purely military terms. But that is neither debatable nor relevant here. It entails only the building of the main roads, not digging *kuhls* or spreading education or planting apricots and grapes. It is these latter steps which entail the more relevant and in the long run the more important question : have we gone in to develop the area or to strengthen the people ? It may seem illogical but the two objectives are not

entirely complementary. The land for example can be improved faster than the people's ability to hold on to it ; physical barriers can be lowered faster than the people's capacity rises to withstand the consequences. These are parallels to the other possibility that social institutions can disappear faster than the economic need for them. What enriches the area without reinforcing the institutions of the people makes both more vulnerable to external pressures (external to the valleys, not alien to India). If our notions of defence require that the vacuum in the valleys must be quickly filled up, then the land must be made more productive, more easy to approach and live in, more attractive to the only people who can fill it up, the large surplus population of the plains, especially the enterprising colonisers of Punjab. When they come in, as in Kinnaur at least they are beginning to, they will squeeze the local population off the points of economic vantage but will ensure the defence which comes from effective occupation of the maximum area. If that is the objective then the influx should not be obstructed by making it difficult for outsiders to acquire land or a share in the trade and commerce of the valleys. But if the welfare of the people who live in the valleys is the primary objective then their land rights, their education and their social institutions must receive greater attention than so far, not in terms of the size of the departmental budgets (though these must follow too), but in terms of carefully worked out policies.

The choice should fall on the latter objective, because even defence requires that people living adjacently to an alien neighbour do not become a discontented minority ; and if it does fall that way it will be found that two valuable assets have been acquired even during a period of incomplete policies and isolated actions. Firstly, the valleys are no longer the unknown quantities which they used to be to their present rulers. A number of senior officers, on whom the responsibility will fall for devising better policies and action, have gained first-hand knowledge of the area, the feel of its problems. The second and the more important asset is that closer to the ground there are more executants now than ever before who have not only acquired knowledge of the area but a great fund of sympathy for its people. Except some whom the bleakness of their living conditions has blinded to the charm of the valleys and the many admirable qualities of their

people, most of the officers who have gone there have developed a tenacious goodwill towards their charges. This is the first requirement for a greater understanding of real needs (as against the trappings of "development") and at least some officers have gone on to acquire great respect for some of the local institutions.

Much of the official machinery in the valleys is new. Some of it has yet to learn to function in the special ways required of it. Many of the directives which travel down from New Delhi to the state capitals and from there to the border headquarters or from the latter to the offices below them are insensitive to the needs of the border. But since the structure now exists its improvement is possible and will probably occur when sufficient information begins to travel upwards from below and begins to receive the right amount of attention at the headquarters. Signs have multiplied in the course of the past couple of years that this has begun to happen. Cooperative societies, of the *kuth* growers in Lahul and goods carriers in Kinnaur, are being strengthened and encouraged to take on duties which would otherwise have to be performed by the government departmentally. In Kinnaur there is a realisation, at least at the level of the district administration, that the swiftness of procedures which the Tribes Advisory Council has conferred on Lahul and Spiti should be emulated. In allocating social welfare funds extra concern is shown there for areas and communities which are particularly poor, and this is only a few steps short of ensuring for them a larger than their proportionate share in sources of wealth. In Lahul and Spiti some of the contempt of the "progressive" intellectual towards the monastery has worn off and in deciding whether grants should be given to them for maintenance or other purposes the approach is more pragmatic, with an eye on what place each monastery occupies in the life of the area. The forest department shows greater respect than it used to for the experience of the local people and in pushing through its experiments and schemes, even those which show some commendable results, the agricultural department now adopts the healthy approach that "any large-scale experimentation should not frighten away the farmer". Ways are being studied of increasing the autonomy of the local administration, of keeping down the size of its establishment and of increasing in it the proportion of senior officers on the one hand and local personnel on the other. Also, the share of the district

administration and of the people themselves in building and maintaining public benefit works is being increased. Last year three *kuhls* in Lahul and two in Spiti were handed over to the beneficiaries for upkeep even though they were built by the department. This particular change has gone to the extent of an officially recorded admission that it is better and cheaper to work through the people than through the departments. The official explanation of a recent decision says: "Previously irrigation schemes were executed by the Irrigation department. In order to speed up the execution of work and to reduce the cost wherever possible it has now been decided to entrust the work to the Deputy Commissioner of Lahul and Spiti who will carry it out with the help of the local people." What is of greater interest than the change in policy is that the demand for it came from below.

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