

In Shadow of Kangchenjunga

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Kangchenjunga is the third highest peak in the world. It rises almost 12000 ft (3700 m) from Zemu glacier to its 28,165 ft (8585 m) summit. The Zemu glacier extends almost up to the eastern base of Kangchenjunga from where, in a stupendous steep wall, the summit rises. The massif is almost north to south in orientation, thus the east wall faces the sun directly, from early morning. The sun, rising from Bhutan in the east, disappears by about 3.00 p.m. behind the summit of the Kangchenjunga. The long shadow of Kangchenjunga descends on the Zemu glacier and it darkens as the time passes. Campers at Green Lake on the Zemu glacier would be in virtual darkness by this hour. As the sun sets on the western horizon behind the peak, unseen from the Zemu glacier, the fading glow towards the east is the only indication that dusk is approaching. Thus one almost feels what Doug Freshfield described as the eastern sunset.

We spent on the whole an enjoyable evening, and witnessed a sublime sunset and afterglow. The sunsets in the high Himalaya, though less vivid than those I saw afterwards in the Bay of Bengal, were often singularly beautiful. The colours were tender and exquisitely graduated; pools of green and gold sky were ringed round with ruddier tints of the melting vapours. We noticed more than once a peculiarity, referred to elsewhere in India by Sir J. Hooker, the false sunset in the East, where a glow, as strong as that when sunset and sunrise fade into one another on the northern horizon in the Highlands in June, would show above the mountain tops, while zodiacal rays, or appearance resembling them – thin bars of light – shot across the zenith, uniting what appeared as separate sources of illumination.

(Doug Freshfield, *Round Kangchenjunga*, p 129, Edward Arnold, London 1903)

Many have walked the streets of Darjeeling and watched the magnificent panorama of Kangchenjunga towering over the landscape. The peak is worshipped by locals and has a long history of exploration and climbing, which no doubt would have been recalled in 2005 during the 50th anniversary of its first ascent. This mighty peak has witnessed legends, history and events, under its shadow.

The sunset, its golden rays lighting up the Kangchenjunga peak is a sight that many visitors in Darjeeling await fervently. It is a rare event as clouds generally cover the peak around evening and one would have to be blessed to watch a beautiful sunset. The crowded streets of Darjeeling today look modern in appearance, but the *Chaurasta*, the historic square in the centre of town has retained its charm. Tourists throng the square; legendary Sherpas have sat on the benches around here playing cards, chatting or just eating an ice cream.

Ghoom at 2258 m is the highest point on the way to Darjeeling from the plains. Its pristine surroundings and a famous monastery had attracted the bard Rabindranath Tagore to spend a few months here and write some of his well-known poems. Today the Ghoom monastery is an attraction for tourists where the lamas blow their long conches and give a taste of what Sikkim was like many years ago. Like poets, Kangchenjunga has inspired artists for several generations. For example, Mumbai's galleries have some excellent paintings of Kangchenjunga rising over Chortens in Sikkim¹, all by a leading artist, M.K. Kelkar.

The foothills of Kangchenjunga produce tea of excellent quality. Darjeeling tea is on the menu of almost all restaurants in India and abroad. The best quality Darjeeling tea is yearly auctioned at about Rs. 17,000 (US \$ 400) per kg and is purchased by the Royal families of England and Japan. Never refuse, if you are ever invited for tea with the royal families!

Darjeeling gained importance not because of Kangchenjunga, but with the attraction for Everest. Nepal had closed its borders thus outsiders could not explore or attempt the highest peak in the world. As a result, an approach route from the north was developed. Starting from Darjeeling where all *bandobast* was made, the party would trek over high passes to the Tibetan plateau to reach Rongbuk, north of Everest, to attempt the mountain. Darjeeling gained importance as a bazaar for arranging supplies and employing Sherpas and porters.

Himalayan Mountaineering Institute

This mountaineering tradition continued with establishment of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI on Birch Hill, at one end of Darjeeling. Since 1956, it has trained several young students to keep up its motto 'May you climb from peak to peak'. Its corridors are well decorated and bustling with activity. In its premises stands a telescope with a caption that reads;

This is a powerful Veb Carl Zeiss Jena telescope capable of astronomical observations. One can view the beautiful Kangchenjunga range through this telescope. It was presented by Adolf HITLER to Maharaja Judh Shumsher Jung Bahadur Rana, Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Nepal Army. It was passed down to his son General Shamsheer Jang Bahadur Rana who presented it to Himalayan Mountaineering Institute on 7 July 1961.

The force behind this institute was Sherpa Tenzing Norgay who made the first ascent of Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953. As the nation celebrated, , Jawaharlal Nehru¹, the then Prime Minister of India, asked Tenzing to establish a training institute for budding young mountaineers 'to produce a hundred Tenzings'. Tenzing was the soul behind this institute and served as its director and advisor . When he died in 1986, he was cremated above his beloved institute and a bronze statue stands in his memory today looking towards Kangchenjunga.

Since its inception HMI has played a historical role, and several legendary Sherpas were its first instructors. Da Namgyal was instrumental in opening the route towards the summit of Everest in the 1953 expedition. This gentle Sherpa while rock climbing near Mumbai fell and injured his head and was in coma for many days. Though he recovered he was never his true self again and finally this injury claimed his life decades later. Micken Gyalzen, the first chief instructor of this institute, had climbed Manaslu and many other peaks. Ang Temba was also a legendary 'Tiger' on the 1953 Everest expedition. He was the shortest Sherpa on the expedition and, as the legend has it, he married the tallest Sherpani on that trip! But the person who was perhaps far ahead of his time was Sherpa Wangdi. Around 1970s he established a 'Sherpa Guide School' on the outskirts of Manali in the western Himalaya, with a band of trusted Sherpas from Darjeeling. These Sherpas would accompany expedition parties as guides and Wangdi would organize expeditions with his equipment and knowledge. But local *babus* did not appreciate this intrusion by an outside expert and Wangdi faced many difficulties. Unfortunately there was an accident on one of the expeditions organised by him and this gave enough leverage to officials to harass him forcing him to close business. In later years he suffered from tuberculosis and as I walked with him from his quarters to the hospital, just two kilometres from Manali, it was painful to see him coughing and having to rest at almost every 100 m. HMI also had on its staff Ang Kami, the prince among Sherpas. Colourful, jolly and he would burst in a dance at the slightest provocation. Ang Kami had carried luggage to the South Col of Everest several times and finally reached the summit in 1965, then one of the youngest persons to have climbed Everest. He joined a Mumbai based expedition to Bethartoli Himal in 1970. While the team camped at foot of the main peak an avalanche trapped the party. Four climbers, including Ang Kami, were killed. His body was never recovered. The

¹ When Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru died part of his ashes were scattered over this hill, which was named as "Jawaher Parvat".

streets of Darjeeling were sad at the loss of this charming son especially as Ang Kami had left behind a 90-year-old mother.

The first Principal of HMI was Nandu Jayal, one of the best mountaineers India had produced at that time. Once, finishing his duties with the students at HMI, he rushed through plains of Nepal to catch up with the Indian team, which was climbing Cho Oyu. Thinking that he was well acclimatised due to his stay in Darjeeling and conducting the course, he climbed, gaining height rapidly. Not much was known about high altitude pulmonary oedema during those times and he was struck by the illness at night. Before he could either recover or descend quickly, he died on the mountain. India lost one of its brilliant mountaineers.

At the end of every course, the Graduation Ceremony in the square at HMI is an unforgettable experience for any student. When I completed my course in 1964, on the dais were Sherpa Tenzing, H.C.Sarin (President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation for 23 years), with S. S. Khera and Principal Brig. Jaiswal. In shadow of this high peak I received my silver ice axe badge qualifying me as a mountaineer. Many have gone through this experience. Behind this square is an exhibition, which portrays the history of Kangchenjunga and several other peaks. There are photographs of leading Indian mountaineers, flags and in one corner is the famous picture of Tenzing on Everest with some of the equipment that he had used on that climb.

Pleasures of Darjeeling

In Darjeeling little below the mall is an old cemetery. It contains the grave of Csoma de Koros, a Hungarian scholar who had spent perhaps the longest time in the Himalaya after Marco Polo. He researched and learnt the Tibetan language, and translated into scripts into Hungarian, the first such translation into any European language. One could find memorial stones to Csoma de Koros as far away as Ladakh, Zaskar and Kinnaur, places that he stayed for a few years. He reached Darjeeling and died after a brief illness. He was buried here on 4th March 1842 in the presence Arthur Campbell (District Commissioner of Darjeeling) and other members of the Everest expedition.

The pleasures of Darjeeling are many. You can sit in one of the many small cafes and from its windows you can look at the massif and share a light moment with your Sherpa friends. I will always remember spending an afternoon with Sherpa Tenzing decades ago. Often he would be recognized by the tourists and would pose with them effortlessly and sign autographs. Despite fame, he remained a simple Sherpa at heart. Some evenings we spent time with Sherpanis, sipping *tomba*, (a light millet beer), and when the party moved to their homes for dinner there would be *momos* (dumplings), impromptu gatherings and dancing. Some of these Chinese restaurants are now a memory. After the 1962 war with China, they were looked at with suspicion and many of them were driven out. Some young Chinese even lost their lives. Today just few of them run their restaurants peacefully.

From the foothills of Kangchenjunga originates several rivers, which cut across Sikkim and Darjeeling areas. The Zemu, the Rangit and the little Rangit are some of the major rivers, which flow through thick forest. Traditionally, small bamboo bridges were built across it and now several motor bridges span them.

Hill Railway

Along with the roads and rivers runs the famous railway line, now declared as a World Heritage line by UNESCO. Climbing from the Teesta valley, it puffs its way up to Darjeeling. Lines were laid from 1879 and the first train was inaugurated in 1882. New engines were designed in 1889 and worked until 1927 to pull the train over the steep slopes. It is truly a marvellous piece of engineering. There are 'Z' loops where the trains going back and forth climb up over one slope, and there are switchbacks or loops where the train gains height. A workshop was established at Tindharia and the romantic journey from Siliguri to Darjeeling passed through small towns. The motor road runs parallel to the railway tracks at many places. Bollywood has made full use of this - the heroine looking out of the window and the romantic hero driving besides the train,

wooing her with a song. In the climax, the hero from the parallel road would jump into the train and knock out the villain from its slow moving carriage to save the honour of the lady. The coaches and engines are today well cared for by its staff and train runs only a small section from Darjeeling to Ghoom for tourists. As it halts at the Batasia garden, the smoke from the engine can be seen floating towards the peak of Kangchenjunga. This inspired the writer and an authority on the Indian railways to say:

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway celebrated its centenary on 18 December 1982 and the first day cover in the (*Himalayan*) Club library with Rs. 2.85 postal stamp (for foreign letters) shows the puffing saddle-tank in reverse making a lot of smoke for only four bogies. One suspects the driver is so used to posing for photographs that he has stationed his smoke stack upwind of Kangchenjunga to get a black streamer effect over the abode of snow.

Together, steam and ice represents the union of the opposites, a thrilling and satisfying subject on any level. Dull would he be of soul who could pass by a sight so touching in its beauty, or turn deaf ears to a sound so magical:

The runaway train went over the hill, she blew. She was blowing then and she is blowing still, and she blew-ew, blew-ew and blew.

Bill Aitken,
(‘Himalayan Railways’, *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. 41, p. 203)

The Gorkha Soldiers and the Younghusband Mission

Near the railway line at the Batasia garden stands an impressive memorial with a statue of a Gorkha soldier with Kangchenjunga as the backdrop. Darjeeling and its foothills were always recruiting grounds for brave Gorkhas of British and Indian armies. Traditionally, young boys from eastern Nepal would run away from their families to Darjeeling to join the British Army. They were trained in weaponry and use of the traditional weapon, the khukris. Their motto was *Kayar Hunu Bhanda, Marnu Ramro* - It is better to die in valour than be a coward. After Indian independence, four Gorkha regiments went to the British and the other six serve in the Indian Army. Gorkhas have won several honours including Victoria Crosses. Rifleman Kulbir Thapa of the 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifle was one of the earliest winners of Victoria Cross on 25th September 1915. With his khukri drawn, he cut through enemy lines in France with the fearsome shout *Ayo Gorkha Re* (Here comes Gorkha).

In the early part of the 20th century a major military expedition left the foothills of Kangchenjunga. Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India had inclination that the Russians may have their eyes on Lhasa and Tibet. He persuaded the British Government for permission to send a military expedition in 1903/04 under Sir Francis Younghusband. It came to be known as the Younghusband Mission. The army marched from Siliguri to Darjeeling and crossed from Nathu la into Tibet. Guns were mounted on *ekkas* pulled by yaks, the first ever wheels seen by the Tibetans. The British marched to Gyantse, a fort on a hill rising on the Tibetan plateau. At first, on the arrival of the British, Tibetans ran away but when General McDonald proceeded ahead towards Karo la and Lhasa, they returned and reoccupied the fort. Efforts to dislodge them proved futile. The British asked for reinforcement by way of soldiers from the 8 Gorkha Rifles. Lt J D Grant and Havildar Karbir Pun climbed a steep wall to enter the Gyantse fort. As several other Gorkhas followed them wielding their kukris, the local army was in disarray, many jumped to their deaths. For this ‘bravery’, Lt. Grant received Victoria Cross and Pun received First Class Order of Merit. The British marched into Lhasa through a huge chorten and this was the first opening up of Tibet.

Sherpas and the Tiger Badge

Another ethnic group, the pride of Darjeeling, are the Sherpas. Hailing from the Khumbu district of Nepal, many families trekked across to Darjeeling to seek employment with Everest expeditions. This migration continued for several years till Nepal opened its doors for mountaineers. Many of these families produced legendary Sherpas (some of whom I have mentioned earlier. One of the well-known names was Ang Tsering who passed away recently at the age of 96. He served on several expeditions like Everest in 1924 with Irvine and Mallory and climbed high on Nanga Parbat with a German team when a tragedy claimed lives of leader Merkl and Gaylay Sherpa. During a horrific storm, Ang Tsering descended the fearsome killer mountain with sheer strength, suffering frostbites, to alert members at the base for a rescue, which could not be mounted. 'With almost a superhuman endurance he had fought his way down through storm and snow, a hero at every step', wrote member Bechtold in tribute.

For this bravery on Nanga Parbat by Sherpas three certificates on behalf of Adolf Hitler arrived in Darjeeling. Not being able to read either German or English they decided to distribute one each, irrespective of to whom it belonged. As a result, Ang Tsering's family has a certificate of 'Herrn Kidar'. Many Sherpas have sacrificed their lives in the service of mountaineering. Without these brave souls, the story of climbing would have been very different.

To honour such bravery, the Himalayan Club instituted a 'Tiger's Badge'. This is a bronze badge with the mark of tiger in the centre. It was awarded to a Sherpa who had performed bravely, particularly on Everest. Each Tiger Sherpa was given a small notebook with his photograph and family details. Whichever expedition he joined, the leader of that team would write remarks about his performance and recommendations. Some of these books today are of great historical value as they have signatures of Norton, Bauer, Dyhrenfurth, Ruttledge, Merkl and other legendary climbers.

The house of any Sherpa is a museum of mountaineering history, containing several memorabilia, certificates and items presented by various mountaineers. But if you are visiting a Sherpa friend be careful before praising a piece, for no sooner you uttered the word, this warm and friendly friend may be packing this item to present to you!. Such is the hospitality and generosity of Sherpas.

Of several Sherpas living in Darjeeling today, one can name just a few. The most educated, articulate and proficient climber is Dorjee Lhatoo who served at HMI for many years. He could be rightly called a 'mountaineering historian of Darjeeling'. If you walk with him in the streets of Darjeeling there is no end to stories, legends and history that he could narrate. Himself a leading mountaineer of India, having climbed Nanda Devi, Chomolahri, Everest and many other challenging peaks, he has also trained many climbers. Near him lives Nawang Gombu, who today acts as the elder statesman of the Sherpa community. He was the first person to have climbed Everest twice, in 1963 with Americans and in 1965 with Indians. Solidly built, he is often seen walking in the streets of Darjeeling and greeted respectfully by many. Children of Sherpas have not generally entered the field of mountaineering and climbing, but nevertheless they have been successful in life in varied fields such as a television commentator, a journalist, the owner of a successful adventure company, Superintendent of Police and a well-known surgeon and doctor. People who grew up in the shadow of Kangchenjunga have certainly gone places. In the HMI quarters, lives Kusang Sherpa, who today is the strongest Sherpa of them all. He has climbed Everest by four different routes, including the Kangshung Face. This strong but gentle Sherpa is one of the instructors.

But unfortunately sometimes the Indian bureaucracy has not looked after these Sherpas well. Once, walking with Lhatoo on the streets of Darjeeling decades ago, I was shocked to see legendary Da Namgyal and Gyalzen selling sweaters on the street to make a living after retiring from a long service at HMI. Due to Government regulations they were treated as lower class employees and no pension was offered to them. When they approached one of the senior bureaucrats they were brushed aside, citing Government rules. Their needs was small, but even this respect was denied to them. Their foreign friends of yesteryears offered to help but they refused such charity with dignity and instead decided to publish their plight in the papers

so that the future lot of Sherpas would benefit. We took a picture of Dorjee Lhatoo, who was then a serving instructor, standing between them and this picture was published with a caption: 'The present and future sweater-sellers of Darjeeling'. It made an impact and the bureaucracy, shocked and pressurised, changed rules to offer a well-deserved pension to all instructors since.

In 2000, at the change of the millennium, only 3 'Tiger Sherpas' were alive. Ang Tsering, Nawang Gombu and Topgay. The Himalayan Club organized a special function in Darjeeling to honour them. My wife Geeta and myself travelled to be with them on one bright December day. As everybody gathered around noon we asked them if they would have beer. There was a stunned silence among the gathering of 50 odd Sherpas until one of the old gentlemen stated the obvious with a grin; 'We will start with rum, it is too cold otherwise'. Merry making started right in the afternoon, carrying on until late evening. Later, these three 'Tigers' were invited to Mumbai and were honoured before a large gathering of mountaineers.

Sikkim : a history

Darjeeling has a long history, also portrayed in several paintings by different artists. T. Howard Somervell who lived here made a colour sketch of sunrise over Kangchenjunga. Sir Joseph Hooker's *Himalayan Journals* featured black and white sketches of old Darjeeling drawn in 1854 with the peak. It was Joseph Dalton Hooker, a naturalist, who was responsible for steering up the first round of political history of this area. He was friend of Lord Dalhousie and they had travelled together to India by sea when Dalhousie took over as the Governor General. During his years of travel, Hooker came to Darjeeling, which was then part of Sikkim and teamed up with Arthur Campbell, the then District Magistrate of the area. The British had negotiated with Sikkim to establish a sanatorium in Darjeeling and this was their first foothold. Hooker and Campbell proceeded to enter Sikkim despite being denied permission by the Chogyal. In December 1849 as they entered Sikkim, they were arrested and, by some accounts, treated badly. This was done at the behest of the *Pagla Diwan* or the *Mad Prime Minister* of Sikkim. Taking offence at the arrest of a close friend of the Governor General, in January 1950, the British army crossed over into Sikkim and camped on the Singalila ridge. As retribution Sikkim had to concede the areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong to join the provinces of Bengal which later were passed on to India. The British India was thus firmly established in the foothills of Kangchenjunga and the British gentry enjoyed the walks on the malls.

The streets of Gangtok and Kalimpong were full of festivities when Dalai Lama and Panchan Lama visited Sikkim. But the flight of Dalai Lama to India in 1959 infuriated the Chinese. One focus of their anger was Sikkim with which they had always coveted. During the 1962 Indo-China war, much firing took place on the high passes of Nathu la and Se la. Historically China always recognised Sikkim as an independent country and even after it joined India as a state, China refused to change its stand. In 1967-68, situation on the passes with China was grim and at certain points, Indian and Chinese armies were constantly in skirmishes. Luckily a war was averted. During 2001, the Indian Prime Minister visited Peking and the Chinese negotiated a road from Kolkata to Lhasa via Sikkim, Nathu la and Chumbi valley, which was a prime need for China as it would give them an access to the port of Kolkata and bring Lhasa much closer for supplies. As a *quid pro quo* China agreed to recognise Sikkim as part of India. After some time when nothing was heard from the Chinese authorities, the Indian Government inquired about their promise. Pat came the reply, 'Please look up the official website of the Chinese Government. We have done the needful'. On the website map, below the word 'Sikkim', they had added a word in red, 'India'. Only by such subtle diplomacy did China concede that Sikkim was indeed part of India.

Sikkim Joins India

Nari Rustomji was a Parsi bureaucrat from Mumbai. He was posted to several areas in the northeast and later was appointed as Dewan, the Prime Minister of Sikkim. He had an abiding friendship with Sir Tashi Namgyal, the then Chogyal of Sikkim as well as the earlier Chogyal, known as the Prince. He was a trusted confidante and advisor during the troubled period of the

state. At *Durbars* (courts) Nari Rustomji was always a Guest of Honour. With him was Appa Saheb Pant who was from Aundh, a princely state in Central India.² These two Indian gentlemen acted as representatives of the Government of India and guided the Chogyal and thus the destiny of Sikkim.

But soon the destiny of Sikkim was in the hands of three women. The Chogyal, while walking on the streets of Darjeeling, developed a romantic association with Hope Cook, a shy American girl. The romance flourished under the shadows of Kangchenjunga and the Chogyal persuaded orthodox Lamas to grant him permission to marry an American. Hope Cook had political ambitions and she guided Chogyal to be independent of Indian influence and lead Sikkim to a different path than where it was headed. Later the Chogyal visited Kathmandu for a regional conference against the advise of the Indian Government and what irritated the Indians most was the fact that he spent few hours with Chinese Vice Premier behind locked doors. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who was then the Prime Minister, did not look kindly upon this. Sikkim had a large Nepali population and they were always at crossroads with the minority Lepchas to which the Chogyal belonged. In such a scenario, the third lady entered, Elisa Maria, a Belgian who had lived in Delhi, cultivating several political contacts. She counted Chou En Lai and Kamal Ata'ark amongst her friends. She had married Kazi Lhendup Dorji in Sikkim and came to be known as Chakyal Kazini. She and Kazi Lhendup became instrumental in organizing protests against the Chogyal and the institute of monarchy. Some processions turned violent and were fired on, which gave enough reasons for the Indian army to put Chogyal under house arrest and disarm palace guards. Elections were held and the Sikkim Pradesh Congress under Kazi took power. One of the first resolutions they passed was to join India as one of the states. This was 'accepted' by Mrs. Gandhi's Government and on 23 April 1975 Sikkim joined the Indian Union. Chogyal had two sons Prince Wangchuk and Crown Prince Tenzing who was interested in politics. While driving to Gangtok he died in a car accident and the other brother renounced Sikkim to live peacefully abroad.

Mountains and Mountainering

Towards the eastern side of Kangchenjunga, where the long afternoon shadow falls, lies the Green Lake. The circuit around Kangchenjunga was accomplished in 1899 by Douglas William Freshfield, mountaineer, explorer and geographer. The Italian photographer, Vittorio Sella whose black and white photographs of that trip are legendary, accompanied him. Their journey has not been repeated often. Dorjee Lhatoo and his team were one of the few teams to have undertaken this. When Charles Evans and his team, which made the first ascent of Kangchenjunga in 1955 returned to Darjeeling, they were received by Jill Henderson, the then Honorary Local Secretary of the Himalayan Club, and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay on the Singalila ridge and given *khattas*, the traditional Sherpa welcome.

Sikkim and Kangchenjunga have had a long association with mountaineers. Paul Bauer and Germans attempted the eastern and northern approaches several times but the long difficult northeastern spur defeated them. As compensation they climbed Simvo and Siniolchu, the peak Doug Freshfield had labelled the most beautiful mountain he had ever seen. After the first ascent of Kangchenjunga in 1955, the second ascent was made only after 22 years by an army team led by Col. Kumar. Col. Prem Chand and N. D. Sherpa negotiated the problem of northeast spur and they made the second ascent of the peak. N. D. Sherpa was born in the lap of Kangchenjunga and spent his childhood in streets of Darjeeling. He joined the Indian army and became one of the celebrated mountaineers of the force, particularly after this ascent. He was keenly desirous of climbing Everest, which eluded him due to various factors, though he attempted it several times. This turned into frustration and he hit the bottle hard. Finally, this claimed his life at an early age and India lost a good mountaineer.

² Appa Pant had perfected the yogic systems of *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutes) developed by his father. He performed this *asana* (form of exercise) facing Kangchenjunga every morning at sunrise.

No word on Kangchenjunga would be complete without mention of its flora and fauna. It has a variety of rhododendrons, pristine forests, orchids and butterflies. The Himalayan Club had built a solid hut in the northern Sikkim at foot of Sela pass. This allowed the British from Kolkata to travel quickly to Darjeeling and to this hut to cross Sela Pass and enjoy the beauty of mountains. Chombu peak rising above Sela pass is still unclimbed indicative of the several pleasures that the range has to offer today.

The legendary Indian film maker, Satyajit Ray in his movie, 'Kangchenjunga' narrated the story of a family which gathered at *Chaurasta* to view the famed sunset on the peak. While waiting, they discuss their affairs and are soon embroiled in their internal problems. As a result when the mountain was bathing in evening glory, they themselves were in a shadow and could not appreciate it. Ray used this as an aphorism to indicate the shadows that exist in the mind.

There is no pleasure greater than to sit at the open terrace of Kelventor Dairy in the centre of Darjeeling, sip hot Darjeeling tea, admiring a sunset over Kangchenjunga. The long shadows of the peak would have cleared by then, like the shadows of history and between human beings, to offer a most magnificent view.