



SIDKYONG TULKU AND THE MAKING OF SIKKIM FOR THE 1911 DELHI DURBAR

EMMA MARTIN

Head of Ethnology

National Museums Liverpool

Abstract

In the volumes published to acknowledge the centenary of the 1911 Delhi Durbar one looks for familiar faces in the masses of Indian Princes, British India soldiers and Political Officers that thronged the Durbar camp. In amongst all these images the Sikkim delegation is nowhere to be seen.¹ While Sikkim was of enough interest to the Anglo-Indian-speaking press to warrant several mentions regarding their attendance at the Durbar, very few photographs of the Sikkim party's involvement in the Coronation Durbar are now in circulation.² This makes photographs recording Sidkyong Tulku and the Sikkim tent at the 1911 Durbar, now in the collections of National Museums Liverpool, UK, of particular interest. This article will reinstate Sikkim into the Delhi Durbar by piecing together the delegation's place in the coronation of George V as Emperor of India. Alongside this, some light will be shed on Sidkyong Tulku's own role in creating the Sikkim tent and interiors for arguably the greatest ceremonial show constructed during the British Empire.

INTRODUCTION

[t]he rulers of Sikkim and Bhutan, evidencing their Mongolian connection, brought home impressively the frontier responsibilities...
in days when no State is isolated

The Times of India, 13 December, 1911

- 1 There are however several wonderful images of the Sikkim delegation's escort taken during the 1903 Durbar.
- 2 Charles Bell (Political Officer Sikkim, see later in this paper) owned several cameras and recorded or instructed others to record the major diplomatic events that he was involved in as a Political Officer, including the Bhutan Treaty signing of 1910 and his mission to Lhasa in 1920-21. There are very few images of the 1911 Durbar, while surprising, this can be explained by a comment made by Bell in a letter to his future wife, Cashie Fernie dated 17 December 1911, 'I could not get the verascope open, till a photographer turned up yesterday, who understood it, so have taken hardly any photographs'. A verascope was a camera designed to take a simultaneous double image, thus creating a three-dimensional picture. Bell was not the first, nor the last man to invest in new technology to record a major event in his life only to be defeated by it on the day.



From the 7 to the 15 December 1911, a visit by King George V and Queen Mary saw 250,000 people pour into Delhi. They were there to celebrate not only the coronation of King George as the Emperor of India, but also to invest in Delhi its new capital city status. Invitations to the Delhi Durbar were sent to every Indian Prince of any consequence across the length and breadth of India and for those wishing to enhance their British India credentials it was an eagerly anticipated ticket. With international attention on the Durbar and in order to ensure that the maximum obeisance would be paid to the new Emperor, it was clear this would not be the stage to test new alliances. Their Holinesses, the Panchen Lama and the Dalai Lama having requested a ticket to the Durbar were in fact both refused access to this show of colonial power and reach,³ instead it would be the small Himalayan states of Bhutan and Sikkim, who would be asked to take a seat at the imperial table.

Our main focus is Sidkyong Tulku (1879-1914), he was no stranger to the imperial shock and awe tactics of a British India Durbar; having already attended the Delhi Durbar held in 1903, and on that occasion he had led the Sikkim deputation. That 1903 invitation had originally been meant for his father, the ninth Chogyal of Sikkim, Thutob Namgyal (1860-1914), but something of a last minute decision, meant that it would be his son, and British India proclaimed heir, who would present himself at the Durbar audience; the first member of Sikkimese royalty to do so.⁴ John Claude White (1853-1919), Political Officer in Sikkim, appeared unsure of the Chogyal's motives for pulling out of the 1903 Durbar in his book *Sikkim and Bhutan*, when he attributed his absence to several mitigating factors,⁵

I think he was afraid of venturing so far from his own country, and though he has since quite grown out of it, he was at that time still conscious of and very sensitive about his hare-lip, which is a great

3 The Foreign Department files in the National Archives of India show that the Panchen Lama requested Rs. 20,000 to enable him to attend the Durbar, (NAI External, December 1911 Nos 8-9 Part B). He was categorically turned down by the British as they were now cautiously courting the exiled Dalai Lama. In order to retain some semblance of impartiality neither Lama was in the end invited to the Durbar.

4 Thutob Namgyal's father, Sidkyong Namgyal (1819-1880), the eighth Chogyal of Sikkim, had himself refused an invitation to the 1877 Durbar organised by Viceroy Lytton (White 1909: 48).

5 Beryl White, White's daughter, pasted a newspaper report into her 1903 Durbar album that cites the Chogyal's absence to illness. See Renate Dohmen's on-line exhibition of Beryl White's photographs and watercolours, of which some illustrate the 1903 Delhi Durbar, at: <http://www.kingscollections.org/exhibitions/archives/a-daughter-of-the-empire>.

disfigurement. His lamas also, whom he consults on every important subject, gave it as their opinion that he would probably fall ill and at any rate the result was he declined to go.

White (1909: 45)

But White, in his paternalistic and ever so slightly patronising tone, forgets to mention that there were other politically motivated reasons for the Chogyal not attending the Durbar.

While the Chogyal and Maharani, Yeshe Dölma (1867-1910) were now back in their rightful positions as monarchs of Sikkim, their particular relationship with the British had been a strained one. Between 1893-1895 the Chogyal and Maharani had been placed under house arrest in Kurseong and Darjeeling with White becoming the de-facto ruler of Sikkim during that time, a time in which he brought about a series of controversial land reforms that still have ramifications for the Sikkimese people today.⁶ White's relationship with the Sikkim monarch took a further turn for the worse in 1899 when British India officially recognised Sidkyong Tulku as the rightful heir to the Sikkim *gadi*,⁷ a privilege that should have been the right of the Chogyal's eldest son, Tsodrak Namgyal, who resided in Chumbi (or Dromo) Valley, Tibet. White unable to countenance the possibility that with Tsodrak Namgyal's accession to the *gadi* there would be another generation of opposition to British India in Sikkim duly promoted the pro-British and compliant Sidkyong Tulku above the ever obstinate Chogyal and his eldest son. The extent of this favouritism becomes clear in both Singh (1988) and McKay (2003) who show that it was White himself, who put an end to the Chogyal's thoughts of leading his state at the 1903 Durbar, insisting that the face of the future, Sidkyong Tulku, should represent Sikkim.

By 1911 there had been a sea-change in the diplomatic outlook of the British India Residency in Sikkim epitomised in a later memo from Viceroy Hardinge directed at the man who would take over from White in 1908, Charles Bell. 'I hope Mr Bell understands that when a Ruling Chief is not a minor I am not in favour of many restrictions or interference in the administration of the State'.⁸ The kind of interferences that White had taken to be his political right were a thing of the past, and Bell in the early part of his tenure stepped lightly across the diplomatic minefield that now constituted the Anglo-Sikkim relationship. Sidkyong Tulku was keen to impress on Bell in the early months of his occupancy that he was a

6 Thanks to Dr Anna Balikci-Denjongpa for supplying the dates and background information for Thutob Namgyal when the photographs at National Museums Liverpool were first being catalogued.

7 See, NAI Internal, April 1914 Nos. 24-46 Part A.

8 See NAI Internal, April 1914 Nos. 24-46 Part A.



true British ally and that his father, Thutob Namgyal was unfit for office. Bell's notebooks recorded meetings with Sidkyong Tulku in February 1909 that recount tales of threatened beatings unless bonds were signed in the Chogyal's favour and of political intrigues undertaken by the Maharani in the form of letter writing to Tibet, indicating that Sidkyong Tulku was now in fact a Christian (Bell, Sikkim & General Notebook: 25 February 1909). The desired effect, the Maharaj Kumar suggests, no doubt to increase tensions between himself and the Lhasa aristocracy and government.

Bell duly recorded all the salacious gossip he was offered, but he had watched the situation, and most pointedly White's handling of it, for several years from his various postings in Kalimpong and the Chumbi Valley and White's reliance on a very small group of Sikkimese monastic and political elites was not something that he wished to repeat (Bell, Sikkim & General Notebook: 16 and 28 March 1909).⁹ Despite Sidkyong Tulku's overtly pro-British stance, Bell was well aware that any further favouritism of the Tulku might see the Chogyal look to build closer ties with Tibet and by extension China and so he advised Sidkyong Tulku, 'to go slow and especially to interfere with the M'raja's concerns as little as possible' (Bell Sikkim & General Notebook: 5 April 1909). The softer more nuanced diplomacy of Bell would mean that there would be no question in 1911 of anyone but the ninth Chogyal heading the Sikkim delegation.

THUTOB NAMGYAL: KNIGHT COMMANDER OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE

With five-months still to go before the 1911 Durbar the Anglo-Indian press was already speculating on who would attend. Amongst the high profile names listed on 11 July in the *Times of India*, we see the 'Rajah of Sikkim'. This time Sidkyong Tulku was not to be paraded as the Maharaja-in-waiting, this time, with White out of the picture and the more conciliatory Charles Bell in post, it would be the Maharaj Kumar's father, Thutob Namgyal who would lead the delegation. With not some note of irony there was an extra incentive for him to do so. Despite his imprisonment by the British and his anti-British leanings he was about to be incorporated into that truly British hierarchy, the honours system. Chogyal Thutob Namgyal was about to become Maharaja Sir Thutob Namgyal, Knight Commander of the Indian Empire and with it he would officially receive his permitted 15 gun salute.¹⁰

9 See Tashi Tsering's insightful article on the writing of the 1908, 'The History of Sikkim' for information on the privileging of certain Sikkim families over others by the British.

10 The Durbar investiture took place at 9.30pm on 14 December, with Thutob Namgyal, featuring on page 16 of the Master of Ceremonies programme. He was followed



While this was a fairly low-level honour, the implications of the title were far greater than the sum of its parts. This was a very visible reward for his increasing collaboration with the British, which began with the sending of interpreters and negotiating officials during the Younghusband Punitive Expedition of 1903-04 (although, White would have undoubtedly used his power and position to sanction this). But more than this, it would signify that Bell as Political Officer, Sikkim recognised the Chogyal as the leader of his state and was therefore likely a further strategy employed by Bell to build closer relations between the two men. While Bell was acknowledging Thutob Namgyal's right to rule, the Chogyal's acceptance of the honour also had implications, which Cannadine clearly lays out, 'the acceptance of an honour did not merely elevate someone in the social and imperial hierarchy; it also put them formally in direct, and subordinate, relation to the monarch' (2001:86). And what better place than the 1911 Durbar for the Chogyal to truly comprehend exactly what it was he was being incorporated into. Of the many rulers who had an audience with George V on the 12 December 1911 very few were noted in dispatches, but in the official record of the visit we find the 'Maharaja of Sikkim' (Fig. 1),

Most reverential of all were the chiefs of Bhutan and of Sikkim, who, after bowing profoundly and throwing earth by gesture seven times on their heads, drew from their breasts two white shawls, such as they use only to drape the most sacred images of their gods, spread them before the King and Queen, and finally raising their quaint caps from their heads, passed on. Their homage was a solemn religious ceremony.

Fortescue (1912: 155)¹¹

From the various records, files and archives there does not appear to be a note pertaining to how this audience and the gestures involved were negotiated

towards the end of the programme by his son Sidkyong Tulku, who would receive a Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire or CIE for short.

11 This gesture should normally involve three or, in the case of appearing in front of the Qing Emperor, nine prostrations. Called *phyag dgu phrug* in Tibetan, although known in China as the *koutou*. This act has then either been wrongly recorded by the British Indian government, or there was a clear manipulation of the practice by the British in order to meet their comprehension of subservience. It should be noted that the most high ranking India Prince, the Nizam of Hyderabad gave three prostrations, so it is likely that the Chogyal was ordered to give more. Grateful thanks to Tashi Tsering for making this observation on the prostration and for his observation on the *khata*. See Hevia (2005) for a critique of the British manipulation of the *koutou* during the Macartney Embassy's visit to Qianlong in 1793.

and constructed.¹² The act of laying the ceremonial scarf, the *khata* at the feet of George V as he sat on the Durbar throne is an extraordinary one. In order to show, in the British context, complete submission to the Emperor the Indian Princes had been instructed to lay their bejeweled ceremonial swords at the feet of George V (Raman and Agarwal 2012: 135). However, this was not possible for the Chogyal, his ceremonial dress only allowed for a ceremonial dagger. A decision therefore seems to have been made that the *khata* would be laid at the feet of the Emperor by the Chogyal in order to bring some parity to the proceedings. What appears not to have been appreciated by the British was that a *khata* should always be offered either on a table in front of the king or lama or given into the recipient's hands, it should never be left on the ground, which was an act of great disrespect.

From British Indian perceptions here was a clear acknowledgement by the Chogyal of his position vis à vis the Emperor of India, its significance was to be clear not only to the Emperor and the Chogyal, but also to the Chogyal's delegation who would have witnessed the British understanding of submission from the stands. But in fact this act from the Sikkim perspective was more disrespectful than anything the Gaekwad of Baroda could have hoped to achieve in turning his back on the Emperor as he walked away from his own audience in 1911.¹³ One wonders if the Chogyal hid a wry smile as he obediently performed this dreadful slight to the satisfaction of the British empire.

There is much to speculate over regarding this act, did Thutob Namgyal contest it, did he negotiate to present the *khata* into the hands of George V, or in fact did he know of the act he was expected to perform much before the rehearsals began? While this was an imperfect sign of submission, the intention was that the Chogyal would now understand where the British placed him in the greater imperial scheme of things, never mind that the act he had been instructed to perform was for him a show of utter disrespect.

This was one of several moments of ceremonial contact between the King and the Chogyal, including a fleeting private audience and return visit and attendance

12 Neither the records in the India Office, National Archives of India, the Sikkim State Archive, the Sikkim Palace archive catalogue nor Charles Bell's notebooks and diaries shed any light on the run up to the 1911 Delhi Durbar (this may be due to the fact that Bell was on leave from September - November 1911) or Thutob Namgyal's knowledge of his role in the proceedings. However, Bell notes in a letter from the Durbar camp to his fiancé, Cashie Fernie, dated 7 December 1911 that, 'The State Entry today was a fine sight; my two Chiefs as per previous arrangement laid scarves at the feet of the King + Queen'.

13 See Nickolls, Charles W (1990) 'The Dubar Incident', in *Modern Asian Studies* Vol 24, No 3, pp.529-559 for an account of the furore over the Gaekwad of Baroda's actions at the 1911 Durbar and the subsequent fallout for the Gaekwad.



[Fig. 1] Sir Ugyen Wangchuk, Chogyal Thutob Namgyal, Charles Bell and Tashi Wangyal returning from the Coronation Durbar Audience, 12 December 1911
Courtesy of Private Collection





[Fig. 2] Sidkyong Tulku (seated), surrounded by Sikkim officials, right to left: not identified, not identified, not identified, Rai Sahib Lobzang Chhoden, Yangthang Kazi, Namkha Gyatso, not identified. December 1911
Charles Bell Collection 50.31.137, Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool



at the state banquet.¹⁴ Sidkyong Tulku was also present on these state occasions ensuring his affirmation as the heir to the throne. Bell, ever sensitive to Sidkyong Tulku's need for social as well as ceremonial appearances, gave the Maharaj Kumar access to a very different network. Listed on 1 December 1911 in Bell's tally of present giving and receiving we find, 'Tickets for polo tournament at Delhi + tea' for Sidkyong Tulku (Bell Sikkim & General Notebook: 203), there is no such gift for anyone else from the Sikkimese or for that matter the Bhutanese delegation. White had noted that in 1903 the delegation had spent many of their afternoons watching the polo, 'where the polo was magnificent and where all the Delhi world would congregate' (White 1909: 47). Bell was keenly aware of the need to introduce the Maharaj Kumar to colonial society and to provide him with the means to make contacts that he might one day need when he became Chogyal himself, and the polo at the Delhi Durbar was an ideal way for the Tulku to make these less formal connections.

THE SIKKIM DELEGATION

In November His Highness accompanied by the Maharaj Kumar, the Kumar Trashi Wangyal, the Kumari and Choze Kusho, three members of Council, several Kazis, Lamas and Nepali Thikadars with a large following attended the Coronation Durbar at Delhi¹⁵

The Chogyal and his son had not of course come alone to the Durbar, but unlike the enormous contingent from Madras, which spread itself over two separate camps and numbered 110 delegates from five Princely States, the Sikkim encampment was a much more modest affair and officially numbered just 26 men.¹⁶ The delegation list copied from the Durbar records in full here (spellings as shown in the Coronation Durbar programme) contains many familiar names from

14 The Sikkim delegation was most likely thoroughly underwhelmed by the time they actually met the King and Emperor. The pomp and ceremony of the occasion was no doubt undermined by the constant practicing of the protocols and procedures that went before the actual event. Bell writing to Cashie Fernie sighed, 'I have been working off my feet since coming here; we have had daily rehearsals of the chief ceremonials to be performed by our Ruling Chiefs, one has to go early + stay till late, + do a lot of waiting about. We have rehearsed the Durbar itself...3 times; the State entry twice' (ibid.).

15 See Sikkim Administrative Report IOR/V/23/89, No 450.

16 Several individuals recorded as being in Delhi do not make the official delegation list, including Rinpoche Choze Kusho (chos mdzad sku shog), who was later and more commonly known as Taring Rinpoche, who as the son of Lhase Kusho and the Maharani Yeshe Dölma was the step-son of the Chogyal (Who's Who in Tibet, 1920).



Sikkim's aristocratic and monastic lineages (See Fig. 2),¹⁷ listed alongside them, we also find their British India officers, the staff of the Gangtok Residency, who would stage-manage every move made by Sikkim during the Durbar ceremonials.

His Highness Maharaja Thotub Namgye

The Maharaj Kumar of Sikkim.	Kumar Trashi Wangyal of Sikkim.
Barmiak Kazi.	Lambodar Pradhan, Rai Sahib.
Cheepa Lama.	Lingmo Chotenpa.
Dawsandup Kazi.	Living Kazi.
Gyaltsen Kazi.	Lobzang Chhoden, Rai Sahib.
Kharagsing Pradhan, Babu.	Pem Tsering, Babu.
Kincho Gyalpa. ¹⁸	Rhenok Kazi.
Lachminarain Pradhan, Rai Sahib.	Shamlal Subba, Babu.
	Tasang Lama ¹⁹
	Yangthang Kazi.
Mr. C. A. Bell	Political Officer in Sikkim.
Achuk Tsering, Rai Sahib.	
Gyaltsen Tsering, Babu.	
Hickley, Mr. A. D.	State Engineer, Sikkim.
Hodges, Mr. W. H.	Superintendent, Agency Office.
Thapa, Babu H. B.	
Turner, Asst. Surgeon J. N., I.S.M.D.	Civil Surgeon, Sikkim Agency.

The delegation list highlights the new political order that had come to Sikkim in 1910. Not only do we see long-standing and well-established Sikkimese families represented here, but also the Newar landlords/contractors who had just the previous year begun to serve as officials on the Sikkim council and at the Palace (Shrestha 2005: 33). The most familiar names are those of the Kazis. Barmiak Kazi, (personal name, Barmiok Athing Tenzin Wangyal) (d.1926), was

¹⁷ It is interesting to note that the British India publication, *Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet: List of Chiefs and leading families*, Calcutta: Govt of India [Political Officer Sikkim] 1933 makes no mention of any of the men attending the 1903 or 1911 Durbars.

¹⁸ His actual title was Munshi Konchok Gyalpo.

¹⁹ According to the Administrative Report for Sikkim 1912-1913 the Taksang Lama was also a member of the State Council and had previously been a councillor to the Chogyal. This was prior to White sending him, along with several others influential men, to their respective estates ensuring that the Phodang Lama, a trusted ally of White's, would gain prominence (Singh 1988: 225).



one of the most influential landlords in Sikkim, Chief Steward at the Palace and also a Sikkim Council member. Rhenock Kazi, (personal name, Sonam Dadul) had succeeded his father in 1908; he also sat on the Sikkim Council and became the manager of the Chogyal's private estates. There was also Yangthang Kazi, (personal name, Namkha Gyatso) another Sikkim Councillor and furthermore Writer in the Chogyal's household who was a member of the influential Brag dKar pa family; they having provided state officials from the family for the past eight generations. We then have Dawsandup Kazi, or Dawa Samdup Kazi, the well-known translator and Head Master of the Bhutia Boarding School in Gangtok and then finally Gyaltsen Kazi. He was from one of the leading families in Sikkim, the Tsugshing-Athing family. At the age of 19 he served as an interpreter on the Younghusband Expedition of 1903-04, receiving the Tibet medal for his efforts. In 1906, he escorted Sidkyong Tulku to England, while he undertook his studies there, and on their return in 1907 Gyaltsen Kazi was given a post in the office of the Gangtok Residency, alongside this he also held the post of Private Secretary to the Maharaj Kumar.²⁰

Amongst the new arrivals to the Sikkim State's inner circle we find listed here, Rai Sahib Lachminarain Pradhan or Laksminarayan Pradhan and Rai Sahib Lambodar Pradhan the sons of Laksmidas Pradhan,²¹ the first Newar settler in Sikkim and subsequently powerful landlord. Both men would continue the family line and become influential landlords in Sikkim in their own right, their influence ensuring they would both be appointed to seats on the Sikkim State Council in 1914. Last but not least from the Sikkim delegation we see Rai Sahib Lobzang Chhoden. He had been educated in the Bhutia Boarding School in Darjeeling after which he joined the Survey Department at Simla from where he was sent to Sikkim as Settlement Surveyor. He would serve as Court Surveyor in the Deputy Commissioner's office at Darjeeling and then as surveyor and interpreter in the Gangtok Residency Office. In 1903 he joined the Younghusband Punitive Expedition as interpreter and translator and in recognition of his services he received the title Rai Sahib. Thutob Namgyal also created him a Kazi and in October 1908 he became the Chogyal's Private Secretary followed in July 1912 by an appointment to the State Council.

20 Many thanks to Tashi Tsering for giving me access to his personal collection of the various volumes of, *Lists of Leading Officials, Nobles, And Personages in Bhutan, Sikkim, and Tibet*, Calcutta Superintendent Government Printing, India, from which much of this information is taken from.

21 Charles Bell describes Rai Sahib Lambodar Pradhan as one of the most enlightened landlords of Sikkim, in the Administrative Report for 1911-12.



From the Gangtok Residency we see Charles Bell of course; who at this moment in time also had one eye on the events taking place in Darjeeling, where the thirteenth Dalai Lama was still in exile.²² He was supported by his trusted right-hand man Rai Sahib Achuk Tsering (1877-1920), he too had gone to the Bhutia Boarding School in Darjeeling and had been selected by Bell as interpreter for the Ammo Chu Valley expedition in 1904, after which Bell had appointed him to the post of Confidential Clerk when he himself came into post. He had made an important contribution to the signing of the Bhutan Treaty in 1910, for which he was awarded the title Rai Sahib and he would also support Bell as key advisor at the Simla Conference in 1914. Tragically, he would die only days after arriving with Bell into Lhasa in November 1920.²³

What this delegation list shows us is that the group of men selected to travel with the Chogyal was a decidedly pro-British (pro-Bell is perhaps a more accurate turn of phrase) contingent. Although the men were working on behalf of the Chogyal many had been schooled or had associations with the British India Bhutia Boarding Schools, while others had joint roles that ensured they had allegiances to both the Palace and the Gangtok Residency. Some, like Barmiak Kazi had had personal disputes with White, but with the arrival of Bell the strength of the Sikkim State Council and its members rose and men who had previously played key roles as advisors to the Chogyal, roles that had been outlawed by White, had now been reinstalled (Singh 1988: 225). Furthermore, the Newar landlords had also been given a place at the political table, ensuring sectarian and landlord disputes would be discussed and settled during Council. This was to be the first outing for the new political order now operating in Sikkim and while some of the men had seen what the British were capable of before, for others including the Chogyal, this would be the first opportunity to truly take in what the British India government was capable of and what displays of pomp and ceremony it was willing to create for such an occasion.

PREPARING FOR DURBAR CAMP

Gorgeous Scenes and Dramatic Statements

The Times of India, 13 December 1911

22 He was also preparing for a personal milestone, his marriage to Cashie Fernie that would take place within the month.

23 11 December 1920. 'Achuk Tsering died today, of heart failure, brought on by a combined attack of influenza and gout. His heart turned out to be weak, which I did not know before. His death is a great shock to us all, + we shall all miss him terribly. He was a man of great political acumen, my right hand man in Tibetan, Bhutanese and Sikkimese politics' (Bell Diary Vol. VII).



The Delhi Durbar camp of 1911 was something of a temporary wonder of the colonial world. Covering 25 square miles of Old Delhi, it began at the Red Fort and reached its pinnacle at the now almost forgotten Coronation Park on the edge of today's NH1 Bypass (Raman and Agarwal 2012).²⁴ Delhi Junction, what we now know as Old Delhi Railway Station, had a major refurbishment with eleven new platforms constructed in order to simplify the logistics of bringing together the Princes of India in Delhi. If that wasn't enough, a light railway system was built, taking passengers on a scenic ride of the many hundreds of Durbar camps and local attractions.²⁵ The camps themselves had complex telephone and postal systems, were lit with electric lighting and there was a carefully laid out system of metalled roads and pavements all of which were bordered by iron railing fences punctuated with castellated entrance pillars to each camp. When looking over the Durbar pictures of this utopian creation, one feels as if one has stepped into a colonial Disney World, but while the British wanted their Durbars to be of a sumptuous and regal nature, they didn't necessary want to pay for every small detail.²⁶

This need for grand sumptuous displays delivered on a budget had also been expected during the 1903 Durbar and this had proved to be quite a worry for White who found Sikkim at a distinct disadvantage to other Princely States. Many of them, as long-time supporters of the British, had procured over many years the symbols of ceremonial colonialism that were expected to be displayed on such occasions including, the carriage and horses, processional elephants, furniture, tents and camping equipment. Sikkim, however, had none of these, and while the processional elephant was borrowed from the Bettiah Raj of Bihar, everything else had to be procured from the State coffers while keeping, 'the expenditure down to the lowest possible sum' (White 1909: 46). The creation and maintaining of the Sikkim Camp in 1911 would also come out of the Sikkim State budget and while elephants processions would not be a pre-requisite for the 1911 Durbar

24 Although Codell notes in her essay that the park is now in the process of being marketed and turned into a tourist attraction (Codell 2012: 42n).

25 During the build up to the 1911 Durbar, regular updates on the preparation of the camp were printed in the Anglo-Indian press. A typically laudatory report on the railway construction can be found in 11 July *The Times of India*, 'the railway systems were a mere matter of detail and will, as it has now developed be a marvel of mobility and convenience'. The mere detail they failed to mention being the many hundreds of Indian men and women who would undertake back-breaking work during the intense heat of the summer and the debilitating humidity of the monsoon to complete this 'marvel'.

26 See, NAI Internal, August 1911 Nos. 127-130 Part B, as the *tosha khana* office begins to assess what can be found, restored, dusted down and reused from the 1903 Durbar for the upcoming Coronation Durbar of 1911.



costs still spiralled, with the total cost of the Sikkim delegation's attendance at the 1911 Durbar reaching a grand total of Rs.68, 808/-6/-6, a major financial burden for this small, developing state.

Sidkyong Tulku had of course been here before. Heading the delegation and managing a tight but not insubstantial budget in 1903 had given Sidkyong Tulku a unique opportunity to shape the representation of Sikkim not only for the princes of India, but also for the many British subjects from across India and the Empire who would be making the trip to Delhi to witness the spectacle. In 1903, 'The Kumar took this entirely into his own hands, drew out the designs, selected the colouring, and superintended the whole of the details of the manufacture with the best possible result' (ibid.). As can be seen in Beryl White's watercolour of the Sikkim camp,²⁷ the red, blue, green and yellow prayer flags and banners lining the entrance to the camp and the identifying feature of the bold blue appliqué tent designs would have been quite a contrast to the plain white canvas camps of the other Princely States and as a result, 'The camp attracted many visitors, amongst others Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Connaught' (ibid.).²⁸

The 1903 Durbar had been the perfect preparation for Sidkyong Tulku's later involvement in the 1911 Durbar. Not only did he have some idea of what to expect and what expectations would be placed upon him, but the event had introduced him to the highly impressive workings of British India. Although he would later further his education at Oxford University and take a tour of North America, Japan and China between 1906-08,²⁹ this would have been the first opportunity for White to truly persuade Sidkyong Tulku of the power the British had across this immense region and if there had been any slight doubt in Sidkyong Tulku's mind as to which mast he should pin his colours to (the British or the Tibetan), the matter would surely have been settled by his attendance at the Durbar of 1903. His involvement in the creation of the 1903 Sikkim camp would ensure he would gauge the level of expected spectacle in 1911 perfectly.

THE SIKKIM CAMP OF 1911

The principal event of the year was His Majesty the King-Emperor's Coronation Durbar at Delhi. Preparations for His Highness the

27 See <http://www.kingscollections.org/exhibitions/archives/a-daughter-of-the-empire/durbar/tents>.

28 The type of prayer flags seen in the watercolours of Beryl White and the photograph of 1911 are indicative of those found specifically in Sikkim and Bhutan and the borders with Tibet.

29 See, McKay (2003) for a record of Sidkyong Tulku's English education and subsequent tour.





Maharaja's camp in Delhi were begun in March. Every one took a keen interest in them, and worked hard to make it a success. The result proved very satisfactory, and the camp attracted much attention by its richly embroidered Reception tent...³⁰

With the approaching Durbar of 1911, Sidkyong Tulku's first-hand experience of creating a tented encampment for an imperial Durbar ensured that yet again in 1911 the Maharaj Kumar took control of constructing or 'making' Sikkim for the rest of British India to gaze upon and in some cases to consume. The delegation arrived on the 30 November by special train. Allocated site 317, Sikkim pitched camp alongside its neighbours Bhutan (Camp 316), the Political Officer's (Camp 318) and the then Punjabi Princely State of Bilaspur (Camp 319). As Camp 1 was ascribed to George V's camp with subsequent camp numbers allotted in order of proximity to the King's camp, it is clear that the Sikkim camp was on the peripheries of the 'Native Chiefs' camp' and the official map shows us that the camp was situated on the very edges of the camps allocated to the Princely States, equidistant from the King's camp and the Durbar Amphitheatre. As in life Sikkim was situated on the outer limits of empire.³¹

This peripheral positioning would be something the Maharaj Kumar would play on in creating the tent and interior for the Sikkim camp. Following a request by W H Hodges for a record of the Sikkim compound, for the official account of the Durbar to be published in 1913,³² a dossier of information (now archived in the Sikkim State Archive, Department of Darbar SI No: 81 File No: 13/1913)³³ was compiled by Sidkyong Tulku and Kazi Dawa Samdup which gives a detailed pen picture of the encampment. In its compilation Sidkyong Tulku's involvement in its making is drawn for us. From the outset, it seems clear that Sikkim at the

30 See, Sikkim Administrative Report IOR/V/23/89, No 450.

31 The camps appears to have been allocated in terms of honours and gun salutes, physically and geographically expressing the importance and the influence of the camp in question, but this was undoubtedly coupled with colonial geography and it is interesting to note that only three camps along from Sikkim was the Chamba camp, another peripheral Himalayan state.

32 Unfortunately, the India Office Records only hold volume two of the sumptuous, *The Imperial Coronation Durbar (illustrated). Delhi, 1911. Lahore: The Imperial Publishing Co, [1913]*, which includes detailed biographies of the Indian Princes, their contributions to British Indian rule and studio portraits of the chiefs in their finery (often worn at the instigation of the British), alas, it seems Sikkim was included in volume one.

33 Unless otherwise stated this archive is the source for the following account of the tent, its interiors and the Tulku's comments.





Delhi Durbar was to place itself at odds with the colonial order of the castellated entrance pillars of the vast majority of the other Princely States.

This difference was apparent before the visitor even entered the Sikkim encampment, as the camp's entrance did not include a ceremonial archway or fountain as many of the other Princely States did (aping the Saracenic architecture of late nineteenth century British India), but instead there stood a chörten or stupa, the first of many objects to represent Tibetan Buddhist culture that had been designed and made under the supervision of the Maharaj Kumar specifically for the Durbar display. As we shall see with the camp's interiors, the Tulku wished to stress the distinctive Himalayan culture that he represented, but there were occasionally small concessions to British India, the first being the inner workings of the chörten. Instead of a space reserved for the burning of juniper branches, the chörten would hold four electric lights connected to the grid, lit courtesy of the Durbar camp's drive for modernity. The chörten then would be a mere representation removed from its intended religious use; here at the Durbar it would act purely as an electric lamp post. A further visual sign that British India had made its mark on Sikkim would be in the displaying of the new flag of Sikkim. Flags, banners and standards had become an important part of British and British Indian pageantry, reflecting an increasing British interest in handmade arts and crafts and the medieval guilds of artists that were in stark juxtaposition to what was considered the over engineered and vulgar culture of Britain that had been so heavily criticised at the Great Exhibition held at Crystal Palace in 1851. In previous Durbars, standards had been created en masse for the attending Indian Princes (Codell 2012: 21), but in 1911 Sidkyong Tulku was given the opportunity to create his state's own national flag, 'newly designed by myself, bearing the gem wheel in the centre and the seven minor gems...with the sun and the moon, with flames as the border', this brief description listed in the inventory of items sent to the Durbar is easily recognisable as the flag that continued to be Sikkim's national flag until the state's annexation in 1975.

The reception tent itself did however brush off any British Indian interventions and stood in contrast to the ubiquitous white canvas tents of the Raj (see Fig. 3).³⁴ Sidkyong Tulku described his creation in fine detail and so it seems fitting to allow the Tulku to explain his design to us.

34 Another photograph in the Liverpool collection (50.31.150, page 23) shows that the Bhutanese reception tent was also constructed along the same lines as the Sikkim tent with appliqué work, but to my mind it does not show the same originality as Sidkyong Tulku's design. A photograph of the Burmese encampment shows statues of guardian lions at the entrance to their camp, although they did retained the standard issue white canvas tents.





The reception tent, unique in shape and design from all other tents in the Durbar consisted of three separate pieces. The design of the tents too were my own, and they were all done under my own direct supervision.

They were: (1) The Reception Camp, consisting of a roof or outer covering tent called Jayab. (2) The inner tent which served as the real reception tent called (Ding-gur) (3) The courtyard in the front adjoining the Ding-gur called Yolgur...

The Yolgur has the seven lesser gems embossed on them on the sides. The Ding-gur bore the design of Garuda on the front and back-roofs and the sides bore the sign of the phoenix birds. The Garuda was surrounded by the 8 auspicious signs...The outer tent Jayab only bore the auspicious Tranga design-signifying a coin

It goes without saying that tents and canopies play an integral part in Tibetan society from lingka tents used for picnicking, to monastic encampments that house entire Buddhist schools. In this case from the description of the tent and what we can see in the solitary photograph of its exterior, the general design principles appears to have been based on a modified high monastic or state reception camp, a majestic example of which was the 'Great Peacock' reception tent, photographed by Hugh Richardson in October 1939 being used to house the throne of the fourteenth Dalai Lama as he was finally escorted into Lhasa.³⁵ One further detail not described by the Maharaj Kumar is the appliqué design of a pair of *seng ge* at the entrance to the outer tent, which as symbols of Buddhist protectors act as a further sign of what the tent contained and what was the real draw for the Durbar crowds.

TRAVELLING TO THE HEART OF SIKKIM: THE TENT INTERIORS

This much can be said of it, that even at the Durbar amidst all the display of wealth and riches of India, the little altar attracted some notice of the visitors

Sidkyong Tulku

The effort and expense that was poured into the making of each of the camps clearly shows that this tented city was not just merely a place for the attending delegations to eat and sleep. In many respects what we see here is a living, breathing exhibition. The already mentioned Great Exhibition in 1851, whose halls and corridors had (poorly) represented the indigenous arts and crafts

35 See The Tibet Album. "Dalai Lama's Peacock Tent at Doguthang, Rikya" 05 Dec. 2006. The British Museum. Accessed 03 Jun. 2012, http://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk/photo_BMR.6.8.222.html.





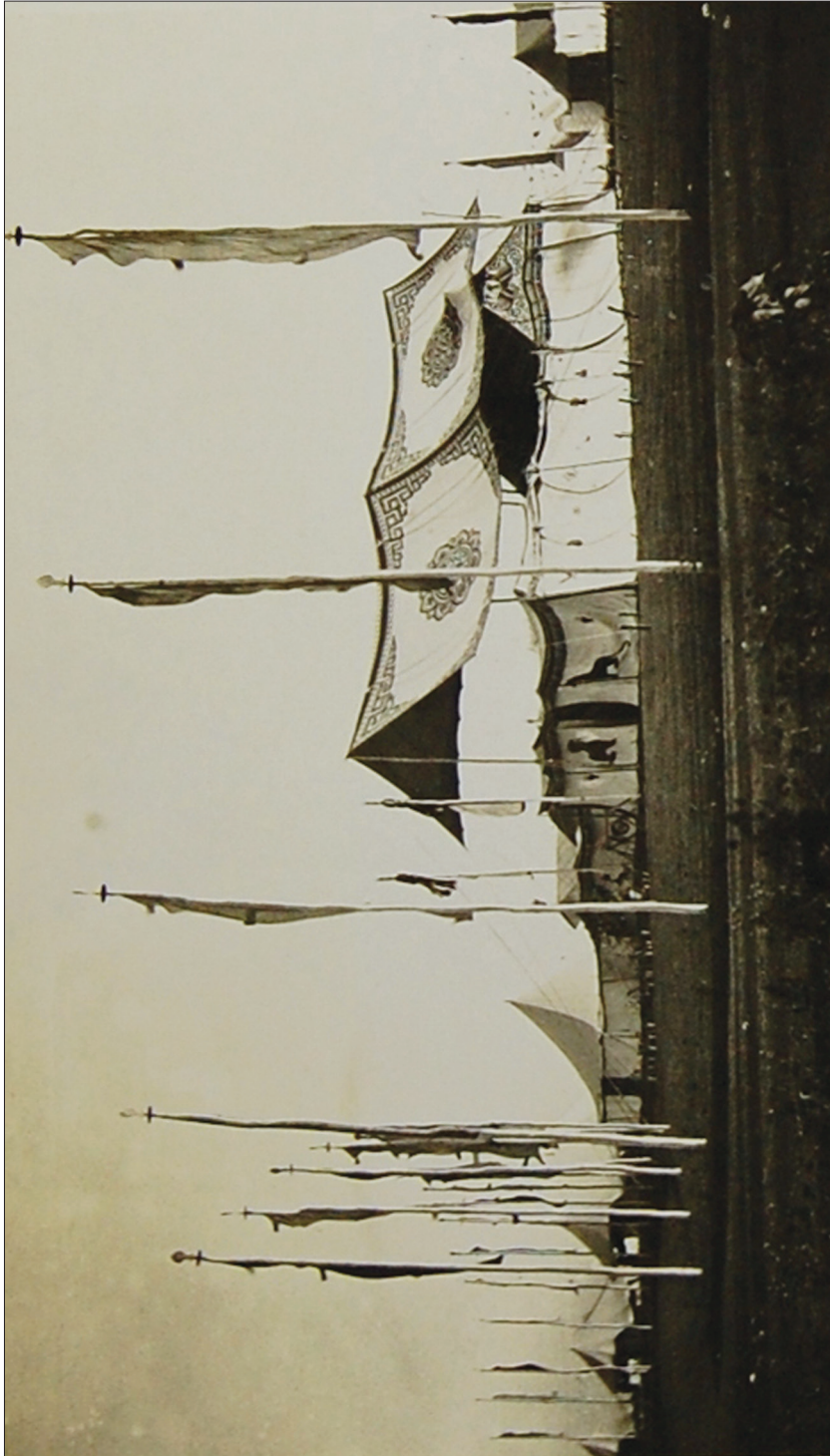
of many of the colonies within the British empire had been the catalyst for a growing phenomena in Europe that would be much later termed as cultural mega-events (Roche 2000). These events encompassed large-scale expos, travelling circuses, the re-emergence of the Olympic Games and temporary experiential museums that often included a 'living element' in the shape of the participation of peoples from across the colonies, in many cases 'living' in their 'natural habitat'. While a number of princes contested their participation and adornment at the Delhi Durbars,³⁶ the archives do not show any such protests from Sikkim on the necessity of having a reception tent that would be manned by the Maharaja and his delegation for the European contingent of the Durbar to visit.

My argument here is that the Raj-era British, whether in England or in India understood what was expected of them at a cultural mega-event, it was an opportunity for visitors to travel the colonial world without the actual risk of making the difficult journeys themselves. We get a sense of this when Bell, in writing up the Administrative Report for Sikkim at the end of 1912, recalls the entrance to the camp and the impact it made, 'Tibetan prayer flags on tall masts placed at intervals on either side of the road from the main gate of the camp to the Reception tent were characteristic of the country and added to the picturesqueness of the Camp'. The inclusion of the term 'picturesque' is important here, the notion of the picturesque, that is, in seeing pleasure in a scene and capturing it, possessing it, on canvas or later through photography whilst travelling, had become an important feature of European aristocratic travel in the nineteenth century and while it had begun with tours of the Lake District in northern England, the romantic and rugged attractions of the landscape had moved on to the Swiss Alps and had finally settled in the Himalayas. For some a visit to the Sikkim camp would be their only opportunity to take in the picturesque nature of the Himalayas, in a sense the Durbar visitors would be the precursors of the virtual tourist. There were of course strong colonial overtones to these camp visits too, Thomas and Ryan note that, 'As European visitors took the opportunity to "tour India" within the tented city, the separation of camps in fact subliminally reinforced the metaphor of colonial conquest, exploration and appropriation' (Thomas and Ryan 2012: 57).

The Sikkim encampment was not however sited on the main tourist route; that is, the main processional route of the Durbar camp. Those encampments were allotted to the states that had long shown allegiance to the Crown including, Hyderabad, Baroda and Mysore. The spatial hierarchies that had placed Sikkim on the peripheries of the imperial Durbar would not however present visitors to Sikkim in the Durbar world with the same challenges that Sikkim did in the real world.

36 As Mathur notes, 'Gandhi viewed the medals on the Indian maharajas as "badges of impotence", and "insignia not of their royalty, but of their slavery" (2012: 79).





[Fig. 3] The Sikkim Reception Tent at the Delhi Coronation Durbar, 1911
Bell Album 3, p.23
Charles Bell Collection 50.31.150, Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool





[Fig. 4] The Sikkim Reception Tent Interior, December 1911
Charles Bell Collection 50.31.138, Courtesy of National Museums Liverpool



Sikkim camp, unlike its real life counterpart, had a light railway station just two camps away. The railway as we have already heard was designed to guarantee European visitors to the Durbar a comprehensive view of the sights and sounds of the Durbar camps and could in true Great Exhibition fashion ensure that they could step into every colonial corner of the British Indian empire without leaving the confines of the camp.³⁷ Considering Sikkim's relatively inaccessible position in reality, the Sikkim camp was clearly an attraction to many, but what would the visitor gaze upon having finally made it to 'Sikkim'?

Then just as the visitor entered into the Din-gur [sic] the first object to catch his eye was the altar, the design of which was all my own. I had to superintended the execution of the artistically delicate and intricate carvings and paintings myself.

Sidkyong Tulku

Comparing the photograph of the Sikkim reception tent taken by Johnston and Hoffmann (Fig. 4) with other photographic records of the various reception tents it suggests that a similar layout was prescribed for each tent. These photographs were destined for the souvenir album of the imperial visit and would sit alongside the studio portraits of the respective delegation heads. These official photographs once assembled in the souvenir guide were just another way for the armchair tourist to take the India tour, here was all of British India captured and contained within the pages of a book, a record of the empire's possessions. For many of the Princely States, the reception tents themselves, and the portraits taken to coincide with the publication, offered a further opportunity to advertise and display their wealth and more importantly their British India credentials. The reception tents illustrated these ideas well displaying a healthy mix of over-stuffed Victoriana furniture coupled with the trappings of an Indian audience hall.

This was not the case with Sidkyong Tulku's creation, having whetted the appetite with his description of the altar, which will be discussed shortly, he expressly states,

that all the objects exhibited and laid out in the tent, from the tent outside to the carpets and Chuddars arranged on the floor, were either all Sikkim, Tibetan, Bhutanese, Nepalese, or Chinese made. There were very few European manufactured things there.

The Maharaj Kumar had not only shied away from the penchant of India princes to display all things British, but he had also decided not to create a raised

37 It seems that these privileges of virtual travel were only open to the European factions of the Durbar delegations. Ryan and Thomas note the positioning of sentry guards at the entrance to each enclosure, ensuring the movements of the Indian inhabitants of the camps were strictly controlled (2012: 58).

dais on top on which was the government sanctioned 'durbar chair', instead the Tulku would exhibit and display a Buddhist altar.

The centre piece of the Sikkim reception tent was a large wooden altar or shrine (*mchod gshom*). From the partial view we have of the altar we can see that the base unit was beautifully painted and that above the two tiers of shelves there were three large glazed niches for the chief images and above this a further set of niches for vessels. The supporting poles for the altar were deeply and elaborately carved with undulating dragons which were each crowned by a phoenix. The cornice or crown featured a carving of *sang gye o pame* Amitabha Buddha, who was flanked by two *shang shang*, the mythical bird-men who appeared from swirling clouds. Sidkyong Tulku was obviously delighted with the end result as he notes to Hodges that, 'They may be said to be the best products of Sikkimese carving ever done hitherto'. Although it is difficult to see the quality from the photograph a carved and painted folding table (*lteb lcog*) in the Charles Bell collection at National Museums Liverpool (number 50.31.3),³⁸ which was given to Bell by Sidkyong Tulku in around 1912 and is described as being, 'made and painted by a Sikkimese', shows the fine quality of the deep carving and gilding that the Sikkimese craftsmen were capable of in the early twentieth century.

Not everything in the reception tent had been especially commissioned for the Durbar, and the Maharaj Kumar curated a display that brought together new pieces with state treasures. Seated within the glass niches, for example, was a large silver figure of Padma Sambhava or Guru Rinpoche surrounded by a copper gilt mandorla or halo and at each side sat equally large silver figures of his consorts, Mandarava and Yeshe Tsogyal. Sidkyong Tulku described these as 'very old rare images and family heirlooms'. Rare too were the Eight Auspicious Symbols and the Seven Symbols of the Chakravartin (seen on the side table in Fig. 2), which the Tulku notes are, 'heir looms and used during the installation ceremony of the Maharaja to the guddi'.³⁹

The museum curator in me finds the construction of the altar, and the ritual objects selected to populate it, fascinating. I would suggest this is one of the first recorded displays of Tibetan Buddhist objects (by a Himalayan man) that brings together ritual objects for a relatively general public and places them in their cultural context. The altar doesn't appear to be in use, there are no butter lamps (or electric lights for that matter) burning, no offerings apparent, no incense

38 See, the folding table in the on-line Charles Bell catalogue at: www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/collections/item.aspx?tab=summary&item=50.31.3&coll=1&page=1&themeId=3.

39 The spelling of *gadi* or throne was not standardised until later in the twentieth century and so a variety of spellings can be found for this term in the archives.

burning. Added to this we see that the Tulku has created a display structure for the Mahakala and the Kanchenjunga masks and their respective costumes that are still used today in museum displays, as the masks were, ‘dressed out in the rare old silk dancing dresses, which were stretched out on frames so as to look as if someone actually wore them’. The importance of dressing the set was clearly important to him as he also used, ‘several other knick-knacks too numerous to be mentioned; but all of native Sikkim manufacture, which tended to give the Sikkim tent quite a unique feature, and which quite attracted the visitors’. The Maharaj Kumar, was not just presenting Sikkim and wider Tibetan culture to the British and the Indian Princes, but he was doing so with a strong sense of aesthetics and drama by bringing together unique objects and the best of contemporary craftsmanship, in doing so he had created a show-stopper.

The audience’s reaction to the display can be gauged by the wish the visitors had to take home with them a small part of what they had witnessed, a souvenir to testify to the fact that they had come into contact with something not seen before, something inaccessible to so many. As the Maharaj Kumar recalls, ‘there would have been quite a scramble for the curios if they had been for sale’. In order to satisfy this compulsion to take away something material from the Sikkim tent, the numerous carpets that covered the tent floors, and the few western-style chairs that had found their way into the tent, were sold off ensuring that a small piece of Sikkim was carried off to England or some distant corner of India.

THE DURBAR CONCLUDED

After the many carriage rides, polo games and the Durbar itself were over, the Sikkim delegation left Delhi on the 17 December, with Bell and his entourage following on the 19 December after tying up final details. The Durbar and what it represented had entered the Sikkim consciousness, not just in the men and women who had made the trip to Delhi, but also throughout the more general population. It was not enough for the British India government that a group of 26 men from the Himalayan state had come to show their allegiance, this allegiance was also expected of the wider Sikkim population too. Sidkyong Tulku would play an instrumental part in making this happen by writing and distributing a prayer that was to be offered at every Sikkim monastery to the King Emperor and his consort to mark the royal couple’s visit,⁴⁰ while he also distributed to every school boy in a Sikkim State School a commemorative medal. Finally, to ensure the big day itself would not go unnoticed in Sikkim a sports day was held on 12 December 1912, the actual Durbar Day, in Gangtok.

40 A translation of the full prayer can be found in IOR/Mss Eur/F80/144.



While the party had been preoccupied with matters of state during their stay in Delhi as they turned for home their thoughts became much more personal with the Chogyal deciding to travel to Benares (now Varanasi) and Bodh Gaya to making offerings for the late Maharani Yeshe Dölma who had died the previous year. He was accompanied on this trip by the Kumar Tashi Wangyal (later Tashi Namgyal), the Kumari, Chozed Kusho (later Taring Rinpoche) and a few of the Kazis and Lamas, but notable in his absence was Sidkyong Tulku who instead travelled to Calcutta to stay with the Maharaja of Burdwan before returning home. The last official duty before finally reaching Gangtok on the 13 January 1912 was for the Chogyal to pay a visit to the thirteenth Dalai Lama in Darjeeling.

The participation of the Sikkim delegation at the 1911 Durbar offers up several conflicting conclusions. We see Thutob Namgyal, ninth Chogyal of Sikkim, reported in 1908 to still be pro-Chinese, heading up a delegation that would see him and his state personally and politically acknowledging their position under the umbrella of the British Indian government. His medal of honour would label him as a part of (a possession of) the British India government. This acknowledgement being witnessed by his, in some cases, long-standing inner circle of advisors who were increasingly, due to the diplomatic aplomb of Bell, coming to terms with British Indian intervention in Sikkim.

In sharp contrast we see Sidkyong Tulku, pro-British, desperate to succeed to the *gadi* and keen to implement state reforms as quickly as possible, who welcomed his participation in these British India mega-events and through prayers and sports days encouraged the people of Sikkim to embrace them too. However, unlike his Indian counterparts from the plains he would not countenance filling his reception tent with over elaborate Anglo-India furniture that said nothing of his state's and his own identity. Instead he chose to ensure his reception tent was 'Made in Sikkim', the manufacturing and constructing of his altar display illustrating Sikkim's separation from the rest of British India.

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