

Excerpt: Sarat Chandra Das was born in the town of Chittagong, in Eastern Bengal, in 1849, in a Hindu family of the vaidya, or medical caste. He received his education in the Presidency College at Calcutta, where he became favourably known to Sir Alfred Croft, the present Director of Public Instruction of Bengal, who ever since has been his friend and guide in his geographical and literary work, and by whose representations to the Indian Government it became possible for him to perform his important journeys into Tibet. While still in the engineering department of the college he was appointed in 1874 head master of the Bhutia Boarding School, just opened at Darjiling by order of the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell. Sarat Chandra at once applied himself with characteristic energy to the study of the Tibetan language, and established friendly relations with the Raja of Sikkim and many of the leading lamas in that country, to which he made several short trips in the succeeding years. In 1878, lama Ugyen-gyatso, who was attached to his school as Tibetan teacher, was sent to Tashilhunpo and Lhasa with tribute from his monastery, and advantage was taken of this opportunity to ascertain whether permission could not be obtained from the Tibetan authorities for Sarat Chandra to visit Tibet. The lama was so fortunate as to obtain from the Prime Minister of the Panchen rinpoche of Tashilhunpo an invitation for Sarat Chandra to visit that great centre of lamaist learning, of which George Bogle and Samuel Turner have left us such interesting descriptions; and, so as further to insure his safety and justify his presence in the country in the eyes of the suspicious lamas and Chinese, the Minister had the Babus name entered as a student of theology in the Grand Monastery of that place. A passport was also brought Sarat Chandra by the lama, issued to him by the Prime Minister, by which a choice of roads to enter Tibet was given him, and his safe conduct insured to Shigatse. Armed with these credentials, Sarat Chandra set out for Tashilhunpo in June, 1879, accompanied by lama Ugyen-gyatso, and there he remained for nearly six months, the guest of the Prime Minister, with whose assistance he was able to make a careful examination of the rich collections of books in the great libraries of the convent, bringing back with him to India a large and valuable collection of works in Sanskrit and Tibetan. He also explored during this journey the country north and north-east of Kanchanjinga, of which nothing was previously known, noting with great care observations of bearing and distances. Not the least valuable result of this journey was, however, the friendly relations which the traveller was able to establish with the liberal and powerful Prime Minister, who, deeply interested in western civilization and its wonderful discoveries, of which he had learned much from the mouth of Sarat Chandra, requested him to come back again to Tashilhunpo, to instruct him further in the wonders of the west.

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CHAPTER P GK I Journey from Darjiling to Tashilhunpo. 1. Residence at Tashilhunpo. Journey to Dongtse. 8 other sections not shown. Other editions.

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