An attempt has been made in the preceding pages to review the Dogra conquest and the invasions of Ladakh, Baltistan and Western Tibet, while some aspects of the life of the people of Ladakh have been briefly touched upon. Comments wherever necessary, have appeared in the body of the text. However, at this stage in the narrative, a few words as a way of principal conclusions, may not be out of order.

A study of the past history of Ladakh reveals that throughout its chequered history, it has preserved continuity and identity of life. The Ladakh of old chronicles is easily recognizable in the Ladakh of the 19th century, and very often the self same things noted centuries ago attract the visitors’ attention to-day.

The continuity of Ladakhi life is mainly due to its geographical situation: parallel ranges of sky-high mountains which surround Ladakh have kept it unaffected by the cataclysmic changes that were enacted in Kashmir, the plains of northern India, Tibet and Eastern Turkestan. The rugged terrain and almost inaccessible passes, made invasion difficult and conquest practically impossible. Again, the invaders from India preferred the salubrious climate, easier gains and richer prizes of Kashmir to the toils and scanty rewards of a Himalayan campaign into Ladakh. Resultantly for centuries Ladakh was ruled by the same dynasty and remained unmolested, absorbed wholly in her medieval if not primitive affairs while its
neighbouring territories witnessed frequent dynastic changes.

Another strong reason for this continued identity is the devotion which the Ladakhi has for his own country and religion. No doubt, recently, a microscopic part of the population has shifted to other places, but the Ladakhi does not willingly leave his country. The climate, food and mode of life of other places are often as strange to him as they are to a visitor to Ladakh. Ladakh's traditions, its costumes, its monasteries and gompas, its ritual dances are remembered, cherished and transmitted from generation to generation and the result is that there is a general impression of continuity and identity.

The constitution of the Government of Ladakh before it was annexed by the Dogras was despotic and feudal, but its administration was by and far more mild and paternal. The central government was largely built by assigning additional duties to a number of hereditary noblemen who were petty rulers of districts, where they collected revenue, administered justice and performed military duties. Although the king was the supreme authority and could grant jagirs to his subordinates, it is not clear as to what extent he actually had the power to resume the land of the local rulers. At some places, especially in districts on the fringes of the kingdom, a local administration by officials appointed by the king, as distinct from the local rule of noblemen also appear to have been weakly developed.

1Feudalism here has been used in the sense that power in Ladakh was mainly derived from the jagirs. But this feudalism should not be confused with the feudalism of Western Europe which had different basis.
The church very much influenced the social and daily life of the people. In politics, however, Lamaism was less important since the supreme ruler was a lay king and not an incarnate Lama as in Lhasa. Sometimes the lamas participated in the local administration, but the Gyalpos of Ladakh never allowed the priesthood to lay its hands on the temporal powers, and lay government was never subordinated to religion. This was again unlike Tibet where sacredotal power was most deeply and firmly established. Monasteries in some places were well-endowed with lands and often, they played an important role in the defence of the country.

The rise of the Dogra Raja Gulab Singh, a feudatory of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, in Jammu hills in the first quarter of the 19th century was a development of great significance in the Western Himalayas; it led to the unification of a number of diverse principalities under one forceful rule. Although Ranjit Singh, after his conquest of Kashmir in 1819, realised the customary tribute from the king of Ladakh, yet Gulab Singh did not like Ladakh's nominal political allegiance to the Lahore Durbar. He wanted to conquer this Himalayan kingdom ostensibly for the Sikh Maharaja but in reality for himself. His conquest of Kishtwar brought him right up to Ladakh's doorsteps, and the working of centrifugal forces at Leh further facilitated his task of the subjugation of Ladakh.

Zorawar Singh's conquest of Ladakh and Baltistan had a great importance in shaping the destiny of the Western Himalayas. It determined the ruin of the Ladakhi and Balti empires and established the paramountcy of the Lahore Durbar over these territories, thus extending
the boundaries of the Sikh state in the north to its true geographical limits. The isolation of Ladakh also came to an end, henceforth a stream of visitors and explorers started flowing into this obscure region.

Zorawar Singh's invasion of Western Tibet is a great landmark in Indian history no less than in Central Asian. His was a bold attempt to extend the frontiers of the Sikh state beyond the natural boundary of India. Although he conquered Western Tibet, yet, due to manifold adverse and hostile circumstances, unlike Ladakh and Baltistan, he could not make it a part of the Dogra dominions. Had he received full help from his base of operations, had the Lahore Durbar given all assistance to him, had Raja Gulab Singh at the time of his illustrious Wazir's critical position in Tibet been at Jammu, and had the attitude of the British Government been helpful, there is every possibility that the brave Dogra general, might have advanced to Lhasa. Thus, he would have become a precursor of Sir Francis Younghusband. All this notwithstanding, the Tibeto-Dogra war of 1841-42, is not without significance: the border between Tibet and the Sikh state, as settled in the peace which closed this war is the border that now separates the Indian Republic from the People's Republic of China, and the entire territorial settlement laid down at that time has remained unchanged until quite recently when Peking has tried forcibly to grab some parts of Ladakh.

British Policy in this area was largely determined by strategic considerations. The scare of Russian invasion was always there, but British authorities in Calcutta knew that Ladakh was contiguous not to the
ever-sprawling dominions of the Czar as to the moribund Ch'ing dynasty. Moreover, it was fairly well known to the British that between Ladakh and Russian possessions, Ili, Kokand and many another Central Asian Khanate intervened. Furthermore the British sense of security was reinforced by the well-known historical fact that since early times the course of foreign invaders lay not across the stupendous Karakoram and Pamir ranges but through the low-lying western Hindu Kush range i.e. India's frontier with Afghanistan. Had it not been so, perhaps Ladakh and Baltistan would have become British protectorates much earlier before the Dogras moved into this area.

In addition to strategic considerations, the economic motive was another important consideration in the formulation of British policy. The highly-remunerative shawl wool was an important article of trade in this area and it was chiefly a product of Western Tibet. Under the old treaty terms, its entire produce was exported to Kashmir via Ladakh, this at any rate was the practice since 1681-84, which was followed throughout the 18th century. Any export of shawl wool to areas other than this was punished by Tibetan and Ladakhi authorities, and deeply resented by the rulers of Kashmir. After the Anglo-Nepalese war of 1814-16, when British India came into closer physical contact with Ladakh and Western Tibet, a sizeable quantity of shawl wood started flowing into British territory. In the late thirties of the 19th century, due to frequent Dogra invasions of Ladakh and Baltistan and consequential unrest and disturbed conditions there, the imports of shawl wool into British-protected hill states increased
beyond all expectations. The British merchants-rulers were not unhappy at this development. No wonder their policy towards the Gyalpoes of Ladakh and Baltistan, who made repeated requests for help against the Dogras, remained non-committal and neutral, for their gain was the maximum without any direct involvement.

But when Zorawar Singh invaded Western Tibet, British attitude vis-a-vis the Dogras underwent a significant change. Export of shawl wool from Western Tibet, into hill states under British protection stopped, consequently the recently-developed Tibet trade on which many British subjects depended for their livelihood, came to a standstill. Failure to protect this trade and prevent frequent Dogra incursions into their territory reflected on British strength. Fear of Chinese intervention and the likely conclusion of a much-publicized anti-British Dogra-Nepalese alliance deeply upset the British policy-makers in India. That would largely explain why they not only set a deadline within which the Dogras were asked to move back into Ladakh but even determined to take military action against the latter in case they refused to withdraw. A little later, when Raja Gulab Singh, who was helping the British in their war with the Afghans, asked British help against the Tibetans, the English, kept scrupulously aloof. Any active military help to the Dogras at this time was likely to jeopardise the sino-British peace parleys then going on in Peking. Protection of British commercial interests in China, by maintaining cordial relations with the Ch'ing Emperor, was therefore far more important than taking sides with the Dogras. Hence the British did not view with favour to the annexation of Western Tibet by Raja Gulab Singh and supported the maintenance of a status quo there.