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[THE EARLIEST DOSSIER, CHRONOLOGICALLY]

[WRITTEN RETROSPECTIVELY / ATTRIBUTION: PROVISIONAL / AUTHENTICITY: PROBABLE]

DHURANDHAR 1

THE QUEEN'S TEA

What a twenty-eight-year-old IB station chief in Gangtok actually did between 1973 and 1975 to deliver Sikkim to India. Twelve theories. One American queen. One king who would not abdicate. One protest movement that ran on Indian money. And one tea shop in Gangtok where, on a wet afternoon in October 1973, two people met for forty-one minutes and never spoke of it again.

■ **CREED'S NOTE.** This is the third dossier received from the same source. It concerns events fifty-three years past, and is, by Sanyal's own framing, a retrospective written in 2024 from memory and surviving working notes — not the contemporaneous file Sanyal would have maintained at the time, which was destroyed under standing protocol on his departure from Gangtok in 1976. Read accordingly. The events are real. The conversations are reconstructions. Three of the twelve theories Sanyal offers are probably correct. The reader is, as before, invited to choose which three.

By **JASPER CREED** | Defence & Strategic Affairs Correspondent | (and a Source Who Wishes to Remain Beyond Reach)

■ COVER NOTE ■

Sanyal arrived in Gangtok in March 1973. He was twenty-eight years old, five years into the Indian Police Service, ten months into the Intelligence Bureau, married for sixteen months to a woman who had reluctantly agreed that the first proper posting of his career would be in a Himalayan kingdom that was not, technically, India.

Sikkim was, at that moment, an independent state under Indian protection, ruled by the twelfth Chogyal of the Namgyal dynasty, Palden Thondup Namgyal. It had its own flag, its own currency notes, its own post office, and a queen named Hope Cook — born in Manhattan in 1940, Sarah Lawrence-educated, married to the Chogyal in 1963 in a ceremony that put Sikkim, briefly, on the cover of LIFE Magazine, and a person of considerable, unresolved, public-relations consequence in the relationship between Gangtok and Delhi.

On April 4, 1975, two years and one month after Sanyal's arrival, the Sikkim Assembly passed a resolution abolishing the monarchy and seeking association with the Indian Union. On April 14, the resolution was endorsed in a referendum with 97.55 percent of votes cast in favour. On April 26, the President of India issued a proclamation. On May 16, Sikkim became the twenty-second state of the Indian Union. The Chogyal was permitted to keep his title for ceremonial purposes until his death in New York in 1982. Hope Cook had, by then, fled to her mother's family in New York and had not returned to Gangtok since August 1973.

What follows is Sanyal's reconstruction, written in 2024, of the twenty-six months between his arrival in Gangtok and the moment Sikkim became Indian. It is offered with the standard caveats. And it includes one event, on a wet October afternoon in 1973, that has not been recorded anywhere else.

**"Sanyal arrived in Gangtok in March 1973.
He was twenty-eight years old.
He had been instructed to deliver a country."**



■ ANNEX A — THE BRIEFING, AND WHAT WAS NOT IN IT

Sanyal's pre-departure briefing took place over two days in February 1973, in a room on the fourth floor of North Block whose number does not appear in any directory. The briefer was a senior IB officer whose name will not be reproduced here. The briefing was conducted standing, without

notes, in the manner that the IB reserved, in those years, for postings whose true purpose was not the purpose written on the file.

The official purpose of Sanyal's posting was reported up the chain as 'liaison work in respect of the Indian House at Gangtok, with attention to the political and security situation in the kingdom of Sikkim.' The unofficial purpose, conveyed standing, was four sentences long. Sanyal can recall them, fifty-one years later, exactly as they were delivered.

1. The Chogyal must be persuaded that his future lies inside India.
2. If he cannot be persuaded, his subjects must be persuaded for him.
3. The American queen is a complication. Resolve her without making her a martyr.
4. You have approximately twenty-four months. Do not write any of this down.

Sanyal flew to Bagdogra on a Tuesday morning. The road from Bagdogra to Gangtok, in March 1973, was a hundred and seventeen kilometres of switchback and landslide. He arrived at the Indian House at twenty past five in the evening and was met by his predecessor, who shook his hand, handed him a single envelope of cash for unrecorded expenses, and was on the same Bagdogra-bound vehicle the next morning. Sanyal did not see him again.

The envelope contained one hundred and twenty thousand rupees in used hundred-rupee notes. Sanyal's annual salary at the time was approximately twenty-four thousand rupees. The envelope, in other words, was five times his annual salary, to be spent over twenty-four months, without receipts, without a budget code, without a chain of approval. It was, by the working definition of the IB at that time, an operational fund. It would, over the next twenty-six months, find its way through several intermediaries to a single recipient.

***"Five times his annual salary in used notes.
No receipts. No budget code. No chain of approval.
It was, in the working definition of the IB, an operational fund."***



■ ANNEX B — THE KAZI, AND THE MONEY

The recipient of the envelope was Kazi Lhendup Dorji Khangsarpa, fifty-eight years old, leader of the Sikkim National Congress, scion of the Kazi family that had held a historic enmity with the Chogyal's Namgyal

lineage going back nearly two centuries. Lhendup Dorji had been agitating against the Chogyal since the early 1960s, with intermittent success, and inconsistent funding.

Sanyal did not personally hand the money to Lhendup Dorji. That would have been, even by the standards of the time, professionally inadvisable. The money moved through an intermediary, an IB sub-agent named Tejpal Sen, who visited Lhendup Dorji at his Gangtok residence approximately every six weeks and handed over portions of the operational fund in exchange for an updated map of the political ground.

Lhendup Dorji has, in a recorded interview given to the historian B.S. Sharma in his final years, described this arrangement publicly. *The people from IB used to visit me twice or thrice a year, he said. An IB agent, Tejpal Sen, used to hand over money to me personally.* Sanyal, in his marginalia, observes that Lhendup Dorji's memory of the visits was less frequent than the actual frequency, which is the kind of mistake that men of advanced age make, and which is also the kind of mistake one would expect from a man who had been instructed, at the time, to remember less than the actual frequency.

What the money paid for.

Posters. Newspaper advertisements. The salaries of approximately one hundred and twenty political organisers who fanned out across Sikkim's twenty-eight blocks in the eighteen months between Sanyal's arrival and the climactic protests of April 1973. The lease on a printing press in Kalimpong that produced the Sikkim National Congress's pamphlet literature in three languages. Travel allowances for delegates to the regional conferences where the Sikkimese case for association with India was pressed. Honoraria for the editors of two Sikkimese-language newspapers whose editorial line shifted, between 1973 and 1974, in a direction Delhi found congenial. And, in one specific instance Sanyal records and does not elaborate, the school fees for the daughter of a Sikkim Council member whose vote, in May 1974, was decisive on a procedural motion that paved the way for the assembly resolution of April 1975.

The protests that brought down the Sikkimese monarchy were not staged. The grievances were real, the resentment of the Nepali-origin majority against the Bhutia-Lepcha aristocracy was real, the Chogyal's political miscalculations were his own. But the protests were funded. And the funding came through a printing press in Kalimpong, via an envelope that arrived every six weeks at a residence in Gangtok, from a fourth-floor room in North Block whose number does not appear in any directory.

***"The grievances were real. The resentment was real.
The Chogyal's miscalculations were his own.
But the protests were funded."***



■ ANNEX C — THE QUEEN, AND WHETHER SHE WAS WHAT WE SAID SHE WAS

Hope Cook, born Hope Lavinia Cooke in San Francisco in 1940, had married the Chogyal of Sikkim in March 1963. The wedding had been a media event of considerable proportions. She had, by 1973, lived in Gangtok for ten years, borne two children, learned passable Tibetan and rather better Hindi, and developed a public profile as the spokeswoman — in some interpretations, the architect — of an emergent Sikkimese cultural nationalism that Delhi found not merely inconvenient but, by 1972, alarming.

Whether she was actually a CIA asset is, fifty-three years later, still a matter of professional dispute. Sanyal's working assessment, formed in 1973 and reproduced here, was that the CIA suspicion was approximately seventy percent product of bureaucratic momentum and thirty percent product of intelligence work. **That ratio, however, was not what mattered.** What mattered was the Indian state's operational requirement. Whether or not Hope Cook was actually a CIA asset, she was sufficiently *plausibly* a CIA asset that the Indian state could justify, internally, the measures that were being prepared. This is, Sanyal observes in his marginalia, the kind of distinction the Intelligence Bureau exists to make. The reader will draw their own conclusions.

WHAT THE FILE ON HOPE COOK ACTUALLY SAID — AS OF JULY 1973

■ **Education.** Sarah Lawrence College, with a year at the Indian Studies programme at Columbia. Senior thesis on Tibetan Buddhist iconography. Conventional credentials for a young American woman of her class.

■ **The marriage.** Met the Chogyal in Darjeeling in 1959 when she was nineteen. Engagement formalised in 1961. Marriage in 1963. By all accounts, a love match. By all accounts is a phrase the file uses sparingly.

■ **The political activity.** Cultural-revivalist programmes restoring Bhutia-Lepcha festivals and dress traditions. Public statements in interviews — The New York Times, Newsweek, the Times of India — describing Sikkim as a country, the Chogyal as a sovereign, and the Indian state as a presence to be politely managed.

■ **The American connections.** Two visits annually to her mother's family in New York. Three further visits, in 1971, 1972, and early 1973, to addresses in Washington that the file flagged but could not, in any case, definitively associate with Langley.

■ **The actual concern.** Whether or not she was a CIA asset, she was a foreign-born royal consort with an international media profile, articulating a vision of Sikkimese sovereignty that ran directly counter to the operational requirement Sanyal had been instructed to deliver. Resolve her without making her a martyr was the third sentence of his briefing. It was not phrased as a question.

On the question of the CIA.

Sanyal's view, then and now, was that the CIA's actual operational interest in Sikkim in the early 1970s was minimal. Langley was, in that period, comprehensively occupied: Vietnam, Chile, the Middle East, the Soviet near-abroad. A small Himalayan kingdom of fewer than three hundred thousand people, with no significant strategic resources beyond its border with Tibet, did not represent the kind of asset allocation the CIA would have mounted. Hope Cook's American connections were, by Sanyal's assessment, more her family's than her professional life's. She was a queen who happened to be American, not an American who happened to be a queen.

But this distinction, Sanyal noted in 1973 and notes again in 2024, was operationally irrelevant. The Indian state needed the CIA to be plausibly involved so that the measures being prepared could be justified internally. *The truth and the working hypothesis are different things*, his briefer had said in February 1973. *You will sometimes need to be careful which one you act on*. Sanyal acted on the working hypothesis. He acts on it still.

***"Whether or not she was a CIA asset,
she was sufficiently plausibly a CIA asset
that the Indian state could justify the measures it was preparing."***



■ ANNEX D — THE TEA SHOP, IN OCTOBER 1973

On the afternoon of Wednesday, October 17, 1973, at approximately ten minutes past three, a young Indian man and a young American woman met for forty-one minutes in a small tea shop on the lower bend of the Mall Road in Gangtok, two hundred and forty metres downhill from the Royal Palace.

The Indian man was Sanyal. The American woman was Hope Cook. The meeting had been arranged through an intermediary whose name does not need to appear in this file. Hope Cook had requested it. Sanyal had agreed. Neither side had told the Chogyal.

What was discussed.

Sanyal does not, even fifty-one years later, intend to write a verbatim account. He is not certain he could. But the substance, as he reconstructed it the same evening in private notes that he then destroyed, and as he reconstructs it again now from memory, was as follows.

SHE said that she was aware of the activities of the Sikkim National Congress, of the funding flows that supported them, and of the role that the Indian state was playing in their organisation. She did not, in those words, accuse Sanyal personally. She did not need to.

HE said that he was a junior officer at the Indian House and was not in a position to comment on the matters she was raising. The standard formula. She did not believe him. She did not need to.

SHE said that she had two children, born in Gangtok, of mixed parentage, of complicated nationality, and that whatever was being prepared by the Indian state had to find a path through their existence. She did not, in those words, plead. She stated.

HE said that he was, again, a junior officer, that he could not commit the Indian state to anything, but that he was a father himself — his daughter was three months old — and that he understood what she was saying. He was not lying about being a father. He was lying, in part, about everything else.

SHE said that she was not asking him to commit the Indian state to anything. She was asking him, personally, to remember that whatever was being done was being done to a family and not to an abstract sovereignty problem. He nodded. He did remember. He still remembers.

SHE paid for the tea. **HE** walked back up the hill alone. Neither of them spoke of the meeting again to anyone. Hope Cook left Gangtok for the last time on August 14, 1973 — ten months *before* this meeting. The date is incorrect.

That, Sanyal observes in his 2024 marginalia, **is the kind of mistake an old man makes when he is trying to write something down that he has been trying not to remember for half a century.**

It does not matter, for the purposes of this file, whether the meeting took place in October 1973 or in some other month, or whether Hope Cook left Sikkim before or after the meeting, or whether the exchange happened in the precise terms Sanyal has set down. What matters is that it happened. Sanyal has been certain of that, for fifty-one years. He is less certain of every other particular than he was the day after.

*"She paid for the tea. He walked back up the hill alone.
Neither of them spoke of the meeting again to anyone.
He has been trying not to remember it for half a century."*



■ ANNEX E — TWELVE THEORIES OF THE SIKKIM OPERATION

What follows are twelve theories of how Sikkim was actually delivered to India. Three are probably correct. Sanyal, when asked, would not say which three.

Theory One. The protests of April 1973 were spontaneous expressions of long-suppressed Nepali-origin majority grievance, and the Indian state's role was limited to logistical support and tactical advice.

Theory Two. The protests of April 1973 were entirely engineered through Lhendup Dorji and the Sikkim National Congress, funded by IB operational money, and the spontaneity was a useful retrospective construction.

Theory Three. Hope Cook was, in fact, a CIA asset of low formal status but high operational interest, and her departure in 1973 was the decisive moment that opened space for the political resolution that followed.

Theory Four. Hope Cook was not a CIA asset at all, and her departure was the result of marital and political exhaustion that the Indian state had merely accelerated, not engineered.

Theory Five. The Chogyal was offered, through an intermediary, the option of remaining as a constitutional figurehead within an Indian Sikkim, with a generous pension and continuing residence in the Royal Palace, and refused the offer for reasons of personal pride that his subsequent biographers have not fully reconstructed.

Theory Six. The 1975 referendum result of 97.55 percent in favour of association with India was achieved through democratic processes that, while imperfect, did broadly reflect the political will of the Sikkimese majority of the day.

Theory Seven. The 1975 referendum result was inflated through ballot-stuffing, voter-roll manipulation, and a pattern of intimidation in three named blocks, and would have produced a result in the high seventies under cleaner conditions — still a clear majority, but not the unanimous-looking figure that history records.

Theory Eight. Sanyal's posting to Gangtok was authorised at the level of the Prime Minister's Office, with personal endorsement by Indira Gandhi, on the basis of a small file that had been prepared by R.N. Kao but that does not appear in any of his papers.

Theory Nine. The 1975 referendum was, despite all of the above, the necessary outcome of a structural mismatch — between a 300,000-person Buddhist kingdom and a 600-million-person republic abutting it on three sides — that no amount of either Sikkimese resistance or American sympathy could have prevented for more than a decade.

Theory Ten. Sanyal personally delivered, on a date in early 1975 he will not specify, the final political guarantee that brought the last hesitant member of the Sikkim Council to the affirmative vote. The guarantee was honoured. The Council member was rewarded. The reward was modest by the standards of these things.

Theory Eleven. The American queen's departure was, in retrospect, the only event that mattered. Once she was gone, the Chogyal lost the international voice that could have made his case in capitals where Indian intentions might have been resisted. Without her, he was a small king in a small palace. With her, he had been, for ten years, a small king with a major American media presence.

Theory Twelve. Each of the eleven preceding theories captures a fragment. The complete operation, like the Punjab operation of 1991, was deliberately constructed so that no single participant could later reconstruct the whole. Sanyal observes that he has now done this twice in his career. He observes also, with the irony he reserves for his own habits, that he has been preparing to do it a third time.

*"Sanyal observes that he has now done this twice.
He observes also, with the irony he reserves for his own habits,
that he has been preparing to do it a third time."*



■ **CLOSING NOTE — THE FIRST OF THREE**

Sanyal left Gangtok on a Bagdogra-bound vehicle on the morning of February 11, 1976, nine months after Sikkim became the twenty-second state of the Indian Union. His next posting was Aizawl. He would not return to the Sikkim file in any official capacity for the rest of his career.

Three things, however, he kept. He kept his copy of the operational fund ledger — every six-week disbursement to Tejpal Sen, every onward payment, every printing-press invoice, every voter-roll annotation — in his own handwriting, in a single bound notebook with a black cover. He kept the small enamel pin, in the shape of a Sikkimese state flag, that the Chogyal had presented to all foreign-mission staff at a reception in November 1973, and which he should, by protocol, have surrendered to the IB archive on departure. And he kept the memory of the tea shop, which he wrote down once, that same evening, on a single sheet of hotel notepaper, and burned in the bathroom sink before midnight.

This dossier is the first of three the source has released. The second, on operations conducted in Punjab in March 1991, follows in the next edition. The third was published on April 27, 2026 — the recovered file on the Sanyal-MBZ meeting in Abu Dhabi, presented at that time as Sanyal's swansong. Creed, having now read all three, is no longer entirely certain that the third was the swansong. He will return to that question in due course.

For now: the first dossier ends here. The young man who walked back up the hill alone from a tea shop on Mall Road in October 1973 had, by the time he left Gangtok in February 1976, delivered a country. He was thirty-one years old. He had not yet begun.

**"He had, by the time he left Gangtok in February 1976,
delivered a country.
He was thirty-one years old. He had not yet begun."**

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— **JASPER CREED** —

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Sources: Provided as a recovered dossier from a source within the Government of India who, following the publication of Dhurandhar 3 on April 27, 2026, made contact a second time and released two further files. This is the first of those two, chronologically the earliest of the trilogy. Background: The 1973 Sikkim protests and the 1975 referendum that produced Sikkim's accession to the Indian Union are matters of historical record. The role of the Indian Intelligence Bureau in funding the Sikkim National Congress is a matter of public record, including in the recorded interviews of Kazi Lhendup Dorji (see B.S. Sharma's historical interviews; Sunanda K. Datta-Ray, 'Smash and Grab: Annexation of Sikkim,' 1984). The IB sub-agent name Tejpal Sen appears in Lhendup Dorji's public testimony. Hope Cook's biographical details, marriage, and 1973 departure from Sikkim are matters of public record. All names of intelligence personnel, all conversations, and all marginalia are fictional. The protagonist, Ajit Sanyal, is a fictional rendering. The October 17, 1973 tea-shop meeting did not occur in any verifiable record. It is the central creative liberty of this dossier. Three of the twelve theories Sanyal offers are, as always, probably correct.

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