

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Thus ultimately it was one of the secular chiefs of Bhutan, the Tongsa Ponlop, who ushered in a new era of monarchical rule in 1907 and set that country on the road to modernity. The history of modern Bhutan continues even up to this date, but one has to draw the line some where. It might be said that with the advent of Ugyen Wangchuk, the British at last felt that here was some one intelligent and sensible enough, to say the least, with whom diplomatic discussions could be carried on. With Ugyen Wangchuk now at the helm of affairs, ~~the~~ Indo-Bhutanese relations could be expected to take on a more definite and concrete shape. Though the trade statistics did not reveal an immediate

improvement, nevertheless an all round ^{development} ~~improvement~~ in political as well as in commercial relations was no doubt entertained, and the future held out promises of fulfilling that distant dream of the eighteenth century British statesman, of opening out commercial contacts with Bhutan and through her with Tibet and China.

It might be remembered that it was in pursuit of trade that the first contacts with the Himalayan regions were made, and that was long before the British had established their stronghold in India. The fact that Tibet and Nepal were more or less well known to European traders and travellers have been proved by the fairly frequent expeditions and exchange of commodities between Tibet and Nepal and the West. Bhutan, though not a closed country, was nevertheless comparatively lesser known than both Nepal and Tibet. Her land locked condition, together with a deep sense of preservation of the identity of her people, made Bhutan endeavour to keep her doors shut to the entry of foreigners, especially Europeans. With her immediate neighbours however, especially with Tibet and India, Bhutan had maintained a fairly brisk commercial exchange and intercourse through out the centuries.

Concrete evidence of Bhutan's commercial contacts with India is available from the account of Ralph Fitch, an

European traveller who visited Cooch Behar in Bengal in 1583 and has given a lively, though some what exaggerated account of that place as well as of a country called 'Bottanter', which can safely be assumed to be Bhutan. Later, two Portuguese Fathers, Cacella and Cabral, who were the first Europeans to have actually visited Bhutan in 1626, have given a description of Bhutan's trade not only with the plains of Bengal and Assam but also with Tibet and China. The theory, therefore, that Bhutan was an entirely unknown and a closed country can now be disputed. A recent monograph, published by His Majesty's Government of Bhutan in 1972, has also opposed the prevalent idea that Bhutan was an entirely closed country in the medieval age, "The statement so often repeated that medieval Bhutan was a wholly closed country is only half the truth. It was no more closed than any land locked mountain country would, in the nature of things, be. Bhutan had plenty of contacts with her neighbours, and the intersecting point of the trade route in the India-Bhutan-Tibet triangle was at Cooch Behar on the Indian plains". (Michael Aris, Views of Medieval Bhutan, p.95).

Commercial contacts therefore, between Indian and her Northern neighbours, especially Tibet and Bhutan, had existed long before the advent of the British in India. With their arrival, however, Indo-Bhutanese relations

especially became much more systematic in form and attempts were made to control and regulate the same centrally. It is true that the British did this to suit their own commercial interests, since opening up Tibet and China through Bhutan was their main concern. In the course of this endeavour, a new and complex chapter in Indo-Bhutanese relations was also opened up. With commercial interests being interwoven with political concerns, the British found that they were up against a determined, and occasionally a meddlesome neighbour. With the British getting the better of most of the exchanges, slowly and inevitably interests of trade and commerce were transformed into political interests. How these interests came to embrace all the Himalayan territories and to shape British policy in these regions was a problem which deserved some attention.

Soon after the East India Company had established their political stronghold in India, the Company being basically a mercantilist organisation decided to extend the commerce of the state in every way possible. Casting about for new pastures as it were, their eyes fell upon the Himalayan states of Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim, and they wondered what these countries had to sell and buy. Though Warren Hastings is accredited with the ingenious scheme of establishing commercial contacts between India and Tibet and Bhutan on a firmer basis, and for sending the first commercial

mission ever to these countries, certain events had conspired to make this possible even before Hastings assumed the Governor Generalship. The emergence of the Gurkha Chief Prithvi Narayan Shah on the throne of Nepal, threw the previously flourishing Indo-Nepal trade into jeopardy, since the Gurkhas though friendly to the English, guarded their country against English merchants. The officials frustrated in their plans to link up their Chinese and Tibetan trade through Nepal, looked about for an alternative route to continue the same trade. At this time most opportunely another incident opened their eyes towards Bhutan. The details of the Cooch Behar-Bhutan conflict need not be repeated again, it only sufficing to say that the Cooch Behar Raja appealed to the British against the outrages of the Bhutanese Chief Deb Judhur. The British complied to the Raja's appeal, seeing some lucrative gains which could be made at the expense of Cooch Behar. Moreover, it was realised that if trade with Bhutan and Tibet was to be extended, Cooch Behar as one of the gates to the north should definitely be under the Company's authority.

At the successful cessation of hostilities, at the end of which the Bhutanese were driven back to their own country, Hastings, seizing upon the chance offered by the dignified letter received from the Panchen Lama of Tibet, decided to send the first ever commercial mission to these countries with a view to increase further the commercial

contacts between these countries and India. Thus began a phase in Indo-Tibetan ~~and Indo-Tibetan~~ and Indo-Bhutanese relations which can appropriately be designated as the high tide of commercial intercourse. The first mission, sent under George Bogle in 1774, achieved moderate success, especially with the Deb Raja of Bhutan from whom a written concession was secured for Indian Hindu and Muslim merchants to pass through his domains, though under some restrictions. European merchants however, were not allowed to pass through Bhutan. Besides obtaining concessions Bogle was responsible for preparing the way for extensive tea plantations in Bengal and Assam, and for pointing out possibilities of capturing this lucrative trade from China.

The fact that Hastings himself was highly satisfied by the outcome of Bogle's mission can be corroborated by the following facts - building of a Bhot Mandir at Howrah to extend facilities to the Tibetan merchants visiting Calcutta, sending of a couple of missions under Hamilton who had accompanied Bogle, and employing Bogle as the Collector of Rangpur in a further bid to give more encouragement to the Indo-Bhutanese fair which had been going on for some years now, under the sponsorship of the Government of Bengal. The fair, it may be noted, flourished considerably under Bogle's guardianship. The untimely death of Bogle in 1781 brought to an end many grandiose plans entertained by the

British. Nevertheless, in an attempt to prevent the opening made by Bogle from being closed, the Governor General decided upon sending a fourth mission to Bhutan and Tibet. This time it was sent under Lieutenant Samuel Turner in 1783. It is however true that Turner did not achieve anything new in the way of commercial concessions from the rulers of either Tibet or Bhutan. He however, helped to strengthen and reaffirm the contacts established by his predecessor and thereby establish a closer alliance between India on the one hand, and Bhutan and Tibet on the other. Thus the astute diplomacy of Hastings, combined with the intelligence and application of Bogle and Turner, succeeded in re-establishing to a certain degree, what had once been a flourishing trade between India and her northern neighbours.

However, subsequent problems, characterised by border skirmishes, and indifference and neglect on the part of the rulers of both India and Bhutan led to a deterioration in political as well as in commercial relations. Hastings' departure from India resulted in a dramatic breakdown of the cordial relations, which he had striven so hard to build up. With his retirement a distinct phase in Indo-Bhutanese and Indo-Tibetan friendship came to an end, and "so completely was the policy of opening commercial intercourse between India and the trans-Himalayan regions

abandoned that the very history of Hasting's negotiations was forgotten". The period from 1788-1838 which can be termed as a period of uncertain prospects, witnessed a gradual transition from accord and amiability to discord and disharmony bringing in its wake a disruption of the political and commercial accords.

The hostilities between Nepal and Tibet, served to effect adversely the relations between India and Tibet. This was so, because the British by their apathy and refusal to help the Tibetans, or the Gurkhas for that matter, earned the wrath of the Tibetans and the Chinese who suspected them of being in compliance with the Gurkhas. Be that as it may, the outcome of it was that Tibet closed all her passes to India, thus shattering the commercial aspirations of the British officials. As ill fortune would have it, relations with Bhutan also started deteriorating at this time due to constantly recurring border raids and plunders. Whether the Bhutanese were entirely to be blamed for these outrages is a different aspect altogether. The crux of the problem was that with Tibet closing her doors, and no head way being made in commercial transactions with Nepal and Bhutan either, the whole concept of the trans-himalayan trade was endangered. Not that the British made no attempt to improve the state of affairs. An official named Kishen Kant Bose was

sent to Bhutan in 1815 to attempt to resolve these border differences. Though he failed in his objective since border raids continued unabated subsequent to his visit, his mission was important for the valuable report he presented at the end of his visit, throwing light on various aspects of Bhutanese life and her relations with other countries. The fact that the Rangpur fair was still continuing in spite of deteriorating commercial conditions was also evident from his report. Subsequent to Kishen Kant's visit, British contacts with Bhutan do not appear to have been of great significance for there is no account of any communication with the Bhutanese, till the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26. This war and the resultant acquisition of Assam by the British, marked the beginning of an important phase in Anglo-Bhutanese relations, for the British domains were extended right upto the Bhutanese border. Feuds, though not uncommon before, started recurring with increasing frequency. The British, naturally distressed at this state of affairs which was proving detrimental to their commercial interests, made yet another attempt to resolve this state of affairs by deputing another mission to Bhutan in 1837-1838.

This was the mission of Pemberton, and he was asked mainly to settle terms of commercial intercourse between the two countries. Pemberton too, could not succeed in

concluding a successful negotiation with the Deb Raja of Bhutan, and he attributed this failure to the weak and vascillating Deb Raja and to the stronghold which the Chinese had upon Tibet and Bhutanese trade. However Pemberton some what made up for his failure to sign an agreement with the Bhutanese officials by the exhaustive and detailed account which he gave of Bhutan on his return to India. He also suggested the occupation of all the Duars both in Bengal and in Assam then held by Bhutan. The Government of India too ultimately decided to shelve the policy of mendicancy and embarked upon force. The suggestion given by Pemberton was taken up and the Assam Duars were annexed in 1841. The ultimate occupation of the Assam Duars did seem to provide some relief, for the raids into the British territory decreased. But the Bengal Duars proved to be a bone of contention and in a last attempt to settle disputes peacefully, the British government decided to send yet another mission to Bhutan in 1864. This mission under Ashley Eden was deputed to "further endeavour to secure free commerce between the subjects of the British and Bootan Government and protection to travellers and merchants." But it was also emphasised that negotiations on this subject were to be kept in entire subordination to the main political objects of the mission, these being mainly border incursions and outrages. Eden was also advised to abstain from

pressing further the commercial concessions if he felt that these were hindering him from securing the main objects for which he was being deputed. Thus it is evident that this was the first time that political considerations were gaining advantage over commercial ones. The British probably felt, at this juncture, that commercial transactions would automatically increase, with an improved political condition. However, the mission under Ashley Eden was a complete disaster, and the crises reached such a point as could only be solved by a war. The whole of the period following the return of Pemberton from Bhutan to that of Ashley Eden was a period ridden with border strifes and raids, and the bitter harvest was the Diar War of 1864-65.

The military strategies of the war does not really come within the purview of this study. It would be sufficient to say that the Bhutanese resistance was unexpectedly tough and they gave in ultimately since they were being starved out by an effective policy of economic blockade employed by the British, and were forced to comply in the end. Of course, militarily the British were far superior to them, but it was not till the November of the following year that the final terms of the treaty of Sinchula was concluded. The terms of this treaty obviously favoured the British and all the Bengal Duars were unconditionally handed over to them. Article IX of the treaty laid particular emphasis on free

trade and commerce being carried on between India and Bhutan. The territorial gains of the British were also considerable. The Duars with their tea growing and other economic potentialities, had been acquired, new hopes entertained of trade with Tibet through Chumbi valley, and finally the subsidy which the British Indian Government was supposed to be paying to Bhutan, put a powerful lever into their hands, since it could be withheld whenever the British felt the necessity of doing so.

Thus ended the battle over land for tea. Nearly 9000 sq. miles of land were secured by the British in the Western Duars by the treaty of Sinchula, and these lands developed considerably during the next few decades. The first tea garden in the Western Duars was opened in 1876 at Gazaldobe followed by gardens at Fulbari and Bagrakote. A new type of tea bush known as the 'Assam-China hybrid', was soon introduced and was found to have greater merits than the 'China type of bush'. Very soon a wave of land speculation swept over the region and many resident capitalists of every description bought up land for the cultivation of tea. Thus the British acquisition of these land and their subsequent development as tea gardens proved to be a blessing as India was provided with a profitable tea industry. This was thus one of the far reaching consequences of the Duar war.

The post-war period ushered in a new era for Bhutan, and brought about a new dimension in the history of Indo-Bhutanese relations. Since the conclusion of the Duar war, and till 1885 in particular, the civil strife in Bhutan assumed serious proportion with the warring faction constantly asking the British for help. The latter tried more or less to maintain a neutral front. As a result of these internal disputes trade and commerce between the two countries naturally suffered and frequent violations of clause IX of the treaty of Sinchula did not help either, in the furtherance of trade. The obstacle on the Chukha bridge in 1867, which was a serious outcome of the internal quarrels as well as a violation of the Sinchula treaty, is one glaring example. This was, ultimately amicably settled. Be that as it may, evidences are available of certain amount of commercial transactions going on during this period as well as the commencement of a number of ^{ih} fairs. Governmental Reports are available of the external trade of Bengal and Assam with Bhutan, which provide certain statistics to show that during 1878 to 1885, inspite of certain fluctuations the general trend of the trade was to increase. These reports barring certain fabrications on the part of the Mohurirs or accountants at the frontier posts, may be accepted to be reasonably correct.

Besides the trade which India carried on exclusively with Bhutan, it must be remembered that especially after

1865, the British policy was to establish greater economic and political relations with Tibet and through Tibet with China and Central Asia. For the fulfilment of this policy the British were looking towards Bhutan for help, since Bhutan lay on the route to Tibet, and her connections with Tibet, was felt, would be useful in furthering British Indian trade with that country. The Government of India made earnest efforts to reopen trade and communications with Tibet. This attempt, on the part of the British Indian Government, however, did not meet with much success and though the Chefoo convention was held in 1876 which agreed to provide facilities to the British for explorations in Tibet, it ultimately ended in a failure since the Tibetans themselves were not a party to this agreement. The Bhutanese were no help to the British either, for internal dissension in their country was serving to weaken the central power, and the authorities in Bhutan could not decide upon a definite foreign policy. Therefore a line of thinking was emerging among the British officials in India by the mid eighties, that a strong and centralised Bhutan could help them in fulfilling their commercial dreams in Tibet and Central Asia. For this purpose they embarked upon a conciliatory and friendly attitude towards Bhutan, with however, strict non-interference in her internal matters. At the time, fortunately for both countries, there

emerged a personality in Bhutan. He was Ugyen Wangchuk who took over as the Tongsa Ponlob in 1884, and who ultimately succeeded, after defeating his opponents in getting his nominee, Pam Sangye Dorji appointed as the Deb Raja, while he himself emerged as the virtual ruler of Bhutan. Ugyen Wangchuk seemed to be a strong ruler with friendly inclination towards the British. Thus the last decade of the nineteenth century saw the British somewhat more confident in the hope that a strong centralised Bhutan would improve their over all relations with that country and moreover serve as an important intermediary through which British access to Tibet and Central Asia could be made more certain.

The Tibetan hostility towards British commercial expansion however still remained. Their aversion towards the proposed despatch of a mission under Colman Macaulay to their country gave ample proof of this. However, the mission itself was abandoned, due to 'international considerations'. Nevertheless in 1893, certain Regulations were signed in Darjeeling, whereby the British and Manchu governments agreed to open a trade mart at Yatung, though the Tibetans were not party to any agreement. Yatung however, did not prove to be a suitable mart, for trade, and it was reported that mainly due to Tibetan hostility practically no business was being transacted there. With Tibet as usual being a stumbling block in British

endeavours to open up the northern trade, the Bhutanese authorities too were putting obstacles in the way of free commerce between India and Bhutan. Though trade statistics upto 1890 showed a general upward trend, and with Ugyen Wangchuk at the helm of affairs, more improvement was expected in the future, the clauses of the Sinchula treaty were not being adhered to especially with regard to free trade. Consequently, from 1890, the figures indicate a downward trend in Indo-Bhutanese commercial exchanges, which continued right up to 1897-98. Tibet's closure probably also played a part in this deterioration, because a considerable part of Bhutanese import and export was carried into and from Tibet.

The twentieth century saw the British continue in their efforts to open up Tibet, aided this time by the Viceroy Lord Curzon who was in favour of a 'forward policy' towards Tibet. A probability of Russia entering into an agreement with Tibet further increased British apprehensions. Though the Russians staunchly denied any diplomatic agreement with Tibet, the British decided to send yet another mission to that country with the double objective of entering into direct communications with the authorities at Lhasa, as well as preventing the Russians from coming into closer contact with Tibet. The Younghusband mission finally began its journey on 5 December, 1903 from Darjeeling,

and ultimately after tedious negotiations the draft treaty which Younghusband carried with him, was signed by Tibetan officials. Another important outcome of this mission was the valuable help rendered by Ugyen Wangchuk to the mission and his efforts to make it a success. This gesture on part of Ugyen Wangchuk proved to be a further cementing factor in Indo-Bhutanese ties. With an increase in cordial relations at governmental levels, other substantial matters such as trade received a boost as well, and reports indicate that commerce progressed rapidly from 1898-99 to 1905-06, contrasting sharply with the situation during the previous decade.

Minor causes of complaints regarding collection of duties on trade articles etc. were registered, but on the whole were not detrimental to the all round improvement in relations between the two countries. The British showed their gratitude for Bhutanese help by knighting Ugyen Wangchuk. The mission under Claude White in 1904-05 accomplished this very successfully. The crowning of Ugyen Wangchuk in 1907 as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan served as a satisfactory finale, and a fitting tribute to his statesmanship.

With a strong and friendly ruler at the helm of affairs British could now hope for a longlasting friendship with

Bhutan -- a friendship which would serve to satisfy their commercial and strategic needs. The commercial minded diplomacy of the eighteenth century British statesmen, having in mind the double purpose of entering into commercial relations with Bhutan, and through her with Tibet, reached a stage of fulfilment more than one and a half centuries later. The friendship of Bhutan was secured and further hopes were entertained for the future.