

CHAPTER III

The High Tide of Commercial Intercourse, 1774-1788

Soon after the conclusion of the Anglo-Bhutanese treaty of 1774, which in fact initiated a policy of wooing Bhutan in the interests of trans-Himalayan trade¹, George Bogle, accompanied by Alexander Hamilton, Porungir Gossain, and probably also a Kashmiri named Mir Mohammad Sattar, set out for the very first commercial mission, to these northern countries of Tibet and Bhutan. The sending of this mission has been described as an exercise in commercial diplomacy par excellence². On his way to Tibet Bogle stayed in Bhutan a month longer than he intended, due to delay in his obtaining the entry permits into Tibet. He has given a

detailed account of his travels in these two countries. From his account it is clear that Bogle succeeded, after tedious negotiations, in inducing the Bhutan government to allow the passage of Indian merchants and goods, through their territory, to and from Tibet and Bengal. He also secured the hearty co-operation and support of the Tibetans in the encouragement of trade.

Bogle's Description of the Economy of Bhutan

Bogle travelled by way of Cooch Behar and Buxa to Tashichhodzong. On the 9th of June 1774, he entered the hills³, and on his way to Tashichhodzong, passed through a number of places, such as Gygoogoo, ^UMirichom, Chuka and Chupcha⁴. The exact route followed by Bogle has been shown in the map attached (Map II). From his description a fair idea may be formed of the agricultural produce and generally ~~of the~~ economic condition of the country during the period of late-eighteenth century.

The climate of Bhutan, according to Bogle, changed rapidly, and as far as agricultural production was concerned, the place called ^UMirichom was said to be quite prosperous. ^UMirichom was situated at a distance of 'not above two days journey from the entrance into the hills'⁵, and produced apricots, peaches, apples, pears, mulberries

and even oaks. Potatoes, however, were not available in Bhutan. Hence at ^UMarichom, fifteen potatoe plants were planted by Bogle. This was done in accordance with Hastings' wishes, who desired that Bogle should plant some potatoes at every halting place, so that a valuable new plant might be introduced into Bhutan. Ten potatoe plants were also planted at Gygoogoo⁶. These potatoes plants, however, did not survive, and Samuel Turner visiting Bhutan in 1783, described them as being very poor specimens, no bigger than marbles. Turner attributed the failure of the potatoe crops to ignorance and idleness on the part of the Bhutanese⁷. Thus Hastings' experiment of planting potatoes in order to introduce a valuable new crop for Bhutan, appears to have failed. Nevertheless, other agricultural products were quite abundant in Bhutan, as per Bogle's report.

He described turnips, water melons, cucumbers and brinjals being cultivated at Chupcha (spelt Kepta by Bogle and Chupka by Pemberton). Markham, editor of Bogle's narrative, is of the opinion that Bhutan probably produced at that time the best ^tturnips in the world⁸. Soon after Bogle reached TashiChhodzong he was cordially welcomed by the Deb Raja, and several copper platters with rice, butter, treacle, tea, walnuts, Kashmirian dates, apricots, cucumbers and other fruits, were set before him⁹. The

Kashmirian dates gave evidence of commercial transactions being carried on between that region and Kashmir. Bogle was suitably impressed by the palace at Tashichhodzong and by the immense quantity of timber that had gone into the construction of the building¹⁰. Bhutan was rich in forest wealth, and the abundance of timber did not escape the attention of Bogle. The low grounds near the palace of ^aTashichhodzong were covered with rice, and wheat was also grown on the less steep slopes¹¹. It may be interesting to note that rice, husked as well as unhusked, constituted at one time a major export item of Bhutan, to which we shall return later.

From Bogle's account, an idea can be formed of the administrative structure of Bhutan as well as the life style of the people. In the dual form of government that existed in Bhutan the authority of the Deb Raja appeared to be quite complete and extended to the appointment of officials, the collection and management of the revenues, and the command and direction of the military forces. Considerable power, however, was also vested in the hands of the provincial governors of the various forts such as the Paro Ponlob, the Tongsa Ponlob and the Tagna Ponlob¹², without whose consent the Deb Raja could not take any effective decision.

The inhabitants of Bhutan, said Bogle, could be distinctly classified into three main classes—the priests, the servants or officers of government, and the land holders or husbandmen. But, there was hardly any distinction of profession in Bhutan. Every family was acquainted with almost all the useful arts, and contained within themselves, almost all the necessities of life. Even clothes, which were so important an article in the extreme climate of Bhutan, were generally the produce of the husbandman's industry. At one particular season, the husbandman and his sons, exchanged the produce of their land for the wool from the Panchen Lama's country, that is from Tibet. This wool was spun, dyed and woven into cloth by the women of the family, and the family were provided with clothing. The remainder of the wool brought from Tibet, were in most cases, transported along with musk and horses to Rangpur, and exchanged for hogs, salt, fish, coarse linen, dyes, spices, broadcloth and other articles¹³.

First Round of Commercial Negotiations

While at Bhutan, it was the primary duty of Bogle to interview the Deb Raja, and obtain from him the permission to allow men and merchandise from Tibet and India to pass through his domains. Without much delay therefore, Bogle

proceeded to open negotiations with the Deb Raja ^T Ashenlop Kunga Rinchen, and sent regular reports of the outcome of these negotiations to Hastings. Bogle noticed that the Bhutanese authorities were suspicious of the motives of the company. In a letter written to Hastings on 20th August 1774, Bogle mentioned that his servants were not allowed to buy even the smallest article, except through the Bhutanese officials, and that the Deb Raja himself seemed to be extremely anxious that he should leave Bhutan as soon as possible¹⁴. Bogle however, did not give up so easily. In a letter written on 8th October 1774, Bogle said that he had represented to the Bhutanese, Hastings' wish to extend commercial intercourse between Bengal and the northern countries. Bogle had further tried to impress upon the Raja the advantages that would accrue to Bhutan from this trade. Finally Bogle pointed out that a mutual commercial intercourse would serve to strengthen and cement the amity and good understanding, which had been established between the two countries. In answer to these proposals, Bogle received assurances from the Deb Raja that he would try to cultivate friendship with the British¹⁵. But, in spite of assurances of friendship, the Raja had his own reservations on the matter and was not very keen to allow merchants, especially European merchants, to pass through his territory.

Bogle, in the course of his negotiations, also elicited some information about the fair at Rangpur, which was the chief entrepot of trade between these two countries. In a letter written to Hastings on October 11, 1774, he described the fair thus, "the annual caravan from this to Rangpur is principally an adventure of the Deb Rajah, his ministers and provincial governors. Each of them sends an agent, with his tanyans, musk, cowtails, coarse red blankets, or striped woollen cloth half yard wide. The other Bhutanese go under their protection. The returns from thence consisting chiefly of broad cloth, spices, dyes, Malda cloths, go almost wholly into Teshu Lama's country either as tribute or in trade. In the last case they are converted into Pelong handkerchiefs, flowered satins, tea, salt, wool etc."¹⁶. Bogle mentioned that this trade between Rangpur and Bhutan was very beneficial to the Raja and his people, and that they were jealous of it. Bogle was a little perplexed as to why the proposal for the extension of this commerce upto Tibet, was not received very enthusiastically by the Bhutanese. The Bhutanese point of view might be understood by the fact that they were loth to encourage any new measures, which they felt might interfere with the monopoly of their trade with India¹⁷. In other words, they feared that the British Indian, as well as the Tibetan merchants, might claim a share in the profit of this trade, of which they had long been the sole beneficiaries.

With a view to assure the Raja further of British help and cooperation, Bogle wrote to Hastings asking him to issue a parwana (a permit) to the Deb Raja, with the assurance that Bhutanese caravans proceeding to Rangpur, would have free liberty to trade according to ancient custom¹⁸. Bogle also placed before Hastings another interesting proposition. He informed the Governor General that some of the Bhutanese merchants were desirous of penetrating further into Bengal, even as far as Calcutta, and purchase many articles of their choice, including fire arms. The war between the Bhutanese and the English over Cooch Behar and, later, the cordial treaty signed between them, probably, had broadened their minds towards the English, felt Bogle¹⁹. He realised the necessity of encouraging the Bhutanese to come to Calcutta and to other interior parts of Bengal for trade, which would be mutually beneficial.

On 28th November 1774, Warren Hastings, in a letter to the ^{Deb} Raja of Bhutan, expressed his desire to see commercial transactions being smoothly carried out between the two countries. As per Bogle's instructions, he also enclosed a parwana, which ran as follows -

Notice is hereby given to all the merchants of Bhutan, that the strictest orders have been issued to the officers at Rangpur and GHORAGHAT dependent on the Subah of Bengal (the paradise of nations) that they do not obstruct the passage of the Bhutan merchants to those places

for the purposes of carrying on their trade as formerly, but that they afford every assistance to their caravans. They are therefore required not to entertain the least apprehension, but with the greatest security and confidence to come into Bengal and carry on their traffic as formerly. Placing an entire reliance on this, let them act agreeably there to²⁰.

The issuing of the parwana, gives as indication of Hastings' eagerness to increase trade between the two countries, which brought great advantage to the company extending to about two, or two and a half lakhs of rupees a year²¹.

In another letter to the Deb Raja, written on the 6th of January 1775, Hastings, informed him of how he had expressed 'the strongest injunctions to remove some obstructions in the cotton trade'²² between the two countries. He further asked the Deb Raja to appoint a yakil (representative) at Calcutta, with a view to developing more intimate connections between the British and the Deb. In his own words "As the distance between us is so great that many obstructions to the trade of your subjects and causes of complaint may arise of which I may be wholly ignorant and as I wish to prevent any such, it is proper that a Vackil should reside here on your part to deliver your letters to me and to lay before me any representations you may have to make to me"²³. The Deb Raja, however, did not agree to the above proposal.

Bogle was of the opinion that the Panchen Lama of Tibet might be more inclined to this extension of trade with Bengal, than the Deb Raja. He felt that if he could convince the Panchen Lama of the commercial advantages to be gained, the latter would in turn exert his influence on the Deb Raja to do the same²⁴. The civil war in favour of the deposed Deb Raja Desi Shidariva, which was raging in Bhutan at that time might have caused the existing incumbent to the office wary about British designs, and, therefore, Bogle was not in favour of pushing the Raja any further before he reached some definite conclusions with the Panchen Lama of Tibet. Hence he decided to conclude the remaining agreement with the Deb, only on his return journey from Tibet.

After the conclusion of some preliminary negotiations with the Deb Raja, Bogle wanted to proceed for Tibet 'to endeavour to establish a free and lasting intercourse'²⁵ with that country. However, due to certain difficulties Bogle's mission never reached Lhasa. While waiting in Bhutan to obtain permission to enter Tibet, Bogle received a letter from the Panchenⁿ Lama, informing him that it was the order of the Emperor of China, under whose subjection his country lay, not to allow any Moghul, Hindustani, Patan or Firingy to enter Tibet. The Panchen Lama pointed out the difficulty of obtaining permission from China, because

of the distance between his country and China, and concluded that it would be best for Bogle to return to Calcutta. Porungir Gossain, who was down in Calcutta at that time also received a letter, explaining that the reason for delaying Bogle was the outbreak of small pox in Tibet²⁶. What ever be the pretext; it was clear that the Tibetan authorities were not eager to welcome Bogle.

Bogle attributed this reluctance on the part of the Tibetans, to have arisen from their suspicion of Europeans. The same suspicion was evident among the Bhutanese, particularly the Deb Raja, who also advised Bogle to follow the Panchen Lama's advise, and return to Calcutta²⁷. Be that as it may, ultimately Bogle did get the permission to proceed to Tibet and left, Tashichhodzong on the 13th of October 1774. He held his first interview with the Panchen Lama, at a place called Desheripgay on the 8th November, where amongst other things, trade and commerce were also thoroughly discussed. The principal articles of merchandise between Bengal and Tibet were broadcloth, otter skins, indigo, pearls, coral, amber and other skins, chank shells, spices, tobacco, sugar, striped satins, and a few white cloths mostly coarse. The returns were made in gold dust, musk and cow tails. This profitable trade had started declining, according to the Panchen Lama from 1769, after Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Gurkha Raja, occupied Nepal, and

stopped the passage of commercial goods through Nepal and forced traders to leave his country²⁸. Hence, the alternative route for the transportation of goods lay through Bhutan, and even this route was being closed, asserted the Panchen Lama, by the recent incursions led by Desi Shidariva, and the subsequent war.

On being asked by Bogle to apply some effectual remedy to remove this stagnation in trade, the Panchen Lama replied that there was no direct trade between Bengal and Tibet. The Tibetan merchants carried their goods upto Pharidzong near the border, where the Bhutanese subjects of the Deb Raja brought commodities from Bengal to exchange for Tibetan goods²⁹. It may be assumed from the Lama's reply that since trade with Bengal was carried on through the medium of the Bhutanese merchants, he could do nothing to improve the conditions, till the trouble with Bhutan had blown over. Not only the Bhutanese, but the Gurkhas as well, claimed the Lama, were hindering the passage of free commerce between India and Tibet. Not only had they (the Gurkhas) closed the passes into India and into Tibet, and discouraged merchants from residing in their domains, but while Bogle was in Tashilhumpo, they attacked Sikkim, thus closing yet another route. The Panchen Lama on one occasion seemed to suspect that the English might be having something to do with this invasion, but Bogle assured him to the contrary³⁰.

After conversing with various Tibetans as well as with the Kashmiri merchants at Tashilhunpo Bogle found that the merchants themselves were unwilling to come to Bengal because of the heat, and because the journey was unfamiliar to them. In spite of Bogle's repeated persuasions, the Panchen Lama refused to be drawn into any agreement with the British. The Lama said that though he himself was desirous of re-introducing the flourishing trade once carried on between Tibet and Bengal, he would have to refer to the higher authorities in Lhasa in order to do this³¹ and the recovery of trade would take about a year or two³². Thus no concrete result, emerged from Bogle's negotiations with the Panchen Lama. All this pointed to suspicion of foreigners, and a dependence upon the authorities at Lhasa. Chinese considerations probably also played a part in Tibetan reticence. Bogle finally left Tashilhunpo on the 7th of April 1775.

Second Round of Discussions

On his return journey from Tibet, Bogle once again stopped at Tashichhodzong, and on the 17th of May 1775, entered into negotiations with the Deb Raja. Realising the suspicion with which the Tibetans as well as the Bhutanese regarded the Europeans, Bogle felt that it would be useless to ask permission from the Deb Raja to allow

Europeans to trade into the Deb Raja's country. He therefore, decided to procure leave for Hindu and Muslim traders from India only, to go and come through the Deb Raja's domains, between Bengal and Tibet. The merchants would also be given the option of leaving their goods either at Paro, or carrying them into Tibet³³. Bogle was further of the opinion that if the merchants from Tibet were also allowed to come with their merchandise to Paro, it would soon become a central mart for commodities. But since a constant fear was prevalent in Bhutan of a recurrence of another insurrection in favour of Desi Shidariva, which the Bhutanese felt, would in all probability be supported by the government at Lhasa, Bogle felt that it would be impossible to apply for the Deb Raja's consent to allow Tibetans a freedom of trade to Paro³⁴.

Bogle had earlier got an impression that Bhutanese traders were eager to come further inside Bengal for trading purposes. With a view to help them do so, Bogle requested the Governor General to issue dastuks or permits to any trader willing to come to Calcutta. Bogle wrote, "I am convinced that after their people arrive at Calcutta, discover numbers of curiosities which they never saw before and find the price of broad cloth, coral, spices etc., much lower than at Rangpur, they will fall into the practice of purchasing their goods at Calcutta"³⁵. Hastings, in a letter

written to Bogle on May 9 1775, approved the remission of tribute or duty which Bogle had suggested. This concession ^t Hasings thought was to be the 'ground work' of Bogle's commercial transactions in Bhutan. He said that though the caravan paid about rupees two thousand to the government, the right of levying this tax might be interpreted by the Bhutanese government as a sort of exaction, while the surrender of this privilege, could be considered a great benefit to them³⁶.

With all the above considerations in view, Bogle drew up the following paper for facilitating commerce between Bengal and the Deb Raja's country. It ran as follows -

Whereas the trade between Bengal and Tibet formerly very considerable and all Hindu and Mussulman merchants were allowed to trade into Nepal, which was the centre of communication between the two countries, and whereas from the wars and oppressions in Nepal, the merchants having of late years been unable to travel into that country, the governor and the Deb Rajah, united in friendship, being desirous of removing these obstacles, so that merchants may carry on their trade free and secure as formerly, having agreed upon the following articles :

"That the Bhutanese shall enjoy the privileges of trading to Rangpur as formerly, and shall also be allowed to proceed, either themselves or by their gumashtas, (agents) to all places in Bengal, for the purpose of trading and selling their horses, free from duty or hindrance.

"That the duty hitherto exacted at Rangpur from the Bhutan caravan be from henceforward abolished.

"That the Deb Rajah, shall allow all Hindu and Mussulman merchants freely to pass and repass through his country between Bengal and Tibet.

"That no English or European merchants shall enter the Deb Raja's dominions.

"That the exclusive trade in sandal, indigo, red skins, tobacco, betelnut, and pan, shall remain with the Bhutanese, and that the merchants be prohibited from importing the same into the Deb Raja's dominions; and that the governor shall confirm this in regard to indigo by an order to Rangpur³⁷.

The terms of this agreement, being suitable to the Deb Raja, was accepted by him, all the more so, since the terms favoured the Bhutanese more than the Indian merchants.

The Bhutanese merchants, however, did not come to Calcutta but continued their trading activities at the fairs at Rangpur and Titalya, and registered their goods only at the frontier stations.

The Outcome of Bogle's Mission

George Bogle returned from his expedition to Bhutan and Tibet in June 1775. In a general report presented to Hastings, he gave a detailed account of his commercial venture, and enumerated the extent of his success. As far as Bhutan was concerned, Bogle seemed to have achieved a greater degree of success than with the authorities in

Tibet. He entered into a written agreement with the Deb Raja regarding commercial transactions between the two countries, which was something that he could not persuade the Panchen Lama of Tibet to enter into.

Some people have, however, labelled Bogle's mission to be a totally unsuccessful and fruitless one. S.C. Bajpaie has said, 'George Bogle merely passed through Bhutan without transacting any business there'³⁸. But to label Bogle's mission as 'unsuccessful', would not be doing full justice to him. Bogle had pointed out that the entire trade with Tibet was in the hands of native agency before Europeans had any thing to do with it³⁹ and so there was nothing unusual in Europeans not being allowed to enter Bhutan. He also believed that trade in this region could be promoted 'without the establishment of English factories and employment of English agents'. Bogle considered it an achievement to restore it 'back to that point', and believed that the connection he had achieved with the Panchen Lama and the Deb Raja would help to promote it further⁴⁰. The fact that Warren Hastings himself was pleased with the result of Bogle's expedition can be corroborated by the fact that the Governor General entrusted Bogle with yet another mission to Tibet in 1779. Unfortunately this journey could not be undertaken because the Panchen Lama happened to be on a visit to Peking at that time.

Besides securing commercial concessions, Bogle was also responsible for preparing the way for the establishment of extensive tea plantations in Bengal and Assam under European management. It was he who reported that tea was a universal beverage in Bhutan and Tibet, and this item was entirely imported from China. Bogle therefore argued that if tea plants could be cultivated in the British territory, this large and profitable trade could be captured from China⁴¹. Besides tea, a very considerable trade in other commodities was also going on between China and Tibet, which included rock salt, wool, sheep skins, and other Chinese commodities. The Chinese jealously guarded this trade, and were reluctant to allow any other country to share in the profits. It was probably out of respect for Chinese wishes that the Panchen Lama did not enter into any agreement with Bogle. The Panchen Lama, however, assured Bogle that he would try to persuade the Deb Raja to enter into free commercial transactions with British India, and would also write to the Raja of Nepal to reopen his domain as before.

The hesitant attitude of the Bhutanese was due to two reasons. First, they regarded the European merchants with suspicion, since they felt that they might lose the monopoly of trade they had since enjoyed with Tibet. There was also the lurking fear of losing their national

independence as well. This fear was not unjustified because Bogle himself had observed that 'the power and elevation to which the English have now risen render them objects of jealousy to all their neighbours'⁴². Some European merchants had complained to Bogle of the bad behaviour of the Bhutanese⁴³. This bad behaviour was really out of a fear for the British. The Bhutanese were also apprehensive that the insurrection which was going on in Bhutan during Bogle's visit, in favour of Desi Shidariva, was being supported by the Tibetans. Hence their reluctance to allow Tibetan merchants into their own territory. However, in spite of all these hindrances, Bogle did succeed in getting some concessions, and ended the General Report of his mission on an optimistic note by emphasizing on three main points - (i) With the death of Prithvi Narayan Shah and the accession of his son Singh Pertab to the throne, possibilities of trade through Nepal were brightened; (ii) Consent was obtained for the passage of Hindu and Muslim merchants through Bhutan; and (iii) ^tThe Tibetan merchants might be able to come to Paro and even to the interiors of Bengal to trade as soon as the fear of another insurrection in Bhutan supported by the Tibetans was removed.

Soon after the return of Bogle in June 1775, Hastings, in a gesture of courtesy and friendship, thanked the Deb

Raja for 'very kindly' receiving his envoy and for agreeing 'to allow the merchants to carry on their trade between Bengal and Tibet',⁴⁴. The rapport which Bogle had established with the Panchen Lama of Tibet, and the Deb Raja of Bhutan, pleased Hastings exceedingly, and he was determined to keep up the good work. Throughout his tenure, the importance of Bhutan as 'gate on the south that prevents entry',⁴⁵ was never lost sight of. It was with a view to furthering his project that he took several steps in that direction. These included the building of a small Buddhist temple at Calcutta to facilitate Tibetan traders, sending of several missionsⁿ to further cement the existing bonds of friendship, and finally making great concessions for the Tibetan and Bhutanese traders coming to exchange their wares at Rangpur.

Keeping in mind Bogle's proposal of extending facilities to Tibetan and Bhutanese merchants who happened to be visiting Calcutta, Hastings built a small Buddhist temple at Howrah, near Calcutta. This temple could be used by any Tibetan or Bhutanese merchant as a meeting as well as a resting place. This shrine 'still in a certain condition of active existence',⁴⁶ was rediscovered in 1887. It is on record that the Panchen Lama of Tibet had requested, in a letter sent through Bogle to grant him hundred bighas of

land on the banks of the Ganges opposite to Calcutta. In consequence of this request, the Governor General laid before the Board of Revenue on December 4 1775, the necessary papers, which he had obtained with the consent of the proprietors for some ground lying on the other side of the river⁴⁷. Thus hundred bighas of land were granted to the Lama, and it was on this land that the temple was built. Gourdas Basak had observed that it was 'for the first and last time that a living divinity in Tibet condescended to accept a sannad from the representative of the British power in India, and to become his jagirdar'⁴⁸.

Attempts to Keep up Contacts - the Missions Under Hamilton

Hastings decided to follow up Bogle's mission by sending yet another mission to Bhutan under Alexander Hamilton, who had accompanied Bogle. One of the main duties of Hamilton was to examine into the claims which was being made by the Deb Raja of Bhutan on the districts of Ambari Falakata and Jalpesh in the heart of the Bengal Duars. Accordingly, Hamilton set out in November 1775, and following the same route as Bogle, reached the frontier of Bhutan in January 1776. Thereupon he received a friendly letter from the Deb Raja inviting him to Punakha. He reached there on April 6, and was at Tashichhodzong in May 1776. After

examining into the claims of the Deb Raja, Hamilton came to the conclusion that equity demanded the restoration of ^{these lands} ~~lands~~ to the Deb Raja. The recommendation was made more in the interests of furthering Warren Hastings' policies than on the intrinsic merits of the case. Hamilton hoped that if restitution was made, he would probably be able to induce the Deb Raja to fulfil his agreement with Bogle, and only to levy moderate transit duties on merchandise⁴⁹. Hamilton returned after insisting upon the agreement between the Deb Raja and Bogle being faithfully ⁶ observed. This agreement had promised, it will be remembered, in return for the free passage of non-European merchants of Bengal across Bhutan, freedom of access to the Bhutanese and their gomostas to all places in Bengal, the privilege of selling horses duty free, the abolition of all duty on the Bhutanese caravan in Rangpur, and the reservation for the Bhutanese exclusively on the export of indigo, tobacco, red skin, betelnut, etc. into Bhutan⁵⁰.

On Hamilton's recommendation, and in order to preserve the lasting effects of Bogle's mission to Bhutan, Hastings decided upon the secession of these territories of Ambari Falakata and Jalpesh which were eventually transferred to Bhutan in 1787. These areas had belonged to the Zemindars of Baikunthapur, under the Cooch Behar Raj. Ashley Eden

who himself was a later envoy to Bhutan, wrote, "I am afraid on this occasion the friendship of the Bhutanese was purchased at the expense of the Baikunthapur Zamindar". This transfer also went to imply that "history or geography, religion or language were subordinated to the company's own motive securing access to Tibet and through Tibet to China"⁵¹.

Be that as it may, in the effort to keep up friendly relations with Bhutan and Tibet, Hamilton was sent to Bhutan yet again in July 1777. This time it was to congratulate the new Deb Raja Jigme Singye on his assuming the temporal authority of the country after the death of the erstwhile Deb Raja, Tshenlop Kunga Richen, with whom Bogle had concluded the trade treaty. This Hastings availed of every opportunity keep up a constant communication with Bhutan in order to prevent the opening made by Bogle from being closed.

In 1778, the new Deb Raja sent his yakil, Narpoo Paigah to Calcutta, where he delivered, under the Deb Raja's seal, a declaration ratifying the agreement for a trade passage across Bhutan. One of the originals of this declaration is in Bengali, and confirms the articles of Bogle's treaty in a different order. In the English version of the ratification attached to the document, it was stated:

Formerly there were extensive commercial transactions between Bengal and the region of Lhasa. Hindus and Mussalmanas came and went for purposes of trade and carried on their business. Since some time however, there have been difficulties in the passage of merchants to and from on account of wars and disturbances. A hearty friendship has been established between Sri Sri Devadharma Lama Rimpashay and the honourable company and it has been written and agreed to on both sides that the Deb Raja shall not in any way hinder the passage and the trade of Hindus and Mussalmans. These however, shall not be allowed to carry sandalwood, indigo, 'googul', softened skins, betel leaves and betelnut. No English or Firingi merchants shall be permitted to go up to the hills. Those people of Bhutan who go to sell horses and other articles in Bengal shall be subject to no duties. On this side I myself give this agreement in writing. In this manner it will be put into effect, and there will not be any departure from it.

Dated in the year 269 (two hundred and sixty nine) answering to the Bengali year 1185, on the 9th Paush at Calcutta⁵².

This ratification of the treaty by the Bhutanese four years after it was concluded may be interpreted as a sign of willingness on their part to conform to the clauses of the treaty.

George Bogle himself was again appointed on a second mission to Bhutan and Tibet on 19 April 1779. The stated purpose of the proposed mission was to cultivate and improve 'the good understanding subsisting between the chiefs of those countries and government and to endeavour to establish a free and lasting intercourse of trade with the kingdom of Tibet and the other states to the northern

ward of Bengal⁵³. In the course of the summer of that year, however, the news arrived that the Panchen Lama had undertaken a journey to China, and the mission was consequently postponed. Later a novel plan was formulated with regard to having a meeting in Peking itself between the Lama, Bogle and the emperor of China. But the death of the Panchen Lama in Peking on 12 November 1780, and of Bogle in Calcutta on 3 April 1781, put an end to all these grandiose plans.

The Rangpur Fair

Prior to his death however, Bogle had been appointed to succeed Purling as the Collector of Rangpur in September 1779, where his main duty was to encourage commercial intercourse and to superintend the annual fair held there every year. Here it might be worthwhile to mention that while many have accredited Bogle with the establishment of the fair at Rangpur in 1780, the fact is that he gave encouragement to an already existing institution. Bogle was very much enthusiastic about his appointment and wrote thus about his future plans and intentions, "I have schemes and projects for introducing new articles of commerce through Bhutan, and of perfecting what ^hwas already cost me so much trouble. The narrow minded jealousy of the Bhutanese

opposes obstacles, but my situation here leads me at least to make an attempt"⁵⁴. Rangpur was the Indian terminus for caravans from Bhutan and Bogle was in a position to encourage the northern trade as well as to superintend the annual fair there. Bogle was ideally suited for the post, and maintained a regular correspondence with Hastings to apprise him of the state of affairs. Hastings too frequently sent him packets of tea, and on one occasion, some seeds of hyson tea or chinese green tea, so as to 'aid your benevolent plan of introducing the luxuries and elegances of our world into that of Bhutan'⁵⁵.

The annual fair at Rangpur, had been going on for a number of years before Bogle's appointment; but since his time it acquired significant proportions. Rangpur was situated on the river Tista, south of Cooch Behar, and the Rangpur records are also full of accounts of the annual trade caravans of the Bhutanese bringing skins, blankets, cotton chintz, musk, walnuts, gold dust, and 400 to 500 hill ponies to the value of Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 40,000. The traders carried back in return indigo, broad cloth, leather, copper, lead, spices etc. The trade had at one time amounted to upwards of ^a lakh of rupees, but the demand for ponies was gradually falling off⁵⁶. These caravans left Tashichhodzong and Paro in February and March, and returned in May and June. Previously they used to pay a duty of

about 2000 rupees at Rangpur, but Warren Hastings in his bid to facilitate trading conditions, had decided to abolish these duties. In 1780 the Rangpur fair was held under the supervision of Bogle. The expenses of the Bhutanese traders were paid by the government, stables were erected for their horses, and houses for themselves. Of this occasion Bogle wrote, "There was a great concourse of Bhutan merchants who have been excused all duties, and left to the freedom of their own will in buying and selling, went away very well satisfied"⁵⁷.

Even before Bogle was appointed as Collector, Hastings had asked Bogle's predecessor Purling to take steps to abolish all duties on the Bhutanese trade, and give every aid and encouragement to the merchants. In a letter written to Purling dated 6th April 1779, Hastings made this point very clear by saying, "Having determined to abolish all duties on the Bootea trade to Rangpore, either on the sales or purchases of their horses or other merchandise, we desire that you will carry this resolution into execution"⁵⁸. On the basis of a petition from certain Bhutanese merchants who complained that they were not being allowed to purchase oil and dried fish from certain places in Bengal such as Rangpur, Cooch Behar, Rangamati etc., according to ancient custom, and were not being assisted in recovering their

outstanding balances either, Hastings took immediate steps to remedy the inconveniences. He instructed Purling to 'issue Perwannahs to the zemindars and officers of the districts in which the Booteas have been accustomed to buy these articles to protect and assist them in carrying on their trade and to allow their oil and dried fish freely to pass the different chokeys and gauts'⁵⁹.

Encouraged by these attempts on the part of the Government, Bogle, on becoming the Collector, also requested Hastings in a letter dated 10 December 1779, to abolish the duty on indigo which was equivalent to 4 rupees 8 annas per maund, and which he said 'tends greatly to discourage the culture and trade of indigo'⁶⁰. This measure together with a number of others, had a most satisfactory effect, and the Rangpur fair was continued for a number of years. The unfortunate and untimely death of Bogle on 3 April, 1781, also brought to an end many grand plans, which he had in mind, regarding commerce with Bhutan and Tibet. The Rangpur fair might have prospered much more had Bogle continued as the Collector for a few more years. The fair nevertheless, was continued up to 1832, when at the orders of Nesbit, Economic Commissioner of Revenue at that time, it was discontinued and the result was a significant decline in trade.

Turner's Description of Economy and Trade

With both the British Indian Government as well as the Bhutanese government showing their eagerness to abide by the terms of the treaty of 1775, all seemed set for a longlasting and extensive commercial relation between the two countries. However the death of Bogle as well as of the third Panchen Lama, provided a temporary set back to this progressively increasing commercial contact\$. Hastings, however, was on the lookout for another pretext to send yet again another mission to Bhutan and Tibet, and obtain some further concessions in the way of commerce. Accordingly, when news reached Hastings on 12 February 1782, that the Panchen Lama had been reincarnated, he seized upon this opportunity to send a mission to congratulate the new Lama on his arrival.

On 9 January 1783, Hastings appointed Lieutenant Samuel Turner as the head of this mission, together with Samuel Davis and Robert Saunders, the former as draftsman and surveyor, and the latter in the capacity of a surgeon. It may be worthwhile to mention here that Poorungir Gosain who had accompanied Bogle also went with Turner and acted as his guide and interpreter. The Governor General thought it might be of "public utility at this time to renew and confirm the intercourse which had been established between the government and the Lama of Tibet"⁶¹. Earlier the

Governor General, had received some letters from the regent at Tashilhunpo, which had encouraged him quite a bit⁶². Moreover, the world situation was also quite favourable at that time, facilitating Hastings' attempt to renew contacts with Tibet. The American Revolution, and the Anglo-French hostilities had just recently ended and, as a result, sea commerce was beginning to flow freely once again. Hastings had thus reasons to anticipate a renewed flood of manufactured goods from Britain, and felt that it would be necessary to find wider markets for them⁶³.

Thus the fourth commercial mission set forth on its journey to Tibet and Bhutan under Samuel Turner, who had been recommended by Hastings as being 'well qualified to cultivate a good understanding with the Lama of Tibet, and possibly to open a communication and intercourse with the northern provinces as far as China'⁶⁴. Whatever may have been the real objectives behind this mission the ostensible purpose was to congratulate the new Lama. Accordingly the mission carried a number of gifts for the infant Lama on behalf of the Governor General. These included pearls, fine coral earrings, a jewelled watch, spectacles, two pieces of special Russian cloth, and silver cups containing spices, cloves, and nutmegs, while Turner himself carried some wooden hats, pieces of gold brocade, etc.⁶⁵. Turner, like Bogle before him, was asked to proceed first to Bhutan, and try to make further arrangements for trade with that

country. Notice of the Governor General's intention to send a deputation to Tibet had already been sent to the Deb Raja. This was necessary, since without his permission and assistance, it would not be possible for Turner to enter Tibet.

Turner proceeded to Bhutan, following exactly the same route that Bogle had taken and entered Bhutan by the Buxaduar. He too, like his predecessor, has described at length the agricultural and industrial productions of Bhutan. As mentioned earlier, the potatoes planted by Bogle did not thrive and Samuel Davis accompanying Turner, said, 'the potatoes which Bogle left must have been neglected for there were none on our arrival'⁶⁶.

Turner was, however, very enthusiastic about the cultivation of fruits in Bhutan. He has given a good account of the fruits grown in this country, and this cannot be said to be an exaggerated account, since fruits and vegetables did indeed form an important part of Bhutan's production and export. On arriving at a village near a place called Nomnoo, Turner observed, "I visited an orchard in the neighbourhood and found it well stored with walnut, apple, peach, pear, apricot and barberry trees"⁶⁷. He also mentioned that there were excellent orchards at Tashichhodzong, and these contained apples, apricot, peas, walnuts

and peaches as well. At Wangdiphodrang, a garden was found by Turner. Describing that garden Turner wrote, "We found orange, citron, pomegranate, peach, apple, and even mango trees, thriving extremely well. Of culinary vegetables it boasted no great variety. There were however, cucumbers, bangun and chilli"⁶⁸. At another place, Mirichom, he saw the inhabitants gathering raspberries and strawberries, and peach trees were also seen there in great abundance, all laden with fruit⁶⁹.

Besides fruits, Turner had also described a flourishing crop of barley, almost fit for reaping near Punakha. Rice was also cultivated in the valley of Tashichhodzong. In his own words --- "The valley of Tassisudon is most luxuriantly clothed with the most promising crops of rice which in defect of rain, all the spring of the surrounding mountains are artificially conducted to fertilize"⁷⁰. Rice cultivation had been mentioned by Bogle as well, and it bears repetition that rice, both husked and unhusked, formed an important export item.

Turner also mentioned that paper was produced from the bark of a tree, by an inexpensive and easy process called deah⁷¹. This tree grew in great abundance upon the mountains near Tashichhodzong and the botanical name of this tree was Daphne Pappyfera. However, the quantity of

paper produced was reported to be so small that it was not even sufficient for home consumption, leaving aside exports. Besides paper, other local manufactures included tents and ropes made from the yak's hair, and also some inferior quality of caps and jackets. Turner was full of praise for the yak, which he said was a very useful animal, their tails or chowries forming an important export item⁷². Besides they were very useful as beasts of burden and formed an important mode of conveyance in carrying goods from one place to another; the other alternative mode of conveyance being the backs of the human beings.

Commenting on trade relations with Bhutan, which were agreed upon by the treaty entered into by Bogle in 1775, Turner observed, "The Deb Raja having acknowledged to me the validity of that treaty it became unnecessary to insist on the execution of another, since no privileges and immunities appear to be requisite, until the commerce can be established on a different footing"⁷³. Turner had also given a favourable report of the attitude of the Deb Raja towards the passage of commerce between Bengal and Tibet through his territory. As to who were the people engaged in trade, Turner said that the chief merchants were none other than the first members of the state, hereby meaning the Deb and the Dharma Rajas themselves. They together with their chief officers, or the provincial

governors, were said to monopolise the trade, and gain the maximum benefit from it⁷⁴.

The Bhutanese traders passed mainly through Buxa Duar, situated on the Cooch Behar-Bhutan frontier on their way to Rangpur fair. According to Turner, in the past, the Bhutanese traders, before they quitted this pass and descended into the plains with their caravans, cut off the tails of their tangun horses, which greatly disfigured their appearance, and depreciated their value. The British, after establishing a fixed station at Rangpur, persuaded the traders to abolish this cruel custom, by offering a liberal reward. These un mutilated animals earned so high a value, that the traders, repeated this procedure the following year, and hence the pass was styled the 'bounteous pass', or the Buxaduar⁷⁵. This theory was disputed, however, by the men who led the later missions, such as Pemberton and Griffiths (1837-38), who claimed that the Buxa Duar was too steep and precipitous for loaded animals, and, as such, it is difficult to visualise it as the most frequented route.

When Turner visited Bhutan, the Rangpur fair was going on at a brisk rate. In his own words, "From Bootan indeed a caravan now annually visits the district of Rangpur in Bengal bringing with it oranges, walnuts, and the coarse

woollen manufactures of that country with the horses that carry them for sale, and it returns after a month's stay, with the cotton cloths, salt and other articles of the produce of Bengal"⁷⁶. About these tangun ponies, Davis, who accompanied Turner, was of the opinion that the Deb Raja himself was the proprietor of these horses, and that "they are bred in most parts of the country, carefully reared and kept in the Rajah's stables, one of which adjoins to each castle, and from thence they are sent for sale to Bengal, Assam and Nepal". The imports of tobacco, betelnut, dried fish, etc. which were brought from Rangpur and the coarse cloths from Assam, were also said to be carefully lodged in the castles as in a public store, and sold out for the subsistence and use of the people⁷⁷. These places in fact served as the main shops and store houses of Bhutan.

All the above facts go to prove that the Rangpur fair was carried on in a flourishing manner even after Bogle's death. At Paro, Turner met a Mookhy or an agent who conducted a division of the caravan that went from Bhutan to Rangpur. Turner received a first hand information of the Rangpur fair from this man, who talked much of his journey to Rangpur, and strongly expressed his gratitude for the kind treatment and encouragement he had always experienced from the Collector of Revenue, the Commercial resident and other government officials residing there⁷⁸.

Turner stayed in Bhutan for about three months longer than did Bogle, and then proceeded to Tibet. There he paid his respects to ~~the~~ new Panchen Lama, as instructed. While in Tibet, Turner noticed that an extensive trade was carried on between Tibet and Bhutan. The exports from Bhutan included English broad cloth, Rangpur, leather, tobacco, coarse cotton cloth, including Guzzy (the Anglo-Indian term for poor quality cotton), paper, rice, sandalwood, indigo and ~~Manjeet~~ ^{Manjeet} or madder. From Tibet was obtained gold dust, tea, woollen cloths manufactured in Tibet, and salt⁷⁹. The surplus rice produced in Bhutan were also exported to Tibet. The returns from Tibet were carried on to Rangpur, while some items such as the Rangpur leather and English broad cloth were obviously carried up from India. Bhutan's trade was, therefore, essentially a carrying one.

Turner also, like his predecessor Bogle saw another lucrative market for Indian traders, in the establishment of tea gardens. He discussed the importance of Chinese tea and the vast profits that could be gained from it. This point put forward both by Bogle and Turner was one of the factors that might have stimulated the growth of the tea industry in Bengal and Assam in subsequent period. The huge profits that were being reaped entirely by the Chinese from this tea trade led the Indian planters to have extravagant notions of the profits that they themselves could gain⁸⁰.

Turner returned to India in March 1784, and met the Governor General at Patna, where he proceeded to give a fairly detailed account of his expedition. Some are of the opinion that though Turner stayed longer than Bogle in Bhutan, 'his mission also ended in a failure so far as the commercial part of it was concerned'⁸¹. This does not appear to be a correct assessment because Hastings was extremely pleased with the report Turner presented to his^m on their meeting.

The Commercial 'Adventure' of Indian Merchants

Like his predecessor, Turner thought that 'security and protection were the essential requisites³, in commercial intercourse and profit would prove 'its best encouragement'. It was, according to Turner, necessary to 'let merchants first learn the way, taste the profit and establish the intercourse'⁸². Turner extended the scope of Bogle's treaty with the Deb Raja by securing a promise from the Regent of the Panchen Lama of 'encouragement to all merchants native of India, that may be sent to traffic in Tibet on himself or the government of Bengal'. Every assistance 'requisite for the transport of their goods from the frontier of Bhutan'⁸³ was assured⁴.

The cordiality with which the missions led by Bogle and Turner were entertained, especially in Bhutan, served to convince Hastings that even closer commercial contacts would be made in the near future. Suitable markets would be found for woollen and manufactured articles coming into India from abroad, now that the peace with France had rendered the seas safe for commerce, and so would a flow of bullion from Tibet and Bhutan help to reduce Bengal's chronic currency problems.

Turner, on his return from Tibet, urged the Company to do all it could to bring about a more profitable trans-himalayan trade. Acting upon this advise of Turner, Hastings instructed that an advertisement ~~be~~ circulated, inviting native Indian merchants to join in an 'adventure' trade with Tibet through Bhutan, where Turner's diplomacy seemed to have at least secured a promise of reasonable conditions of passage. The party of merchants were asked to assemble the following year, that is in 1785 in the month of February, with goods likely to find a suitable market in Tibet, which included second quality cloth, coating, cheap watches, clocks, trinkets, snuff boxes, smelling bottles, pocket knives, amber, gloves and coarse cotton, conch shells, indigo, coral, and large imperfect pearls. In return the merchants could bring back gold dust, silver, musk, yak tails, and wool⁸⁴.

The advertisement, which was published at the orders of Hastings ran as follows :

a promise of encouragement to all merchants, Natives of India, who may be sent to traffic in Tibet on behalf of the government of Bengal and a promise of yielding them every Assistance requisite for the transport of their goods from the frontier of Bhootan and of assigning them a place of Residence either within the Monastery or should it be considered as more eligible in the town the Native merchants of Bengal are hereby informed thereof and invited to engage in the trade receiving as they hereby do the promise of this government, that there shall be an exemption of all duties upon such articles as shall be taken out to Bengal to compose their first Adventure to Tibet

It is proposed that the Natives employed on this service should assemble with their goods at Rangpore early in the month of February⁸⁵.

In 1785, this 'adventure' took place according to plan, and a reasonably flourishing and profitable trade seemed to have resulted. It was at this time that Purangir Gossain was selected by Hastings to visit Tibet on yet another mission. This was in early 1785, just on the eve of Hastings' departure from India, and the actual mission was undertaken after Hastings left for England. The fact that harmonious relations were still existing between India and Bhutan at that time is testified by the ^General ^Letter written by the Court of Directors, dated 27 March, 1787, where they noted their gratification that 'in passing through the country of Bootan, the Gossain^a received the

most ample and voluntary assistance from the subjects of the Dabe Raja '86.

Purangir reached Tibet on 8 May 1785, visited the infant Panchen Lama in October, witnessed the conglomeration of Indian merchants there and found the markets stocked with Indian and British goods. He then returned to Bengal in December and reported to the Honourable John Macpherson, who was then officiating as the Governor General, that 'many merchants had brought their commodities to market and others followed. The authorities were most heartily disposed to continue the commercial intercourse. There were no complaints of impediment or loss '87. As it was the first venture every attempt was made to ensure that it was a success and no duties were taken. Purangir thus returned, to give a fairly satisfactory report of the success of this adventure and bringing with him 'protestations of friendship for the English from the chief men of the court of the Tashi Lama '88. Hastings unfortunately was not present to witness the results of this novel plan of his. Even prior to Purangir's departure for Tibet Hastings had set sail^l for England, and to the many trials that awaited him there.

A Change in Fortunes

Soon after the departure of Hastings his enthusiasm for trans-himalayan trade was rejected. The indifferent policy of Cornwallis, so far as the trade with the northern countries was concerned, together with the wars and border strifes among the Himalayan kingdom themselves and India led to a complete reversal of policy from the one followed in the eighteenth century. Francis Younghusband very neatly summed up the situation following Hastings' departure when he said 'a contretemps occurred and all his good work was undone'⁸⁹.

Immediately after Hastings departure, however, attempts were made by John Macpherson acting Governor General, to see that the Anglo-Tibetan and Anglo-Bhutanese accords did not altogether disappear into oblivion. In January 1786, he remarked that the increasing trade with Tibet, and the steady flow of letters from the Panchen Lama's advisers gave good grounds for hope that a direct correspondence with the Emperor of China might soon be arranged through Tibet⁹⁰. Macpherson, thus, was still entertaining the grand hopes of opening up China through Tibet.

The Court of Directors too at this point of time, deriving their information from the satisfactory reports of Bogle and Turner and the Gossain, declared that a 'very

beneficial commerce with Tibet both in Indian and in British goods ought to be practicable, and Bengal would receive what was very much needed, a plentiful supply of gold,⁹¹.

The Court of Directors were further, very keen that the people of these regions should not have the least suspicion that the interests of the British were in any way political. Their desire to keep up strict commercial relations with the regions of eastern himalayas was further corroborated by them in a letter written on 14 March 1787, in which they said, "Our views in forming connections with any new states or powers are merely commercial"⁹². The policy of the Court of Directors in this respect was evident as being in keeping with their keenness in general, for promoting trade with the countries to the north east of Bengal.

In another letter written on 27 March 1787, they reiterated this policy. They declared that it was upto the authorities in India to determine the mode of achieving the minimum commercial gains from Tibet and Bhutan. Whether trade was to be enhanced by encouraging the 'resort of Cashmarians, Gossains, Bootans and Tibetans to Calcutta, or by sanctioning regular caravans to go directly to Tibet, or by the establishment of a Commercial Factory in the Province of Bengal as near to the territories of the

Deb Rajah as possible⁹³ depended upon the discretion of the Governor General; nevertheless, the Court of Directors repeatedly warned the British Indian authorities that they must "studiously avoid affording the least cause of suspicion to any of the country powers that we have any schemes of ambition to accomplish, which in truth, we have not, and we must here repeat the sentiment contained in our letter of the 14th March last, that our views in forming connections with any new states or powers are merely commercial"⁹⁴. It was further observed by the Directors that as Bhutan still seemed friendly to the company and was placing no obstacles in the way of trade across the mountains to Tibet, it was all the more necessary that the Deb Raja should have no suspicions of this nature. Since it appeared difficult, if not impracticable, to open a communication with Tibet through the Dominions of Nepal, it was alone through the encouragement of the Deb Raja of Bhutan that the proposed intercourse of trade could be made to flourish⁹⁵. It was thus considered vital that Bhutan should not entertain any suspicion of imperialistic tendencies on the part of the British.

Therefore even after Hasting's departure, hopes of a commercial intercourse being carried on were kept alive by the British authorities both in India as well as in England. However the contretremps, or the unfortunate and unforeseen events of which Younghusband had spoken took shape in the

outbreak of hostilities between Tibet and Nepal, first in 1788, and then again in 1791, in which the British were victims of circumstances, and secondly by the recurring border disputes between India and Bhutan which were probably to some extent inadeptly handled by the British authorities. Whatever it may be the outcome was an appreciable decline in the commercial transactions.

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