CHAPTER IV

A Period of Uncertain Prospects, 1788-1838

With the emergence of the Gurkha dynasty in Nepal, the political equations in the Himalayan region changed fast.

The expansionist policy of the Gurkhas had also been posing quite a problem for their neighbours. They had conquered the whole of Nepal and had for years been committing aggressions on the frontier. In 1788 they invaded Sikkim, and retired only after the Tibetan government had ceded a piece of territory at the head of the Kuti pass. The Tibetans, remembering the promises of friendship which the two envoys

of Hastings had made to them, hoped vainly that the British would come to help them in their hour of need, and protect them against the Gurkhas.

Hostilities Between Tibet and Nepal

On 9 December 1788, the Collector of Rangpur D.H.McDowell in a letter to Cornwallis, who had assumed the Governor Generalship in 1786, gave an indication of the intention of the Tibetans of soliciting British help. It seemed that two messengers from Tibet, Mohamed Redjeb and Mahomed Willie, had been deputed by the Dalai Lama of Tibet, and had arrived at Rangpur with a letter from the Lama, requesting McDowell to provide guides and attendents to these messengers in order to enable them to reach Calcutta as soon as possible. McDowell on questioning them had found out that Tibet had lately been invaded by the Gurkhas who had taken possession of several frontier forts and a large portion of the country. According to these two messengers, the Lama had offered to make peace with the Gurkhas but they had refused to listen to any terms unless the Lama consented to relinquish to them all the gold produced in his country, for the collection of which they insisted on appointing their own officers. McDowell, after having conversed with the messengers from Tibet came to the conclusion that the

purpose of their mission to Calcutta was to ask for help from Cornwallis[1].

The letter from McDowell introducing the Tibetan Embassy to Bengal did not produce any result. The British remained steadfast in their policy of non-intervention in the internal matters of Bhutan, Nepal and Sikkim. It was clear that Cornwallis did not want to be involved in a Himalayan war, nor take any action which might be construed as being hostile by the Gurkhas. Hence he remained firm in his reply to Tashilhunpo and said that British assistance would be rendered neither to the Gurkha nor to the Tibetans for that matter. The excuse which he gave for this was that the Company could not afford the expenses of a hill war. Further, military aid by the English government, 'could not be afforded without a direct departure from the system of policy laid down for its general guidance by the Legislature'[2], the general policy referring to the policy of non-interference of British government into the private affairs of individual states. Lastly, the British government in India did not want to intervene in a matter which concerned a dependency of the Chinese Emperor, without first being asked to do so by that ruler. It was suggested from this statement that Cornwallis was not much interested in the value of the local trans-Himalayan trade of which he was well aware, and which was bound to suffer from any increase in the power and

extent of Nepal[3]. The 1788 invasions by the Gurkhas stopped soon after the Gurkhas acquired some territory from the Tibetans but the seeds of discontent were sown, and four years later a more serious invasion took place.

It may be that it was the British inactivity and apathy that emboldened the Gurkhas to repeat their attacks, this time of a more serious nature, on Tibet in 1792. The pretext of the war was that the Tibetans had insisted on circulating a base coin, and refused either to withdraw it or to establish a fair rate of exchange[4]. The Tibetans panic-striken at the unopposed advance of the Gurkha army, and realising the futility of appealing to the British for help, appealed for help to Peking. The Chinese responded immediately and sent an expeditionary force to meet the Gurkha army. The outcome was that the Gurkha army eventually surrendered to the Chinese, and peace was restored in September 1792. The Gurkhas had to submit to a humiliating treaty, by which they agreed to restore all that they had plundered, pay an annual tribute to the Emperor of China, and to send an embassy to Peking once every five years[5]. Throughout the course of this war, the British government in India remained a passive spectator.

In August 1792, even before peace between the Chinese and the Gurkhas was made, Lord Cornwallis received a letter

from the Dalai Lama informing him that the Chinese army had defeated the Gurkhas and warning him not to interfere on their behalf. In fact, when the Gurkhas had sought the military aid of the British ~~a little afterwards,~~ Lord Cornwallis replied back on 15 September 1792 declining to give them ~~Gurkhas~~ any assistance. The reason given by Cornwallis was that the English Company carried on extensive commercial contacts with the Chinese and had a factory at Canton, and, therefore, it was necessary to preserve a good understanding with the Emperor of China[6]. It might be interesting to note that the Gurkhas had on 1st March 1792 also concluded a commercial treaty with Jonathan Duncan, the Resident at Benaras. According to the terms of this treaty a duty of 2½ per cent was to be reciprocally taken on the imports from both the countries. This treaty was however repudiated by the Nepal Durbar a few years later[7]. The British were thus following a policy of playing safe and refused to embroil themselves in any politics of the Himalayan states. As a compromise, Lord Cornwallis ultimately decided to send Colonel Kirkpatrick on a mission to Kathmandu with a view to mediate between the Chinese and the Nepalese. Kirkpatrick, however, arrived too late to effect any amicable settlement and even before his arrival, the treaty had already been signed between the Nepalese and the Tibetans.

However this policy of playing safe, and of waiting and watching did not in any way help the British and the

results were unfortunate in the end. Markham is of the opinion, that the wisest policy on the part of the British would have been to prevent or check the invasion of Tibet by the Gurkhas even by using force if necessary. Such a course would have ensured the gratitude of the Lamas, curbed the restless aggression of the Gurkhas, secured their respect, and obviated the march of the Chinese army[8]. As it were, the Chinese general who had invaded Nepal gave a very unfavourable report of the conduct of the English, and even suspected that the British troops were in the Gurkha army. The immediate consequence was that the Chinese closed all the passes into Tibet to the natives of India, and occupied all the frontier stations[9]. Tibet thus became completely inaccessible to the British and the commercial contacts, so carefully built up by Hastings were in jeopardy. This was thus an unpleasant and unexpected turn to the relations which had promised so much.

Differences with Bhutan

With Tibet closing all her doors to India the passage of merchandise between India and Tibet through Bhutan almost totally stopped. At this time relations with Bhutan also started deteriorating due to constantly recurring border problems and raids, which in its turn threatened to disturb

the commerce exclusively carried on between India and Bhutan.

The Bhutanese continued their raids into Cooch Behar and claimed their authority over certain areas of Cooch Behar. The Raja of Cooch Behar, Maharaja Harendra Narayan, who ruled from 1783 to 1839 was a strong ruler who was determined to preserve his civil jurisdiction and the right of issuing Narayani coins. With the help of the Raikats of Baikunthapur, who were also piqued at the loss of Ambari Falakata handed over to Bhutan in 1787, Maharaja Harendra Narayan recovered from the Bhutanese the lands of Chamurchi and Rangamati in the Duars. In 1808 the subjects of Cooch Behar and Bhutan were once again involved in armed clashes over the possession of a highly productive tract of land, known as Maraghat. This territory had been ceded to Bhutan by the treaty of 1774 and since then it remained a bone of contention between Cooch Behar and Bhutan. This was more so because the Raja of Cooch Behar retained his rights over a number of 'insulated spots', or farms in the Maraghat division. As a consequence of the armed clashes in 1808, this territory was given over to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar on the mediation of Digby, the British Commissioner, in 1811-12[10].

Besides disputes with Cooch Behar, raids and robberies marred the tranquility of Indo-Bhutanese borders. The Bhutanese were also reported to be committing the offense of

giving asylum to Indian criminals. The company's several applications for the surrender of criminals were turned down by the Bhutan authorities. The Government of India in a letter dated 26th July 1810, wrote to the then Deb Raja, Jigme Dragpa, that the peace and tranquility of the northern frontier of the district of Rangpur had been disturbed by the frequent robberies committed by the inhabitants of Bhutan. It stated that a daring and notorious dacoit named Mohunt Ram had sought refuge in Bhutan after escaping from India and that the Magistrate of Rangpur had repeatedly requested Bhutanese officers to apprehend and surrender that man for trial in India, but in vain[11].

Earlier in 1800, one Jadunath Ishwar of Bhutan together with a number of accomplices committed a dacoity in the house of one Baikuntha Narayan of Cooch Behar. The company's authorities apprehended a dacoit named Pullanu and sentenced him to death, but he escaped from prison into Bhutan. The application made by the British for his extradition was reportedly turned down by the Government of Bhutan[12]. Thus constant conflicts were predominant in the relations between the two countries of Bhutan and India, and the sanguine hopes, which the Directors had entertained as late as 1787, were showing signs of not materialising. Their pleas to the authorities in India to try and appease the Deb Raja so as to obtain another agreement from him for the passage of

merchants through his domains, fell on deaf ears of the British in India who were not willing to give the Bhutanese a free hand. The Bhutanese on their part did not show much willingness to cooperate, and things were not very much better with Nepal either. In 1802 a treaty was negotiated with Nepal by Captain Knox, with a view to renew the treaty of 1792 which had become a dead letter, and the same year, that officer proceeded to Kathmandu as resident. But he could not stay there long. He withdrew in March 1803, and on 24 January 1804 Lord Wellesllley formally dissolved the alliance with the Durbar[13]. Finally, with Tibet also closing her doors to India the whole concept of trans-Himalayan trade was endangered.

Unofficial Visits of Manning and Moorcraft to Bhutan and Tibet

It was not surprising, therefore, that with Tibet closing her doors, and the harmonious relations with Bhutan disturbed by raids and plunders, trade with the northern neighbours reached a low ebb in the first half of the nineteenth century. It also became very difficult to obtain intelligence as to what went on in Tibetan and Chinese minds, as the agents of the company were now banned from Tibetan territory. Lack of information however did not

prevent the British from taking an interest in Tibet[14]. It was this interest which induced an Englishman named Thomas Manning to break through the barriers and reach the holy city of Lhasa in 1811. He entered Bhutan by the Lukhi Duar and reached Paro dzong on the frontiers of Tibet in the guise of a medical practitioner. Manning's route was one never taken by any European before, being to the westward of the one travelled by Bogle and Turner[15]. Manning's venture however was an entirely private one, and he received no official help or encouragement for his trip. Manning returned in May 1812, and published an account of his experiences, concerned mostly with personal difficulties and problems, but giving an insight into the social life of the Tibetans and the relative positions of the Chinese and Tibetans at that time. The indifference of the government towards Manning's mission was felt greatly by him, and he lamented the short sightedness of the government for failing to take advantage of this opportunity of reestablishing contacts with Bhutan and Tibet.

William Moorcraft was another enterprising Englishman, who was also given no official encouragement in his ambitions to explore Tibet. He was a vetenary surgeon and, in 1812, made his way to Gartok in western Tibet. His main intention was to seek out new breeds of horses and to investigate the possibility of trade in the shawl wool of western Tibet of

which Gartok was the centre. To the government at this date, Moorcraft's journey seemed to be 'replete with danger ... and not likely to be productive of advantage to the public service'[16]. Therefore, the government did not consider it judicious to sponsor this mission of Moorcraft's either. This policy of indifference and neglect on the part of the rulers, with small wars being waged over petty boundary disputes, served to benefit no one. But then, Hastings' policy of "watchful and constant vigilance, of firmness combined with conciliation and of persistent resolution to keep open friendly relations and to encourage trade"[17] was not present in his successors.

But it was not always the British or the hill people who were at fault for bringing about this stagnation in trade. In 1812, there occured an incident over which the trade between India and Bhutan was in danger of being interrupted altogether. Babu Guru Prasad, Diwan of the Cooch Behar Raja Harendra Narayan, detained the property of one Indian trader Mohammad Azim, and some other Bhutanese traders on their refusal to pay the duties demanded. The Diwan is quoted to have said, "We are obliged to pay annual money to British government, and without receiving the duties upon these goods we will not give them up"[18]. The Diwan's action in demanding duties from the Bhutanese traders amounted to a violation of Article 4 of the treaty

of 1774, which promised the Bhutanese the privilege of trading duty-free at Rangpur as formerly. However at this juncture, the British government's insistence upon the observance of the above article by the Raja of Cooch Behar, successfully averted the crisis. Not only that but steps were also taken to see that such actions would not be repeated in the future. David Scott, Magistrate of Rangpur, asked the government to warn the Raja against the repetition of such conduct by saying, "The Bhotia caravans have frequently sustained great inconvenience from the cavalier behaviour of the Raja of Cooch Behar or his people". In accordance with these recommendations a letter was written to the Cooch Behar Raja on the 4th May 1812, asking him to prevent his officers from making exactions when the Bhutanese had occasion to pass through his country[19].

But the situation did not improve much with the out break of the Anglo-Gurkha war in 1814 when Lord Moira, later Marquess of Hastings, became the Governor General. The outcome of this war was nevertheless satisfactory, and the turbulent Gurkhas were subdued and confined to their territory east of the river Kali while at the same time their encroachments on the side of Sikkim was also stopped[20]. It was decided however not to annex Nepal. Another result of this war was that Maraghat given over to Cooch Behar by Digby

in 1811-12 was reversed once again to the Bhutanese by David Scott in 1817, reportedly for their proclaimed neutrality in the Anglo-Nepalese war[21]. This war moreover once again impressed upon the English 'the seriousness of the Bhutanese claims and the necessity of prompt accomodation'. Since the border conflicts were showing no signs of abating, Scott sent a person named Kishen Kant Bose to Bhutan to effect an amicable settlement with the Bhutanese in 1815.

The Mission of Kishen Kant Bose

Kishen Kant Bose set out for Bhutan in 1815 accompanied by a person named Ram Mohan Rai. In all probability this person was the same as Ram Mohan Roy, the would-be founder of the Brahmo Samaj. It is on record that Ram Mohan Roy had travelled to Tibet in his younger days and had worked at Rangpur as sheristadar that is, assistant to the Collector of Revenue from 1809 to 1815[22].

Kishen Kant Bose entered Bhutan through the Assam frontier. From Goalpara he reached Bijni, then on to Sidli and Chirang and so up the valley of the Pho-chhu and Mochhu rivers to Punakha (map II). Kishen Kant Bose did not succeed in reaching Tibet but stayed in Bhutan for some time, and from his detailed account of that country an idea can be formed, besides other things, of trading conditions

existing in Bhutan at that time.

According to Bose, the Dharma Raja of Bhutan headed the group of traders, trading with a capital of rupees 25,000 to 30,000. The Lam Zimpe or the household stewart of the Dharma Raja was also supposed to exercise authority over the agents in trade. The Deb Raja who was the head of the administration of the country also traded with a capital of 30,000 rupees per annum. The Deb Zimpe or the private dewan of the Deb Raja superintended the trading and other concerns of the Deb Raja. Amongst the Bhutanese themselves, something in the nature of a private trade was also carried on. The Deb Raja presented horses, silk, salt and hoes to the petty land holders and farmers, and received much more than their value in return. The Dony or the public dewan constantly attended the Deb Raja and transacted the public business of the government. This public business must have also included the trade transactions of Bhutan with foreign countries. Besides, hundreds of Zinkøffs, or inferior officers remained in attendance on the Deb Raja. Their main functions included going to war and running errands of trade or private business[23].

Besides, the independent Councillors and the Governors of the different forts were also said to be engaged in trade to some extent. The Governor of the Punakha fort the

Punakha Dzongpön traded with a capital of four or five thousand rupees. The Governor of Tashichhodzong was supposed to be trading to an even greater extent than did the Punakha Governor[24]. Kishen Kant Bose however does not mention anything about the Governors of Paro, Wandiphodrang, Tongsadzong and Tagnadzong being involved in any trading activities. It may be assumed that they also did trade probably not on a very large scale but definitely to some extent. Thus from Bose's account it would seem that nearly the whole of the Bhutanese bureaucracy, together with their subordinates were engaged in commercial activities, be it internal or external.

The agriculture of Bhutan has also been described by Bose. The description is however not very detailed and corresponds mostly with what had been said previously by Bogle and Turner. In Bose's own words, "Bhutan produces an abundance of tangun-horses, blankets, walnuts, musk, chowries or cow tails, oranges and munjeet". Specifically on agriculture he says, "In Bhutan the grains produced are rice, wheat, dhemsi, barley, mustard, chenna, muruwa and Indian corn. All sorts of fruits ripen between June and October. The fruits are walnuts, apples, peaches, oranges, pomegranates, chouli limes, melons etc. Sugarcane is cultivated, and radishes and turnips are plentiful"[25]. Most of these goods grown in Bhutan were items of export, as can

be known from the description given by Bose of the list of goods going down to Rangpur for the annual fair.

It is interesting to note, that in spite of border disputes and raids, the Rangpur fair was still going on at a fairly brisk rate. At least it seemed so from the way Kishen Kant Bose had described it.

> The inhabitants take back woollen cloth, pattus, indigo, red sandal, assafoetida nutmegs cloves, nakhi, and coarse woollen cloths of which they used a part in Bhutan and send the rest to Lhasa, and from the latter country they import tea, silver, gold and embroidered silk goods. In Lhasa there is no rice produced and little grain of any kind, on which account rice, parched rice, wheat and flour of dhemsi are also exported from Bhutan to that country. The tea the Bhuteahs consume themselves, the greater part of the silk goods for clothing and hanging in their temples and with the silver they mix lead and coin it into narrainee rupees. The Bhuteahs also send the same sort of goods as they export to Rangpur to Nepal to Assam, and to the former country they like wise export rock salt. From the low lands under the hills and on the borders of Rangpore and Cooch Behar they import swine, cattle, pan and betel, tobacco, dried fish and coarse cotton cloth[26].

Kishen Kant Bose returned to India after a few months stay in Bhutan. The purpose for which he had been sent - namely ~~viz.~~ to affect an amicable settlement of the border problems, was not very successfully accomplished since border disputes still occured frequently. However, it was his investigations that proved the neutrality of the Bhutanese in the Anglo -Gurkha war of 1814-16, and earned them the territory of

Maraghat. Bose's mission is also important because of the picture that he provided of commercial activity in Bhutan. Moreover by sending this mission the British government showed some willingness to improve the situation between the two countries. Nevertheless, with Tibet remaining inaccessible, the commercial treaty with Nepal being repudiated and border conflicts with Bhutan being a constant recurrence, trade with the northern countries was certainly not at its peak. Cornwallis was preoccupied with administrative reforms and the third Mysore war. He appeared indifferent towards extension of commercial intercourse in the northern regions, and might have been influenced by the feeling that efforts in that direction were not likely to yield fruitful results[27].

There is hardly any record of British communication with Bhutan, following the return of Kishen Kant Bose in 1815. There is only a mention of opium being brought in from Bhutan, which was incidentally an illegal item of trade. In a letter dated 13 August 1822, D. Scott, Commissioner of Cooch Behar, observed that this trade was, "chiefly by numerous petty dealers in salt, tobacco, sugar, etc., who proceed up the rivers into Assam and the Bhootan low lands in small canoes and hawk their goods about from village to village. The capital of the majority of these traders does not probably exceed ten rupees"[28].

British Annexation of Assam and Dispute Over the Assam Duars

In the first Anglo-Burmese war (1825-26), Assam was formally handed over to the British, following the defeat of the Burmese, by the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826[29]. As a result of this acquisition the British territories were brought right up to the Bhutanese borders, and strifes over revenue payment and border conflicts became all the more recurrent.

It might be interesting to note that prior to the annexation of Assam, quite an extensive trade was carried on between this country and Tibet through the Kooreaparah Duar which was independent of the Bhutanese government at Punakha. The inhabitants of the Kooreaparah Duar, known as the Mambas, were governed by a Council of chiefs designated as the Sath Rajas, who owed allegiance to the Tawang Raja, a tributary of Lhasa[30]. At a place called Chauna which was situated at a distance of two months journey from Lhasa a mart was established, and on the Assam side a similar mart was set up at a place called Gagunshur, about four miles distant from Chauna. An annual caravan would proceed from Tibet to Chauna conducted by about twenty persons, conveying silver bullion to the amount of one lakh of rupees and a considerable quantity of rock salt, woollens, gold dust, musk, horses, chowries and chinese silk for sale to the Assam merchants. The latter on their part brought rice,

Assam silk, iron, lac, skins, buffalo horns, pearls etc. to be imported into Tibet[31]. That this route from Lhasa to Chauna was convenient and safe can be inferred from the small number of persons who accompanied the caravans, and which even carried silver bullion to the amount of one lakh of rupees. The trade between Assam and Tibet was quite extensive, and in the first decade of the nineteenth century, it amounted in value to about two lakhs of rupees per annum. Even in the year before the Burmese invasion the Lhasa merchants were said to have brought down gold amounting in value to Rs. 70,000/-[32].

After the British annexation of Assam disputes arose between the British and the Bhutanese over the Assam Duars, of which Gharkhola, Banska, Chappagori, Chappakhamar and Bijni were in Kamrup and the Darrang Duars included the Buriguma and the Kulling. The weak Ahom rulers being unable to deal with frontier outrages and incursions of the Bhutanese had in the past decided to hand over the seven duars to them, for an annual payment of Yak-tails, ponies, musks, gold dust, blanket and knives of an estimated value of 4,785 Narayani rupees and 4 annas. All these articles were available to the Bhutanese in their own country or in Tibet, and were to be taken at a certain fixed valuation and upon an understanding that they would be of average good quality[33]. Upon the British occupying Assam in 1826, the revenues for

the Assam Duars, would now have to be paid into the British treasury, by the Bhutanese. Almost the entire tract known as the Assam Duars were inhabited by the Mech and the Kachari tribes. The Bhutan government ruled these territories through local officials appointed by the Deb Raja, on the recommendations of the Dzongpons or the governors of the various districts to which these Duars were attached. The Meches were a hardworking tribe, and paid to the Dzongpons who lived in forts in the lower range of the hills, revenues in kind such as rice, cloth, betelnut, cotton, butter and ghee[34]. These governors in turn paid their revenue to the British officials through a set of intermediaries known as the Sajwals. These intermediaries allegedly changed the articles originally sent, substituting them for others of inferior values. These articles being sold by auction on their arrival at the principal stations in Assam seldom realized the value at which they were appraised by the Bhutanese. Consequently each year's tribute fell short of the fixed amount, and a meticulous system of accounting showed an arrear every year, and thus a constantly accruing balance was shown against the Bhutanese[35].

The Bhutanese government refuted the British claim for the arrears of tribute on the plea that the British functionaries on the frontier were dishonest. The Deb Raja wrote to the Governor General's agent — "Your people sell these

articles at such very low prices that we must necessarily fall into arrears"[36]. The Government of India, however, did not accept this plea and further demands for the payment of the supposed arrears were made. The lack of communication between the frontier officials and the central authorities in Bhutan further confounded the problem, and Pemberton noted during his visit in 1837-38 that 'The Bootan government appears to have been quite ignorant of proceedings on the frontier'.

Besides corruption in the revenue collection in the Kamrup Duars, things were not very satisfactory either in the two Darrang Duars, namely Kulling and Buriguma. These two duars were under a peculiar system of administrative arrangement. The Ahom Raj had administered them for five months in the year from July to November, and for the rest they were under the Bhutanese control. As a result of this dual system two sets of officials collected revenue from the hapless ryots, who were rackrented[37]. Thus with the annexation of Assam in 1826 the British inherited the complex problems of the Assam Duars, to resolve which, they annexed them ultimately in 1841.

Obstacles to Trade and Some Attempts to Overcome them

The Burmese invasion of Assam, subsequently followed by the British occupation of that region, affected the trade

between Assam and Tibet. Trade through the Bengal frontier was not very brisk either at that time, with the abolition of the Rangpur fair in 1832. Some attempts were made to revive this trade, and in 1833, Lieutenant Rutherford, officer-in-charge of central Assam, opened a trade fair at Udalguri in the district of Darrang with a view to attract traders from Tibet and the neighbouring hills. To Rutherford's disappointment however, the response was far from encouraging[38].

T.C.Robertson the then agent to the Governor General, in a letter addressed to the government on 6 December 1833, entertained hopes that great benefits might soon accrue to Assam, if trade is restored. "The Booteahs not only require the produce of the plains for their support, but seem disposed to become the customers of the Assamese for various commodities which the latter can either supply by their own industry or procure from Bengal to be exchanged among other articles for gold, of which metal there seems reason to suspect that the regions to the north of Bootan yield no considerable quantity". He further expressed the view that this trade was likely to increase further in future, unless it was checked by any 'political misunderstanding'. He further suggested the deputation of an envoy to Bhutan to settle terms of commercial intercourse and if possible to effect the adjustment of tribute payable for the Duars, so

as to diminish the chances of misunderstanding[39].

On the other side the Bengal Duars were also creating problems. These Duars extended along the foot of the Himalayas between the river Tista to Sankos. From west to East the Duars were named Dalimkot, Mainaguri, Chamurchi, Lucki, Buxa, Balka, Guma, Chirang and Bagh[40]. The Bengal Duars were under the jurisdiction of the Paro Ponlob, the Governor of the western division of Bhutan. Infringements and border conflicts were the main disturbances in the Bengal Duars. These conflicting claims continued until 1834, when an officer Ensign Brodie was deputed to settle and adjust them. While adjusting the boundaries of Balka, Guma and Ripu in 1834 Brodie noticed that Bhutanese officials in the Duars received payment for allowing their subjects the right to intra-duar trade. He came across a singular custom prevalent among inhabitants from a long time. In his own words. "In the neighbourhood of Bhulka, some of the inhabitants of Sangamma and other surrounding villages are in the habit of giving written agreements to pay what is called Gaongeeree to the Katma of Bhulka, who is the Deb Raja's Khas Tehseeldar in consideration of which they obtain the right to trade to all the different Dooars of Bootan. There are other kinds of Gaongeeree, but this is the principal one, and when it is not paid regularly the Katma has usually taken the law into his own hands and seized the goods of the ryots

in default and occasionally their persons"[41]. It may be noted that though the Bhutanese themselves often had an accruing deficit in the payment of revenues to the rulers of Assam, they themselves remained scrupulously vigilant of the revenues that were due to be paid to them by the inhabitants of the duars in lieu of trading facilities.

In 1834 a proposal was made by the Accountant General in a letter written on 23rd October to the Deputy Secretary suggesting the expediency of introducing the Furruckabad coinage into Cooch Behar instead of the prevalent Narayani coins. The Raja of Cooch Behar Maharaja Harendra Narayan was strongly averse to the adoption of this measure, which he alleged would be derogatory to his dignity and injurious to the agricultural and commercial interests of his territory, particularly in matters of trade with Bhutan. In a letter written on 9 May 1835 to Jenkins, the Governor General's Agent in Assam, the Maharaja asserted that should the Narayani coin be entirely done away with his ryots and merchants would be totally ruined as a very considerable trade was carried on between them and the Bhutanese, with whom none but the Narayani rupees would pass[42].

Jenkins, however, refuted the objections of the Cooch Behar Raja saying that a change in currency was not likely to effect a falling off in trade with the Bhutanese, since

this trade was confined mostly to barter. Further Jenkins noted that a change in currency had already been introduced in Bhutan, with the Sonat rupees having been introduced into that portion of Bhutan bordering on the eastern side of Cooch Behar, and as far as Jenkins' knowledge went no objections whatsoever had been made to this[43]. Ultimately, keeping in mind Jenkins' point of view, attempts were made to gradually abolish the Narayani coins, and replace them with the Sicca rupees.

In spite of these efforts the situation was not generally conducive to the promotion of trade with the northern countries. Besides other problems, the British government in India also attributed the deterioration in trading contacts between Tibet and Bhutan on the one hand and India on the other, to the jealousies of the Chinese government. In 1836 Jenkins wrote, "Our subjects have been excluded from the trade of Tibet and Bhutan through the jealousy and influence of the Chinese government against the wishes of the Lamas and inhabitants of either country, and though the favourable commercial treaty settled by Mr. Bogle in 1775 and subsequently admitted in 1785 by the Deb Raja has never been abrogated yet it has been rendered of no benefit and virtually set aside through the interference of the Chinese government"[44]. The jealousy of the Chinese could be attributed to their desire to maintain a monopoly of trade with Tibet

and Bhutan, and their dislike of the interference of yet another country in this lucrative trade, which they felt would probably deprive them of securing a substantial profit. "There may be little hope", remarked Jenkins, "at present of placing the trade between the countries on a reciprocal footing as regards the permission of free entry of merchants ... from the influence of Chinese policy over these states .. yet some arrangements very profitable to us might probably be made for the promotion and extension of the present petty commerce by the establishment of periodical fairs along our frontier to which the Tibetan caravans might be prevailed upon to meet our merchants"[45].

Be that as it may, it was with a view to attempt at resolving all these aforementioned problems that the British government decided to send yet another mission to Bhutan in 1837. The leadership of the mission was entrusted to Captain R. Boileau Pemberton with Ensign Blake of the 56th Native Infantry as an assistant and Dr. Griffiths of the Madras establishment as Botanist and medical incharge. The objects of the mission were clear cut and precise and could be classified under three heads -

(a) to settle terms of commercial intercourse between the two countries. In this regard Pemberton was asked to convince Bhutanese authorities of the sincerity of the company's friendship and to assure them that his

government sought no exclusive advantage from commerce, and that its main object was to introduce an unrestricted intercourse between the subjects of the two countries;

(b) to affect a suitable system of revenue payment in the Duars; and

(c) to attempt to know the extent of the Chinese power in these hilly regions, and the precise nature of the ties by which Tibet and Bhutan were bound to each other and to China.

Economy and Trade According to Pemberton and Griffiths

Pemberton entered Bhutan through Dewangiri in January 1838. He was led in a direction "nearly due north" to the confines of Bhutan and Tibet. From there he turned west to Punakha covering a distance, "rather more than two hundred and fifty miles" in "twenty six marches"[46]. He returned through the Buxa Duar, arriving in Goalpara on 31 May 1838. (see Map II). On his return Pemberton presented a vast and exhaustive account of Bhutan, which dealt with practically every aspect$ of the country, including the trade routes to and from Bhutan, the manufactures and agriculture of that country, as well as some detailed description of the entrepots of Bhutanese trade meaning hereby the fairs at Rangpur,

Hajo and Titalya. Griffiths also presented no insignificant an account covering some of these aspects.

Making reference to the Buxa Duar by which the caravans from Bhutan were supposed to descend into the plains, Pemberton wrote of it as being very rugged and precipitous. Especially in the north and south of Chupcha this path became a narrow ledge in the side of the mountains which was quite inaccessible even for ponies and other laden animals. He was convinced that it was not by this route that the caravans annually visiting Rangpur, travelled. Pemberton concluded that the merchants who conveyed their goods from Tibet and Bhutan to the town of Rangpur in the plains all travelled from the northern frontier to the latter country through the districts subject to the Paro Ponlop i.e. through the western part of Bhutan, and continued to travel straight along a route which led to a village called Doona situated between Dalimkot and Chamurchi Duars, and from there on to Rangpur on the south of the duars. Pemberton reported not to have met a single laden animal on its way from the plains, and very few men carrying articles for the use of the Deb Raja of Bhutan during his return journey by this route[47]. This observation of Pemberton contradicts the one made by Turner who said that the very name Buxa Duar, meaning bounteous pass, had been given by the merchants who profited handsomely by trading through this pass.

Besides the above mentioned route there were also a number of routes through which intercourse was carried on between Bhutan and India according to Pemberton. One of these went by the valley of the Manas river via Tazgong and Dewangiri to Hajo in Lower Assam. This route was frequented by that class of Tibetan merchants called Khampas who visited Hajo for purposes of trade every year. There was another route also leading to Hajo which started from the Tawang territory and led to Hajo through the Kooreaparah Duar. This route however did not enter any part of the territory of the Deb or the Dharma Rajas[48].

As far as the modes of conveyance were concerned both Pemberton and Griffiths said that ponies and coolies were most commonly used. Yaks or chowrie tailed cattle were also used as conveyance, and Pemberton observed one that had come from the Kham country laden with salt of about a maund weight packed on a saddle[49]. Griffiths observed that chowrie tailed cattle were exported to the plains, and were also used as beasts of burden. Ewes, goats and mares, he said, were also used by the Khampas for carrying goods[50]. Mules, sheep and goats, were used by the Bhutanese in the carriage of their produce, noted Pemberton. Salt was the article generally placed upon them carefully sewn up in small canvas bags which were slung over the backs of the animals[51]. Besides these beasts of burden, men carrying loads on their backs had also been observed by both Pemberton and Griffiths.

According to Pemberton the manufactures of Bhutan consisted mostly of the coarsest description of dark coloured blankets. The blankets which were exported to Bengal were however entirely brought from Tibet. Besides blankets, other manufactures of Bhutan included coarse cotton cloths, small circular bowls made of wood, Daos or straight swords about three feet in length, spears and arrow heads made from iron procured from the hills near Tazgong. Paper was another important article of manufacture. It was made from a plant the botanical name of which was 'Daphne pappyfera'. This plant was extremely tough and not liable to the ravages of insects. Pemberton thought that this paper, if made more extensively, could become an important article of export, but at that time, that is in 1837-38, it was hardly more than sufficient for the very limited demand at home and rarely found its way to the plains. Leather was also imperfectly tanned from the hide of the buffalo or the bullock, and principally used as soles for snow boots. Another softer variety made from goat and sheep skin was principally used as in making small leather pouches. As far as pottery was concerned, it was confined almost entirely to the manufacture of cooking utensils[52].

Griffiths however, was not very enthusiastic about the manufactures of Bhutan. Tashi Yangtsi was said to be famous for its copper cauldrons, but Griffiths did not see

anything indicating the existence of manufactures there excepting for a small village which he said looked like the 'habitation of charcoal burners'. The only thing of any account, noted Griffiths, was clay that was available in considerable quantities in Punakha and the pottery thus manufactured was primarily used by the inhabitants[53]. Of their other manufacturing skills Griffiths saw few or no instances. All the woollen cloths of ordinary quality were imported from Bengal or Tibet, their own manufactures being confined to the production of coarse often striped blankets, which were scarcely a foot wide. He observed that the Bhutanese made very little cotton cloth, and whatever cloth was manufactured was confined to the villages near the plains, and the article was of poor and coarse quality. The silks and other fine apparel of the Bhutanese were imported from China. The superior variety of utensils used by them were also of foreign manufacture, principally Tibetan. Griffiths however has corroborated Pemberton by saying that paper was made in some quantity[54]. Finally he concluded by saying that the Bhutanese manufactures were so little that not much was to be expected in the way of commerce, and this would continue to be the case so "long as Bhutan derived everything from the plains and made no returns whatever"[55]. It would however be wrong to say that Bhutan made no returns to the plains. Even though the trade had dwindled to some

extent, when Pemberton and Griffiths reached Bhutan, certain items such as cowtails, lac, wax, madder etc. were certainly being brought down to the plains in fairly substantial quantities.

According to Pemberton and Griffiths, the agriculture of Bhutan had been eulogised by Captain Turner when in fact a very large portion of the supplies were derived from the plains. Rice, wheat, barley, millet, maize, buckwheat, pea etc. however were grown, said Griffiths. But, very few turnips had been seen by Griffiths, and the Bhutanese were unaware of the value of the potatoe. This again went to prove the futility of the experiment made by Bogle way back in 1774. Cotton plants were very few since the population mostly were woollen clothes, and whatever cotton was required, was met with the supply from the plains. A few solitary specimen of sugar cane occured in the villages, wrote Griffiths. The cane itself was imported from the plains, as well as gur or molasses. Tobacco was another commodity obtained from the plains[56]. The most common dye in Bhutan was Manjeet furnished by the plant Manjistha (the botanical name of which has been given as Rubia Cordifolia). Griffiths observed that as the supply from the jungles were plentiful no attempts were made to cultivate it, and it formed one of the articles of export from the country and was generally exchanged for dry fish[57].

The main centres of commercial transactions between India and Bhutan were Rangpur and Titalya in Bengal, and Hajo in Assam. It may be remembered that the Rangpur fair had already been disbanded in 1832, when during the Governor Generalship of William Bentick, all privileges extended to the merchants at Rangpur and Dinajpur were discontinued to effect economy in administration. After the abolition of the Rangpur fair, A.C.Campbell, who was the superintendent of Darjeeling at that time, set up the Titalya fair. The fair at Titalya was great success while under Campbell's control.

Besides Rangpur and Titalya, another important commercial fair was held at Hajo in Assam, where the principal traders were merchants from Kham, a region in the south eastern portion of Tibet. Pemberton mentioned seeing several parties of 'Kampas', as he called them, on their way to Hajo. The parties were accompanied by some very beautiful asses, almost all of which were laden with salt. At Hajo there was an image (Muha Moonee) in a temple where the Khampas offered worship. Presents were made to the priests attached to the temple, and the Khampas worshipped and bartered with equal zeal. The goods the Khampas brought down consisted principally of red blankets, musk, gold dust, silver, rock salt, chowries, and a few coarse chinese silks, manjeet and bees wax. These they exchanged for lac, raw or manufactured

silks, Assam cotton cloth, dried fish, and tobacco. They returned homewards during the months of February and March, taking care to leave the plains before the hot weather or the rains set in[58]. The fair at Hajo has also been described at some length by Griffiths. Referring to it as 'Hazoo', Griffiths described it as a picturesque plain, with a temple which was considered very sacred to the Bhutanese and the Khampas. Griffiths has supported Pemberton by saying that the pilgrimage which the Bhutanese and the Khampas made annually to this place was connected more with trade than with religion[59].

Both Pemberton and Griffiths testify to the fact that at the time of their visit Bhutan's commerce with India had considerably lessened, as compared with earlier times. Even though the Rangpur fair was officially closed at the time of Pemberton's visit, the caravans nevertheless still conveyed annually to Rangpur with goods of a very limited variety. N. Smith, who was the collector of Rangpur at that time, reported that the caravans from Bhutan generally arrived at Rangpur in February and March and returned to their country in Many and June. With the assistance provided by Smith, Pemberton formed a comprehensive idea of the items of Indo-Bhutanese export and import together with their corresponding volume and value (see Table 1).

Table 1

Indo-Bhutan Trade: 1837-38

Imports to India from Bhutan			Exports from India to Bhutan		
Name of articles	Quantity	Value in Rupees	Name of articles	Quantity	Value in Rupees
Debang (China Silk)	1 piece	50	Broad cloth	15 pieces	1,115
Blankets	300 nos.	600	Indigo	10 maunds	1,000
Hill Ponies	100 "	3,500	Nukher	1½ "	120
Cow Tails	4 maunds	160	Camphor	1½ "	40
Wax	30 "	1,000	Sugar	10 "	80
Walnuts	50,000 "	125	Copper	10 "	400
Musk	50 "	100	Goat skin etc.	1000 "	500
Lac	10 "	100	Endy cloth	50 "	200
Madder (or, Manjeet)	500 "	1,500	Coarse Endy	50 "	100
Silver	3 seers	240	Googool	10 "	100
			Sandal wood	10 "	100
			Country gum powder	2 "	20
			Dried Fish	10 "	50
			Tobacco	15 "	100
			Cloves	20 seers	30
			Nutmeg	20 "	100
			Cardamum	20 "	100
Total value		7,375	Total value		4,150

Note : One maund = 37 Kilogram
One seer = .94 Kilogram

Source : 'Report on Bootan' by Capt. R.B.Pemberton, in Political Missions to Bootan, New Delhi, 1972, p.225.

Since no earlier tables of this kind are available a comparison is not possible. However, Pemberton said that the whole foreign trade of Bhutan, which was almost entirely confined to Tibet on one side and Bengal and Assam on the other, could then (i.e. in 1837-38) hardly amount to fifty thousand rupees per annum, although at one time it was estimated at two lakhs for Assam alone[50]. Griffiths also felt that throughout the country there was but little evidence of frequency of intercourse. The Deb Raja was stated to be the principal merchant but Griffiths had met on his way only two coolies laden with the Deb Raja's merchandise.

End of the Era of Peaceful Negotiations

Pemberton's mission withdrew from Bhutan on 9 May 1838. As far as the objects of the mission were concerned, Pemberton failed to achieve them. After much tedious negotiations and discussions with the Deb Raja and his officers, a treaty was ultimately drawn up on April 25 1836 (See appendix IV). The Bhutanese authorities, however, ultimately decided to reject the agreement. Pemberton attributed this failure to the weak and vascillating Deb Raja, and observed that the real power was concentrated in the hands of the Paro and the Tongsa Ponlobs.

Briefly, the elaborate terms of the treaty drawn up by Pemberton included an agreement between the two governments for the extradition of criminals, a free and unrestricted intercourse of the subjects of the two countries, and the settlement of the arrears of tribute and its payment in cash. Article seven of the proposed treaty stipulated, "In the event of any Duar falling into arrears to the extent of one years' tribute, the British government shall be at liberty to take possession of and continue to hold such Duar, until the balance has been fully realised"[61]. Such peremptory terms were obviously not acceptable to the Bhutanese, and neither were they prepared to enter into an unrestricted commercial intercourse on the terms proposed. Pemberton had further insisted on the payment of the tribute in Narayani rupees, whereas the Bhutanese wanted to pay the tribute in Deba rupees, a local Bhutanese currency. The Bhutanese authorities stated that they would not be able to pay in Narayani rupees because the latter was not available in Bhutan[62].

Besides, there was very little that Pemberton could do to relax the strong hold that the Chinese had upon Tibetan and Bhutanese trade. He felt that as long as Chinese policy and influence continued to reign paramount in either country, there was little hope either of any relaxation in the jealous restrictions imposed upon this trade, or of the admission of British merchants to Bhutan and Tibet[63]. In utter despair

at the failure of his mission Pemberton wrote, 'A rigid policy under such circumstances would justify the immediate permanent resumption of all Duars, both in Bengal and Assam now held by Bhutan'. The Duars he observed, formed the most valuable portion of the Bhutanese territory supplying almost every article of consumption or luxury to the inhabitants of the hills. Their principal trade was also with the Duars and depriving them of these duars would cause their economy considerable harm. This policy would therefore exclude the Bhutanese altogether from their possession and would sever one of the strongest ties by which they might then be constrained[64].

Thus ended the mission of Pemberton. Though he could not succeed in concluding a successful negotiation with the Bhutanese, he made up for it somewhat by the exhaustive and detailed account which he gave of Bhutan on his return to India. Pemberton's failure to sign a treaty with Bhutan gave an indication of the rapidly deteriorating state of affairs between the two countries. With him ended the era of negotiations, heralding in its wake more hostile confrontations until the final showdown in 1865.

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