

CHAPTER VII

The Fulfilment of Commercial Diplomacy, 1885-1907

Ugyen Wangchuk, unlike his father Jigme Singye, was keen to develop his country's relations with the British along with strengthening his position within the country itself. As a result of the diplomatic overtures of Ugyen Wangchuk the relations with India improved. British India, on her part, still hoped to control the commercial strings of Tibet, and looked towards Bhutan as an useful ally in the fulfilment of this dream. The support of the Bhutanese was indeed essential for the British to reach a commercial agreement with Tibet, since the Tibetans were very much opposed to British commercial ventures into their country.

Ugyen Wangchuk became the defacto ruler, and realised even during the tenure of his Tongsa Ponlobship that Bhutan's future lay in stabilising her internal situation. In order to do this, he felt that the central government must be strengthened. He also concluded that, to establish supreme authority within his country, he must have a close association with his neighbours. Though both China and Tibet were interested in maintaining an intimate relation with Bhutan, Ugyen Wangchuk realised that none of them could stand up to British India, and hence his decision to lend support to the British, as against the Tibetans and the Chinese.

Tibetan Hostility Towards British Commercial Expansion

The Chinese officials were always anxious to exercise any kind of control over the Himalayan region, and therefore they were on the lookout for any incident that would provide them with a pretext for intervention. One opportunity had presented itself in 1885 when Gawa Zangpo, the Deb Raja who had been deposed by Ugyen Wangchuk, appealed to the Chinese and Tibetan officials against the injustice done to him. The Tibetan and Chinese officials responded to his appeal and a Chinese Phopen (a Commissioner) and a Tibetan Saphe (a Governor) arrived at Phari in connection with this matter. The Maharaja of Sikkim was also present there, and it was

decided to stop the Tibetan trade with India till the Bhutanese matters were settled. The traders were not to be harmed in any way and were told that they would be allowed to proceed once again as soon as matters with Bhutan were satisfactorily solved¹. However, the situation in Bhutan did not change, Gawa Zangpo was not reinstated, and Ugyen Wangchuk decided not to comply with the desires of his adversaries. Though relations between India and Tibet were not improved to any extent by this incident, nevertheless the British became more sure of Bhutanese inclination towards them. They felt that they could rely on Bhutanese co-operation in the execution of their policy towards Tibet and China.

Colman Macaulay, Financial Secretary to the Government of Bengal, greatly elated by the prospect of a revival of the Tibetan policy of Warren Hastings, suggested the sending of a mission to Tibet. Under the articles of the Chefoo Convention (1876), the British had previously obtained a promise^e of Manchu protection for an exploratory British mission to Tibet. Not to be undone by the indifferent attitude of the Tibetans, once again, the Government of Bengal initiated correspondence with the Panchenⁿ Lama to seek his approval for the same. But the Tibetans appeared to be opposed to the despatch of this mission, even though Macaulay had meanwhile obtained permission from Peking under the

provisions of the Chefoo Convention. Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy, was not very keen about the despatch of a British mission to Lhasa because of its probable uncertain consequences. But, Macaulay succeeded in impressing Lord Randolph Churchill, Secretary to State, with the advantage of such a mission, and it was agreed that a mission should go under the leadership of Macaulay. In early 1886 the mission was ready to proceed, and Macaulay said that he planned to meet the Tibetan, Sikkimese and the Bhutanese authorities at Kophu, a place on the Sikkim side of the Jelep^{La} close to the trijunction of Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet, and to make an understanding with them to secure the peace and tranquility of the region. He pointed out that there was a provision in the Treaty of Sinchula which enabled the British to put an end to a state of affairs which hampered commerce. Macaulay proposed that the ^{G₁} government of India should pay the annual subsidy to the ^{G₁} government of Bhutan not at Buxa but at Kophu, so that the Bhutanese authorities might be induced to maintain peace and security in that region during his visit². But when all arrangements were nearly complete, the Macaulay mission itself was abandoned due to 'international considerations'. In 1885, the British had declared war against Upper Burma and annexed it. Since the Manchus had acquiesced ^{to} in the annexation, the ^{G₁} government of India did not consider it advisable to carry

on any programme that might in the end hurt their susceptibilities, and make them apprehensive of the British policy of expansion.

Whatever be the real reason behind the calling off of the Macaulay mission, one of its effects was that the policy of enlisting Bhutanese cooperation in promoting commerce fell to the ground. Further, the Tibetans apparently took the withdrawal of the British mission as a sign of British and Manchu weakness. In a rare display of 'unprovoked aggression' they crossed Jelp La, the pass from Chumbi into Sikkim, and occupied Lingtu and even threatened that Darjeeling would soon come under their possession. The British government professing its policy of forbearance, requested the Chinese to ask the Tibetans to withdraw. When this produced no effect arms were taken up and, in March 1888, the British attacked and drove the Tibetans out of Lingtu³. The Chinese on their own carried on further negotiations with India, and on 7 March 1890 an Anglo-Chinese Convention was signed at Calcutta to define the status of Sikkim, and provide for trade between India and Tibet. But that was only the first stage. Within another three years, ²regulations concerning trade, communication, and pasturage were signed at Darjeeling on 5 December 1893, whereby the British and Manchu governments agreed to open a trade mart at Yatung on the Tibetan side of the frontier. They also

agreed to post British and Chinese agents there to supervise trade. The Tibetans were ^{Party} ~~partly~~ to neither agreements, and resented the interference into their internal affairs.

This attitude on the part of the Tibetans, and the professed inability of the Chinese to control them, was very much against the principle of the Chefoo Convention which had been concluded in 1876 according to which the Chinese had agreed to provide facilities for, and protect a British mission of exploration across Tibet from India to China or in the reverse direction. In 1890, another step was taken towards the ultimate objective of regularising commercial intercourse with Tibet, and finally, a set of Tibetan Trade Regulations were signed in 1893. The principal aim of the British regarding these trade regulations was to get some mart recognized to which the British Indian merchants could proceed to meet their Tibetan counterparts. There was no attempt made to persuade Tibetans to allow British traders on their territory, as the British knew the futility of such a suggestion. They merely sought to have one single place recognized where Indian and Tibetan traders could meet to do business with each other. The site suggested by the British as a trading mart was Phari at the head of the Chumbi valley, but eventually, after prolonged discussion, Yatung, at the extreme southern end of the Chumbi Valley, was agreed upon⁴.

Though the British felt that Yatung was not a suitable place to offer much attraction for traders, they accepted Yatung as the only alternative to avoid the breakdown of the negotiations. Having made this concession and having refrained from pressing for permission to allow British subjects to travel beyond this, or to buy land and build houses there, the British hoped that the Chinese would meet their wishes regarding the unrestricted admission of Indian tea into Tibet. The pressure from the Darjeeling tea planters had mounted with the years, and tea being a commodity suited for transit across mountains, it seemed natural and reasonable to the Bengal government that it should press for its admission ⁱⁿ to Tibet. The Chinese, however, understandably on their part was unrelenting in giving such a concession to the Indian tea planters⁵.

On 5 December 1893, the Trade Regulations were signed at Darjeeling. The trade mart at Yatung was to 'be open for all British subjects for purposes of trade from the first day of May, 1894', and the government were to be 'free to send officers to reside at Yatung to watch the conditions of British trade'. The British subjects were not at liberty to buy land and build houses for themselves but were to be free 'to rent houses and godowns (stores) for their own accommodation and for the storage of their goods' and 'to sell their goods to whomsoever they please, to purchase

native commodities in kind or in money, to hire transport of any kind, and, in general, to conduct their business without any vexatious restrictions⁵. Goods other than arms, liquors and others specified were to be 'exempt from duty for a period of five years', but after that, if found desirable a tariff might be 'mutually agreed upon and enforced'⁶.

Claude White, the Political Officer in Sikkim, was sent in 1894 to visit Yatung to attend the opening of the mart, and to report on the general situation as regards trade. White gave a very dismal picture of the trading activities at Yatung. The place itself, reported White, had been 'exceedingly badly chosen'. He also condemned the condition of the shops or stores, which he said while being suitable as native shops, were quite inadequate for the storage of goods or for the use of European merchants. Above all, the free trade clauses of the treaty, reported White, were not being carried out, since the Tibetans were charging a tax of ten percent on all goods passing through Phari. The Tibetans were being discourteous and obstructive, and were claiming that this Trade Regulation had been signed by the Chinese and the British, and that they had nothing to do with it⁷. Thus even with the signing of trade regulations with Tibet, no substantial increase in the volume of trade was noticed. The officiating Chief Secretary to the govern-^gment of Bengal in a report about relations with Bhutan and

Sikkim for the year 1895-96 to the Secretary to the ^Government of India, concluded that the results of the convention with China and the trade regulations had so far been entirely disappointing. He further said that it would be impossible ^{to} ~~for~~ foresee when the obstructive attitude of the Tibetans would give place to cordial cooperation with the British authorities⁸. It was claimed that the Tibetans had prevented Yatung from becoming a real trade mart and absolutely no business was ^{being} transacted there. It seemed therefore, that the signing of trade conventions, amounted to wasted labour, since no Tibetan was a party to the agreement, and it seemed as if the farce of the Chefoo was being re-enacted on a larger scale.

Unsteady Progress in Bhutanese Trade

Meanwhile, with no headway being made in commercial ties with Tibet, the Bhutan authorities too on their part put obstacles in the way of a recommencement of free trade with India. This was a blatant violation of the treaty of Sinchula, which had been a dead letter so far as the goods transported from India into Bhutan were concerned. The traders from India were not usually allowed to enter Bhutan. It was evident that suspicion of foreigners still continued. This fact together with the unwillingness of the Bhutanese Ponlobs to relinquish

the monopoly of Bhutan's foreign trade as also the internal disturbances in Bhutan were responsible for the slow recovery in trade. In his Administration Report for 1885-1886, the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri made the following remarks on the subject - "It may be noted that the trade with Bhutan has suffered owing to the late commotions in that state but with the establishment of a settled and peaceful government a revival of trade may be hoped for"⁹.

Table 6

Volume of Indo-Bhutan Trade Through the Bengal Frontier :
1885-86 to 1889-90

(in Rs.)

Year	Imports from Bhutan	Exports to Bhutan	Total
1885-86	99,164	1,00,787	1,99,951
1886-87	77,072	1,54,725	2,31,797
1887-88	1,28,913	1,80,677	3,09,590
1888-89	1,48,708	1,53,044	3,01,752
1889-90	1,85,441	1,91,939	3,77,380

Source : Reports on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal Tibet Sikkim and Bhutan for the official years 1885-86 - 1889-90.

It is true that soon after Ugyen Wangchuk established himself at the helm of affairs, stability returned considerably, one effect of which was indicated in the external trade. Though the fluctuations shown in Table 6

are not negligible, ^{nevertheless} the general trend of the traffic is on ~~the traffic is~~ on the increase. Be that as it may, the principle of free trade was not being adhered to by the Bhutanese, and whatever commercial transactions at the fairs and markets were being held were on the Indian side of the border. However, the ^Government of India did not, at that stage, insist on the fulfilment of this article of the treaty. The conciliatory policy of the British paid them rich dividends in the shape of Bhutanese friendship. In 1888 when the conflict took place between the British and the Tibetan governments, the Bhutanese authorities used the occasion to show how greatly they valued British partnership. The Tibetans had solicited Bhutanese help, but they were refused. In fact, a person named Shipanjoo, father of Ugyen Kazi, who was the Trade Agent of Bhutan in Kalimpong, actually warned the Tibetans of the consequences if they did not come to terms with the British¹⁰. This attitude on the part of the Bhutanese was an important step towards a more intimate connection between the two countries. In 1889, Ugyen Wangchuk's nominee Sangay Dorji resigned in his mentor's favour. With the emergence of Ugyen Wangchuk as the all powerful figure in Bhutan an even closer contact was established between him and the British. The Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri in a report to the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division claimed that relations with Bhutan continued on a most satisfactory footing throughout the year 1889. A minor

conflict however arose over border claims. A Bhutanese official visiting the Hope Tea Estate in February 1889, which lay on the border between Bhutan and the western Duars, being much struck with the tea cultivation and the prosperous look of the tea estate, wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling laying claim to the land as being a portion of Bhutan territory¹¹. It may be presumed that the Bhutanese were lured by the prospect of acquiring a valuable item of export like tea, which could bring them rich dividends. However, the inspection of the boundary pillars indicated that the land lay and had always been within the British territory. The British ultimately succeeded in assuring the Bhutan government that such was the case. Apart from this there was no other territorial disputes, and relations with the Bhutan government were on a fairly satisfactory and friendly footing.

In spite of Ugyen Wangchuk professing great friendship with the British, the British themselves were sometimes a little wary of Bhutanese attitude. When permission was refused to Dr. Ehlers, a well known German explorer, to enter Bhutan in 1890, W.J. Cunningham, officiating Secretary to the ^Government of India, described the Bhutanese as 'uncivilised'. According to him, a ^Bmore than usually unsettled state of affairs^J existed in Bhutan at that time, and that the ^Government of India could not undertake to

guarantee the safety of an European travelling in the interior of that country¹². It may be noted that the British had not sent any other mission since the disastrous experiences of Ashley Eden way back in 1864. They were not sure of Bhutanese attitude to an European visiting their country, even twenty five years after the treaty of Sinchula had been signed by both the governments.

Though mutual trust and confidence between the two countries were lacking, apparently however the relations were satisfactory. The payment of subsidy for the year 1890 was executed smoothly. During that year, a fairly large settlement of Bhutanese developed at Chunabhati near to Buxa. Most of these Bhutanese were inhabitants of the old Bhutia Busti which lay just outside the cantonment of Buxa. Their presence in Buxa was said to be useful since these Bhutanese indulged in certain amount of commercial activity and carried on trade with the interior of Bhutan. During the course of the year the Bhutanese traders also attended in a large number ^{of} fairs and markets held in British territories. The _A items they brought down to be exchanged with the products of the plains included ponies, dogs, blankets, musk, skins, Bhutanese knives, etc.¹³.

But, the trade between Bhutan and India began to decline after 1889-90, and this declining trend continued right upto 1897-98, as may be seen from Table 7.

Table 7

Volume of Indo-Bhutan Trade Through The Bengal Frontier :
1889-90 to 1897-98

Year	Imports from Bhutan (in Rs.)	Exports to Bhutan (in Rs.)	Total (in Rs.)
1889-90	1,85,441	1,91,939	3,77,380
1890-91	1,82,659	1,84,612	3,67,271
1891-92	1,84,892	1,34,848	3,19,740
1892-93	1,66,194	1,26,471	2,92,665
1893-94	1,35,735	1,43,241	2,78,976
1894-95	1,50,614	1,38,963	2,89,577
1895-96	1,29,856	1,36,077	2,65,933
1896-97	1,19,713	1,44,471	2,64,184
1897-98	1,08,194	1,37,460	2,45,654

Source : Reports on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan for the years 1889-90 - 1897-98.

In 1890-91, the total value of goods exported to and from Bhutan amounted to Rs. 3,67,271, against Rs. 3,77,380 of the previous year. Decrease was noticed both in the value of the imports from Bhutan as well as in the goods exported to Bhutan. Despite this falling off which was in any case not of very serious proportions, the commercial zeal of the traders were not dampened in any way. This ^{was} indicated by the
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establishment of another fair in 1891, known as the Kalimpong fair, which subsequently became the most popular in the whole of the Darjeeling district. It attracted not only the surrounding villagers, but also traders from Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim as well as a large number of Tibetan traders. These traders brought up ponies, silks and mules for sale. It was reported that silk manufactured by the Bhutanese found a good market in the whole of the Darjeeling district¹⁴.

During the year 1891-92 the decrease in the total value as compared to the previous year was mainly due to a slump in export goods to Bhutan. Imports from Bhutan, however, increased, and this increase was mainly due to the importation of a considerable supply of fresh fruits and vegetables. During the next year, that is for 1892-93, a further and quite considerable decrease was noticed compared to 1891-92. The decrease which occurred this time was greater under imports than under exports. There was an appreciable falling off in the imports of fresh fruits and vegetables which had shown a great increase only the year before. The value of yaktails also decreased, while in the case of raw wool, wax, ponies and mules, and ~~gh~~the figures indicated a satisfactory advance. The export trade was characterised by a fall under piece goods and betelnuts, while woollen and silk goods, and tobacco showed an increase. Trade further declined in 1893-94, with the total value of goods coming down from

2,92,665 in 1892-93 to 2,78,976 during the current year. The decrease during that year was due mainly to a falling off under imports only, while the exports showed an improvement of 13.26 per cent over the figures of 1892-93, owing chiefly to larger despatches of European cotton and woollen piece goods, rice and tobacco. The decrease in the import trade amounted to 18.33 per cent as compared with 1892-93, and was due to a falling off in the supplies of raw wool, fresh fruits and vegetables, and yak tails received from Bhutan. The year 1894-95, however, showed a slight increase in the total value as compared to the previous year. The main increase was under imports, ^{and} the chief articles brought into India ^{while} being woollen manufactures, wax, fresh fruits and vegetables - while there was a heavy decrease under raw wool. As regards exports there was a falling off under tobacco, and European cotton and woollen goods, while the traffic in betelnuts, Indian silk manufactures, and European cotton - both twist and yarn - showed an increase¹⁵.

It may be remembered that Tibet remained practically closed and inaccessible for British Indian trade during this period. The Anglo-Tibetan war in 1888 was undoubtedly a great shock. The Trade Regulations signed in 1893 did not improve the situation to any great extent. One reason for the continuous falling off in trade with Bhutan must have been the closure of Tibet, because a considerable part of

Bhutanese import and export was carried into and from Tibet. The Tibetans were accused of sending back unopened the letters written to them by the British Indian government for a redress of the situation. But, apart from that, some of the blame for this falling off in trade may be attributed to the Bhutanese who were indulging in constant violations of the Sinchula treaty, particularly with regard to free trade, by imposing duties on certain items, and by prohibiting Indian merchants from entering their territory. The total value for 1895-96, came down to 2,65,933 rupees from 2,89,577 rupees of the previous year. The decrease in the trade was almost entirely in imports and was chiefly due to a falling off in the supplies of raw wool. In the export trade the largest decreases were under European woollen fabrics, rice and European cotton piece goods, while the articles which showed the largest increase were Indian silk and cotton piece goods and refined sugar¹⁶.

During 1896-97, there was again a slight decrease in the total value, which came down to 2,64,184 rupees from 2,65,933 of the previous year. The decrease in trade was entirely in imports and was due chiefly to a falling off in the supplies of Indian woollen manufactures and cotton piece goods; there was in fact no imports ^{of} raw wool during the year, while the articles which showed an improvement were musk, and ponies and mules. The Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri had stated

that the decrease under wool, raw as well as manufactured, cotton piece goods and yak tails was due to a fall in the demand for those articles in the plains. Regarding exports which by itself had risen to 1,44,471 from 1,36,077 rupees the Deputy Commissioner had opined that "The increase in traffic may be attributed to the growing appreciation of the articles amongst the Bhutias, to the facilities offered to them for obtaining their supplies at the foot of the hills by establishing markets, and at the fairs opened every year by government at Falakata and Alipur, and also to the fact that the articles are sold at higher rate to the Bhutias than to the local purchasers". In the export trade certain items had also lost their values, the largest decreases being under European cotton piece goods and twist and yarn. This decrease may be attributed to the small handloom manufacture of coarse cloth by the Bhutanese women which probably cost less than the European manufactured twist and yarn¹⁷.

A minor dispute was reported at the end of 1897 between the Bhutanese and the Indian police at the Chamurchi Bazar in Jalpaiguri district in which a Bhutanese was killed. Apart from this there were no other disturbances. The reports of 1898-99 indicate that the influence of the Tongsa Ponlob, Ugyen Wangchuk, continued to be paramount but it was exercised in a friendly spirit towards the British government¹⁸. During 1897-98 however the trade fell off further,

to 2,45,654 from Rs. 2,64,184 of the previous year. Decreases were noticed both in the imports as well as in the exports. As in 1896-97, there was no import of raw wool during the next year as well, and other decreases were noticed in wax, musk, horses, ponies and mules. The Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri stated that the general decrease in the value of imports was due to the falling off in the demand consequent on the scarcity during the year under report. In exports there was a decline under the items of cotton and woollen piece goods of European manufacture, betelnuts, unrefined sugar and Indian silk manufactures. The decrease under the above heads was attributed to the fact that traffic from Calcutta to Torsa was entirely stopped from June to September in 1897 owing to damage caused to the railway line by earthquake, while the roads from Jalpaiguri to Buxa via Alipurduar and from Falakata to Hantupara were also rendered unfit for traffic for nearly six months during the year¹⁹.

Trouble Over Transactions In Assam Borders

In 1891 there was a recurrence of raids by the Bhutanese on the Assamese ^aryots. There were also rumours that the ^eBhutanese were threatening to invade into British territory. These rumours were brought down by traders coming from the interior of the country to Buxa, and was to the effect that

the Tongsa Ponlob, while on a visit to Tibet in 1890, had been persuaded by the Tibetans to plan an incursion on British territory²⁰. It cannot be definitely ascertained whether there was an element of truth in these rumours since the invasion never took place, but certainly there was an element of unrest. Reports, however, later confirmed that there were no gathering of armed men as such at Phari, as had been previously rumoured, neither had any one heard of any warlike preparations or intrigues in Bhutan. It was further clarified that what actually happened was that about five or six hundred coolies had collected at Phari by the order of the Phari Dzongpon, and had commenced to cut timber and clear the ground for the purpose of building a trade mart or a custom station²¹. Major Woodhouse, Commanding Officer at Buxa, greatly deplored the want of some system of intelligence in Bhutan, and said that nothing was being done to enable the British officials on the frontier to keep in touch with what was going on in the interior. He further asserted that all these were having an adverse effect on trade between the plains and the hills with fewer men coming each year to Buxa from the interior²².

The situation was not helped in any way by the Bhutanese raids which occurred again on the hapless Assamese ^aryots in 1891. Exactions on these ^aryots by the Bhutanese were reported to have been going on for some years past, but, during 1891,

they exceeded anything known before. The Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam stated that from the enquires which the Chief Commissioner of Assam had made at Guwahati, he was convinced that this was not a case of simple dispute between the Bhutanese and the villagers of Kamrup, regarding the rate at which the goods brought down by the Bhutanese for sale were to be bartered for the produce offered by the villagers. Neither had this case anything to do with the claim of the Bhutanese to duties on forest produce cut by the Kamrup villagers in the forests of Bhutan. According to the Commissioner of Assam the facts simply were that in the past years the Bhutanese had found themselves stronger than the villagers with whom they professed to trade, and had every year taken more and more advantage of the submission of the simple Assamese to their extortionate demands, till matters reached such a height that it was necessary to take steps to redress the situation.²³

The Bhutanese however, gave a completely different picture of the incidents, and said that they were simply trading with the Assamese. A detailed description of this so called trade had been given by Laghanu Ram ^{Das} ~~Das~~, Supervisor and Qanungo of the villages situated on the north of the Kamrup district, where these disturbances were taking place. The Bhutanese, reported the Qanungo, visited

the houses of the people in the mouza of Bijni and offered them a few chillies. When their offer was not accepted, the Bhutanese left the chillies at the doorway, and then exacted about seven dones, that is, about thirty five seers of mustard seeds. The villagers who refused to make any contribution were made to submit by means of threats. The Bhutanese also made the people believe that the Mouza would from that year come under the possession of Bhutan. In all, seeds worth about five hundred rupees were taken away from the ryōts^a. It was also stated that in cases where there was no sufficient paddy to satisfy the demands, money, pigs and cattle were taken. The Qanungo was of the opinion that these Bhutanese would come again and repeat their oppressive practises in the name of 'trade'. He further reported that if steps were not taken to remedy this evil, the oppression would become intolerable for the ryōts^a, forcing them to migrate in the event of which the government revenue would suffer²⁴.

Both the governments of Assam and Bengal were perturbed at this state of affairs. It was decided that punitive measures were to be taken to prevent recurrence of such incidents in the future, and compensation were to be given to the villagers. The Chief Commissioner of Assam was asked to draw the Deb Raja's attention to articles IV and V of the treaty of Sinchula, under which the British government

would be justified in suspending the payment of the subsidy either in whole or in part in the event of the failure of the Bhutan government to check aggressions into the British frontier. The non-payment of the subsidy, or at least a threat of non-payment was considered to be a very effective instrument by the British for subduing the Bhutanese. Ultimately, however, the payment of subsidy was not stopped because of the Raja's friendly letter dated 22 October 1891. This letter made the ^Government of Bengal feel confident that the Raja would make ample redress for any fault that may be proved to have been committed by his people²⁵. But, as a preventive against the occurrence of such events in future, it was decided to establish several police frontiers in the villages where the outrages had been reported²⁶. It was hoped that the depredations complained of by the inhabitants would not be again attempted if there were some police on the spot.

Contrary to the belief of the British Indian government, that Bhutanese raids into the Assam territory would stop, there were again reports of similar outrages committed by the Bhutanese in certain villages in the Kamrup district, at the beginning of January, 1892. There were of course no reports of any violence. Under the pretence of their so called trade the Bhutanese, who claimed that they came from the village of Nurpu, put packets of chillies in the hands

of the villagers or put them in their houses, and asked for dhan or unhusked paddy. None of the villagers had the courage to refuse and the Bhutanese were reported to have taken away about half to three fourth maunds of rice from each house, there being about three hundred houses in all²⁷. This peculiar system of trade and blackmail by the Bhutanese could only be checked, the British felt, by building more military outposts near the villages and deducting the sum from the annual subsidy.

After considerable discussions it was ultimately decided to deduct a certain sum from the subsidy paid to the Bhutanese government in 1892 for the maintenance of an outpost at Kakolabari. Upon the receipt of this depleted subsidy, the Deb Raja²⁸ of Bhutan wrote to the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri pleading that an injustice had been done to the Bhutanese. He claimed that his subjects had 'begged' rice and paddy from the Assamese villagers according to a prevalent and ancient custom, and that there had been no question of any extortion whatsoever. On the contrary it had been reported to him, claimed the Deb, that the ryots^a themselves had assaulted the Bhutanese, two of whom had died in the beatings²⁹. The Bengal government however remained firm in their resolve to deduct the stipulated amount for the maintenance of an outpost. The Commissioner of the Rajshahi

Division wrote back to the Deb Raja saying that it had been found necessary to establish an outpost to protect the Kamrup frontier from further aggression. He further proclaimed that though he regretted it, there was no way that the money could be refunded³⁰.

The deduction in the payment of the annual subsidy to Bhutan, made the Deb Raja realise that the British would continue in this policy unless some steps were taken to prevent these exaction. Thus, once again proclaiming that these acts were nothing more than a continuation of an old custom of bartering and begging paddy, he declared that an order should be issued to the Bhutanese subjects barring them from engaging in unlawful or forced barter in which both the parties did not agree to perfectly³¹. This was acceptable to the British, and the Deputy Commissioner of Assam wrote to the Deb Raja that the rates of such barter would be fixed between the Commissioner and the Bhutanese deputies at the Dewangiri fair which was being held regularly every year³².

The Bengal government however, did not wish to make the subject of the Assam raids and subsequent deduction of subsidy, as an issue for hostility between the two countries. As a gesture of goodwill and friendship, it was decided by the British Indian government in 1894, to present a M.H.Rifle

with a bayonet and scabbard together with fifty rounds of ammunition to the Tongsa Ponlob³³. The presentation of this rifle indicated that the overall relations between the two countries were not only on satisfactory level, but also that the British had reposed an exceptionally good faith upon the ruler of Tongsa.

Opening Tibet With the Aid of Bhutan

At the close of the 19th century Bhutan had a relatively stronger and a more stable government than what she had for a long time. India too had a new Viceroy, Lord Curzon, whose appointment was announced in the fall of 1898, and who assumed his Viceroyalty in January 1899. The British in India were becoming increasingly frustrated at their failure to break past the barrier of defence created by the Tibetans and open up their country. The protocol of the Anglo-Chinese Convention signed in 1890 had provided various provisions for trading facilities, and so did the decision to open up the trading mart at Yatung in 1894. However, all these proved futile since the privileges were entered upon on paper only, having little value in real life. The Tibetans were making themselves as inaccessible as possible, and their remote geographical location helped them in maintaining their aloofness.

Lord Curzon had commenced in the autumn of 1899 a series of attempts to open up direct communication with the Tibetans. Ugyen Kazi, who was the personal agent of Ugyen Wangchuk and was residing in Kalimpong, was commissioned by the Viceroy to write a letter on his own behalf to the Dalai Lama, suggesting in general terms that a high Tibetan official should be sent to India to discuss the frontier and trade questions. This letter met with an unfavourable response. Later another letter was sent through Captain Kennion, the Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir, but this was not delivered to the authorities at Lhasa. Finally, Ugyen Kazi was again entrusted with yet another letter which he himself was to deliver to the Dalai Lama at Lhasa, but in August 1901, the letter was referred back with the seal intact³⁴. The repeated failure of all these attempts ultimately led the British to shelve the policy of trifling about on the frontier with petty Chinese or Tibetan officials, and they proposed to take some definite steps to enter into a direct contact with the Dalai Lama himself.

When the Viceroy was thus trying to enter into some negotiations with Tibet, a new dimension was brought into the whole aspect of Indo-Tibetan relations by the news that the Dalai Lama was sending an envoy to Russia, and diplomatic negotiations were to be entered into with that country. The Russians themselves strove to assure the British that 'the

mission was chiefly concerned with matters of religion and had no political diplomatic objects in character³⁵. But the fact that the Dalai Lama, who had only so recently refused to receive the communications of the Viceroy of India, was publicly sending a mission to Russia, could not but give rise to apprehensions in the minds of the Indian government as to the object and result of any negotiation that might take place. This incident took place in the latter part of 1901.

" On 2 August 1902, another new factor was introduced into this already disturbing situation, by the rumour that China was making a secret agreement with Russia regarding Tibet. The rumour was strongly denied by the Chinese who declared that such an arrangement had never even formed a subject of discussion between the Chinese and the Russian governments. But the seeds of suspicion had been sown in the Indian minds, and it is doubtful if these suspicions did not rest on some amount of authenticity. Russia had been interested in Tibet for quite some time, and on her part had been sending semi-official, semi-scientific expeditions into that country. These had always reported on the richness of Tibet in regard to gold and the desirability of getting concessions there. The British in India felt that, even if it might be accepted that the mission sent by the Dalai Lama was essentially of a religious character, it

would not take much time for a religious understanding to be converted into a political one. To have Tibet entering into an agreement with Russia, was not at all a comfortable proposition for India. It must be remembered that in 1902, Russia was still on the crest of a great advancing wave of expansion. She had already spread over Manchuria, extended her strong hold in western Turkestan, and annexed the Pamirs. Therefore, it seemed to be only a matter of time before she would absorb Chinese Turkestan and Mongolia³⁶. Even though it seemed impossible that Russia would invade India through Tibet, the mere prospect of having Russia established in Lhasa, while the British themselves were unrepresented there, was enough to make the British recommend prompt action to countermand this menace.

With the double objective of entering into a direct communication with the higher authorities there as well as preventing the Russians from coming into closer contact with Tibet, it was proposed in the very important despatch of 8 January 1903, to send a mission with an armed escort to Lhasa with a view to settle future relations especially with regard to the trade regulations³⁷. It was to be made very clear to the Chinese and Tibetans, emphasized the ^Government of India, that this mission was of an exclusively commercial character, and that there was no intention of declaring a protectorate or permanently occupying any portion of Tibet³⁸.

The Russians were accordingly informed of this forthcoming mission to Tibet, and they on their part once again disclaimed all rumours regarding any convention about Tibet either with China, or with Tibet herself, or with any one else for that matter. In spite of these very definite assurance from Russia, the British decided to go on furthering their plans for the proposed mission. Though the main objective was indeed to secure the trading rights and privileges with Tibet, yet the underlying fear of Russian influence exerting itself in Lhasa was still existent in the British minds and they were determined to regularise relations with Tibet before it was too late.

The stage was therefore all set for the deputation of yet another mission to Tibet through Bhutan. The Viceroy appointed Major Younghusband as the Commissioner and head of the mission, which finally began its journey on 5 December, 1903, from Darjeeling. The attitude of the Bhutanese towards this mission was of the greatest importance, as the line of communications up the Chumbi valley ran through difficult country within a few miles of the frontier of Bhutan. At this crucial point of time, Ugyen Wangchuk once again gave another proof of his able statesmanship, and himself accompanied Younghusband to Lhasa. Being a devout Buddhist, he was in a position to visit the high Tibetan officers, and

personally explain the desires and objectives of the British. This attitude on the part of the Tongsa Ponlob further helped to cement the newly developing friendship between the two countries. The Tongsa Ponlob had already been informally told by Younghusband as to what was to be expected of the Tibetans. Ugyen Wangchuk acted as a mediator with great efficiency during the whole of this expedition, expounding the British terms of settlement, and generally 'preparing' the Tibetan delegates in behind the scene encounters, and before their meetings with Younghusband in stately durbars³⁹.

Immediately before the Younghusband mission took off, another interesting development had taken place, which may be most appropriate to recollect here. The incident reflects, above all, the close collaboration of Bhutan in any British endeavour to reach the further north.

It was felt by the British Government that one of the reasons for the inaccessibility of Tibet was the absence of a good road from India. It was therefore decided to offer the Bhutanese certain concessions if they agreed to the construction of a road through their country upto Tibet.

The Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division was to meet the Tongsa Ponlob in November 1903. It was decided that, during his meeting, he would offer the Tongsa Ponlob, Ugyen Wangchuk, an increase of 25,000 rupees in the annual subsidy on condition that a road be made through the Dichu or Amochu Valley

and be maintained by the Bhutanese. It was also suggested that the interest and cooperation of the Bhutanese authorities in the construction of the road could be stimulated by an offer to allow them to levy transit duties on the proposed road at rates to be approved by the British government. Macpherson, official Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, while making the above mentioned suggestion, observed that though these conditions would be against Article 9 of the Sinchula treaty, it would probably in any case make little difference since this particular article had been a 'dead letter', from its very inception. In these circumstances, it was felt that it would be better to have a fixed scale of duties on the new trade route as against a nominal maintenance of Article 9 of the treaty⁴⁰.

Lord Curzon however, did not approve the proposal of allowing the Bhutanese to levy duties on the trade route to Tibet, which he said, besides being contrary to the treaty would also be detrimental to the very purpose for which the British were thinking of entering Tibet. He was also opposed to an increase in the annual subsidy to Bhutan which was to be offered if the Bhutanese cooperated in the construction of the road⁴¹. In view of Curzon's opposition to increased payment to the Bhutanese, the Chief Commissioner of Assam suggested that as a last resort the Bhutan government might be offered a portion of the territory taken from them after

the Duar War of 1865 if other inducements held out by the Bengal Government towards the securing of this important object failed. This territory consisted of a narrow strip of land in the Kamrup district between the Manas and the Darrang rivers. This bit of land had little value for Assam, consisting as it did mainly of forest land, while its acquisition would be greatly valued by the Bhutanese. The British were, however, careful to keep any villages out of the territory to be assigned to Bhutan for they would on no condition hand over any British subject to Bhutanese authority⁴².

Accordingly negotiations were entered into with the Bhutanese with a view to enlist their cooperation in the building of the road. The British side was represented by Marindin, the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division, and by Walsh, assistant to the British Commissioner for Tibet. Walsh succeeded in impressing upon the Bhutanese that, in order to benefit trade between the two countries of Tibet and India, it was desirable to obtain an easier route through Bhutan by following the course of the Di Chu or the Amo Chu. It was further pointed out by Walsh that the construction of either of these roads would be of great advantage to the Bhutanese as it would give them an easier access for trade with the plains of India. The Bhutanese on their part were quite willing to cooperate⁴³. Accordingly, an official

was sent with a small escort to Bhutan in order to explore routes in the Amo Chu and Di Chu valleys. By 16 February 1904, the exploration of routes was completed. The Amo Chu valley was full of jungles and sparsely populated whereas the Di Chu valley was open and well populated. On 6 March 1904, the ^Government of Bhutan sent a permit to Walsh through the Bhutanese envoy to enable him to make the survey and build a road. The ^Government of Bengal strongly advised postponement of the work on the road during rains⁴⁴. But, all these preparations proved futile, because, in September 1904 when the rains had ceased, the construction of this road was also postponed indefinitely on the ground of its high cost.

What exactly was the reason for the abandonment of the project, apart from what is available on records, cannot be easily known at this distance. But, one thing needs to be mentioned. The road to Tibet via Bhutan was conceived immediately prior to the departure of the Younghusband mission; and, the plan was given up a year later synchronising with the achievements of the same.

The terms of the draft treaty which Younghusband was supposed to present to the authorities in Lhasa contained the following provisions (The whole draft of the treaty is given in Appendix VI). First, trade marts were to be established at Gyantse, and Gartok, in addition to Yatung,

and a British agent was to have right of access to the Gyantse mart; secondly, an indemnity was also to be demanded from the Tibetans, though the sum to be demanded was not to exceed an amount which it was believed would be within the power of the Tibetans to pay. Provision was also made allowing the Tibetans to pay the money in instalments if necessary, spread over a period of three years; thirdly, the Chumbi valley was to be occupied as security for the indemnity, and for the fulfilment of the conditions regarding the trade marts; fourthly, the boundary laid down in the Convention of 1890 was to be recognized, fifthly, the two Sikkim-British subjects who had been captured in 1903 were to be released; and, finally, fortifications were to be demolished⁴⁵.

It goes without saying that the consent of the Tibetans in accepting the terms of the draft treaty was not achieved very easily. The Dalai Lama ultimately fled from his country after warning his countrymen against making any negotiations with the British. The Tibetans on their part made considerable protestations against certain clauses, particularly against the payment of indemnity. Making 'a last desperate though vain bid against the sacrilege involved'⁴⁶ the convention was ultimately signed and sealed on 7 September 1904, in the audience hall of the golden Potala at Lhasa. The great ceremony tailed off with a speech by Younghusband in which he reminded the Tibetans that most of their misfortunes had

been due to disrespect which they had shown to the British representatives. He exhorted them by saying "You will find us equally good friends if you keep the present treaty and show civility" -- a promise that was for many a year made good and honoured by both sides⁴⁷.

The thing was thus done, and the mission achieved what it had set out to do. As far as the trade regulations were concerned, the Tibetans accepted them without much hesitation. It was only in the matter of payment of indemnity that certain amount of reservation was shown by them. Younghusband, showing a great deal of discretion on the subject of establishing trading marts at Gyantse and Gartok, went one step further and asked permission for the British agent at Gyantse to proceed to Lhasa to discuss matters with the Tibetan officials. Younghusband had done this on his own judgement after receiving orders from the Indian government desisting him from pressing this clause any further. He moreover found that the Tibetans raised no special objection to this particular clause, provided the trade agent went to Lhasa only on commercial business, and only after he had found it impossible to get this commercial business disposed of by correspondence, or by personal conference, with the Tibetan agent at Gyantse. Therefore, Younghusband felt that there would be no objection to exacting such an agreement from the Tibetans, and he had it drawn up separately. It ran as follows - "The Government

of Tibet agrees to permit the British agent, who will reside at Gyantse to watch the conditions of the British trade, to visit Lhasa, when it is necessary, to consult with high Chinese and Tibetan officials on such commercial matters of importance as he has found impossible to settle at Gyantse by correspondence or by personal conference with the Tibetan agent"⁴⁸.

Thus ended the Younghusband mission. Beside entering into agreements with Tibet, one very important result of the mission was that friendship with Bhutan was established on a firmer basis. The service rendered by Ugyen Wangchuk to the mission has already been mentioned above. No doubt the Tongsa Ponlob, by his presence, and by the 'weight' which he carried, helped in executing a smoother exchange of terms and conditions between the British and the Tibetans, than would otherwise have been expected. The British government too were not ungrateful. For 'services rendered', the Ponlob was to receive soon the signal honour of a 'Knight Commander of the Indian Empire'.

The Give and Take of a Growing Trade

It will thus be seen that the Viceroyalty of Curzon was indeed a crucial phase in the history of India's relations

with her northern neighbours. The Tibetan Trade Regulations of 1893 had fallen due for revision in 1898 and little had been done to put them into effect when he arrived. By 1904, the Younghusband mission achieved its goal not only as far as Tibet was concerned, but also helped to project the friendship with Bhutan. The Bhutanese also reciprocated their friendship with India by whatever gestures they could within their means. Exchanges of present were frequent on either side, as an example of which the presentation of a sword and a belt to Walsh, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, by Ugyen Wangchuk, the Tongsa Ponlob, may be cited⁴⁹. On 3 June 1904, when the Younghusband mission was in progress, the gift was handed over to Walsh, who, it may be remembered, was responsible for the successful negotiation of the construction of a road to Tibet via Bhutan, and who was also the Assistant to the Commissioner for Tibet, Younghusband. The gift was subsequently deposited duly at the Toshakhana.

Even in more substantive matters, the period was equally promising. A look at Table 8 will reveal that the volume of trade between Bhutan and India progressed rapidly from 1898-99 to 1905-06, in complete contrast with the situation that prevailed roughly during the previous decade.

Table 8
Volume of Indo-Bhutan Trade Through the Bengal Frontier 1898
-99 to 1905-06 (in Rs.)

Year	Imports from Bhutan	Exports to Bhutan	Total
1898-99	1,05,756	1,47,056	2,52,812
1899-1900	1,23,714	1,47,608	2,71,322
1900-01	2,76,366	1,73,679	4,50,045
1901-02	5,11,675	1,37,485	6,49,160
1902-03	4,16,521	1,16,194	5,32,715
1903-04	7,01,315	1,18,817	8,20,132
1904-05	5,60,144	1,38,306	6,98,450
1905-06	11,11,241	1,54,440	12,65,681

Source : Reports on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Tibet, Sikkim and Bhutan for the years 1898-99 - 1905-06.

During 1902-03, as per the records of registration, the total value of goods went down to Rs. 5,32,715, compared to Rs. 6,49,160 of the previous year. Decrease was noticed both in the imports as well as in the exports category. Walsh, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, stated that whatever exports there had been from Bhutan had consisted in the main of ponies, cattle, beeswax and blankets, while in the imports section the chief items were tobacco, piece goods, copper and German silver. During the next year however, that is during

1903-04, quite a substantial increase was noticed in the value of the goods traded. The total went up to quite a remarkable 8,20,132 rupees against 5,32,715 of the previous year. Increase was noticeable especially in the imports from Bhutan which went up from 4,16,521 in 1902-03 to 7,01,315 the next year. This was entirely due to the increase in the imports of timber, the value of which amounted to Rs. 4,45,609 against Rs. 1,81,000 in the preceding year⁵⁰. Exports to Bhutan also increased though not to a very great degree. One of the reasons for the increase in exports was assigned to the fact that a large number of guns were being manufactured at this time in Bhutan, and the iron for these guns were probably imported by way of Buxa or the Duars⁵¹.

In spite of this quite substantial increase in the volume of trade, frequent violation of the Treaty of Sinchula were also noticed. Evidence showed that faults lay on both sides. In 1903 it was brought to the notice of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, as well as to the ^Government of India that a duty was being levied on rubber imported into Assam from Bhutan. This was contrary to the provisions of Article IX of the treaty of 1865 in which it was provided that no duty should be levied on Bhutanese goods imported into British territories, and vice-versa. Since this duty had been in existence for many years it was presumed that this duty was causing no injury to Bhutan. However, it was considered safe

to ascertain the exact opinion of the ^Government of Bhutan in this matter so as to avoid any possible charge against the Indian government in future, of a breach of faith⁵². The Assam government, in reply to the queries, made an attempt to clarify the reasons for this duty having been imposed. They said that when, with the Chief Commissioner's Notification of 24 September 1892, duty on all foreign rubber imported into the province was imposed, no exception had been made in the case of rubber imported from Bhutan, apparently through an oversight. Moreover since there were no complaints from Bhutan on this issue, this rule had remained unchanged. It was further stated that imports of rubber from Bhutan had amounted to about seventy two maunds annually for the last five years, and the average amount of duty levied on the same was Rs. 995 per year. The Chief Commissioner of Assam concluded his remarks by saying that the Bhutan rubber could be exempted from import duty in accordance with the terms of the Sinchula treaty⁵³.

The Government of India, while agreeing with the Chief Commissioner of Assam, replied that an alternative plan could also be worked out. It was suggested that an annual fixed payment might be granted to Bhutan as a compensation for the levy of import duty on rubber. This payment could be made by an addition to the amount of the subsidy - the addition being a sum of one thousand rupees per annum or a sum in

slightly ⁱⁿ excess of this, which ever would be accepted, by the Bhutanese as being adequate⁵⁴. However, this plan was accepted neither by the Bengal nor by the Assam governments who felt that this would again be a breach of the treaty. Therefore the orders imposing the duties were withdrawn, and attempts were made on the side of the Assam government to adhere as far as possible to the treaty of Sinchula.

This imposition of unauthorised duties on rubber led the Government of Assam to be more careful in future regarding duties on goods brought in from Bhutan. The Chief Commissioner of Assam while soliciting sanction to the issue of a notification under section 37 of the Assam Forest Regulation, regarding the duty on imported forest produce from adjoining areas, made a specific alteration to show that the produce coming from Bhutan was to be exempted from taxation. Previous to the issue of this notification cane was being imported into British territory from the adjoining provinces free of duty. As this led to the loss of revenue the Chief Commissioner of Assam considered it desirable that a duty similar to that levied on imported timber and bamboos should be imposed on canes as well. It was however made clear that canes from Bhutan were to be exempted as per the clauses of the treaty of Sinchula⁵⁵, so that unwanted controversy as in the case of rubber was not repeated.

In 1906, a certain amount of hope was entertained, by the discovery of coal in Dewangiri, that a valuable mineral might be introduced as an important export item from Bhutan. It was reported by G.E. Pilgrim of the Geological survey Department that ~~that~~ this deposit of coal contained a very high as^h content and was, therefore not considered to be of a very good quality. The cost^t of mining this coal, predicted Pilgrim, would also be very high, and this would prevent it from successfully competing with the Upper Assam coal, which cost about Rs. 12 to Rs. 20 a ton. If the Bhutanese could find it possible to supply the coal below the price mentioned above they would have no difficulty in competing with the Upper Assam coal. But, since this would be difficult, Pilgrim concluded by saying that he himself was disinclined to recommend any capital being sunk in prospecting operations, which would certainly be expensive and would also probably be useless⁵⁶. Thus any new hopes which might have arisen with the founding of this coal site was lost.

The reports of the relations between Bhutan and India for the year ending 1906-07 showed that a great deal of unlicensed ~~traffic in~~ forest produce were being brought into India from the Bhutan forests. The Tongsa Ponlob had, in January 1906, asked Claude White to arrest persons engaged in the smuggling of forest produce such as timber, lac, wax, bamboo and cane, elephant tusks, horns of rhinoceros, etc.

from Bhutan into India. The matter was accordingly referred to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam who replied that though they would be very pleased to be of assistance to the Bhutan Durbar, it would be impossible to undertake the arrest of any person engaged in such activities as there were no sufficient forest staff, available for guarding the frontier. The Tongsa Ponlob was however informed that if any persons were found with unlicensed forest produce, crossing the border, he would at once be arrested. White felt that the Bhutan Durbar was losing yearly a large portion of their revenues due to the smuggling of forest produce across the frontier⁵⁷.

The Tongsa Ponlob gave further evidence of his friendly attitude towards the British by supplying good quality timber for the construction of the new Trade Agency Building which was being built by the British at Gyantse during 1906. He supplied 17,132 large sized beams and 1,250 battens valued at Rs. 21,203⁵⁸. This indicated Ugyen Wangchuk's desire to facilitate the Indo-Tibetan trade which the British themselves were so eager to develop.

However, infringement of clause IX of the treaty of Sinchula continued J.E. Webster, Judicial Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam said that duties were levied on the borders of Kamrup district by the Bhutan government. Duties were levied on articles and livestock

passing out of Bhutanese territory as well as on articles coming into Bhutan from Assam and Eastern Bengal⁵⁹, at the rates given in Table 9.

Table 9

Rates of Duties Levied by Bhutan on the Borders of Kamrup, Assam, 1907

Imports from Bhutan				Exports to Bhutan		
Articles	Unit	Rate Rs.	Rate annas	Articles	Unit	Rate
Ponies	head	1	- 0	Rice or	Mile/ Pony load	3 seers
Goats and sheep	head	0	- 4			
Blanket	Bundle	0	- 8	Paddy	head -load	2 seers
Wax	Maund	1	- 0	Betelnut	Pony- load	80 nuts
Lac	Maund	1	- 0		head- load	
Manjit or Madder	Maund	0	- 8			
Chillies	Maund	0	- 4			
Dried Radish	Maund	0	- 2			

Note : A Bundle of blankets normally consisted of about 20 to 25 blankets.

Maund = 43 Kilogram (approx.)

Seer = 1.2 Kilogram (approx.)

Source : Information regarding the duties levied on exports and imports from and into Bhutan, Foreign, External A, December, 1907, NAI.

But, the district officers of Jalpaiguri, Goalpara, and Darrang reported that no duties were known to be levied on goods exported from or imported into Bhutan. Nevertheless, whatever duties were ~~definitely~~ ^{definitely} levied on goods constituted an infringement of the terms of Article 9 of the Treaty of 1865. Though both the governments were well aware that duties were being taken, little was done to redeem this state of affairs. The Assistant Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, requested Claude White to bring the matter to the notice of Ugyen Wangchuk during his visit to Bhutan, in the hope that Ugyen Wangchuk would take some effective steps towards abolishing these illegal duties⁶⁰.

The Mission of Claude White And The Crowning of Sir Ugyen Wangchuk

After the help rendered by Ugyen Wangchuk to the Young-husband mission, Bhutan rose considerably in British estimation. In fact the Department of Political Affairs relating to Bhutan was transferred from the Government of Bengal to the Government of India thereby indicating the importance which the Viceroy was at that time attaching to Bhutan⁶¹. Moreover, as already mentioned before, the British government had decided to send another mission to Bhutan to felicitate Ugyen Wangchuk in recognition of his services. Claude White, Political Officer in Sikkim, was chosen for this purpose,

together with Major F.W.Rennick of the Intelligence Department.

Thus, an European Mission once again visited Bhutan more than forty years after the disastrous one led by Eden way back in 1864. The circumstances being very much different this time, the humiliation faced by Eden was replaced by warm friendliness. The route followed by Eden via Sipchu to Hah and Paro seemed a very suitable road for White until it was reported that the first part of this route was in a very bad condition and impracticable even for laden animals. So in the end it was decided that White, after leaving Gangtok, would cross the Nathula in the Amo Chu Valley, then over the Masseng-Chung-dong range in the Ha valley and subsequently follow Eden's route upto Punakha⁶² (Map II).

White reached Bhutan accordingly, and presented the insignia to Ugyen Wangchuk on 23 April 1905, thereby establishing a firmer bond of friendship between the two countries. Having completed his mission White returned to his headquarters at Gangtok on the afternoon on 19th June. On 6 July 1905 White sent a detailed account of his visit to the Government of India. He described at length the course of his journey, the internal situation of Bhutan, and above all the statesmanship of Ugyen Wangchuk. He mentioned that the overall control of Bhutan was vested in the hands of the Tongsa Ponlob and his council, the existing Deb Raja, Sangey Dorji, being a great recluse who occupied himself entirely with

religious affairs of the country⁶³.

Shortly after his return from Bhutan, two proposals were suggested by White. One was to increase the annual subsidy of Bhutan from fifty thousand rupees to one lakh per year, and the other included the building of a road from Ha, Paro and Tashichhodzong to the plains. Substantiating his first proposal he said that the Bhutan council had submitted to him a formal petition for an increase in the annual subsidy. White accordingly pleaded with the government to consider this petition favourably. His opinion was that this slight increase would give the British Indian government an absolute hold on Bhutan. In his own words,

formerly there was a chance of Tibet paying it, but by making the subsidy a lakh all danger on this point would disappear It will be money well laid out in that it will help to consolidate the present stable government in Bhutan, it will find Bhutan closer to India and give the Indian government a much greater control over it; it will assist the Bhutanese who have now for many years shown themselves friendly to us, to carry out some very pressing reforms and to open their country to trade, and will finally place Bhutan on our side and will show the Tibetans and the Chinese that it is so⁶⁴.

Further White pointed out that the great earthquake in Bhutan in 1897 had brought great havoc and ruin on the country and every public building to the east of Paro was shattered to the loss of lakhs of rupees. The Tangu breed of ponies for which Bhutan had been famous was dying out, and funds were

necessary for the regeneration of pony and mule breeding, Ugyen Wangchuk was also reported to have expressed a desire to open out the country to trade by making roads, but had complained of being constrained by the lack of funds⁶⁵. However, in spite of White's repeated claims that an enhancement of the subsidy could only be in India's favour, his plea was not supported by any body else, and as a result this proposal was dropped.

The second proposal of making a road through Ha, Paro and Tashichhodzong to the plains was however given much more thought. White in his report stated that the Bhutanese were fully cooperative on the subject of opening up roads and communication between India and Bhutan, but their difficulty lay in the paucity of labour and applicances. Taking this point into consideration, White suggested giving the Bhutanese a loan of tools to the value of Rs. 640 together with skilled labour for blasting and other purposes to assist them in opening out a road from Ha, Paro and Tashichhodzong to the plains. White also proposed sending the Sikkim State Engineer to make a rough survey from the Chukha Dzong down to the river Raidak in the plains to ascertain the approximate cost and feasibility of making a cart road or a bridle path over this portion. The government of India also felt that the opening up of communications between Bengal and Bhutan would be the best possible way of spreading British influence without active interference. The construction of this road would be

all the more welcome since the construction of the road along the Amuchu or Dichu was not being proceeded with, because of expenses. White was accordingly instructed to prepare a separate petition for the same, outlying a full explanation and scope of his proposals, and testifying to the fact that no objection would be raised to the Sikkim Engineer's journey in to the Bhutanese territory⁶⁶.

Amity and good will continued between the Tongsa Ponlob and the British, and constant exchange of presents and correspondence continued. Ugyen Wangchuk realised that it would be safer and more profitable to have a closer contact with British India as against Tibet and China. The British too at this point of time were prepared to extend all possible cordiality to the Bhutanese. In view of this growing friendly relations, they invited Ugyen Wangchuk along with the rulers of the Indian states to receive the Prince of Wales when he visited India in 1906. In addition to the customary honours due to an Indian ruler, the Tongsa Ponlob was accorded the special honour of a reception and a return visit by the Prince of Wales and the Viceroy⁶⁷. After his return to his country, Sir Ugyen Wangchuk began thinking on the lines of a monarchy for Bhutan. His ideas found support among by other Councillors who unanimously decided to invite him to become the first hereditary king of Bhutan. Sir Ugyen was enthroned on 17 December 1907 raising fresh hopes of peace and prosperity

in the minds of everyone concerned.

In a message to the Secretary to the Government of India, Claude White, while praising Sir Ugyen on establishing hereditary monarchy in Bhutan, greatly deplored the system of government which had hitherto existed in Bhutan. He said that the previous Deb and Dharma Rajas had exercised only nominal powers, while the real power passed into the hands of the powerful Ponlobs or the ministers who were constantly engaged in warring amongst themselves⁶⁸.

Claude White together with his entourage was present at the crowning ceremony of Ugyen Wangchuk. In the course of his discussions with the Maharaja, the latter expressed his keenness to develop the resources of his country, and White suggested to the Maharaja to seek the help of the Government of India to open rubber and tea gardens in Bhutan⁶⁹. White felt that the choice of Ugyen Wangchuk to be the king of Bhutan, could not have been a better one because, in his own words,

His integrity, uprightness and firmness of character commend him to every one and his accession to the Maharajaship is not only a gain to Bhutan but is of great advantage to the British government who will hence forth have a settled government with a man of strong character as its head to negotiate with⁷⁰.

Thus began a new era for Bhutan — the era of hereditary monarchy. The British were now happy at the thought of negotiating with a person of strength and integrity — a Bhutanese who had proved to be their ally. Hopes were no doubt entertained that all round improvement in relations would embrace commerce as well. Though the trade statistics did not give much hope it was nevertheless believed that things would improve considerably in the near future.

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28. It has been stated before that in 1889, the Deb Raja Sangey Dorji virtually resigned in favour of his mentor Ugyen Wangchuk who then became the all powerful ruler of Bhutan. But, neither the list of the Deb Raja's prepared chronologically by Michael Aires nor the names given by Bikrama Jit Hasrat indicate that Ugyen Wangchuk was at any time the Deb Raja of Bhutan. Dorji was supposed to have continued as the Deb Raja till 1903. However, the British records imply that it was Ugyen Wangchuk who held the seals of office and was chief in name as well as in reality. Nevertheless going through the lists of Aires and Hasrat it can be concluded that Sangay Dorji remained the Deb Raja in name only while the real power and authority was vested upon Ugyen Wangchuk who continued officially as the Fongsa Ponlob. The correspondence entered into the British by the Deb Raja may have been written under the seal of Sangay Dorji but were written under Ugyen Wangchuk's instructions.

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